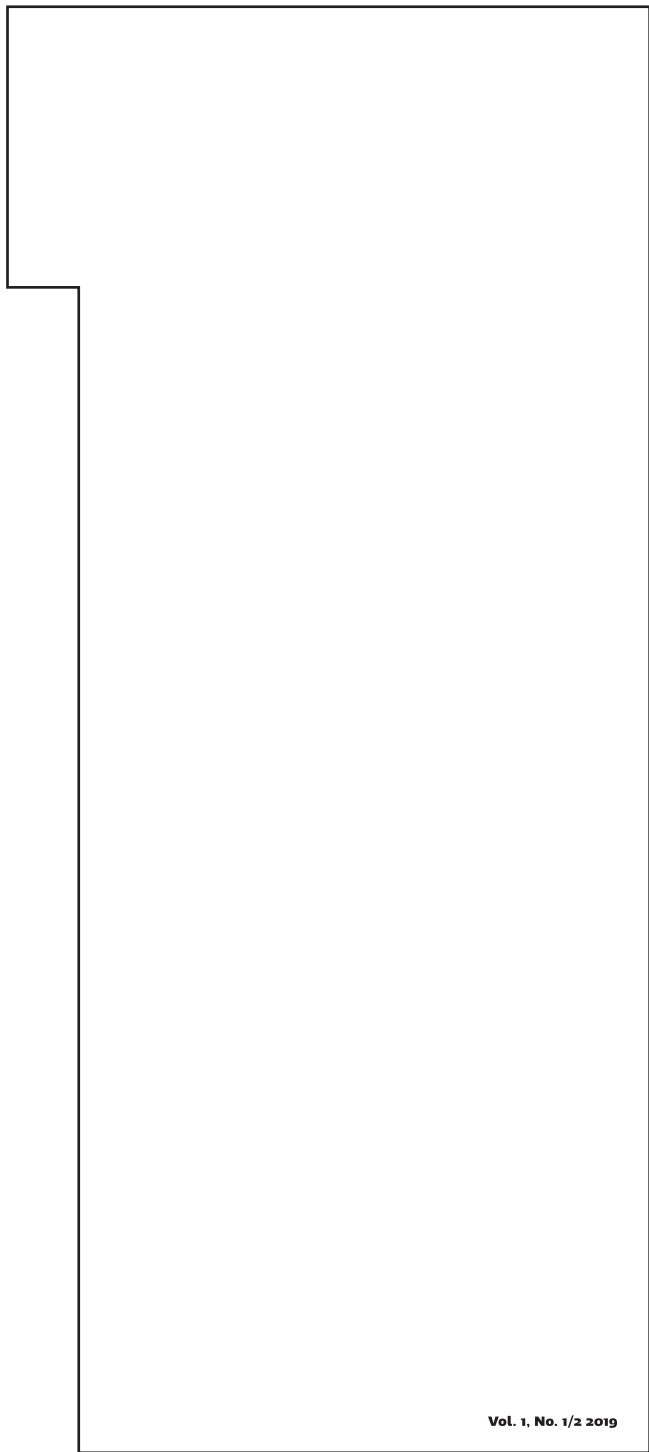


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Speculating worlds

Structure and Resistance in Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge**

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Abstract

From his first to his last novel, Pynchon has addressed the 'constraints' hemming in human existence and gestured to different ways of transcending these. After summarizing the way his novels exemplify this twofold movement I will offer a reading of his last novel *Bleeding Edge* and show how the dialectic between structures of power and human resistance continue to order the narrative. My reading of the novel will argue that, like in his previous work, the cooption of utopian potential resurfaces in this work and offers a vivid way of analyzing 'speculative change' in literature.

Keywords: Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, power, resistance, utopia

late capitalism is a pyramid racket on a global scale, the kind of pyramid you do human sacrifices up on top of, meantime getting the suckers to believe it's all gonna go on forever. (Pynchon 2013: 163)

1.

