

Music as Dialogic Sounding Device in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon

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## Abstract

Combining key aspects of literary, musical, and cultural theory, my thesis investigates the significance of music in the work of the contemporary American novelist Thomas Pynchon. His novels, along with a handful of short stories, are so saturated with musical references and fictional songs that it borders on eccentricity. It is my argument that understanding musical presence and the way it is represented here is of crucial importance to our understanding one of the overarching themes of Pynchon's writing: that of communication, and specifically the persistence of communication from the margins of society in the face of restricting and divisive political forces. My aim is to establish a positive view of Pynchon's representation of music as a site of social intercourse, in the literal sense – a shared territory between language and artistic expression, through which both listener and performer are placed in a socially communicative framework; but also metaphorically, as a model for dialogic interaction that can undercut official discourse. As with all things in Pynchon, hope is tempered with a degree of cynicism: his depiction of musical media, for example, is varied and complex, and can be seen as a commentary on issues such as authenticity, the commodification of art, and corporate co-optation of subcultural expression. Nonetheless, the ubiquity of music in Pynchon is such that the attempt to communicate is persistently foregrounded.

Chapter one establishes the techniques by which Pynchon incorporates the subject of music into his writing, before setting the significance of the author's enterprise against the light of critical debates concerning the social efficacy and political energy of musical expression. The subsequent four chapters offer an in-depth look at Pynchon's engagement with music in the light of themes that feed into the broader, overarching compulsion signalled above. In binding music to such grand themes – the commodification of culture; resistance to power; our relationship to time and history; post-secular re-enchantment – it is inevitable that I will be forced, at times, into making some digressions of my own regarding those subjects and their significance to Pynchon's work, before bringing the argument back around to music. For this I beg the reader's indulgence in advance.

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## Abbreviations:

*ATD – Against the Day*

*BE – Bleeding Edge*

*GR – Gravity's Rainbow*

*IV – Inherent Vice*

*Lot 49 – The Crying of Lot 49*

*M&D – Mason & Dixon*

*SL – Slow Learner*

## Introduction: Pynchon in Context

When reading Thomas Pynchon, one is struck immediately by the descriptive element within his work concerning music. The lengths to which Pynchon will go so that the reader may appreciate exactly the style and significance of the music he wishes us to imagine hearing during a given scene seem inordinately great when compared with his contemporaries (or indeed with any other major literary figure) – and the sheer weight of musical allusion that is incorporated into the work is such that each of his novels appears to develop its own distinct ‘soundtrack.’ Pynchon’s work is shot through with an abundance of references to a wide spectrum of musical forms: from classical works (Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner make regular appearances) and eighteenth-century street airs, to various jazz forms, English popular rock, and the punk phenomenon of the late 1970’s. Taking into account the volume of musical expression in Pynchon (there are well over a hundred separate musical references in the first novel *V.* alone) and the significance of its pervasive presence within the texts, the relative paucity of existing criticism that effectively engages with this aspect of his work is striking considering Pynchon’s reputation as one of the most influential writers of the last sixty years.

The sheer weight of musical expression in Pynchon is such that most scholars in the field have discussed the issue to some degree or another. The value of my thesis, however, stems from the fact that the treatment of musical presence in Pynchon has never been comprehensive; too often it is seen as simply adding colour to the narrative, or satisfying an interesting but insignificant authorial penchant, and where we do get some in-depth analysis it tends to be too narrowly focused on a single aspect or on one particular novel. Articles such as ‘*Gravity’s Rainbow*: The Original Soundtrack’ (J. O. Tate); ‘The Transcription of Electronic Music in *The Crying of Lot 49*’ (Marcus Erbe); ‘Music in Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*’ (John Joseph Hess); ‘*Gravity’s Rainbow* as Orphic Text’ (Thomas A. Bass); “‘Sell Out With Me Tonight’: Popular Music Commercialization and Commodification in *Vineland*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *V.*’ (George William Twigg) and the like all bring some useful analysis to the forum of music in Pynchon, but with such narrow remits (inevitably, given the nature of articles as opposed to book-length studies) that the significance of music’s

pervasive presence across the oeuvre and in all its manifestations is underplayed. One recent publication that bucks this trend is Christian Hänggi's book *Pynchon's Sound of Music* (2020), which offers an overview of Pynchon's engagement with music across the entirety of his work, in combination with an exhaustive catalogue of the hundreds of musical references to be found therein.<sup>1</sup> Even taking Hänggi's monograph into account, however, there remains a great deal to be said on the subject – particularly regarding the relationship between music (as it is presented by the author) and the broader themes at the heart of Pynchon's literary enterprise. In this thesis I hope to show that musical presence in Pynchon can act as a sounding device to penetrate the murky waters and tangled weeds of Pynchon's literary style – the narrative digressions; the overabundance of minor characters; the surrealism; the satirising of the quest for knowledge – and to test the depths of his underlying preoccupations concerning ethical responsibility in human relations and the desire for communication across socio-political barriers.

To justify an in-depth study of music as it is represented in Pynchon's work it is necessary to consider the ambit of socio-political energy involved with musical expression *per se*. To this end many scholars in the field have appropriated the work of Russian literary/linguistic theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whose dialogic principle – whereby the individual psyche is bonded to the social collective through uttered speech and artistic expression – has proved fertile ground for academics wishing to re-emphasize music's socially communicative power. In this chapter I will be looking at the various methods by which Pynchon incorporates music into his work, before going on to explore the debate within musicology regarding tensions between two theoretical approaches to music – Bakhtin's dialogism and a (perceived) fatalistic strand of postmodern theory – that establish two contrasting versions of musical meaning: the first socially active, and potentially subversive; the second personally transcendental, yet socially ineffective. Having done so, I hope to show how either approach may inform our reading of Pynchon's works – the methodologies of which can be said to vacillate between these two extremes, with postmodern techniques masking an underlying metanarrative relating to ethical responsibility and social interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> It is a sure indication of the vast scale involved with musical presence in Pynchon that Hänggi's book and my thesis share remarkably little in the way of overlapping content.

References in literature testifying to the power and significance of music are by no means rare. On the contrary, there is a long and varied tradition of musical presence to be found across a vast spectrum of literary works. Shakespeare's Lorenzo, in *The Merchant of Venice*, testifies to the "sweet power of music," warning that "The man that hath no music in himself, / Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; / The motions of his spirit are dull as night, / And his affections dark as Erebus: / Let no such man be trusted. – Mark the music." We are given an indication as to the affective force of the musical expression – invoking the power of Orpheus – here against even "a wild and wanton herd, / Or race of youthful and unhandled colts" that, if exposed to "any air of music" shall "make a mutual stand, / Their savage eyes turn'd to a modest gaze."<sup>2</sup> This same significance of the listener's emotive response to music (observed in almost miraculous proportions) is picked up by William Wordsworth in the poem 'Power of Music,' in which the scene is delivered of a street musician delighting an enthusiastic crowd in the middle of Oxford Street: 'he works on the crowd/ He sways them with harmony merry and loud.' The depicted audience seem utterly enchanted by the music, which has the ability to soothe, to excite, and to invoke rejoicing in an audience who otherwise might be inclined to depression: 'What an eager assembly! What an empire is this/ The weary have life and the hungry have bliss;/ The mourner is cheered, and the anxious have rest;/ And the guilt-burthened soul is no longer oppress.'<sup>3</sup> The same theme is taken up later by W.B. Yeats, whose 'Fiddler of Dooney' is able to harness the benevolent power of music in the same way as Wordsworth's musician is able to please his audience: 'When I play on my fiddle in Dooney/ Folk dance like a wave of the sea'; 'For the good are always the merry,/ Save by an evil chance,/ And the merry love the fiddle,/ And the merry love to dance.'<sup>4</sup> That music has the power to please in this way, acting as a kind of balming or protective force against the more mundane aspects of day-to-day living, is beyond question. It is a quality of music emphasized by the American novelist Kurt Vonnegut – a close contemporary of Pynchon's – who, in an interview for *In*

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<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act V. Sc.1 (New York: Oxford UP, 2008) 216-17.

<sup>3</sup> William Wordsworth, "Power of Music," *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 323.

<sup>4</sup> W.B. Yeats, "The Fiddler of Dooney," *The Work of W.B. Yeats* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994) 60.

*These Times* magazine, published on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2003, stated that: 'Music makes practically everybody fonder of life than he or she would be without it [...] Anybody practicing the fine art of composing music, no matter how cynical or greedy or scared, still can't help serving all humanity.'

There are other literary sources, however, from which one can get an impression of the more complex processes involved in the musical expression and its impact on the listener. In the poem 'To Music,' Rainer Maria Rilke describes the individual's engagement with music as an almost sublime experience, through which our innermost feelings, that we are incapable of articulating in any other way, are communicated outside of ourselves: the 'Innermost us, transcendently surging away from us' as 'audible landscape,' acknowledged through music, which is seen as a 'language where language ends.'<sup>5</sup> On a more contemporary note, the Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami has explored similar themes regarding the conscious acknowledgement of inner, often repressed feelings through the musical medium, most notably in the international bestseller *Norwegian Wood*, in which music is seen as possessing the power to transport us back to the site of past experiences in recreating vivid emotional responses in the listener. The action of *Norwegian Wood* is predicated by just such an experience in the life of Toru, the story's protagonist: 'Once the plane was on the ground, soft music began to flow from the ceiling speakers: a sweet orchestral version of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood". The melody never failed to send a shudder through me, but this time it hit me harder than ever.'<sup>6</sup> In Murakami's novel, music opens a dialogue with repressed consciousness which, in this instance, forces Toru to confront a crucial area of his innermost psyche.

Many BIPOC voices in contemporary American literature treat music in a significantly different way still, testifying to the social and political power of music rather than focusing on the individual escapist elements of listening, or the ability of music to infiltrate the recesses of the subconscious mind. In *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, August Wilson reminds us – through the voice of the eponymous blues singer – that music is "life's way of talking. You don't sing to feel better. You sing 'cause that's a way of understanding life."<sup>7</sup> Not only this, music (in this case the blues) is also a way of communicating that sense of life on a social scale: "The

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<sup>5</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, "To Music," *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. & trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1984) 147.

<sup>6</sup> Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood* (London: Vintage, 2003) 1.

<sup>7</sup> August Wilson, *Fences and Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (London: Penguin, 1988) 194.

blues help you get out of bed in the morning. You get up knowing you ain't alone. There's something else in the world. Something's been added by that song. This be an empty world without the blues."<sup>8</sup> In her novel *Jazz*, Toni Morrison portrays the development of the eponymous musical form as an undercurrent to social disaffection, race riots, and a heightening of sexual awareness in the early part of the twentieth century. The jazz rhythms – sensual and libidinous – do not merely symbolize but actually help to generate the sexually-charged pulse of life in the novel: 'Songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart had dropped on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts'<sup>9</sup> of people living in 'a City seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day.'<sup>10</sup> Another figure on the contemporary literary scene in America, for whom music is a crucial theme, is Sherman Alexie. The power of music is emphasized time and again in Alexie's *Reservation Blues*, in which the spirit of the legendary early 1930's bluesman Robert Johnson passes on the mystical power of the blues to a young, contemporary Native American rock and roll band. Here we have a crucial dialogue across barriers of time and race that is nurtured and celebrated by the character of Big Mom, who 'played a new flute song every morning to remind everybody that music created and recreated the world daily.'<sup>11</sup>

The list of writers who display a preoccupation with music in their work is long and diverse – we could mention, for instance, Thomas Mann, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Anthony Burgess, Ishmael Reed, Richard Powers – and Thomas Pynchon's writing stands as further testimony to the social significance of musical expression. Pynchon, however, appears to be more than merely another link in this longstanding tradition of writers engaging with music; it could be said, rather, that he occupies a unique position on this list owing to the many-faceted deployment and saturating scope of musical expression that characterise his work. The social implications of the representation of music in Pynchon's fiction form the basis of this thesis. I approach the subject from two differing perspectives. The first of these is represented by the following quotation from *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973):

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson, 195.

<sup>9</sup> Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992) 56.

<sup>10</sup> Morrison, 67.

<sup>11</sup> Sherman Alexie, *Reservation Blues* (London: Minerva, 1996) 10.

‘While nobles are crying in their night’s chains, the squires sing. The terrible politics of the Grail can never touch them. Song is the magic cape’ (701).

This passage is indicative of the feeling that, through music, the individual may indulge in a form of escapism, removed from the troubles in society, thereby avoiding ‘[t]he terrible politics of the Grail,’ and arriving at an introverted sense of spiritual transcendence. By contrast, the second quotation, from *Mason & Dixon* (1997), testifies to the social and political significance of musical expression, mischievously recasting Plato’s famous warning concerning the relationship between changing musical forms and civil unrest into more positive terms:

“‘Tis ever the sign of revolutionary times, that Street-Airs become Hymns, and Roist’ring Songs Anthems – just as Plato fear’d, - hast heard the Negroe Musick, the flatted Fifths, the vocal *portamenti*, - ‘tis there sings your Revolution. [...] Is it not the very Rhythm of the Engines, the Clamour of the Mills, the Rock of the Oceans, the Roll of the Drums in the Night” (264).

Contrary to the first position, in which music makes no direct impact on society, here we get the impression that music can be a far more powerful agency, firstly as a medium through which the listener is imbued with a sense of affinity with the world – the “Rhythm of the Engines, the Clamor of the Mills, the Rock of the Oceans” – but also in the way music is endowed with the power to effect social change, for “‘tis there sings your Revolution.” Whether music, as it is represented in Pynchon’s fiction, is a medium through which the forces that perpetuate the social status quo can be effectively antagonized, or whether, on the other hand, it can simply act to lift us free, in a personal sense, from social concerns, is the prime focus of this thesis. To appreciate how the power of music is displayed in Pynchon’s work it is imperative that we acquire an understanding of just where meaning lies within the musical realm in general, taking into account a variety of critical perspectives from the fields of musicology, philosophy, social and cultural theory, and literary criticism. Such a broad theoretical framework inevitably gives rise to a wealth of competing and contradictory voices, which, as shall be seen, correspond to the contrasting messages inherent in the two quotations above.

### Music as a Dialogic Force – a critical overview

In Pynchon's work traditional concepts of readership and interpretation are held up for scrutiny in ways which can often feel as though the search for meaning is being satirised. To undertake a critical engagement with his work, therefore, is not done without a strong sense of caution. The problem is outlined by Thomas Schaub who offers an account of his own initial efforts at understanding *Gravity's Rainbow*, characterized, he says, by a 'frustrating search for repetition, symmetry, and a consistency revealing Pynchon's true disposition and theme.'<sup>12</sup> However, if the reader is prepared to accept the inadequacies of such ways of reading, a meaningful interpretative insight into Pynchon's work can finally be achieved by dismissing what Schaub calls 'the tyrannizing desire of the mind for unity and meaning.'<sup>13</sup> Other critics, such as Molly Hite, identify Pynchon's characteristic satirizing of the assumption that 'a narrative *means* only when it adds up to a culminating insight.'<sup>14</sup> In his parodic use of the quest narrative in which, as Hite reminds us, 'climactic revelation tends to be beyond the reach of description or explanation,'<sup>15</sup> Pynchon sends his characters (and the unsuspecting reader) on a quest that will inevitably lead only as far as the threshold of a totalized truth and will ultimately fail to deliver. The encyclopaedic nature of Pynchon's work, the proliferation of ambiguous characters, the (at times) flagrantly digressive narrative and the way in which the two worlds of certainty and chance are played off against each other within the texts means that the search for order and coherence can often feel like an exercise in futility. A totalized notion of truth is not the same as knowledge, however, and it is my argument that Pynchon's fiction establishes a notion of meaning made available through a representation of the the cultural heterophony that constitutes our times.

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin is useful at this point. His development of the 'dialogic principle' in the production of art has been appropriated by several popular music theorists, including George Lipsitz, Neil Nehring, and Michael

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Chicago: Illinois UP, 1981) ix.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983) 78. Hite and Schaub, writing in the early 1980s, are referring specifically to *V.*, *L49*, and *GR* – but their comments remain valid for Pynchon's later work.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Chanan, for their own work concerning the resurrection of emotion and the overdue recognition of music's social significance. In Bakhtin's work the spoken word unites individual consciousness with the macro level of the social collective: 'A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is the product of the living interaction of social forces. [...] Thus, the psyche and ideology dialectically interpenetrate in the unitary and objective process of social intercourse.'<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin places great emphasis on the need to understand the hermeneutic relationship between the individual and society, and he also testifies to the significance of placing that relationship in the historical context of the tradition of social communication. The binding force is perceived to be the utterance: 'Any utterance, no matter how weighty and complete in and of itself, is a moment in the continuous, all-inclusive, generative process of a given social collective.'<sup>17</sup> Verbal communication in any form, including music, engages in 'ideological colloquy of large scale: it responds to something, objects to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections.'<sup>18</sup> In observing the expression of music in the light of Bakhtin's thoughts, it is possible to establish a convincing argument for the re-assertion of music's social significance. As for the Pynchon critic, Bakhtin also has much to offer in his emphatic affirmation of narrative multiplicity and heterophonic presence in the novel and his celebration of the use of parody, the carnivalesque and a certain grotesque realism. This combined with Bakhtin's suspicion of forms that employ a monological and authoritarian voice – which reduce the possibility of communication – remind the reader of the tensions and characteristics that dominate Pynchon's work. In the light of Bakhtin's thinking Michael Chanan finds in music 'a sense of social controversy, with all the richness that Bakhtin's dialogical approach discovers in the contemporary cultural process: the heteroglossia of voices, which do not fuse into a single zeitgeist at all but are constantly counterposed.'<sup>19</sup> The resulting sense of heterophony, with equal value attached to each voice regardless of its origin, means that the previous aesthetic hierarchy, which saw the glorification of educated art and a concomitant discriminatory bias levelled against so-called

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<sup>16</sup> Pam Morris, ed., *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov* (London: Arnold, 2003) 58.

<sup>17</sup> Morris, 59.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Chanan, *Musica Practica: The Social Practice of Western Music from Gregorian Chant to Postmodernism* (New York: Verso, 1994) 276.

'popular' forms of artistic expression from popular culture, is therefore dismissed. In Pynchon's work the results of this process can be seen in the author's characteristic penchant for blending high and low art forms – often in the same phrase or image. Take, for example, the Vivaldi Kazoo Concerto mentioned in *V.* (419) and *Lot 49* (6), or the abundance of comic book motifs with which *Gravity's Rainbow* is riddled, lying alongside other references to such disparate artistic works as Wagner's *Tannhäuser* opera and the classic 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. All this is indicative of the proliferation of competing and intersecting voices in contemporary culture that give our times a heterophonic feel, affirmed as much in Pynchon's fiction as through Bakhtin's dialogic principle.

The socially communicative framework, within which both performers and listeners of music are placed, and which is crucial to the argument confirming the social impact of music, is referred to as '*musica practica*' in the work of the French post-structuralist Roland Barthes. In this instance, knowledge of music is attained through performance, on the one hand, and 'active' listening on the other, and it is in this sense that music becomes a dialogue. For Barthes the dialogue inherent in *musica practica* is dependent, in modern times, on the realization that music can no longer be appreciated through mere performance or hearing, but rather through a 'reading' of the musical expression, 'Just as the reading of the modern text [...] consists not in receiving, in knowing or in feeling that text, but in writing it anew, in crossing its writing with a fresh inscription.'<sup>20</sup> The listener, however, is unable to reclaim this active, interpretative power in the modern world of corporate mass production. The raw musical expression, that shares so much with the uttered word, has been replaced by a search for the "perfect take." Barthes' work in this regard has proven to be highly influential on subsequent popular music theorists – many of whom combine the ideas surrounding *musica practica* with the work of economist Jacques Attali, who shares some of Barthes' concerns regarding the commodified and replicated musical art-product but is more positive in asserting an alternative to that regressive state. The significant thing to note here is that Thomas Pynchon's work, in the way it deals with music, at least partially counteracts Barthes' pessimistic outlook concerning musical presence in modern times, while at the same time giving credence to Attali's rally-cry for authentic opposition to

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<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Musica Practica,' trans. Stephen Heath, *Image-Music-Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977) 153.

regressive artistic practices.<sup>21</sup> This is not to say, though, that a study of music's social significance from a literary perspective must therefore cast Barthes' work aside, for the concept of *musica practica* is nonetheless productive. Due to Barthes' characteristically abstract style, however, it is necessary that we refer once again to the thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin for that value to hold – the crucial point remaining the social significance of the comparison between *musica practica* and the uttered word. For Bakhtin music, like the uttered word, 'having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogical threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of the utterance.'<sup>22</sup> In this sense music cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue, but as a consequence – in the same way as there exists in linguistics the slippery-natured problem of the relationship between the so-called arbitrary signifier and the arbitrary signified – meaning cannot be stabilized and foreclosed in music, which points the issue towards the post-structuralist arena and henceforth into the realm of the postmodern, with emphasis on fragmented subjectivity and the multiplication and proliferation of voices across the whole spectrum of contemporary culture.

Bakhtin, on the other hand, postulates that the relation within the sign between its formal element and its meaning is *not* arbitrary, but nor is it fixed. He acknowledges the indeterminacy of the text but places it more firmly in social practice. Bakhtin argued that there is a fusion of formal element and meaning which results in a process of social development in the actual activities of speech and the continuing development of language. As Voloshinov/Bakhtin states, 'consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse.'<sup>23</sup> The continuing social process into which individuals are born and within which they are shaped partly forms the basis of Bakhtin's dialogic principle. The dialogic theory is completed, crucially, in the active contribution of the individual to the social process. As Raymond Williams points out in *Marxism and Literature*: 'This is at once their

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<sup>21</sup> In Chapter Two I return to the significance of recorded music in Pynchon's work, and the influence of Barthes and Attali on contemporary cultural theory.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 2002) 276.

<sup>23</sup> V.N Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (New York & London: Seminar Press, 1973) 13.

socialization and their individuation: the connected aspects of a single process' in which we then find 'not a reified 'language' and 'society' but an active *social language*.'<sup>24</sup> In the same way the forces at work in the cultural production of music – as part of a social dialogue unfolding in a particular historical moment – do not impinge upon the musical expression mechanically from without but enter it dialectically as 'a necessary constitutive element of its semantic structure,' as Michael Chanan puts it.<sup>25</sup> In this sense music is more than merely a reflection of reality, it is also itself a material participant in that reality, and therefore a powerful medium through which to effect possible social change.

Cultural theorists such as George Lipsitz, Michael Chanan, and Neil Nehring set about applying the dialogical theory to popular music in ways that challenge the ahistoricity of preceding critics in the field, whose methods bear close relation to 1970's French postmodern theory, and who do not allow for sufficient consideration of music as a dialogic process. In *Time Passages* George Lipsitz maintains that: 'Popular music is nothing if not dialogic, the product of an ongoing historical conversation in which no one has the first or last word.'<sup>26</sup> He argues that the cultural production of music needs to be seen as entering into a dialogue with the social and historical context in which it is produced and received. Music-making is part of a dialogic tradition in this sense, that Lipsitz compares with the traditions of carnival laughter (the 'carnavalesque') drawn upon in Bakhtin's work, that establishes an opposition to 'official' discourse and is deeply embedded within the 'past and present lives of concrete historical subjects' who work to undermine dominant ideologies to 'stimulate real and imagined alternatives' to the repressive social status quo.<sup>27</sup> Just as notions of the carnivalesque are drawn upon by the writers who comprise Bakhtin's studies, so, for example, 'contemporary musicians draw upon the language and traditions of the postwar, urban, working-class subcultures that gave birth to rock and roll.' As Lipsitz reminds us, 'popular music has never been totally severed from the energy and imagination of the postwar American industrial communities in which it originated.'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2009) 37.

<sup>25</sup> Chanan, 38.

<sup>26</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990) 99.

<sup>27</sup> Lipsitz, 108.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

When Pynchon penned the liner notes to *Nobody's Cool* – a 1995 album from New York rock band Lotion – he emphasized the significance of continuing this musical dialogic tradition: 'Every night, somewhere on the outlaw side of some town, below some metaphysical 14<sup>th</sup> Street, out at the hard edges of some consensus about what's real, the continuity is always being sought, claimed, lost, found again, carried on.' While Pynchon detects an 'attentive nostalgia' in Lotion's music and their allusions to American popular culture, there is also a recognition of continuing socio-political resonances being felt through the decades, and destinations that have not yet been reached: 'undetoned mines from the cultural disputes that began in the Sixties, unexplained lights now and then from just over the horizon, stowaways who sneak past security and meddle with the amps causing them to emit strange Rays, unannounced calls at ports that seem almost like cities we have been to, though not quite.' The dialogic continuity that is invoked here, the openness to where we have been and where we might yet go, requires active participants to drive any kind of change – actors that frequently take the form of musicians in Pynchon's work. That he places the struggle on the periphery, at the 'hard edges' of society, is indicative of the role many of his own musical characters are compelled to perform. And yet the voices of Pynchon's musicians infiltrate the very essence of the cosmos he establishes in his fiction, suggesting that it is here, on the so-called periphery, where we may find the epicentre of social consciousness. 'If for no other reason [than this]' Pynchon claims in the same source, 'rock and roll remains one of the last honorable callings, and a working band is a miracle of everyday life.'

It could be argued that it is here, on the periphery, that music's political power truly lies, as Reebee Garofalo suggests in his article 'How Autonomous is Relative,' in which the counter-hegemonic potential in the emergence of new musical forms is highlighted – a conviction that is indicative of a strand in musicology and cultural theory more broadly that shares much with the second quotation (from Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, recasting Plato's fears of civil unrest into the promise of a more positive political challenge) that I highlighted towards the beginning of this chapter. The concept of hegemony, as developed by Antonio Gramsci, refers to a situation in which a provisional alliance of certain social groups can exert total social authority over other subordinate groups, not simply by coercion or by the direct imposition of ruling ideas, but through an internalized form of social control which makes the power of the dominant classes appear

natural and legitimate. However, as Dick Hebdige points out, hegemony 'can only be maintained so long as the dominant classes succeed in framing all competing definitions within their range,' meaning that all subordinate groups must be contained within an ideological space 'which does not seem at all 'ideological' and which appears instead to be permanent and 'natural', to lie outside history, to be beyond particular interests.'<sup>29</sup> To maintain its authority then, the hegemonic landscape must be constantly re-established to incorporate minority voices, and radical opinions, or else to exclude these as unacceptable. As Garofalo suggests, 'it is on this ever-changing terrain that the possibilities for counter-hegemonic practice arise,'<sup>30</sup> for the concept of hegemony can now be seen as a subtle and complex formulation which accommodates the reality of shifting alliances among 'class fractions' and of social relations based on race, gender, subculture, age and so on – categories which often cut across strict class boundaries. There have been many famous examples of musical 'moments' breaking through the 'ideological grasp of hegemony,' as Garofalo puts it. Perhaps the most successful of these being the advent of rock and roll in the mid to late 1950s, with its cross-racial combination of blues and folk music, coupled with a defiantly rebellious celebration of sexuality and a location firmly etched in the social energy of disenchanted urban youth culture. Similar breakthrough moments can be said to have occurred in the mid-1960s with the progressive rhythm and blues movement, typified by artists such as James Brown and Wilson Pickett, which came to be closely allied to the growing militancy of Black Power. The late 1960s saw the anti-Vietnam war movement with the counter-cultural energies of the 'Woodstock generation' summed up and fuelled by the lyrics and performances of artists such as Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and The Doors, along with a concomitant subversion of the work ethic, exemplified by John Lennon's bed-peace episode. Their music became synonymous with the Movement for Free Speech and was heard across campuses such as UC Berkeley where the followers of Mario Savio developed their peace activist philosophy. Again, in the mid-to-late 1970s the punk movement rose out of disillusioned urban youth culture – particularly in Britain as a response to a (perceived) out-of-touch establishment presiding over a failing economy (coupled with an insipid or

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<sup>29</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979) 16.

<sup>30</sup> Reebee Garofalo, "How Autonomous Is Relative: Popular Music, the Social Formation and Cultural Struggle," *Popular Music* Vol.6, No.1 (Cambridge UP, 1987) 89.

escapist current Top40) – almost as a reincarnation of rock and roll, only with the politics expanded from the destruction of sexually inhibited behavioural codes to the destruction of behavioural codes of all kinds and often (sometimes literally) the destruction of property and commodity culture. The significance of these contests against hegemonic power is summed up by the music theorist Richard Middleton's oft quoted passage in *Reading Popular Music*, adopted as the final word in Garofalo's article: 'To all attempts at social control through appeals to "reality" or "reason," music offers a counterview, a space where rebellion is possible; and that is what explains music's immense role in political contestation and in subcultures'<sup>31</sup> – just as it also explains why music is so important in Pynchon's work.

Clearly there is much here corresponding to the social import of the second quotation – from Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon* – towards the beginning of this chapter, positing music as a social force to be reckoned with, for it is 'there sings your Revolution.' Further to this counter-hegemonic subcultural engagement with music, it is useful once again to refer to Bakhtin's thinking in order to place music in its social context. George Lipsitz' enthusiasm for Bakhtin's dialogical principle is shared by Michael Chanan who states, in relation to Bakhtin's work, that: 'Music, as definitive a human proclivity as speech itself, and which we know no society to have lacked, is a barometer of the social order, in which we can not only listen to the past but, if we know how, also take soundings of the future.'<sup>32</sup> He also states that where music is concerned 'the audience forms a community to which the musician implicitly also belongs, whose activity – whether composing or performing – is therefore, as Bakhtin says of verbal utterance, a way of locating oneself in relation to the social setting, a socialization of the self.'<sup>33</sup> As in Raymond Williams' writing the affirmative qualities of Bakhtin's work are stressed here, for what we are given is a vision of the socialized self who is nonetheless not so firmly embedded in the dominant ideological discourse (due to the remaining indeterminacy of the sign) as to be rendered incapable of opposing it, through means which include musical expression and reception. On the contrary, Neil Nehring believes that Bakhtin's description of language – as always involving a material social relation (or

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<sup>31</sup> Garofalo, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Chanan, 287.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 51.

dialogue) – results in an emotive impact that is indissociable from its cognitive effects, and which forms the root of music's social energy. In *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism* Nehring describes the crucial link between affect and agency in Bakhtin's work, which establishes a socialized, yet nonetheless authentically emotive voice which had hitherto been thwarted, or simply denied, by successive aesthetic traditions in the romantic, modernist, and Postmodern eras, given their definition of authenticity in terms of 'resisting commercial culture and its supposedly spurious emotional appeals.'<sup>34</sup> Nehring looks to Bakhtin's example as a possible way out of the 'fatalistic' strand of postmodernism extolled by the likes of Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault, informed as it is by abstract post-structuralist theories pointing away from material social relations and towards concepts hinting at the end of social history. It is this brand of cultural theory that comes into play regarding the earlier quotation from Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* – concerning music's lack of social impact – whereby music simply acts as a 'magic cape' to protect the individual from 'the terrible politics of the Grail.'

A significant number of social critics and cultural theorists consider the dominant trend in postmodern theory from the 1970s onwards as reductive at best, and a betrayal to society at worst. The fact remains, however, that work from this section of cultural theory has had a tremendous impact on social studies over the last fifty years. The crucial point to be considered here is the significance of the notion developed in postmodern theory concerning the difficulty of enforcing coherent social action and change. There are two main reasons for this belief, the first of which has at its root Michel Foucault's description of power operating virtually untouchable through its control of specialized discourses (such as medicine, psychiatry, the penal system, etc.) and of language itself. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault outlines the relationship between power and knowledge, and the way in which a modern disciplinary society has emerged, not so much through the threat of physical punishment, but through the internalization of behavioural codes learned in institutions such as schools. In this sense we act as our own behavioural censors, operating under the illusion of individual freedom. We are all objects in a 'corpus of knowledge, techniques, 'scientific' discourses [which] is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the

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<sup>34</sup> Neil Nehring, *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism: Anger Is an Energy* (Berkeley: Sage, 1997) 130.

power to punish.<sup>35</sup> The knowledge we acquire through education and experience is an exercise in social power, in that what we learn enables us to behave and to use our bodies in a manner appropriate to the needs of modern capitalist society: 'the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjective body,'<sup>36</sup> and Foucault maintains that 'We should admit [...] power produces knowledge [...]; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.'<sup>37</sup> If power operates through every form of language or discourse, then it becomes impossible to express oneself for the purpose of undermining power. The only form of opposition that can arise from this situation would come from removing oneself from language and discourse entirely, thereby transcending the sphere of power. This is precisely the destiny of many of Pynchon's characters, most notably Tyrone Slothrop who falls out of the text of *Gravity's Rainbow* after learning to play the blues on the harmonica, thereby exposing a world of alternative harmonies, 'for the sake of tunes to be played, millions of possible blues lines, notes bent from the official frequencies' (GR 65-6). Two crucial points are noticeable here: firstly, that music is established as a definite medium through which to escape the confines of mythologized power structures; and secondly, as a consequence of this liberating experience, the individual is nonetheless forced to relinquish his/her social self, and with it the possibility of social change. Opposition must come from *within* language and discourse, and therefore it must be on power's terms, which means, as Foucault has it, that such opposition is thwarted before it even begins.

In later years Foucault would qualify his argument concerning power relations, to allow for a certain degree of freedom on either side of any given human relationship. In 'The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom' – included in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* – Foucault argues that power is always present in these relationships, which exist at different levels and in different forms – 'whether they involve verbal communication [...] or amorous,

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<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979) 23.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

institutional, or economic relationships.’<sup>38</sup> ‘Power relations’, he continues, ‘are possible only in so far as the subjects are free [...]. For power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides.’<sup>39</sup> To talk of the persistence of freedom in power relations is to introduce the concept of resistance to existing power structures, and therefore some possibility of change is established. Foucault asserts that ‘The idea that power is a system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom cannot be attributed to me.’<sup>40</sup> However, the significance of these later assertions is limited to relations on a microcosmic scale – for instance a one-to-one conversation, or a marriage perhaps. Foucault concedes that on a large scale – for instance the relationship between the subject or a specific class group and the State – domination of one party by the other does indeed exist: ‘In a great many cases, power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom.’<sup>41</sup> It is in this sense that Foucault’s work has proved extremely influential on the so-called ‘fatalistic’ strand of postmodern theory.

The second major influence has come from Jean-François Lyotard, whose condemnation – expressed most acutely in *The Postmodern Condition* – of any ‘grand narrative’ of history representing a totalizing explanation of the way things are provides much of the rhetoric of postmodern politics. The totalizing nature of these metanarratives (for instance Christianity or Marxism) is, in Lyotard’s view, a form of violence against the postmodern force he extols – the supposed anarchy of the numerous incommensurate language games that fragment subjectivity, thereby rendering the subject socially ineffective: ‘The social subject itself seems to dissolve in this dissemination of language games. The social bond is linguistic but is not woven with a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality, an indeterminate number) of language games, obeying different rules.’<sup>42</sup> The effect is that any chance of coherent social action on a significant scale and towards any end dissolves with social

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<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,’ *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al (New York: New Press, 1997) 291.

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* 292.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 40.

subjectivity, meaning that the metanarrative becomes an implausibility. 'The grand narrative', Lyotard says, 'has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.'<sup>43</sup> However, 'it in no way follows that [people] are reduced to barbarity. What saves them from it is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicated interaction.' As with Foucault then, the message here is qualified to provide for at least the dignity of human beings living in the system. From Foucault we learn that we are free to resist existing social structures, so long as we do not expect to triumph in our resistance; while Lyotard comforts us with the knowledge that we are free to interact socially, so long as we do so in ways which do not undermine the values of modern society: 'be operational (that is, commensurable)' he says, 'or disappear.'<sup>44</sup> Taken together with Foucault, Lyotard's work effectively closes the loop of abstract circular systems of power in which the possibility of social change is denied – a situation giving rise to beliefs akin to Judith Butler's startling declaration – the significance of which is emphasized by Neil Nehring – that: 'Emancipation and the good have proven their unrealizability.'<sup>45</sup>

The influence of French postmodernism in the realm of popular music theory has proved fundamentally divisive. Certain scholars and critics in the field, such as Lawrence Grossberg, Simon Frith, and E. Ann Kaplan display clear allegiances to the postmodernist conviction that resistance to the social status quo is contained within the closed loop of power and is, therefore, redundant. As Neil Nehring points out, what they find instead is merely a 'terrible fragmentation and passivity in [music's] intended audience,' which apparently reveals that 'no one really cares about the social world [...] or at least everyone is convinced of the impossibility of understanding and influencing it.'<sup>46</sup> As a result, any expression of conviction or authenticity in music is 'a pretense, a fraud, and emotions expressed in music aren't political dynamite – they're just good for business.'<sup>47</sup> In this sense emotion in music loses authenticity through its co-optation in corporate mass production – a prime example of the closed power loop thwarting the social agency of music. Lawrence Grossberg reveals his compliance with Lyotard's

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<sup>43</sup> Lyotard, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., xxiv.

<sup>45</sup> Nehring, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

work in this regard, when he states in 'Another Boring Day in Paradise' that: 'As history becomes mere change – discontinuous, directionless and meaningless – it is replaced by a sense of fragmentation and rupture, of oppressive materiality, of powerlessness and relativism.'<sup>48</sup> In Lyotard politics is reduced to a war of minority discourses, and so the social subject of history is abandoned in favour of what John O'Neill calls 'the history and politics of subjectivity and minoritarianism.'<sup>49</sup> From the perspective of society we have arrived at the end of history (a postmodern apothegm), and Grossberg is quick to jump on to the bandwagon. It must be stressed here, however, that this aspect to the work of Foucault and Lyotard regarding microtextual history is highly pertinent to the way Pynchon writes about history and our relationship to time – something which I will be looking at more closely in Chapter Four.

Frith and Kaplan follow Grossberg's lead in appropriating the postmodernist theories of Lyotard and Foucault in their studies of popular music. In *Sound Effects* the former uses the postmodern 'condition' as an excuse to overlook the social contexts in which music is produced and received, arguing that 'music doesn't challenge the system, but rather reflects and illuminates it.'<sup>50</sup> While Kaplan, as George Lipsitz points out, sees the MTV television channel as 'part of a contemporary discourse that has written out history as a possible discourse,' claiming that the channel's teenage audience 'is constituted by the station as one decentred mass that absorbs all the types indiscriminately – without noting or knowing their historical origins.'<sup>51</sup> Lipsitz, along with Nehring and Chanan, views the ahistoricity of critics such as Grossberg, Frith, and Kaplan with disdain, and illustrates instead the pervasive presence of the past in and around popular music, even in the postmodern age. He – like Nehring and Chanan – draws heavily upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to explain how language is a social process (while allowing for the contemporary postmodern celebration of language as plural and multiple) and has links both to the past and the future; preceding and proceeding utterances; tradition and progress. Effectively, in linking the process of musical production and reception to Bakhtin's description of carnival tradition, and by establishing this as a preferable alternative to the

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<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, "Another Boring Day in Paradise," *Popular Music* Vol.4 (Cambridge UP, 1984).

<sup>49</sup> John O'Neill, *The Poverty of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1995) 4.

<sup>50</sup> Simon Frith, *Sound Effects* (New York: Pantheon, 1981) 272.

<sup>51</sup> Lipsitz, 103.

postmodernism of Lyotard and Foucault – which is seen as reductive, abstract, and fatalistic – scholars such as Lipsitz, Nehring, and Chanan have held Bakhtin's work up as a template of postmodern theory that *should have been*. After all Bakhtin pre-dates post-structuralism by thirty years, yet his work concerning the unfixed nature of the sign in language bears striking similarities – with the crucial difference being, however, that Bakhtin grounded his theories in the material world of social agency. It is for this reason that contemporary scholars who wish to re-assert the social significance of music value his work so highly.

This trend in social and cultural theory – exemplified in the field of popular music by Lipsitz, Nehring, and Chanan, but also in a broader social context by the likes of Terry Eagleton and John O'Neill – appears to be directed away from the work of Foucault and Lyotard, and towards an affirmation of work such as Bakhtin's which promises much more of a possibility for effective opposition to monological power structures. Eagleton, for example, abhors Lyotard's dismissal of metanarratives, and uses the persistence of so-called grand narratives of oppression to illustrate his point. Referring, in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, to the violent rise of fascism in the first half of the twentieth century, Eagleton suggests that the price of believing in the non-existence of grand narratives amounts to 'a betrayal of the dead, along with a majority of the living.'<sup>52</sup> By the same token, in *The Poverty of Postmodernism* John O'Neill decries the 'postmodern fascination with cultural surfaces and its derision of essence'<sup>53</sup> – a fascination fostered (O'Neill says) by the work of Fredric Jameson, who argues that contemporary culture has suffered from a waning of affect resulting from a diminished emotional engagement with the arts. With the perceived reduction in contemporary culture of the aesthetic distinction between 'high' and 'popular' forms, the postmodern world, has become filled with incoherent pastiche and is now characterized by a repudiation of what Jameson calls 'depth models,' via the poststructuralist critique of the hermeneutic, or modes of interpretation. Jameson lists these depth models as 'the hermeneutic model of inside and outside [...]; the Freudian model of latent and manifest, or of repression [...]; the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity, whose heroic or tragic thematics are closely related to that other great opposition between alienation and disalienation, itself equally a casualty of the postmodern period; and finally [...] the great semiotic

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<sup>52</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 51.

<sup>53</sup> O'Neill, 5.

opposition between signifier and signified.’ O’Neill goes on to highlight Jameson’s explanation that these various depth models are replaced by ‘a conception of practices, discourses and textual play’ where depth is replaced ‘by surface, or by multiple surfaces.’<sup>54</sup>

A pattern starts to emerge in the fields of popular music studies and broader cultural theory whereby the utilisation of a fatalistic aspect of critical postmodern theory is somewhat overplayed – either to aid arguments concerning the socio-political impotence of musical expression; or, countering that idea, to highlight a wrong-turn in cultural theory that is seen as dangerously reductive compared to the socially impactful Bakhtinian model of dialogism that is preferable to many. In either case, many useful and positive ideas from the arena of postmodern theory (for example, relating to Foucault’s resurrection of microtextual experience) are too casually overlooked. The fact remains, however, that for anybody seeking to emphasize music’s socially active role, it is the Bakhtinian camp (in their struggle against the headline-grabbing postmodern philosophers) who hold the greatest appeal. Part of the vehemence characteristic of the objections levelled against the postmodernists is no doubt due to the fame (and effectiveness) of their theories. Jean Baudrillard, and his concept of hyperreality, is yet another who is taken to task: in *Simulacra and Simulations* Baudrillard identifies a sense of acute disenchantment in mass culture, generated by a lack of real depth in the world, in which everything from consumer products to feelings and emotions are simulations that abolish the real, or at least replace former concepts of the real through ‘the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal,’<sup>55</sup> whereby signs of the real are substituted for the real itself. The lack of essence and authenticity described in these theories makes it difficult, in the words of O’Neill, to ‘resist the power/knowledge trope that now dominates postmodern political thought.’ Resistance is difficult, that is, but worth it; for O’Neill goes on to plead that ‘social structure is unthinkable as [merely] appearance [without essence]. To ignore this [...] is to surrender ourselves to cave culture, and to the cultural amnesia that separates us from the long struggle against ideology.’<sup>56</sup> The crucial point to consider here is how this perceived lack of essence impacts the power of music; for if we are living in an age where such

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<sup>54</sup> O’Neill, 198.

<sup>55</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2004) 1.

<sup>56</sup> O’Neill, 5.

values as authenticity and originality are denied, then is it possible for the listener to be moved by a piece of music that is produced in such circumstances? Neil Nehring notes how Jameson's work leads to the assumption that 'the commercial process that makes available something like punk rock completely determines (or limits) the possibilities of both the artistic product itself and the ways people respond to it;' and that, according to Baudrillard's description of the hyperreal in the modern world, generated through technologies of entertainment and information, 'what we experience as feelings is in reality just an imitation of feeling, and we all know it.'<sup>57</sup> For the Bakhtinian musicologists sentiments like these are anathemas – but what of Pynchon? In Chapter Two, looking at music and media in the light of authenticity and commerciality, we will see that Pynchon is rather more equivocal when it comes to the commodification of cultural expression.

That music can have an emotive impact on the listener is surely not in question, yet the exact nature of music's communicative force has, despite thousands of years' worth of endeavour to the contrary, defied satisfactory explanation (one of the first to approach the conundrum was the Greek philosopher Damon, a contemporary of Plato in the fifth century BCE). However, the attempt to define music as a language – which would eventually lead to a kind of 'semiotics of music' – was picked up in earnest during the early part of the nineteenth century, notably by, among others, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. In his three-volume work *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer describes music's unique position among the arts as that which does not merely copy or reflect the ideas we have of the world around us; rather, music embodies the will itself, which is closely aligned to instinct and desire as opposed to the intellect. Through the 'will' we participate in the reality of an otherwise unachievable world outside the mind, and in the underlying reality that lies beyond the mere phenomena of our sensory and mental representations of the world. All other art-forms, Schopenhauer argues, 'objectify the will only indirectly [...] by means of the Ideas,' whereas music, because it speaks of the will, 'passes over the Ideas, is also quite independent of the phenomenal world, positively ignores it, and, to a certain extent, could still exist even if there was no

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<sup>57</sup> Nehring, 25.

world at all, which cannot be said of the other arts.’<sup>58</sup> What Schopenhauer tries to establish is a sense of the inexplicable nature of the language of music – an ‘exceedingly universal language’<sup>59</sup> he says, the effect of which ‘is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence.’<sup>60</sup> He is speaking of the sensation that all lovers of music have experienced, that sublime moment of connection when it feels as though a piece of music is speaking directly to our very essence and imparting its meaning to us, which remains at once inexplicable and yet is deeply felt and in some way understood. It is perhaps significant to note how Schopenhauer himself – a self-confessed misanthropist – chooses to explain the sensation: ‘The inexpressible depth of all music, by virtue of which it floats past us as a paradise quite familiar yet ever distant from us, and by which also it is so fully understood and yet eternally remote, and is so easy to understand and yet so inexplicable, is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being.’<sup>61</sup> There is, however, a certain transcendent quality to music in Schopenhauer’s view, that rather hinders any attempt to establish a concept of music as being socially active; for here is described an artistic force that authenticates the ‘emotions of our innermost being,’ but one which does so ‘entirely without reality and remote from its pain.’<sup>62</sup>

Other philosophers of the early nineteenth century, such as Hegel (whom Schopenhauer nonetheless despised), reinforce this idealistic view of music as an art of emotion. In Hegel, ‘just as inarticulate cries are direct expressions of the soul, so is music the art of the inner consciousness [Innerlichkeit].’<sup>63</sup> Emotion is the living trace of the inner consciousness and in its purest form is not connected with any object or content. As Raymond Monelle points out, in the sense that ‘music proceeds from, and communicates with, that inner consciousness’ in Hegel’s writing, ‘its ‘meaning’ is thus prior to anything that can be put into words.’<sup>64</sup> Due to the inexplicability of musical meaning it was a perfect topic at the time for Hegel’s new form of thinking and logic, which he termed ‘speculative

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<sup>58</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol.1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Dover Publications, 2021) 257.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Raymond Monelle, *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 6.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

reason,’ and which today is popularly called ‘dialectics’ – an attempt to overcome what he saw as the limitations of both common sense and of traditional philosophy at grasping philosophical problems, the relationship between thought and reality, and the problem of metaphysical contradictions and their solutions.

The idealism of Schopenhauer and Hegel, which would later be shared by, among others, the German writer and composer E T A Hoffmann – ‘Is not music the mysterious language of a more distant spiritual realm whose wonderful accents strike a responsive chord within us, and awaken a higher and more intense life?’<sup>65</sup> – is simply not good enough for those wishing to establish an accurate concept of musical meaning. To this end, a significant section of musical analysis has, throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, attempted to move towards a theory of musical semiotics, or the process of signification in music, in an effort to decipher the ‘universal language’ and to explain the previously inexplicable. This, however, has proved to be a largely elusive goal – as Monelle’s book, *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music*, shows. For while such people as, for instance, the music aesthetician Susanne Langer have distanced themselves from Hoffmann’s ideas of transcendence, they nonetheless find it difficult to avoid touching on the undefinable qualities of music. In *Feeling and Form*, Langer suggests that music acts as a perceptive ordering of human emotions, and as such should be considered as the ‘logical form of sentience,’ our interest in which ‘arises from its intimate relation to the all-important life of feeling, whatever that relation may be. [Music] is not the symptomatic expression of feelings that beset the composer but a symbolic expression of the forms of sentience as he understands them.’<sup>66</sup> The symbol here, however, is recognized as being ‘felt as a quality,’ rather than ‘recognized as a function,’ and cannot help to put the ‘logical form of sentience’ into words. It is a problem that occurs again and again in studies into the semiotics of music, which, despite the best efforts of many, has been forced thus far at least to focus on the scientific description of music, rather than on how or what music is able to communicate. This frustrating fact has led to Raymond Monelle’s claim that ‘the chief enterprise of music semiotics remains unfulfilled.’<sup>67</sup> Likewise, Henry Orlov, in the aptly titled “Toward a Semiotics of Music” (for we clearly are yet to *reach* a semiotics of music), sums

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<sup>65</sup> Monelle, 6.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 327.

up the problem in this way: 'If music is to be considered a sign system, then it is a very strange one: an icon which has nothing in common with the object it represents; an abstract language which does not allow for a prior definition of its alphabet and vocabulary, and operates with an indefinite, virtually infinite number of unique elements; a text which cannot be decomposed into standard interchangeable items.'<sup>68</sup> For reasons such as these, Orlov admits, 'music stubbornly and defiantly conceals even what is already known, and turns out to be a very difficult object to deal with.'<sup>69</sup>

The problem for music semiologists lies in the fact that music can be, and so often is, associated with and described as language, in that it certainly conveys or communicates something to the listener and is generally accepted as having developed along parallel lines with the faculty of speech. Yet there remains no satisfactory explanation of music's communicative power through semiotic study. One area in which some notable success has been achieved, however, is in regard to the parallels that may be drawn between music and mythology, most notably in Claude Lévi-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked*. Here music and myth are seen to share the characteristic of 'both being languages which, in their different ways, transcend articulate expression, while at the same time – like articulate speech [...] – requiring a temporal dimension in which to unfold.'<sup>70</sup> He explains how music utilizes a concept of time that is at once diachronic and yet at the same time the musical composition is enclosed in a synchronic totality, because of the internal organization of the musical work. Music is, in this sense, able to overcome 'the contradiction between historical, enacted time and a permanent constant.'<sup>71</sup> Music, according to Lévi-Strauss, operates on two grids: physiological and cultural. The existence of the first arises from the fact that music exploits organic rhythms; while the second consists of a scale of musical sounds, 'of which the number and the intervals vary from one culture to another.'<sup>72</sup> Culture is already present in music as its themes are drawn from a theoretically infinite series of sensory experiences and supposedly historical events, which is where common ground is shared with mythology. Lévi-Strauss' discussion of music in

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<sup>68</sup> Henry Orlov, "Toward a Semiotics of Music," *The Sign in Music and Literature*, ed. Wendy Steiner (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 136.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>70</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques Vol. 1: The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1964) 16.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

relation to myth, establishes a concept of music as the resolution to a temporal paradox that brings man 'face to face with potential objects of which only the shadows are actualized, with conscious approximations [...] of inevitably unconscious truths, which follow from them.'<sup>73</sup> It is in this sense that music is at once intelligible, because of the culture bound up within its composition; instinctively felt, due to the physiological time we share with its organic rhythms; and yet it remains untranslatable and retains an element of the sublime because, in resolving the contradiction between the diachronic and the synchronic, 'music, like myth, is an instrument for the obliteration of time,'<sup>74</sup> much as Jacques Attali's political economy of music stresses that time, in becoming multifaceted through the large-scale re-appropriation of the composition process, no longer flows linearly therein. The musical creator is therefore, according to Lévi-Strauss, 'a being comparable to the gods, and music itself is the supreme mystery of the science of man, a mystery that all the other disciplines come up against and which holds the key to their progress.'<sup>75</sup>

Considering this theoretical framework, it is easy to see why Thomas Pynchon continually strives to place music in a significant position within the cosmos of his fiction, despite (or perhaps, at times, because of) some of its inexplicable and abstract qualities. As well as establishing music as a medium for social communication, Pynchon uses music as a tool to undercut and challenge the dominant political order, to act as a model for re-enchantment and a symbol of his own desire to emphasise non-linear temporal patterns in his narratives, thereby subverting the insidious drift towards decadence ("cultural heat-loss" or "entropy") that we see played out many times in his fiction. As music is essentially the artistic expression of time restructured, it is a crucial tool in Pynchon's campaign against the linear disintegration of cultural identity. We can draw parallels, for example, between his penchant for incorporating jazz into his work – a genre of music that revels in improvisation, alternative time signatures and the avoidance of traditional chord progressions – with the non-linear narrative style of his first novel *V*. The tensions involved in Pynchon's double usage of music – on the one hand seen as part of a progressive narrative of cultural expression (as seen through the lens of Bakhtinian thinking), and on the other an

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<sup>73</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 18.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

instrument for the obliteration of time as we know it – reflect the tensions involved in the distinction between Bakhtinian and postmodernist perspectives on music. This is not to say, however, that the establishment of Bakhtin as a preferable alternative to the dominant strain of postmodernism is guaranteed to correlate with the representation of music in Thomas Pynchon's fiction, for meaning in that particular realm is never so easily available.

What is certain is the fact that musical presence in Pynchon is pervasive, eclectic, and heterophonic, taking the form of everything from muzak to punk to Wagner, with a Vivaldi kazoo concerto along the way. It infiltrates every crevice of his fiction and simply will not be quieted. It is certainly true that, although many of Pynchon's characters develop musical selves in ways which antagonize the dominant order by affecting their own emancipation from other forms of language and discourse which 'They' control – nonetheless, the reader quite often receives the impression that nothing has changed in the process other than the exile of the self from society. On the other hand, the very fact of Pynchon's writing about the struggle in such obviously sympathetic tones and considering the positive enthusiasm that characterises his non-fictional writings on music, is enough to make the reader think again. The usefulness of Bakhtin to this investigation stems from the way in which his dialogic principle – whereby the individual psyche is bonded to the social collective through the utterance, which is placed in the perpetual tradition of social communication – can be appropriated for the purpose of resurrecting the significance of *musica practica*, which Roland Barthes perceived to be on the wane in modern times, in the face of the authoritarian and abstract power structures defined in much of contemporary postmodern theory. The following chapters of this thesis focus the broader theoretical issues described above on to the novels of Thomas Pynchon, in order to evaluate the extent to which the social power of music is emphasized therein.