I take my cue from that part of literary studies which concedes, with a sense of both resignation and sadness, that, although literature almost by default challenges the constraints of the present and seeks to escape them, much contemporary work is focused on dystopia. According to that reading of the present, the prospects for the future are dim. That diagnosis is influenced by the conjecture of which it is itself a part

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and by the readings and representations of that selfsame conjuncture which are collected as evidence of its state of being. For evidence I have repeatedly gone to Thomas Pynchon, on this occasion to his last novel *Bleeding Edge*, because I think that he has continually imparted to us convincing purchases on that state. As an initial step I return to the title of Pynchon's most famous book *Gravity's Rainbow*. Namely, I have always seen the first word in Pynchon's title as referencing systemic limitations and constraints while the rainbow betokened the momentum that worked to overcome these. The title I ultimately settled upon for this paper demetaphorizes the original terms and points directly to structures one always encounters in his work and to the different embodiments of oppositional forces that work against these. That tension runs pretty much throughout Pynchon's entire opus. However, instead of narratives of change and transformation that the leftist bias of much critical thinking has sought to read from or into his fictional worlds, I hold that Pynchon has always shown how transgressions are overshadowed by structures of power. If there is a utopian charge in his narratives they narrate how that charge eventuates in dystopian outcomes. If there is no doubt that Pynchon writes from a position "leftward of capitalism," as he puts it in *Bleeding Edge* (Pynchon 2013, 101), that position does not promulgate a positive vision of transformation and change. I will outline this point of departure by way of a detour and a comparison.

In the detour I will briefly look at Nick Dyer-Witherford's book *Cyber-Marx* (1999). I make this detour not only because the book exemplifies the challenging of and the resistance against the constraints of a present dominated by cybernetics by updating Marx's critique but also because, in different ways, that critique is implied when not explicitly referenced in what I have to say on the issue. To begin with, analogously to my own procedure, Dyer-Witherford begins his book by a reading of a work of fiction, in his case, William Gibson's and Bruce Sterling's novel *The Difference Engine* (1990). In brief, in the novel Gibson and Sterling reimagine the year 1855 in England and an alliance of science and capital that "seems irresistible, even as it drives toward unthinkable transformations in the fate of the human species" (Dyer-Witherford 1). If that were all that can be said about Gibson and Sterling's novel it obviously replicates the thematics of not only Pynchon's last novel but of much of science fiction writing. However, what really intrigued me in *The Difference Engine* is that the novel, creating an alternative history, imagines Karl Marx to have emigrated to the United States and that in the present of the novel he, along with other revolutionaries, has seized the means of information and production in the largest city of the New World.

In accord with its tenets, Dyer-Witherford thusly discusses stunning technological changes but maintains that they do not annul the possibility of transformation. On the contrary, he agrees with those theorists who maintain that 'the technoscientific knowledge crystallized in computers, telecommunications, and biotechnologies is now unleashing an ongoing and irresistible transformation of civilization, dramatic in its consequences, unavoidably traumatic in the short term, but opening onto horizons nothing short of utopian" (15). While acknowledging the annihilating power of new technologies he registers initiatives that 'constitute a diffuse coalescence of microactivisms contesting the macrologic of capitalist globalization" (157). Voicing his own activism, Dyer-Witthford comments: 'if Marxism cannot under contemporary conditions locate agents of contestation and practices of opposition, its analysis of postmodern capital amounts only to a reiteration (albeit on a more political economic basis) of the chief point of anti-Marxist postmodern theory: that under postmodern conditions, the game is over" (170-71). Interestingly enough and highly relevant to my argument, Witthford puts 'political economy" in parenthesis. As a final comment on the book, I contend that much more could have been done with the insight that during the 1960s and the 1970s financial trading became an important escape route for capital. He adds: 'Faced with loss of control in the shop floor and the paddy fields, many commercial interests simply evacuated the corporeal world, with its mud, blood, and recalcitrant labor power, taking flight not merely by seeking new sites for production but by dematerializing themselves entirely into speculative activity" (139). I will formulate how I plan to engage Pynchon's novel by way of a conditional which in a way summarizes my reading of Dyer-Witherford's updated Marx: I maintain that if enough attention had been given to this dematerializing speculative activity, one would as a consequence have been much more sceptical about the opening up onto horizons of utopia. Returning to Pynchon: without explicitly considering either his relation to Marx or to postmodernism I intend to show that Pynchon's work dramatizes the condition in which the 'game is over."¹

2.

Texts and cultural phenomena can rarely be approached without a political bias. In what we know as theory, that bias is critical towards what exists and projects alternatives, it takes apart and scrutinizes the scaffolding.

1 I articulate my relation to Marx in a recent special issue of *The New Centennial Review* (Grgas 2018).

folding of the existent and, as a rule, it beckons to a futurity yet to be realized. It puts forward normative pronouncements and ethical norms that are founded in an elsewhere that is independent from the pressures imposed by existing constraints. To use Caroly D'Cruz's formulation, that bias responds to a "certain emancipatory promise" (D'Cruz 60) and exposes "spaces in which counter-hegemonic articulations can be developed" (62). I have reservations about this idea which I will summarize with an observation Bertell Ollman makes in his book *Dance of the Dialectic. Steps in Marx's Method* (2003). The reservations I have relate to the mistake theory is prone to make and which Ollman formulates as follows: "In organizing reality for purposes of grasping change, relative stability does not always get the attention that it deserves" (Ollman 19). Paraphrasing Ollmann, I contend that the relative stability of reality that always disables change has most oftento do with the economy. The economy I have in mind is, in the words of Bruno Latour, "an infinite and boundless domain totally indifferent to terrestrial existence and the very notion of limits, and entirely self-centered and self-governed" (Latour 6). I therefore agree with Andrea Micocci who, in *The Metaphysics of Capitalism*, observes: "Economics has acquired today a perfect centrality, comparable to that central architectural position that once upon a time seemed to belong to theology" (Micocci xi). The economic order that has insinuated itself as being without alternative is capitalism. Let me quote two additional passages from Micocci because of their pertinence to my argument: "despite an initial set of ruptures, capitalism has taken over a dialectical functioning that, by its capacity to cover everything material and abstract, has prevented and will always prevent change, condemning it to the stasis of its iterative mechanisms" (157). Even more to the point of the way Pynchon thematizes resistance is the following statement: "the absolute impotence of the individual vis-a-vis- the big iterativeness. No individual and no mass struggle can afflict it" (122). In Bruno Latour's words, "the world of economy...is now final and absolute" and in it we are today *being affected* by "the feeling of *helplessness* that is associated with any discussion of economics" (Latour 2, italics in original). Micocci and Latour are among the many diagnosticians of the present who recognize, as Fredric Jameson observed, that the "ultimate referent, the true ground of being in our time" is capital (Jameson 82).

That referent and how it has mutated both in historical time and in fiction has been the subject of a number of my readings of Pynchon which can be supplemented by showing how money capital structures the world of *Bleeding Edge* and what the implications of this structuring for Pynchon's representations of resistance are. However, researching the extant literature on Pynchon's latest novel I discovered, to my disappointment, that the first part of that task has, in large part, already

been performed. I am referring to Sascha Pöhlmann's article 'I Just Look at Books': Reading the Monetary Metareality of *Bleeding Edge*' (2016). This article accords with my own arguing for the need of an economic reading of Pynchon and gathers evidence from *Bleeding Edge* which is pretty much what I planned on presenting as evidence of the significant role of capital in the novel. In much reduced form some of this will be redeployed below. If my reading of the novel had been exclusively focused on Pynchon's structures, Pöhlmann would have made the task wholly superfluous; but since I also seek to problematize the dynamics of resistance, this allows me to both show how my reading diverges both from Pöhlmann and from others who have taken up the theme.

Pöhlmann begins by stating that 'the importance of economic issues' remains somewhat underdeveloped in Pynchon criticism and is nowhere near the level of saturation, or some might say exhaustion, of topics such as paranoia or technology' (Pöhlmann 2). I wholly agree with this assessment and have seen my work on Pynchon as remedying this underdevelopment. Pöhlmann's analysis of *Bleeding Edge* argues that money operates as a metareality in the novel both on the levels of plot and style' (3). Pöhlmann actually uses the word I opted for in my own title, writing that money is presented 'as a symbolic structure behind reality that is accessible to the initiated' (ibid.) and that 'money provides the structure for other phenomena in *Bleeding Edge*' (15). According to Pöhlmann, this 'does not simply mean that everything—politics, society, culture, technology, etc.—is ultimately determined by economic factors, but rather that money underlies the reality of these phenomena like a kind of source code' (3). The same notion is rephrased when Pöhlmann makes clear that the monetary metareality that I describe in this essay is not something metaphysical or transcendent in any way but is rather entirely immanent to the world it structures all the same' (16). Explaining what he means by 'immanence' he goes on to say that 'no other single element in the novel provides such an all-encompassing and fundamental access to the world as money' (ibid.).