## Chapter One: Pynchon's Musical Method

It is necessary at this stage to take a close look at the several methods by which Thomas Pynchon incorporates music into his writing – techniques which form a significant contribution to the overall style that marks Pynchon out as a highly distinctive voice in postwar literature. Music is encountered in the work in many ways, but they can be gathered under four main headings: performance; media; allusion; metaphor (although there are often combinations of these). Just dipping into the opening chapter of the first novel *V.* (1963), we get an immediate sense of the preoccupation with music that will mark the entirety of Pynchon's career. Here we have four fictional songs (out of the novel's total of twenty-five) performed by various characters, plus renditions of "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" (15), "Blue Suede Shoes" (32), "Tienes Mi Corazón" (41), 'the old Depression song, Wanderin'" (34) and the 'raving merengues or baións' of Tolito, José and Kook 'clobbering polyrhythmic to the racketing of the shuttle' (38). There are allusions to Guy Lombardo and "Auld Lang Syne" (11; 30); 'a radio tuned to WAVY and Pat Boone' (19); 'the sizzle of chang music' (23); 'jazz on the record player' (35). A character named Dahoud evokes Clifford Brown and Max Roach's 1954 jazz composition "Daahoud;" Rachel Owlglass, a love interest of the novel's protagonist Benny Profane, has a smile 'like Rodgers and Hammerstein in 3/4 time [which] rendered Profane fluttery and gelatinous' (29); and minor character Dewey Gland's voice 'sounded like part of the inanimate wind, so high overhead' (30).<sup>76</sup> Gland's guitar is twice referred to as a weapon, particularly in the scene where members of the Shore Patrol attempt to break up the New Year's revelry that has migrated to a luxury liner under construction – in response to which he 'yelled, "Now stand by to repel boarders," and waved his guitar like a cutlass' (31), taking Woody Guthrie's famous slogan, "this machine kills fascists," literally. Finally, Pynchon gives us this ironic juxtaposition: "Dewey Gland. Sing them that Algerian pacifist song." Dewey, now astride a lifeline on the bridge, gave a bass string intro and began to sing Blue Suede Shoes, after Elvis Presley. Profane flopped over onto his back, blinking up into the snow. "Well almost," he said' (32). Here, in this one chapter, we encounter most of Pynchon's preoccupations with

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<sup>76</sup> The music/wind metaphor is a recurrent one in Pynchon and forms the basis of the second part of Chapter 5 in this thesis.

music and his techniques for incorporating them into his work. We have the traditional alongside the ultra-contemporary; the sacred and the secular; the familiar and the exotic; the comfortable with the subversive. We have irony, romanticism, the politics of resistance, and sheer fun. We have the intimacy and inclusivity of live performance alongside representations of musical media (radio, LPs). Finally, we have musical metaphor in the comparison with the wind.

Of the four techniques given above, performance is probably the most readily noticeable when reading Pynchon for the first time; the sheer number of songs that the characters in his vast fictional universe are apt to break into is one of the things that mark Pynchon out as a unique voice in literature over the last sixty years. Many of these occasions involve the singing (or humming/whistling) of real popular songs, classical arias, hymns, music hall ditties – usually in brief snippets, in such a way that performance and allusion are combined (there are literally hundreds of these instances to be found across Pynchon's works).<sup>77</sup> But the more striking aspect of Pynchon's writing is the rendering of many fictional songs, complete with lyrics and often information regarding style, time signature, key, chord progressions etc., that enable the reader to form an impression of how the song would sound. There are love ballads, shanties, lullabies, anthems, vaudevillian numbers, popular songs in a variety of styles from blues to musical theatre, folk songs that seem to transcend time and place. While some of these songs are humorous, almost frivolous, others are poignant; and while some are said to be the result of a song-writing process (such as those performed by the many fictional musical artists and bands to be found in Pynchon), a great number appear to be instantaneously inspired, off-the-cuff improvisations arising out of, or in some way commenting on, the recent narrative.

In *V.* we encounter one of these original songs as early as the first page, while *Gravity's Rainbow* alone contains upwards of fifty of them. There is a discrepancy across Pynchon's oeuvre regarding the number of songs we might expect from a novel. By far the highest ratio of songs to pages is *GR* (1 song for every 13 pages), followed by *V.* (1:20); *Lot 49* (1:21); *Vineland* (1:26); *Mason & Dixon* (1:26); *Inherent Vice* (1:46); *Against the Day* (1:61); and finally *Bleeding Edge* (1:79).<sup>78</sup> We can see that the three most recent novels show a significant

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<sup>77</sup> Christian Hänggi's *Pynchon's Sound of Music* provides an exhaustive catalogue of musical references in Pynchon's work.

<sup>78</sup> Once again, Hänggi's monograph is the work to consult for the data regarding the representation of music in Pynchon.

reduction in the number of songs; whether this is due to a deliberate alteration in the author's general approach, or whether a different approach was felt to be necessary for those three novels in particular, is hard to say. Certainly, in the case of *Bleeding Edge* (published 2013 and set in 2001), with its greater emphasis on allusion, mixtapes, DJ sets and karaoke, we can sense a shift in the balance from spontaneous musical utterance of an original kind (so characteristic of *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example) to the scattergun appropriation of pop- and subcultural music – accessed through a greater variety of media platforms than ever before – as an aid to individual expression and cultural solidarity that would be anachronistic in the novels set pre-Billboard. It may come as no surprise then to find the number of original songs reduced in this novel, nor to discover that of the six original songs to be found here not one of them can be considered a spontaneous utterance from the character/s in question.

The following quotation, taken from Pynchon's 1990 novel *Vineland*, is a good example of the way the author renders a song on the page, with ellipses, commas and dashes between syllables denoting pauses and hesitations, and information regarding the musical backing given in square brackets:

Mention ... [rattle of bongos] to me, [picking up slow  
Tropical beat]  
"Es posible,"  
And I won't need a replay,  
My evening, is yours....

Yes that's all, it takes,  
*Incre-íble*,  
Would it be so ... *ter-reeb-lay*,  
To dare hope for more?

¿Es posible?  
Could you at last be, the one?  
*Increíble*,  
Out of so many mil-lyun,  
What fun,

If you [bongo rattle, as above] would say,  
"Es po-ho-seeb-lay,"  
While that old *Mar Carib'* lay  
'Neath the moonlight above,  
*Es posible*,  
*Increíble*,  
It's love ... [fill phrase such as B-C-E-C-B flat]  
It's love ... [etc., board-fading] (343-4)

Often the musical information we are given is left somewhat vague and certainly incomplete (there must have been more than just bongos accompanying this lounge song parody; what instrument(s) provide the ‘fill phrase’? What particular ‘slow tropical beat’ are we meant to hear?). The song and its musical parts could have been rendered in its entirety as sheet music, as other authors have occasionally done (one thinks of James Joyce, John Barth, Anthony Burgess) – any reader familiar with musical notation would then have a much clearer notion of how the song would sound. But with Pynchon there is a greater sense of collaboration between author and reader, at least in this regard; we are given a certain amount of information, and then it’s up to us to fill in the blanks. For instance, we have this comedic song in *Inherent Vice* (2009), where lounge act Carmine and the Cal-Zones perform their latest release:

## JUST THE LASAGNA (semi-bossa nova)

Izzit some U, FO?  
 (No, no-no!)  
 Maybe it's—wait, I know! It's  
 Just the Lasa-gna! [*Rhythm-guitar fill*]  
 Just the La-sa-hah-gna ...  
 (Just-the-La-sa-gna),  
 Out of the blue, it came,  
 (Blue, it came)  
 Nobody knew, its name, just  
 “The Lasagna” ...  
 Just—“The La-sagna,”  
 (Just “Th’ La—”)  
 Oh, wo, Lo-  
 Zon-yaaah! (229-30)

Here we have the same techniques as deployed in the previous song, only this time with backing vocals given in indented parentheses. The musical information is, once again, fairly vague: ‘semi-bossa nova,’ and the rhythm-guitar fill is obviously one of our own choosing. Slightly more specific, but still leaving plenty of room for the reader’s imagination, is the piece of direction to be found in the first verse of “Soul Gidget” by Meatball Flag in the same novel:

Who's that strollin down the street,  
Hi-heel flip-flops on her feet,

Always got a great big smile,  
 Never gets popped by Juv-o-nile—  
 Who is it? [*Minor-seventh guitar fill*]  
 Soul Gidget! (155)

This sense of active participation on the part of the reader is occasionally picked up on and toyed with by the narrator. At one stage in *Gravity's Rainbow*, we are given a little insight into the method by which music and narrative inter-relate: 'The bridge music here, bright with xylophones, is based on some old favorite that will comment, ironically but gently, on what is transpiring—a tune such as "School Days, School Days," or "Come Josephine, in My Flying Machine," or even "There'll Be a HOT TIME in the Old Town Tonite!" take your pick—slowing and fading to a glassed-in porch downstairs, Slothrop and Katje tête-à-tête" (222-3). Performance and allusion, combined with a certain cinematic ambience, encourage the reader to utilise their experience of romantic Hollywood film music – only to realise that the musical references given here are utterly inappropriate to the romantic scene in question. They may indeed be commenting ironically on what is transpiring, but in a way that is anything but gentle. The narrator's facetiousness here prefigures the doomed nature of this particular love affair; the joke is on Slothrop and Katje if they thought their liaison would last. Later in Pynchon's career we can even see the narrator predicting the reader's expectations and losing patience: 'Music track? Frank Sinatra if you really need to know' – as though Pynchon, after so many years filling his work with musical references, might be starting to feel it as a rod for his own back. But even here the tetchiness in the narrative voice only lasts a moment before we are launched into the following reverie: 'The most poignant B-flat in all lounge music occurs in Cahn & Styne's song "Time After Time," beginning the phrase "in the evening when the day is through," and never more effectively than when Frank Sinatra reaches after it on vinyl that happens to be in the household record library' (*Bleeding Edge* 332).

Some songs provide biographical information: 'Winsome had even cast his own autobiography into aaaa rhyme and that simple-minded combination of three—count them—chord changes' (V. 220). Others offer a summation of the current cultural atmosphere – as is the case with the song performed by 'nerdcore band' Pringle Chip Equation in *Bleeding Edge*, in which the disorientation at the rapid boom-and-bust of the dotcom industry in the late 1990s is given expression:

Remember the Alley,  
 each day was a party, and  
 we were the new kids in town...  
 geeks on a joyride,  
 all rowdy and red-eyed,  
 and too high, to ever come down...

[...] Was it real?  
                                   was it  
 Anything more than a  
 dream through a lunch break, a  
 prayer on the fly,  
 Could we feel...  
 Off the edge of the screen, somethin  
 Meatspace and mean, that was passing us by... (232-3)<sup>79</sup>

Freelance web designer Driscoll Padgett, on 'guest' vocals for this number, conveys a sense of disillusionment and loss at the rude imposition of 'meatspace' reality on the virtual world that had offered so many exciting possibilities – but there is also the admission that such a wake-up call was probably necessary. This is a crooner's song full of nostalgia and regret, and Driscoll wears an appropriate 'LBD' (Little Black Dress) to sing it – her cool, experienced look and demeanour contrasting with the band, 'all wearing nerd eyeglass frames and, like everyone else in the room, sweating' (232).

There are many other songs that offer the encapsulation of an idea, the condensing of a theme/emotion or the periodic crystallization of the narrative (somewhat akin to the '*kommos*' technique used in Athenian tragedy, where particularly emotive dialogue is sung) in such a way that contrasts with the often-digressive narrative voice. An example of this comes during a scene in *Gravity's Rainbow* when Roger Mexico takes Jessica Swanlake and his nieces to a pantomime version of *Hansel and Gretel* in the hope of taking the children's minds off the nightly German rocket attacks. Almost inevitably a rocket explodes nearby stopping the pantomime mid-show and terrifying the audience – after which momentary panic the girl playing Gretel steps forward to sing, ostensibly to calm and reassure the people in the auditorium. The song we get, however, is far from what we might expect:

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<sup>79</sup> I am not quoting this song in its entirety, just enough to get the feeling of it.

Oh, don't let it get you,  
 It will if they let you, but there's  
 Something I'll bet you can't see—  
 It's big and it's nasty and it's right over there,  
 It's waiting to get its sticky claws in your hair!  
 Oh, the greengrocer's wishing on a rainbow today,  
 And the dustman is tying his tie ...  
 And it all goes along to the same jolly song,  
 With a peppermint face in the sky!

"Now sing along," she smiled, and actually got the audience, even Roger, to sing:

With a peppermint face in the sky-y,  
 And a withered old dream in your heart,  
 You'll get hit with a piece of the pie-ie,  
 With the pantomime ready to start!  
 Oh, the Tommy is sleeping in a snowbank tonight,  
 And the Jerries are learning to fly—  
 We can fly to the moon, we'll be higher than noon,  
 In our polythene home in the sky....

Pretty polythene home in the sky,  
 Pretty platinum pins in your hand—  
 Oh your mother's a big fat machine gun,  
 And your father's a dreary young man....

(Whispered and staccato):

Oh, the man-a-ger's suck-ing on a corn-cob, pipe,  
 And the bank-ers are, eat-ing their, wives,  
 All the world's in a daze, while the orchestra plays,  
 So turn your pockets and get your surprise—

Turn your pockets and get-your surpr-i-se,  
 There was nobody there af-ter all!  
 And the lamps up the stairway are dying,  
 It's the season just after the ball ...  
 Oh the palm-trees whisper on the beach somewhere,  
 And the lifesaver's heaving a sigh,  
 And those voices you hear, Boy and Girl of the Year,  
 Are of children who are learning to die.... (174-5)

Instead of a calming lullaby to ease the children's fears, the song we get is an attack on complacency – a warning not to take the war too much at face value or to buy into simplistic stories about good versus evil. As Pynchon points out elsewhere in *Gravity's Rainbow* 'what do you think, it's a children's story? There aren't any' (135). It is no coincidence that the pantomime being interrupted is *Hansel and Gretel*, establishing correspondences with the sado-masochistic role-playing of Weissmann/Blicero-Katje-Gottfried witnessed later in the novel, but with far greater psychological complexity than any pantomime will allow for. Is

Blicero's attack on the Orpheus Theatre at the end of the novel an act of evil, the product of a deranged mind? Or is it the judgement of an avenging angel? With rockets falling each night, this is not the time to be kidding ourselves about such things, engaging in make-believe and 'wishing on a rainbow.' The monster that is out to get us does not correspond so neatly with the official government line about the threat against freedom and democracy, and the danger does not simply come from across the Channel but can also be found much closer to home. Whether the audience understand the song or miss the point is hard to say, although the impression we get is that the message is not lost on everybody – for the scene immediately shifts to the perspective of Roger's niece Penelope, agonizing over the death of her father who was killed in action early in the war, and the dawning suspicion that, rather than dying a hero fighting for freedom, he is just one of the many victims of 'death-by-government' (176). The fact that the actress manages to get the audience to sing along seems miraculous given that this has the feeling of an improvised number. It reinforces the notion of this song as *kommos*, with the audience acting as the Chorus in a way which suggests an implicit understanding. One is reminded of the fact that the novel ends on a song and a similar encouragement for everybody to sing along, to 'follow the bouncing ball' (760).

Some types of musical expression in Pynchon are tailored to certain novels. For instance, In *Gravity's Rainbow* songs can quickly escalate into full-blown Busby Berkeley-style song-and-dance routines reminiscent of early 1930s movies such as *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* – but in ways that always contain a heavy dose of satire:

[A] crowd of Army personnel, American sailors, NAAFI girls, and German fräuleins [...] and leading the glee [...] General Wivern [...]. Ukuleles, kazoos, harmonicas, and any number of makeshift metal noisemakers accompany the song, which is an innocent salute to Postwar, a hope that the end of shortages, the end of Austerity, is near:

It's—  
 Mouthtrip-ping time!  
 Mouthtrip-ping time!  
 Time to open up that icebox door—  
 Oh yes it's  
 Mouthtrip-ping time,  
 Mouthtrip-ping time,  
 And once you've eaten some, you'll come, for more!

Ah, mouthtrip-ping time,  
 Mouthtrip-ping time!  
 It's something old, but also very new-w-w—  
 Life's so sublime,  
 In mouthtrip-ping time—  
 We hope you're all mouth*trip*-ping, toooooo!

Next chorus is soldiers 'n' sailors all together for the first eight bars, girls for the second, General Wivern singing the next eight solo, and *tutti* to finish it up. Then comes a chorus for ukuleles and kazoos and so on while everyone dances [...] ... on the final chorus the boys circle clockwise, girls anticlockwise, the ensemble opening out into a rose-pattern, from the middle of which dissipatedly leering tosspot General Wivern, tankard aloft, is hoisted briefly, like an erect stamen. (593-4)

The mood of this section is complex – on the one hand the hope for an improvement to living conditions after several years of the horrors and privations of war is understandable; on the other hand, the whole skit feels like a desperate appeal to the magic of Hollywood, a consumerist rain dance invoking the lush production values of those movies from the early 1930s that belied the economic situation of their own day. This is not so much a hymn to sufficiency as to excess. The unpalatable hoisting aloft of General Wivern gives further credence to the feeling that this 'salute to Postwar' is not entirely 'innocent' – as a high-ranking representative of what would become known as the American military industrial complex (which, as Pynchon repeatedly points out in *Gravity's Rainbow*, has deep ties to the Nazi war machine) Wivern is, in some sense, complicit in creating the situation that he is being exalted for rectifying.<sup>80</sup> He now becomes the capitalist exemplar cashing in his illegitimate chips, a phallic and lascivious figure (his very name is serpentine), whose job it is to convince everybody that enough just won't cut it. Pynchon returns to the glitzy 'showstopper' later in the novel – once again for satirical purposes – when Katje Borgesius is welcomed by members of the Schwarzkommando with the following elaborate routine:

What does happen now, and this is quite alarming, is that out of nowhere suddenly appear a full dancing-chorus of Herero men. They are dressed in white sailor suits [...] and they are carrying a girl all in silver lame, a loud brassy dame after the style of Diamond Lil or Texas Guinan. As they set her down, everyone begins to sing:

Pa—ra—noooooiia, Pa-ra-noia!

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<sup>80</sup> Wivern is a British general but also on the technical staff of SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) under American funding.

Ain't it grand to see, that good-time face, again!  
 Pa-ra-*noi*-ya, boy oh boy, yer  
 Just a bit of you-know-what  
 From way back when!  
 Even Goya, couldn't draw ya,  
 Not the way you looked, just kickin' in that door—  
 Call a lawyer, Paranoia,  
 Lemme will my ass to you, for-ever-more!

Then Andreas and Pavel come out in tap shoes (liberated from a rather insolent ENSA show that came through in July) to do one of those staccato tap-and-sing numbers:

Pa- ra- noi— (clippety-clippety-clippety cl[ya,]op!)  
 Pa- ra- noi— (shuffle*stomp!* shuffle*stomp!* shuffle*stomp!*  
 [and] cl[ya,]op! clickety cl[Ain't]ick) it grand (clop)  
 ta (clop) see (clippy*clop*) yer good-time face again! etc.  
 (657)

Katje, thrust unwittingly into the piece as the blonde bombshell/allegorical figure of paranoia, is unnerved by the racial element: 'she must say that she finds the jazzy vulgarity of this music a bit distressing. What she had in mind was more of an Isadora Duncan routine, classical and full of gauzes, and—well, *white*' (657). The routine plays like a disorienting mash-up of *Anchors Aweigh* and the sacrificial scene in *King Kong*, with Katje in the position of a Fay Wray as much as a Diamond Lil. Andreas and Pavel's tap dance is so frenzied that Pynchon's literary portrayal of it is difficult to read, and impossible to read aloud. If the song during the pantomime performance mentioned earlier represents *kommos*, then in these two examples we have something akin to the often playful and comic lyric dance known as *hyporchema* – only here with the added bitterness of satirical content, with Pynchon channelling his inner Menippus.<sup>81</sup> In *Gravity's Rainbow*, where there is an emphasis on cinematic tropes (including non-diegetic music) and Hollywood illusion (not to mention the surreal) Pynchon has licence to play with techniques such as this. We don't get quite the same degree of elaboration in musical performances elsewhere in the oeuvre – except occasionally in the Chums of Chance sections in *Against the Day* (2006), the Chums being in the curious position of inhabiting two fictional worlds at the same time, one within the other, but having agency in both. They even start to become

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<sup>81</sup> Theodore D. Kharpertian has more on this subject in his book *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon* (1990).

aware themselves of the unusual propensity for song and dance in this multi-layered universe (Pynchon, at this point in his career, happy to make fun of his own stylistic tendencies):

Uproar. Heads appearing over the edges of upper bunks. Jumping up and down, running around colliding with each other, looking under furniture, in closets, everywhere for the vanished harpman. The Chums by now understood that this was the “intro” to a musical number (*ATD* 472-3)

It is not only the Chums that can sense a ‘musical number’ approaching; so too can the well-attuned Pynchon reader after several novels’-worth of prior conditioning.

A different model for thinking about these original songs, however, might be in the form of the ‘cadenza’ – improvised flourishes riding above the underlying narrative. Here too Pynchon can be playfully ironic in drawing attention to his own musical methods. An episode in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a case in point: Seaman Bodine’s response to the seriality vs. tonality argument between Gustav Schlabone and Säure Bummer is to sing his own song, titled ‘My Doper’s Cadenza,’ and thereby ‘set up a useful interference.’ It is not improvised – ‘every chance he gets, Bodine will croon it’ – except for the cadenza part, which, presumably, would alter with each rendition:

If you hear. A “box” so sweet,  
Play-in’ tunes-with, a peppy beat,  
That’s just MY DOPER’S, CADEN-ZA-A-A-A!

Mel-o-dees, that getcha so,  
Where’d they *come* from? / don’t know!  
(h-ha) It’s just MY DOPER’S CADEN-ZA(A)A-A-A!

<i>This is the “ca- denza” part—</i>	Now I know it’s not as keen as old Rossini <div style="text-align: right;"><i>[snatch of La Gazza Ladra here],</i></div> Nor as grand as Bach, or Beethoven-or-Brahms <i>(bubububoo[oo] oo [sung to opening of Beethoven 5<sup>th</sup>, with full band]),</i> But I’d give away the fames, of a hundred Harry James ... wait, fame? Of a hundred <i>Jame?</i> Jameses ... Uh ... fameses? Hmm ...
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[scherzoso]	I-hi-hif this little-song, can-bring, you-to-my arms! Dum de dum, de dum de dee, Oh, it’s better than a symphonee— It’s MY DOPER’S CADENZA, to yooooouuu! (685-6)
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The first two verses and the final 'scherzoso' – i.e., the non-spontaneous sections – are performed with aplomb; the improvised cadenza, on the other hand, falls apart in the moment of composition as Bodine becomes distracted by his own lack of grammatical certainty, and it simply peters out. The miraculous 'snatch' of Rossini and the 'full band' accompaniment that enters halfway through at the mention of Beethoven, only serve to highlight the realism of Bodine's incompetence (one can imagine him messing it up every time). The amusing thing to note here, however, is that by rights this kind of stumbling, groping performance should be the experience of *all* those characters in Pynchon who burst into song at random – and yet those other performances, those dozens of other narrative cadenzas, are usually perfectly slick and betray no in-the-moment nerves or anxieties. In this one instance, Pynchon is satirising his own technique for comedic effect, allowing Bodine – the picaresque seaman – to be the fall guy in the process.

Some of the songs in the novels resonate (often miraculously) with other scenes, crossing barriers of place and time: an example being Charisma and Mafia's Wittgenstein-inspired duet in *V.* (288-9), which follows closely on from the cryptic references to Wittgenstein in the previous chapter set on a different continent over thirty years prior. Occasionally songs even offer correspondences with other novels: "Soul Gidget" features in both *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*, while the same two novels also contain songs by the fictitious Droolin' Floyd Womack. Bands like The Paranoids (*Lot 49*; *Vineland*) and The Corvairs, aka The Surfadelics (*Vineland*; *Inherent Vice*), also have crossover presence. It can be said that these meta-correspondences serve to re-emphasize Pynchon's technique of figuration, exemplified by (but certainly not limited to) the several incarnations of the aforementioned Seaman Bodine. There are also family ties across more than one novel (what Pynchon calls 'consanguinous discombobulation' (*Vineland* 324)) – the Traverse family figuring in both *Vineland* and *Against the Day* (and possibly also *Bleeding Edge*, if the Justin of that novel is the same Justin we met in *Vineland* grown to adulthood) – as well as the shadowy development of the Yoyodyne company in *V.*, *Lot 49*, and *Gravity's Rainbow*. We are given a whole host of protagonists compelled by similar quests, most notably the quest for truth – overtly in the cases of Herbert Stencil (*V.*), Oedipa Maas (*Lot 49*), Doc Sportello (*Inherent Vice*) and Maxine Tarnow

(*Bleeding Edge*), but also in *GR* we have Slothrop, Enzian, Tchitcherine, Roger Mexico, Ned Pointsman, Katje Borgesius and Pirate Prentice, all of whom are engaged in sense-making quests of one sort or another, while Prairie Wheeler (*Vineland*), Charles Mason (*Mason & Dixon*), Lew Basnight, Yashmeen Halfcourt, Dally Rideout and the Traverse brothers (*Against the Day*) are also seeking answers of a very personal nature. It all contributes to what amounts to a literary universe of extraordinary breadth, but in which binding correspondences may be found across the oeuvre. It is my contention that one of the most significant of such correspondences – both thematically and stylistically – is the presence of music.

The sense of the miraculous in Pynchon's use of music makes itself felt in other ways too. Not infrequently a guitar, or more often a ukulele, will manifest itself out of nowhere for the purposes of a song, but even where performances are given *a capella* there is often an unaccountable sense of musical accompaniment. We can see this in *Gravity's Rainbow* when Slothrop serenades Katje with a corny fox-trot called 'Too Soon to Know:' 'she waits with a vapid look till he's done, mellow close-harmony reeds humming a moment in the air' (196). The scene is an intimate tête-à-tête between the two characters in a private hotel room, so where is the music coming from? Is it imagined by Katje or Slothrop, perhaps engendered by the recent memory of the hotel band downstairs? Or by the narrator, either consciously (to emphasize the romantic aspect of the scene) or unconsciously (entering the frame of mind of Katje and/or Slothrop)? Perhaps the hotel band can be heard downstairs, through an open window, their music at that moment suiting Slothrop's purposes as serenading crooner. Or maybe the music is just miraculously *there*, and we don't need to worry too much about how it is there, but why. In this instance, the non-diegetic music feeds into the cinematic motifs of the novel, accompanying Katje and Slothrop's romantic melodrama but in such a way as to ironically undercut the expectations of the dedicated movie-goer: after all, these fleeting lovers are destined for no Hollywood-style happy ending. In a similar vein we are introduced to the Learned English Dog through the medium of song in *Mason & Dixon*: 'from somewhere less illuminate comes a sprightly Overture upon Horn, Clarinet, and Cello, in time to which the Dog steps back and forth in his bright Ambit' (18) – whereby not only the music but even the light miraculously serves the Dog's performative intentions.

The fact that the music in a scene may not be objectively heard by anyone does not diminish its significance. In Pynchon's work, music is often a crucial factor in dreams and hallucinations and is as important an aspect of inner life as of outer reality. Some of the songs are not 'performed' at all and only exist as part of the inner life of the text, inaccessible to the characters and only 'heard' by the reader. This is particularly true of *Gravity's Rainbow*, with its oneiric/filmic quality and schizophrenic narration – but even then, these songs have a musicality to them beyond what is termed the musicality of poetry (which is how all these songs could otherwise be classed). An example is where the narrator chooses the medium of song to comment on Enzian's ephedrine addiction:

Just a daredevil Desox-yephedrine Daddy  
 With m'pockets full o' happee daze,  
 Zoomin' through the Zone, where the wild dogs roam,  
 Givin' all m'dreams away ... (522)

The song continues for another fourteen lines, but the significant thing to note here is the marginal note that accompanies it: 'Sort of a Hoagy Carmichael piano can be heard in behind this here,' leaving us in no doubt as to the musicality of what is being offered up. Despite the first-person perspective in this song, it is not Enzian singing. The narrator has not entered into free indirect discourse here (a technique that is liberally applied elsewhere in *GR*); the song comes from a place outside the story, as though the narrative personality is susceptible to the same uncontrollable urge to expression through song that the characters are seen to exhibit. Conversely, we have the following musical interlude that occurs during one of Pirate Prentice's dreams: 'they do bother him, these free women in their teens. Their spirits are so contagious,

I'll tell you it's just —out, —ray, —juss,  
 Spirit is so —con, —tay, —juss,  
 Nobody knows their a-ges ...

Walkin' through bees of hon —ney,  
 Throwin' away —that —mon, —ney,  
 Laughin' at things so —fun —ny,  
 Spirit's comin' through —to, —you! (538)

with the marginal note: 'Where did the swing band come from? She's bouncing up and down, she wants to be jitterbugged, he sees she wants to lose her

gravity—.' In this completely internalized and surreal episode the question as to where the swing band accompaniment is coming from almost seems beside the point: in dreams we may expect anything and, in this particularly sinister reverie, anxieties regarding the origins of the music ought to be the least of Pirate's concerns. Unless, of course, he does not take it to be a dream – Pirate's singular contribution to the people at PISCES is his ability to dream other people's dreams (especially nightmares) for them, thereby freeing them up, psychically, for their important work. One would think then that such a connoisseur of dreams would be able to spot one a mile away – but this dream is all his own, the subject his own anxieties about trust. The fantasy does in fact begin to merge with reality after a while with the appearance of Katje, but that is exactly what happens to dreams on waking. If Pirate mistakes this episode for waking reality, then the question makes sense because the music seems miraculous. But even then, the feeling of surprise is quickly dismissed as he gets distracted by the girl wanting to dance.

In addition to Pynchon's utilisation of the sense of the miraculous in music is the consequent feeling that music can (in simple terms) somehow be a force for good; at various times in Pynchon's work, it is seen as a protective influence, a guide to the right path, and an enabler of happy coincidences (not to mention plot development). In *Vineland*, for example, the dual forces of music and mantra combine to (it is hoped) apotropaic effect at Bodhi Dharma Pizza – Prairie Wheeler's place of work and focal point of resistance to the presence in the area of Brock Vond's federal task force CAMP (Campaign Against Marijuana Production): 'All the occupants of the place were chanting, something that, with vibes of trouble to come, he [Zoyd] recognized – not the words, which were in Tibetan, but the tune, with its bone-stirring bass, to a powerful and secret spell against invaders and oppressors' (49). While, in *Against the Day*, the occasion of Yashmeen and Cyprian's fortuitous reuniting (which has far-reaching consequences for the plot) is facilitated by the sound of a music student playing the piano:

Out on his perambulations one day, he heard from an open upstairs window a piano student, forever to remain invisible, playing exercises from Carl Czerny's *School of Velocity*, op. 299. Cyprian had paused to listen to those moments of passionate emergence among the mechanical fingerwork, and at that moment Yashmeen Halfcourt came around the

corner. If he had not stopped for the music, he would have been around another corner by the time she had reached the spot where he was standing. (804)

It is recognition of the human element here that arrests Cyprian in his wanderings; the mechanical exercise (with its academic considerations of musical theory and correct fingering) giving way (if only momentarily) to artistic expression. It is poignant that, after his horrific experiences with Derrick Theign, Cyprian's aimlessness is halted and his sentimentalist-romantic tendencies rekindled by this auspicious coincidence, in which the emergence of human passion, out of the mechanical and the mundane, figures prominently.

In *Vineland*, the important meeting between Zoyd and karmic 'adjustment' agent Takeshi Fumimota, is facilitated by information gained from a musician in a place of music: 'At some point [Zoyd] found himself back in the toilet of the Cosmic Pineapple, a then-notorious acid rock club, conferring with a bass player he'd worked with, who told him about the lounge-piano opening at Kahuna Airlines' (61). It is while working this job that Zoyd, as musician, provides another example of music acting as a protective force against malevolent agents – despite the fact that his instrument appears to have some malevolent intentions of its own):

Zoyd was presented with a thick tattered fake book full of Hawaiian tunes, and on the lounge synthesizer, a Japanese make he'd heard of but never played, he found a ukulele option that would provide up to three orchestral sections of eight ukes each. It would take several flights across the Pacific Ocean and back before Zoyd felt easy with this by no means user-friendly instrument. The critter liked to drift off pitch on him, or worse, into that shrillness that sours the stomach, curtails seduction, poisons the careful ambience. Nothing he could find in the dash-one under the seat ever corrected what he more and more took to be conscious decisions by the machine. (62)

Zoyd – 'segueing into the main title theme from *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*' (65) as their aircraft is boarded mid-flight by a group of shielded trooper-pirates – utilises the unpredictable electronic effects of the synthesizer to bamboozle the would-be kidnappers. Takeshi, in disguise as a blonde-haired hippie in order to outfox the intruders, joins Zoyd and sits in on banjo-ukulele<sup>82</sup> as they perform 'the

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<sup>82</sup> I look at the significance of the ukulele in Pynchon's work (specifically *Against the Day*) in Chapter Four.

old Hawaiian favorite “Wacky Coconuts” (66; the song is actually a Pynchon original): ‘Zoyd noticed that every time he hit his highest B flat, the invaders would grab for their radio headsets, as if unable to hear or understand the signal, so he tried to play the note whenever he could, and soon was watching them withdraw in a blank perplexity’ (66). Zoyd’s reward for helping Takeshi elude his pursuers is a business card and the promise of future assistance – the card later proving to be crucial to the plot in that it enables Prairie to hook up with DL Chastain (the latter carrying a scanning device that plays the theme from “Hawaii Five-O” when in proximity of one of Takeshi’s cards).

It is not only music itself but also the effect that it has on people that can act against the interests of malevolent agents in Pynchon. In *Inherent Vice* Doc Sportello needs to cause a scene to cover his escape from airport security and members of the Golden Fang – Doc having checked a parcel of drugs (earlier planted in his car by Bigfoot Bjornsen) onto a Kahuna Airlines flight. It is significant that Doc’s first instinct is not to simply run, or employ violence in some way, but to marshal members of the public to his cause through the medium of song: ‘[he] set his hat at a jaunty Sinatroid angle, and in a not-totally-embarrassing lounge voice began to work the crowd, singing,’

There’s a skyful of hearts,  
Broken in two,  
Some flyin full fare,  
Some non-revenue,  
All us bit actors  
Me, him and you,  
Playin our parts,  
In a skyful of hearts...

Up there in first class,  
Ten-dollar wine,  
Playing canasta,  
Doin so fine,  
Suddenly, uh-oh,  
Here’s ’at No Smokin sign  
That’s how it starts,  
In a skyful of hearts...

[*Bridge*]  
To the roar of the fanjet...  
You went on your way...  
I’ll sure miss you, and yet...  
There ain’t much to say...

Now I'm flyin alone  
 In economy class,  
 Drinkin the cheap stuff,  
 Till I'm flat on my ass,  
 Watchin my torch song  
 Fall off the charts,  
 But that's how it goes  
 In a skyful of hearts...(337-8)

'This tune had in fact been on the radio briefly a couple weeks back, so by the last eight bars there were actually people singing along, some lead, some backup, and stepping in rhythm. Enough witnesses to keep the Fang busy for a while' (338) – enabling Doc to make his getaway. The fact that this song has only recently featured on the radio (and 'briefly' at that) yet is already so deeply ingrained on public consciousness that the people in the check-in lounge can, in several different ways, join in the performance and eventually take it over, suggests the power of radio in ways which are also felt elsewhere in Pynchon.<sup>83</sup> Unlike many of Pynchon's original songs, this one comes with no information regarding its musicality – other than the vague suggestion of a 'Sinatroid' lounge sound. It may be, then, that we are meant to understand the immediate popularity of the song to be a result of the lyrics as opposed to any kind of sonic hook – it is a lament for the growing imposition of authoritative restrictions ('No Smokin sign / That's how it starts') that is striking a chord with the public.<sup>84</sup>

Just how deeply music is embedded in the psyche of some of Pynchon's characters can be seen in the latter stages of *Gravity's Rainbow*; as Slothrop's mind begins to fragment and his anxiety build, his first (protective) instinct is to fall back on song – to the point where at one stage he has to fight the urge to sing:

'why is he out here, doing this? [...] he was supposed to be ... whatever it was ... uh....

Yeah! yeah what happened to Imipolex G, all that Jamf a-and that S-Gerät, s'posed to be a hardboiled private eye here, gonna go out all alone and beat the odds, avenge my friend that They killed, get my ID back and find that piece of mystery hardware but now aw it's JUST LIKE—

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<sup>83</sup> I make this a key aspect of my discussion on music media in Chapter Two.

<sup>84</sup> Pynchon being Pynchon, there are also some truly awful lyrics here – the 'fanjet'/'and yet' rhyme is particularly bad. But we should not forget that low comedy (slapstick and bad puns abound in his work) is also a significant part of Pynchon's enterprise. Nor do I mean to imply that low comedy cannot be hilarious.

LOOK-IN' FAWR A NEEDLE IN A HAAAAY-STACK!  
 Sssss—searchinfrasomethin' fulla moon-beams,  
 (Something) got ta have yooooou!

Feet whispering through weeds and meadow grass, humming along exactly the breathless, chin-up way Fred Astaire did, reflecting on his chances of ever finding Ginger Rogers again this side of their graceful mortality....

Then, snapping back—no no, wait, you're supposed to be planning soberly now, weighing your options, determining your goals at this critical turning point in your ...

Ya—*ta-ta*, LOOKIN' F'R A NEEDLE IN A—

Nonono come *on*, Jackson, quit fooling, you got to *concentrate*....'  
 (561)

Pynchon's fictional universe is so saturated with music, both literally and metaphorically, that his characters find it only natural to express themselves through that medium; the desire to sing or perform music can become overwhelming. In *Against the Day*, for example, the Chums of Chance adopt designated singing roles for 'whenever they found it impossible to contain song of some kind' (4); and in *Gravity's Rainbow* Tyrone Slothrop is so heavily imbued with music (to the extent, indeed, that he is eventually depicted as a latter-day Orpheus figure) that when the miracle of musical expression temporarily leaves him, the effect is poignant in the extreme: 'Slothrop wants to sing, decides to, but then can't think of anything that'd work' (226).

Alongside the original song performances and the miraculous or non-diegetic soundscapes, Pynchon's use of media as a means to introduce music into the text is varied and complex.<sup>85</sup> It can be seen as a commentary on issues such as authenticity, the commodification of art, corporate co-optation of subcultural expression (I will be looking closer at this aspect of Pynchon's work in chapter 2) – but it also serves as a way to toy with ideas of representation and blur the distinction between reality and fiction. Many of Pynchon's songs are cultural artefacts in the world as it is represented – in other words, they have a broader life than the spontaneous, more localized musical utterances to be found elsewhere in the novels. There are also dozens of references to fictitious songs, operas, radio stations, record labels etc., that are of varying importance to the text but all of which combines to form a fictional cultural network superimposed

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<sup>85</sup> I will be looking closely at this aspect to Pynchon's work in Chapter Two.

on reality. Pynchon's work often involves a blending of fact with fiction, or a blurring of the distinction between the two, and in the field of music it is no different: fictional songs and artists on the radio are often heard alongside real ones; we have imaginary cover versions; facets of the media, of broadcasting and studio recording techniques, are brought into otherwise intimate live performances.

Music is further incorporated into Pynchon's writing through the use of allusion: the novels and short stories are shot through with hundreds of musical references (I count somewhere close to 900) – from jazz icons Lester Young and Gerry Mulligan at the beginning of the first of the stories, 'The Small Rain' (1959), to Tammy Wynette towards the end of *Bleeding Edge* (2013). The musical touchstones encountered in this fictional universe – from 18<sup>th</sup>-century baroque classical to Norwegian black metal; TV theme songs to Eastern European folk music; Wagnerian opera to advertising jingles; Noel Coward to Britney Spears – are as diverse as can be imagined. Their presence in the text can occur in several ways: in the narration; in dialogue (characters frequently use song lyrics to make a point); through media (songs heard on the radio or stereo system are often uncannily appropriate to the current scene); through paraphernalia; in performance (whether it be amateur or professional, private or public); in dreams; in the names of characters.

Music, both performative and allusive, enables Pynchon to develop an affinity between the narrative voice and certain characters. It is too simplistic to say that his work is about heroes and villains, good and evil; villainous characters in Pynchon are only ever tools in the employ of a more powerful agency, and often seem as disoriented and as paranoid as the so-called heroes. Furthermore, there are a whole host of characters who inhabit the grey area in between. Nevertheless, it is usually quite clear where our sympathies are meant to lie, and the satisfaction we feel at the downfall of characters like Brock Vond (*Vineland*), Scarsdale Vibe (*Against the Day*), Adrian Prussia (*Inherent Vice*), and Gabriel Ice (*Bleeding Edge*) is largely unmitigated. It should be noted that villains in Pynchon hardly ever display any affinity for, or interest in, music – or if they do show some small degree of musical inclination, the attempt feels uncomfortable at best. Indeed, on one occasion in *Vineland* we see a failed attempt by Brock Vond's right-hand man Roscoe to engage with this kind of allusive mode of expression after being busted by internal affairs:

“Jeez I know I’m bad but—” He wanted to quote the Shangri-Las and point out, “But I’m not evil,” but had inhaled a piece of burger roll and started to cough instead. (270)

The musical reference is denied this particular villain, but the fact that the attempt at least was made sets him apart from the true villain of the piece. In *Inherent Vice*, neo-Nazi Puck Beaverton’s obsession with Ethel Merman musicals establishes enough ambiguity about his character that when he is finally exposed as the villain he truly is, the effect is genuinely disturbing – so conditioned is the Pynchon reader to associate a passion for music (even Ethel Merman) with positive virtues.

Concert performances and jukebox selections can also engender feelings of cultural solidarity. The violent suppression of the People’s Republic of Rock and Roll campus in *Vineland* is accompanied by the distant sounds of a Blue Cheer concert at Anaheim Stadium (247), as if to emphasise the ultimate futility of the clampdown – but at the same time the separation between the immediate reality of state-sponsored violence and the ideal of free expression is also highlighted. But when Zoyd Wheeler is interrogated and brutalized by Brock Vond later in the same novel, the narrative is less equivocal: ‘Somewhere down the road from this federal facility, carried by the midnight wind from a biker’s bar called Knucklehead Jack’s, came live, loud rock and roll, ever-breaking waves of notes in squealing screaming guitar solos that defied any number of rules, that also lifted the blood and reassured the soul of locked-up Zoyd’ (300). Likewise, when people begin to regroup in the aftermath of Vond’s clampdown it is the jukebox that becomes a rallying point:

They sat devouring cheeseburgers, fries, and shakes in a waterfront place full of refugees from the fighting up the hill, all their eyes, including ones that wept, now lighted from the inside — was it only the overhead fluorescents, some trick of sun and water outside? no ... too many of these fevered lamps not to have origin across the line somewhere, in a world sprung new, not even defined yet, worth the loss of nearly everything in this one. The jukebox played the Doors, Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish. (117)

The feeling that a point – a ‘line somewhere’ – has been crossed in the social climate of America by the end of the 1960s is emphasised here by music of a

political stripe far removed from anything experienced only a decade before; where sex had been the main area of concern for cultural regulators, now drugs and civil unrest were becoming overt presences in mainstream music. Of course, there is a certain dramatic irony in play here, the narrative voice approaching free indirect discourse in the revolutionary sentiments of the penultimate sentence – because we, like Pynchon (writing this nearly two decades after the fact) and his narrator, know only too well the relative failings of late-1960s protest movements. It is something decried by Pynchon in his introduction to the *Slow Learner* collection, and we see again and again in his fiction movements of great potential on the cusp of failure – be it political resistance without coherence or a broad enough consensus, the summer-of-love ideal in the wake of Charles Manson in *Inherent Vice*, or the internet in the early stages of corporatization in *Bleeding Edge*.

The positive view of Pynchon's representation of music is that it constitutes a site of social intercourse; a shared territory between language and artistic expression, through which both listener and performer are placed in a socially communicative framework. For the majority of Pynchon's 'overlooked', 'disinherited', or 'preterite' population of characters, music is the most effective and satisfying means of communication. It allows them to obtain a voice, to participate in a cultural heterophony directed against the monological and authoritarian power-mongers who remain faceless and abstract in the texts. Pynchon celebrates the creation of virtuoso showmen such as McClintic Sphere (V.), The Paranoids (*The Crying of Lot 49*), and Billy Barf and the Vomitones (*Vineland*), and revels in offering up for the reader's pleasure a vast array of characters who randomly burst into song at a moment's notice. They all contribute to what Pynchon describes as the 'miracle of communication' (*Lot 49*, 124) that Oedipa Maas, the protagonist of *Lot 49*, can only half sense to be unfolding around her. In the introduction to *Slow Learner*, a collection of his early short stories, Pynchon – betraying for once his usual reticence – allows the reader a rare insight into the forces at work shaping his early literary ambitions. He speaks of new and exciting innovations in existing art-forms, such as the advent of a new kind of literary language emerging from the work of Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, and the 'wide availability of recorded jazz,' as 'centrifugal lures' against 'the undeniable power of tradition' (7). What Pynchon found exciting – and was whole-heartedly in favour of – were different ways of

communicating; multiple forms of expression across the whole spectrum of society, where boundaries or binary systems of thought are challenged and, occasionally, overcome. For Pynchon the effect of entering this new heterophonic realm was 'exciting, liberating, strongly positive. It was not a case of either/or, but an expansion of possibilities' (7).

He also sketches out here, however, an impression of the forces that stand in opposition to this sense of communicative freedom, and of the failure on the part of certain areas of society to come together in a synthesis of dissenting voices aimed at opposing the monological social structures that perpetuate the divisions between different social groups. Pynchon confesses that: 'The success of the "new left" later in the '60's was to be limited by the failure of college kids and blue-collar workers to get together politically. One reason was the presence of real, invisible class force fields in the way of communication between the two groups' (7). He describes a similar sense of social isolation in reference to issues of racial tension in the late 1950s: 'It may yet turn out that racial differences are not as basic as questions of money and power, but have served a useful purpose, often in the interest of those who deplore them most, in keeping us divided and so relatively poor and powerless' (12). The issue is a crucial one, for it sets the template for much of Pynchon's work, characterized as it is by a succession of endeavours to identify and establish, against the odds, a heterophonic level of communication – in the face of, and in opposition to, authoritarian social structures – which takes its most effective form as musical expression. Pynchon's early literary interest in music – besides his enthusiasm for Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (a book laden with jazz references and which Pynchon considered to be 'one of the great American novels' (*Slow Learner*, 7))<sup>86</sup> – appears to stem from a book written by Helen Waddell entitled *The Wandering Scholars*, which, having been reprinted in the early 1950s, was readily accessible to the aspiring writer. In the introduction to *Slow Learner* Pynchon describes it as 'an account of the young poets of the Middle Ages who left the monasteries in large numbers and took to the roads of Europe, celebrating in song the wider range of life to be found outside their academic walls' (7-8). Following in the footsteps of these 'young poets' Pynchon brings his own celebrated vision of 'the wider range of life' to the reader

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<sup>86</sup> I will be returning to Kerouac's *On the Road* in Chapter Three.

but allows the inhabitants of that world to develop voices of their own, so that they may sing their own lives.

## Chapter 2: Music and Media

Broadly mediated recorded music, and the commercial industry that surrounds it, is a ubiquitous presence in Thomas Pynchon's writing – as are the ever-advancing technological means by which the musical product is disseminated: from the Parsons-Short Auxetophone mentioned in *Against the Day*; the wireless in *Gravity's Rainbow*; transistor and car radios, LPs and home sound systems in *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Inherent Vice*; cassette tapes, boomboxes and the Walkman in *Vineland*; mix-tapes, DJ sets, audio files and karaoke in *Bleeding Edge*. Of course, *Mason & Dixon*, set in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, is necessarily lacking in this regard – the dissemination of music is restricted here to word of mouth, published scores for home performance, and live music events (such as Benjamin Franklin's demonstration of the glass harmonium, and the several operas, real and fictitious, that are mentioned in the novel). Even here, however, Pynchon manages to include allusions to musical media – from the level of novelty (see the musical bodice (425)) to the following cosmic simile, in which the Mason-Dixon line and its array of oölite shafts is likened to Franklin's 'Armonica' playing technique, taken to the planetary level:

“Rather than a Finger circling upon the stationary Rim of a Glass, the Finger keeps still, whilst the Rim rotates. As long as there is movement *between* the two, a note is produc'd. Similarly, this Oölite Array, at this Latitude, will be spun along at more than seven hundred miles per hour,— spun thro' the light of the Sun, and whatever Medium bears it to us. What arises from this? What Music?” (*M&D* 442)

The image conjured up here is of the Earth as cosmic turntable, with the light of the sun acting as stylus and the actions of people on the surface of the planet creating the grooves (literally, in the case of Mason and Dixon) of a record which could be termed history. The analogy serves to highlight the gravity with which Pynchon considers music and its mediation, and this chapter will be looking closely at key passages in the novels that bring such considerations to the fore – particularly regarding corporate manipulation, technological development, and the impact of popular music on youth culture.

There are literally hundreds of examples in Pynchon's work whereby music enters the narrative through one medium or another, and the genuine works co-exist with a whole host of fictitious artists, songs, record labels and radio stations. The earliest example occurs in the short story "Entropy" (1960) in the shape of the Duke di Angelis quartet who 'recorded for a local label called Tambú and had to their credit one 10" LP entitled *Songs of Outer Space*' (SL 81). In V. we have McClintic Sphere signing to Outlandish Records, whose otherwise novelty output includes titles like '*Volkswagens in Hi-Fi*' and '*The Leavenworth Glee Club Sings Old Favorites*,' and in a later chapter Satin and Porcépic's ballet '*L'Enlèvement des Vierges Chinoises*' at the Theatre de Vincent Castor. *The Crying of Lot 49* gives us the Fort Wayne Settecento Ensemble, KCUF radio station, Sick Dick and the Volkswagens (with their single, "I Want to Kiss your Feet") and the Paranoids. *Gravity's Rainbow* breaks free of its 1945 setting to make reference to a Rolling Stones-esque mid-60s band called The Fool. *Vineland* gives us the following bands: Septic Tank, Fascist Toejam ('300 watts of sonic apocalypse'), Billy Barf and the Vomitones aka Gino Baglione and the Paisans, the Corvairs aka the Surfadelics, Holocaust Pixels, and the Paranoids once again (having hit the big time since the days of *Lot 49*) – along with Indolent Records and KQAS radio station. *Mason & Dixon*: The Vásquez Brother's Marimba Quartet, operas *L'Orecchio Fatale*, *The Rebel Weaver*, and *The Black Hole of Calcutta, or, The Peevish Wazir*. *Against the Day*: Gastón Villa and His Bughouse Bandoleros, "Dope" Breedlove and His Merry Coons; there is a sequence of operettas produced by R. Wilshire Vibe with titles like *Princess of the Badlands*, *Mischief in Mexico*, *African Antics* and *Shanghai Scampers*; further operettas *Waltzing in Whitechapel, or, A Ripping Romance*, *The Burgher King*, and *Fossettes L'Enflammeuse*; along with 'popular' tunes such as "The Idiotic" and "The Hesitation Waltz." *Inherent Vice* gives us surf band the Boards, Spotted Dick, Beer (comprising remnants of the Corvairs encountered in *Vineland*), Droolin' Floyd Womack, Meatball Flag, the Furies, Carmine & the Calzones – plus KQAS (as seen in *Vineland*) and Stone Turntable music magazine. *Bleeding Edge* gives us the Kugelblitz Bebop Ensemble, Slade May Goodnight 'with her early career chartbuster' "Middletown New York," Droolin' Floyd Womack (of *Inherent Vice* fame), a 'nerdcore' band named Pringle Chip Equation, and Nazi Vegetable with their 'once chartbusting disco anthem' "In the Toilet"; there is also mention of an obscure Russian opera 'from the purge era' called *The Attractive Schoolgirl of*

*Zazhopinsk*, and a song from an off-Broadway musical about Amy Fisher called *Amy & Joey* ‘that’s been running since 1994 to packed houses.’