However, those who approach Pynchon espousing either technophilia or technophobia might voice disagreement. They would assign more weight to the fact that the novel's title refers to technology as 'Lucas sez': 'What's known as bleeding-edge technology ...No proven use, high risk, something only early-adoption addicts feel comfortable with' (Pynchon 2013, 78). Although I recognize the importance of technology in Pynchon's novel, I find it pertinent that the first documented example of the term 'bleeding edge' dates to early 1983 when it was actually an unnamed banking executive who used it in reference to Storage Technology Corporation when the company took a nasty fall. His words were: 'We ended up on the bleeding edge of technology, instead of the leading edge' (Hayes). The

reason I bring this up is because it shows the imbrication of technology and money in *Bleeding Edge* and that the novel ought to be viewed as squarely positioned within what Sloterdijk has labeled 'the current capitalist-informatic ecumene' (Sloterdijk 51). That ecumene has been, on the one hand, constituted by the power of technologies that ultimately produce and process information, a development which was in its initial stage seen as having a great potential for change. But it ultimately defaulted on that potential not because of its endemic characteristics but because those technologies arose within a reality whose overriding priorities were of a different nature. I will name that reality 'the capitalist schema,' using the title of Christopher Lotz's book, from which I give two quotes. The first one reads as follows: 'money is the thing' through which *all* other entities receive their real form. Money, in other words, is the *thinghood* of objects that are accessible under capitalism and is the quasi transcendental force' ... that schematizes what we encounter as accessible in our age' (Lotz 41). The second: 'the capitalist schema in some sense universalizes imagination and takes the situatedness' out of it. Money, in other words, pre-structures what can be imagined and in which framework present experiences are shaped, formed and limited' (92).² These insights supplement Pöhlmann's analysis and attribute to money a power that seems irresistible, a power that disables oppositional positionings. I will illustrate this by commenting upon Pynchon's description of capital's subsumption of the internet and by a close reading of the ending of *Bleeding Edge* which, in my opinion, is not as redemptive as some critics make it out to be.

Pöhlmann writes that the Internet in the novel is 'a sphere that is not yet entirely subjected to the logic of capitalism' (Pöhlmann 17) but that the Internet, particularly the DeepArcher segment, is depicted as an alternative to capitalism while it is 'simultaneously being incorporated into its structure' (ibid.). If the Internet does configure a space of resistance than Pynchon's novel narrates the inevitability of its subsumption under money capital. That process is personified, for example, in the opposition between 'geeks' and 'jocks': 'Same old classic dotcom dilemma, be rich forever or make a tarball out of it and post it around for free, and keep their cred and maybe self-esteem as geeks but stay more or less middle income' (Pynchon 2013, 37). At one point in the novel Maxine asks what happened to the 'revenge of the nerds,' or the resistance in my terms, and is answered by Driscoll: 'Is no revenge of the nerds, you know what, last year when everything collapsed, all it meant was the nerds lost out

2 Similar ways of reading money are developed by Korin Karatani who writes that money is 'like a Kantian transcendental apperception X, as it were...money as substance is an illusion, but more correctly, it is a transcendental illusion in the sense that it is hardly possible to discard it' (Karatani 6).

once again and the jocks won. Same as always” (48). A little further on in the dialogue we read: ‘Some of the quants are smart, but quants come, quants go, they’re just nerds for hire with a different fashion sense. The jocks may not know a stochastic crossover if it bites them on the ass, but they have that drive to thrive, they’re synced in to them deep market rhythms, and that’ll always beat out nerditude no matter how smart it gets” (ibid). The ‘drive to thrive” is shorthand for the power of capital against which the ‘techies” are positioned: ‘I haven’t seen anything like it since the sixties. These kids are out to change the world. Information has to be free’ – they really mean. At the same time, here’s all these greedy fuckin dotcomers make real-estate developers look like Bampi and Thumper” (116). It needs to be noted that eventually the sixties turn out not really providing an analogy because the powers of containment are in the present of the novel much more insidious. As March editorializes on her blog: ‘Back in the days of hippie simplicity, people liked to blame the CIA’ or a secret rogue organization.’ But this is a new enemy, unnamable, locatable on no organization chart or budget line – who knows, maybe even the CIA’s scared of them” (399). Finally I quote Eric’s apodictic judgment: ‘Were being played, Maxi, and the game is fixed, and it won’t end till the Internet – the real one, the dream, the promise – is destroyed” (432). As always in Pynchon, antisystemic utopias, in this case the Internet, are coopted and annulled.

Pynchon describes what happens to the ‘undefined anarchism of cyberspace” (327) on another level as well. That level is formed by ‘real estate imperatives” (166) which are particularly relevant to the evocation of the urban space of the novel. It is no mere coincidence that at one point Maxine realizes that what is happening to New York is also happening to the Internet (DeepArcher): ‘Like the Island Meadows, DeepArcher also has developers after it. Whatever migratory visitors are still down there trusting in its inviolability will some morning all soo soon be rudely surprised by the whispering descent of corporate Web crawlers itching to index and corrupt another patch of sanctuary for their own far-from-selfless ends” (167). The spatial metaphor ‘patch” finds an echo in the way Pynchon uses the Wild West to indicate what is taking place on the Internet: ‘It’s still unmessed-with country. You like to think it goes on forever, but the colonizers are coming. The suits and tenderfeet. You can hear the blue-eyed-soul music over the ridgeline. There’s already a half dozen well-funded projects for designing software to crawl the Deep Web –” (241). The passage continues by making the metaphor explicit: ‘Except summer will end all too soon, once they get down here, everything’ll be suburbanized faster than you can say late capitalism.’ Then it’ll be just like up there in the shallows. Link by link, they’ll bring it all under control, safe and respectable. Churches on every corner. Licenses in all the

saloons. Anybody still wants his freedom'll have to saddle up and head somewhere else" (ibid.). Reg's statement 'There's always a way to monetize anything" (349) succinctly points to the context in which Pynchon traces development in cyber space.

The parallels Pynchon draws between what capital is doing to geographical space and to the Deep Web illustrate the transformative power of capital. However, we ought not to understand this power as utopian because it does not challenge capital itself but rather augments it. This augmentation is the defining trait of capital and the way it relates to space has been convincingly explained by David Harvey. I will not here detail Harvey's argument but merely point out that Harvey's notion of the spatial fix describes how capital, whenever it arrives at an impasse, seeks geographical resolutions of its contradictions. The reason I bring up the matter at the present point is because the Web in *Bleeding Edge* functions as a resource which can assuage the driving thrust of the capital drive. Daniel Marcus Greene and Daniel Joseph, in their article 'The Digital Spatial Fix" (2015), use Harvey to show how capital bends the Web to its interests.³ Pynchon shows how this is done in *Bleeding Edge* where the alternative world of the Web is always already coopted by capital and its dynmaic.

The same holds true for the ending of Pynchon's novel. The mother seeing her sons off to school motif harks back to the opening scene of the novel and definitely has a compositional significance. Brian Chappell contends that Pynchon 'creates an opportunity to use the rhetorically privileged position of the ending to posit something that can last beyond the book and remain in the reader's consciousness" (Chappell 3). According to the same author, Pynchon in that ending 'posits a human response, a way of proceeding in the face of these faceless forces" (1) and the family scenes that he enumerates near the end of the novel 'are spaces of resistance to (or perhaps perhaps blissful ignorance of) a burgeoning world order bent on control" (2). But let us take a close look at the final scene keeping in mind its 'privileged position": 'The boys have been waiting for her, and of course that's when she flashes back to not long ago down in DeepArcher, down to their virtual hometown of Zigotispolis, both of them standing just like this, folded in just this precarious light, ready to step out into their peaceable city, still safe from the spiders and bots that one day too soon will be coming for it, to claim-jump it in the name of the indexed world" (Pynchon 2013, 476). Although Chappell writes that

3 This in brief is their argument: We argue here that the digital spaces formed by technologies such as the Internet are experimental spaces where capital seeks freedom from contemporary limits. Old strategies of accumulation are re-attempted in new spaces and new strategies are crafted through trial and error in the never-ending quest to surpass or displace the internal contradictions which lead to crisis" (Greene and Joseph 224).