Pynchon’s work often involves a blending of fact with fiction, or a blurring of the distinction between the two, and in the field of music it is no different: fictional songs and artists on the radio are often heard alongside real ones; there are genuine songs on fictional radio stations, and vice versa; we have imaginary cover versions, such as Ohio Express’s “Yummy Yummy Yummy” covered and arranged, to Doc’s horror, by Herb Alpert (*Inherent Vice* 332). We hear of the preposterous Vivaldi kazoo concerto (*Lot* 49 11) and Haydn’s Op.76 ‘the so-called “kazoo” Quartet in G-Flat Minor’ (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 711), while there is also mention of a long-suppressed Rossini violin concerto (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 684). Theme tunes from television shows the Big Valley and Hawaii 5-0 (both famously instrumental pieces) are given lyrics in *Inherent Vice*, and in the same novel we are informed of the L.A. Philharmonic’s cross-cultural music series featuring the Boards and Frank Zappa. In *Vineland* the Paranoids play the Fillmore concert venue, Takeshi Fumimota actually *chooses* to listen to an album called *The Chipmunks Sing Marvin Hamlisch*, and Billy Barf and the Vomitones make it through a tough gig at a Mafia wedding with the help of the Italian Wedding Fake Book by Deleuze & Guattari. In *Bleeding Edge* there is a television broadcast of an ‘obscure, in fact never distributed Marx Brothers comedy version of *Don Giovanni*, with Groucho in the title role’ and also starring Margaret Dumont and Beatrice Pearson. Clearly, some of these are more credible than others; one can imagine a Marx Brothers *Don Giovanni*, but a Vivaldi kazoo concerto? (despite Pynchon’s obvious predilection for that novelty instrument). Things start to get really surreal though where genuinely fictitious elements take on concrete form: for example, in *Gravity’s Rainbow* the band at the Casino Hermann Goering are getting ready to perform ‘an abbreviated version of *L’Inutil Precauzione* (that imaginary opera in which Rosina seeks to delude her guardian in *The Barber of Seville*)’ (204); while in *Vineland* Sasha Traverse reminisces about her days singing with Eddie Enrico and his Hong Kong Hotshots, mentioning that Eddie had previously worked with Ramón Raquello, “playing congas [...] the night they interrupted ‘La Cumparsita’ with the news from Mars” (78). Raquello was the name of the fictitious bandleader (in fact it was Bernard Hermann) whose song “La Cumparsita” famously featured, briefly, as part of Orson Welles’ infamous

War of the Worlds radio announcement in 1938 – hence the reference to the news from Mars.<sup>87</sup>

Another method by which Pynchon incorporates music into his work is through allusion. The novels and short stories are permeated with roughly 900 allusive musical references, the effect of which is to establish music as an integral part of culture, and musical media as an important aspect of human social interaction. A readily noticeable effect of this musical ubiquity can be seen when characters use song lyrics in dialogue – a technique which occurs dozens of times in Pynchon but predominantly in the more contemporary novels of his later career. Often the reference is easy to catch, the lyric in question being the title of the song: “Oops, I did it again, as Britney always sez,” “Time is what the Rolling Stones call on their side, yes it is” (*Bleeding Edge* 7 and 47-8 respectively). Frequently, however, the reader has to do a bit more work in order to catch the reference: “‘Me gotta go’ as the Kingsmen always used to say” (*Vineland* 190, alluding to the song “Louie Louie”); “‘As Roy Orbison always sez,’ holding out his wrists dramatically, ‘let’s git it over with—’” (*Inherent Vice* 69, paraphrasing a lyric from the song “It’s Over”); “‘So he’s working in ‘D.C. now,’ as Martha and the Vandellas might say” (*Bleeding Edge* 351, referring to “Dancing in the Street”). An interesting thing to note here is that this technique is not limited to dialogue between characters; the narrator frequently speaks in the same way: ‘soon he was keeping up that act even where there was “nobody else around,” as Wilson Pickett might say’ (*Vineland* 73, – alluding to “In the Midnight Hour”) – and there are dozens more examples to be found in Pynchon’s work. It might be tempting to dismiss this as a particular affectation on the part of the author – after all, Pynchon himself employs the device in his introduction to *Slow Learner*: ‘The lesson is sad, as Dion always sez, but true’ (referring to the hit song “Runaround Sue” – the exact same reference occurs in *Inherent Vice* (11)). One gets the impression that Pynchon probably talks like this all the time. However, this device suits part of Pynchon’s enterprise in the later contemporary novels, regarding issues relating to the mediation and ubiquity of popular music from the 1960s onwards. We find no evidence of this technique in *Against the Day* or *Mason & Dixon*, for example, because it would be incongruous for those time settings.

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<sup>87</sup> I take the liberty of including these lists to give an idea of the degree of saturation involved with musical allusion in Pynchon, and to convey a sense of what it feels like to be bombarded with such references when reading him.

While the first novel *V.* is replete with popular music references, it is the second novel *The Crying of Lot 49* where Pynchon begins to dissect the significance of pop music media – particularly through references to the Beatles and the democratic influence of the transistor radio. Published in 1965 and with a roughly contemporary setting (various hints in the novel point to the summer of 1964), Pynchon is writing at a boom-time for pop music with various factors, both technological and aesthetic, driving the art-form ever further into the public consciousness since the mid-1950s setting of *V.* The recent advent of studio albums being added to the compilation LP and the 7" single – the latter undergoing its own evolution from 78rpm to the higher fidelity microgroove 45 – and the shift from mono to stereo recording are all part of the burgeoning appeal of pop at this time; so too is the inception of a new kind of act: the rock and roll band (as distinct from the 'group' or the 'backing group') – and, most notably, one band in particular: The Beatles. Where before, the adulation was focussed on one idol at a time (be it Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, or Ella Fitzgerald) or perhaps one main idol with their backing group (Bill Haley and His Comets, Buddy Holly and the Crickets, James Brown and the Famous Flames) – now there was a whole gang to idolize at once, and you could pick your favourite: Elvis had become John, Paul, George and Ringo. If Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley were matinee idols, the Beatles (and the many bands that followed in their wake on both sides of the Atlantic) were more like a sports team in their youthful exuberance and camaraderie. And while their musicality may not have been as proficient as that of James Brown's band, it could be argued that they did more to popularise their instruments: after all, the drummer is as much a Beatle as any of the other bandmembers. The impact on American pop culture of the Beatles' first appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show in early 1964 is well documented,<sup>88</sup> and the band would further utilise the visual media later that year in their hugely successful debut movie feature *A Hard Day's Night* (which had its US release in August) – a vivid youth culture showcase which blended the Beatles' music with the campiness of the British *Carry On...* films, the surrealist humour of Spike Milligan, and the French New Wave-influenced direction of Richard Lester. One further thing cannot be overlooked of course: their songwriting. While cover versions feature on four of the first five albums, most of their hit singles from the

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<sup>88</sup> On February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1964, an estimated 73 million viewers – a record for US television at the time – tuned in to watch the Beatles perform three songs including "She Loves You."

start were self-penned originals – a quality of do-it-yourself that, combined with the appealing band dynamic, engendered, in many, a hope of emulation (to go with the adulation) that was somewhat lacking regarding most prior musical idols.<sup>89</sup>

Such is the immediate pop-cultural backdrop of *The Crying of Lot 49* – a novel with far fewer musical references than *V.* but which examines the phenomenon of pop music media to a much greater extent.<sup>90</sup> The important thing is the degree to which the music is able to permeate public consciousness by 1964, aided by advances in technology both in the recording industry itself and in the electronic appliances market, with transistor radio and television set ownership figures rising year on year – Pynchon's novels, with their hundreds of musical allusions and characters who speak in pop song lyrics, bear witness to the power of popular music and mass media alike. In his exploration of the effects of such a potent combination of forces Pynchon often toys with the notion of representation, bringing facets of the media into otherwise intimate live performances. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, for example, young hopefuls the Paranoids have been fashioned by their manager into clones of the early Beatles (the fab four having occasionally used the name 'Los Para Noias' as a comedic alias). Complete with mop-top haircuts and fake accents, they serenade Oedipa and Metzger outside their motel room: 'in a shuddering deluge of thick guitar chords, the Paranoids had broken into song. Their drummer had set up precariously on the diving board, the others were invisible. [...] They [Oedipa and Metzger] stood at the window and heard the Paranoids singing:

#### *Serenade*

As I lie and watch the moon  
On the lonely sea,  
Watch it tug the lonely tide  
Like a comforter over me,

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<sup>89</sup> Many stars of the mid-to-late 1950s wrote their own hits – such as Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Sam Cooke. However, while many early-1960s bands recorded cover versions of 1950s rock and roll classics in their formative years, they were not looking to *be like* those earlier stars (an exception to this would be the relatable appeal of Buddy Holly). This is not to downplay the significance of 1950s (and often earlier) black American music in the sound of later bands but to emphasise that such influences are manifested, for the most part, through appropriation rather than imitation.

<sup>90</sup> The abundance of musical allusions in *V.* is replaced in *Lot 49* (to a large extent anyway) with extended narrative passages that take music as a key subject. The lengthy diversion dealing with *The Courier's Tragedy*, where there is no real scope for musical allusion, is also a contributing factor to this stylistic discrepancy between the two novels.

The still and faceless moon  
 Fills the beach tonight  
 With only a ghost of day,  
 All shadow grey, and moonbeam white,  
 And you lie alone tonight,  
 As alone as I;  
 Lonely girl in your lonely flat, well, that's where it's at,  
 So hush your lonely cry.  
 How can I come to you, put out the moon, send back the tide?  
 The night has gone so grey, I'd lose the way, and it's dark inside.  
 No, I must lie alone,  
 Till it comes for me;  
 Till it takes the sky, the sand, the moon, and the lonely sea.  
 And the lonely sea ... etc. [*Fade out*] (25-6)

This live performance, though perfectly plausible, nonetheless has an air of unreality about it; it feels mediated. The drummer setting up on a diving board (which is difficult even to envisage) creates the impression of a wacky television special or evokes the sort of precarious situations in which Ringo would often find himself in movies like *A Hard Day's Night*. Perhaps it is just one more way in which the Paranoids are trying to imitate the Beatles – but then we also have the fact that the song fades out at the end, as though it were a studio recording and not a live performance at all. Furthermore, Oedipa, listening to this from inside her motel room, experiences a richness of sound from the Paranoids' playing that would be impossible from a live performance given their limited personnel and equipment, and rather suggests a multi-track overlaying of parts: 'a fugue of guitars had begun, and she counted each electronic voice as it came in, till she reached six or so and recalled only three of the Paranoids played guitars' (27). In his article on the commercial aspects of popular music as it is represented in Pynchon's work, George William Twigg suggests that the band fade the song out themselves: 'This *diminuendo al niente* (which is rarely, if ever, used in rock concerts) shows how the Paranoids, even playing live, feel compelled to adhere to tropes associated with recorded music.'<sup>91</sup> I would suggest, however, that the song is represented as being miraculously mediated in the very moment of its live performance, or the text itself is taking on certain aspects of mediation, similar to the way in which *Gravity's Rainbow* (to a much greater degree) plays with

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<sup>91</sup> George William Twigg, "Sell Out With Me Tonight: Popular Music Commercialization and Commodification in *Vineland*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *V*," *Orbit* (2014), 31 March 2016 <http://doi.org/10.7766/orbit.v2.2.55>.

cinematic techniques. Either way, the fact that the Paranoids' music is geared towards mediation is clear; their *raison d'être* in their bid to ride the wave of the early 1960s British invasion is to be recorded – much as the Beatles would eventually eschew live performance in favour of developing their studio craft. Pynchon has the song fade out so that we are under no misapprehensions regarding the Paranoids' status as an act meant for radio. We learn in *Vineland* that their ensuing success would lead them to perform at the famous Fillmore venue by the decade's end – but presumably this would have been facilitated by the strength of their record sales in the intervening years. The studio quality of the sound in this scene is representative of the degree to which mediated music – via radio (portable or otherwise), LPs, television and film – has saturated public consciousness in the early-to-mid 1960s, particularly with regard to youth culture.

The interesting thing about the Paranoids is that, for a band going through the process of being moulded into an act akin to the early Beatles, their music (at least the music they play at Echo Courts for Oedipa) is not at all congruent with the catchy style of the Mersey Beat. This is particularly true of their lyrics, which seem to veer between a jazz-blues/beatnik tone and Sinatra-esque crooning. The 'Serenade' quoted above is an example of the latter style, vaguely reminiscent of "Moonlight in Vermont" or "Moon River;" while the former style can be seen in 'Miles's Song':

Too fat to Frug,  
That's what you tell me all the time,  
When you really try'n' to put me down,  
But I'm hip,  
So close your big fat lip,  
Yeah, baby,  
I may be too fat to Frug,  
But at least I ain't too slim to Swim. (17)

Here we have a punning riff on the contemporary dances the Frug and the Swim (early 1960s variations on the Twist) set against the backdrop of relationship dissatisfaction. While the subject matter of both songs – the whimsical longing of the first; the frustration with the opposite sex in the second – may be found in the early Beatles' repertoire (think "Yesterday" and "I'm Down" respectively), the tone is very different, and neither *Miles's Song* nor the *Serenade* exhibit anything like the simple yet catchy structure of a Lennon-McCartney composition at this point

of their career (the melodies, of course, are left to the imagination of the reader – one of the more fun aspects of engaging with Pynchon's work, considering the amount of songs to be found in the novels). All things considered, if the Paranoids are working an imitation of the Beatles then they are doing a fairly poor job of it – at least on their own time, away from the scrutiny of their management. They are more than willing to buy into the change of image that they believe will bring them success (I will be looking further at the manipulation of the musical artist by corporate interests later in this chapter) – but when it comes to their music, the songs are very much their own (albeit reflecting the influence of several aspects of post-war American culture). They understand that side of the business that has always been true about pop music in the wake of television specials and movies: that it is partly down to the 'look.' But despite the desire for a Beatles Mk.2 among those with a vested interest in the band's success, the Paranoids are not generic. Their idiosyncrasies come through in their lyrics – for example, Serge's allusion to Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita* in the wake of his girlfriend running off with the older Metzger:

What chance has a lonely surfer boy  
For the love of a surfer chick,  
With all these Humber Humbert<sup>92</sup> cats  
Coming on so big and sick? (101)

What most characterises Pynchon's representation of the Paranoid's – and perhaps best aligns them with the Beatles (the copied image and mannerisms notwithstanding) – is the emphasis on youth and the impact of pop music on youth culture. Although John Lennon was 23 years old and married by the time the Beatles first appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show, their appeal was decidedly teen-oriented until late 1964 and the release of *Beatles For Sale*, which marked the beginning of their artistic growth and wider appeal. Yet, despite the huge success of the later albums, the abiding image of the Beatles now (some sixty years later) is, for many people, the band striving in vain to make themselves heard above the screaming teenage audience. Youthful adulation of a singing idol was by no

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<sup>92</sup> The slight misspelling of the Nabokovian professor's name here suggests that Serge's interest in contemporary literature (or cinema, for that matter, with Stanley Kubrick's movie adaptation of *Lolita* having been released in 1962) is not quite as diligent as it ought to be if he is going to be utilising such cultural allusions in his songs. Or it could just be a typo.

means new (Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley both received it in abundance in the 1940s and 50s respectively), but few would argue that the Beatles' experience did not take the phenomenon to a new extreme, for reasons that I outlined above: the new appeal of the idol multiplied by four and the smart and creative utilisation of the burgeoning visual media (with the help of equally smart and creative people behind the scenes, like Brian Epstein and Richard Lester). Pynchon is at pains to highlight how young the Paranoids are – 'maybe sixteen' (16) (could they be even younger?) – and the band themselves revel in their adolescence, frequently alluding to it in their song lyrics. Pynchon is always sympathetic to the seriousness of teenage appetites and recognises the role the media plays in feeding them (and often, in less positive terms, driving them). Many of his most endearing (and wisest) characters are teenagers, or younger – Prairie Wheeler and her punk boyfriend Isaiah 2:4 in *Vineland*; Geli Tripping, the latter-day Brocken witch in *Gravity's Rainbow*; Maxine Tarnow's opera-loving pre-teens Ziggy and Otis in *Bleeding Edge*; the 'junta' of neighbourhood kids who form the focus of the 1964 short story *The Secret Integration*; half the main characters of *Against the Day* are eighteen or under, at least at the beginning of the novel – and their characterization is not the patronizing result of mere blind faith in the wholesomeness of youth. There is nothing insipid about the Paranoids, for example; they smoke marijuana and steal motorboats. While there may often be an element of hysterical realism in Pynchon's portrayal of young people (Miles, when he is not performing with the Paranoids, is a motel manager), and even outright comedy (see the *Bugsy Malone*-esque sequence in *Against the Day* (449-51)), there can be no doubt as to where Pynchon's sympathies lie regarding youth culture in the face of the adult world that seeks to control it. There is enough of their own personality in the Paranoids' music and behaviour to suggest that they are prepared to meet such manipulation halfway (showing a degree of business-savvy that, again, belies their years) – but no further.

In addition to the far-reaching influence of pop music, *The Crying of Lot 49* investigates possibilities for the mediation of more niche sounds. Following straight on from the musical scene at Echo Courts, in which the immediacy of live performance and the slickness of studio technique are conflated in the Paranoids' *Serenade*, Pynchon develops the issue in the direction of the avant-garde and the possibilities of live electronic music – an ultra-contemporary topic in 1964. Seeking a break from the Paranoids' adolescent leering, Oedipa and Metzger

'drift' into a bar called The Scope in the fictional town of San Narciso – 'a haunt for electronics people from Yoyodyne,' the toy company-turned-aerospace weapons manufacturer that features in each of Pynchon's first three novels. 'A sudden chorus of whoops and yibbles burst from a kind of juke box at the far end of the room. Everybody quit talking. The bartender tiptoed back, with the drinks' (31). In the previous chapter I spoke about jukebox solidarity, whereby music becomes a rallying point for like-minded people; here, however, we have a degree of earnest attention on the part of the listeners in the bar, the likes of which the 'juke' is seldom afforded. It is the sort of respectful hush and active listening that is normally reserved for an intimate performance by a string quartet or an avant-garde jazz ensemble. In fact, Pynchon stretches out the incongruity of the scene by having the bartender speak of the electronic music favoured at the Scope in a distinctly jazz argot:

"That's by Stockhausen," the hip greybeard informed her, "the early crowd tends to dig your Radio Cologne sound. Later on we really swing. We're the only bar in the area, you know, has a strictly electronic music policy. Come on around Saturdays, starting midnight we have your Sinewave session, that's a live get-together, fellas come in just to jam from all over the state, San Jose, Santa Barbara, San Diego-"

"Live?" Metzger said, "electronic music, live?"

"They put it on the tape, here, live, fella. We got a whole back room full of your audio oscillators, gunshot machines, contact mikes, everything man. That's for if you didn't bring your ax, see, but you got the feeling and you want to swing with the rest of the cats, there's always something available." (31-2)

On the one hand we have recorded music that is being listened to with all the diligent attention of an intimate live performance; on the other we have the promise of live electronic music – a form closely associated with recorded, or at least pre-recorded, sounds – here performed in the spirit of jazz improvisation. Once again Pynchon is engaged in blurring the boundaries between mediated and in-the-moment expression – to the bewilderment, in this case, of Oedipa and Metzger. Although, as Marcus Erbe points out in their article looking at this scene, significant developments in the field during the early 1960s would enable John Cage in particular to approximate a live form of electronic music;<sup>93</sup> and while

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<sup>93</sup> Marcus Erbe, "The Transcription of Electronic Music in The Crying of Lot 49," *Pynchon Notes* 54-55 (Spring-Fall 2008): 99-107.

Stockhausen's own indeterminate or aleatory technique (whereby the performer spontaneously determines the sequence of the composer's arrangement) entails a degree of improvisation – Pynchon's extension of this idea into the realm of jazz improvisation (that quintessential live experience) nonetheless borders on the surreal. The mention of gunshot machines as being one of the 'instruments' with which a participant may be able to sit in with the band and jam only serves to further emphasise this, and once again hearkens back to Pynchon's fondness for Spike Jones and His City Slickers.<sup>94</sup> Pynchon is playing, no doubt; yet he is being far from frivolous. The respectful attention given by the Yoyodyne employees to the jukebox – the listening with intent – may be due to more than merely a great passion for this particular type of music; the hushed atmosphere in the bar indicates something deeper, almost a sadness, as the electronic sounds of Stockhausen's composition act as artistic counterpoint (and alternative) to the way in which technology is put to use by The Scope regulars in their day-to-day work, churning out missiles for the giant aerospace defence contractor. The promise of a live electronic jam thus becomes an act of group therapy or cleansing of the conscience.

The emphasis on electronic technology in the scene at The Scope encourages further rumination on a passage that occurs a few pages earlier in which Oedipa, on her drive towards San Narciso, observed the tightly ordered pattern of streets and houses 'and thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. [...] there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate' (*Lot* 49 14-15). At this early stage, however, Oedipa's rumination only stands to highlight her rather fanciful naiveté, as opposed to offering any kind of useful insight. It is part of a sequence of mixed metaphors that she is almost amusing herself with. On the same page, for example, Oedipa imagines the 'vast sprawl of houses' as having 'grown up all together like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth;' and then, a couple of pages later, the metaphor shifts again, as the city (this time Los Angeles) is likened to a body craving nourishment, and 'what the road really was, [...] was this hypodermic needle,

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<sup>94</sup> In remarking on the importance of details, Pynchon makes the following comment in the Introduction to *Slow Learner*: 'Spike Jones, Jr., whose father's orchestral recordings had an indelible effect on me as a child, said once in an interview, "One of the things that people don't realize about Dad's kind of music is, when you replace a C-sharp with a gunshot, it has to be a C-sharp gunshot or it sounds awful"' (*SL* 20).

inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway,' keeping the city 'happy, coherent, protected from pain' (16). This quick sequence of confused and seemingly incommensurate analogies – circuit board, organic crop, physical body – shows that Oedipa, at the beginning of her 'quest,' is only playing at her role; she is trying on a critical mind for size, and, as yet, it does not quite fit – understandably so, perhaps, considering that until being tasked with executing her former lover's will, her main sources for concern had been things like the mould on the oregano in her garden (14). As the novel progresses, however, and Oedipa's journey takes her into the heart of the urban sprawl, she is confronted by the realities of life as it is lived there – the unimagined complexities of harsh socio-economic circumstances and individual desires – to the point where the cutely succinct images with which she formerly entertained herself are replaced by an overwhelming feeling of claustrophobia and powerlessness. Towards the end of the novel there is a passage that indicates Oedipa's shift in perspective, from an indulgence in overarching and impersonal analogies to a newly-sensitized awareness and consideration of the individual human experience – and, once again, the portable radio is a key factor:

'She thought of other, immobilized freight cars, where the kids sat on the floor planking and sang back, happy as fat, whatever came over the mother's pocket radio; of other squatters who stretched canvas lean-tos behind smiling billboards along all the highways, or slept in junkyards in the stripped shells of wrecked Plymouths, or even, daring, spent the night up some pole in a linesman's tent like caterpillars, swung among a web of telephone wires, living in the very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication, untroubled by the dumb voltages flickering their miles, the night long, in the thousands of unheard messages.' (124)

Pynchon frequently shines a light on such representatives of society's underside – here living (quite literally) beneath the false veneer, and among the very real detritus, of late capitalism. They live in agonisingly-close proximity to the system that enables more fortunate groups of people to fulfil their social and economic roles – but, for these people, the freight car is 'immobilized,' and the telephone messages go unheard. However, Pynchon is at pains to point out the unique ability of musical media (in this case radio) to permeate even the lowest echelons of American life, providing, via the litany of human desires that characterise the Top 200, a sense of connection to broader society that is so lacking by other,

more conventional means. Whether the songs elicit feelings of hope or nostalgia, romantic longing or simply the pleasure of catchy melodies and rhythms (perhaps especially so this last regarding the children – ‘happy as fat’ – in the freight car), the power of popular music is seldom so keenly felt as in this particular image. Elsewhere, it is the transience of the pop expression that is emphasised, as in the following passage which occurs earlier in the novel:

In the buses all night she listened to transistor radios playing songs in the lower stretches of the Top 200, that would never become popular, whose melodies and lyrics would perish as if they had never been sung. A Mexican girl, trying to hear one of these through snarling static from the bus’s motor, hummed along as if she would remember it always, tracing post horns and hearts with a fingernail, in the haze of her breath on the window. (*Lot 49*, 84)

For every ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand,’ how many songs are destined to go unremembered, to fall through the cracks of history having failed to make a lasting mark on popular consciousness? And yet, even here Pynchon looks for the positive; every single one of these songs has the potential to affect at least one person’s consciousness – in this case a Mexican girl on a bus journey. Her ephemeral doodlings identify her as a member of the w.a.s.t.e. network, the underground postal service whose symbol is the muted post horn and which is used by so many of the outcast and disinherited inhabitants of this part of southern California, and perhaps beyond. The fact that the girl is tracing hearts and post horns together on the bus window encourages the connection between the two: perhaps this girl uses the alternative mailing system as a safer way to contact the illicit lover that she may currently be on her way to meet – and if love is uppermost in her mind at this moment then a pop song dealing with the subject (as so many do) might just be the comfort and encouragement she requires, whether it is a hit or not. The transistor radio means that, for the first time, such solace may be found anywhere.

Despite Pynchon’s awareness of the manipulative tendencies of the recording industry, the abundance of allusions to mediated music that can be found in his work never really create any friction with that other side of the musical coin: live performance. The latter is seen by many music commentators to be the more

authentic artistic expression, and Pynchon certainly utilises the dynamics of live music to positive effect in his work. However, even here Pynchon highlights a caveat – as demonstrated by the experience of jazz saxophonist McClintic Sphere in the first novel *V. Sphere*, a virtuoso live performer, is dissatisfied with the way his audience engage with the band's music and so turns to the recording studio as a means to broaden out the dissemination of his work, thereby creating greater chances for reaching his *true* audience. The LP, in this case, is seen as a more democratic method of engagement between artist and audience (I will be looking more closely at the subject of live performance, and McClintic Sphere's story, in the following chapter looking at jazz). The fact remains, though, that live and recorded music are two sides of the same coin in Pynchon – both have their unique qualities and possibilities for social impact; neither are wholly unproblematic.

Roland Barthes' work focussing on the impact of recorded music on performance habits is useful at this point. In his conception of '*musica practica*,' knowledge of music is attained through performance, on the one hand, and 'active' listening on the other, and it is in this sense that music becomes a dialogue. It must be stated here that Barthes' work in this regard only applies to the live performance of music, particularly with regard to amateur virtuosity. With the role of the virtuoso showman having been usurped by the studio technician, as Barthes perceives in *Image-Music-Text*, the dialogue between listener and artist is broken. The result is that 'passive, receptive music, sound music, is become *the* music (that of concert, festival, record, radio): playing has ceased to exist [...]. So too has the performer changed. The amateur [...] is no longer anywhere to be found' (149-50). For Barthes the dialogue inherent in *musica practica* is dependent, in modern times, on the realization that music can no longer be appreciated through mere performance or hearing, but rather through a 'reading' of the musical expression, 'Just as the reading of the modern text [...] consists not in receiving, in knowing or in feeling that text, but in writing it anew, in crossing its writing with a fresh inscription' (153). The listener, however, is unable to reclaim this active, interpretative power in the modern world of corporate mass production. The raw musical expression, that shares so much with the uttered word, has been replaced by a search for the "perfect take". The result, as Barthes perceives it, is the establishment of an 'average culture', defined by 'the growth of the number of listeners and the disappearance of

practitioners (no more amateurs)'. Such a culture 'wants art, wants music, provided they be clear, that they 'translate' an emotion and represent a signified (the 'meaning' of a poem); an art that inoculates pleasure (by reducing it to a known, coded emotion) and reconciles the subject to what in music *can be said*: what is said about it, predicatively, by Institution, Criticism, Opinion' (185). In this situation – where the amateur musical showman is dead, and the listener relieved of all activity by the technician – what music says is lost. The active process of *musica practica* can only be reclaimed if we, as listeners, are able to discover the ability to operate upon music ourselves, 'to draw it [...] into an unknown praxis' (153), and to revel in a sense of 'jouissance' achieved through listening to music that has escaped the 'tyranny of meaning' (185). Due to the highly abstract style of Barthes' writing, however, we do not get a sufficient suggestion of just how this may be achieved in practice. The reader is left with the impression that, due to the break-up in modern times of the dialogue between performers and listeners of music – and the failure of Barthes to postulate a realistic alternative to the 'average culture' he describes – the significance of musical expression is eradicated at all levels, social and individual.

The economist Jacques Attali shares some of Barthes' concerns regarding the commodified and replicated musical product but is much more positive in asserting an alternative to that regressive state. In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Attali demands that we, as social individuals, bring 'an end to repetition' by 'transforming the world into an art form and life into a shifting pleasure. Will a sacrifice be necessary?' he asks, and if so 'Hurry up with it, because [...] the World, by repeating itself, is dissolving into Noise and Violence.'<sup>95</sup> If the individuals in society choose to re-appropriate the means of producing art themselves, thereby liberating the process of composition from the bondage of academic training institutions, then we can, according to Attali, have hope of escaping the downward spiral of 'Repetition' and instead, through the demystification of the 'Composition process,' we can arrive at a new conception of history in which time and space are re-appropriated through music. In this new 'political economy' of music, 'Time no longer flows in a linear fashion; sometimes it crystallizes in stable codes in which everyone's composition is compatible, sometimes in a multifaceted time in which rhythms, styles and codes diverge,

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<sup>95</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985) 147-8.

independencies become more burdensome, and rules dissolve [...] Composition is inscribed not in a repetitive world, but in the permanent fragility of meaning after the disappearance of usage and exchange.<sup>96</sup> The diversity of composition that Attali is calling for here constitutes nothing less than the authentic expression of a social philosophy of music, that challenges ‘the ideology of the rigorous, autonomous, elitist’ conceptions of music that lie at the core of specialized musical training practices.<sup>97</sup>

The significant thing to note here is that Thomas Pynchon’s work, in the way it deals with music, at least partially counteracts Barthes’ pessimistic outlook concerning musical presence in modern times, while at the same time giving credence to Attali’s rally-cry for authentic opposition to regressive artistic repetition.<sup>98</sup> Pynchon absolutely refuses to kill off his virtuoso amateur showmen, subverting the process of co-optation – which Barthes believed to be inevitable – whereby performers of music are perceived to have “sold out” in aiding the dissolution of musical dialogue by entering the corporate world of the technician. The concept of *musica practica* is alive and well in Pynchon’s novels, despite the existence therein of authoritarian power structures which would seek to deny its possibility. Although Pynchon would seem to agree with Barthes, to a certain extent, that the positive social forces at work in *musica practica* are difficult to maintain once the musical expression has been removed from its social source – in *Lot 49*, for example, the Paranoids drop out of the text after they are offered a record deal – nevertheless, Barthes’ assertion that *musica practica* is an impossibility in modern times is categorically refuted in Pynchon’s work. The relationship between performer and audience, as Barthes sees it, really depends on the existence of an ideal listener; however, as is the case with Pynchon’s first virtuoso musician, McClintic Sphere, practitioners of music do not always get the audience they deserve. In this case, social economics have restricted the demographic of his audience to such a degree that Sphere becomes entirely disillusioned with the thought of performing live. It is only when he visits a recording studio in the hope of accessing a more democratic means of disseminating his music, and he begins to see the technological possibilities there, that he starts to emerge from his artistic ennui. Pynchon being Pynchon,

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<sup>96</sup> Attali, 147.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>98</sup> For a more thoroughgoing account of Attali’s significance to Pynchon studies, chapter three of Christian Hänggi’s *Pynchon’s Sound of Music* should be consulted.

however, we would expect a caveat to all this – and we get it in the fact that the only record company Sphere can find that is willing to take a risk on him is Rooney Winsome's novelty label 'Outlandish Records.' Exactly what kind of audience Sphere expects to be able to reach by such means is hard to say; but the fact remains that the thought of getting his music 'out there,' and creating something permanent in the process, is far more appealing than the stifling atmosphere of his sets at the V-Note club.

The significance of recorded sound is an ambiguous issue with Pynchon, for while on the one hand the social impact of The Paranoid's music on the text of *Lot 49* is reduced after Mucho Maas invites them into a studio environment (though we are to hear of the Paranoids again in Pynchon's fourth novel, *Vineland*, where the reader is informed of the band's meteoric rise to stardom under Mucho's guidance, emphasized by their gig at San Francisco's legendary Fillmore concert hall (*Vineland*, 308)), we have seen, in other situations in *Lot 49*, that there persists an emphatic affirmation of recorded sound's unique ability to infiltrate and affect the consciousness of even the most peripheral members of the social collective. In *Conventional Wisdom* the popular music academic Susan McClary describes the significance of music's ability to permeate social consciousness: 'while the threat of co-optation always accompanies the commercial media, so do the possibilities of worldwide distribution, dialogue across the barriers of class and race and the unpredictable responses and tangents of development that can proceed from such heightened visibility and audibility' (38). Commercial interventions in the dissemination of the musical expression in this sense do not discredit the integrity of that expression, for as McClary maintains, 'it has not been despite but rather *by means of* the power of mass mediation that the explosive energies of the blues [for example] managed to spread and develop' (38).

This same power of musical dissemination is fully acknowledged by Pynchon who establishes an affirmation of the process that runs contrary to Barthes' pessimism, while keeping in sight the negative aspects of commercialisation: co-optation and market manipulation. All these topics can be seen in the colourful career of Wendell "Mucho" Maas, a character first encountered in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and again in the novel *Vineland* (1990). A former car salesman-turned-radio station disc jockey, he is the husband of *Lot 49*'s protagonist, Oedipa. Contrary to Oedipa's readiness to engage with a world

beyond her comfortable middle-class life, Mucho takes up his DJ position as a way of escaping from the too-real world of salesmanship – Oedipa believes that he is seeking a refuge from the pressures of being complicit in the national obsession with automobiles and the very real hopes and dreams that they can come to symbolize and often facilitate, and that the fantasy world of pop music (as they both perceive it) has provided him with just that:

She suspected the disc jockey spot [...] was a way of letting the Top 200, and even the news copy that came jabbering out of the machine – all the fraudulent dream of teenage appetites – be a buffer between him and that lot.

He had believed too much in the lot. He believed not at all in the station. (*Lot 49, 9*)

What neither of them realise at this stage is the seriousness of teenage appetites, whether they be fraudulent (i.e., manipulated by the industry) or not; that the exhilaration of being transported emotionally and psychically by a particular song, lyric, or guitar hook, can be just as important as the physical transportation on offer in the form of the automobile. Mucho finally comes to realise his complacency after listening to the same music under the influence of LSD. He comes clean during a conversation with Oedipa that begins with his analysis of the muzak that is currently playing in the restaurant, his auditory perception heightened by the drug in his system. After identifying a flaw – and thus the human element – in the playing of one of the seventeen violins that he can discern on the recording, Mucho acknowledges that modern studio technology could have avoided the error: “They could dispense with live musicians if they wanted. Put together all the right overtones at the right power levels so it’d come out like a violin” (98). He is thankful for the fact that, even for this pizzeria muzak, the recording relies on flesh-and-blood musicianship – even if it is not of the highest calibre – and, inspired by the fact that an anomaly in the “power spectrum” of this particular music was what enabled the identification of the human within it, he begins to speak of human communication, and even the human body, in terms of spectrum analysis:

‘His E string,’ Mucho said, ‘It’s a few cycles sharp. [...] Do you think somebody could do the dinosaur bone bit with that one string, Oed? With just his set of notes on that cut.

Figure out what his ear is like, and then the musculature of his hands and arms, and eventually the entire man. God, wouldn’t that be wonderful.’

‘Why should you want to?’

‘He was real. That wasn’t synthetic.’ (98)

The propensity for creating human stories out of the minutiae of life, the paraphernalia of life’s margins, is common in Pynchon’s work – here Mucho employs the same idea to forge a connection to the human element behind the anonymous muzak. The LSD has opened his mind up to such a degree that he cannot help but search for the connections between all sounds. He is in danger, however, of falling into the same obsessive state of mind that made his life on the car lot unbearable; there, he was unable to avoid reading signs of human desires and struggles in the detritus left behind in vehicles by their former owners, and in the vehicles themselves – ‘it made him sick to look, but he had to look’ (8). Now, albeit with the aid of hallucinogenic drugs, he can not only see the human connections, but feels, for the first time, the desire to enter into dialogue with them and to identify with them. The anxiety and shame that he once felt at sharing in the human condition has now been replaced with euphoria. Giddy with the thought of recreating a human life out of the power spectrum, Mucho takes it a step further:

‘You’ll think I’m crazy, Oed. But I can do the same thing in reverse. Listen to anything and take it apart again. Spectrum analysis, in my head. I can break down chords, and timbres, and words too into all the basic frequencies and harmonics, with all their different loudnesses, and listen to them, each pure tone, but all at once. [...] No matter who’s talking, the different power spectra are the same, give or take a small percentage. More than that. Everybody who says the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time, you dig? But the time is arbitrary. You pick your zero point anywhere you want, that way you can shuffle each person’s time line sideways till they all coincide. Then you’d have this big, God, maybe a couple hundred million chorus [...] and it would all be the same voice.’ (98-9)

From the micro-history of an individual life, we now have the image of millions of human lives harmonized on a mixing desk of infinite tracks – the spectra brought into focus by who knows what meta-studio technician. Mucho’s narcotic reverie

appears to be getting out of control, and Oedipa is understandably nervous. And yet, within this flight of fancy we can find something approaching an explanation of the power of radio, and a precursor to the hippy philosophy of communal sympathy that would form a significant part of music culture later in the decade. When Mucho speaks of the 'same voice' dubbed millions of times over, he is not referring to homogeneity but solidarity – and the 'zero point' to which he alludes, and from which these many voices may be brought into harmony, is the sadly unattainable point of clarity that Rilke's (quantum) angels occupy in *Gravity's Rainbow* but that is denied to us, mired as we are in human existence. Pynchon speaks of this in the Introduction to *Slow Learner*, regarding the failure of late 1960s social movements to coalesce. Mucho, however, his mind expanded by the LSD, has been offered a glimpse of the potential for human harmony from this heady vantage point, and it comes as a revelation:

'Whenever I put the headset on now [...] I really do understand what I find there. When those kids sing about "She loves you," yeah well, you know, she does, she's any number of people, all over the world, back through time, different colours, sizes, ages, shapes, distances from death, but she loves. And the "you" is everybody. And herself. Oedipa, the human voice, you know, it's a flipping miracle.' (99)

The catchy Beatles song referred to here contains a message that is simple, sympathetic, and sustaining – broadcast to millions of people around the world, how many will resist the urge to sing along, knowing that countless others will be doing likewise at the same moment. The really successful pop songs, like this one, are also slogans, and Mucho fully acknowledges his own role in helping to facilitate this binding force:

'You're an antenna, sending your pattern out across a million lives a night, and they're your lives too. [...] The songs, it's not just that they say something, they *are* something, in the pure sound. Something new.' (99-100)

This sense of something new does not merely reflect a changing style of music; it also suggests changing attitudes towards it at a time when technological

advancements such as the transistor radio were enabling the ever-wider dissemination of the pop expression.<sup>99</sup>

We next encounter Mucho in one of the flashback sections of *Vineland*, set in 1969/70 – five or six years after the events of *The Crying of Lot 49*. By now, the radio DJ has become a successful executive at Indolent Records, having in the meantime divorced Oedipa and become a sort of local celebrity off Sunset and Vine under the alias Count Drugula. Zoyd Wheeler, having recorded with his band The Corvairs under Mucho's production earlier in the decade, feels able to call in on the now 'music business biggie' (307) amid his flight from federal agent Brock Vond, and the two get to talking about the current state of the music business, the Nixonite war on drugs and (with dramatic irony) the forthcoming Reagan era. Mucho's once-innocent passion has, over this short span of years, given way to a jaded and fatalistic realism; the mind-expanding acid replaced by a destructive cocaine habit that he has had to take drastic measures to curb. The two men share a nostalgia for the time, not long passed, when, with the aid of the right drugs and the right music, they felt tuned-in to something greater than themselves to the point that it felt as though even death had no claim on them – before the government began in earnest to dispel such notions. As Mucho puts it:

"No wonder the State panicked. How are they supposed to control a population that knows it'll never die? When that was always their last big chip, when they thought they had the power of life and death. But acid gave us the X-ray vision to see through that one, so of course they had to take it away from us."

"Yeah, but they can't take what happened, what we found out."

"Easy. They just let us forget. Give us too much to process, fill up every minute, keep us distracted, it's what the Tube is for, and though it kills me to say it, it's what rock and roll is becoming – just another way to claim our attention, so that beautiful certainty we had starts to fade, and after a while they have us convinced all over again that we really are going to die. And they've got us again." It was the way people used to talk.

"I'm not gonna forget" Zoyd vowed (*Vineland* 313-14)

Mucho is under no illusions regarding the co-optation of countercultural music – and there is an interesting narrative interjection here ('It was the way people used

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<sup>99</sup> Initially expensive to produce and thus to purchase, transistor radios began to become more affordable in the early 1960s. By 1962, Sony's popular TR-63 model cost around \$15 (\$127 in today's money).

to talk') that comes from the seemingly more knowing perspective of a later time (the 1980s of the novel's contemporary setting), that suggests one of two things: either that there is something in Mucho's words that strikes a later perspective as being problematic; or, that what he is saying is, by the 1980s, so self-evident that it really does not need saying at all. Either way, we are being asked for our indulgence – and judging from the narrative tone in the following passage, it may be that the second of these options is the valid one:

Mucho went to the stereo and put on *The Best of Sam Cooke*, volumes 1 and 2, and then they sat together and listened [...] to the sermon, one they knew and felt their hearts comforted by, though outside spread the lampless wastes, the unseen paybacks, the heartless power of the scabland garrison state the green free America of their childhoods even then was turning into. (314)

If it were not for Zoyd's refusal to give in to Mucho's brand of fatalism, we would be left with the image of two prematurely aging hippies seeking refuge in the familiar soul music of what, to them, now seems like a freer time – although Cooke's premature death in 1964, and some of the open questions that still surround the events of that night, only serve to reinforce the theme of violent suppression (Pynchon's choice of music is rarely, if ever, arbitrary; we are meant to reflect on Sam Cooke's life as a cautionary tale, in the same way that John Garfield's story permeates the narrative of *Inherent Vice*). For all Mucho's pessimism, the threat of violence is a reality beyond his own personal disillusionment and, much as he admires his friend's fidelity to his ideals, he feels the need to warn him: "Just please go careful, Zoyd. 'Cause soon they're gonna be coming after everything" (313). Mucho's story, then, is one of dreams turned sour: the car salesman who was in denial as to his own humanity, suddenly confronted with the bright possibilities of widely disseminated popular music – only for the machinery of state to denude that great hope of its vital essence. Lest we get too depressed at all this, however, Pynchon ends this sub-section of chapter 14 on a more positive note, as Zoyd and baby Prairie leave Mucho's executive town house and ride the Greyhound to Vineland:

Aislemates struck up conversations, joints appeared and were lit, guitars came down from overhead racks and harmonicas out of fringe bags, and soon there was a concert that went on all night, a retrospective of the times

they'd come through more or less as a generation, the singing of rock and roll, folk, Motown, fifties oldies, and at last, for about an hour just before the watery green sunrise, one guitar and one harmonica, playing the blues. (315)

Here the communal is allied to the feeling of persistence – an awareness and celebration of a shared heritage in popular song. This spontaneous concert through the night, and through the land, in which strangers come together out of a shared fondness for music – and need of company – stands in stark contrast to the atmosphere at Mucho's. The sense of nostalgia is still there, this being a retrospective that gradually regresses back to the purity of the blues, the starting point of popular music – and the emphasis here on the importance of amateur live music in close juxtaposition with the problematic issues surrounding professional recorded sound is significant. However, the bus passengers are able to form this little mobile commune precisely because they are familiar with, and inspired by, the songs in question as a result of their mass mediation over the previous twenty years. Pynchon is thus able to end the section on a positive note, drawing together the power of recorded sound and the communal sympathy and fun that comes through amateur live performance – while nonetheless maintaining a note of tension as the bus heads through the night.

In Pynchon's work, recorded sound mediated via the radio or other playback devices is often encountered in conjunction with amateur live performance: 'music coming all directions, from radios, accordions, singers unaccompanied, jukeboxes, guitars.' (*Vineland* 258); 'Cars drove by with the windows down and you could hear tambourines inside keeping time to whatever was on the radio. Jukeboxes were playing in corner coffee shops, and acoustic guitars and harmonicas in little apartment courtyards. All over this piece of night hillside, there was music' (*Inherent Vice* 159). Music feels like an integral part of the community, a binding element of neighbourhood culture: 'The minute they step off the subway [...] they can hear music. They go sashaying more than schlepping downstairs to the street, where salsa pulses deeply from the stereo systems of double-parked Caprices and Escalades, from bars, from shoulder-mounted boom boxes' (*Bleeding Edge* 163). Musical media are as important a part of that atmosphere as the urge to pick up a guitar and play, or to raise one's voice in song. Passages like these convey the feeling that music is an important contributory factor to a sense of local culture that feels almost poignant in the face

of forces that are represented in these novels as seeking to divide and to alienate. The persistence of music in Pynchon, then, can be said to be despite the odds. There are several instances in the novels where music adopts a protective, apotropaic quality – it can be a binding force against evil and a guide to the correct path. These examples display an idealistic conviction towards music that Pynchon is not prepared to relinquish.

If concerns are raised concerning the commercialization of music, it is often done through the medium of a particular character's attitudes and ideals – as is the case in *Inherent Vice* when Doc Sportello drives past the famous Wallich's Music City<sup>100</sup> record store, with its try-before-you-buy listening booths:

In every window [...] appeared a hippie freak or small party of hippie freaks, each listening on headphones to a different rock 'n' roll album and moving at a different rhythm. Doc was used to outdoor concerts where thousands of people congregated to listen to music for free, and where it all got sort of blended together into a single public self, because everybody was having the same experience. But here, each person was listening in solitude, confinement and mutual silence, and some of them later at the register would actually be spending money to hear rock 'n' roll. It seemed to Doc like some strange kind of dues or payback. 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. (176)

Doc's communal and egalitarian philosophy of rock and roll is being challenged by the great commercial emporium in which music is tried on like shirts, and we get another reference here to a narcotizing culture industry – however, by this stage of the novel we already know Doc to be a vinyl owner with a home music system, and his passion for radio, particularly while driving, shows that despite his misgivings he is unable, or unwilling, to entirely denounce the commercial side of music. In *Vineland* we get a description of the music business feverishly cashing in on youth culture in a sort of ad-hoc explosion reminiscent of the dot-com bubble in *Bleeding Edge*:

For one demented season the town lost its ear, and talent was signed that in other times would have kept on wandering in the desert [...]. On the

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<sup>100</sup> Pynchon, rather surprisingly, mis-spells the name as 'Wallach.'

assumption that Youth understood its own market, entry-level folks who only yesterday had been content to deal lids down in the mail room were suddenly being elevated to executive rank, given stupendous budgets, and let loose, as it turned out, to sign just about anybody who could carry a tune and figure out how to walk in the door. Stunned by the great childward surge, critical abilities lapsed. Who knew the worth of any product, or could live with having failed to sign the next superstar? Crazed, heedless, the business was running on pure nerve, with million-dollar deals struck on the basis of dreams, vibes (283).

Indeed, “Mucho” Maas himself is drawn into this quality control-deficient free-for-all, as we later learn that he was one of the executives to have auditioned aspiring rock star Charles Manson. As the narrator warns: ‘Next week, next year it could all be gone, [...] careers being that volatile in those days, as revolution went blending into commerce’ (*Vineland* 308). It is clear that Pynchon’s sympathy for young, hard-working bands is tempered by a distrust of the industry that waits to cash in on them. The Paranoids are aware from the very beginning that they will have to play the corporate game if they want to gain any kind of widespread appeal – however, Pynchon leaves the reader guessing as to the extent to which they ultimately sell out for their success. On the other hand, The Boards (a successful surf-rock band encountered in *Inherent Vice*) exhibit clearer symptoms of industry manipulation – their co-optation has literally left them zombified.<sup>101</sup> Again, it is worth keeping in mind Pynchon’s liner notes to Lotion’s 1995 album *Nobody’s Cool*, where he sums up his appreciation for rock bands and their music (when it is at its best), seeing the form as being anchored by a political legacy – ‘the cultural disputes that began in the Sixties’ – and each act entering into a continuity that is ‘always being sought, claimed, lost, found again, carried on.’<sup>102</sup> If there is a touch of idealism here, it is thrown into relief by Pynchon’s acknowledgement of the business’s many failures (akin to the pop songs that are destined never to be popular, mentioned earlier) – and his emphasis on ‘working’ bands (as opposed to those only in it for the superficial perks, presumably) is important. The adjective carries a sense of activity and drive that the Boards are severely lacking when we meet them in *Inherent Vice*, surrounded by industry executives (and, it is suggested, government agents) in

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<sup>101</sup> Although this revelation comes to Doc during a spiked-hashish experience, the idea gains more currency later in the novel when we discover that the Boards’ groupies were compelled to hire a Buddhist priest to perform an exorcism on the band (*IV* 299).

<sup>102</sup> Liner notes to Lotion’s 1996 album *Nobody’s Cool*.

their rented Topanga mansion – a lifestyle that forces Doc to acknowledge the contrast between their cosy success and the life of a ‘working’ band:

Doc was reminded [...] that for every band like this one there were a hundred or a thousand others like his cousin’s band Beer, doomed to scuffle in obscurity, energized by a faith in the imperishability of rock ‘n’ roll, running on dope and nerve, brother- and sisterhood, and good spirits. (126)

The Boards’ lazy decadence shows how far removed they have become from even a hint of the rock and roll ideal, or fidelity to their own origins:

The Boards [...] had changed personnel so often that only meticulous music historians had any kind of a handle on who was or had been who anymore. Which didn’t matter because by now the band had evolved into pretty much a brand name (126).

Their lack of vitality (their zombification) is juxtaposed with the greater degree of earnestness displayed by a member of Spotted Dick, ‘a visiting British band’ who are staying with the Boards at this stage. Doc finds Smedley, the keyboard player, ‘doing Hanon exercises on his Farfisa’ – an act that, while not exactly rock and roll, at least shows that the young musician is serious about his playing and willing to put the effort into improving his technique (while the Boards just sit around watching TV while members of their entourage run around ‘indulging band whims that required deep-frying Hostess Twinkies, ironing each other’s hair on the ironing board to maintain some muse image, and going through fan magazines with X-acto knives and cutting out all references to competing surf acts’ (128)). Such dedication to his artform, while surrounded by all the superficial trappings and temptations of the rock star lifestyle (the drugs, the groupies), sets Smedley (and, by extension, Spotted Dick) apart from the Boards – that, combined with his outsider’s perspective, encourage Doc to tap him for information concerning the exaggerated level of security at the mansion. In response, Smedley replies “paranoia, man” and is about to say more when ‘a scowling young gent, maybe one of the Boards’ roadies, maybe not,’ arrives on the scene to scare him off. Whether the Boards have been complicit in their co-optation, or, despite their more ‘honorable’ intentions at the outset, have been merely worked inextricably

into a corner by a manipulative industry – it is clear their current situation is, at the very least, stifling their creativity and may even be hazardous to their health. Later in the novel it is mentioned that the Boards are due to play a gig with the L.A. Philharmonic as part of ‘cross-cultural music series with guest artists like Frank Zappa’ (223) – given the state they were in at Topanga, reduced to zombie-like lethargy and divorced from any kind of youthful idealism, one has to wonder if Pynchon sees the hand of co-optation in these kinds of cross-cultural events as well.

All of this shows that there is, at the very least, a degree of tension to be found in Pynchon’s work concerning the popular musical expression and its mass mediation – with issues such as co-optation, market manipulation and inauthentic reformatting regularly coming to the fore. Take the case of muzak – one of Pynchon’s *bêtes noires*. Tyrone Slothrop has a reverie at the Roseland Ballroom in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in which he foresees a time to come where the music he loves (bebop) will be so broadly disseminated as to become a catalyst for change: ‘out over the airwaves, into the society gigs, someday as far as what seeps out hidden speakers in the city’s elevators and in all the markets, his bird’s singing, to gainsay the Man’s lullabies, to subvert the groggy wash of the endlessly, gutlessly overdubbed strings’ (*GR* 63-4). Slothrop’s hope is that the authenticity he hears in Charlie Parker’s solos will replace the fraudulent effects of studio technique and jolt the listening public out of their dependency on the commercial sounds currently on offer. Of course, the irony here lies in the fact that we (and Pynchon, writing this in the late 1960s/early 1970s) know all too well the sort of insipid muzak that actually gets pumped into public places. At times Pynchon can play with the representation of muzak for comedic effect – as is the case in an early scene of *The Crying of Lot 49*, when Oedipa Maas makes her trip to the market ‘to buy ricotta and listen to the Muzak (today she came through the bead-curtained entrance around bar four of the Fort Wayne Settecento Ensemble’s variorum recording of the Vivaldi Kazoo Concerto, Boyd Beaver, soloist)’ (6). For Oedipa, the muzak is a welcome part of daily routine – a fact almost as absurd as the notion of a Kazoo Concerto by Vivaldi. Pynchon is at his iconoclastic best here, blending high culture with low – no doubt inspired by Spike Jones and His City Slickers, who employ the kazoo to great effect and for whom Pynchon has a

self-confessed passion.<sup>103</sup> There is also a degree of mockery towards nth-degree academic analysis in the fact that this is, specifically, a ‘variorum recording’ – in other words it shows acknowledgement to annotations and theories of the many commentators who have analysed the piece over the years, thereby establishing the Kazoo Concerto as part of the Vivaldi canon. And yet, one cannot shake the suspicion that for all the mockery and playfulness at work here, if anyone were in fact to appreciate a kazoo concerto in the first instance, and the need to analyse it in the second, it might be Thomas Pynchon.

Elsewhere, Pynchon is less forgiving of muzak, and nowhere is this more evident than during Prairie and her friend Ché’s visit to the shopping mall in *Vineland*: ‘New Age mindbarf came dribbling out of the PA system’ (330). The frankly dismissive tone here suggests that the narrative voice has entered into the character zone of Prairie and her friend: the narrator’s words coloured by the attitudes of a teenage girl with an interest in punk rock and a penchant for shoplifting-as-protest. Earlier in the novel, however, we get a similarly dismissive reaction from the narrative voice as Prairie and DL walk the grounds of the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives’ mountainside retreat: ‘for background the local 24-hour “New Age” music station, gushing into the environment billows of audio treacle’ (109). Pynchon’s crusade against the insipid gathers further strength, though, as the girls fondly recall their participation in the event which would become known as the Great South Coast Plaza Eyeshadow Raid, in which a gang of teenage girls on roller skates descend on the unsuspecting monument to consumerism with military precision, making off with packs filled with cosmetic goods which they then go on to sell to ‘an older person named Otis, with a panel truck headed for a swap meet far away’ (328).<sup>104</sup> The scene is so far out of the ordinary day-to-day life of the mall that for many of the shoppers it does not even register, and, as if to emphasise the futility of this anti-capitalist act of expropriation, the muzak too plays on regardless. Pynchon’s choice of genre here, though, is significant:

all through this the background shopping music continued, perky and up-tempo, originally rock and roll but here reformatted into unthreatening wimped-out effluent, tranquilizing onlookers into thinking the juvenile

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<sup>103</sup> Thomas Pynchon, liner notes to *Spiked! The Music of Spike Jones* (1994).

<sup>104</sup> For Pynchon the swap meet is the healthy antithesis to the shopping mall.

snatch-and-grab mission couldn't have been what it looked like, so it must be all right to return to closing time, what a relief. The tune coming out of the speakers as the girls all dispersed into the evening happened to be a sprightly oboe-and-string rendition of Chuck Berry's "Maybellene." (328)

As well as being another instance in Pynchon's work of diegetic music acting as a comment on the action that is transpiring (in this case a comedic play on the name 'Maybelline,' shared by the song title and the famous cosmetics company), Pynchon's choice to set this scene to a soundtrack of rock and roll-cum-muzak is effective: the rebelliousness and the raucous sex appeal of the original music, once considered to be dangerously subversive, now denuded of its energy and rendered saccharine in the name of commercial ambience. This is about as far from Tyrone Slothrop's idealistic vision in *Gravity's Rainbow* as can be.