Pynchon's narrator describes them as caught in the same web between hope and despair" (Chappell 12), the thrust of his argument and, I would add, that "something that lasts beyond" the general reader's consciousness, privileges the pole of hope. A cursory reading definitely leaves that impression. However, such a reading downplays the menacing signifiers "still" or "too soon." Chappell contends that in the closing stretch of the novel Maxine's "work of investigating invisible power structures become the work of helping souls, forging bonds, (re)establishing communities" (ibid.). If this is partially true, I voice my disagreement with Chappell's opinion that in the closing segment of the novel "The ominous world of terror and war, and the virtual world beneath it, recede, and a perception of even broader cosmic forces arises" (ibid.). Chappell's reading of the concluding scene accords with the importance he assigns to spirituality and the family but it does not give due attention to textual evidence. To overlook the significance of the adverbs "still," "too soon" or the fact that Maxine imagines her children in a "precarious" light elides the fact that the "spaces of resistance" are always already under threat. Those threats do not recede in the final section of the novel. My disagreement with Chappell is in no way an oddity in the critical debate over Pynchon because, as Chappell himself states at the beginning of his article, some have been "lauding Pynchon's humanism, others lamenting a perceived stance of despair, and others balking at his political naïvete" (Chappell 1). Chappell says that his essay decidedly falls into the first category. Mine does not. If I do recognize a certain humanism in Pynchon than it is a humanism that is always endangered and almost always defeated.

4.

The peripeteias in Pynchon's novels set up structures against what resists and seeks to subvert them. In an "indexed world" the outcome of that conflict is a foregone conclusion. Featuring so prominently as it does at the very end of the novel, the word "indexed" demands a few remarks. In his article "Welcome to the Indexed World," David Haeselin reiterates the banal truth that Pynchon in *Bleeding Edge* deals with technological change but adds "this novel is not just about media technology or even the Internet more specifically; it is about the effect of the search engine" (Haeselin 313). Haeselin particularizes the field of technology and specifies one of its instruments. In the course of his argument he points to the role of advertising in the functioning of search engines but is not as forthright as Joseph Darlington in arguing that "the movement of DeepArcher to open source is a recuperation of radical potential by capitalism" (Darlington 248). This needs to be said because just as the

title of Pynchon's novel has a twofold meaning so does the word "index." Namely, in addition to indicating a procedure on the Internet, this being Haeselin's argument, it also relates to the economy, where indices track and signify its fluctuations.

Having said this I think it is necessary to specify that the monetary metareality depicted in *Bleeding Edge* is characterized by a distinct mutation of money. Two references from the novel suffice to point to this mutation. The first is the following: "Lucas, who'd been putting his money in places a bit less domestic, flipping IPOs, buying into strange instruments understood only by sociopathic quants" (Pynchon 2013, 73). Whoever has attempted to understand today's finance will not take Pynchon to task for his description of its "strange instruments." The second refers to a historical person and his money affairs: the person is Bernie Madoff and his affairs proved "to be a Ponzi scheme" (140). These two references, chosen among the many scattered throughout the novel, indicate the power and the illegible nature of finance in contemporary capitalism. The word "illegible" is intended to echo Alison Shonkwiler's contention that finance represents the "untaming" of the economy: "It does not stabilize questions about the value of money or where wealth comes from. In generating a sense that there is no there in capitalism, finance threatens to disconnect social, political, and class-based modes of legibility" (Shonkwiler 5). Just as Haeselin particularized the question of technology, I now return to money capital because certain things have to be reiterated and rethought in the context of thinking the possibility of resistance.

In his book *The Social Life of Money*, Nigel Dodd has a chapter on culture and utopia in which he explains how money is conceived and how it can be subverted. He offers a dichotomy "between *structural* accounts of money and *agent-centred* approaches." In other words he offers two theories of money one of which "is *determinist* and one that is *voluntarist*. One approach sees money as an objective and objectifying force, a vehicle and expression of profound alienation. The other sees money as the active and ongoing creation of its users" (Dodd 305-6). It can be said that orthodox Marxists upheld the voluntarist position believing that money could be disposed of as revolutionaries thought fit so that, as Robert Kurz remarks "The utopian thought always toyed with the idea of abolishing money" (Kurz). History shows that this was more easily thought than done. To update the issue and point to the context in which I am reading Pynchon I add another observation from Kurz: "by and large, it seems, the utopian energy is on the wane anyway. Under the global reign of neo-liberal economic radicalism, the monetary subjectivity is as unchallenged as never before" (ibid.). Using Dodd's dichotomy I hold that Pynchon in *Bleeding Edge*, as elsewhere in his opus, adumbrates a structural, determinist conception of money. This is the main point of