Pointed as his attitudes toward muzak are, Pynchon's greater preoccupation is still with radio – in terms of both the egalitarian possibilities of that medium, and a culture industry that seeks to manipulate and monopolise it. At times, Pynchon appears to fall in line with Adorno/Horkheimer in flagging up the dangers of such a narcotizing commercial enterprise, characterised by co-optation and the generating of acceptable desires. As Vanya, one of *Gravity's Rainbow's* anti-capitalists puts it: "all these novels, these films and songs they lull us with, they're approaches, more comfortable and less so, to that Absolute Comfort" (GR 155). In a similar vein, here is the narrator of *Vineland* lamenting the homogenizing processes of officially sanctioned culture:

Sooner or later Holytail was due for the full treatment, from which it would emerge, like most of the old Emerald Triangle, pacified territory – reclaimed by the enemy for a timeless, defectively imagined future of zero-tolerance drug-free Americans all pulling their weight and all locked in to the official economy, inoffensive music, endless family specials on the Tube, church all week long, and, on special days, for extra-good behavior, maybe a cookie. (*Vineland* 221-2)

And yet, for all this, Pynchon consistently emphasises the power of radio, of mass mediation, as being potentially positive – so long as the right songs (not merely inoffensive ones) are being played. Of course, in that regard, subjective value judgements are unavoidable, and Pynchon does not shy away from them; the novels are littered with his personal predilections and negative comments on music he does not like. The important thing to note is Pynchon's propensity for

utilising radio as part of the narrative. Songs heard through that medium are often uncannily appropriate to the current scene, or to a broader theme. For example, when Roger Mexico puts his foot in it with girlfriend Jessica, the music on the wireless at that moment is ‘the lilting saxophones of Roland Peachey and his Orchestra playing “There, I Said It Again”’ (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 121); while Thunderclap Newman’s revolutionary rallying cry “Something in the Air” (with the pertinent lyric “we’ve got to get together sooner or later”) stands in ironic contrast to the LAPD’s crackdown on hippy culture in *Inherent Vice*. Time and again in that novel Doc Sportello appears to gain sustenance or moral support from the music on his car radio: ‘The Bonzo Dog Band cover of “Bang Bang” came on from KRLA in Pasadena, and Doc cranked up the Vibrasonic. As he moved up into the hills the reception began to fade, so he drove slower, but eventually lost the signal’ (56); going through a tunnel ‘the radio, which had been playing the Byrds’ “Eight Miles High,” lost the signal. Doc kept singing it to himself, and when they emerged and the sound came back, he was no more than half a bar off’ (135). The final image of the novel is Doc driving through thick fog ‘in a convoy of unknown size [...] like a caravan in a desert of perception, gathered awhile for safety in getting across a patch of blindness [...] a temporary commune to help each other home.’ Apart from the taillight ahead, the only means of reassurance is the music on the radio:

KQAS was playing Fapardokly’s triple-tongue highway classic “Super Market,” [...] and then there were some Elephant’s Memory bootleg tapes, and the Spaniels’ cover of “Stranger in Love,” and “God Only Knows” by the Beach Boys, which Doc realized after a while he’d been singing along with. He looked at the gas gauge and saw there was still better than half a tank, plus fumes. He had a container of coffee from Zucky’s and almost a full pack of smokes. (368)

There is an element of hysterical realism in Pynchon’s choice of music here: the psychedelic folk sound of Fapardokly, the political consciousness associated with Elephant’s Memory, the pop-aesthetic of the Spaniels’ doo-wop sound and the progressive pop-rock of Pet Sounds-era Beach Boys, all combine to make a playlist that is almost too good to be true as far as Doc is concerned. It is as though this particular selection (with the highly unlikely inclusion of the Elephant’s Memory bootlegs) has been put together with Doc specifically in mind, sent out over the airwaves to his car in particular to find their most eloquent expression

through the power of his in-car speaker system. The timing of this radio intervention is auspicious (Doc would say copacetic) as the Santa Anas fog closes around him to signify the stifling of the hippy dream and the final throes of the 1960s; but the music provides a sympathetic link between the listener and the like-minded DJ, in the first instance, but also between Doc and the other members of this 'caravan' travelling through dangerous times, who may be tuning in to the same station. We get the feeling Doc will be ok, especially with his 'Vibrasonic' amplifier hooked up to the car radio – the button for which Coy Harlingen at one stage makes the mistake of pressing: 'They were submerged in the bone-shaking reverberations of Pink Floyd's "Interstellar Overdrive." Doc found the volume knob. "—the Vibrasonic. Takes up half the trunk, but it's there when you need it"' (299). This last reference to Pink Floyd's anarchic, raucous, partly improvised 1967 instrumental composition is suggestive of a mood in *Inherent Vice*. Earlier on in the novel Doc listens to a 'Super Surfin' Marathon' on the radio, featuring "'Pipeline" and "Surfin' Bird," by the Trashmen, and "Bamboo," by Johnny and the Hurricanes, singles by Eddie and the Showmen, the Bel Airs, the Hollywood Saxons, and the Olympics, souvenirs out of a childhood Doc had never much felt he wanted to escape from' (124-5). There is an element of comfort here, born out of familiarity – to such a degree that Doc's car passenger Denis correctly guesses what song is coming next: "Tequila" by the Champs. By comparison, "Interstellar Overdrive" feels like an exhortation, the shock of the new, changing times. Instead of the more radio-friendly sounds of ten years prior – which may have felt fresh and dangerous originally but have now been brought into the fold of what is acceptable (to have been co-opted, in Gramscian terms) – the kind of mid-to-late 1960s rock music of which "Interstellar Overdrive" is representative here stands as a challenge to the very notion of co-optation.<sup>105</sup> Many of the musical references in this novel can be considered anthems or

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<sup>105</sup> Listening to this track in 2022, 55 years after it was recorded, is, to my mind, still an exciting and visceral experience, and the album it is taken from, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, one of those healthy anomalies in popular music that are resistant to the processes of co-optation – by which much of what passed, at one time, for subversive is made palatable through reformatting, familiarity and pale imitators. It brings to mind a line from Bruce Robinson's 1987 film *Withnail and I*, set around the same time as *Inherent Vice*, in which one of the characters, Danny, laments: "They're selling hippy wigs in Woolworths, man." Punk rock in the late 1970s suffered from a similar kind of co-optation through fashion (beyond the co-eval association and linked development of the style with the music, generated in the milieu of Vivienne Westwood's SEX boutique), with the ripped T-shirts and safety pins made famous by Richard Hell and John Lydon appearing, before long, on the catwalks of London and Milan – one of the reasons, no doubt, that important punk figures such as Lydon, The Clash and Siouxsie Sioux were so quick to leave the genre behind and head towards a more post-punk aesthetic.

rallying cries against the prevailing political climate – but this is certainly the most violent, and Pynchon does not shy away from the fact that violence is one method of meeting violence.

The flip side of the sanitising effects of the culture industry are those moments when a bold enough DJ or station will send something truly subversive out over the airwaves and thereby infiltrate the most incongruous of spaces. Pynchon takes gleeful pleasure at these moments, when representatives of officialdom are taken off guard by the realisation that their culture machine is not working as they believe it should. Such is the case in *Vineland* as federal prosecutor (and arch-enemy of hippies everywhere) Brock Vond finds, to his disgust, that acid-oriented hard rock has permeated even the highest echelons of American official life – albeit only so far as the restrooms: ‘Stalls in the glass-block and travertine toilets of the Justice Department itself boomed and echoed with Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix. Everywhere Brock looked he saw defects of control’ (279). There is a sad irony in the fact that the one who most clearly sees the subversive quality in this kind of music appears to be the one who loathes it the most. He proves the earnestness of his crusade against the kind of liberal culture that creates such music by brandishing a loaded gun at Frenesi, leading to the following exchange:

“When these little left-wing kiddie games come apart, things often turn dangerous.”

“And you’re thinking of my safety, Brock how sweet, but come on, it’s only rock and roll.”

His eyes were brimming with gelatinous tears, and his voice was higher in pitch. “Sooner or later the gun comes out.” (240)

Brock’s own fear is palpable in this exchange, but it is not long before he settles back into the old complacent faith in the machinery of state and the ultimate failure of social movements:

Brock Vond’s genius was to have seen in the activities of the sixties Left not threats to order but unacknowledged desires for it. While the Tube was proclaiming youth revolution against parents of all kinds and most viewers were accepting this story, Brock saw the deep – if he’d allowed himself to feel it, the sometimes touching – need only to stay children forever, safe

inside some extended national Family. The hunch he was betting on was that these kid rebels, being halfway there already, would be easy to turn and cheap to develop. They'd only been listening to the wrong music, breathing the wrong smoke, admiring the wrong personalities. They needed some reconditioning. (269)

Brock Vond's mania for control is finally and comprehensively undermined when some unnamed agency (God? The Devil? Some other great force of justice?) puts him in the hands of karmic mechanics Vato and Blood, who proceed to usher him into his own personal version of Hell characterised by a cacophony of voices all beyond his control: 'the drumming, the voices, not chanting together but remembering, speculating, arguing, telling tales, uttering curses, singing songs, all the things voices do, but without ever allowing the briefest breath of silence. All these voices, forever' (379). Vond is finally condemned to an eternity of facing up to the realisation that his efforts to restrict human expression to what is acceptable to the State have ultimately failed.

It is a measure of the enduring efficacy of such power structures – both corporate and State – that Pynchon, having cast one of their most extreme agents into Hell, would feel compelled to return to the subject in *Inherent Vice*. There we find other agents, equally nefarious yet more covert in their operations for the most part, 'dutiful and silent' (130), feeding the post-Manson paranoia that Pynchon describes as being prevalent in and around Los Angeles at that time. This is exemplified during Doc's visit to the Boards' rented mansion where 'everybody he got introduced to greeted him with the same formula—"Where are you at, man?" suggesting a high level of discomfort, even fear, about anybody who couldn't be dropped in a bag right away and labelled' (129). It is in this element of fear, bound up in the attempt to regulate musical expression, that we see a marked difference between the 1970 of *Inherent Vice* and the 1964 of *Lot 49*. In the latter, the emphasis is on corporate manipulation in the name of greed.<sup>106</sup> By the end of the 1960s – having witnessed the force of several social movements and their opposition (race rallies; hippy culture and the summer of love; anti-war demonstrations), and having begun to incorporate drugs as an

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<sup>106</sup> Some concerns existed within polite society concerning 'long-haired' British bands of the early to mid-1960s and the sexual themes in some of their songs – highlighted by CBC's Larry Zolf asking, in 1965, 'would you let your daughter marry a Rolling Stone?' Headlines such as these certainly did not hinder record sales and were actively exploited by the band's management.

overt theme to add to the sex that was already there – popular music in many quarters had become more politicised,<sup>107</sup> more subversive,<sup>108</sup> and more experimental<sup>109</sup> (therefore less commercial). As a result, Pynchon shows a music industry not merely engaged in regulation for the sake of profits, but under pressure from the State to regulate in the name of decency, morals, and national security. What's more, the attempt to control popular music – and popular culture more generally – is not confined to the mass media; Doc can sense the presence of such forces wherever pop culture may threaten to become 'counter'-culture:

Was it possible, that at every gathering—concert, peace rally, love-in, be-in, and freak-in, here, up north, back East, wherever—those dark crews had been busy all along, reclaiming the music, the resistance to power, the sexual desire from epic to everyday, all they could sweep up, for the ancient forces of greed and fear? (130)<sup>110</sup>

There is an element of paranoia to Doc's panic here – but paranoia in Pynchon is rarely unjustified. The key point is to have people living in a condition of fear and to have them question the rightness of their culture.

Despite the negatives associated with the commercial side of the music industry, and the sanitizing or narcotizing efforts of government agencies that seek to render the popular musical expression as inoffensive as possible, Pynchon never loses faith in the possibilities of recorded music – after all, he cites the 'wide availability of recorded jazz' as a major influence on his own young and enquiring mind (*SL* 7). It appears to be with a particular kind of glee, therefore, that in *Bleeding Edge* Pynchon displays consumer habits at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a kind of mix-and-match curatorship, both public and private, on the part of the audience. With the advent of live DJ sets, karaoke, mix tapes, and digital downloads – all of which feature prominently in the novel – the audience is now able to claim a greater degree of ownership in the method of their consumption, in ways that have altered the music industry irrevocably. With the further advent of on-line streaming and cheap download sites removing key sources of income for musical acts, debate goes on concerning the current

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<sup>107</sup> "Something in the Air" – Thunderclap Newman: *IV*, 356.

<sup>108</sup> "Something Happened to Me Yesterday" – The Rolling Stones: *IV*, 193.

<sup>109</sup> "Interstellar Overdrive" – Pink Floyd: *IV*, 299.

<sup>110</sup> Pynchon may have in mind here the disastrous 1969 'free festival' at Altamont.

direction of music media. One of the ironic effects of the current trend has been to re-establish the importance of touring as a source of revenue, with ticket sales compensating for a drop-off in royalties and physical unit sales – a necessity which may, in the long run, indicate a paradigm shift back towards the live performance circuit (the ‘miracle’ of Pynchon’s ‘working band’) over studio craft.

While each of Pynchon’s novels incorporates an abundance of musical references, by far the most eclectic is *Bleeding Edge* where we get an indication of the more scatter-gun consumption habits of music listeners in the final decade of the twentieth century – culminating in the development of peer-to-peer file sharing applications, such as Napster and LimeWire, and the mp3 revolution (although the new technologies only served to further satisfy already eclectic palettes that grew up with the mix-tapes of the 1980s). This novel is saturated with references to songs and musical artists, but the inclusion of Pynchon-penned original numbers is scaled back in comparison with the other novels (just the six songs in nearly five hundred pages). Furthermore, four of these originals are fictitious popular songs – “Massapequa,” performed by a minor character at a karaoke bar, is from ‘*Amy & Joey*, an Off-Broadway musical about Amy Fisher that’s been running since 1994 to packed houses’ (151-2); “Middletown New York,” the ‘early-career chartbuster’ by Slade May Goodnight, is heard on Maxine’s car radio (185); a Droolin Floyd Womack ‘classic’ (title not given), is also heard on the radio (195); and Nazi Vegetable’s ‘once-chartbusting disco anthem’ “In the Toilet,” is played as part of a deejay set at the Tworkeffx 1999-themed nostalgia party (307). The other two original songs are Pringle Chip Equation’s “Remember the Alley” (with Driscoll Padgett on guest vocals; 232), and Darren the intern’s rap about racial representation (283) – both of which can be considered part of the performer’s repertoire. In *Bleeding Edge* there are none of the spontaneous, off-the-cuff forays into song so characteristic of Pynchon’s earlier work; it is as though the improvised musical flourishes have been replaced by habitual recourse to referentiality.<sup>111</sup> Christian Hänggi puts it in these terms: ‘as the number of historical music references grows [...] the characters become less interested in music as evidenced by a decline in references to live music,

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<sup>111</sup> For an in-depth look at musical allusion in *Bleeding Edge*, see Samuel Thomas’ 2019 article “Blood on the Tracks: Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, and (Un)Popular Music from Britney to Black Metal,” *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, 7(1): 3, 1-55. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.788>.

musical instruments, and songs penned by Pynchon. This may well be an implicit pronouncement on the effects of a mass-mediated music and consumer industry, namely that it revolves around the consumption and not the production, or better yet, generation of meaning.<sup>112</sup> If the shift in the methods of consumption seen during the 1990s places more emphasis on the listener as curator of their own experience, we must also be aware of the effects of oversaturation and the potential risk for superficial engagement.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Christian Hänggi, *Pynchon's Sound of Music* (University of Chicago Press, 2020) 12.

<sup>113</sup> One of the disadvantages of downloading music is that there is the temptation to cherry-pick individual tracks instead of buying the entire album. But to do so with, for example, a concept album like *The Wall* or *The Sophtware Slump*, would be to miss out on key aspects of the overall artistic vision. It also fosters the habit of not listening to albums in their entirety in one sitting.

### Chapter 3: Jazz and the Politics of Resistance

For Pynchon, music can be an alternative method of communication countering absolutist discourse, through which monological or binary systems of thought are abandoned in favour of multiple forms of expression. Jazz is particularly important to Pynchon's enterprise in this regard and stands as a key element in the three novels under consideration in this chapter: *V.* (1963), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), and *Against the Day* (2006). Speaking about his exposure to jazz records in the 1950s, Pynchon describes entering this new heterophonic realm as 'exciting, liberating, strongly positive. It was not a case of either/or but an expansion of possibilities [and a] centrifugal lure against the undeniable power of tradition' (*Slow Learner* 7). The use of the word 'centrifugal' here is significant in that, by implying movement away from the centre and towards the periphery, Pynchon's early experience with jazz echoes the desire of much of his work: to cross the terrain between a centralized concept of official discourse (political, historical, conventional) and the shadowy outer regions that harbour the alternatives to, or subversions of, centralized power. In his fiction, music is often established as an eloquent and accessible mode of expression for the disinherited of America (or at least for those who still express a desire to communicate) and offers a forceful means by which valuable communicative insights may impinge upon the central narrative (which is often characterized by forms of non-communication) from the margins of the text. This chapter looks at the ways in which jazz meets Pynchon's needs as both an artistic product and a political philosophy that seeks to undermine the kind of absolutist reasoning which Pynchon devotes much time to satirizing. In so doing I will be looking at the work of some of Pynchon's contemporaries to get a feeling for the representation of jazz in American literature (and Pynchon's place in that conversation), while close scrutiny will be given to two influential figures in Pynchon's formative years as a writer: Jack Kerouac and Norman Mailer. A key issue arising out of this investigation will be the white reception of jazz in the light of race relations in the U.S. (Pynchon's commentary on the 1965 Watts riots providing a focal point) and the associated problematics of cultural appropriation, and artistic integrity in the commercial field. Textual analyses of the three novels mentioned above will form the second half of the chapter.

It is important to highlight at the outset the several forms of jazz as they appear in Pynchon's work; it is not a one-size-fits-all category but an evolutionary artform with many influences and many branching paths – some seen as having political energy, others as being inauthentic or simple entertainment. The various styles or sub-genres of jazz are viewed in relation to the political climate of each novel's timeframe: the syncopated ragtime of *Against the Day*, with its 'strange un-American rhythms' (179), compliments the anti-establishment attitudes of union organisers during the labour wars at the turn of the twentieth century; 1940s bebop is opposed to the saccharine popular music of the day in *Gravity's Rainbow*; while *V.* showcases the ever-more daring and experimental music of the mid-to late 1950s – when hard bop, modal jazz and the emergent 'free' or avant-garde form offered, on the one hand, an antidote to the staid, conservative principles of the Eisenhower administration and, on the other, a concomitant hipster nihilism that Pynchon satirises in the novel through the activities of the Whole Sick Crew. Moreover, as a writer of historical novels (fabulating and madly proliferative though they may be) that simultaneously comment on affairs current to the time of writing, Pynchon deals in a double perspective in which the historical subject acts as a sounding device (pun intended) for the contemporary situation. So, *Gravity's Rainbow*, published in 1973 and set in the mid-1940s, is also a commentary on the conflict in Vietnam and the civil rights movement in 1960s America – and so the jazz in that novel, and all the issues surrounding it concerning performance and reception, must also be viewed (often with dramatic irony) in the same double light. In so doing, we may get a sense (from Pynchon's perspective, at least) of how the impact of the music and the conditions of the socio-political climate of a given era resonate, develop, or diminish over time.

In his book on Pynchon and Toni Morrison, Cyrus R.K. Patell describes the significance of jazz as a model of dialogic interaction: 'In jazz, answering the call of another not only serves the community but also sets the stage for individual achievement. One player's lead is taken by another, who revises it and gives it an individual stamp, before passing on, while the piece as a whole moves forward all the while.' In this sense jazz is 'both highly individual and highly collaborative.'<sup>114</sup> The social energy at the heart of this art-form, and the

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<sup>114</sup> Cyrus R.K. Patell, *Negative Liberties: Morrison, Pynchon, and the Problem of Liberal Ideology* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001) 176.

communicative insights that may be gained from it, clearly appeals to Pynchon; but so too does the fact that jazz – both as art-form and as sub-culture, or “scene” – was, from its earliest origins, considered as having the power to subvert the conventional behavioural codes of respectable, white middle-class society. The significance of jazz to Pynchon’s work lies, firstly, in its pluralist vision; the call-and-response structure of jazz music, its improvisatory essence and the feeling that each individual voice, each solo, can be consonant with the whole, provides what Cyrus K. Patell sees as a ‘vision of what social responsibility might be in a culture of individualism.’<sup>115</sup> This description fits well with Pynchon’s own ideals in relation to small-scale communities – of which there are dozens of examples in his writing, all of them more-or-less peripheral to the mainstreams of culture or politics. We might think of the Thanatoid community in *Vineland*, or the Becker-Traverse extended family gathering that ends that novel; the surfing community of Gordita Beach in *Inherent Vice*; the internet chatrooms of *Bleeding Edge*; or the ad-hoc arrangement at a snowed-in tavern in *Mason & Dixon*. As a model for the dynamics of a vibrant small community, in which each member is valued and has something to contribute, the jazz of which Patell talks could not be more apt.

Add to this the fact that jazz has its roots in a distinctly African-American artistic heritage, and was able to flourish into American culture’s most distinctive contribution to world music – an evolution that occurred despite the extreme persecution placed on it at times by white mainstream society – and it is not difficult to see why Pynchon is able to develop jazz as a powerful communicative and political motif within his work.<sup>116</sup> This is quite apart from his own predilection for the genre which is outlined in the introduction to *Slow Learner*. It is also significant that jazz is an inherently syncretic form of expression, drawing on many styles and reconfiguring them on European instruments through the lens of Black experience. As such, it fits another of Pynchon’s main themes: a syncretic desire that lies at the heart of his work concerning dialogue between disparate groups – although such cultural syncretism will frequently give rise to accusations of cultural colonisation – a situation that Pynchon dramatizes in the three novels under consideration here.

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<sup>115</sup> Patell, 175.

<sup>116</sup> Antonín Dvořák foresaw the cultural impact of African American musical forms when he stated as early as 1893 that ‘negro melodies [...] must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States’ – “Real Value of Negro Melodies,” *New York Herald*, 21<sup>st</sup> May.

Through the psychological behaviour of those characters who are at the mercy of power and its agents in Pynchon, it is possible to gain insights into the nature of the broader themes at work in his novels. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the Pavlovian psychologist Ned Pointsman mentions that "Pavlov believed that obsessions and paranoid delusions were a result of certain—call them cells, neurons, on the mosaic of the brain, being excited to the level where, through reciprocal induction, all the area around becomes inhibited. One bright, burning point, surrounded by darkness" (90). To take the experience of the individual and expand it to a social level, this kind of cathexis (as it is viewed in Pynchon's work) becomes society's obsession with markets, production and consumerism; while sub- or peripheral culture and its representatives (otherwise known in Pynchon's fictional world as the 'preterite' or 'passed over' marginal subjects) are seen as a fractured sub-conscious felt just beneath the veneer of capitalist society, pockets of resistance that have the potential to rise to the surface and subvert the dominant order (the Pavlovian Pointsman is unable to grasp the Freudian implications of this dark periphery) if only the right channels could be cleared or synapses triggered. Frequently, however, such groups lack the means or the desire to make their presence felt in Pynchon's work and are marked instead by forms of fatalism and ennui in the face of the barriers that keep them isolated – the 'real, invisible class force fields in the way of communication between [...] two groups' that Pynchon talks about in *Slow Learner* (7). Music, however, constitutes the most effective form of expression to emanate from this section of society, and it is jazz in particular that promises to challenge and destabilize conventional social codes.

For these reasons jazz and blues have provided significant subject matter for several of Thomas Pynchon's contemporaries. Novelists and dramatists such as Toni Morrison, Ishmael Reed, Jack Kerouac, August Wilson, Amiri Baraka, Ralph Ellison, E.L. Doctorow and Michael Ondaatje have all incorporated these forms into the narrative fabric of their work as a decidedly political presence – carrying on the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance jazz poets. As with Pynchon, the literary representation of music in the work of these writers is more than merely incidental; the dialogic qualities of certain types of jazz composition, combined with the socio-historical origins of both jazz and blues establish the presence of these musical forms in literature as a complex signifier: a metaphor for the persistence of dialogic expression across subcultures of the disinherited.

In *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, for instance, August Wilson reminds us that music is 'Life's way of talking. You don't sing to feel better. You sing 'cause that's a way of understanding life' (194). Not only this, music (in this case the blues) is also a way of communicating that sense of life on a social scale: 'The blues help you get out of bed in the morning. You get up knowing you ain't alone. There's something else in the world. Something's been added by that song. This be an empty world without the blues' (195).

Elsewhere, however, representations of the political complexities inherent in such musical forms may be found. Toni Morrison, in the novel *Jazz*, portrays the popularity of the eponymous musical form as an undercurrent to social disaffection, race riots, and a heightening of sexual expression in the early part of the twentieth century. The jazz rhythms – sensual and libidinous – do not merely symbolize but help to generate the sexually-charged pulse of life in the novel: 'Songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart had dropped on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts' (56) of the city's inhabitants. We are given the representation of 'a City seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day' (67), where 'the right tune whistled in a doorway or lifting up from the circles and grooves of a record can change the weather. From freezing to hot to cool' (51). In Morrison's novel jazz often feels like a living entity: it has 'appetite' (59); it cajoles and implores those who listen to it to transgress conservative behavioural codes: "'Come" it said. "Come and do wrong"' (67), and 'have a little why don't you? Since this is the it you've been looking for' (188). It is repeatedly and inextricably linked with the city, which also exudes – through its amorality and its association with money – a powerful allure to the Black Americans of the south. They find when they arrive that 'the City is what they want it to be: thriftless, warm, scary and full of amiable strangers' (35). Of course, 'Little of that makes for love, but it does pump desire' (34) which, in the years immediately after the First World War, was a driving force that would grow to characterize the upbeat music of the west.

There seems to be a paradox at the heart of Morrison's representation of jazz that centres on its desire to corrupt as much as it seeks to emancipate; until, that is, we realize that corruption and emancipation become interchangeable terms in any attempt to transcend the confines of established behavioural codes. In the minds of those seeking emancipation the act of breaking with tradition is a positive change; whereas there are those who, in the name of established values,

would see in the same action a desire to corrupt the underlying principles of a 'decent' society. Such desire must therefore be curbed by the agents of power – most effectively the media – who are entrusted with ensuring that the dominant discourse is not undermined. A crucial element in the political history of jazz music is the interaction of some sections of the white middle-class with the jazz scene, beginning in the early 1920s, for with that interaction arose the concomitant accusations of corruption that jazz would have to defend itself against for decades after its emergence. Furthermore, the political implications of a distinctly African American art-form such as jazz being "colonized" by comfortable white society would resonate through many changes in the jazz format, as Black musicians attempted to revive the authenticity of their art by ever more daring excursions away from established western musical sensibilities.

The at-times volatile relationship between Black jazz practitioners and white audiences is a recurring preoccupation for Pynchon, and it introduces the first political element of his literary representation of music. As will be seen later in this chapter, Pynchon explores the implications of a white audience passively engaging with the authentic jazz expression on stage – particularly regarding McClintic Sphere (V.) and "Dope" Breedlove (*Against the Day*), two African American jazz characters who both harbour violent fantasies against their respective audience members. Pynchon displays an almost excruciating sense of self-awareness (or, rather, awareness of a younger self) in the *Slow Learner* introduction – which is perhaps not surprising for an author notorious for shunning the spotlight but who is here laid bare, to an extent, for public and private scrutiny. He describes himself during these formative years as a sort of phoney hipster: 'Like others, I spent a lot of time in jazz clubs, nursing the two-beer minimum. I put on hornrimmed sunglasses at night. I went to parties in lofts where girls wore strange attire. I was hugely tickled by all forms of marijuana humor, though the talk back then was in inverse relation to the availability of that useful substance' (SL 8). For Pynchon in the 1950s, the appeal of the hipster lifestyle was, in part, exactly that: the style of it, the fashion. In Norman Mailer's sympathetic portrayal of the hipster (or 'American existentialist') in the "The White Negro," however, we get a contemporary sense of the non-conformity, rebelliousness, and violence bound up in the psychopathy of the 'Hip' that Pynchon would begin to dramatize in his early twenties.

Mailer's 1957 essay is mentioned by Pynchon alongside jazz music and Kerouac's *On the Road* as being influential in its depiction of a culture that cuts against the perceived monolithic societal codes of post-war America. The essay itself responds to, and expands on, an article by Caroline Bird in which the phenomenon of the hipster is reduced to a stereotype and disparaged as little more than an amusing sideshow:

As the only extreme nonconformist of his generation, [the hipster] exercises a powerful if underground appeal for conformists, through newspaper accounts of his delinquencies, his structureless jazz, and his emotive grunt words.<sup>117</sup>

What Bird fails to consider is the genuine appeal of the hipster philosophy for young people at the time (Pynchon being one), and the very real socio-political ramifications of that influence that would become manifest over the next decade. The mention of jazz here is astute in this regard (if patronising), for the interaction between white 'nonconformists' and Black culture is at the heart of Mailer's American existentialism:

It is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries. But the presence of Hip as a working philosophy in the sub-world of American life is probably due to jazz, and its knifelike entrance into culture, its subtle but so penetrating influence on an avant-garde generation – that post-war generation of adventurers who (some consciously, some by osmosis) had absorbed the lessons of disillusionment and disgust of the twenties, the depression, and the war.<sup>118</sup>

The philosophy of the (white) nonconformist, in the midst of a civilisation whose codes have been exposed in the wake of the Second World War, seeks correspondences with the inevitable existentialism at the heart of Black experience and revels in the expressive quality of jazz music: 'The Negro has the simplest of alternatives: live a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger [...] [k]nowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war [...]

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<sup>117</sup> Caroline Bird, "Born 1930: The Unlost Generation," *Harper's Bazaar*, Feb. 1957.

<sup>118</sup> Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," *Advertisements for Myself*, (Manchester: Panther, 1968) 272.

in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage.' However, any kind of correspondence between the two sets of experience is problematic in that it will always depend, at least on some level, on the colonization of the 'other.' In Mailer, despite his obvious empathy for the harsh day-to-day realities faced by African-Americans in late 1950s America,<sup>119</sup> the correspondences between their experience and that of the hipster feel too easy: 'the bohemian and the juvenile delinquent came face-to-face with the Negro, and the hipster was a fact in American life [...] a new breed of adventurers, urban adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man's code to fit their facts. The hipster had absorbed the existentialist synopses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro.'<sup>120</sup> Simplistic conflations such as this are at the root of Pynchon's self-conscious unease regarding white interaction with jazz and Black culture generally.

David Witzling has explored this aspect of *V.* in depth and makes the case that Pynchon's writing (even at this early stage in his career) shows a far greater degree of awareness than either Kerouac or Mailer regarding the problems attendant on the depiction of Black culture from a white perspective: 'Through his juxtaposition of the racialized affects evoked by the discourses of his intertextual sources [such as Kerouac and Mailer], Pynchon suggests that his own radically ironic and seemingly cool narrative practice is an attempt to mediate the shock of a white culture suddenly forced to recognize the presence and authority of African American cultural and political voices somewhere close to the center of the American scene.'<sup>121</sup> The colonizing effects of Black representation in Kerouac and Mailer are more consciously acknowledged in Pynchon's work and combined with depictions of white liberal guilt (Pynchon's own) and 'white male self-abasement'<sup>122</sup> (see Rooney Winsome in *V.*, and Tyrone Slothrop in *GR*). In order to draw attention to these problems, Pynchon creates a 'narrative voice whose constituent falsity and inauthenticity of tone' – for instance, in the excessive repetition of 'dig' to mean 'understand' – 'suggests the political as well as the epistemological limitations of his attempts to give a black male character a

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<sup>119</sup> In the wake of #blacklivesmatter we might ask just how much things have improved by 2023.

<sup>120</sup> Mailer, 273.

<sup>121</sup> David Witzling, "The Sensibility of Postmodern Whiteness in *V.*, or Thomas Pynchon's Identity Problem," *Contemporary Literature*, vol.47, no.3 (2006) 384.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

voice.’<sup>123</sup> This development in narrative awareness is not paralyzing (in the way that Winsome’s white liberal guilt is for him) but makes for a more nuanced, multi-dimensional characterisation – for while Sphere is not the most present character in *V.*, he is certainly the most dynamic psychologically and intellectually. As Witzling comments: ‘Sphere’s articulation of a master narrative of postwar history and a creed that potentially enables us to live with that history provides an ironic contrast to the failures of Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil to create meaningful stories.’<sup>124</sup>

Notwithstanding Pynchon’s awareness of such problematics regarding the representation of Black culture and experience, there exists in his work a concomitant desire for interaction between disparate groups, that constantly seeks to challenge ‘the real, invisible class force fields in the way of communication’ (*Slow Learner* 7). However, such idealism is usually tempered in his work with a heavy dose of pragmatism – some would say pessimism – in that the undeniable force of society’s monological and inhibiting structures is too often seen to have its deleterious and enervating effect. Such is the case with Pynchon’s most famous set of hipsters: the Whole Sick Crew – a group of artists and bohemians in the first novel *V.* who find their template in Mailer:

[I]f the fate of twentieth-century man is to live with death [in the wake of Auschwitz and the atomic bomb] from adolescence to premature senescence, why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. In short [...] the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself, to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention, the life where a man must go until he is beat, where he must gamble with his energies through all those small or large crises of courage and unforeseen situations which beset his day<sup>125</sup>

Pynchon’s crew only partially fit this description though: they are stagnant, pseudo-hipsters in that they exhibit all the sickness and none of the courage of Mailer’s hipster. Their nonconformism is merely a retreat and poses no threat to established societal codes, because the ‘enormous present’ that they inhabit is

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<sup>123</sup> Witzling, 387-8.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>125</sup> Mailer, 271-2.

non-dialogic, non-conjugating – it is only a wasteland reflected in the banality of the Crew’s various forms of non-expression.<sup>126</sup> Theirs is not a psychopathy but a sociopathy; they are too bored to counter systemic violence with any of their own. McClintic Sphere, the African American jazz musician in their midst, dutifully despises them as much as he despises the affluent white audiences that only play at hipsterism for the fashion of it, and who treat his sets as background music. Nonetheless, Sphere finds it difficult to break free of the Crew’s ambit, so contagious is their nihilism.

Pynchon’s appreciation of jazz, however, must surely extend beyond the self-disparaging reflection on his younger self that we get in *Slow Learner*, and the evidence for that can be found in his negative portrayal of characters who believe they ‘get’ jazz but who in fact couldn’t be wider of the mark. The first real instance of this occurs during the short story ‘Entropy,’ first published in 1960 and later included in the *Slow Learner* collection. There we find the Duke di Angelis quartet, in the middle of the first of many insipid and emotionally sterile (or otherwise outright dangerous) parties to be found in Pynchon’s fiction, busily engaged in the production of silent music, whereby an entire musical piece exists only in the imaginings of the ‘musicians’ who ‘produce’ it. Taking for a starting point the fact that the great jazz musician Gerry Mulligan’s first quartet operated without piano, and therefore without root chords, Duke – the leader of Pynchon’s fictional quartet here – postulates that if root chords can be ‘thought’ then the logical extension of this would be to “think everything. [...] Roots, line, everything” (*Slow Learner* 95). The farcical element to all this is summed up in the fact that one member of the quartet had been ‘playing’ the wrong tune, but hadn’t realized because the music was silent anyway, and is further compounded when it transpires that another member was ‘playing in G sharp while the rest were in E flat, so they had to start all over’ (96). The comic element of the quartet’s ignorance turns to something more serious once we get to the novels, where the implications of missing the communicative insights that can be gained from jazz music – or, indeed, any attempt at communication from the margins of ‘acceptable’ discourse – are explored further.

An interesting comparison can be made here between Pynchon’s practitioner-based representation and that of Jack Kerouac who dramatizes the

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<sup>126</sup> Temporal themes in Pynchon form the basis of chapter Four in this thesis.

relationship from the opposite perspective: that of the white audience members. *On the Road* – the influential significance of which is emphasized by Pynchon in the *Slow Learner* introduction – exhibits an almost bipolar vacillation between heady hipster idealism and a negative fatalism evidenced in the repeated refrain ‘everything was collapsing.’ But in contrast to the inertia of V.’s Whole Sick Crew, Kerouac’s hipsters (and by that I mean the real ‘American existentialists’ rather than those who are merely drawn in by the appeal of style) are characterised by an incessant and feverish thirst for movement: ‘we were [...] performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*’ (133); ‘crossing and recrossing the country every year [...] because there was nowhere to go but everywhere’ (28); ‘all I wanted to do was sneak out into the night and disappear somewhere, and go and find out what everybody was doing all over the country’ (67). The desire for connection, for the linking of peripheral cultures into some sense of a fanciful community of the marginalised, is palpable in Dean and Sal’s wide-eyed wanderings, and reminds us of certain passages in Pynchon (although the latter is never so idealistic). The binding force for this ‘community,’ its most exciting signifier, is jazz:

‘That grand wild sound of bop came floating from beer parlors; it mixed medleys with every kind of cowboy and boogie-woogie in the American night [...]. Wild Negroes with bop caps and goatees came laughing by; then long-haired brokendown hipsters straight off Route 66 from New York; then old desert rats, carrying packs and heading for a park bench at the Plaza; then Methodist ministers in raveled sleeves, and the occasional Nature Boy saint in beard and sandals. I wanted to meet them all, talk to everybody’ (86)

The combination of these elements is intoxicating for Sal, but the hope and euphoria that it engenders leads to a too-simplistic and overarching feeling of commonality – ‘everywhere I went, everybody was in it together’ (92) – and it is never long before the harsh realities of life on the road serve to deflate Sal’s enthusiasm altogether. Dean’s own passionate response to the underside of American life is indefatigable; but it too is problematic in its attitudes towards race:

He dodged a mule wagon; in it sat an old Negro plodding along. “Yes!” yelled Dean. “Yes! Dig him! Now consider his soul—stop a while and consider.” And he slowed down the car for all of us to turn and look at the old jazzbo moaning along. “Oh yes, dig him sweet; now there’s thoughts in that mind that I would give my last arm to know; to climb in there and

find out just what he's poor-ass pondering about this year's turnip greens and ham" (113)

In contrast to most of white society who too often turn a blind eye to such figures, Dean is almost too desperate to see and know – to the point where his attitudes start to border on the patronising. His charisma and enthusiasm are such that his idealism inevitably rubs off on Sal: 'wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night [...], wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America' (180) – the naivety displayed here would be risible if it were not for the genuine longing.

Dean's easy attachment to black culture becomes more and more problematized by tensions within the novel concerning race and authenticity. While Kerouac enthuses over a performance by the white British pianist George Shearing the scene is tempered by the comment that 'these were his great 1949 days before he became cool and commercial' (128) – and later when a 'white hipster' asks to sit in on drums with a band playing in San Francisco his performance, though competent, is merely tolerated by the black musicians 'blowing, unaware of him' as his incongruous style provides only a 'giggling, rippling background for [their] big solid foghorn blues' (200). The latter is seen as a white imposter; he is aware of technique but has no access to the guts and violence at the root of jazz-blues, and so draws the disdain of some of those watching on: 'The big Negro bullneck drummer sat waiting for his turn. "What that man doing?" he said. "Play the music!" he said. "What in hell!" he said' (200). The theme is witnessed again in Chicago with Sal and Dean following a band around the clubs, their young blonde saxophonist too hung up on style and technique: "[He] has the technical anxieties of a money-making musician, he's the only one who's well dressed, see him grow worried when he blows a clinker, but the leader, that cool cat, tells him not to worry and just blow and blow—the mere sound and serious exuberance of the music is all *he* cares about." (239) – at least this musician's peers are more encouraging. The fact remains that, regarding white jazz practitioners, Kerouac emphasizes commerciality, technique and style above emotion, energy, authenticity.

Elsewhere in literature may be found representations of the animosity that can be generated within the Black community towards whites who enthuse about

jazz without knowing anything of the cultural roots of the jazz expression – in ways similar to Pynchon’s angry jazz musicians. LeRoi Jones’s 1964 play *Dutchman* focuses on the rage of a young black-American man at the attempts of certain members of the white middle class to engage with black culture for the sake of thrill and novelty: “Old bald-headed four-eyed ofays popping their fingers ... and don’t know yet what they’re doing. They say, “I love Bessie Smith.” And don’t even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, “Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass.” Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she’s saying, and very plainly, “Kiss my black ass.” And if you don’t know that, it’s you that’s doing the kissing” (34-5). This kind of colonizing of black experience is one of many factors that catalyse in jazz a reactionary, rebellious element that I will look at in more detail later in this chapter. The problem here lies in the difficulty faced by a group of people who seek to express aspects of their culture through innovative art such as jazz music, while still retaining full control of that expression: in other words, do the black community make jazz for themselves or for a wider audience?

One of Pynchon’s contemporaries, Ishmael Reed is another writer to re-enforce the perceptual comparison between jazz and exoticism. In his 1972 novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, jazz music and ragtime are elements of a virus known as “Jes Grew” which is sweeping across America during the 1920s, infecting youth culture with the spirit of ancient African rhythms and dance. Of course, the dominant conservative order – here known as “The Wallflower Order,” who are linked to the absolutism of the Knights Templar – attempt to arrest the flow of this new craze because of its subversive influence. As one of the characters points out, carriers of the virus “have synthesized the HooDoo of VooDoo. Its bleeblop essence; They’ve isolated the unknown factor which gives the loas their rise. Jazz. Blues. The new thang. That talk you drum from your lips. Your style” (152). The loas (Haitian voodoo gods, that are repeatedly associated in the novel with the early jazz greats) require nourishment through the active participation of people in the jazz scene to survive and to carry on the rhythmic legacy that can be traced from Osiris – and by extension, Orpheus – to Dionysus and the glossolalia and “happy convulsions” (*Mumbo Jumbo* 183) of ancient musical ritual. The perceived savagery of these associated links with jazz – the magic and the polytheism – is offensive to white-conservative American sensibilities; but its threat is even more effective on account of the paranoia and vulnerability of those

representative of authority in the years immediately after the Great War, and this is what makes the satirical aspect of the novel so effective.

From the outset, the narrative of *Mumbo Jumbo* makes clear the fact that the “atonists” of society are bound to fail in their quest to rein in “Jes Grew;” a reference to the birth of Charlie Parker in 1920 marks the beginning of the decade in which the narrative action is set, and indicates the political significance of the era: “That 1 decade that doesn’t seem so much a part of American history as the hidden After-Hours of America struggling to jam. To get through” (16). During this period, characterized by a hedonistic sense of excessive consumerism for those who could afford it, and a growing sense of social alienation for those who could not, subcultural art movements such as jazz were significant in that other voices were being offered as alternatives to the self-authorized discourse of white capitalism. Yet the very essence of jazz’s self-validation as alternative discourse – for example, the association with voodoo – would lead many of those white middle-class consumers straight to that art-form for the sake of novelty, thereby diluting the artistic expression through the process of colonization. The jazz scene was portrayed by the conservative press as having enticed middle-class American youth into free-wheeling debauchery, and as such jazz was seen as being complicit with the liberal ideals of the modern age as much as a regression towards “savage” impulses. As David Meltzer has it: “Jazz” became a word describing style and attitude, newness, ultramodernity. In the middle-class culture arguing about the immorality of hooch-swigging, shimmying middle-class youth, jazz was colonized as a word used as a negative moral epithet.”<sup>127</sup> Of course, the irony of this lies in the fact that white middle-class American youth were, for the most part, engaging with an inauthentic, Europeanized form of jazz that spoke very little of the true nature of black-American artistic expression. However, lest the reader become too depressed at the thought of all this, Reed explains in *Mumbo Jumbo* that during these times a loa was born: the reference to Charlie Parker reminds us that he, and those who came after him in the 1950s and 60s, would go a long way to reclaiming jazz, firstly (and necessarily) as a black art form, and from there on as the supreme example of multivocal artistic expression.

As we have seen, such questions of authenticity are important for Pynchon too in his representations of Black culture and his depictions of privileged white

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<sup>127</sup> David Meltzer, *Reading Jazz*, ed. David Meltzer (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1993) 74.

ignorance and/or guilt – particularly in *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Against the Day*. However, in the two most recent novels, *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*, Pynchon exhibits a far greater degree of comfort (or at least willingness) in his depictions of cross-cultural interaction. His third significant saxophone-playing character, Coy Harlingen in *Inherent Vice*, is a white hippie – but, nonetheless, having been helped out of the clutches of the DEA, he goes from surf-sax afterthought with local band The Boards to a crowd-pleasing horn blower of no small skill and intensity: “Coy picked up a baritone sax, took the mike off the mike stand, and put it down in the bell of the sax and started just blasting” (362). The late 1960s/early 1970s is a period marked by a rise in multiculturalism in music – and, significantly, in the *visibility* of multiculturalism. With the commercial and critical success of acts like The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Eric Burdon and War, Love – and the many Black musicians who worked with Frank Zappa or the white ones who worked with Miles Davis – the cross-fertilization of ideas and attitudes from different cultural backgrounds had become commonplace, if not exactly the rule. By this stage, the idea that a white musician could (or should) not play jazz or that a Black musician could not play psychedelic rock, for example, has become untenable.<sup>128</sup>

In *Bleeding Edge*, Pynchon takes this sense of inclusivity a stage further with mention of the ‘semi-underground Russian hip-hop scene’ (141) so beloved by the minor characters Misha and Grisha; and the Chinese rap artist Darren, who gives Maxine Tarnow a mix tape of his own work and a live performance to boot: ‘From somewhere he has produced a TB-303 clone with built-in speakers, which he now plugs in and powers up, fingering a major pentatonic bass line’ (282) – proceeding to rap about the (mis-)representation of Chinese (and, more broadly, Asian) character tropes in American media, while acknowledging his own appropriation of a distinctly Black American musical form to do so:

Tryin to do Tupac and Biggie thangs  
 With red velvet Chairman Mao piggy banks,  
 like Screamin Jay in Hong Kong  
 jumpin to wrong conclusions  
 old movie confusions, yo who be dat

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<sup>128</sup> Such, at least, is the snapshot conception of *Inherent Vice*'s time-setting. While the sense of promise offered by this kind of diversity may be realised later in the 1970s by some UK ska and two-tone bands (like The Specials and The Selecter) it is tempered by the recognition that ethnic minorities have been, and continue to be, under-represented in genres like hard rock and heavy metal.

Scandinavian brand of Azian  
 Ya dig wid some Sigrid be  
 The daughter of Kublai Khan,  
 Warner Oland, Charlie Chan, General Yan  
 bitter tea, for her stupidity pullin rank  
 Bette Davis shanked by Gale Sondegard  
 like they was on the yard  
 or down in some forgotten cell  
 far, far from the corner of  
 Mott and Pell— (282-3)

In signalling his act of cultural appropriation from the outset, and by speaking in what he believes to be the corresponding idiom – saying things like “Dig it” (282), and “Mad cool, yo” (283) – Darren, far from acknowledging any kind of guilt, is defiant in his right to express himself through the musical form that he loves. This is 2001 after all (in the novel) and the internet is already a way of life. After decades of misrepresentation, it would be an egregious error to remain ignorant of a musical form’s cultural and historical roots; but it would also be a shame if artistic creativity was stifled by too many cultural inhibitions.

It is considered by many music historians that jazz emerged from the blues when black musicians, having joined the major movements of African Americans into the white-dominated cities, were exposed to European instruments and musical forms. Whether this is true or whether jazz emerged from an urban blues base (there are studies that suggest blues had a stronghold as a recognizable form in New Orleans from as early as the 1880s) is a somewhat contentious issue within the jazz/blues field of study. What is certain is that exposure to white popular music and European instruments such as the saxophone, clarinet, trumpet, and piano, enabled the jazz form to develop in ways separate to the blues. While retaining strong elements of the sense of sexuality and release – from isolation, rootlessness, and repression – so indicative of the blues and so alien to the white mainstream, early jazz was nonetheless characterized over time by a sublimation into a more acceptable format via a close adherence to established European metre. Wilfred Mellers detects an ‘orgiastic submission to time’<sup>129</sup> in a form like ‘hot jazz,’ that cuts the music off from any semblance of a blues tradition or vernacular of the disinherited (to use Pynchonian language). The progression of

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<sup>129</sup> Wilfred Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of American Music* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2011) 273.

jazz music – from early forms dating from the late nineteenth century, such as ragtime; through the inter-war years of ‘European colonization’ that saw formats such as swing and hot jazz develop; to what would later become known as ‘bebop’ and then ‘free jazz’ – is significant to our understanding the way in which Pynchon develops jazz as a presence (both literal and metaphorical) in his work. From its earliest incarnations jazz was persistently associated with rebellion: against convention and against traditional codes of practice in both music and social behaviour. Early articles of the period frequently attest to jazz’s inherent corruptibility – titles and headlines such as “Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?” (Anne Shaw Faulkner in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Aug. 1921) and “Why ‘Jazz’ Sends Us Back to the Jungle” (*Current Opinion*, Sept. 1918) set the trend for much of the criticism levelled against jazz by white commentators in mainstream publications of the time. Though many of these diatribes betray an underlying note of racial propaganda – attacking black communities by attacking jazz – the concerns seemed justified to many as more and more white people were attracted to the format in the roles of both practitioner and audience, until high-tempo jazz became the ubiquitous soundtrack to America’s post-Great War boom. In a little over twenty years, jazz had moved into a diametrically opposed position to the blues philosophy out of which it had grown and was now, instead, a reflection of the care-free excesses of white post-war consumption. To refer again to Ishmael Reed and his novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, if jazz ‘could not find its Text then it would be mistaken for entertainment’ (211). There is a certain irony in the fact that Black artists were castigated for corrupting a generation of whites through a musical form that now owed its structural essence to a distinctly European notion of rhythm and temporality.

The political energy that jazz accrued in each of its manifestations held great and far-reaching appeal for anybody hoping to tap into discourses alternative to the prevailing dominant ideology. As Lawrence Levine notes in his article “Jazz and American Culture”: ‘The striking thing about jazz is the extent to which it symbolized revolt wherever it became established.’<sup>130</sup> To highlight this belief Levine cites, on the same page, two accounts of instances whereby jazz and politics had become inextricably associated, and in the unlikeliest of places. The first is a piece from Erik Wiedemann, written in 1985, entitled ‘Jazz in

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<sup>130</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, “Jazz and American Culture,” *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol.102, No.403 (Jan. - Mar. 1989) 15.

Denmark—Past, Present and Future,’ in which the author asserts that in Denmark, ‘[f]rom 1933 on advocating jazz became part of the anti-fascist culture-radical movement;’ while the second quotation comes from Marshall Stearns who, after lecturing at the Zagreb Conservatory of Music in 1956, reported that the Yugoslav students and faculty agreed that ‘jazz symbolized an element of unconscious protest which cut through the pretenses of tradition and authority.’ This last statement is very much in keeping with Thomas Pynchon’s own account (included in the introduction to *Slow Learner* and mentioned earlier in this chapter) of the political energy at the heart of jazz music’s appeal – though one has to wonder whether Pynchon would stop at, and not go further than, the kind of associative link between jazz and a form of ‘unconscious’ political protest that Marshall Stearns found among the music students at Zagreb. If the jazz expression is coloured with the violence of revolt, then it is due to the reactionary suppression of the unconventional for the purpose of restoring hegemonic authority.

In Pynchon’s 1966 article on the Watts riots of that year, entitled “A Journey into the Mind of Watts,” he notes the relevance of jazz as a form of expression able to undermine the capitalist ideology of white society in Los Angeles. This was a period that saw increasing tensions in the relationship between white authority and Black society, but also some of the greatest artistic innovations in Black cultural history. Pynchon reveals in this article an empathetic understanding of the distrust and contempt displayed towards authority and its agents – the police – during these turbulent times, and finds it natural to draw on the notion that the mob violence and contemporary jazz were somehow part of the same necessary expression: this ‘coordinated and graceful [...] scattering of the man’s power,’ was starting to be remembered ‘less as chaos and more as art.’ Pynchon expands on this to say that ‘others remember it in terms of music: through much of the rioting seemed to run, they say, a remarkable empathy, or whatever it is that jazz musicians feel on certain nights: everybody knowing what to do and when to do it without needing a word or a signal.’<sup>131</sup> If this jazz-like rioting is art, then it is an art of violent realism set against the surrounding fiction of a white consumer society based on fabricated moral standards – the ‘unreality

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<sup>131</sup> Thomas Pynchon, “A Journey into the Mind of Watts,” *The New York Times Magazine* (12 June 1966).

of Los Angeles.<sup>132</sup> Pynchon identifies an antagonism inherent in the opposition between the veneer of Los Angeles' white-orientated consumer culture and the stark, often violent, reality of poor black urban areas such as Watts:

While the white culture is concerned with various forms of systematized folly—the economy of the area in fact depending on it—the black culture is stuck pretty much with basic realities like disease, like failure, violence and death, which the whites have mostly chosen—and can afford—to ignore. [...] it is hard to believe there is any mystery to Watts. Everything seems so out in the open, all of it is real, no plastic faces, no transistors, no hidden Muzak, or Disneyfied landscaping, or smiling little chicks to show you around. Not in Raceriotland.

Nor indeed, according to Pynchon, should there be any mystery regarding the germination of the riots:

what, from the realistic viewpoint of Watts, was so abnormal? "Man's got his foot on your neck," said one guy who was there, "sooner or later you going to stop asking him to take it off." The violence it took to get that foot to ease up even the little it did was no surprise.

Through the narrative voice in *V.* Pynchon explores the implications surrounding this occasional sympathetic recognition of the necessity for violent confrontation: 'mob violence, like tourism, is a kind of communion. By its special magic, a large number of lonely souls, however heterogenous, can share the common property of opposition to what is' (*V.* 471). Though tempered by the realization that such violent energy may be open to the manipulation of higher forces, and for ulterior motives, the feeling remains that violence directed towards certain worthy ends and against repressive social structures is, at the very least, understandable. As Norman Mailer has it: 'it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the State; it takes literal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth.'<sup>133</sup> What seem preferable to Pynchon, however, are forms of expression that, in resisting absolutist definition, commit violence against the 'real, invisible class force fields in the way of communication between [...] two groups' (*SL* 7).