contention I have with Pöhlmann's reading of the novel. Namely, although Pöhlmann sees that money in the novel informs the world to such an extent that it seems to have no outside, he holds that Pynchon uses 'the ubiquity of money against that very system of capitalism itself' (Pöhlmann 32). Pöhlmann writes: 'The novel offers no sense of an outside to capitalism, and yet it identifies within that system an element that is both at its very heart but at the same time never fully under its control' (33). According to Pöhlmann, this element is money itself. Orrell helps us understand the misconception about control in capitalism implied in Pöhlmann's statement: 'Perhaps the problem is that, because money is based on number we have become used to the idea that the economy is a kind of predictable, mechanical system – rather than something with a life of its own' (Orrell 20). Money as an 'entanglement device' (16) plays a huge role in that life and as represented in Pynchon leaves little room for disentanglements and resistance even if one does, as Pöhlmann suggests, 'the right thing with regard to money' (Pöhlmann 33).

If attended to at all, readings of economic issues such as money and their narrative representations show how our axiology is often biased toward the emancipatory project. But what if the very envisioning of such a project is threatened? Roy Bhaskar introduced the term 'de-agentification,' which we can summarily define as the 'enervation or fragmentation of agents or groups' (Bhaskar 396); I find it appropriately designates the enfeeblement of resistance at a time witnessing 'the closure of the future within the present' (115). Since I am reading Pynchon within that present, let me map it with two supplementary comments. Alain Badiou discusses ethics, I would add resistance, and its relation to 'necessity,' designating the latter in the following manner: 'The modern name for necessity is, as everyone knows, economics.' Economic objectivity – which should be called by its name: the logic of Capital – is the basis from which our parliamentary regimes organize a subjectivity and a public opinion condemned in advance to ratify what seems necessary' (Badiou 30). Remarking on the possible in these circumstances Badiou writes that it is 'circumscribed and annulled, in advance, by the external neutrality of the economic referent – in such a way that subjectivity in general is inevitably dragged down into a kind of belligerent impotence, the emptiness of which is filled by elections and the sound-bites' of party leaders' (31). In her book *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, Judith Butler refers to 'a larger cultural and political predicament, namely, how to take an oppositional relation to power that is, admittedly, implicated in the very power one opposes'. This is surely a predicament shared by Pynchon. She adds: Often this postliberatory insight has led to the conclusion that all agency here meets its impasse. Either forms of capital or symbolic domination are held to be such that our acts are always already

domesticated' in advance, or a set of generalized and timeless insights is offered into the operative structure of all movements toward a future" (Butler 17-18). I quote Butler because postliberatory and the impasse are, in my opinion, apt descriptions of the thematization of resistance in Pynchon. That she mentions capital makes her remarks all the more relevant to my argument. But I do register her critical distancing from the general, timeless and operative and do not have to underscore how both Badiou and Butler do not renegade, at least on the ideational level, from the task of challenging the existent. Neither does Pynchon.

One way he does this is by recognizing the unsustainability of capital's belief in limitless growth. The epitaph I have chosen from *Bleeding Edge* encapsulates Pynchon's sarcasm regarding that belief. Others have drawn attention to the ecological problematic in Pynchon (Schaub). Here I will illustrate it by a passage from *Against the Day* where Pynchon indulges in a bit of science fiction. At the Candlebrow Conference, "subsidized out of the vast fortune of Mr. Gideon Candlebrow" (Pynchon 2006, 406) Pynchon gives voice to a people from the future who give warnings of where capital is heading:

We are here among you as seekers of refuge from our present – your future – a time of worldwide famine, exhausted fuel supplies, terminal poverty – the end of the capitalist experiment. Once we came to understand the simple thermodynamic truth that Earth's resources were limited, in fact soon to run out, the whole capitalist illusion fell to pieces. Those of us who spoke this truth aloud were denounced as heretics, as enemies of the prevailing economic faith. Like religious Dissenters of an earlier date, we were forced to migrate, with little choice but to set forth upon that far fourth-dimensional Atlantic known as Time." (415)

As I see it, Pynchon's critical take on capitalism is even more radical than that of its critics who espouse a utopian alternative. His future is closed and foredoomed. In my conclusion I will point out how Pynchon, although espousing a defeatism concerning the grand strategies of resistance, deploys tactics that squarely put him in opposition to the really existing world.