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<sup>132</sup> Pynchon, "A Journey into the Mind of Watts."

<sup>133</sup> Mailer, 286.

In Pynchon's work, actions or expressions that run contrary to convention are frequently stifled through violence – a characteristic that is perhaps motivated by images of the Watts riots and other violent confrontations between agents of authority and politically motivated social groups. The difference with jazz lies in its own militancy against definition through language, which is power's most effective tool. As Roland Barthes has it: 'The object in which power is inscribed, for all of human eternity, is language, or to be more precise, its necessary expression: the language we speak and write.'<sup>134</sup> Music, more than any other form of artistic expression, is able to escape the parameters of official discourse to a large degree, as the relative failings of musical semiology show; and jazz, with its emphasis on improvisation and the unconventional virtuosity of its best practitioners, is the archetypal musical form in this regard. As Amiri Baraka states: 'A printed musical example of an Armstrong solo, or of a Thelonious Monk solo, tells us almost nothing except the futility of formal musicology when dealing with jazz. Not only are the various jazz effects almost impossible to notate, but each note *means something* quite in addition to musical notation.'<sup>135</sup> In addition to this, Ernest Ansermet – a Swiss concert hall musician and conductor who was one of the first so-called "serious" musicians to endorse jazz – is more specific in his explanation of how the jazz musician 'uses thirds which are neither major nor minor and false seconds, and falls often by instinct on the natural harmonic sounds of a given note—it is here especially that no written music can give the idea of his playing.'<sup>136</sup> Such refusal to be captured fully in written notation is one of the reasons why jazz is able to put up crucial resistance to the ubiquitous capitalist process of commodification, thereby escaping what Jacques Attali terms the 'violence of repetition.' In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Attali writes:

Free jazz was the first attempt to express in economic terms the refusal of the cultural alienation inherent in repetition, to use music to build a new culture. What institutional politics, trapped within representation, could not do, what violence, crushed by counterviolence, could not achieve, free

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<sup>134</sup> Roland Barthes, "Inaugural Lecture, College de France," *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (London: Vintage, 1993) 460.

<sup>135</sup> Amiri Baraka, "Jazz and the White Critic," *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 258.

<sup>136</sup> Walser, 11.

jazz tried to bring about in a gradual way through the production of a new music outside of the industry.<sup>137</sup>

What is crucial here is that the production of authentic free jazz is bound up in the expression: composition and performance are one-and-the-same thing. As Mezz Mezzrow put it: 'to us [...] a guy composed as he played, the creating and performing took place at the same time—and we kept thinking what a drag it must be for any musician with spirit to have to sit in on a symphonic assembly-line.'<sup>138</sup> In a similar vein this is Miles Davis talking about the *Bitches Brew* album in *Miles: The Autobiography*:

What we did [...] you couldn't ever write down for an orchestra to play. That's why I didn't write it all out, not because I didn't know what I wanted; I knew what I wanted would come out of a process and not some prearranged shit. This session was about improvisation, and that's what makes jazz so fabulous. Any time the weather changes it's going to change your whole attitude about something, and so a musician will play differently, especially if everything is not put in front of him.<sup>139</sup>

Within the more progressive, post-swing forms of jazz, then, there is room for experiment, exploration, accident, and the expression of individual personality. This is not to say, however, that the jazz practitioner is adrift in a soundscape with no reference points – as Wynston Marsalis explains: "Jazz is not just, "Well, man, this is what I feel like playing." It's a very structured thing that comes down from a tradition and requires a lot of thought and study."<sup>140</sup> Understanding that bedrock of structure and tradition enables the best jazz practitioners to reinscribe the form afresh through new textures in the moment of performance. In addition to any given tonal centre that a piece may be founded on, the musician must remain alert to mood, emotion, atmosphere – both in their own playing and in that of others. Hence the familiar description of jazz as 'ear music':

The experience of negotiating through the ever-changing patterns around them from the perspective of their personal structure maps is a rich and

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<sup>137</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985) 138.

<sup>138</sup> Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues* (New York: Random House, 1946) 124.

<sup>139</sup> Miles Davis and Troupe Quincy, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990) 290.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1994) 63.

dynamic one for improvisers. It potentially involves the imaginative play of sounds, physical gestures, colourful shapes, and abstract symbols, whose gestalt creates the impression of perpetual movement through a multidimensional musical realm. Although the emphasis upon distinct imagery can differ from individual to individual and vary within performances, artists commonly describe aural musical representations in their thoughts and perceptions as preeminent.<sup>141</sup>

These very facets of jazz, that proponents and enthusiasts of the form hold to be most characteristic and powerful, were famously dismissed by Theodor Adorno as manipulative overstatements that merely masked jazz's inherent complicity in the anaesthetic effects of what he calls the 'Culture Industry.' In highlighting the influences of European classical music and popular songs on jazz (in Duke Ellington, for instance, the melodic impressionism of Debussy may be discerned in what is, after all, a common – and marketable – three-minute format) Adorno signals his refusal to engage with any ideological mythologising of the artform or its top practitioners. While much of what Adorno says concerning jazz up to the mid-1930s is compelling, his critique is undermined by a relative lack of critical musical analysis on the subject (particularly when compared to his in-depth analyses of classical pieces), and the well-noted failure to properly engage with later jazz forms up to his death in 1969. For all Adorno's downplaying of jazz, the fact remains that the emphasis on exploration, emotion, and dialogue that can be heard in the best examples of the form can be said to push back against a codifying commodity culture that seeks to categorise for the sake of marketability.

The association between jazz and revolt, through the refusal to adhere to convention (as opposed to tradition) is what gives this mode of expression its political energy. The violence that often seems to creep into the association consistently takes the form either of an authoritarian countermeasure generated by conservative agents of social authority; or else the aggressive retrieval of jazz, enacted by the authentic exponents of that art-form, from its sublimation into the hegemony of a white, Eurocentric culture. In *V.*, Pynchon describes jazz as innovative, unpredictable, and exhilarating – for the same reason that other areas of society find it dangerous, subversive, and sinful: because at the heart of jazz lies an antagonism to the decadent commodity culture described in Pynchon's novel that, due to authority's desire to preserve the hegemonic order, must remain violent. We can get a sense of this underlying violence by looking at

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<sup>141</sup> Berliner, 93.

McClintic Sphere's reaction to the white Ivy League audiences at the V-Note club. We can also sense it in Pynchon's description of Sphere's band-dynamic: 'Horn and alto together favored sixths and minor fourths and when this happened it was like a knife fight or tug of war: the sound was consonant but as if cross-purposes were in the air' (58). The musical dynamic here is crucially inclusive of individual expression in the context of community; for while Sphere's solos are 'something else' (58), they do not detract from the performative consonance of the group. Nor does the fact that they perform without piano – the classical embodiment of Europeanized chordal progression – suggest a lack of coherence; it simply validates their sound as an indigenous form of African American expression. It could be said, in fact, that as an emblem of the undeniable centrality of African American influence within American culture, jazz represents a dramatic re-assertion of America's collective suppressed consciousness.

McClintic Sphere is perhaps the most significant exponent of jazz in Pynchon's writing. Many critics have picked up on the resemblance between Sphere and the great saxophonist Ornette Coleman who broke onto the New York jazz scene in the late 1950s. Pynchon provides some textual clues to back up this comparison; for example, both Coleman and Sphere use the same size reed, and Sphere's hand carved ivory saxophone resembles Coleman's favoured white plastic instrument. However, there is an equally convincing resemblance between Pynchon's character and Thelonius Monk – another influential jazz musician of the period, whose middle name was Sphere. Taken along with the numerous textual references to a second legendary jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, I think it is more relevant to consider McClintic Sphere not so much as a literary incarnation of one or other of these figures, but rather as an amalgam of each and possibly of others from the jazz community at this time. As such, Sphere becomes the personification of his art-form – the living embodiment of the possibilities of jazz through the artform's progressive stages between 1940 and the novel's late 1950s setting. Sphere's presence in *V.* provides a stark contrast to the (a)pathetic artistic endeavours of the Whole Sick Crew; his art maintains a vitality of expression and innovation, and amid the cultural waste depicted in the novel, his sets at the V-Note jazz club provide an oasis of artistic integrity. Unfortunately, the expressive nature of Sphere's music is lost somewhat on the

essentially racist white “Ivy League” audiences that he plays to, as well as the majority of the Whole Sick Crew at whose peripheral edge he finds himself.<sup>142</sup>

At the beginning of chapter ten, McClintic Sphere exposes his artistic dissatisfaction through a fantasy wherein the alto-saxophone becomes a weapon with which to assault the audience of wealthy Ivy League kids at the V-Note club who ‘used him for background music’ (281). This is echoed later in Pynchon’s career through the experience of “Dope” Breedlove in *Against the Day* – a character in the same mould as Sphere, but who represents an earlier form of jazz. Both Sphere and Breedlove share the frustration of having to play their music to predominantly well-off white audiences, while others – presumably young black people ‘who couldn’t really afford dollar beers at the V-Note but did or wanted to understand’ – get left out because ‘the space they might have occupied was already taken up by the rich kids’ (281). It is the ignorance and inherent racism of such audiences that is exposed through Sphere and Breedlove’s similar mockery of the black-American stereotypes fostered by white society – such attitudes seemingly having been maintained rather than diminished over the fifty-year period between the era of Breedlove’s ragtime and that of Sphere’s avant-garde format – or, for that matter between the publications of *V.* in 1963 and *Against the Day* in 2006. Breedlove jokes that he plays “not wanting to disappoint the many Caucasian music-lovers who come in here expecting that certain dental gleam. Oh yes suh, I loves them po’k chops!” (371); while the same kind of racism invokes a more violent reaction in Sphere: ‘Yes, bwana. Yazzuh, boss. Dis darkey, ol’ Uncle McClintic, he play you de finest Night Train you evah did hear. An’ aftah de set he gwine take dis ol’ alto an’ shove it up yo’ white Ivy League ass’ (281).

McClintic Sphere’s objection to being patronized by an audience that do not fully appreciate his art is juxtaposed in *V.* with the final scene of the preceding chapter, which also features a black man whose music cannot be understood by those who hear it. The scene is set at the end of the section recounting Foppl’s siege party which takes place in Southwest Africa in 1922 and depicts the charitable actions of a mutilated Bondel native towards Kurt Mondaugen (the recounter of this part of the narrative). The Bondel is riding a donkey through the

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<sup>142</sup> Interestingly, Pynchon – writing in the *Slow Learner* introduction – seems to (half-)identify his younger “hipster” self with certain members of the Crew and their pretensions, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

scrubland that surrounds Foppl's farmstead and stops to offer Mondaugen a ride. As they move away from the obscene decadence of Foppl's party, the Bondel begins to sing in native Hottentot dialect – which of course Mondaugen cannot understand. There is, however, something more significant at play here than the simple fact that Mondaugen is ignorant of the local dialect. It is more pertinent, I think, to suggest that he is incapable of entering into communion of any kind with the Bondel on ethical grounds. After the depiction of the depravities inflicted on Bondel servants at Foppl's plantation, the charitable actions of Mondaugen's rescuer seem poignant in the extreme. Far from being a vision of reconciliation, however, the image of a debilitated white German man riding with a mutilated Bondel native represents, in fact, a chance lost for human communion; for we discover that Mondaugen is destined to spend the years of the Second World War having returned to his native Germany to help develop the V-1 and V-2 rockets, before entering employment at the Yoyodyne aerospace defence company. Any question of Mondaugen's conception of morality having been altered by the actions of the charitable Bondel must therefore be cast into doubt. As a result of this, the Bondel's Hottentot song is sung only to the wilderness, and it was 'lost before it reached the nearest Ganna bush' (279).

In 'Mondaugen's Story,' it is the hot jazz of the 1920s (associated with European notions of temporality and rhythm) that forms the fashionable musical accompaniment to the debauched revelling and celebration of European decadence enjoyed by guests at Foppl's siege party:

[Mondaugen] emerged from the billiard room to hot jazz somewhere overhead. Blinking, he made his way up to the grand ballroom and found the dance floor empty. Clothing of both sexes was littered about; the music, which came from a Gramophone in the corner, roared gay and hollow under the electric chandelier. But no one was there, no one at all. (243)

References here to billiards, grand ballrooms, and electric chandeliers, not to mention the murderous debauchery of Foppl's guests throughout this chapter and the hollow-sounding music that accompanies their activities, suggest the extent to which hot jazz as a form had been divorced ideologically, and in its earliest manifestations, from any kind of a blues heritage. The fact that nobody is there to listen to the music in this passage merely compounds the entropic association between cultural decadence and the development of a musical form that speaks

very little of its social roots. During Mondaugen's nightmare vision of 'Fasching' – a 'mad German carnival or Mardi Gras' (243) where rollickers link arms, 'all singing a death-song and weaving side to side in a chain' (244) – the insidious process of cultural entropy is symbolized by the sound of a 'black oak clock above the fireplace tick[ing] terribly loud in strange waves of silence that swept regularly over the company' (244). It is a sound that indicates a progression into decadence – the inanimate silence of death. It is a presence that signifies a lack (a loud silence), much like the presence of hot jazz music in an empty ballroom. Pynchon's decision to locate this form of music in a chapter of V. that deals with aggressive European colonisation and the violent repression and degradation of black communities is indicative of this irony – especially when read side-by-side with McClintic Sphere's subsequent ideological anxieties concerning the white audiences who 'dig' but don't 'get' his art.

Pynchon's work is riddled with such chances lost. It is a fiction haunted by the possibility of transcendence, for the means to communicate are always there but they are too often overlooked or ignored. There are in V., however, glimpses of the possibility for redemption through communication, and again jazz frequently serves as the binding symbol. Such is the case early on in the novel when Ploy's suicide bid – motivated by the humiliation of having had his teeth forcibly removed and replaced by a 'gleaming [...] set of upper and lower plates' (12) – is thwarted by a 'gargantuan negro' (12) named Dahoud, who convinces Ploy that all possessions, including false teeth, are of secondary consideration to the most precious possession of all: life itself. Pynchon's naming of Ploy's rescuer is significant: Dahoud invokes the title of a famous jazz piece of the 1950s written by the trumpeter Clifford Brown (though the title of Brown's piece is spelt 'Daahoud,' there can be no mistaking the reference). When Rooney Winsome attempts to take his own life later in the novel, the thoroughly degenerate Pig Bodine tries to stop him by invoking the same sentiment that had worked for Dahoud. This time, however, the attempt fails; coming from the mouth of one too-closely associated with the Whole Sick Crew (as Bodine is) the words sound hollow. But in the mouth of a jazz man (as his name would suggest that Dahoud literally is) words have the power to redeem and to save. He convinces Ploy that the inanimate matter in his mouth bears no relation to his identity as a human being. In a novel filled with characters who identify themselves with inanimate objects, and who risk, consequently, being absorbed into V's decadent

metaphysic, Dahoud's intervention represents the possibility (slender though it may be) of an alternative to the novel's dominant entropic narrative. Dahoud's jazz credentials are consolidated late in the novel when his rendition of 'I Only Have Eyes for You,' in the style of Billy Eckstine, temporarily quells the wrath of '200 Royal Commandos' intent on attacking 'maybe 30 Scaffold sailors' of which Dahoud is one:<sup>143</sup>

"Hey Billy Eckstine," yelled the Commandos in front of Dahoud. "Billy Eckstine! Sing us a song!" A volley of firecrackers went off somewhere to the right. Most of the fistfighting was still concentrated in the center of the mob. [...] Dahoud removed his hat, drew himself up and began to sing [...]. Commandos were struck dumb. Somewhere down the street a police whistle blew. Glass broke in the middle of the crowd. (440)

The reference to Eckstine is significant, not simply in that it name-checks a popular early post-war jazz musician and band leader in relation to the character of Dahoud, who, in the comparison, is further associated with the jazz genre to which his name already alluded; the naming of Eckstine in particular is important because he provides a link between the commercial big-band jazz format of the 1920s and 30s, and the more expressive and innovative forms of jazz that began to emerge in the mid-1940s. Many of the musicians who founded these modern styles – among them Dexter Gordon, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Fats Navarro, Dizzy Gillespie, Art Blakey – were given early employment by the forward-thinking Eckstine, and the freedom to experiment with ever-more daring forms of musical expression. Though these new forms were initially viewed with hostility from many quarters, Pynchon reveals his own positive reaction to them through the association between Eckstine and the pacifist (pacifier) Dahoud.

There are times, indeed, when Pynchon invokes a miraculous element within the most expressive forms of jazz music, in connection with the concept of glossolalia (speaking an unknown language) and/or xenoglossy (having knowledge of a language one has never learned) in such a way that the value of artistic expression and the miracle of (dialogic) communication are emphasised together under the auspices of (re-)enchantment. For Pynchon these later musical forms speak of an authenticity undercutting the glossy veneer of white capitalist society and offer a challenge to the reductive concept of temporality at

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<sup>143</sup> It will be shown in Chapter Five that this scene also has Orphic overtones.

the heart of V's metaphysic through an insistence on composition through performance – the value of spontaneous expression in the lived moment. It is, in short, a valuable alternative discourse that opposes the entropic decline of western culture as chronicled in much of Pynchon's work. There is an emphasis placed on the need to recognize and to keep open the endless chances for communication that exist in the real time of the present; yet the ability to recognize this necessity, and to then actively participate in the heterophonic order that such a philosophy promises to yield, is something which tends to elude the majority of Pynchon's characters – given their position in relation to dominant social structures that appear to limit the chances for heterophonic communication through the control of language. There are, however, moments of genuine optimism to counterbalance such difficulties. In the interaction between McClintic Sphere and Paola Maijstral (the multi-lingual, almost protean Maltese who seems to embody aspects of Robert Graves' White Goddess) Pynchon brings the dual metaphor of jazz and glossolalia together in a vision of potential, communicative transcendence from the stifling subjection to 'power and indifference' (*GR* 209) that is experienced by so many other characters in his fictional cosmos, and the debased language forms of a simulated consumer society to which they are also subject.<sup>144</sup> As the artist Hunter Penhallow explains in *Against the Day*, this multivocal level of communication is "redemption, isn't it, you expect chaos, you get order instead. Unmet expectations. Miracles" (580). When the narrative voice in Pynchon's work refers to the wind – as it so frequently does, including in the name 'Maijstral' – the allusion evokes both music (perhaps the blowing of Sphere's alto sax) and the wind that accompanies the Pentecostal gift of glossolalia: two forms of communication that are, in effect, comparable modes of expression in that both constitute unknown languages that nonetheless have the power to impart meaning to all who hear them.<sup>145</sup> In his book on Barthelme, Coover, and Pynchon, entitled *Dissident Postmodernists*, Paul Maltby touches briefly on the significance of the Pentecostal 'gift of tongues' as an alternative to other, less inclusive forms of discourse in V. Pynchon's reference to glossolalia, he writes, is 'an account of an ecstatic and, it seems, telepathic mode of communication in which those who speak are possessed by an inexpressible,

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<sup>144</sup> I explore the relationship between Sphere and Paola in the context of Orphism in Chapter Five.

<sup>145</sup> The relationship between music and the wind in Pynchon forms the second part of Chapter Five.

numinous power.’<sup>146</sup> However, Maltby goes no further than to suggest that Pynchon establishes this alternative mode of communication as merely an implicitly utopian ideal to other forms of discourse, and fails to recognize (as, indeed, do many of Pynchon’s fictional characters) that a secular mode of glossolalia has been available throughout, in the form of the musical expression. The writings of musical semioticians indicate firstly, the desire to classify music as a language – for how else can it be utilized for the purpose of communicating? – and secondly, the swift realization that existing methods of understanding how language works are wholly inappropriate when applied to the affective power of music. For this reason, music effectively remains an unknown language that is nonetheless understandable on an affective level by all,<sup>147</sup> and so may be considered as a very real equivalent of the phenomenon of glossolalia: an all-inclusive medium of communication, the central force of which ultimately defies scientific definition. When Pynchon brings McClintic Sphere and Paola Maijstral together, he develops a dynamic metaphor for a heterophonic, yet integrated sense of human communion that signifies the possibility of transcendence from the cultural lassitude of the Whole Sick Crew and the fascistic driving force at the heart of V’s metaphysic – both of which constitute an entropic declension away from communication and towards cultural silence. Towards the culmination of Chapter 12 – after Benny Profane’s bitter confrontation with Fina, the arrest of several members of the Crew for ‘disturbing the peace,’ and Rooney Winsome’s attempted suicide – the narrator puts it in these terms: ‘Maybe the only undisturbed peace that night was McClintic’s and Paola’s. [...] their own wind was cool, taking away whatever of Nueva York had clogged ears, nostrils, mouths’ (365).

The desire for an all-inclusive level of communicative interaction between human beings is one of the underlying principles behind Pynchon’s fiction. Another underlying principle, however, is the difficulty that humans have in entering this liberated realm – for most of Pynchon’s questing heroes it is an opportunity that is never fully appreciated, owing to their preoccupation with absolutist methods of understanding. Their actions are hardly surprising given the limited choice that seems available to them: either to conform to absolutist

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<sup>146</sup> Paul Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists: Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon* (U of Pennsylvania P, 1991) 134.

<sup>147</sup> With the exception of those who exhibit extreme forms of amusia – Vladimir Nabokov and Sigmund Freud were two whose aversion to music bordered on the pathological.

principles and get swept up in a world of paranoid fantasy (as happens to Herbert Stencil); or surrender to the opposite conviction that nothing is connected to anything, thereby losing any slim sense of identity that might once have existed. Pynchon satirizes these characters in order to expose their ignorance, however, and in so doing is able to foreground seemingly insignificant pockets of human creativity and communion that resist entropy. One could do worse, Pynchon suggests, than to listen to the wind blowing through McClintic Sphere's alto sax and to think of the dialogic essence of free jazz as metaphor for integral human interaction.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* jazz is incorporated into the narrative in several ways: as specific allusion, as metaphor and as narrative device. The schizophrenic narrative voice often adopts a jazz-inflected tone as we can see here: 'in a culture of death, certain situations are just more *hep to the jive* than others' (176-77; italics mine). At other times, the very structure of certain narrative sections feels jazz-inflected:

But more musicians have floundered in the channel to "Cherokee" than have got through from end to end. All those long, long notes ... what're they up to, all that time to do something inside of? Is it an Indian spirit plot? Down in New York [...] "Yardbird" Parker is finding out how he can use the notes at the higher ends of these very chords to break up the melody into *have mercy* what is it a fucking machine gun or something man he must be out of his *mind* 32nd notes demisemiquavers say it very (demisemiquaver) fast in a Munchkin voice if you can dig *that* coming out of Dan Wall's Chili House and down the street—shit, out in all kinds of streets [...] out over the airwaves, into the society gigs, someday as far as what seeps out hidden speakers in the city elevators and in all the markets, his bird's singing, to gainsay the Man's lullabies, to subvert the groggy wash of the endlessly, gutlessly overdubbed strings.... So that prophecy [...] is beginning these days to work itself out in "Cherokee," the saxes downstairs getting into some, oh really weird shit.... (63-4)

This passage – dramatizing Charlie Parker's famous 'epiphany' at Dan Wall's that led to the birth of bebop – I take the liberty of quoting at length to emphasise the way in which the flow of language appears to gather pace, to rise and fall rapidly like a good saxophone solo: the narrator is not merely talking about jazz but talking *in* jazz, specifically the new type of jazz that Parker created in 1939 as he improvised during the duller moments of the straightforward standard "Cherokee." Like the music it refers to, the style of this passage is jolting in the

extreme; the language is threatening, the punctuation deficient. Pynchon is trying to convey some of the excitement and novelty that this new music would have offered at the time (and still does to many people who are introduced to it).<sup>148</sup> The key to the excitement lies in the vitality of the music; it represents a more authentic form of expression indicative of real emotions, including anger, that the narrator (channelling Slothrop) hopes will counteract the soporific forms of mainstream music that are currently popular – ‘the Man’s lullabies’ – and form the benchmark for artistic expression going forward.

There are many other references in *Gravity’s Rainbow* to music from a peripheral culture that subverts the ‘official frequencies’ (65-6) of all that the dominant order holds dear, including history and conventional codes of practice. The appearance of a Jamaican corporal at an evensong event in a Kentish Anglican church is indicative of the text’s desire to unsettle the stifled sensibilities of ‘respectable’ society: ‘With the high voice of the black man riding above the others, no head falsetto here but complete, out of the honest breast, a baritone voice brought over years of woodshedding up to this range ... he was bringing brown girls to sashay among these nervous protestants, down the ancient paths the music had set’ (129). In the spirit of dialogic interaction, the corporal’s voice brings to those who hear it a sample of what might be perceived as being ‘other’ during an all-too-familiar evensong recital. From what may be defined as the officially sanctioned frequencies, something far less honest is offered:

Everybody you don’t suspect is in on this, everybody but you: [...] the vapid soprano last night on the Home Service programme, let’s not forget Mr. Noel Coward so stylish and cute about death and the afterlife, packing them into the Duchess for the fourth year running, the lads in Hollywood telling us how grand it all is over here, how much fun, Walt Disney causing Dumbo the elephant to clutch to that feather like how many carcasses under the snow tonight [...] what do you think, this is a children’s story? There aren’t any. (134-5)

In Pynchon’s work representatives of a repressed peripheral culture are often dropped into the narrative and given a micro-history that in some way disturbs the macro-historical order.<sup>149</sup> A good example would be the origins of Tyrone

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<sup>148</sup> In his book *Pynchon’s Sound of Music* Christian Hänggi gives an entertaining account of his own attempts to recite this passage aloud as quickly as possible, to get a feeling for the rhythms and emphases at work. Of course, all readers should be encouraged to do likewise.

<sup>149</sup> I take a closer look at this tendency in Chapter Four, on music and time.

Slothrop's Zoot Suit in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which acts as an oblique method of bringing jazz into the narrative once more – it is one of many costumes, donned by Slothrop during his peregrinations throughout The Zone, that mark him out as a dissident (despite his usual ignorance of the fact). We are informed that the Zoot Suit once belonged to 'a kid who used to live in East Los Angeles, named Ricky Gutiérrez' before the narrator elaborates on this individual's experience:

During the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, young Gutiérrez was set upon by a carload of Anglo vigilantes from Whittier, beaten up while the L.A. police watched and called out advice, then arrested for disturbing the peace. The judge was allowing zoot-suiters to choose between jail and the army. Gutiérrez joined up, was wounded on Saipan, developed gangrene, had to have his arm amputated, is home now, married to a girl who works in the kitchen at a taco place in San Gabriel, can't find any work himself, drinks a lot during the day.... (249)

The Zoot Suit became an emblem of urban African American and Mexican youth fashion during the early 1940s and came to be closely associated with jazz culture at that time. As Marcel Cornis-Pope puts it: 'the novelist "cuts" history down to size, reorganizing it around the potentially endless modulations of his marginal subjects' as we see here.<sup>150</sup>

Nonetheless, Slothrop exhibits his own difficulty with tapping into alternative frequencies of communication, that sees him display complex anxieties regarding his interest in jazz. He fluctuates between a desire to escape from the bureaucratic web of political machination and the realization that the quest to establish the roots of his psychopathology must depend on a paranoiac dependency on 'Their' influence: 'Either They have put him here for a reason, or he's just here. He isn't sure that he wouldn't, actually, rather have that *reason*' (434). The struggle is emphasized during Slothrop's hallucinated scene – induced by Pointsman's truth serum – in which he loses his mouth harp in a toilet bowl at the Roseland Ballroom and then proceeds after it head-first to retrieve 'his silver chances of song' (63) and to avoid being sodomized by a gang of African Americans who have gathered behind him. Slothrop has agreed to go under narcosis to help PISCES gather information on racial tensions in the U.S. as part of the initial phase of Operation Black Wing – a proposed strategy for agitating

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<sup>150</sup> Marcel Cornis-Pope, *Narrative Innovation and Cultural Rewriting in the Cold War Era and After* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 102.

expatriated Hereros in Germany to rise up and sow panic among the white population there. There are several key elements to this protracted hallucination, and the digressive narration accompanying it, that point towards Slothrop's unconscious rejection of his conditioning at both a personal level (the Pavlovian stimulus and response technique inflicted on the infant Tyrone that is said to account for the sexual arousal he experiences prior to V-2 rocket impacts) and a cultural level: i.e., his interpellation into the web of political bureaucracy. The first of these elements is the ubiquitous textual presence of jazz music (specifically bebop and references to Charlie Parker in this instance).

Jazz, and black American youth culture more generally, is clearly a part of Slothrop's sub-conscious – and yet his guilt at engaging with music of that culture (the white liberal guilt of the Ivy-Leaguer who can (like Pynchon) trace his forbears back to a key participant in the early days of Colonisation) is such that the mouth harp in his pocket 'reverts to brass inertia. A weight. A jive accessory.' Nevertheless, he 'packs it everywhere he goes' (63). He realizes that he is no different to the '[w]hite college boys hollering requests to the "combo" up on the stand' (62), and so the second key element of this hallucination – the threat of being violated by African Americans – becomes a genuine fear for Slothrop because of the suspicion that he might, in fact, deserve it. As the narrator comments when he finally manages to wriggle free: 'Now some folks might say whew, thank God for *that*, and others moaning a little, aw shucks' (65). It is hinted at more than once in the text that Slothrop's fear is the result of being conditioned that way by PISCES as a preliminary stage in the operation to undermine and destroy the Schwarzkommando – though this suspicion is not confirmed until late in the text when Sir Marcus Scammony admits that "[w]e sent him out to destroy the blacks, and it's obvious now he won't do the job [...]. We've got the army, when the time is right" (615). The alternative possibility is that they send him after the Schwarzkommando as a *result* of his response under narcosis. Either way, it is debatable whether Slothrop is even aware to what end he is being used, but the fact that he (unconsciously) rejects this conditioning (far from carrying out the machinations of Operation Black Wing he actually provides some limited assistance to the Hereros in the Zone) re-emphasizes the conviction that 'Their' tools of influence may be resisted. Slothrop's affiliation with marginal subjects and cultures is enough to over-ride authoritarian conditioning, which means that

his fear during the Roseland Ballroom hallucination is motivated by a personal sense of guilt as opposed to any secondary influence.

The presence of Jack Kennedy and Malcolm X during this scene constitutes a further key element, which has significant political implications. As representatives of democracy and free speech, both figures are opposed to the alienating forces of centralized political bureaucracy.<sup>151</sup> We discover that Slothrop was a Harvard classmate of the young Kennedy, which would suggest that the latter might also be considered as part of the group of white college boys so keen to adopt jazz culture as their own without engaging with its roots. However, Kennedy is portrayed in such a way that suggests his role is one of reconciler, as somebody who might redeem the way whites interact with black society and culture: 'might Jack have kept [the harp] from falling, violated gravity somehow? [...] yes it seems Jack might have. For the sake of tunes to be played, millions of possible blues lines, notes to be bent from the official frequencies, bends Slothrop hasn't really the breath to do ... not yet but someday' (65-6). As advocates of dialogic interaction both Kennedy and Malcolm X are subject to the violence so frequently meted out against the counter-conventional: 'Eventually Jack and Malcolm both got murdered. Slothrop's fate is not so clear. It may be that They have something different in mind for Slothrop' (688). Though whatever it is 'They' have in mind is not, in fact, to be Slothrop's destiny; for, as Deborah L. Madsen puts it, 'Slothrop [...] appears to have been chosen for enlightenment'<sup>152</sup> – a development prophesied by the narrator in the Roseland Ballroom scene when we are informed that Slothrop will someday bend 'from the official frequencies' and thereby attain something of the challenging eloquence of Ralph Ellison's 'invisible man': 'Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?'<sup>153</sup>

In *Against the Day* Pynchon introduces early jazz, of the pre-First World War era, in much more positive terms than his representation of 'hot jazz' in *V*. Here jazz constitutes an interaction with the periphery, the 'outside' of acceptable society – the very essence of which is encountered many times in the novel, and in many different settings. In large turn-of-the-century urban centres such as New Orleans

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<sup>151</sup> It may seem rather simplistic, even naïve, to speak of Kennedy in such terms – but the youthful 'Jack' Kennedy of Slothrop's imagination represents the *potential* for a better way.

<sup>152</sup> Deborah L. Madsen, *The Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon*, (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1991) 103.

<sup>153</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin, 1965) 469.

and Chicago – cities with strong jazz and blues traditions – these groups are defined by means of what is described in the narration as ‘The Forbidden’ (369). When Reef Traverse enters New Orleans, he is confronted by a sensation of depth behind the ‘ornate iron gates’ that seems diametrically opposed to the ‘Cabinet of Ultimate Illusion, known also as New York City’ (353) – the financial heartbeat of America and therefore the seat of white-masculine (monological) power. In contrast to New York, where the buildings rise from street level as emblems of capitalism, in New Orleans ‘[w]hat you could see from the street was not only less than “the whole story” but in fact not even the picture on the cover. The real life of this place was secured deep inside the city blocks [...] and up tiled passages that might as well’ve run for miles’ (368). Here may be found a focal point for the itinerant outsiders who permeate the text and whose transience is emphasized more here than anywhere else in Pynchon’s oeuvre. Whether they are Americans or travellers from abroad, each speaks something of the forbidden that ‘America’s wardens could not tolerate’ (51); and yet their existence is a shadowy one: more often than not they are encountered in a certain half-light that the narrator suggests – in reference to the temporary ‘lampless world’ that has sprung up around the periphery of the Chicago World’s Fair, for example – may have been ‘deliberately provided in the interests of mercy, as a necessary veiling for the faces here, which held an urgency somehow too intense for the full light of day and those innocent American visitors with their Kodaks and parasols who might somehow happen across this place’ (22). If the agents of power are able, in some degree, to control the visibility of these outsiders – ‘Armed “bouncers,” drawn from the ranks of the Chicago police, patrolled the shadows restlessly’ (22) – they are powerless to inhibit the desire of these groups to be heard through music: ‘From somewhere ahead too dark to see came music from a small orchestra, unusually syncopated, which grew louder’; and later: ‘Pygmies sang Christian hymns in the Pygmy dialect, Jewish klezmer ensembles filled the night with unearthly clarinet solos’ (22). These peripheral yet undeniable sounds, so alien to bourgeois American sensibilities, constitute a more accurate representation of the diversity of world cultures than the World’s Fair, with its ‘bright electrical glow,’ promises to offer. And yet many visitors to the Fair are unable to see the worth in such pockets of exotic performance, and instead revert to snobbish racism: ‘Observers of the Fair had remarked how, as one moved up and down its Midway, the more European, civilized, and ... well, frankly, *white*

exhibits located closer to the center of the “White City” seemed to be, whereas the farther from that alabaster Metropolis one ventured, the more evident grew the signs of cultural darkness and savagery’ (22).

In New Orleans, Reef witnesses a similar prejudice against the jazz music of “Dope” Breedlove among the ‘neurasthenic’ group of high-society European tourists that he has fallen in with – most notably from the direction of the odious character Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin, who comments that “[t]his music [...] is fit only for copulation of the most beastly sort” (369) (the comic irony here being Ruperta’s own varied sexual appetite, which is something Reef is quick to point out). The challenging nature of this jazz music, coupled with its exotic roots, makes it offensive to traditional western sensibilities, which, as a result, means that the jazz of this era was often looked on with the same sense of disapproval as the use of marijuana, say, or the practice of sexual promiscuity or ‘deviance’ would have been (Pynchon’s decision to name the jazz man of this novel “Dope” Breedlove is significant in this regard). Jazz as a libidinous force is explicitly referred to in comparison with Voodoo in *Against the Day*: ‘You could hear faint strands of music, crazy stuff, banjos and bugling, trombone glissandi, pianos under the hands of whorehouse professors sounding like they came with keys between the keys. Voodoo? Voodoo was the least of it, Voodoo was just everywhere’ (368). Perhaps the comparison is not literal here but is nonetheless appropriate in the sense that neither practice is fully understood by traditional white society and is therefore deemed forbidden and negated perceptually as coming from ‘savage’ origins. Like jazz, voodoo is syncretic: it integrates aspects of different religious traditions just as jazz draws on many musical forms – and in relating the one to the other Pynchon is invoking a sense of the uncanny in their function as a bridge between cultures. The exotic/forbidden aspect of jazz, its disorienting and threatening element, is emphasized again later in the novel: ‘a dark swirl of opium haunts, leering foreigners, girls in abbreviated underwear, jazz music full of jangling Chinese fourths’ (1054); and yet again: ‘[s]omewhere an accordion was playing a jazz-inflected *hopak*’ (1079) – the ‘*hopak*’ being an energetic dance originating in the Ukraine. It is only a short step in conceptual terms from what is ‘challenging’ to what may be regarded as ‘rebellious,’ particularly from the perspective of those being challenged: in this instance, traditional white conservative society. Whether early jazz exponents had overt political rebellion in mind, however, is doubtful; what is certain is that jazz music,

with its exotic rhythms, highly charged sexual elements, and black-American heritage, was seen from the outset as dangerously subversive.

*Against The Day* sees the transposition of the link between jazz and revolt to the era of that art form's cultural birth. In addition to the association therein between jazz and the repressed groups of people on the periphery of polite American society, there are also indications that jazz was able to find a sympathetic and enthusiastic audience among those seeking to redress, through violence, the imbalance between the dominant capitalist organisations and the individual who lives in subjective bondage to their authority. These 'desperate malcontents' (51) are frequently seen to convene in saloons throughout the various mid-west towns that the narrative moves through, in which an early form of jazz known as 'ragtime' is often played. 'Singing in so many different tempos and keys [...] Boots stomping in strange, un-American rhythms' (179). (The 'peculiar rhythmic hesitations' (302) – otherwise known as syncopation – that are associated with ragtime will be further investigated in the next chapter in relation to the reconfiguration of temporal perception and the subversion of established notions of linear, as opposed to rhythmic, time.)

In V. McClintic Sphere's music represents the attempt to reclaim jazz from decadent white society; to abandon the dependency on European metre (with its decadent connotations in this novel) and to develop a new art-form in dialogue with the spirit of these earlier jazz forms, but in a way that expresses the social dis-satisfaction of the liberal in contemporary early 1960s American culture. As the literary embodiment of progressive jazz, Sphere's art echoes the endeavours of significant figures such as Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and others, who attempted to re-establish – through innovation, improvisation, and politicization – the integrity of jazz as a non-conformist, yet socially communicative art-form. In breaking with the traditions of the decidedly Eurocentric notion of culture in the United States at the time, free jazz became as much an expression of revolt as of freedom, whereas the earliest forms of jazz spoke only of the latter of these. The fact that jazz remained in the city during its movement away from Eurocentric culture merely added volume to the art-form as a strong and indigenous, yet contemporary counter-voice to established modes of artistic representation and to the reifying forces of white capitalism – a voice that, in its improvisatory essence, spoke of the id as opposed to the superego, thereby undermining the city's consumerist principles. In *Against the Day* the Irish

insurrectionist Wolf Tone O’Rooney compares “Dope” Breedlove’s jazz ensemble to a notion of “perfect Anarchist organization,” until Breedlove points out the self-contradiction within that phrase. The conversation continues with O’Rooney’s response:

“Yet I’ve noticed the same thing when your band plays—the most amazing social coherence, as if you all shared the same brain.”

“Sure,” agreed “Dope,” “but you can’t call that organization.”

“What do you call it?”

“Jass.” (370)

Coherence here does not imply organization, as in any kind of pre-ordained structure. Jazz music at its best requires the freedom to experiment and to improvise in the lived moment; it is anti-organization and without hierarchy, and so may be a more effective means of undermining the sensibilities of the prevailing social order, in an ideological sense, than any kind of anarchic conception that O’Rooney might have access to. It is all the more effective in having roots firmly established in a defiant blues culture, and a subsequent history of reclaiming and safeguarding that authenticity through innovation and resistance.

## Chapter 4: Music and Time

The way we think about time has always been an insistent topic for Pynchon, with many of his works exploring different means of reconfiguring temporal perception – most prominently in *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and *Against the Day*. At the heart of the matter is Pynchon's distrust of officially sanctioned histories that retrospectively rationalise events while they negate the human experiences that are bound up within them. In *Mason & Dixon* the Rev<sup>d</sup> Wicks Cherrycoke sums up Pynchon's purpose in this regard quite nicely: 'History is not Chronology, for that is left to the lawyers,—nor is it Remembrance, for Remembrance belongs to the People. History can as little pretend to the Veracity of the one, as claim the Power of the other' (349). Furthermore, our relationship to the past must comprise 'not a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All,—rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common' (349). In other words, we must keep channels open to other, microtextual histories so that the perspective from the margins is given a platform to potentially challenge authorised, undemocratic accounts of human experience. One of the most effective means of getting to the heart of Pynchon's ideas relating to time is through the lens of music – which, after all, is time rendered into art. Before looking closely at Pynchon's use of music in relation to time, however, it is important to establish how the configuration of time is used more generally in the novels to pose fundamental questions regarding history, ethics, and responsibility.

In the first novel *V.*, Pynchon develops several interesting takes on the concept of time, not least of which is a fragmented sense of temporality indicated by the non-linear narrative pattern of the novel. What is significant here, however, is the way in which Pynchon establishes two key configurations of time corresponding to the principle properties of what we might call the *V* metaphysic: an attachment to the 'hothouse' of the inanimate past, founded upon a nostalgic conception of time whereby history may be seen as a cyclical repetition of the past; and the 'street' of the violent present – in *V.* we may think of the riot scene outside the Venezuelan consulate at the climax of the Florentine episode, or the depiction of Strait Street, also known as 'the Gut,' in Valletta – which is predicated

on the idea that time is linear and that the present exists merely as a function of the future.<sup>154</sup> Any sense of ethical responsibility is put at risk in this latter concept, where violence frequently becomes an acceptable means to a desired end. The 'Street,' as Deborah L. Madsen claims, 'is therefore the place of political revolution, of violent opposition to the present order and of death' and '[b]oth time-schemes constitute a rejection of the present, of the lived moment or 'real time,' in favour of illusions, memories, and dreams.'<sup>155</sup> As Stencil sr. succinctly puts it: we carry out the business of this century with an intolerable double vision. Right and Left; the hothouse and the street. The Right can only live and work hermetically, in the hothouse of the past, while outside the Left prosecute their affairs in the streets by manipulated mob violence. And cannot live but in the dreamscape of the future' (468). The elusive and enigmatic Lady V character vacillates within a metaphysic incorporating both of these conceptions of time; her character – though she is difficult to conceive of as a coherent, or even identifiable, entity due to her inception (predominantly) in the mind of the character Herbert Stencil – is inextricably linked by means of this metaphysic to the rise of fascism, and therefore casts a malevolent shadow over the entire narrative. She symbolizes, through her insidious reification, the drift towards dehumanization experienced in western societies throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Figuring prominently in each of the six historical or 'past' chapters of the novel – each time under an alias that incorporates in some way the eponymous initial – Lady V fluctuates between a penchant for violent revolution and a fetishistic nostalgia. As the young Victoria Wren, she remains 'involute and calm' while witnessing the rioting scenes of the Florentine episode set in 1899: 'she watched the spasms of wounded bodies, the fair of violent death, framed and staged, it seemed, for her alone in that tiny square' (209). Sidney Stencil later recalls the same scene in a different way: '[I]n Florence, during the bloody

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<sup>154</sup> The 'hothouse' conception of time is first encountered in Pynchon's short story "Entropy" (1960). There we find Callisto in his 'hothouse jungle [...] hermetically sealed' (SL 83) caring for an injured bird. He is hoping to establish a sense of equilibrium to counter the anarchy of Meatball Mulligan's 'lease-breaking party' (81) downstairs – but also, more broadly, he desires a sanctuary away from 'the city's chaos, [...] the vagaries of the weather, of national politics, of any civil disorder' (83-4). What he achieves, however, is only stagnation: 'helpless in the past' (97) his hermetic experiment is a 'sad sick dance' (93) of ever-diminishing steps that can only lead to a 'final absence of all motion' (98). Inevitably, given the lack of anything vital in this environment, the bird dies.

<sup>155</sup> Deborah L. Madsen, *The Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1991) 41.

demonstration before the Venezuelan Consulate, he had dragged her away from an unarmed policeman, whose face she was flaying with pointed fingernails' (487). The question whether Victoria is calm in the face of the rioting around her, or, by contrast, driven to frenzy by the violence, may be less significant than the realisation that, in either case, she sees the street riot as a welcome development. For V., inviolate serenity and maenad-like frenzy are simply two sides of the same coin: 'Riot was her element, as surely as this dark room, almost creeping with amassed objects. The street and the hothouse; in V. were resolved, by some magic, the two extremes' (487). In a later chapter, set in 1922, she displays her decadent tendencies (in the guise of Vera Meroving) during Foppl's siege party, where 'guests' are encouraged to engage in a reconstruction of Lothar von Trotha's genocidal campaign against the native Herero population of German Südwest Afrika some fifteen years earlier. In V's metaphysic – characterized as it is by the relation between the hothouse and the street – we are given no other choice but decadence and violence. In the hothouse conception of time nothing changes, there is no progress; the past exists as memory, relived out of context. It is a stasis that leads to decadence, which in V. is linked to the inanimate, to the 'foist[ing] off of [...] humanity' (405). If the hothouse conception of time involves a dialogue with the past, it does so only in a corrupt way: not to inform the present, but to satisfy the impulse towards decadence.

Between the 'hothouse' and the 'street' there exists only the void, inhabited and characterized in the novel by the Whole Sick Crew who represent merely the symptoms of a culture grown sick through decades of entropic decline – as chronicled by Stencil in his V narrative. They, along with Benny Profane, the novel's other main protagonist, are the victims of this process. The historical chapters of Stencil's narrative speak all too pertinently of a decline in human moral standards, epitomized in the comparison between von Trotha's campaign of ethnic cleansing and the persecution of the Jews under the Nazi regime some thirty-five years later: 'Allowing for natural causes during these unnatural years, von Trotha, who stayed for only one of them, is reckoned to have done away with about 60,000 people. This is only 1 per cent of six million, but still pretty good' (245). By comparison, the Whole Sick Crew's lack of activity – which forms the basis of the contemporary chapters – seems banal in the extreme; they are depicted as a sub-culture alienated from the ability, and even the desire, to

communicate – artistically or otherwise. Caught between hothouse and street conceptions of time, between decadence and violence, they constitute – along with all the other subway riders, ‘schlemihls,’ winos and bums that the novel throws up – the excluded middle of western society, compelled to inhabit the void of the present while history is constructed around them according to the template of V’s metaphysic. They are the first in a long line of culturally alienated, politically disinherited, preterite groups of people to populate Pynchon’s fictional world.

The Whole Sick Crew are, however, presented in a largely negative light because they seem to revel in their lassitude. While certain members of this small community exhibit signs of artistic creativity, that energy is all-too-frequently channelled in inappropriate or reductive directions, and so Pynchon locates the nexus of cultural expression on the periphery of this microcosm of artistic ennui. Examples of this may be found in the characters of Benny Profane, Rooney Winsome and McClintic Sphere – each find themselves located at the edge of the Whole Sick Crew and never feel entirely part of that community. What is crucial is the extent to which these characters attempt to communicate something of themselves in ways that run contrary to the V-metaphysic: in other words, is it possible for the ‘present’ time of the novel – the time of the excluded middles – to constitute something more than merely the void at the heart of a fascistic historical driving force. Profane, for example, can recognise and lament, to some extent, the condition in which he finds himself; his incompetent relationship with the inanimate world distances him from the characteristic de-humanizing processes that otherwise permeate the novel and mark out the decadent from the vital. Rooney Winsome is at least able to satirize his own predicament and ridicule the artistic banalities of those around him; while McClintic’s jazz sessions at the V-Note club display a degree of vitality and authenticity that is notably lacking from the output of the other members of the Crew (as discussed in the previous chapter).

Any alternative to the fascistic V-metaphysic must, by needs, derive from the so-called void between the hothouse and the street. This is crucial terrain in Pynchon’s fictional cosmos, for it is here where the dominant antitheses that arise in his work – the oppositions between order and chaos, meaning and meaninglessness, reality and imagination – are called into question. In her book *Chronoschisms*, Ursula K. Heise foregrounds two key theories that point towards a crisis of historicity in the late twentieth century, the representation of which is

characteristic of much postmodern art and cultural theory. The first of these postulates that 'history as a dialectic interplay of opposing forces has exhausted itself and led society to a stage in which all that can be expected of the future is a continuing replay and spread of familiar modernization processes.'<sup>156</sup> The result is a society that resembles a 'machine-like aggregate that stubbornly reproduces its own structures without allowing any meaningful human intervention.'<sup>157</sup> This would account for the failure, ultimately, of alternate ideologies (Heise uses Nazism and Stalinism as examples) to effectively impinge on this process. Once again, we are reminded of Pynchon's frustrations, exhibited in the introduction to *Slow Learner*, regarding the counterproductive factionalism of 1960s protest movements: '[t]he success of the "new left" [...] in the '60's was to be limited by the failure of college kids and blue-collar workers to get together politically,' and that one of the reasons for this was 'the presence of real, invisible class force fields in the way of communication between the two groups' (7).

The depiction of the Counterforce in *Gravity's Rainbow*, who end up adopting the same absolutist reasoning that is characteristic of the prevailing ideology they seek to oppose, is further evidence for Pynchon's understanding of the difficulties faced by those who seek to undermine the status quo. The second theory stressed by Heise foregrounds the acceleration of 'the existential rhythm of individuals as well as societies'<sup>158</sup> resulting from the rapidity of technological, economic, and social innovations of the late capitalist period, that divorce large sections of western society from the ability to fully comprehend the culture surrounding them. Taking this crisis into account, one of the tenets of postmodern culture is the desire to reconfigure the way we think about time in order to emphasize the significance of the present moment – the essence of time being inherent 'in the event rather than an abstract dimension surrounding it.'<sup>159</sup> This kind of thinking emphasizes 'the contemporary focus on a present that is increasingly conceived as taking over both past and future, and the difficulty of envisioning temporal patterns that transcend the present and allow the observer to view it from a distance.'<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ursula K. Heise, *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 17.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 30.

Having looked closely at the political energy of jazz in the previous chapter, it is necessary to return to that art form, briefly, as part of our consideration of Pynchon's preoccupation with exploring alternative temporal modes of experience. Certain forms of jazz music, where emphasis is placed on improvisation in the lived moment, are analogous to this central ground countering the polysystemic version of history that corresponds with V's temporal metaphysic and Pynchon's broader representation of the individual's subjection to one or other entropic conceptions of time. In its experimental, conjugating rhythms, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth sees jazz improvisation as 'the ultimate emblem' of this postmodern sense of temporality and 'an imaginative alternative to history.'<sup>161</sup> It posits the true value of human experience as being inherent within the structure of the "event" itself, which is seen in relation to the concept of rhythmic time – 'the time of experiment, improvisation, adventure'<sup>162</sup> – compared with the traditional notion of linear time as a set of coordinates that can be referenced back and forth. As an artistic forum that speaks of pluralities (of expression), improvisation (composition through performance), and the 'forbidden' (exoticism, sexual energy, syncretism), jazz cuts against the grain of more than merely polite middle-class tastes: entire binary systems of thought are exposed as reductive at best, and fascistic at worst – while the very concept of linear time is radically disrupted by the dialogic compositional process and alternative rhythmic properties of the art form.

From the early beginnings of ragtime, with its unconventional syncopation, jazz has long been synonymous with non-western forms of rhythm or with polyrhythms. The importance of this to the art-form is emphasized by the reaction of bebop and free-jazz practitioners against the imposition of European meter in jazz that occurred during the interwar years, in an endeavour to resurrect the rhythmical properties of African oral tradition – but in such a way that enables the organization of many voices, as opposed to an anarchic heterophony. The polyrhythmic quality in most examples of post-swing jazz, as well as much of the improvisation, is founded either on an underlying chord pattern (as we see in bebop) or else in relation to the modal techniques – which allow greater freedom for melodic improvisation within a given scale or scales – employed by later free-

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<sup>161</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Oxford: Princeton UP, 1992) 48.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

jazz composers such as John Coltrane. A sense of rhythmic tension is achieved in the relationship between these elements, in which regular rhythms are paraphrased and toyed with in a way that is indicative of the spontaneity inherent in oral tradition, which responds to natural occurrences and perceptual phenomena. As Gunther Schuller attests, over the underlying chords can be found, for example, ‘asymmetrical groupings of five and sevens or between-the-beat rhythms that defy notation.’<sup>163</sup> Charles Mingus is another devotee of the displaced accent:

Swing went in one direction, it was linear, and everything had to be played with an obvious pulse and that’s very restrictive. But I use the term ‘rotary perception.’ If you get a mental picture of the beat existing within a circle you’re more free to improvise. People used to think that notes had to fall on the centre of the beats in the bar at intervals like a metronome, with these three or four men in the rhythm section accenting the same pulse. That’s like parade music or dance music. But imagine a circle surrounding each beat—each guy can play his notes anywhere in that circle and it gives him a feeling he has more space. The notes fall anywhere inside the circle but the original feeling for the beat isn’t changed. If one of the group loses confidence, somebody hits the beat again. The pulse is inside you.<sup>164</sup>

Something like this ‘rotary perception’ may be seen in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, where jazz music once again provides a valuable metaphor for Pynchon’s alternative temporal design: ‘off the jukebox a quick twinkle in the bleat of a trombone, a reed section, planting swing notes precisely into the groove between silent midpoint and next beat, jumping it *pah* (hm) *pah* (hm) *pah* so exactly in the groove that you knew it was ahead but *felt* it was behind’ (GR 471). Although Mingus emphasises the group dynamic in a live performance environment, the syncopated rhythm of this recorded piece ‘off the jukebox’ provides a similar feeling of movement within the beat – which, furthermore, stands as a sadly ironic comment on one of the novel’s major themes: the disruption of cause and effect, most vividly exemplified by the ballistics of the V2 rocket, the approach of which is heard only after it strikes.

Not all jazz improvisation is thematic, with many exponents of non-thematic improvisation – including Charlie Parker and Lester Young – proving to

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<sup>163</sup> Gunther Schuller, “Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation,” *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 214.

<sup>164</sup> Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005) 289.

be extremely influential. However, it is perhaps the socially organized ethic of thematic improvisation that is most significant here. David Meltzer describes it as being 'in and out of control at once, a conduit of/for invention. Present tense. Awake and alert to the cues and clues the music allows. Receiving and transmitting. At once.'<sup>165</sup> It is a way of foregrounding the perception that time can be interpreted and expressed in many ways, and that one dominant conception of time (the western tradition of time duration as motion-through-space) is not necessarily the most effective means of organizing our relation to it. In returning to jazz so often and in such sympathetic terms, Pynchon laces his work with one of the more overt signifiers of a desire for alternative temporal designs.

Marcel Cornis-Pope states that Pynchon's fiction 'pendulates between [...] two understandings of history, pitting grand metaphysical plots against the unpredictable dynamics of a centerless web.'<sup>166</sup> The characters that populate Pynchon's work, having been thrust into this binary conception of history, become irrevocably tied to one or other of its modes: they either seek a resolution to the deep structures of meaning that they only dimly perceive to be around them, or else they simply drift among the detritus of a 'non-hermeneutic horizontal sprawl'<sup>167</sup> that reduces connections to coincidences and negates the possibility of communication. Both views are essentially entropic: the relationship of individuals to history is reduced to a choice between the 'drifting disorder of "posthistory" and the deadening burden of history's grand narratives.'<sup>168</sup> Pynchon foregrounds resistance to this sense of entropy by highlighting those pockets of creativity and communication that exist between these two extremes; by dragging what had been suppressed out of the peripheral shadows to challenge the prevailing forces that seek to negate communication, Pynchon establishes a vision of integrated diversity that is not at all utopian but represents, rather, the persistent possibility of authentic dialogic interaction between human beings. As Cornis-Pope puts it, '[t]he resulting perspective [...] articulates a powerful rereading from the margin, a microtextual history that tells us more about who we are than our grand narratives,' because by 'accommodating contingency and

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<sup>165</sup> David Meltzer, *Reading Jazz*, ed. David Meltzer (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1993) 178.

<sup>166</sup> Marcel Cornis-Pope, *Narrative Innovation and Cultural Rewriting in the Cold War Era and After*. (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 102.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

illustrating the effects of “major” conflicts on lowly beings, Pynchon narrows the gap [...] between “history” (as a retrospective rationalization) and “life”.<sup>169</sup> There are echoes here of Foucault’s concept of genealogy, or ‘effective history’ – after Nietzsche’s *wirkliche Historie* – as preferable alternative to the masked ‘demagoguery’ of historical tradition: ‘genealogy [...] must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history—in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts.’<sup>170</sup> ‘An entire historical tradition [...] aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity—as a teleological movement or a natural process. “Effective” history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations.’<sup>171</sup>

Often, the narrative digressions so characteristic of Pynchon’s writing are necessary to facilitate the resurrection of individual experience: i.e., the reinterpretation of history from a ‘microtextual’ perspective or, as Cornis-Pope puts it, ‘the effort to grasp the web of historical events from the off-centered perspective of one of its nodes’<sup>172</sup> – once again, echoing Foucault: ‘[t]he world we know [...] is a profusion of entangled events.’<sup>173</sup> What interests Cornis-Pope about Pynchon’s fiction are these figures that ‘fall through the cracks of history’: the preterite hoards ‘expended by murderous political and metaphysical bureaucracies’<sup>174</sup> whose experience happens, as Pynchon puts it, in ‘light that history would be blind to’ (*Against the Day* 1142). The act of rationalizing past events into what are essentially fictional representations of experience is criticized in *Against the Day*. For example, this is how the swell of refugees linked to anarchist sympathizers in the southern United States is described at one point in the narrative:

[a]nother headlong, fearful escape of the kind that in collective dreams, in legends, would be misremembered and reimagined into pilgrimage or crusade ... the dark terror behind transmuted to a bright hope ahead, the bright hope becoming a popular, perhaps someday a national delusion. Embedded invisibly in it would remain the ancient darkness, too awful to

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<sup>169</sup> Cornis-Pope, 102.

<sup>170</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991) 76.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>172</sup> Cornis-Pope 103.

<sup>173</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 89.

<sup>174</sup> Cornis-Pope 102.

face, thriving, emerging in disguise, vigorous, evil, destructive, inextricable. (1083)

If the ‘ancient darkness’ referred to here is “the evil that men do” – or the ‘ancient forces of greed and fear’ mentioned in *Inherent Vice* (130) – then its chief representative in this novel is the magnate Scarsdale Vibe, who actually uses a musical metaphor to hint at the incompatibility between the preterite of the novel and his own brand of capitalist absolutism: “Look at them—they carry the mark of their absurd fate in plain sight. Their foolish music is about to stop, and it is they who will be caught out, awkwardly, most of them tone-deaf and never to be fully aware” (1124). The irony here – and the reason for Vibe’s eventual murder at the hands of his most trusted aide Foley Walker – is Vibe’s own lack of dialogic awareness, his inability to tune into alternative perceptions that prevents him from crossing the divide at the heart of his absolutist reasoning.

Foley, on the other hand, is more able to engage with those at the mercy of Vibe’s organization, coming from lower social stock as his employment as Scarsdale’s substitute Civil War conscript would suggest. We are informed that during that time Foley received a gunshot wound to the head, lodging a bullet in his brain that enables him to hear “communications from far, far away” (112) – a gift that, due to its prophetic nature, is utilized by Vibe for profitable stock-market gains, but which also places Foley outside the absolutist philosophy at the heart of Vibe Enterprises. His communicative gift comes from outside the traditional linear timeframe and therefore affects his perception of those at the periphery of history. When Scarsdale Vibe asks rhetorically: “who will be left anymore to remember the jabbering Union scum, the frozen corpses whose names, false in any case, have gone forever unrecorded?” (1125), the answer may well be people like Foley Walker. His credentials as preterite sympathizer are established with an account of his own interaction with the people at the periphery of ‘acceptable’ society, and his own understanding of microtextual desire:

Foley was no innocent. He’d been down to Cooper Square and the Tenderloin, passed an evening, maybe two, in the resorts where men danced with each other or dolled up like Nellie Noonan or Anna Held and sang for the crowds of “fairies,” as they called themselves, and it would have figured only as one more item of city depravity, except for the longing. Which wasn’t just real, it was too real to ignore. Foley had at least got that far, learned not to disrespect another man’s longing. (377)

Foley's sympathetic tendencies are enough to ensure that he remains as 'tone-deaf' to absolutist conceptions of the world as those who oppose his employer.

Such resonances – of peripheral experience outside the narrow ambit of authorised history – are frequent in Pynchon (if often brief). A further example may be found in *Gravity's Rainbow* during the Maenad pinball episode that highlights one of the main themes of that novel: Dionysian desire in reaction to Apollonian control (a theme that I will return to in Chapter 5). It is the story of how Lyle Bland came to enlightenment through his involvement with the Masonic order, having been asked to join as a reward for arranging the repair of a shipment of malfunctioning pinball machines for one Alfonso Tracy. Through his exposure to ancient Masonic magic, Bland achieves bodily transcendence after coming to realise that the Earth is a living organism – the chapter ending with Bland taking a psychological excursion outside of his body for good. Preceding all this is an explanation of Bland's connection to I.G. Farben, Siemens, Jamf, and a company called Glitherius Paint & Dye of Berlin, which establishes him as being representative of American business interests in the German war machine (the F.B.I. are also a client). Tracy takes Bland to a warehouse in Mouthorgan, Missouri (a small settlement dominated by a gigantic Masonic Hall) where the defective machines are being stored. Bland tries out a Folies-Bergères-themed machine and quickly realises that its operations have been reduced to an anarchy of malfunctions – the pinball gets stuck on a solenoid, the score ratcheting up into the millions, flippers flip the wrong way, tilt warnings flash for no reason. Finally, 'here come these cancan girls [...], Folies-Bergères maenads, moving in for the kill, big lipstick smiles around blazing choppers, some Offenbach galop come jiggling in now out of the loudspeakers that are implicit in this machine's design' (584). The music is the "Galop infernal" from Jacques Offenbach's 1858 opéra bouffon *Orphée aux enfers*, adopted by the Moulin Rouge and Folies-Bergères as accompaniment to the cancan. This is a complex section that ties together a lot of the broad themes of the novel, including, on the one hand, corporate amorality, control, and officially sanctioned history; on the other, micro-histories, anarchy, and paranoid conspiracy.

The defective machines come to be seen as a challenge to Apollonian control: '[n]o way to tell if someplace in the wood file cabinets exists a set of real blueprints telling exactly how all these pinball machines were rewired – a randomness deliberately simulated – or if it has happened at real random,

preserving at least our faith in Malfunction as still something beyond Their grasp' (586). The ghosts of former players, those who devoted innocent hours to playing the machines the length and breadth of America, are invoked – their thumbs ('the great thumbs of Keokuk and Puyallup, Oyster Bay, Inglewood') once sensitised to the movements, sounds, and patterns of the pinball machine, having become brutalised by weapon drills and finally stilled forever on the battlefields of Europe and the North Pacific:

have players forever strangers brought about, separately, alone, each of these bum machines? believe it: they've sweated, kicked, cried, smashed, lost their balance forever – a single Mobility you never heard, a unity unaware of itself, a silence the encyclopedia histories have blandly filled up with agencies, initials, spokesmen and deficits enough to keep us from finding them again. (586)

The anarchically malfunctioning machines are here seen as a symbolic product of micro-textual desire and frustration; each ball threatened by the maenads is an Orpheus, and so, by extension, is each player – holding out against Dionysian dismemberment for as long as possible, but inevitably succumbing at last.<sup>175</sup> The machines' malfunctioning elements make holding out against the forces of Dionysus more difficult, suggesting a desire on the part of the player (whether it is conscious or not) for Orphic martyrdom and release from Apollonian control. When Bland's engineer Bert Fibel (who also has links to Siemens) manages to repair most of the machines, it amounts to a recalibration of history from the micro-textual back onto official lines. When we discover later in the chapter that Bland was contracted by IG Farben to keep Tyrone Slothrop under surveillance both during and after his Pavlovian conditioning, we understand that this episode has facilitated the removal of one more of Slothrop's controlling agents.

Set against the desire to resurrect the marginal human experience as a direct challenge to 'official' history, is the depiction of people at the mercy of inexorable historical forces that ride roughshod over such individualistic questions as sentiment, conscience, instinct – the primary concerns of Foucault's 'genealogy,' or, as Pynchon puts it, 'the null-time of human love' (V. 409). A significant case in point, which also brings music into the equation, occurs with the character Mélanie L'Heuremaudit (the surname translates as 'cursed hour')

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<sup>175</sup> Orphic and Dionysian myth are examined more closely in Chapter Five.

in V., regarding her susceptibility to the novel's binary system of time – the hothouse and the street – already mentioned. The story of the young ballerina's brief and tragic career on the Parisian stage in 1913, and her relationship with 'Lady V.' (406), forms the entirety of chapter 14, entitled 'V. in love.' From the outset of this section (indeed, from the very first line), time and our relationship to it is established as a key motif:

The clock inside the Gare du Nord read 11:17: Paris time minus five minutes, Belgian railway time plus four minutes, mid-Europe time minus 56 minutes. To Mélanie, who had forgotten her travelling clock—who had forgotten everything—the hands might have stood anywhere. (393)

The time is accurate, but no less relativistic for that. As if to emphasise this fact, the second paragraph switches to a consideration of alternative history: 'By the cover of *Le Soleil*, the Orleanist [sic] morning paper, it was 24 July 1913. Louis Phillippe Robert, duc d'Orleans, was the current Pretender' – immediately followed by the unimaginable distances involved with cosmological space-time: 'Certain quarters of Paris raved under the heat of Sirius, were touched by its halo of plague, which is nine light-years from rim to center' (393-4). Mélanie has come to Paris at the request of M. Itague (a parvenu theatre impresario) to perform the lead role of Su Feng in a new avant-garde ballet titled 'Rape of the Chinese Virgins' – choreographed by Satin and with music by Vladimir Porcépic, the ballet features the modern innovation of automata to play Su Feng's handmaidens. Lady V. is one of the patrons of the enterprise, and so the inclusion of automata in the production is apt given her own ongoing reification (she is even living in a factory at this stage). Mélanie herself is depersonalised by her stage name, 'Mlle. Jarretière' (garter), much to the delight of Lady V.: "Do you only lie passive then, like an object? Of course you do. It is what you are. Une fétiche" (406). The young dancer is even complicit in her own dehumanisation – 'she was not pretty unless she wore something. The sight of her nude body repelled her' (397) – reflecting how thoroughly she has absorbed the decadent ('hothouse') mood of her time: she is an object at the mercy of impersonal history.

V. depicts the first half of the twentieth century as a succession of decadent periods punctuated by episodes of cataclysmic violence (while simultaneously voicing a desire to break free of this cyclical pattern) which is even detected in some of the popular music of the time:

The tango still played [...]. A new dance, and popular. The head and body had to be kept erect, the steps had to be precise, sweeping, graceful. It wasn't like the waltz. In that dance was room for an indiscreet billow of crinolines, a naughty word whispered through mustaches into an ear all ready to blush. But here no words, no deviating: simply the wide spiral, turning about the dancing floor, gradually narrowing, tighter, until there was no motion except for the steps, which led nowhere. A dance for automata. (400)

This episode, marking the end of a period of decadence, unfolds against a backdrop of growing political unrest, with socialist revolutionary activity a key feature – while the behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings of the great European powers in the build-up to the 1914-18 war are felt in the figurative allusions to gathering thunderclouds that are frequent in this section. There is a general atmosphere of nervous impatience, of waiting for the clouds to burst, even wanting the transition to the next cycle – violence and movement seeming a preferable alternative to stagnation. Lady V., being allied to the violence of the street, is serene in the face of the impending (and inevitable) cataclysm: 'the woman stood at their table, not waiting for them to rise, merely standing and looking as if she'd never waited for anything' (399). Porcépic's own music is somewhat ambiguous. He composes 'striking; [...] highly dissonant' pieces for black masses that are in keeping with the atmosphere of impending violence, and which also reflect the current fashion for the exotic: 'Lately he had been experimenting with African polyrhythms' (402). And yet, he also displays, in more private moments, an inclination towards nostalgia and sentimentality that feels incongruous for a 'young composer' living amid an atmosphere of revolution:

Porcépic showed up early with a guitar. He sat on the stage and sang sentimental Russian ballads about willow trees, students getting drunk and going off on sleigh-rides, the body of his love floating belly up in the Don. (A dozen young gathered round the samovar to read novels aloud: where had youth gone?) Porcépic, nostalgic, snuffled over his guitar.

Mélanie [...] caroled harmony. Itague found them that way. In the yellow light, framed by the stage, they seemed like a picture he'd seen somewhere once. Or perhaps it was only the melancholy notes of the guitar, the subdued looks of precarious joy on their faces. Two young people conditionally at peace in the dog days. (403)

When it comes to his commission for *L'Enlèvement des Vierges Chinoises*, however, his compositions, like those for the black masses, are more reflective of the modern climate:

Porcépic sat at the piano, playing *Adoration of the Sun*. It was a tango with cross-rhythms. Satin had devised some near-impossible movements to go with it (404)

His 'lackadaisical attack on the piano' during rehearsals for this section, however, make us question where his artistic affinities truly lie – especially when compared to his emotional response while strumming Russian ballads. Set against the plague-heat decadence of the hothouse on the one hand, and the brutality of the street on the other, Porcépic's taking refuge for a moment in ballads that celebrate love and youth with the simplicity of a guitar and a two-part harmony – for all the clichéd sentimentality that it may involve – stands as a reaffirmation of the human conscience. It certainly provides a stark contrast to the cold political convictions of his associate, Kholsky (a tailor turned socialist revolutionary) – as evidenced by the latter's conversation with Itague:

"your beliefs are non-human," [Itague] said. "You talk of people as if they were point-clusters or curves on a graph."

"So they are," mused Kholsky, dreamy-eyed. "I, Satin, Porcépic may fall by the wayside. No matter. The Socialist Awareness grows, the tide is irresistible and irreversible. It is a bleak world we live in, M. Itague; atoms collide, brain cells fatigue, economies collapse and others rise to succeed them, all in accord with the basic rhythms of History." (405)

Such fatalism on the part of one seeking to help spark a revolution is remarkable and shows that even those who consider themselves to be the most radical are easily taken in by the impersonal, mechanistic view of history. Porcépic himself, despite his ultra-modern musical compositions, is far less radical; indeed, during the build up to the climax of the ballet at the end of the chapter, which results in Mélanie's brutal death, the narrative vacillates between the product of Porcépic's artistry – the clamorous music inspired by the atmosphere of Paris on the cusp of war, vying for supremacy against the riotous audience who hate the production's fashionable Orientalism – and the composer's thoughts, growing ever more conscientious, as he watches from the wings as events unfold:

The orchestra, sweating and nervous, moved baton-driven into the last portion, *Sacrifice of the Virgin*, a powerful, slow-building seven-minute crescendo which seemed at its end to've explored the furthest possible reaches of dissonance, tonal color and (as *Le Figaro's* critic put it next morning) "orchestral barbarity" (413)

The music here reflects the sense of inevitability, often invoked in *V.*, of the drift towards a general state of war in Europe – from the earliest scenes (chronologically speaking) set in Alexandria in 1898, where agents of the competing powers in North Africa attempt to consolidate their country's interests against the backdrop of a 'Situation' they feel increasingly alienated from; to a Paris grown sick in the 'dog days' of 1913 and an inevitable war on the horizon – the inexorable progression towards a climactic state of chaos is captured in Porcépic's score, which, in its Modernist invention, is meant to invoke Stravinsky and Schoenberg.<sup>176</sup> The change in atmosphere from the Alexandrian episode to the Parisian can be felt in Pynchon's use of musical allusion in both sections – the melodrama and romance of Puccini, particularly *Manon Lescaut*, figures prominently in the former and reflects the (largely naïve) notion of the 'Great Game' of 19<sup>th</sup> century espionage being itself a romance; while the dissonance and atonality of the early Modernists in the latter section points to a very different, and altogether more serious mood.

When the crescendo of Porcépic's composition finally arrives, as it must, it becomes, for Mélanie, the cloudburst she has been praying for since her arrival in Paris:

[L]ight seemed all at once to be reborn behind Mélanie's rainy eyes and she became again the Norman dervish Porcépic remembered. He moved closer to the stage, watching her with a kind of love. An apocryphal story relates that he vowed at that moment never to touch drugs again, never to attend another Black Mass. (413)

Mélanie's renewed vitality after a prolonged period of ennui, while appealing to Porcépic on the face of it, is none the less bittersweet; it can be likened to the violence of the street shattering the comfortable illusions (or delusions) of a stagnant governing order that is characterised by a nostalgic adherence to outmoded values. The composer's riotous score, and the physical riot it provokes,

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<sup>176</sup> Likewise, the rioting audience is a clear allusion to the Paris premiere, on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1913, of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* – although reports of the opening night unrest are thought to be exaggerated.

prefigures the trend towards violence that will mark the coming years of the young twentieth century. Indeed, Pynchon's description of the music feels like a report from a battle scene:

Porcépic's music was now almost deafening: all tonal location had been lost, notes screamed out simultaneous and random like fragments of a bomb: winds, strings, brass and percussion were indistinguishable [...] as the last chord blasted out, filled the theatre, echoed, hung, subsided. (414)

However, there is a tension involved in the contrast between Porcépic's public compositions and the music he plays in private – on the one hand a Stravinsky-esque Modernism which bears witness to the current political and cultural climate, but ultimately amounts to shouting into a gale; on the other, a form of escapist nostalgia that, being born out of clichés, may not be very real, but which provides a degree of human comfort, nonetheless. One cannot help but suspect that Pynchon, if he has a preference for one or other of these approaches, would choose the latter – would prefer the human melodrama of a Puccini or Rossini to the more abstract expressiveness of the Modernists. Make no mistake: Thomas Pynchon, the 'encyclopaedic' 'systems novelist' with a penchant for paranoia, is, at heart, an unreconstructed romantic and borderline sentimentalist. Take the following quotation, taken from *Gravity's Rainbow*:

An organ grinder plays Rossini's overture to *La Gazza Ladra* (which [...] marks a high point in music which everybody ignored, preferring Beethoven, who never got further than statements of intention), and here without snaredrums or the sonority of brasses the piece is mellow, full of hope, promising lavender twilights, stainless steel pavilions and everyone elevated at last to aristocracy, and love without payment of any kind.... (274)

One may be forgiven for being on the alert for irony in a passage like this (and you can find it if you want it), but I choose to take it entirely at face value. Later in the same novel, Pynchon puts the issue at the centre of an on-going debate between two peripheral characters, Gustav Schlabone (a serialist composer in the Schoenberg mould who dismisses tonality as passé) and Säure Bummer (a devotee of tonal composers such as Rossini, who considers seriality to be dull and cerebral). Both make valid arguments, and neither gains the upper hand – and yet there is a hint of extra sympathy for Bummer's position, heightened by the positive light in which Rossini is viewed in the earlier passage, and the sheer

abundance of references to tonal music across the novels.<sup>177</sup> A great tune is a powerful thing, not to be underestimated<sup>178</sup> – and neither is a romantic nature or a moment of sentimentality to be dismissed out of hand. Looking back is the very human failing that Orpheus is unjustly punished for, and as Kurt Vonnegut reminds us, ‘Lot’s wife [...] was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she *did* look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human.’<sup>179</sup> We may forgive Porcépic’s own private desire to turn his back on the apocalyptic future and take refuge in a past however rose-tinted.

Pynchon provides enough of these characters – who can maintain some plurality of vision – to ensure some degree of narrative optimism, especially considering that many (like Foley Walker in *Against the Day*) are able to abandon their pre-defined “role” and undercut the dominant order in dramatic ways. Of course, many fail and exit the narrative without being able to discover anything outside the remit of what is “officially sanctioned”; or else some heady sense of revelation does occur, only to be replaced by the impotence of not being able to do anything about it. One of the most complex cases in Pynchon’s fictional world is, of course, that of Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, who becomes less and less present in the text and more a scattered abstraction towards the conclusion of the novel. However, a decidedly political element can be discerned in the dissident nature of Slothrop’s retreat from the text, which coincides with a complete rejection of monological values and a refusal to live on the terms of centralized power. When Slothrop recovers his mouth harp it marks the beginning of a spiritual rejuvenation that has been enabled through his interaction with the

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<sup>177</sup> This is a personal hunch – owing to the relative lack of biographical information on Pynchon, we cannot say for certain what his views on atonality may be. The argument between Bummer and Schlabone is the focus of a 2008 Thomas Schaub article, “Atonalism, Nietzsche and Gravity’s Rainbow: Pynchon’s Use of German Music History and Culture.” *Pynchon Notes* 54-55 (Spring-Fall 2008), in which the implicit Nietzsche *contra* Wagner dynamic is highlighted – Wagner being seen as a precursor to atonality and an opponent of Rossini’s ‘absolute melody.’ Additionally, Wagner is associated with ‘the tradition of nationalizing German music history’ – and, by extension, the rise of German National Socialism. Nietzsche, on the other hand, is a proponent of the Dionysian forces of life associated with some of the more sympathetic characters in the novel, like Tyrone Slothrop and Geli Tripping. I would add the observation that Slothrop, having at one stage in the novel been likened to Wagner’s Tannhäuser, moves ever further away from such associations and towards the Dionysian-Orphic.

<sup>178</sup> As John Joseph Hess states in his discussion of music in *Mason & Dixon*: ‘for better or worse, harmonies are powerful, harmonies are transitory, and harmonies are fragile. They are only as good as the notes that they contain and the vessels that contain their instruments. In the novel’s sustained engagement with the idea that harmony is its own endless possibility and its own inherent limit, *Mason & Dixon* allows Pynchon to try to imagine pure music.’ (“Music in Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*,” *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 2(2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7766/orbit.v2.2.75>.)

<sup>179</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5* (London: Vintage, 2000) 16.

Schwarzkommando and the simultaneous resistance to 'Their' conditioning that such interaction entails. He has earned the right of access to the alternative frequencies of peripheral culture, and as a result now takes on the role of 'spiritual medium' (622) between the unreality of the novel's central textual fabric – which is constructed as a succession of filmic segments – and a marginal, perhaps more truthful realm. When we realize at the dramatic conclusion of the novel that we have, in fact, been 'reading' a 'film,' we can interpret Slothrop's disappearance not merely as dropping out of the text but as stepping outside the frame of 'Their Movieola viewer' before they get a chance to swing 'Their editorial blade' (694).

Movies (at least as products of the Hollywood studio system) are frequently viewed with suspicion in *Gravity's Rainbow* as dramatic distortions of an already constructed version of history or individual experience. The filmic represents an attempt to capture the real through the symbolic and the imaginary, and what we see in *Gravity's Rainbow* are a succession of instances where individuals are forced into crisis through the attempt to identify with such elusive concepts of reality. Slothrop's paranoia, for example, has a particularly Hollywood-fed edge to it: 'there's always someone behind him being careful not to talk, rattle paper, laugh too loud: Slothrop's been to enough movies that he can pick up an anomaly like that right away' (114). Hanjo Berressem states that this filmic textual quality 'serves as an artificial buffer that language inserts between itself and its self-destruction, lodging the desire for its own annihilation into a virtual space: the "written filmic".'<sup>180</sup> For the text establishes itself as illusion, or as an abstract filmic structure, only whilst simultaneously 'voicing a desire to escape' from that structure<sup>181</sup> – just as Slothrop eventually relinquishes his own dependency on imposed structures, the text seeks to break down its own conventional parameters. *Gravity's Rainbow* is littered with suggestions – explicit and covert – that point towards such a desire. The most obvious of these would be the persistent disruption of linear time, or the creation of "time loops" that undermine traditional conceptions of history (the textual representation of human experience as a linear progression). The mention of the Kennedy (1963) and Malcolm X (1965) assassinations, for example, is just one of several narrative interjections in *Gravity's Rainbow* that reference either factual or fictional events

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<sup>180</sup> Hanjo Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text* (Urbana & Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993) 185-6.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

occurring beyond the novel's temporal setting: i.e., the latter stages of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War era.

Other instances are less immediately apparent and involve the disruption of conventional assumptions to do with cause and effect. Most notably this occurs in relation to the destructive power of the V-2 rocket: 'Imagine a missile one hears approaching only *after* it explodes. The reversal! A piece of time neatly snipped out ... a few feet of film run backwards' (48). But this basic reversal of cause and effect (a ballistics phenomenon) is merely symbolic of the broader textual desire to tamper with the "film": to replace linear history – which is 'at best a conspiracy, not always among gentlemen, to defraud' (164) – with a present-time ethics that ensures "effect" is no longer deferred from "cause". To do this, however, it is necessary to destroy the movie/text, to override the "written filmic," and so in referring to representation outside the frame of filmic/historical perspective the text becomes complicit in its own annihilation. This finally occurs at the novel's conclusion via another time-loop in which the 00000 rocket, fired by Blicero in 1945, falls on a contemporary movie theatre in the early 1970s – the theatre in which (it is implied) we have been witnessing the movie of *Gravity's Rainbow* unfold on a screen that is now a 'dim page spread before us, white and silent' (760): a page, significantly, without text. The destruction of the movie is equally the attempt to destroy the illusion of reality, the falsification of human experience as mediated through history's retrospective rationalizing and an attempt to break the conventions of written language and textual parameters.

To see the consequences of our actions we must learn the ability to step outside the frame of history's movieola viewer and re-read human experience from a marginal perspective as the text attempts to do. From this perspective the narrative voice of *Gravity's Rainbow* introduces future effects into the temporal setting of their cause to deny history the chance to distort reality. So, the Potsdam Conference of 1945, during which the seeds of the Vietnam War were inadvertently sewn, is viewed in relation to cryptic references to that conflict which occur throughout the text. The conference itself is described as having all the glamour of a 'Hollywood premiere' (380), and the comparison is confirmed by the bizarre presence of Hollywood actor Mickey Rooney (382). Säure Bummer even reminds Slothrop (whose mission it is to infiltrate the compound to retrieve a parcel of hashish) that he "mustn't spend time gawking like a tourist, asking celebrities for autographs" (372). The events at Potsdam merely amount to the

*illusion* of a peace conference, with the underlying political machinations of communist and anti-communist powers masquerading as diplomacy. The whole scenario adopts the same sense of artifice as Hollywood representations of history, thereby perpetuating the fiction of human experience and the deferral of cause from effect – a process which restricts the notion of ethical responsibility and limits the incentive for humans to learn from past mistakes. The Potsdam Conference, in this sense, may be seen as the blind repetition of previous judgemental errors – most notably the reparatory demands of the 1919 Versailles treaty regarding representations of the Second World War in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

The problem is deeply embedded in the political practices of those who wield the greatest power, and Pynchon devotes much time to exposing the scale of hypocrisy, ulterior motives, and lack of ethical foresight involved in so-called 'peace treaties' or 'peace conferences.' In *Mason & Dixon* we are given the volatile political climate of the American colonies in the wake of the Treaty of Paris (1763), that ended the Seven Years War but precipitated the American War of Independence and can be said to have initiated a chain of events ultimately leading to the US Civil War; in *Against the Day* Pynchon explores the destabilising after-effects of the Treaty of Berlin (1878), whereby growing political dis-satisfaction in the Balkan region eventually leads to general European war; the Berlin Conference of 1884 – which initiated the scramble for Africa by the European imperialist powers – is viewed in the light of the native Herero uprisings in German Südwest Afrika depicted in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, and their subsequent brutal suppression, which, in turn, forms the template for the large-scale ethnic cleansing performed under the Nazi regime in Europe a generation later. The sense of powerlessness experienced by those at the mercy of such political manoeuvrings is captured by a Belgian vectorist in conversation with Kit Traverse in *Against the Day* concerning the impending war in Europe: in response to the Belgian's concern Kit asks, "Isn't Belgium supposed to be neutral?" – to which the former replies, "there's even a Treaty, which makes it a *dead cert* we'll be invaded by at least one of the signatories, isn't that what Treaties of Neutrality are for?" (610). For Pynchon, one of the more egregious consequences of such treaties tends to be the division and separation of peoples (as, for example, in the cases of Germany, Vietnam, and Korea). As Captain Zhang says in *Mason & Dixon*: "To rule forever [...] it is necessary only to create, among the people one would rule, what we call...Bad History. Nothing 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,— to create thus a Distinction betwixt 'em,— 'tis the first stroke.— All else will follow as if predestin'd, unto War and Devastation.” (615) – much to the dismay of the novel’s deuteragonists as they near the completion of their Mason-Dixon Line.

A further time loop is generated in *Gravity’s Rainbow* with the mention of ‘two station marks, yellow crayon through the years of grease and passage, 1966 and 1971’ (739), that are encountered in an underground rail tunnel by members of the Counterforce in the process of ‘heretic-chasing’ (738) – a term which we must assume applies to the identification and disposal of those (including Slothrop) who refuse to work towards the cause of the Counterforce, proving that they have adopted the same absolutist principles of those they seek to counter. In this the Counterforce are guilty of further perpetuating the denial of ethical responsibility in the lived moment. It is open to debate what the years 1966 and 1971 (and those in-between) signify – other than the obvious fact that Pynchon would have been working on his novel during these years. Certainly, in the U.S. this was a period of great social upheaval, especially regarding race relations after the rioting in Watts and the assassinations of both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Increased levels of political paranoia (particularly during the early years of the Nixon administration) combined with an unpopular upsurge of American military action in Vietnam and the often-brutal suppression of free speech against the government also characterize the volatility of these years.

As if to emphasize the recapitulating nature of official history, the conclusion of *Gravity’s Rainbow* brings these themes together on the contemporary Santa Monica ‘freeway for freaks’ (755) where Richard M. Zhubb, night manager of the doomed Orpheus movie theatre, passes a ‘mysteriously-canvassed trailer rig and a liquid-hydrogen tanker sleek as a torpedo’ – which we must assume refer to a nuclear weapon and it’s fuel – while complaining about the “irresponsible use” (754) of subversive musical instruments, such as harmonica and kazoo (I will be looking at this more closely in the following chapter). Even here, however, Pynchon once again refuses to let this kind of militaristic supremacy go unchallenged by referring to the freeway ‘freaks’ who ‘come gibbering in at you from all sides, swarming in, rolling their eyes through the side windows, playing harmonicas and even *kazoos*, in full disrespect for the Prohibitions’ (755-56).

It is interesting to note that the two 'station marks' are found in an underground rail tunnel, as if to emphasize the inevitability of progression along fixed lines that can only be altered by those who have control of the points. However, it must also be noted that the 'Pointsman' of *Gravity's Rainbow* (the Pavlovian psychologist, Ned Pointsman) ultimately fails in his attempt to control Slothrop's influence in the Zone – which suggests that we should look at this time tunnel differently. In Pynchon's work subterranean levels are frequently associated with the subconscious, or with repressed consciousness (as are the preterite), so it may be that this tunnel represents access to a configuration of time that undermines the superficial conception of an absolute sequential time that can be dominated by those who have the power to do so; and underground systems run in networks, rather than simply one line running from past to future. In *Against the Day* Professor Werfner/Renfrew puts it like this: "one might imagine a giant *railway-depot*, with thousands of gates disposed radially in all directions, leading to tracks of departure to all manner of alternate Histories" (767).

*Against The Day*, in fact, displays an incessant preoccupation with alternative ways of configuring and conceiving of time (including through music) – a characteristic hinted at by the title of the novel and developed through a variety of subjects: from Quaternion mathematics that talks of vector positions in the fourth dimension; to shamanic mysticism in which time is 'spread out not in a single dimension but over many, which all exist in a single, timeless instant' (160), leading to a situation where events are 'superimposed on one another' (1203). In this novel the latest ideas concerning time and our relationship to it are debated at the International Conference on Time-Travel hosted at Candlebrow University. We are told that the first such conference, held in 1895, was a "hootenanny" – 'Niels Bohr was there, Ernst Mach, young Einstein, Dr. Spengler, Mr. Wells himself. J. M. E. McTaggart of Cambridge, England, dropped by, to give a brief address dismissing altogether the *existence* of Time as really too ridiculous to consider, regardless of its status as a believed-in phenomenon' (464). The great hope is that, through the commingling of ideas of such eminent scientists and philosophers in the field, a working time machine might be a viable possibility by the end of the century. However, in typical Pynchonian style, the bright hope is brought low by human fallibility – in this case, academic parochialism: 'From initial bickering over what non-specialists would have to deem trivial matters, disputes had grown with astounding rapidity into all-out academic combat. Splinter groups

proliferated [...]. The celebrities in whom so much hope was invested soon departed by steam train and interurban electric, by horseback and by airship, usually muttering to themselves' (464). The really valuable contribution to the debate at Candlebrow comes not from any of these great minds, all vying for the primacy of their own ideas, but from a reflection on something as simple as the playing of a ukulele – an instrument that appears again and again in Pynchon's work (as we have already seen, an episode in *Vineland* sees the ukulele take on apotropaic qualities in the hands of Takeshi Fumimota, as it helps to ward off the anonymous kidnapping group aboard Kahuna Airlines (*Vineland* 65-7)). Having said that, the lengthy and complex string of associations and set pieces centred around Candlebrow that involve considerations of music, time, and ethical responsibility, begins not with the ukulele but with one of Pynchon's other favourite instruments: the harmonica.

The Chums of Chance have enrolled themselves in the university's Marching Academy Harmonica Band – an episode referred to as a 'brief aberration in their history' (471) – ostensibly as a means to escape the temptations that may be offered to them by 'time-trespassers' looking for refuge from some post-apocalyptic future and seeking the Chums' assistance (it being rumoured that other members of the Chums' organisation have already succumbed to such requests). There is a suspicion, however, that these time-travellers are not refugees or 'pilgrims' at all but are, in fact, looking to raid the past for resources – or even (in a turn of mind betraying a level of paranoia remarkable even for one of Pynchon's characters) that the whole thing is an elaborate set-up fabricated by the Chum's higher command for the purpose of wheedling out potential traitors in the ranks.<sup>182</sup> Either way, the Marching Academy Harmonica Band represents a way of 'sidestepping the crisis by passing into metaphorical identities' (471), and the harmonica itself an instrument for anchoring the boys in sequential time – at least at the outset. The atmosphere among the students on the program is one of general dissatisfaction and restlessness, partly due to the emphasis on theory-based pedagogical methods

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<sup>182</sup> Justin St. Clair points out the striking similarity – if not direct influence – between the Joseph Conrad and Ford Maddox Ford collaboration *The Inheritors: An Extravagant Story* (1901), and Pynchon's time-trespassers. For St. Clair the trespassers are 'an amalgam, hyper-spatial time travellers whose characteristics are borrowed and blended from a wide variety of period sources' ("Borrowed Time: Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* and the Fourth Dimension," *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol.38, No.1, Slipstream (March 2011) 53.

(one third-year ‘harpman,’ taking a break from studying for an examination in modal theory, complains: “[r]ather be seeing some real action, get out there into the hullabaloo, just let the durn music go for a while, don’t ya know” (472)); but also, on a related note, the restrictions that are put on any kind of self-expression that is out of keeping with the instrument’s European (specifically German) origin: ‘soon they [the Chums] were [...] being reprimanded like everybody else for improvising during the more tightly arranged pieces like “My Country ’Tis of Thee” (471-2). The martial philosophy of the school (the Head is referred to as the ‘commandant’), with its adherence to 19<sup>th</sup>-century euro-centric modalities and fusty teaching practices, is totally undermined by the students’ off-the-cuff, jazzy number inspired by the disappearance of one of their colleagues and suspected school snitch, Alonzo Meatman (this shadowy character is, in fact, an agent (perhaps double) with links to the time-trespassers) – in which Pynchon showcases the harmonica’s full potential:

The Chum’s [...] understood that this was the “intro” to a musical number, as students broke out and started to play scales on every harmonica within reach, and heavens but there were, well, bell-metal bass harmonicas six feet long—great whopping *tubas* of harmonicas—ranging down to the tiniest possible two-hole silver and pearl Microharmonicas, with every note in the Universe in between, as at some all-but-imperceptible nod the fellows began sucking and singing—

That ‘Zo Meatman’s gone A-WOL.  
Yippy dippy dippy, doo!  
Faster than you can say “Wall”—  
What a nut-ty thing, to do!  
[Comical bass]  
Now, it ain’t that I wouldn’t, ‘cause I can but I won’t,  
And I would if I wasn’t, but I am so I don’t!  
[All] A-a-and,  
That ‘Zo Meatman’s gone A-WOL.

[...] segueing into a spirited cakewalk allowing opportunities for brief novelty effects, locomotive noises, barnyard animals (473).

The desire to expand the harmonica’s range of expression is further exemplified by the existence, among the students, of the ‘Phantom Filer’ – ‘known to sneak in with a full set of harmonica reed files to alter notes and create difficulties for soloists upon the instrument, obliging them at times to shift over to sucking the tonic chords and blowing the sub-dominant ones, producing a vaguely Negroid

sound' (475). The resulting syncopation is characteristic of the bluesy style that the harmonica is more commonly associated with – as though the transition to a 20<sup>th</sup>-century American form (German manufacturers having 'for some years been dumping their surplus inventory on the American market' (474)) required just such an act of subversion.

The Chums, ashamed at having neglected their mission during their stay at the school, begin to consider themselves 'imperfect replicas of who they once were' (476) – even to wonder if they are not, in fact, surrogates of the *real* Chums, 'authorized somehow to serve as volunteer decoys' (476), thereby enabling their more authentic counterparts to continue their important work. This brief crisis of identity is due to the belief that they have been avoiding their obligations – an unconscionable failing for heroes out of a boys' adventure serial. By the end of the chapter, however, there is a growing sense that the whole episode with the Marching Academy Harmonica Band has been instructive, even vital to the Chums' development – as though they are meant to be here at this moment to bear witness to a shift in the dominant culture, from a Euro-centric tradition to the assimilation of a wholly new melting-pot form of American expression. Having absorbed some of the atmosphere at Candlebrow – the debates and ideas relating to time; the transgressive music in contravention of faculty rules – the Chums envisage themselves (or at least versions of themselves) as participants in the great surge towards the 20th century that began with the mass migrations into the northern cities in the latter part of the previous century:

Some would drift away from here as once, already long ago, from their wholesome heartland towns, into the smoke and confusion of urban densities unimagined when they began, to join other ensembles playing music of the newer races, arrangements of Negro blues, Polish polkas, Jewish klezmer, though others, unable to find any clear route out of the past, would return again and again to the old performance sites, to Venice, Italy, and Paris, France (477)

As if to emphasise the decisiveness of this shift to a new cultural topography the time scale is collapsed – the urban migration (still ongoing by this section's turn-of-the-century time-setting) considered to have occurred 'already long ago.' The traditional concept of linear time is further disturbed by the idea of this 'clear route out of the past' having occurred *in* the past, while maintaining the quality of newness – as though past, present, and future are being bound up in the same

conjugating moment. The idea dawns on Miles Blundell (the Chums' cook with a gift for extra-sensory perception) that such development of their temporal awareness, in four-dimensional terms, was always the true purpose of their sojourn at Candlebrow:

"It was about flight [...] into the next dimension. We were always at the mercy of Time, as much as any civilian 'groundhog.' We went from two dimensions, infant's floor-space, out into town- and map-space, ever toddling our way into the third dimension, till as Chums recruits we could take the fateful leap skyward ... and now, after these years of sky-roving, maybe some of us are ready to step 'sidewise' once more, into the next dimension—into Time—our fate, our lord, our destroyer." (481)

Miles' melodramatic flourish is immediately and deliberately punctured by one of his colleagues inquiring about the lunch menu, and the Chums eventually relapse into their former state, bound to quotidian affairs: 'somehow, the earlier, the great, light had departed, the certitude become broken as ground-dwellers' promises—time regained its opacity' (619). It is evident here, however, that there is an awareness among the crew that they are somehow destined to transcend their subservience to the 'Organization whose name curiously had begun to escape them' (476).

It is with this new-found temporal sensitivity that Miles is later able to meet and engage with one of the 'time-trespassers,' one Ryder Thorn, in pre-war Belgium (it is a characteristic of this novel that precise dates are seldom offered, the reader often having to rely on approximations and contextual inferences). Miles remembers Thorn from the college, and it is here where the significance of the ukulele finally comes into play:

"He was at Candlebrow. At the ukulele workshop that summer. He lectured on the four-note chord in the context of timelessness, and described himself then as a Quaternionist. We had quickly discovered our common love of the instrument [...] and discussed the widespread contempt in which ukulele players are held—traceable, we concluded, to the uke's all-but-exclusive employment as a producer of chords—single, timeless events apprehended all at once instead of serially. Notes of a linear melody, up and down a staff, being a record of pitch versus time, to play a melody is to introduce the element of time, and hence of mortality. Our perceived reluctance to leave the timelessness of the struck chord has earned ukulele players our reputation as feckless, clownlike children who will not grow up." (620)

At first, Miles takes it that the ‘trespasser’ has been able to utilise some form of time-travel device, but Thorn gradually reveals that, far from having any control over time, he is in fact subject to it and is fated to an endless cycle of return through a rift in time caused by the catastrophic events on the Belgian battlefields of the Great War. Thorn takes Miles on a cycling trip on the road between Ypres and Menin to try and impress upon him the significance of the horror that is destined to take place there a decade later; but he is hopeful that Miles – as a devotee of the struck chord – will be able to perceive it without having to be informed. However, Miles either cannot or will not make such a leap of perception, despite his characteristic gift for prescience. What he does now understand is that ‘the presence in this world of Thorn and his people had been owing only to some chance blundering upon a shortcut through unknown topographies of Time, enabled somehow by whatever was to happen here, in this part of West Flanders where they stood, by whatever terrible singularity in the smooth flow of Time had opened to them’ (624). Thorn realises that any attempt to warn people of the coming ‘apocalypse’ would be futile, and so he lectures on the struck chord instead, in the hope that it will inspire meditation on human subjectivity to a non-linear time in which past, present, and future are bound up in the same moment.

There are similarities here with Henri Bergson’s description of our immediate experience of time as duration rather than space, as a continuity of transition or ‘a memory within change itself, a memory that prolongs the before into the after, keeping them from being mere snapshots and appearing and disappearing in a present ceaselessly reborn.’<sup>183</sup> For the purpose of elucidation, Bergson employs a musical metaphor that bears some striking similarities to the discussion of the struck chord in *Against the Day*:

A melody to which we listen with our eyes closed, heeding it alone, comes close to this time which is the very fluidity of our inner life; but it still has too many qualities, too much definition, and we must first efface the difference among the sounds, then do away with the distinctive features of sound itself, retaining of it only the continuation of what precedes into what follows and the uninterrupted transition, multiplicity without divisibility and succession without separation, in order finally to rediscover basic time.

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<sup>183</sup> Henri Bergson, “Concerning the Nature of Time,” *Key Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 251.

Such is immediately perceived duration, without which we would have no idea of time.<sup>184</sup>

The criticisms levelled at the Candlebrow ukulele players stem from the traditional conception of time elapsing linearly (a view that the Marching Academy faculty would have their students adhere to) – whereas here we have a description of ‘pure duration,’ the ‘fluid continuity’ of our inner experience of time, whereby what came before and what comes after are apprehended indivisibly and intuitively. It is a concept that can also be found in Heidegger (despite the differing approaches of the two philosophers) when he speaks of ‘the temporality of authentic historicity [...] as the Moment that anticipates and retrieves’<sup>185</sup> – the ‘moment’ here standing in contradistinction to any snapshot idea of the ‘now.’ Furthermore, it shares much with Charles Mingus’ description of group improvisation and ‘rotary perception’ mentioned earlier in this chapter, and with dialogic interaction in general in the sense that each utterance is at once a response to and an anticipation of something else. Unsurprisingly then, this notion of the present as unfolding can also be found in Bakhtin:

The present, in its so-called “wholeness” (although it is, of course, never whole) is in essence and in principle inconclusive; by its very nature it demands continuation, it moves into the future, and the more actively and consciously it moves into the future the more tangible and indispensable its inconclusiveness becomes. Therefore, when the present becomes the center of human orientation in time and in the world, time and world lose their completedness as a whole as well as in each of their parts. The temporal model of the world changes radically: it becomes a world where there is no first word (no ideal word), and the final word has not yet been spoken. [...] time and the world become historical: they unfold [...] as becoming, as an uninterrupted movement into a real future, as a unified, all-embracing and unconcluded process. Every event, every phenomenon, every thing, every object of artistic representation loses its completedness, its hopelessly finished quality and its immutability<sup>186</sup>

For the ‘time-trespasser’ Ryder Thorn in *Against the Day*, considering the type of events and phenomena he has seen on the battlefields of Western Europe, the implications of this kind of temporal awareness are profoundly ethical.

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<sup>184</sup> Bergson, 251.

<sup>185</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State U of New York P, 2010) 372.

<sup>186</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 30.

It is nonetheless indicative of the difficulty we have in conceiving of time without reference to space that even when considering the arguments of Bergson and Heidegger, not to mention the 'rotary perception' of Charlie Mingus, we still find ourselves using spatial terms, if only (we might try to convince ourselves) for the sake of convenience. We have felt the persistent desire expressed in *Against the Day* to escape conventional linear time, the progression from past to future which is seen here as 'the direction of increasing entropy' (1146) or a 'bleak convergence' (250); and yet set against this are other spatial, albeit more complex metaphors – such as the centrifugal essence of '[t]ime elapsing in a dozen ways' (856) suggested by the metaphor of the railway depot. The implication of this historical conception, with multiple historical narratives – "Hundreds, by now thousands, of narratives, all equally valid" (767) – emanating from a central point, is that there must be a timeless origin from which to proceed in any given direction. At times the depiction of the Zone in *Gravity's Rainbow* evokes the purity of such a space, which might equally apply to time: 'maybe for a little while all the fences are down, one road as good as another, the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality' (550-51). In *Against the Day* it is described as 'a safe conjugate to all the spill of accursed meridians, passing daily, desolate, one upon the next' (420); and later Hunter Penhallow asks: "Is there such a thing as the *neutral hour*? One that goes neither forward nor back? Is that too much to hope?" (649).

*Gravity's Rainbow* displays an even more insistent preoccupation with the spatial geometries of time:

What Enzian wants to create will have no history. It will never need a design change. Time, as time is known to the other nations, will wither away inside this new one. [...] The people will find the Center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place. (318-19)

However, it would be more appropriate to say that the 'Center' *is* time, if we conceive of it as the moment as opposed to the now, and that the branches that lead off from this point are multiple histories or narrative paths. For what *Against the Day* emphasizes is that we mustn't interpret time through reference to what

we know of Euclidean space; in other words, we must give up the tendency to conceive of time in anything less than four dimensions. Conventionally, historical time has been viewed in two dimensions: a linear geometry that allows the perpetuation of history's structures in which the possibility of individual engagement with the rhythmic time of the present is endlessly deferred. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon investigates the desire for a three-dimensional understanding of time, in which three-dimensional perception is mapped onto a four-dimensional time plane, thereby multiplying the possible pathways of human experience, and undermining the traditions of sequential history. *Against the Day*, however, finally incorporates the fourth dimension into the argument, most notably via quaternion mathematics and the concept of vectors in time – a concept which radically subverts linear time and makes it seem redundant, almost barbaric. Quaternion knowledge is used in the novel to posit the possibility of creating a 'Q-weapon' to disrupt the linear flow, and inevitable recapitulation, of history. Although this may be a fantastic notion, it adds to Pynchon's metaphor for the alternative configuration of temporal experience, and once again music is drawn into the equation:

He saw that if the Q-waves were in any way longitudinal, if they travelled through the Æther in any way like sound travelling through air, then among the set of further analogies to sound, somewhere in the regime, must be music—which, immediately, obligingly, he heard, or received. The message it seemed to convey being "Deep among the equations describing the behavior of light, field equations, Vector and Quaternion equations, lies a set of directions, an itinerary, a map to a hidden space." (566)

Lurking behind the complex network of plots and counterplots, the web of political bureaucracy and the fictional, yet powerful, appeal of traditional history, lies the 'hidden space' that is spoken of here: a dynamic alternative to the reductive configurations of time seen in relation to V's fascist temporal metaphysic, and the fabricated representation of human experience that masquerades as history throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*; it is the time differential mentioned in *Lot 49*, 'a vanishingly small instant in which chance had to be confronted at last for what it was, where it could no longer disguise itself as something innocuous like an average rate' (89). As Dixon's teacher Emerson puts it: "Time is the Space that may not be seen" – upon which Rev<sup>d</sup> Cherrycoke comments: "He means that out

of mercy we are blind as to Time,— for we could not bear to contemplate what lies at its heart.” (*M&D* 326). And yet despite this, despite the monological forces that attempt to engulf this centre ground, Pynchon establishes it as more than merely a void caught between two historical driving forces. There is something more dynamic at work here; it is a persistent presence that undercuts the artifice and illusion of the dominant capitalist ideology, and it is inhabited by those who are denied representation in official history: the preterite masses of Pynchon’s fiction. The Schwarzkommando of *Gravity’s Rainbow* have a protective mantra: ‘Mba kayere’ (563) meaning ‘I am passed over,’ which they repeat in the hope that they remain as such, emphasizing that though many are forced through the cracks of history there are some, at least, who prefer preterition to life on ‘Their’ terms. The conjugating rhythm and dialogic essence of the marginal world – here placed centre stage – which these people inhabit allows Pynchon to develop jazz and other forms of musical expression as metaphor and paradigm of their ability and desire to communicate and to disrupt the official frequencies of accepted society. The persistence of both these assets is re-emphasized at the conclusion of *Against the Day* where ‘music which cannot be marched to goes on uninterrupted all night, in the bars and *bals musettes* for the dancers who will always be there’ (1217).

## Chapter 5: Re-enchantment – Post-logical Orphism; Post-secular Afflatus

Thomas Pynchon's work is well known for disorienting strategies: extensive narrative digressions, a multitude of minor characters, temporal disruption, specialized subject matter, surrealism and misdirection all combine to challenge the reader at almost every turn. One aspect of his work is ambiguous in this regard, in that it may serve to either increase or, conversely, to lessen the disorientating reading experience – depending on one's sensibilities. Pynchon's interest in re-enchantment ranges from the secular world of science; to the power of myth and the figuration of archetypes; to all manner of metaphysical and spiritual considerations of a world (or worlds) beyond our own. Even in the scientific fields the emphasis is frequently stressed on what is *not* properly understood – such as quantum mechanics (often incorporated into Pynchon's work through appropriately oblique strategies), quaternion mathematics and the fourth dimension, and the human mind itself. In Pynchon's fictional universe (multiverse?) there really are 'more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio' – and while much of this fantastical content may be regarded as part of a satirical enterprise (for example, séances and arcane scrying methods are shown to be as effective for data gathering as historical records in order to highlight the questionability of official narratives), Pynchon's preoccupation with the fantastic seems inordinate to such a limited perspective. At the very least, one gets the sense while reading Pynchon that there is room for faith and feeling in the pursuit of knowledge. Music, and the way it affects the listener, is another topic not fully understood – whether by philosophers, semiologists, or mystics – and so fits Pynchon's effort to forge links between the quotidian details of life and a spiritual contemplation of something greater, something beyond ourselves but of which we are nonetheless part. In his work, music acts in such a way by two means which share some links: Orphism and afflatus.

### I

There is a persistent Orphic theme that runs throughout much of Pynchon's work, and we see it particularly in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Against the Day*. In the first of

these novels, Orphic visions and dream sequences permeate the narrative along with specific references to the myth of Orpheus and to other artistic works that focus on the same theme – most notably Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, but also Jean Cocteau's 1950 film "Orphée." Tyrone Slothrop is seen as a latter-day Orpheus, flitting between the Apollonian (elect) and the Dionysiac (preterite) in what Pynchon calls 'the Zone' (Orpheus is associated with the ancient polis of Zone in Thrace); while Pynchon also establishes here – through other musical characters, allusions, sub-plots and set-pieces – a prophetic Orphic voice that, if heard, offers the unification of Apollonian illusion and Dionysiac primacy; language and music; control and disorder. If it is not heard, however, the promise turns to the apocalyptic alternative, which at the conclusion of *Gravity's Rainbow* takes the shape of the V-2 rocket descending on the Orpheus Theatre. *Against the Day* returns to the Orphic theme and speaks somewhat more optimistically of the possibility for Orphic resolution. Duality is a persistent theme throughout this novel, with a notable connection made between Orpheus and Manichaeism, and manifests itself as expression in the music of the many groups of people, foregrounded by the text, who exist at the periphery of society. Their many varieties of Orphic Song are seen as the expression of a metaphysical – as well as artistic – unification of dualistic elements. As we will see, however, Orphic presence in Pynchon is not restricted to these two novels but rather forms a persistent thread (either overtly or implicitly) throughout the oeuvre. The Orphic theme in Pynchon has received attention from Dwight Eddins,<sup>187</sup> Thomas A. Bass,<sup>188</sup> Kathryn Hume & Thomas J. Knight<sup>189</sup> - the focus here falling mainly on *Gravity's Rainbow* – while many others have looked at Orphism in literature more broadly: Ihab Hassan,<sup>190</sup> Walter A. Strauss,<sup>191</sup> Robert McGahey<sup>192</sup> to name a few. In each of these studies it is the Orphic metaphor that predominates – for example: the psychoanalytical implications of descent and return; dismemberment as a model for thinking about postmodernism; ideas of control and resistance. Music itself is, to a large extent, left out of the discussion. The significance of the broader Orphic themes

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<sup>187</sup> *The Gnostic Pynchon* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).