Conclusion

At certain points in his career Pynchon has come out of his anonymity, which in itself can be understood as an oppositional tactic in celebrity

culture, to voice dissent against contemporary events and developments. In 1966 he published the article "A Journey into the Mind of Watts," in which he empathizes with the plight of the black ghetto. In the 1984 article "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?" Pynchon presciently recognized developments in technology and positioned himself with the rhetorical question. Of even greater relevance to my argument is the introduction Pynchon wrote for Jim Dodge's novel *Stone Junction* in 1997. Pöhlmann, in his article, in the section entitled "God forbid there should be real cash on a real table," speaks of cash money as a subversive element and in passing mentions Pynchon's introduction. The fact that Pynchon wrote the preface indicates that he was not indifferent to this "outlaw epic." Reducing the epic to its rudimentary plot line, I will say that the personifications of the counter-culture society named The Alliance of Magicians and Outlaws (AMO) in the novel mount up points of resistance to what Pynchon in the Preface identifies as "forces of Control" (Pynchon 1997, xi). I quote from the preface a passage that has a strong bearing not only upon the theme of structure and resistance but also upon the mutation of money that provides the economic backdrop of *Bleeding Edge*:

One popular method of resistance was always just to keep moving – seeking, not a place to hideout, secure and fixed, but a state of dynamic ambiguity about where one might be at any given moment, along the lines of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Modern digital machines, however, managed quickly enough to focus the blurred hyper-ellipsoid of human freedom down to well within Planck's Constant. Equally difficult for those who might wish to so proceed through life anonymously and without trace has been the continuing assault against the once-reliable refuge of the cash or non-plastic economy. There was a time not so long ago you could stroll down any major American avenue, collecting on anonymous bank checks, get on some post office line, and send amounts in the range hefty to whopping' anywhere, even overseas, no problem. Now it's down to \$750 a pop, and shrinking. All to catch those Drug Dealers of course, nothing to do with the grim, simplex desire for more information, more control, lying at the heart of most exertions of power, whether governmental or corporate (if that's a distinction you believe in). (xi-xii)

Resistance in this passage is a period of respite, a "refuge" which was once reliable and attainable through a mode of money which has all but disappeared. The last ironic and sarcastic sentence conflates control and power, the state and the economy. The outcome is unequivocal: the space of resistance has shrunk under the "continuing assault" of structures.

Different strands of my reading of Pynchon implicate Marx but I stress that Pynchon's reading of structures shares little if anything with the voluntarism of revolutionary telos. If there is a Marx that can be summoned up here than it is the Marx who at certain junctures of his writing recognized the abiding power of capital such as in *Grundrisse* where he states Labor, by adding a new value to the old one, at the same time maintains and eternizes [capital]" (qtd. in Camatte 6). Jacques Camatte, who cites this quotation in his brief piece *The Wandering of Humanity*, adds, rephrasing Marx: 'all human activity eternizes' capital" (Camatte 6). I think Pynchon would appreciate the acumen of this insight. I bring this up because I think Pynchon's 1993 short piece 'The Deadly Sins/Sloth, Nearer, My Couch, to Thee,' acknowledges, in a negative manner, the truth of that eternization. In the article Pynchon summarizes a diachrony of sloth but, relevant to my argument, he shows how at a certain point it lost its religious connotations and became an 'offense against the economy" (Pynchon 1993). Pynchon dates this shift to 1853 and the publication of Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street,' noting: 'Right in the heart of robber-baron capitalism, the title character develops what proves to be terminal acedia" (ibid.). Let me suggest that what Pynchon seems to be implying is that since all human activity contributes to capital the only way to resist it, to offend economic logic, is to abstain from activity. I wager to say that instead of celebrating the liberation of labor, as a revolutionary Marxist would do, Pynchon is here slyly celebrating the liberation from or the abolition of labor as Marx intermittently argued for in his writing (see Zilbersheid). In that sense it can be surmised that the manifesto which would probably be more to Pynchon's liking than the orthodox communist one would be Marx's son-in-law's treatise *The Right To Be Lazy*.

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