<sup>188</sup> 'Gravity's Rainbow as Orphic Text,' *Pynchon Notes* 13 (1983).

<sup>189</sup> 'Orpheus and the Orphic Voice in Gravity's Rainbow,' *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985).

<sup>190</sup> *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971).

<sup>191</sup> *Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971).

<sup>192</sup> *The Orphic Moment: Shaman to Poet-Thinker in Plato, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé* (New York: State U of New York P, 1994).

mentioned above are such that this chapter will inevitably have to devote space to a consideration of them. However, where music is not the primary factor under discussion it will be shown that it is never far behind.

The myth of Orpheus has its origins in pre-classical antiquity but resonates uniquely throughout the history of western art from medieval times to the present day. Offering something different to each stage or era in the evolution of artistic creation, the myth itself can be said to have evolved or been adapted over the centuries as certain nuances in the story of the singer/poet come to the fore as inspiration for, or validation of, artistic expression. From classical references in the writings of Pindar (who gives Orpheus the epithet ‘father of songs’), through Plato, Apollonius of Rhodes, Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and Pausanias the Orphic theme passes through the age of chivalry (*Sir Orfeo*) and medieval scholasticism before being taken up by countless artists in all media from the Renaissance up to the present day.<sup>193</sup> The enduring appeal of the myth to artists working in all disciplines is obvious, and many – for instance Moreau, Rodin and Cocteau – display a consistent preoccupation with the Orphic theme, returning to it time and again. Others may be considered inherently ‘Orphic’ in terms of their philosophy and methodology, displaying what Elizabeth Sewell calls the Orphic Voice: an essentially syncretistic outlook on the world, seeking to reconcile seemingly opposed elements; searching for correspondences between nature and humanity, art and science, death and life; and contributing to a ‘post-logical’ understanding of the mind’s place in nature. Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Rilke can be counted among these, but the rollcall can be extended to include such heterogenous voices as Emerson, Nietzsche, and Renan – each of whom, in their own way, may be considered to have contributed to a ‘natural history of the mind.’ We shall see how far Pynchon’s work fits into this idea of an underlying Orphic Voice.

The widely known story itself is composed of fairly straightforward stages. Firstly, Orpheus possesses the power of music and song to such a skilful degree

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<sup>193</sup> Most notably: Bacon, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Wordsworth, Mallarmé, Rilke, Valéry, Pynchon, Kathy Acker, Richard Powers (literature); Purcell, Handel, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky (classical music); Peri, Monteverdi, Gluck, Offenbach, Birtwistle (opera); Cocteau, Marcel Camus (film); Bellini, Mantegna, Titian, Tintoretto, Dürer, Moreau, Rodin, Waterhouse, Redon, Chagall, Klee, Cocteau (fine arts); Nick Cave, David Sylvian, Arcade Fire (popular music) – and these are by no means exhaustive lists.

(having had these powers bestowed upon him by Apollo) that he can charm even the rocks and trees into animation, while wild beasts are tamed and subdued by the serenity of his singing. Because of his skills, Orpheus is taken on the voyage of the Argonauts – initially as a pacer for the oarsmen, but his command of music is eventually put to far greater use with his charming of the Sirens and the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece (this part of the story was added in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE by Apollonius of Rhodes). Later, after the death of his wife Eurydice, he is permitted to descend into Hades (*katabasis*) to find and bring her back after impressing Pluto and Persephone with the power of his song – only to fail in the quest by casting a backward glance at his beloved before safely across the edge of the underworld. Finally, after dismemberment (*sparagmos*) at the hands of Thracian Maenads, the severed head and lyre of Orpheus, still singing, float down the river Hebrus until they come to rest at Lesbos, where the head continues to prophesy day and night until Apollo finally forces it into silence.

Where artists have found the myth to be adaptable is in the richness of interpretation and the ambiguous themes that surround the central thread of the story. From what we know of the origins of Orpheus, dualism appears to be woven into the fabric of the myth from the outset. There is ambivalence in the early sources as to the very nature of Orpheus: whether he is mortal or divine, or whether he is a mortal aspiring to godhead, Orpheus inhabits an intriguing position at a complicated intersection. As a mortal, he is associated with the barbarian Thracians as much as the cultured Greeks; as a representative of the Gods he is associated as much with Dionysus (instinct) as Apollo (intellect). These dichotomies—mortality/divinity, barbarity/civility, Dionysus/Apollo—find their synthesis in the figure of Orpheus and represent the reason why this particular myth has remained so beguiling to artists over the many centuries. Further to this, key dynamics emerge from the mythical hero's quest that form a dialogue between love and death, triumph and defeat, art and life. There is Orpheus the lover, the transgressor, the rebel, the martyr; Orpheus the naïf, the paranoid, the pacifier, the victim. The very motives behind many of the events in the story of Orpheus are open to interpretation: the cause of Eurydice's death; the reasons for Orpheus' attempt to bring her back (love, guilt, jealousy, death wish); the cruel necessity of the injunction not to look back – the most enigmatic aspect of the entire myth; the reasons for the Maenads' (priestesses of Dionysus) frenzied attack (pride, revenge, ceremony); the significance of the *sparagmos*;

finally Apollo's initially benevolent intervention and later paranoid reaction as he silences the Orphic oracle that he himself had established. All of this provides fertile material for interpreters of the myth – so much so, in fact, that Orpheus has become almost synonymous with the power of myth itself: Orpheus the original figure in a line of correspondents through the ages (Pythagoras, Terpander, Arion, David, Christ, St. Francis of Assisi); Orpheus the resonant mythic archetype. Whatever specific aspect of the story acts as catalyst for the artist's imagination, the prevailing image that has come down to us from early classical times via the Renaissance, Romanticism, and the Symbolists is of Orpheus as the embodiment of poetry and music: a divinity of poetic art, which is as much as to say a divinity of truth and eloquence. As Shakespeare famously put it: "Orpheus' lyre was strung with poets' sinews."<sup>194</sup>

Most aspects of the myth have had light shed on them by twentieth century anthropology, and perhaps most notably by the poet Robert Graves who argues convincingly for the socio-political and ceremonial origins of the story's several phases. Though many of his theories are rejected by scholars in the field, Graves – like Frazer before him – was by far the greater influence on artistic minds. None of that modern scholarship in any way diminishes the efficacy of the myth on pre-twentieth century artists, nor the power of their resulting work; Pynchon, however, does have the benefit of having read Graves (we know this from references in his work to *The White Goddess*, which in V. is described as 'an adventure of the mind'<sup>195</sup>) and so is able to combine the fabulous aspects of the myth with a deeper understanding – or, considering Graves' approach to the subject, 'intuition' might be a better word – of its more prosaic, human foundations. Lest Orpheus become too shackled by the overspecialized socio-political factors of his creation (any investigation into which having to rely on a certain degree of conjecture) we can turn to Sewell for an explanation in broad strokes of the myth's continued importance: 'in this particular story, mythology is considering, in the person of the poet, the power and the fate of poetry or thinking or myth. In the Orpheus story, myth is looking at itself';<sup>196</sup> '[t]he Orphic voice attests a tradition and a method of thinking. The tradition is constant. What is

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<sup>194</sup> *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act 3; Sc 2.

<sup>195</sup> Pynchon, V. 61.

<sup>196</sup> Elizabeth Sewell, *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) 40-1.

important about it is that it is not history, cold and embalmed, but a living invitation.’<sup>197</sup>

There are many overt references to the myth of Orpheus in Pynchon, but the frequency with which passages from the several stages of the myth and Orphic themes in general arise is also great. The affective power of music is a constant factor; so too is the notion of descent and return, the Orphic *katabasis* (both literally and figuratively – there are many underworlds in Pynchon’s fictional universe) and the knowledge of life that comes with being intimate with death. Then there are the broader preoccupations with the idea of communication through art, transcendence/transgression, oracular power. And in reaction to these there is violence, exile and censorship from those who would seek to reinforce authoritative control.

One of the earliest examples of Orphic presence in Pynchon comes in *V.* in the form of the minor character Dahoud – previously mentioned in Chapter Three in relation to jazz – who is able through his singing to calm (at least temporarily) the ire of a group of drunken commandos in the Maltese port of Valetta: ‘Dahoud removed his hat, drew himself up, and began to sing I Only Have Eyes For You. Commandos were struck dumb’ (440) – this scene echoing Apollonius of Rhodes’ depiction in the *Argonautica* of Orpheus quelling drunken brawls among Jason’s crew the night prior to the *Argo*’s voyage from the port of Pagasae. When members of the shore patrol arrive threatening to make arrests, Dahoud, to avert further confrontation, shifts to another aspect of Orpheus – this time the military paceman leading the commandos away from danger: ‘Dahoud counting cadence, singing it like a blues’ (441). The only other time Dahoud appears in the novel is early on when we are given an anecdote relating how he saved would-be-suicide seaman Ploy from jumping overboard by using the simple argument that “life is the most precious possession you have [...] because, [...] without it, you’d be dead” (12). Coming from almost anybody else this might sound like the tritest of platitudes; from an Orphic figure, however, it has a ring of authenticity to it, and Ploy feels that instinctively.

Aside from figures like Dahoud, which bring Orphism quite explicitly into play, there are other Orphic elements that permeate Pynchon’s work on a more

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<sup>197</sup> Sewell, 404.

implicit level. Descent and return is one of the more frequent. In V. Benny Profane descends into the New York sewer system in a dead-end job hunting alligators; the people of Valetta wait in the caves beneath the city during German bombing raids in the Second World War. *The Crying of Lot 49* sees Oedipa Maas descend into the Los Angeles' cultural underworld searching for clues that she hopes will lead to some kind – any kind – of revelation and ultimate meaning. *Gravity's Rainbow* is simply full of underworlds: the oft-invoked Zone of the novel – geographically speaking it is war torn Germany, but in a metaphysical sense so much more than that – not only invokes the Thracian Zone of Orphic miracle but also the dreamlike 'Zone' of Cocteau's film *Orphée* (1950), the name given to the ruined cityscape between the worlds of the living and the dead (there is a reference in *GR* to María Casares who played the part of the princess/death in the movie); also Slothrop's trip down the toilet into ever deeper recesses of the subconscious in order to retrieve his (mouth)harp. In *Vineland* there are references to Tsorrek, the world of the dead. In *Mason & Dixon* Charles Mason is obsessed with the thought of reaching the spirit of his dead wife and the surveyors come up against all kinds of telluric influences. *Against the Day* can challenge *Gravity's Rainbow* for its plethora of underworlds, from the prosaic (Colorado mines and European tunnels) to the fantastical (sub-desertine cities and civilisations living on the inner side of a toroidal Earth's surface). *Inherent Vice* has frequent allusions to the submerged land of Lemuria and its prophesied reappearance, while *Bleeding Edge* takes the theme into the virtual realm with DeepArcher software and the dark web.

The crucial element in the Orphic myth, as far as Pynchon is concerned, is the element of synthesis.<sup>198</sup> A key part of this is the tension within the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy, an early instance of which may be seen in the characterization and vicissitudes of V.'s jazz musician McClintic Sphere. In a period of introspection triggered by dissatisfaction at the reception of his art, Sphere conjures up the following lyrics (he takes them to be 'nonsense words') and sings them to himself while the band are playing a number titled Set/Reset:

Gwine cross de Jordan

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<sup>198</sup> As William Wordsworth (who may be considered an Orphic poet) has it: 'The mind of man is framed even like the breath / And harmony of music. There is a dark / Invisible workmanship that reconciles / Discordant elements and makes them move / In one society.' *The Prelude* Book I, ll. 351-5.

Ecclesiastically:  
 Flop, flip, once I was hip,  
 Flip, flop, now you're on top,  
 Set-REset, why are we BEset  
 With crazy and cool in the same molecule ... (293)

The underlying principle of the lyric has been inspired by his conversations with studio technicians, having realised that the medium of recorded sound may offer a more democratic means by which to disseminate his music. In the recording studio Sphere learns about stochastic music, digital computers and, specifically, a two-triode circuit called a flip-flop, 'which when it was turned on could be one of two ways, depending on which tube was conducting and which was cut off: set or reset, flip or flop.' "And that," one of the technicians explains, "can be yes or no, or one or zero. And that is what you might call one of the basic units, or specialized 'cells' in a big 'electronic brain'" (293). Here we have a succinct model for Pynchon's characteristic preoccupation with binary systems – a preoccupation which we have already seen in its abstract form with the two strands of V.'s temporal system: the hothouse and the street. As with all cases of binary thinking encountered in Pynchon, the two opposed extremes are seen as reductive and dangerous while the terrain in between, or the process of crossing between, is viewed as having potential both ethically and creatively. Several times Pynchon mentions 'the desire to cross from the zero to the one' – which is not to say that one extreme is replaced by the other, but that personal growth may be had in the crossing itself; just as the concept of change is written into any and all examples of *katabasis*: the individual that descends is not the same on returning. When Orpheus crosses over to the land of the dead he brings the living world with him in the form of his self and his animating instrument; but it works both ways, for when he returns to the surface, he brings back with him intimate knowledge of death. As Benny Profane ponders: "what goes on underground. Do we I wonder come out the same people at the other end?" (301).

At this stage of the novel, McClintic is only aware of the two extremes: he can flip, or he can flop. He tries to make sense of the flip/flop dynamic in conversation with Paola/Ruby: "what happened after the war? That war people flipped. But come '45, and they flopped. Here in Harlem they flopped. Everything got cool – no love, no hate, no worries, no excitement. Every once in a while, though, somebody flips back. Back to where he can love [...]. But you take a whole bunch of people flip at the same time and you've got a war" (293). The

micro level taken up to the macro – the individual (cell) up to society (the computer brain). But Sphere can also see the reverse process: ‘if a computer’s brain could go flip and flop, why so could a musician’s. As long as you were flop, everything was cool. But where did the trigger-pulse come from to make you flip?’ The fact that he is making the effort to understand, to actively ask questions of both himself and society, marks Sphere out as different from the fatalistic tendencies of the Whole Sick Crew. For all his soul searching, however, he cannot find his way beyond this binary model in which one extreme is swapped for another at the flick of a switch or ‘trigger-pulse.’ It will take his relationship with Paola Maijstral to reveal to him the syncretic possibilities within that system.

The clearest vision of transcendence in *V.* occurs during McClintic Sphere’s interaction with Paola. Despite both characters being surrounded by the cultural lassitude of the Whole Sick Crew, they maintain a vitality and integrity of artistic and philosophical expression that Pynchon develops as a paradigm of resistance against *V.*’s negative energies. Despite the aura of phoney mystique that Sphere’s fans generate around him by invoking the comparison with Charlie Parker, and by attributing to him the purely Dionysian qualities of ‘soul, the anti-intellectual and the rising rhythms of African nationalism,’ as both an artist and a human being Sphere’s philosophy remains constant – although he struggles for a long time to express that philosophy eloquently in the face of the cultural decadence surrounding him. Through his interaction with Paola, he is finally able to consolidate his musical philosophy with a broader sense of social responsibility: ‘there came to McClintic something it was time he got around to seeing: That the only way clear of the cool/crazy flipflop was obviously slow, frustrating and hard work. Love with your mouth shut, help without breaking your ass or publicizing it: Keep cool, but care’ (365) – a seemingly naïve and simplistic message, but one that grows in significance when we consider the amount of energy wasted by so many of Pynchon’s other characters in the quest to satisfy their complex paranoid fantasies.

The dynamic significance of Sphere’s interaction with Paola is reinforced by another example of Pynchon’s figural naming technique; in this instance Paola’s alternative alias ‘Ruby’ – which she adopts during her interaction with Sphere – recalls one of Thelonius Monk’s signature tunes of the period, entitled ‘Ruby, My Dear,’ which brings the jazz theme into the narrative once again. In this association Paola, in effect, becomes the artist’s muse, evoking further

reflections on some of the themes in Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, in which the eponym – a conceptual myth postulated by Graves, evoking numerous female deities – is considered as muse to the poet. Retrieving the poetic muse from an exile inflicted during the rise to prominence of the one God of reason, and thereby reviving the language of poetry and myth is, for Graves, the antidote to 'virtually all the ills to which contemporary mankind is heir.'<sup>199</sup> Chief among these ills is the dependence on absolutist reasoning and the insistence that the intellect is stronger than the instinct. Were mankind to worship the White Goddess as Graves did (the tri-partite entity that incorporates within her paradigm features of so many fertility goddesses) we would be able to retrieve the true and original language of poetry, which is based on knowledge of the seasons, of vegetative life and the rhythm of life-death-rebirth that she represents. It is significant in this sense that McClintic and Paola's interaction adopts a specifically pastoral feel as they transcend the pollution of New York city, both in a cultural sense and physically in their trip out of state. It is during that trip that McClintic appears finally to come to terms with the psychic and social contradictions that he has been battling with. As he says to Paola, "did you know I have been blowing a silly line all this time" (366). His last action in the novel is to sing 'to the trees of Massachusetts,' as if to underline his new-found Orphic role.

As McClintic is the embodiment of jazz music – the modern equivalent of Robert Graves' Orphic poet, communicating in a language that transcends absolutist reasoning – so Paola is the embodiment of the spirit of the White Goddess. Like many of Pynchon's characters, they are plural entities: McClintic speaks of individuality within the context of a social dynamic, through an artistic medium that encourages dialogue without fixed parameters – while Paola is the very essence of diversity in her role as the redemptive avatar in association with Graves' White Goddess. Whereas Stencil's psychological make-up becomes as scattered as his concept of V as he pursues her through the deep structure of history's grand narratives, Paola offers coherent diversity and the ability to look to both past and future, all the while maintaining a human concern for others in the real time of the present. As her father Fausto writes in his journal: 'Can you still look both ways, child? If so you stand at an enviable vantage' (331). And whereas Benny Profane is reduced to the status of an abstraction during his

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<sup>199</sup> John B. Vickery, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1972) xi.

wanderings through a horizontal plane of post-historic waste, McClintic Sphere, by contrast, is able to express a philosophy that seeks to draw humanity out of its apocalyptic drift, or the declension towards silence which is the ultimate product of entropy. The 'intolerable double vision' (468) at the heart of V's metaphysic that threatens to make obsolete the real of the present, has been drawn back to a golden mean, at least by these two.

Fausto Maijstral testifies in his journal that he witnessed Paola's participation, along with a group of other children, in the act of dismembering the Bad Priest/V (although we only discover it to have been Paola later in the novel with the revelation that she possesses the priest's ivory comb). If this is an echo of Orphic *sparagmos* then it raises some interesting questions: firstly, it associates Paola with the frenzied Maenads; and secondly, it associates the Bad Priest with Orpheus. But there are significant deviations from the myth here, notably in the fact that it is not the priest's actual, living body that is dismembered but only the inanimate parts that are removed: the prosthetic foot, the clockwork eye, the sapphire navel – the accoutrements of her reification up to this time. Nor is the dismemberment itself performed in an intoxicated frenzy; the children are calm and lucid, deliberate in their actions. It is not so much a scattering as a restoration or renewal of V's humanity at the last, uncontaminated now by any artificial accessories. The fact that she is then left to die does not make her an Orphic martyr either; it is a form of justice that is not without mercy. Restored to the purity of her human state, V can accept the extreme unction given to her by Fausto after the children have gone away.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* we have the more obviously Orphic character Tyrone Slothrop, pulled in one direction by the Apollonian controlling structures and their agents who try to condition him – as well as his own rational need to understand their motives and practices – while simultaneously being drawn irresistibly away, in many different directions, by the Dionysiac influences in the Zone: the witches, mediums and scryers. In this novel more than anywhere else in Pynchon we see people using alternative methods of understanding the world, having been denied the light of truth by those in positions of authority: 'They've stopped the inflow/outflow and here you are trapped inside Their frame with your wastes piling up [...]. Reminded, too late, of how dependent you are on Them, for neglect if not good will: Their neglect is your freedom. But when They do come on it's like

society-gig Apollos, striking the lyre' (694) – in so doing they drown out the voices that protest, challenge and appeal. Nonetheless, it is said of Slothrop that 'Signs will find him here in the Zone' (281): 'Those [...] with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity' (582). Such is the state of affairs for anybody who is bent 'from the official frequencies' either by choice or, more commonly, through necessity:

kicking endlessly among the plastic trivia, finding in each Deeper Significance and trying to string them all together like terms of a power series hoping to zero in on the secret and tremendous Function whose name, like the permuted names of God, cannot be spoken ... plastic saxophone reed *sounds of unnatural timbre*, shampoo bottle *ego-image*, Cracker Jack prize *one-shot amusement*, home appliance casing *fairing for winds of cognition*, baby bottles *tranquilization*, meat packages *disguise of slaughter*, dry-cleaning bags *infant strangulation*, garden hoses *feeding endlessly the desert* ... but to bring them together, in their slick persistence and our preterition ... to make sense out of, to find the meanest sharp sliver of truth in so much replication, so much waste ... (590)

Eddie Pensiero (whose name alludes to a lyric from Verdi's *Rigoletto*) reads shivers, Säure Bummer reads reefers, Miklos Thanatz reads whip scars, Geli Tripping reads tea leaves. Slothrop's own attempts to interpret the world around him are similarly haphazard and chaotic, vacillating from fatalism to extreme paranoia: 'So Slothrop is borne, afloat on the water-leas. Like signals set out for lost travellers, shapes keep repeating for him, Zonal shapes he will allow to enter but won't interpret, not any more. Just as well, probably' (567); and then later: 'Omens grow clearer, more specific. He watched flights of birds and patterns in the ashes of his fire, he reads the guts of trout he's caught and cleaned, scraps of lost paper, 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....' (623).

Ultimately in Slothrop's case the Dionysiac influences prevail, and he undergoes psychic *sparagmos* as a not-unwilling Orphic martyr reminiscent of Graves' sacrificial king as figure of Zagreus Dionysus in the Orphic mysteries. Once the controlling powers realise that the entity they helped to create, through conditioning and manipulation, is no longer willing to work for them – is, indeed,

now a threat – they attempt to pull the plug and, like Apollo with the prophesying head of Orpheus, silence their former asset. Slothrop's Orphic potential first comes to light during his sodium amytal-induced response to the Operation Black Wing interrogation. The chapter begins with Slothrop in a half-waking state, mentally running through permutations of the text 'you never did the Kenosha Kid,' prior to further dosage of the truth serum that the PISCES operatives hope will unlock his race anxieties (the Kenosha Kid appearing to be a composite paternal figure combining Slothrop's own father with Laszlo Jamf, the scientist who conducted the stimulus and response experiments on the infant Tyrone; more broadly, the figure stands for all hard-to-approach agents of control): 'And at the end of the mighty day in which he gave us in fiery letters across the sky all the words we'd ever need, words we today enjoy, and fill our dictionaries with, the meek voice of little Tyrone Slothrop, celebrated ever after in tradition and song, ventured to filter upward to the Kid's attention: "You never did '*the*,' Kenosha Kid!"' (61). Apollo's association with language and control is alluded to here – along with a challenge to this sense of comprehensiveness (or comprehension) by the Orphic who sees it as not at all definitive, but vulnerable to a host of alternative readings (all Slothrop has to do to undermine the idea of control through language is emphasise a different word each time). In a parenthetical narrative interjection that suggests other thoughts competing with Slothrop's preoccupation with the Kenosha Kid language game (perhaps as the latest dose of sodium amytal takes effect), we get a reference to '[t]he day of the Ascent and sacrifice' – a prophetic allusion to the firing of Weissman/Blicero's 00000 rocket that closes the novel nearly 700 pages later. These themes of challenge, prophecy, and silencing recur throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* and mark it out as a highly Orphic text.

As the vision moves on to the Roseland Ballroom, Slothrop, finding himself surrounded and overcome by Dionysian elements (vegetation, intoxication, darkness), becomes self-conscious to the point where the mouth harp that he packs everywhere (mouth harp being an African American synonym for harmonica), 'reverts to brass inertia. A weight. A jive accessory' (63). He is only too aware of the extent to which he is currently under Apollonian control and is therefore shamed and frightened by the forces of Dionysus that are present here. As Slothrop heads down the toilet to retrieve his mouth harp the abiding motif is the contrast between light and dark, white and black (foreshadowing the novel's

many examples of Manichaeian dynamics, including Enzian/Tchichérine), until we get an amalgamation of black and white in the figure of the Afro-Scandinavian Whappo, Crutchfield's current 'little pard,' who may be seen as a product of Slothrop's desire to eradicate the barriers separating Black and White culture – the conscious efforts he makes in that regard (as a white, college-educated jazz fan) are seen to have deep subconscious roots that belie his uncomfortably self-aware reaction in the Roseland Ballroom. Whappo wears a bandanna 'of the regulation magenta and green' (a ubiquitous colour-scheme in Pynchon, here representative of the Dionysian vine and its fruit?) and a top hat (emblem of Apollonian authority) which 'reflects the coming holocaust' (69). This section ends with the following interchange:

In the shadows, black and white holding in a panda-pattern across his face, each of the regions a growth or mass of scar tissue, waits the connection he's travelled all this way to see. [...]

Slothrop: Where is he? Why didn't he show? Who are you?

Voice: The Kid got busted. And you know me, Slothrop. Remember? I'm Never.

Slothrop (peering): *You*, Never? (A pause.) *Did* the Kenosha Kid? (71)

The fact that Slothrop returns to his own personal preoccupation with the Kenosha Kid despite his interrogators' attempts to steer him towards material productive to Operation Black Wing could simply be due to the diminishing effects of the sodium amytal; it feels significant nonetheless, particularly when considered alongside the fact that Slothrop's hallucinated journey begins, towards the end, to move away from racial division and towards harmony. Even at this early stage we can see that Slothrop will prove to be no easy mark for those seeking to control him. As Pointsman concedes, 'Slothrop is a strong imperturbable' (90).

Ultimately the attempt to silence Slothrop fails, as we see him resurface in the text, after his scattering/psychic dismemberment, on the sleeve of a 1960s era LP by an English rock band called The Fool, where he is billed as the harmonica and kazoo player and acknowledged in the liner notes of the album as 'a friend' (742). In this way, just as (in one telling of the Orphic myth) the river Helicon plunged underground rather than wash away the blood from the Maenad's hands, only to re-emerge in another place unsullied, Slothrop can be said to have escaped his own frenzied persecutors through who knows what

underground channels. He continues to participate as “friend” to the countercultural music scene and to persist against the threats and actions of those who would seek to silence him – in the same way that the Orphic myth itself has persisted over millennia (against logic and the light of reason). The picture on the album cover shows the band ‘posed, in the arrogant style of the early Stones, near an old rocket-bomb site, out in the East End, or South of the River. It is spring and French thyme blossoms in amazing white lacework across the cape of green that now hides and softens the true shape of the old rubble’ – further emphasising Slothrop’s association with Dionysian nature/fertility superseding the Apollonian civilization that created the bomb crater in the first place. There are strong hints in this passage relating Slothrop’s influence/legacy to Orphic figuration: ‘Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there’s no telling which of the Zone’s present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering.’ Whether The Fool’s harmonica/kazoo player is Slothrop or not matters less than the fact that versions of Slothrop, this particular type of Dionysian-Orphic figure, continue to exist into the present day in a Zone grown who knows how wide.

We find examples of these figures on the Santa Monica Freeway for Freaks at the end of the novel, ‘gibbering in at you from all sides, swarming in, rolling their eyes through the side windows, playing harmonicas and even *kazoos*, in full disrespect for the Prohibitions’ (755-6) and threatening to converge on the Orpheus Theatre. The manager, Richard M. Zhubb (Nixon), the novel’s final exemplar of Apollonian control, explains that queues outside the place, ‘especially for midnight showings, have fallen into a state of near anarchy’ because of what he calls “irresponsible use of the harmonica” (754). It is revealed that this situation has been going on ever since the theatre’s Bengt Ekerot / Maria Casarès festival – two actors famous for portraying Death, in *The Seventh Seal* and *Orphée* respectively (it is not, significantly, a Max von Sydow / Jean Marais festival – the challengers of Death in the same films). The theatre itself exists as a means of filtering through only so much of the Orphic voice as is tenable to those who seek to maintain authority – enough to give the public the illusion of the possibility for dissent, for transcendence, even to the point of leaving a certain transparency to the process. As Zhubb speciously goes on to explain: “We have to talk in *some* kind of code, naturally [...]. We always have. But none of the codes is that hard to break. Opponents have accused us, for just that reason, of

contempt for the people. But really we do it all in the spirit of fair play. We're not monsters. We know we have to give them *some* chance. We can't take hope away from them, can we?" (756). The only hope on offer here is one that is endlessly deferred, being filtered through the medium of Apollonian control and the system seems to be working: "At least it's not those tambourines," Zhubb mutters. "There aren't as many tambourines as last year, thank God" (756-7) – a hint that the threat from hippy culture has been mitigated at least (dating this episode to shortly after the 'summer of love' of 1967). But the Orpheus Theatre has not only this type of Apollo to contend with; it is also threatened (as is the entirety of western culture) by the 'Apollonian Dream' of Weissmann/Blicero – the annihilating Apollo – as the nuclear warning sirens start to sound, interrupting the interview with Zhubb. The fact that Zhubb/Nixon is threatened by these sirens as much as the Dionysian 'Freaks' around him suggests that Apollonian methods of control are ultimately self-defeating. Apollonian and Dionysian alike will be atomised by the 00000 rocket – a kind of Orphic resolution reduced to bitter mockery.

Slothrop's battle to maintain Orphic balance is seen as dissension that cannot be endured by the megalomaniacal forces seeking to control him. The ensuing Dionysiac reaction, while ensuring personal autonomy from those nefarious influences (Apollonian order unchecked) nevertheless forces him into a position that is exposed to the opposite extreme. His Orphic identity, therefore, is not a resolution between Apollo and Dionysus; he is (by the end of the novel at least) Orpheus as Dionysus – hence the accumulation of vegetation and fertility images that begin to surround him:

now, in the Zone, later in the day he became a crossroad, after a heavy rain he doesn't recall, Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural.... (626)

By this late stage, Slothrop has regained his mouth harp; it was found during his time wandering the Hartz mountains (Goethe's Brocken). Before this, he finds a set of bagpipes as if the spirits of this place are testing him: 'The imperial instrument was a cinch. In a week he mastered that dreamy tune Dick Powell sang in the movies, "In the Shadows Let Me Come and Sing to You" (622) – his

choice of song showing at once (and somewhat poignantly) his continued, if loosening, grip on mainstream American culture, combined with a premonition or an acknowledgement of the peripheral role ('in the shadows') he is to play from now on. His playing is acknowledged by whatever presences people this mountainside: 'By and by he began to notice that offerings of food were being left near the lean-to he'd put up [...]. He never saw who was leaving them. Either he was supposed to be a bagpiper's ghost, or just purely sound itself' (622). Are the offerings simple charity or ceremonial oblations? Either way, '[h]e quit playing the bagpipes, and next day he found the harp.' He leaves it to soak in a mountain stream: 'Through the flowing water, the holes of the old Hohner Slothrop found are warped one by one, squares being bent like notes, a visual blues being played by the clear stream' (622). Here we have a direct connection between music and the natural world, the very sound of his instrument being sculpted by the elements. Is the 'clear stream' a figural Hebrus, waiting to bear this Orphic voice on to its fatidic destiny? There is a further invocation of an Orphic lineage being carried on, figural Orpheuses through the ages, acknowledged amid a meditation on nature that also brings Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* into play:

There are harpmen and dulcimer players in all the rivers, wherever water moves. Like that Rilke prophesied,  
   And though Earthliness forget you,  
   To the stilled Earth say: I flow.  
   To the rushing water speak: I am.

It is still possible, even this far out of it, to find and make audible the spirits of lost harpmen. Whacking the water out of his harmonica, reeds singing against his leg, picking up the single blues at bar 1 of this morning's segment, Slothrop, just suckin' on his harp, is closer to being a spiritual medium than he's been yet, and he doesn't even know it.' (622)

This new-found harmony with nature and the elements comes at a heavy price for Slothrop: the man who up to now has been buffeted, randomly or by design, from one human connection to another suddenly finds himself devoid of human contact: 'He's kept alone. If others have seen him or his fire, they haven't tried to approach' (623). Even the food that is left for him is done so anonymously. Whether it be through awe, fear, or disgust, he is now avoided. Perhaps it is more pertinent to speak of metamorphosis here, rather than dismemberment: the Orphic figure becoming sound, becoming liquid. The Rilke quotation comes from

the final poem of *The Sonnets to Orpheus*, which also contains the following: 'Move through transformation, out and in. / What is the deepest loss that you have suffered? / If drinking is bitter, change yourself to wine.'<sup>200</sup> Slothrop has suffered a great deal of loss as a result of the actions of those wielding Apollonian control: the sense of his own identity during the formative years of his childhood; the relationship with his father; his closest friend Tantivy Mucker-Maffick ('when it's really counted, Tantivy hasn't ever let him down' (21)); Katje Borgesius; the child Bianca, corrupted by her fascist mother, whose corpse would become a mocking Eurydice-emblem. Drinking from the fountain of Apollo has indeed proved bitter, and his metamorphosis into a figure of Dionysus the natural – if alienating – consequence.

It could be said, in fact, that Slothrop begins to resemble a pre-Apollonian Orpheus, associated with the tri-partite Goddess and her earthly ceremonies that Graves believed to have existed prior to the imposition of the patriarchal sun-God Apollo onto the same rights. According to Graves, this Orpheus did not play the lyre but the reed or alder pipe<sup>201</sup> – a wind instrument more in keeping with the kazoo and harmonica that Slothrop is associated with, the sound being generated by the breath from one's own lungs which may then evoke the wind that impregnates the Goddess Night in the Orphic creation myth (the link between breath, music and wind will be explored later). Where McClintic Sphere was able to benefit from the influence of Paola Maijstral (note the wind reference in her surname), Slothrop, by contrast, finds himself alone. Anybody that might have figured as his own White Goddess, or even satisfy his 'Eurydice obsession' (472) proves to be inadequate: Katje Borgesius is too closely associated with Their controlling apparatuses, and by the time she is able to forge her own escape it is too late to help Slothrop; the Zone witch Geli Tripping is irrevocably allied to the forces of Dionysus, and is too preoccupied with her lover Vaslav Tchitcherine in any case.

Whereas McClintic Sphere is able, with the help of his White Goddess Paola/Ruby, to draw the 'intolerable double vision' of the Dionysus/Apollo,

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<sup>200</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies & The Sonnets to Orpheus*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage International, 2009) 191. (The translation of Rilke I am using would obviously not have been available to Pynchon at the time he was writing *Gravity's Rainbow* – let alone to his character Weissmann/Blicero, who takes a copy with him to Südwest Afrika in the 1920s.).

<sup>201</sup> Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Vol.1 (London: Folio Society, 2003) 114.

flip/flop, crazy/cool binary system into some kind of workable focus – at least to the degree that he feels confident in the significance of his art, from an individual as well as a social standpoint – Slothrop has no choice but to relinquish the Apollonian side of the equation in order to maintain his ‘silver chances for song.’ *Against the Day* returns to the theme of Orphic resolution and does so with added complexity. One of the clearest examples occurs at the culmination of “Dope” Breedlove’s discussion of Anarchist theory with the travelling insurrectionist Wolf Tone O’Rooney (already mentioned in chapter two). In response to Breedlove’s comment that ‘Anarchist organization’ is a self-contradictory phrase, O’Rooney says:

“Yet I’ve noticed the same thing when your band plays—the same amazing social coherence, as if you all shared the same brain.”  
 “Sure,” agreed “Dope,” “but you can’t call that organization.”  
 “What do you call it?”  
 “Jass.” (417)<sup>202</sup>

Dionysian anarchy and Apollonian organisation seem to be reconciled in this particular art form, or at least this is what Breedlove is aiming for in his music (jazz in *Against the Day* is further explored in Chapter Two of this thesis).

The Orphic references in *Against the Day* become more frequent in the latter stages of the novel as syncretic themes start to become more and more a factor. This is particularly true of chapter 64 – at 51 pages the longest in this huge novel – in which several characters from different strands of the narrative converge at an anarchist commune in the Pyrenees having broken free from their respective controlling influences: Yashmeen from the T.W.I.T; Cyprian Latewood from Derrick Theign; Ratty McHugh and Coombs De Bottle from Whitehall, etc. They have come into possession of a coded map outlining the Balkan geo-political situation and annotated with cryptic messages prophetically hinting at the inevitability of general war in Europe; it also highlights a ‘critical line’ cutting across Thrace, which the group take to mean Renfrew/Werfner’s ‘Interdikt’ weapon. They realise they must disable the Interdikt and so they join up with Professor Sleepcoat, a musicologist who is mounting a university-funded expedition into that region with the triple objective of compiling and recording local songs and dances, to discover why the Lydian mode is absent from Balkan folk

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<sup>202</sup> I reproduce the quotation here for the sake of convenience.

music, and to investigate rumours of a neo-Pythagorean cult. There is a sense of urgency to Sleepcoat's project, 'as if somehow the work had to be done quickly, before each people's heritage of song was somehow lost for good' (1057). With mobile recording equipment newly available for such endeavours the timing is propitious; however, the first music of interest that the professor hears after the group's arrival in the Thracian hills – a call-and-response song between a boy and girl – must be committed to memory as he finds himself alone and without the recording device. Yet so affecting does he find the music, so memorable the musical dialogue between the two parties, that this poses no problem: 'for the duration of the twilight the two voices sang back and forth across the little valley, sometimes antiphonal, sometimes together in harmony. They were goatherds, and the words were in Shop dialect sung to a Phrygian melody he had never heard before, and knew he would never hear again, not this way, unmediated and immune to Time' (1061). The beauty of this song evincing young love causes a nostalgic response in the aging musicologist that inevitably encompasses thoughts of loss and death and in which the mythical Thracian bard himself naturally figures: he 'was able to hear lying just beneath an intense awareness of loss, as if the division between the singers were more than the width of a valley, something to be crossed through an undertaking at least as metaphysical as song, as if Orpheus might once have sung it to Eurydice in Hell, calling downward through intoxicant fumes, across helically thundering watercourses, echoing among limestone fantastically sculptured over unnumbered generations by Time personified as a demiurge and servant of Death' (1062). If there is an element of sentimentality in this (and there often is with Pynchon) then it is neatly pricked by Yashmeen later in response to the Professor's preoccupation with the Orphic backwards glance:

"He couldn't quite bring himself to believe in her desire to come back with him to live in the upper world again. He had to turn around and look, just to make sure she was coming."

"Typical male insecurity," Yashmeen sniffed. (1062)

This courtship-in-song between the two young Thracian lovers is reminiscent of another scene with Orphic overtones in *Gravity's Rainbow*, part of the section detailing Tchitcherine's former 'exile' to the remote Seven Rivers region of Kyrgyzstan as a member of the New Turkic Alphabet initiative – a Soviet

drive to impose a standardized writing system on the tribes of the Steppe. Tchitcherine, however, has no interest in the work and is consumed by obsessive hatred for his African half-brother Enzian and is paranoid as to the reasons why he has been ordered out to the Kyrgyz plains in the first place. Tchitcherine and his local aide travel to a remote village to write down a song performed by a figure called 'the Aqyn' (a wandering Kazakh singer) which tells of a phenomenon known as the "Kirghiz Light." While there, and before they are allowed access to the aqyn, they witness an 'ajtys' – an improvised singing-duel in which humour and light teasing play a big role – between a boy and girl accompanied by 'qobyz and dombra strummed and plucked,' the whole village gathered around to enjoy the spectacle. We get the sense that the success of the courtship between the two will depend on the quality of the song, the crowd voicing immediate assessment of each verse with either cheers of approval or murmurs of disinterest. There are rules to this game: 'you trade four-line stanzas, first, second, and last lines all have to rhyme though the lines don't have to be any special length, just breathable. Still, it's tricky' (356). We hereby get a vivid representation of the dialogic principle previously mentioned in relation to jazz music, in which exploration in the lived moment, response and anticipation, combine with a relative degree of structure to prevent expression from descending into chaotic nonsense. This particular performance appears to be going badly at first, the couple's courtship and the very peace of the village in jeopardy; the humour begins to take a gentler turn, however, and the girl ends the interchange with an invocation of the syncretic power of music:

Did I hear you mention a marriage?  
 Here there has been a marriage—  
 This warm circle of song,  
 Boisterous, loud as any marriage.... (357)

It would be natural to assume that Tchitcherine represents another of the novel's Apollonian agents of control, out here to impose order through language – after all, he naturally pits himself with gusto against the darkness of his half-brother Enzian, whose very existence the Russian believes to be a threat to his Soviet career (rather than other more likely scenarios that could lead to official attention being directed his way: i.e., his relationship with a politically linked courtesan; his

rumoured connection with IG Farben representative Wimpe). In his mind this personal vendetta finds legitimacy as ‘History and Geopolitics move them [he and Enzian] surely into confrontation’ (342). It is inevitable, guided by forces more powerful than either of them, therefore it is right. However, Tchitcherine’s personal psychology is more complicated than that:

Tchitcherine has a way of getting together with undesirables, sub rosa enemies of order, counterrevolutionary odds and ends of humanity: he doesn’t plan it, it just happens, he is a giant supermolecule with so many open bonds available at any given time, and in the drift of things ... in the dance of things ... howsoever ... others latch on, and the pharmacology of the Tchitcherine thus modified, its onwardly revealed side-effects, can’t necessarily be calculated ahead of time (346)

The chemical analogy here extends to include language later in the same chapter: ‘How alphabetic is the nature of molecules. [...] one finds Committees on molecular structure which are very similar to those back at the NTA plenary session. “See: how they are taken out from the coarse flow – shaped, cleaned, rectified, just as you once redeemed your letters from the lawless, the mortal streaming of human speech”’ (355). However, the sense that alphabetical ‘formulas’ are only useful up to a point in capturing meaning is not lost on the Russian officer as he listens to the singing-duel: ‘The boy and girl go on battling with their voices – and Tchitcherine understands, abruptly, that soon someone will come out and begin to write some of these down in the New Turkic Alphabet he helped frame ... and this is how they will be lost’ (357). He is sensitive enough to understand that no matter how stringent the system of control under which a verbal sentence, a song, or a human life acts, there will always be something that escapes ‘the chain-link fields of the Word’ (705), always an element of darkness that escapes the light of reason. And what of gesture, the look in the eye? What of the pauses, the omissions, the silences that have meaning? ‘The great silences of Seven Rivers have not yet been alphabetized, and perhaps never will be’ (340) (We have discussed the problematics of musical transcription in chapter two in relation to jazz music). Perhaps it is this sensitivity on Tchitcherine’s part that later renders him particularly susceptible (one might say willingly so) to the spells of the Dionysian Zone-witch Geli Tripping, which render him oblivious during the encounter with Enzian, his brother and nemesis, when it finally takes place: ‘This

is magic. Sure – but not necessarily fantasy’ (735) – the two men simply exchange cigarettes and go their separate ways.

At this earlier stage of his story, before the years spent in the Zone, Tchitcherine, intoxicated by the forces of history, still cherishes his vendetta. He transcribes the aqyn’s song, knowing that in so doing part of its meaning will be lost – because he has no interest in the song *as song*, only in the valuable information it contains regarding the Kirghiz Light and where to find it. At nine stanzas of six lines each, the song itself is one of Pynchon’s longest. It speaks of a primordial energy that has the power to renew; that predates language and song:

In the ancient tales it is told  
In a time that is older than Qorqyt,  
Who took from the wood of Šyrghaj  
The first qobyz, and the first song—  
It is told that a land far distant  
Is the place of the Kirghiz Light (357)

Qorqyt is clearly a mythical figure in this region comparable to Orpheus, with the qobyz as his lyre, and there is another reference to a legendary bard: ‘a thing I have seen so awesome / Even Džambul could not sing it’ (357), attesting to Orphic figuration through the ages in this culture. The song goes on to say that the Light may be found in ‘a place where words are unknown / [...] And the face of God is a presence / Behind the mask of the sky,’ for

If the place were not so distant,  
If words were known and spoken,  
Then the God might be a gold ikon,  
Or a page in a paper book.  
But it comes as the Kirghiz Light—  
There is no other way to know it (358)

This is clearly a religious experience then, but one distanced from the official monotheism of the region: ‘For I tell you that I have seen It / In a place which is older than darkness / Where even Allah cannot reach’ (358). Such light is older than the Apollonian civilizing light of language and reason, and its mysterious import is somehow tied in with that of the song itself. We get no sense of the affective power of the song, only Tchitcherine’s cold stenographic rendering of

the lyrics – which is only one aspect of what the aqyn is communicating. The Russian is taking advantage of the wandering singer for purely egotistical reasons; his guide confirms the onus placed onto the aqyn by Tchitcherine's request: "He'll sing about it. [...] He'd betray his profession if he didn't" (356). It is unclear what Tchitcherine hopes to gain from experiencing this phenomenon, but he certainly desires some kind of revelation or epiphany – perhaps something to replace the hatred that defines him, or, on the other hand, insight into how the vendetta will be consummated. Perhaps it is the desire to be born again, as the lyrics in the song suggest: 'a man cannot be the same, / after seeing the Kirghiz Light [...] this light must change us to children' – but 'if you would not be born, / [...] the Light will never find you' (358-9). Ultimately, whatever he hoped to gain will be denied him: 'Tchitcherine will reach the Kirghiz Light, but not his birth. He is no aqyn, and his heart was never ready' (359). Despite his sensitivity, he is no Orphic figure: 'He will not come to love this sky or plain, these people, their animals. Nor look back' (339).

As would be expected of a musicologist, *Against the Day's* Professor Sleepcoat understands that mere stenographic transcription is not enough – hence the recording equipment. The fact that he is forced to rely on memory in the scene quoted above, and yet feels no concern at this, is perhaps more significant still. In this way he enters into the song as an active participant, not merely a passive recorder, and the emotional response that the experience triggers is indicative of this. Orphic correspondences continue as Sleepcoat's expedition, with Yashmeen, Cyprian and Reef in tow, heads further into Thrace towards the mysterious Interdikt. They hear of a potential location for the weapon at a wedding on St. Tryphon's day – named after a Phrygian martyr of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century associated with wine and fertility – which coincides with a ritual pruning of the vines. Sleepcoat has taken the group along to investigate 'a variant of the *ruchenitsa* wedding dance, rumoured to exhibit syncopations hitherto unknown on the underlying 7/8' (1063). During the festivities '[e]verybody was drinking homemade Dimyat and Misket out of casks and dancing to a small local band made up of tuba, accordion, violin, and clarinet.' Orphic/Dionysian elements abound here: a Phrygian martyr with Dionysian associations (the Greek rites of Dionysus are thought to be of Phrygian origin<sup>203</sup>); the vine-pruning ceremony;

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<sup>203</sup> Graves, *The Greek Myths* 109.

intoxication; music that blends unorthodox elements into a unifying expression – all in the name of love. The pruning of the vines is symbolic of Dionysian (and, by extension, Orphic) dismemberment; hence Graves: '[the vine] is the tree of joy, exhilaration and wrath'<sup>204</sup> (In *Gravity's Rainbow* Džabajev and his circle perform the extreme act of injecting themselves with wine as a symbolic rejection of Apollonian control (743). Furthermore, as already suggested the vine and its fruit could be one explanation for the ubiquitous green and magenta colour motif in Pynchon's work). The fact that St. Tryphon was a Christian martyr need not muddy the Orphic theme, as Christ himself has often been described as an Orphic figure – perhaps most succinctly by Thomas Carlyle: 'Our highest Orpheus walked in Judaea, eighteen hundred years ago: his sphere-melody, flowing in wild native tones, took captive the ravished souls of men.'<sup>205</sup> The bride at the wedding happens to be the sister-in-law of one Gabrovo Slim – whom Cyprian had assisted at Salonica earlier in the novel – and it is he who now returns the favour by helping them in the search for the Interdikt. This random meeting, whereby exactly the right person to help is encountered by chance at exactly the right time, is just one of many almost miraculous coincidences in Pynchon – several of which occasions, including this one, being facilitated in some way by music.

As Yashmeen, Reef and Cyprian take their leave of Sleepcoat he expresses his concerns about finding any Lydian material in the region: "Maybe there is none anymore. Maybe it's gone forever. Maybe that gap in the musical continuum, that silence, is a first announcement of something terrible, of which this structural silence is only an inoffensive metaphor" (1064). The professor mentions that the neo-Pythagorean cult, that he also has an interest in, "regard the Lydian with particular horror," tending to favour the Phrygian mode which "happens to coincide with a lyre tuning that some attribute to Pythagoras, and may be traceable all the way back to Orpheus himself" (1056). To favour a mode associated with the spiritual father of your sect is understandable, but the reason for such outright rejection of the Lydian mode is less clear. Sleepcoat detects an element of censorship concerning the mode persisting in this region, "[a]s if it were still forbidden, perhaps even feared. The interval which [the] awkwardly

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<sup>204</sup> Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977) 183.

<sup>205</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Times of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2002) 269.

unflatted B makes with F was known to the ancients as ‘the devil in the music’” (1055). Such prejudicial hostility towards one particular musical mode seems out of keeping with the principles of Orphic philosophy – which, as we have seen, is syncretic in nature and seeks to reconcile rather than oppose. Nor is dissonance or any other type of unorthodoxy in music inconsistent with Orphic expression. Sleepcoat seems to be suggesting that such opposition is indicative of a broader hostility in the region which is about to escalate into open war – as though ‘the devil in the music’ had been tolerated until now. If the monastic order has become embroiled in that same climate of hostility, perhaps that community has allowed itself to drift away from the golden mean of Orphic resolution as a result of Pythagorean thought diluting the purity of the Orphic. The reconciling of the Apollonian and the Dionysian under the aegis of Orpheus is certainly no simple endeavour and must always involve an element of tension – perhaps this is what is meant by ‘the devil in the music.’ But it is this very dynamism that engenders the life of creativity, and to have that dynamic tension checked augurs no good.

When the group finally stumble on the monastery (again, it seems as though providence is at work) Cyprian decides to stay, despite the looming conflict in that region. The hegumen Father Ponko explains the origins of the order: “At some point Orpheus, never comfortable in any kind of history that could not be sung, changed identities, or slowly blended with another demigod, Zalmoxis, who some in Thrace believe was the only true God. According to Herodotus [...] Zalmoxis had once been a slave of Pythagoras himself, who upon receiving his freedom went on to pile up a good-size fortune, returned here to Thrace, and became a great teacher of Pythagorean doctrine” (1075). The mention of ‘the scent of myrtle in the deepening dusk’ in the grounds of the monastery associate this place with death, the myrtle being associated with the thirteenth of the sacral months,<sup>206</sup> and the fact that initiates are referred to as ‘Brides of Night’ reinforce the connection. However, death here needs to be considered in the light of Orphic creationism. Nothing here is without duality; myrtle is also symbolic of germination and the renewal of life, and each initiates’ ‘marriage’ to the goddess Night is meant to evoke the act of creation perpetuating itself. According to Graves, the product of this union is Eros which sets the universe in motion.<sup>207</sup> This last concept would be likely to appeal to the romantic-

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<sup>206</sup> Graves, *The Greek Myths* 369.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

mindful Cyprian, but it is not enough to account for his decision to stay at the monastery. It starts to dawn on all concerned (first Cyprian, the others later) that the real reason they have been traipsing all over Thrace is not the Interdikt at all (the importance of which grows less and less) but the journey itself. As soon as they reach the monastery Cyprian understands that his journey is complete, and what it has revealed to him is that the others must go on alone – must, significantly, go back. He stays behind in this land of death to act as counterweight for their return to life, the promise of their life together. This is his own personal yet selfless act of love, engendered by his marriage to Night: “one seeks to become not a bride at all really, but a kind of sacrifice, an offering, to Night” (1077).

Yashmeen and Reef, with their baby Ljubica, retreat West as hostilities break out, dodging Serbian, Greek, Bulgarian and Turkish armies, and falling in with various flows of refugees through ‘pomegranate orchards’ and ‘wine country’ – symbols of Dionysus. Later they pass through a region of ‘beech trees leafless in the rising winds’ (1089) – the beech being associated with prosperity, divination and (in Graves) with literature. All these vegetation images are significant to the Orphic theme. The medieval Welsh poem *Cad Goddeu* or ‘Battle of the Trees’ figures prominently in Graves’ book where it is seen as an encoding of ancient pagan rituals and beliefs and in which the trees themselves, enchanted by the hero and magician Gwydion and mobilised for war against the god of the underworld, represent characters of the ogham alphabet. In *The Greek Myths* Graves proposes that prior to the introduction of the Phoenician alphabet into Greece there had existed a system of notation whereby the thirteen consonants were represented by twigs cut from different trees, one for each of the months of the sacral year, and that ancient gallic alphabets reflect the influence of such a system having migrated westwards from Greece by way of Spain.<sup>208</sup> In this process the image of the tree becomes a hieroglyph linking language and time, in which is bound up all the associations corresponding to that particular month (the myrtle, for example, corresponds to the last month of the year, hence the association with death). As a genus not indigenous to Greece, the beech itself does not fit into this ancient system; it does, however, figure prominently in the

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<sup>208</sup> Graves, *The Greek Myths* 177.

Cad Goddeu as representative of the written word in general ('beech' and 'book' do in fact share an etymological root):

The tops of the beech-tree  
     Have sprouted of late,  
 Are changed and renewed  
     From their withered state.

When the beech prospers,  
     Though spells and litanies  
 The oak-tops entangle,  
     There is hope for trees.<sup>209</sup>

Graves explains that the 'oak-tops' here most likely refer to the 'ancient poetic mysteries,' the significance of which has become darkened or misunderstood over the centuries.<sup>210</sup> The fact that the beeches surrounding Reef and Yashmeen on this part of their journey have yet to sprout suggests they still have some way to go on their retreat from the land of the dead; nevertheless, beeches, even leafless ones, represent hope of prosperity and enlightenment for this young family, and indicate that they are heading in the right direction: away from the myrtle-scented grounds of the monastery that Cyprian now calls home.

Having established the hieroglyphic link between nature, language and time, the story of Orpheus charming the trees with the sweetness of his music takes on a different significance – one which offers a model for the dialectic of language and nature that Dwight Eddins sees in Orphic song: 'If words can point to an idealized origin that not only predates but transcends the use of words, they can become the means of return to a redeeming sense of this origin [...]. This transcendental function is enhanced when the words become part of Orphic song. [...] To sing, in the fullest and most committed sense, is to experience some sort of unity with [the nonverbal language of primordial being] and to overcome the

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<sup>209</sup> Graves, *The White Goddess* 38.

<sup>210</sup> See also Rilke, *The Sonnets to Orpheus* Part One, XVII:

'Branch upon branch crowds close,  
 none of them free....  
 Keep climbing higher...higher...

Still, though, they break. Yet this  
 top one bends finally  
 into a lyre.'

alienation and divisive competition that unadorned speech tends to foster.’<sup>211</sup> In tandem with this communion with nature, the power of Orpheus has also been seen as a civilizing force: in charming the trees, language is mobilized as a medium for the ‘interchange of nature and thought [...] what we are calling myth;’<sup>212</sup> in animating the rocks, society is constructed. As Sewell says of poetry as nature: ‘language itself comes up out of the earth, as it were, bearing its own continuity with the natural forms and at the very point of translation of those forms into the social ones.’<sup>213</sup> Carlyle sees in this an essential aspect of human civilization: ‘Was it not the still higher Orpheus, or Orpheuses, who, in past centuries, by the divine Music of Wisdom, succeeded in civilising Man? [...] Not only was Thebes built by the Music of an Orpheus; but without the music of some inspired Orpheus was no city ever built, no work that man glories in ever done.’<sup>214</sup> However, the powers of reason and inspiration, intellect and emotion must be kept in balance, lest one extreme swamp the other. The ultimate result of this process is totalitarianism on the one hand, and anarchy on the other. What is required is a broadening of rationality to encompass dreams.

In the final chapter of *Against the Day* we find Kit Traverse yo-yoing across the continent (like a scaled-up equivalent of Benny Profane’s back-and-forth drifting in *V.*) physically and psychically. Figuring in this section is a dream-vision that Kit has of a metaphysical Lake Baikal ‘or [...] some chill boundary at least that pure and uncompromising’ (1214), with an enigmatic city (possibly Shambhala) on the far shore:

The other side of this “Baikal,” he understood, was accessible only to those of intrepid spirit. To go there and come back would be like living through the end of the world. From this precise spot along the shoreline it was possible to “see” on the far shore a city, crystalline, redemptive. There was music, mysteriously audible, tonal yet deliberately broken into by dissonances—demanding, as if each note insisted on being attended to.

The Orphic theme is implicit here (Kit’s association with Orpheus will be made more explicit later), but by this stage the reader is alert to such correspondences: the metaphysical barrier, the desire to cross over and to return, music

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<sup>211</sup> Eddins, 152.

<sup>212</sup> Sewell, 187.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>214</sup> Carlyle, 269.

incorporating Apollonian and Dionysiac elements.<sup>215</sup> Added to this is the insistence on active, as opposed to passive, listening. Is Kit Traverse intrepid spirit enough? His surname suggests he might be. By this late stage of the story Kit has joined the Italian air force as an aerodynamics specialist, working on aircraft design improvements that enable more effective dive-bombing for use in the fight against the Austrian invading force. However, in his fraternization with the proto-fascist pilot Renzo and the realisation that his work is also being utilised against striking munitions workers, he begins to see just how far removed he has become from the idealistic youth who had wanted to improve the world with Dr Tesla earlier in the novel. Kit by now is in the process of losing his own Eurydice (Dally Rideout) due to his drift into distraction, fatalism and disillusionment, and is explicitly associated with Orpheus in a passage detailing one of Renzo's nose-dive test runs:

They were soon going so fast that something happened to time, and maybe they'd slipped for a short interval into the Future, the Future known to Italian Futurists, with events superimposed on one another, and geometry straining irrationally away in all directions including a couple of extra dimensions as they continued hellward, a Hell that could never contain Kit's abducted young wife, to which he could never go to rescue her, which was actually Hell-of-the-future, taken on into its functional equations, stripped and fire-blasted of everything emotional or accidental... (1203)

The sensation of 'pure velocity' appeals to Kit's fatalism at this point, especially sitting in an instrument of death. The verticality of the movement inspires the feeling of 'events superimposed,' echoing the simultaneous note-sounding of the struck chord from the Candlebrow section earlier in the novel. Any kind of special insight that might be gained from this vertiginous perspective is, however, deferred for the time being as the immediate response to the experience takes the form of a particularly sardonic song ('Dive-bombin in-to the / Ci-ty! / Golly, what fun it / Can be') – it is not clear whether the song comes from Kit (perhaps a product of his current self-loathing) or from the narrative voice. The juxtaposition of the personal (Kit's relationship with Dally is in jeopardy) and the impersonal (the terrified crowds of people scattered by dive-bombing); the collapsing of

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<sup>215</sup> An allusion to Bunyan's Christian and the Celestial City of *The Pilgrim's Progress* may also be detected in this passage – Pynchon once again allowing the religious overtones to proliferate.

traditional linear time without the sense of ethical responsibility that it might have engendered (the aeroplane pulls out of its dive having wreaked its havoc); the prophetic realisation of the fascist state to come ('Hell-of-the-future') – all of this conspires to create in Kit a deep psychic confusion and disgust with himself and the world, exemplified by the cruel lyrics in the song we get here. His crisis of identity threatens to overwhelm him until he utilises a meditative technique learned from his time in Tuva, 'where he had heard such unaccountably double-jointed singing' – which involves 'making down in his throat a single low guttural tone, as deep as he could reach, as long as breath would allow [...]. After he had done this for long enough he began to feel himself enter a distinctly different state of affairs' (1214).

The vocal technique Kit uses as part of his meditation, and the vision that it eventually leads to, both stem from his experience travelling through the Tunguska region of inner Asia as an envoy to establish links with the Tungus tribes on behalf of British intelligence (naturally he has become embroiled in this enterprise quite by chance). Once again, it is not the purpose of the journey that ends up being significant (Kit never makes it to the tribes) but the journey itself that promises revelation for those open to it: it is 'a kind of conscious Being, a living deity who does not wish to engage with the foolish or the weak, and hence will try to dissuade you. It insists on the furthest degree of respect' (859). In order to reach the tribal valleys he has been told by a local mystic that he must pass through a natural structure known as the Prophet's Gate: 'The moment he passed through the Gate, Kit was not so much deafened as blinded by a mighty release of sound—a great choral bellowing over the desert, bringing, like a brief interruption of darkness in the daytime, a distinct view now, in this dusk, of sunlit terrain descending in a long gradient directly ahead to a city whose name, though at the moment denied him, was known the world over' (865). We must take this as a vision of Shambhala that Kit is not yet ready for; the 'choral bellowing' powerful enough to provoke a synesthetic reaction. The sight fades as he passes through the Gate and continues his journey, but the experience has left its mark: 'Since the visitation at the stony Tunguska, he had noticed that the angle of his vision was wider and the narrow track of his life branching now and then into unsuspected side trails' (882) – such heightened sensory awareness and loosening of structure can be considered Dionysian. Having progressed further into the region with the assistance of a 'talking' reindeer – another

Dionysian/Orphic connection – Kit and his companion Dwight Prance (a British intelligence language expert) encounter a group of shepherds at dawn, one of whom is performing a type of ‘unearthly guttural singing’ (883):

The man singing was standing alone, but after a while Kit heard a flute accompanying him. He looked around, but there was no flute-player, no other musicians of any kind, in fact. He looked at the singer more closely and could see lip movements that matched up with the sound of the flute. It was all coming from the one voice.

“They call it *borbanngadyr*,” Prance explained. “Perhaps shamans are not the only ones who know how to be in two states at once.”

This type of polyphonic overtone singing is a perfect model for how we have been thinking about Orphic resolution (in Magyar “*borban*” translates to “in wine”) and a suitable emblem for Pynchon’s whole syncretistic agenda. The Orphic credentials of this scene are further emphasised with the addition of elemental influence: where we had water creating a ‘visual blues’ with Slothrop’s mouth harp (a synesthetic image akin to Kit’s audio-vision of Shambhala), here we have the primordial wind in tandem with the human voice: ‘As Kit rode away over a patch of open steppe, the wind came up, and presently he heard the peculiar, bass throat-singing again. A shepherd was standing angled, Kit could tell, precisely to the wind, and the wind was blowing across his moving lips, and after a while it would have been impossible to say which, the man or the wind, was doing the singing’ (884).

Kit will later try to replicate this type of Orphic singing as part of the meditative technique that shortly afterwards will inspire his Lake Baikal vision – a mixture of memory and longing – the first of several we are told which eventually cause a portal to appear, ‘a sort of framed shadow suspended in the empty air’ (1215), that transports him to the room of the enigmatic philatelist Lord Overlunch. In this peculiar scene, which mixes fantasy with reality, dream with consciousness, Overlunch is poring over an album of Shambhala postage stamps, ‘issued in complete sets beginning shortly after the Treaty of Berlin (1878).’ He displays one depicting a marketplace crowded with people, one of whom appears to be Kit – much to his amazement – seemingly proving that Kit had in fact been there, before his own birth. Overlunch explains that the Kit-figure on the stamp had only recently appeared, suggesting that something must have happened to facilitate the change, to cause a kind of butterfly effect through

space-time. It can only be Kit's movement out of fatalism, inspired by the simultaneously double-voiced singing of the Tuvan shepherd, the 'tonal' yet 'dissonant' music of his Lake Baikal vision and the meditative technique he is able to develop thereby, that has engendered this psychic bi-location. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tchitcherine fails to gain the insights promised by the aqyn because he is not ready to be reborn in the Kirghiz Light; Kit, by contrast, has finally been granted access to his Shambhala – even if it is a Shambhala of the soul – because he has proved himself ready.

In *The Orphic Voice* Elizabeth Sewell outlines the factors leading to the relative success or failure of any Orphic enterprise:

There are degrees of authority and confidence in Orphic voices. The least, those who get into this line by accident or almost by misadventure, can only reflect the dualism, the broken vision which unfortunately they approve of and foster. Greater ones struggle to reassert a unity but fall short for various reasons. The greatest Orphic voices of all stand, as their minor fellows do, against their period's wrong-headedness and disharmony; but it must not be thought that they are themselves split, as the first group is, or that they struggle to heal the divergencies in the thought of their age. They know of no such split, and they are right, for it is a chimera, a nonbeing. They do not argue against dualism, they utter and exemplify unity.<sup>216</sup>

Where does Pynchon fit into this? He certainly cannot be counted among the least of Orphic voices. Sewell's post-logical methodology seeks to break down the barriers between art, science and nature – and in many ways Pynchon can be said to share that desire. In fact, the oft-repeated description of Pynchon as an "encyclopaedic" writer seems to conform to Sewell's post-logic (which is to say Orphic) philosophy: 'The true postlogician [...] will be interested in everything and will go round observing the unconscious poetry that exists in all operations and occupations.'<sup>217</sup> But one hesitates to place Pynchon among the greatest Orphic voices (at least as they are defined here) because he is also concerned with the every-day political reality of socio-economic dualism and the imbalance of power; he is no idealist in that regard, and so his 'struggle to reassert a unity' does indeed often fall short – or, more accurately, he *depicts* a struggle that has not yet yielded

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<sup>216</sup> Sewell, 181.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

to resolution. Yet the Orphic voice remains a persistent presence in Pynchon's work, and Orphic figures, major and minor, continue to make themselves heard.

## II

'Who are you trying to kid? Listen to the wind' (V. 148)

The wind is a favourite motif in Pynchon's writing, one that is deployed for a variety of reasons – whether it be pathetic fallacy, physiological agent, or communicative metaphor – and is often encountered side by side with, or metaphorically associated with, music. The wind is frequently described in musical terms or as actually having musical qualities; it acts as an elemental conveyor of messages, carrying sounds further than they otherwise would have travelled (a well-known phenomenon); the animating influence of its energy is described from the physical point of view as well as the spiritual; and the many wind-based images that Pynchon uses encourage meditation on a wide range of metaphorical insights relating to communication, inspiration and metaphysics. All this to the point where the wind seems to have personality of its own, and something to say. The wind-music connections in Pynchon range from the oblique to the explicit – with examples of the latter often involving the wind, or a quality thereof, being depicted as music: 'Mason had begun in recent days hearing in the Wind entire orchestral Performances' (*M&D* 173) – and vice versa: 'the sound of a Bondelswaartz pennywhistle, insubstantial as wind' (V. 232). The wind is often encountered in close proximity to music: 'the wind from the river played chilly about their mouths and the wheeze of the band frolicked about their ears' (V. 203); the bilateral applicability of the verbs here – 'play,' 'frolic,' 'wheeze' – suggest the interchangeability of the elemental medium and the musical expression. The frequency with which these comparisons and conflation occur in the novels is such that it gets to the point where the representation of one medium naturally elicits a reflection on the other, even in places where the link is not being made as explicitly as in these examples.

The wind-music comparison is not rare in literature, or indeed in other artforms including music itself; both are ineffable, insubstantial, invisible – unless

observed through the effects of their energy or animating power. Additionally, the movement of air is, of course, key to many physiological aspects of music such as the singing voice and brass/woodwind instruments. Pynchon's own representation of the wind is not without its ambiguities. On the one hand, for example, the wind is a medium for messages: 'the wind sweeps in and down and everything can be heard' (V. 323); but it can also be an impediment to communication: 'Name indistinct for the wind off the harbour' (V. 334). It can be portentous: 'Destiny waits, a darkness latent in the texture of the summer wind' (*GR* 162); 'an edged wind off the harbour announcing something dark' (*BE* 445) – yet it can also feel arbitrary and alien: 'is the wind any part of us? Has it anything at all to do with us?' (V. 322); 'The Wind, brutal and pure, is there for its own reasons, and human life, any life, counts for close to nought' (*M&D* 107). Yet the persistence of the connections that are made here between wind, communication and music is such that any in-depth study of music in Pynchon's work must acknowledge it.

The images and metaphors themselves range from the secular to the spiritual and are reminiscent of a wide range of literary influence: Biblical, Ovidian, Wordsworthian, Rilkean – with corresponding spiritual, transformative, reflective and physiological experiences coming to the fore. Pynchon's own preoccupation with the wind, both as a physical elemental force and as a source for fruitful metaphors, goes far beyond that of most other writers. For example, named winds are referenced extensively by Pynchon in the novels and include the bora; euroclydon; favogn; föhn; gregale; gregaou; levante; mistral; Santa Anas; scirocco; tramontana – each having their different attributes, 'moods' and 'personalities.' This is more than simply an example of what has often been termed the author's encyclopaedic style; Pynchon wants us to think of the wind as an active and influential agent in a multitude of aspects, having a direct impact on the characters' minds and even the action of the narrative. All this becomes more vivid through the characterization of the elemental force itself in its various manifestations.

Early in V. we are given a scene that shows how quickly references to the wind can play into Pynchon's broader themes – it depicts a group of homeless people outside the V-Note jazz club at the mercy of the elements, begging change

from the affluent young patrons as they leave, immediately followed by the description of the atmosphere inside the club they will never be allowed to enter:

All night the February wind would come barreling down the wide keyway of Third Avenue, moving right over them all: the shavings, cutting oil, sludge of New York's lathe.

Inside McClintic Sphere was swinging his ass off. (V. 59)

The 'bums,' here described as waste by-products of the New York machine, are exposed to the harsh and inescapable truth of the February wind and cannot fail to register its meaning; while the club's clientele enjoy the fashionable atmosphere of the jazz venue without really engaging with a music which offers its own harsh truth for those who are prepared to listen. The two forces in close juxtaposition offer a sadly ironic social commentary – for whereas the homeless are interminably exposed to their medium due to their economic condition, the jazz fans inside the club are insulated by their own sense of style.

The physiological connection between breath and wind, our most intimate link with the natural world, is repeatedly emphasised and ties in with Rilke's Orphic naturalism – particularly regarding the first sonnet of the second cycle (worth quoting in its entirety):

Breathing: you invisible poem! Complete  
interchange of our own  
essence with world-space. You counterweight  
in which I rhythmically happen.

Single wave-motion whose  
gradual sea I am;  
you, most inclusive of all our possible seas—  
space grown warm.

How many regions of space have already been  
inside me. There are winds that seem like  
my wandering son.

Do you recognize me, air, full of places I once absorbed?  
 You who were the smooth bark,  
 roundness, and leaf of my words.

Rilke is a key presence in *Gravity's Rainbow*,<sup>218</sup> but the themes of this sonnet can be said to be of importance to Pynchon's work as a whole: the conjugating rhythm of the present moment; the movement of the human individual through world-space; the shaping of language and the facility for communication. Tied to this human experience is the concept of *afflatus* – the creative impulse or inspiration, probably the most famous artistic representation of which is Zephyrus blowing Venus to the shore in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (this work of art is itself central to the chapter in V. titled "She Hangs on the Western Wall"). Having already identified the significance of Orpheus as a figure in Pynchon's work, it is worth pointing out here that according to Graves the wind has a similarly creative role in the Orphic creation myth, joining with Night to create Eros/Phanes the Love-god whose name also means 'revealer' and whom the Orphics worshipped as the illuminating sun.<sup>219</sup> In repeatedly connecting music with the wind, Pynchon inevitably imbues the former with the qualities associated with *afflatus*: creativity and inspiration, leading to illumination and understanding.

Movement is a key component in Pynchon's usage of the wind as a motif – the appeal of centrifugal movement, away from the centre and into the margins, crossing borders both physical and philosophical, in contravention of officially sanctioned parameters relating to place and identity: 'winds that seem like / my wandering son.' Pynchon's work always dramatizes the tension between constricting power structures and expansive desire; consequently, as the individual moves through world-space (and even space-time) the feeling is one of transgression. In the introduction to *Slow Learner* Pynchon mentions the influence during his college years (alongside Norman Mailer, jazz music and Kerouac's *On The Road*) of Helen Waddell's *The Wandering Scholars*, 'reprinted

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<sup>218</sup> See, for example, Charles Hohmann's book on the subject, *Angel and Rocket: Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow and Rilke's "Tenth" Duino Elegy* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2009), and Doug Haynes' "'Gravity rushes through him": Volk and Fetish in Pynchon's Rilke,' *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol. 58, No. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012).

<sup>219</sup> Graves, *The Greek Myths* 38.

in the early '50's, an account of the young poets of the Middle Ages who left the monasteries in large numbers and took to the roads of Europe, celebrating in song the wider range of life to be found outside their academic walls' (SL 7-8). There are many analogues of these wandering poets, or *vagantes*, to be found in Pynchon's work – Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* eventually drifts into a similar status, and much of McClintic Sphere's artistic disaffection in *V.* comes from his feeling stifled due to a lack of movement; most often, though, Pynchon's troubadours are encountered fleetingly, at the peripheries of the text. They are inexact analogues inasmuch as they are not limited to an academic Western European tradition – Pynchon's *vagantes*, in the form of itinerant musicians, may be encountered in inner Asia, Mexico or the streets of New York; they may be spiritual and they may be secular, and their motives in wandering may differ considerably.

Yet the compulsion to move (as with Kerouac's hipsters) is there, and a sense of confraternity is suggested between these disparate voices – the 'single wave-motion' and 'gradual sea' of Rilke's sonnet. One of Pynchon's fleeting figures who does fit in with the more traditional idea of the *vagantes* is the "latter-day jongleur" Falconière, mentioned by Mehemet, master of the xebec ferrying Stencil Sr. to Malta in the final chapter of *V.* In relating the history of the island to Stencil, the mariner – '[h]e belonged to the trade routes of the Middle Ages. According to the yarn he had in fact sailed the xebec through a rift in time's fabric' (459) – invokes Falconière's song to Mara, the magical protectress of Malta during the Great Siege of 1565, and subsequent national symbol. He tells of how, at one point, the Catalan songster actually took up arms on the ramparts to defend his muse, 'braining four Janissaries with his lute before someone handed him a sword' (465) – the Pynchon-picaresque coming to the fore here, making of Falconière a sort of Popeye-Sordello. The image of the musical instrument being wielded as a weapon for an honourable cause is significant here (close to the end of the novel) in that it mirrors the scene in the first chapter where Dewey Gland brandishes his guitar 'like a cutlass' (31) at the baton-wielding shore-patrolmen on the Susanna Squaducci – eliciting correspondences between the two figures (determined underdogs) across time and space. The figure emerges again towards the end of *Vineland* in the form of Alexei, 'on liberty from a Russian fishing boat' (377). Having heard Prairie Wheeler's distress at being cornered by

villain of the piece Brock Vond, the Russian devotee of American rock and roll ('who turned out to be a Russian Johnny B. Goode' (384)) arrives 'carrying by its neck an old acoustic guitar with Cyrillic stenciling on it, as if he'd been prepared to use it as a weapon' (377) - the 'stenciling' obviously meant to invoke Woody Guthrie's famous slogan, emblazoned on his own guitar: 'This machine kills fascists.'

Of course, the desire for free movement is often seen in ironic counterpoint to the many examples of forced movement in the novels; there is as much exile as migration, as many refugees as wandering payadors and aqyns. As various groups of people are forced onto the road, they take their culture and their songs with them – the music itself coming to reflect that sense of movement, as can be seen in the following extract from *Against the Day* in which Cyprian Latewood listens to a performance given by a group of Macedonian musicians in Salonica (the whole Balkan region is in chaos at this stage with the First World War looming):

as if behind an iconostasis of song, oud, baglamas, and a kind of hammered dulcimer called a santouri were being played without a break. The music was feral, Eastern in scale, flatted seconds and sixths, and a kind of fretless portamento between, instantly familiar [...]. In these nocturnal modalities, "roads," as the musicians called them, Cyprian heard anthems not of defined homelands but of release into lifelong exile. (945)

Here the music is seen as a bulwark, a miraculous barrier ('iconostasis') for these people against the forces – war, politics, racism – that threaten to disperse the group and break up their culture. The 'nocturnal modalities' reflect the movement of refugees under the cover of night; the "roads" suggest jazz-like improvisations indicative of movement through an unfamiliar landscape; while the 'fretless portamento' suggests the desire for freedom of movement without barriers. Despite the exotic nature of the music, Cyprian finds it 'instantly familiar' – perhaps because of his own personal identification with the margins of society on account of his espionage work, firstly, but also his sexuality. He is certainly sympathetic to the anger and defiance that comes through in the energy of the performance: '[g]lass broke, cymbals were bashed repeatedly, *kombolói* clicked in dozens of rhythms, feet stamped along with the music. Women danced the *karsimalás*' (946) – an exuberance of sound and movement together, expressive

of a 'longing so deep that humiliation, pain and danger ceased to matter' (946). This sense of release, of catharsis through song and dance, is enough to sustain the spirits of this small group in the face of the dangers and uncertainties of the moment; but in bringing the community together under the auspices of a shared expression, the music also reforges age-old traditions and stories that speak of a culture that persists, no matter how many roads the people are forced to wander. It is enough to provide some optimism in these darkest of times:

It was a world entirely possible to withdraw from angelwise and soar high enough to see more, consider exits from, but nobody here in the smoke and breaking waves of desire wanted exit, the little world would certainly do. (946)

Rilke's simile – winds like wandering sons – is a useful and concise image when thinking about the way Pynchon establishes his metaphorical association between the movement of air and the movement of people. The physiological significance of breathing – emphasised so beautifully in Rilke's sonnet and related there to movement through the world – is also widely employed by Pynchon to create a variety of effects. The movement of air in the form of breathing is, of course, crucial to the singing voice – and I have already mentioned, in the first part of this chapter, the significance of polyphonic overtone singing. The abundance of wind instruments in Pynchon's work also attests to the significance of this connection – from the saxophones of jazz virtuosos McClintic Sphere, "Dope" Breedlove and Coy Harlingen, to the democratic appeal of the many harmonicas and kazoos that are littered throughout the novels. In these cases, *afflatus* is physiologically generated from within the body, as described by Aunt Euphrenia in *Mason & Dixon* when she discourses on the difficulties of playing the oboe: "the secret being to sneak Charges of Air in thro' your Nose, using the cheeks as a Plenum, for Storage" (670) – emphasising the link between the instrument and the human body. The product of the creative impulse is music; but bound up with it is the promise of illumination: Eros/Phanes the revealer. She goes on to say that "in India they understand how important the breath is,— being indeed the Soul in different form,— and how dangerous it is to meddle unnaturally with the rhythms proper to it..." (670). Although Euphrenia is speaking jokingly in this scene, teasing the younger members of the family with tales of lunatic

oboists and their gymnastic breathing techniques, the connection between breathing and spirituality is common in Pynchon.

Elsewhere the creative impulse is seen to be more metaphysical and from an exterior influence – as is the case with the aqyn’s song in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, already mentioned in this chapter, which promises so much insight for Tchitcherine on the Kazakh steppe, where the native singer-prophet intones: ‘I have come from the lungs of the wind’ (GR 357). Once again there are echoes of Rilke here: ‘True singing is a different breath, about / nothing. A gust inside the god. A wind.’<sup>220</sup> On the one hand we have the intimate physical connection to the environment, the movement of air in and out of the human body; while on the other we have the more abstract idea of divine inspiration. Both, however, are facilitators of Pynchon’s broader preoccupation: the creative expression. Once the aqyn has finished his song Tchitcherine leaves with his guide, ‘the fires dying at their backs, the sounds of string music, of village carousing, presently swallowed behind the wind’ (GR 359) – and once again, we get the close juxtaposition of music and wind, the former actually merging with the latter.

Later in the same novel there is a complex passage which exemplifies Pynchon’s multi-layered appropriation of the wind-breath metaphor. It is the scene in which Horst Achtfaden, aerodynamics expert and part of the team that worked on the 00000 rocket under Major Weissmann, is awaiting interrogation by the Schwarzkommando on board a derelict “toiletship” in the Kiel canal. Among the thoughts flashing through his panicked mind as he reflects on the twists of fate that led him to this precarious position, are several ideas related to the movement of air: the physics of ballistic propulsion; the analogy of history as a wind tunnel (ever the aerodynamics man); the link between breath and the soul (*atmen*, the German verb ‘to breathe’ – and *atman*, a term central to Hindu, Buddhist and Jainist philosophy used to identify the soul or the essential self); and the ancient whistling language (known as Silbo Gomero) of the people of La Gomera in the Canary Islands. Achtfaden, in denial regarding his own responsibility or guilt (he attempts to lay blame on the ‘re-entry people’ for the destructive effects of the V-2 rockets) is mentally consumed by remembered (or possibly imagined) conversations with a former colleague at Peenemünde named

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<sup>220</sup> Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus* 87.

Fahringer, a pacifist with an interest in Chinese culture, murdered by the SS presumably for not fitting in with, or refusing to acquiesce to, the demands placed on their engineering team by the Nazi war machine. The idea of history as a wind tunnel is a comforting conceit to Achtfaden: it offers the seductive illusion of control, of regulation:

If tensor analysis is good enough for turbulence, it ought to be good enough for history. There ought to be nodes, critical points ... there ought to be super-derivatives of the crowded and insatiate flow that can be set equal to zero and these critical points found. [...] here's a thought—find a non-dimensional coefficient for yourself. This is a wind-tunnel you're in, remember? You're an aerodynamics man. So— (451-2)

This kind of wishful thinking, in which the critical points of history (in both the broad sense and the personal) can be identified and the flow or 'Venturi effect' recalibrated, is, however, quickly superseded by Fahringer's own ideas, influenced by Eastern philosophy, concerning breath and the soul – as well as Achtfaden's own recollection of the whistling Gomerians:

whistling from the high ravines (terrific falls, steepness, whistling straight down the precipice to a toy village lying centuries, miles below) [...]. Ur-Spanish, whistled not voiced, from the mountains around Chipuda ... Gomera was the last piece of land Columbus touched before America. Did he hear them too, that last night? Did they have a message for him? A warning? Could he understand the prescient goatherds in the dark, up in the Canarian holly and the faya, gone dead green in the last sunset of Europe? (453)

The movement of air through pursed lips in the act of whistling creates its own analogue of the Venturi effect, but in this case it is used as an aid to communication across the ridges and valleys of the island – the harsh natural topography eliciting reflections on topographies of time and space. The contrast between the ingenious language of the Gomerians and the utilization of the same effect in the name of ballistic science could not be starker: where one enables the binding together of a community, the other has engendered an instrument of mass death. The notion of Silbo Gomero as an Ur-language, due to the characteristic brevity of the information being conveyed – in other words, only the

crucial information, stripped of anything superfluous like trivia or tone – make it analogous to what is described elsewhere in Pynchon as ‘the unabating Wind, that first Voice, not yet inflected,— the pure Whirl,— of the very Planet’ (*M&D* 159). It not only conveys information, however; it is also a source of comfort – an announcement of shared humanity and community intelligible from up to two miles away. Fahringer hears in the Rocket “creating its own great wind” (454) a message equally potent, though far from comforting: a message of death from 25,000 feet away, and if the message is for you then you will never even hear it. Much to Achtfaden’s irritation, his colleague was never under any illusions as to his own responsibility, his own guilt in the part he played in developing this mechanical corruption of the *atman* – “inside the venturi, breath—furious and blazing breath” (454) – which, far from sustaining life, can only destroy it. All these correspondences flash through Achtfaden’s mind so haphazardly that trying to make sense of them is like trying to grasp the wind: ‘Gibberish. Or else a *koan* that Achtfaden isn’t equipped to master, a transcendent puzzle that could lead him to some moment of light ...’ (454). However, any epiphany of this nature is deferred by the commencement of the interrogation he has been dreading, and the final confirmation of his cowardice as he gives up the name of the guidance man wanted by the Schwarzkommando.

To imbue the wind with the qualities of *afflatus*, in other words to see it as a medium for messages – figuratively speaking or otherwise – is not unproblematic, as many of Pynchon’s characters discover. In *Mason & Dixon* Luise Redzinger relates the story of her husband Peter’s spiritual epiphany, triggered by a near-death experience having fallen into a hop-pit. His new-found calling sees him abandon his farm and family to wander the land preaching ‘Tales of the Pit.’ Luise mentions, however, that even prior to Peter’s conversion he was apt to display a certain deistic zeal towards the land and the elements, receiving messages from both: “...And it comes from the wind moving through the underbrush...it is inside of the Wind, and they are real words, and if you listen...” (359-60). His personal mission becomes an obsession, while his wife and daughter are left at the mercy of a neighbouring landowner who covets their farm. Spousal and paternal responsibility have been usurped by the allure of ineffable messages. Peter Redzinger is merely one of the many characters in Pynchon’s work who set out

on quests to decode the often-vertiginous amounts of data and messages that stand between themselves and what they hope will prove to be a useful and comforting insight.

All too often the task threatens to swamp the individual in paranoia and despair, as we see in the case of Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* – and it is no coincidence that the wind figures prominently in her conceptualisation of the predicament: ‘she and the Chevy seemed parked at the centre of an odd, religious instant. As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken. She suspected that much’ (15); ‘watching the artificial windstorm overhead toss gauze in five-foot excursions. Remembering her idea about a slow whirlwind, words she couldn’t hear’ (16). We might expect the image to be of a vicious tornado, 100mph winds indicative of a maelstrom of information moving too quickly to grasp; but the image of a slow whirlwind is somehow more effective: the elusive movement of data and messages in this case has a nauseating inexorability, and Oedipa cannot help but feel that if she is failing to comprehend what is going on around her then it is, in some sense, her own fault. This feeling of helplessness is immediately juxtaposed with the image of her husband Mucho in his DJ booth at the KCUF radio station going through his own disconnected experience in relation to the music he sends out on the airwaves (although, this being Oedipa’s own mental image of her husband it may bear little relation to reality and may, in fact, simply serve to make her feel better about her own state of confusion):

Was it something like he felt, looking through the soundproof glass at one of his colleagues with a headset clamped on and cueing the next record with movements stylized as the handling of chrism, censer, chalice might be for a holy man, yet really tuned in to the voice, voices, the music, its message, surrounded by it, digging it, as were all the faithful it went out to; did Mucho stand outside Studio A looking in, knowing that even if he could hear it he couldn’t believe in it? (15)

We learn later (as previously discussed in Chapter Two regarding music media) that Mucho turns to LSD in an effort to tap into the message in the music, to decrypt the data and trigger his own epiphany; for the time-being, however, he is trapped in his status as non-believer, despite all his desires to the contrary.

While Oedipa is haunted by the image of an insidious maelstrom of data that only serves to disguise her half-consciousness of the fact that she is looking for messages that do not exist, Mucho is all-too aware of his own desire amid the ever-present fear of falling back into his old unhappy life as a car salesman. Once again, the two message-bearing media – elemental and artistic – are encountered side-by-side; here, however, the messages are getting lost: Oedipa fails to acknowledge her mental whirlwind as a message in itself warning against obsessive paranoia, while Mucho is so desperate to find communion (notice the religious overtones in the passage above) in his chosen medium that he only succeeds in pushing the message, whatever it may promise, further away – not unlike the trendy audience at the V-Note club in Pynchon's previous novel *V.*, although he has more honest intentions. Either way, there is no organic sense of afflatus, only a clamouring for a different way of life. In all these novels the superabundance of data is a fact of life and picking a way through it all towards a goal, without getting endlessly side-tracked, proves to be extremely difficult. Too much concentrated effort in any one direction is to be avoided in favour of a more intuitive, organic readiness.

The spiritual, or metaphysical, side to all this is never far away – be it explicit, as in the case of Peter Redzinger, or implicit, as with Mucho Maas. It is rarely straightforward, however; even in the case of the former it is a rather unfocussed animism that takes hold of the farmer (and there is also the suggestion that his epiphany may have been triggered by a hop-induced hallucination). But whatever the nature of the metaphysical experience, it does not preclude the secular and it rarely corresponds to the limiting parameters of established doctrine. It adds currency to the weight of metaphorical associations deployed in relation to the wind: i.e., the wind as fate, or the wind as time as it is often invoked in *Against the Day*, echoing early works of science fiction: “‘setting forth against the Enemy Wind’ (as early epics of time-travel described it)’ (1192). In that novel, for instance, we find yet another example of Pynchon placing the (metaphysical) wind and music in the same passage, in the section recounting Kit Traverse's incident-packed transatlantic crossing and subsequent landing in Morocco – only here the elemental force is invoked as a metaphor for destiny or fate. After a certain point, the ship becomes two ships following different routes and destinies (at least this is what Kit experiences): ‘did the ship take two tacks

at once? Did the wind blow two ways?' (585) – one of many examples in this novel where binary states are syncretized, this being echoed by the musicians who greet the unexpected arrival of the ship (in one of its states at least): 'Gnaoua musicians invoked the *mlouk gnaoui*, calling upon the doorkeeper of the Seigneurs Noirs to open the door of good and evil' (584). Gnaoua (or more commonly 'Gnawa') is a body of Moroccan and sub-Saharan African Islamic religious music which invokes spirits or saints called 'mluk' in a liturgical ceremony, the aim of which is to reintegrate and to balance the powers of the human body which is seen as the locus of both secular and divine creative processes. What is significant here is the notion of a universal energy, bringing disparate factors together – as with the one door of good and evil or the wind that blows two ways at once – and the music that renews that energy: 'Up in the Kashbah people were singing themselves into trances. Somewhere out in the street, the Gnaoua musicians were playing lutes and keeping time with metal hand percussion, and they were invisible to all but those for whom they played' (585).

In addition to the many abstract considerations of the wind in Pynchon, there is also a good deal of direct, concrete influence. The animating energy of the wind is a consistent preoccupation across the oeuvre: 'Thousands of newspaper pages blew through the small park [...] millions of unread and useless words had come to a kind of life in Sheridan Square' (V. 296); 'the huge fricative breathing, approaching speech, of the reeds beneath the scirocco that had blown his ship off course' (ATD 282); 'forests of elms back when there were still elms in Cleveland, making visible the flow of the breezes' (ATD 567) – the examples are numerous. The wind dictates the course of the skyship Inconvenience in *Against the Day*; it drives the waves ridden by Flip, the surfer-saint of Gordita beach, in *Inherent Vice*. A common image-motif in Pynchon's writing is the wind animating areas of vegetation, particularly areas of tall grass. We see it in *Gravity's Rainbow* during the episode recounting Tchitcherine's exile to the Kazakh steppe: 'sweeping dessiatinas of grasses, of mullein stalks, rippling out of sight, green and gray in the wind. An amazing wind'; 'Far into the country, grasses blow, and the waves move on through, slow as sheep' (GR 339; 347). The image gains further currency in *Against the Day*: 'pale grasses [...] bending to the wind together, a million stalks all held to the same exact angle, which no scientific

instrument would measure' (*ATD* 153); 'the wind was blowing in the high Indian grass, and her father said, "There's your gold, Dahlia, the real article." [...] She watched the invisible force at work among the million stalks tall as a horse and rider, flowing for miles under the autumn suns, greater than breath, than tidal lullabies, the necessary rhythms of a sea hidden far from any who would seek it' (*ATD* 83) – in light of this novel's ecocentric themes we cannot help but think of wind-power here, as one of the clean and renewable sources of energy that the big-business cartels seek to stifle in order to safeguard their own interests. In *Bleeding Edge* the splash screen of DeepArcher software is a graphic representing an archer aiming down into an abyss while 'a light wind is blowing in the grass and brush' (*BE* 75). As such, it is an announcement of departure to a place beyond official control where communication is no longer regulated: the dark web.

The image of the wind in the grass is a clear evocation of similar biblical passages, particularly Psalm 103: 'As *for* man, his days *are* as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more'<sup>221</sup> – and Isaiah 40:6 (echoed in 1 Peter 1:24-5): 'All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodness thereof *is* as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people *is* grass.' The analogy of flesh as grass is taken to near-literal proportions at one point in *Against the Day*: 'The wind, which was alive, conscious, and not kindly disposed to travellers, had a practice of coming up in the middle of the night. The camels smelled it first, then slowly everyone else in the party began to hear it, its unstoppable crescendo, giving them too little time to devise shelter, and to which often the only resort was to submit, pressed against the earth flat as any stalk of grass, and try not to be taken away into the sky' (867) – this reminiscent of another passage from Isaiah: 'Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.'<sup>222</sup> In considering the animating power of the elements, Rilke brings us back, once again, to Orpheus: 'Single wave-motion whose / gradual sea I am; / you, most inclusive of all our possible seas'<sup>223</sup> – the

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<sup>221</sup> Psalm 103:15-16.

<sup>222</sup> Isaiah 40:24.

<sup>223</sup> Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus* 135.

image has far wider currency than its biblical associations. It also has a cinematic quality: we may think, for instance, of the films of Andrei Tarkovsky (particularly *Mirror* and *Solaris*) and the slow-motion panning shots of waist-high grass in the breeze, swaying branches in the canopy and the wave-motion of reeds under water; or the endless reed fields that dominate Kaneto Shindo's classic horror film *Onibaba*. It is a method of making visible the energy of the wind, of the atmosphere, as an aid to dramatizing the psychological associations that accompany it.

Several commentators on Pynchon have identified a post-secular mood running throughout his work, and while it may at times be laced with irony or even mockery, it is something that Pynchon returns to time and again. John A. McClure, for instance, sees in Pynchon's work a hybrid combination of secular and religious discourses that serves to counteract the disenchantment of the rationalized world as proclaimed by Max Weber<sup>224</sup> (Pynchon mentions Weber by name in *Gravity's Rainbow*, 464). As McClure puts it: 'Pynchon is attempting both to reenchant the world and to change the very terms of enchantment'.<sup>225</sup> So, for example, Orphic presence in Pynchon is characteristically associated with ecological concerns (this is particularly true regarding *Against the Day*). In this sense, Orpheus, as a hybrid entity combining the mortal with the divine, the quotidian with the metaphysical, can stand as a model for Pynchon's entire methodology – a post-secular avatar. In McClure's words, Pynchon's writing calls on us to

“think big” about the complexity and scale of the cosmos and to follow the trajectory of traditional narratives of transcendence. But at the same time, they recall us, at the level of narrative, to our mortal and embodied being, encourage us to pay close attention to local temporalities, joys, and obligations.<sup>226</sup>

Reading across the oeuvre we find a broad range of interest in religion and spirituality; Western esotericism, indigenous nature religions, New Age mysticism and ancient mystery rites all feature prominently in Pynchon's writing (not to mention the supernatural), and while there may be a certain ambivalence in the

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<sup>224</sup> John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 2007) 29.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

texts towards organized Judeo-Christian faiths, there is, nonetheless, a readily noticeable proliferation of appeals to grace – or at least ‘some *kind* of grace’ (*ATD* 278 – italics mine). This phrase is important as it indicates Pynchon’s reluctance to commit to, or be limited by, any particular religious credo; the crucial thing is the spirit of *afflatus* broadly speaking: the message that inspires and that is not one message at all but a diffusion of ideas among the different individuals who receive it (just as the artwork is not merely a vehicle that enables the transmission of a message directly from one person to another but is more like a prism through which ideas are refracted). The many cultures throughout history that have some sense of *afflatus* as being central to their belief system – along with the more secular connection to artistic inspiration – is reflected in the variety of ways in which Pynchon draws on the concept; however, it remains that the most enduring description of *afflatus* comes from the New Testament:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.’ (Acts 2:1-4)

Pentecostal glossolalia is hugely significant regarding Pynchon’s efforts to emphasise the communicative power of music. As a model of the diffusive power of *afflatus* it cannot be bettered, and is invoked several times in the novels: ‘The matter of a Paraclete’s coming, the comforter, the dove; the tongues of flame, the gift of tongues: Pentecost’ (V. 472); or in the following passage that merges Orphic desire, Ovidian metamorphosis, Pentecostal inspiration and Christian *agapē*:

“Want the Change,” Rilke said, “O be inspired by the Flame!” To laurel, to nightingale, to wind ... *wanting* it, to be taken, to embrace, to fall toward the flame growing to fill all the senses and ... not to love because it was no longer possible to act ... but to be helplessly in a condition of love.... (GR 97)

Pynchon's repetitive and multifaceted linking-together of music and the wind, under the aegis of *afflatus*, inevitably encourages us to think of music in terms of glossolalia. Music has often been described as a universal language; we do not need to know anything about it to have an emotional response to it, whether it be Gnawa musicians, Terry Riley or the Sex Pistols – and yet the reason for this has never been adequately explained, either by musicology or neuroscience (see Oliver Sacks' *Musicophilia*). We are left with a form of artistic expression that elicits some level of intuitive understanding through physiological pleasure and metaphysical resonances, but it is a process that is hard to define without venturing into abstractions; perhaps it is for this reason that the communicative energy of music often feels like a transcendent force in Pynchon's writing, beyond officially sanctioned channels of communication and the limits of language – a vehicle for something like grace. As Hunter Penhallow comments in *Against the Day*: "Yes, well it's redemption isn't it, you expect chaos, you get order instead. Unmet expectations. Miracles" (*ATD* 652). There may even be a suggestion of this in the passage from Acts immediately following the above quotation concerning the spirit of Pentecost: in explaining the significance of the event (the power of universal communication) the author repeatedly emphasises the connection between David and Christ – a combination of the power of music and the light of truth (I have already mentioned that both can be, and have been, considered as Orphic figures). The idea of universal communication may seem naïve, but it is born of a desire to transcend the social and cultural limitations placed on human interaction, the false assumptions that keep people divided and hostile – Pynchon devotes much time to identifying and criticising these processes and dramatizing the frustrations and the reactions that they cause. If it is an impossible ideal we can at least say that music approaches it most closely – a miracle in a world that has given up on them.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* we get a sense of the miracle of music in a scene depicting an evensong event in a Kentish church in the lead-up to Christmas, 1944 – it is the sixth Christmas of the war and Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake decide to enter the old church on a whim, feeling nostalgic for the carefree enjoyment of pre-wartime holidays. The church itself is described as 'a hummock in the dark upland, lamplit, growing out of the earth [...] doorway shaggy with wintering vines' (127) – not what we might expect of a Norman

church in the garden of England. The impression is more that of an early or even pre-Christian Saxon place of worship; the mention of vines, as I have already discussed, suggests Orphic presence – Pynchon is broadening out the religious correspondences from the very outset. Inside, a male choir made up of Home Guard volunteers, American servicemen and, significantly, a Jamaican corporal, perform a program of ‘plainsong in English [with] forays now and then into polyphony: Thomas Tallis, Henry Purcell, even a German macronic from the fifteenth century, attributed to Heinrich Suso’ (129). Children, having been evacuated to safer parts of the country, are conspicuous by their absence: ‘The children are away dreaming’ (135) – a fact which particularly resonates with Jessica: ‘winds that must blow not through Christmas air but through the substance of time would bring her those child-voices, singing for sixpences’ (128). With no children in the audience even greater attention is given over to reflections on the infant Christ and the socially-binding power of song that has brought people here to celebrate him – exemplified by the soaring baritone voice of the Jamaican corporal:

Listen to this mock-angel singing, let your communion be at least in listening, even if they are not spokesmen for your exact hopes, your exact, darkest terror, listen. There must have been evensong here long before the news of Christ. Surely for as long as there have been nights bad as this one—something to raise the possibility of another night that could actually, with love and cockcrows, light the path home, banish the Adversary, destroy the boundaries between our lands, our bodies, our stories, all false, about who we are: for the one night, leaving only the clear way home and the memory of the infant you saw. (135)

What is being sung here is less important than the fact of song in and of itself, which is just as much a unifying force in this scene as the symbol of Christ the infant – or in this case it might be more proper to say Christ the symbol of all infants. The various people gathered in the small church have done so as much out of the desire for human companionship as they have for any sense of religious duty; it is the sheer visceral pleasure of adding one’s voice or ear to the agglomeration of sound made by people in tune with a common urge. In typical post-secular style, it is not simply a communion with Christ but also a communion with each other:

So this pickup group, these exiles and horny kids [...] knowing they ought to be grabbing a little sleep, not out here performing for strangers, give you

this evensong, climaxing now with its rising fragment of some ancient scale, voices overlapping three- and fourfold, up, echoing, filling the entire hollow of the church—no counterfeit baby, no announcement of the Kingdom, not even a try at warming or lighting this terrible night, only, damn us, our scruffy obligatory little cry, our maximum reach outward—*praise be to God!*—for you to take back to your war-address, your war-identity, across the snow's footprints and tire tracks finally to the path you must create by yourself, alone in the dark. Whether you want it or not, whatever seas you have crossed, the way home.... (136)

John A. McClure considers this evensong scene to be a supreme example of what he terms the practice of 'open dwelling' – a spiritual way of life that has 'not closed the door onto otherness, shut the windows on the larger world, or cut off all questioning and innovation within the house of belief.'<sup>227</sup> 'Pynchon's splendid depiction,' McClure goes on to say, 'may well be the single most powerful celebration of this mode of religious life in contemporary fiction. The play of languages, the mingling of races, the emphasis on the richness of tradition and the passion of the ceremony all testify to the possibilities for good that reside in traditional religious structures and congregations.'<sup>228</sup> At such a time as this, under the flightpath of German bombers, honest faith in the 'possibilities for good' may seem like a flimsy bastion against the dangers that threaten to destroy this small sanctuary, this communion in song; but their 'maximum reach outward,' far from being impotent, is seen as hopeful enough to be sustaining – powerful enough even to be transgressive: 'For the moment not caring who you're supposed to be registered as. For the moment anyway, no longer who the Caesars say you are' (136).

It is a sense of hope that stubbornly persists in Pynchon's writing, against all odds it would seem, considering the oppressive structures that loom large against it on almost every page. It may also seem as though any product of that hope is endlessly deferred, and yet Pynchon refuses to relinquish it. Consider, for example the very last words of Pynchon's gargantuan novel *Against the Day* – which brings us back once again to the idea of afflatus: 'Soon they will see the pressure-gauge begin to fall. They will feel the turn in the wind. They will put on

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<sup>227</sup> McClure, 193.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 193-4.

smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly toward grace' (1220).

## Conclusion

A telling indication as to the significance of Pynchon's engagement with music can be found in the many examples of musical artists who engage with him in their own work. From Soft Machine's "Esther's Nose Job," an eleven-minute suite in five movements (referencing the fourth chapter of *V.*) that closes their second album, *Volume Two* (1969); to the more recent offering of the alt-country band Visit and their album *Now Everybody—* (2020), in which the band give their own musical realizations of a selection of Pynchon's in-novel songs – the sheer weight of expression in recorded music over the last fifty years that is influenced by or given to Pynchon is remarkable, whether it be allusive, thematic, overt or sub-textual.<sup>229</sup> While other writers have figured prominently as an inspiration to musicians (George Orwell to David Bowie; Emily Brontë and James Joyce to Kate Bush; J.G. Ballard to Joy Division – to offer just a few famous examples) it must be said, looking at the sheer numbers, that none have had a more wide-ranging impact on recorded music than Pynchon. The question that must be asked, then, is why? What is it about Pynchon that holds such appeal for musicians – from established and well-known artists such as Radiohead, Laurie Anderson, Mark Knopfler and Devo, to the dozens (if not hundreds) of lesser-known acts that we are currently aware of? Of course, each artist will have their own answer, their own personal experience of reading Pynchon: the surrealism at the heart of Soft Machine's progressive jazz-rock; the alienation and paranoia that marks much of Radiohead's work; Devo's iconoclasm – each can draw inspiration from different Pynchonian themes. But among the broader aspects of his appeal must surely be the sympathetic and enthusiastic way in which Pynchon writes about music and insistently incorporates the many-faceted artform into the fabric of his narratives.

Pynchon understands how powerful music can be as a communicative force that can cross socio-political boundaries through media, and as a focal point and binding force in small communities; at its best, music can be indicative of

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<sup>229</sup> Christian Hänggi periodically updates an exhaustive list of musical acts that are known to have referenced or been influenced by Pynchon, at <https://thomaspynchon.com/thomaspynchon-inspired-music/>.

emotion in ways that language alone cannot achieve; it can be syncretic without being homogenising; it allows us to renegotiate our relationship to time in such a way that the ethics of the dialogic ‘moment’ supersedes all other models of temporal experience; as a means of expression and communication it predates even myth, and yet it has never fully submitted to semiological understanding, retaining instead a degree of fluidity with regard to representation and reception – all of these aspects of music can be found in Pynchon’s writing, making it fertile ground for inspiration to anybody hoping to communicate their own message through music, and also to those who want to explore the unique opportunities that music offers for artistic expression in a more abstract sense. Indeed, many acts – such as Benny Profane and Kenosha Kid – wear their Pynchon references like a badge of honour. It may be the case that some musicians include allusions to Pynchon in their work out of a desire to look “cool” or cerebral, perhaps noting a wider trend among other artists they admire; but I think that for most serious artists the abiding appeal must lie in the fact that, through his writing on music, Pynchon speaks to something fundamental in the musician – he is a kindred spirit who just happens to be working in another medium.

The seriousness with which Pynchon engages with music is what makes it so useful as a sounding device for getting to the depths of his most pertinent subject matter – the underlying concerns at the heart of his fiction beyond the layers of postmodern technique, that mark him out as a decidedly ethical and political writer. The view of Pynchon as an exemplar of high postmodernism that prevailed up to at least the mid-1990s (when critical studies were limited to *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* – with an occasional nod to the then-recent *Vineland*) has been markedly revised in more recent years to acknowledge the deeper currents of socio-political commentary that run through the earlier novels, and the further development of such themes in the later work. From the postmodern pedestal, Pynchon has been moved into his rightful place among the people – dialogic, socially aware, and politically engaged (if still camera shy). Nowadays, tags like ‘post-postmodern,’ ‘other than postmodern,’ ‘post-paranoia’ are as likely to be encountered in critical debates about Pynchon as any of the epithets that previously applied. This ongoing re-evaluation is exemplified by the tenor of *The New Pynchon Studies* (2019), which showcases a collection of recent essays that can all be said to foreground political aspects of the 21<sup>st</sup>

century novels, bringing Pynchon to bear on areas such as eco-criticism, identity politics, and activism.<sup>230</sup> It is a trend that goes back to at least 2001 (after a relatively lean period for Pynchon scholarship during the 1990s) and Frank Palmeri's article 'Other than Postmodern?' (the question mark of the title indicating a degree of tentativeness at this stage in cutting against the grain of established Pynchon criticism) in which *Mason & Dixon* is discussed in terms of a heightened awareness of individual responsibility on Pynchon's part that manifests itself in the behaviour of the eponymous deuteragonists.<sup>231</sup> This thesis is firmly allied to the movement that steps beyond postmodernism in the assessment of Pynchon's work; in it I have attempted to show how music can act as a mode of access to the ethical current that persists throughout the long career of one of the Western world's foremost literary voices – a crucial part of a rich and varied fictional topography, which, until recently, has too often been downplayed or ignored.

The sheer abundance of musical presence in Pynchon – and the manifold ways in which music feeds into the author's broader themes and concerns – means that a comprehensive accounting of it is beyond the scope of any book-length study. Christian Hänggi's recent book *Pynchon's Sound of Music* is as comprehensive a resource as can be imagined for anybody interested in the data on music in Pynchon; but even there, the author calls for further critical engagement with the subject going forward. I certainly do not believe that my own interest in this area has been exhausted in writing my thesis; each re-reading of Pynchon's novels, stories, essays, and liner notes brings renewed appreciation for his passionate and abiding interest in music – and we may hope for new material in the future. I have no doubt that there will be further monographs on the subject, and many more articles (perhaps an anthology) in the coming years as recognition of music's central place in Pynchon's work gathers momentum.

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<sup>230</sup> Joanna Freer ed. *The New Pynchon Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2019)

<sup>231</sup> Frank Palmeri, "Other than Postmodern? – Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics," *Postmodern Culture* (2001)

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