

**Conceptualizing Cyberspace through the Representation of Paranoia in Thomas
Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49***

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Abstract

This thesis argues that postmodern subjectivity is fundamentally defined by its relationship with information technology, a relationship that generates a particularly paranoid subjectivity. This paranoia arises from the subject's disorientation within the digital landscape of postmodernity, characterized by an overwhelming influx of information, hidden structures of control, and the destabilization of traditional epistemologies and structures of meaning. This condition is prefigured in the literary works of Thomas Pynchon, particularly *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, where he represents paranoia as emerging as a response to the overdetermination of bureaucratic apparatuses of surveillance and control, enabled and intensified by technology, in postindustrial society. By analyzing Pynchon's representations of bureaucratic networks, I draw a comparison and note a similarity between the fictional environments of his novels and the contemporary digital sphere, particularly the Internet and social media platforms, which can be argued to function as analogous systems of control and surveillance. These platforms, underpinned by algorithmic logic and decentralized infrastructures, produce a sense of epistemic instability that mirrors the paranoid logic Pynchon's characters adopt in their efforts to find coherence within the complex systems they find themselves enmeshed in. I consider how postmodern subjectivity has been shaped by shifts from Enlightenment models of rational agency to post-structuralist and postmodern understandings of the self as fragmented. Drawing on theorists such as Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Slavoj Žižek, Jürgen Habermas, and Fredric Jameson, the convergence of global capitalism and cyberspace has created a disorienting social infrastructure in which meaning becomes unstable, and subjectivity becomes increasingly mediated by systems of surveillance and commodified information. I conclude that the rise of conspiratorial logic in the digital age represents not only a symptom of epistemic crisis, but also a survival mechanism: a way for subjects to orient themselves amid the erosion of traditional institutions of knowledge and legitimacy. In this context, Pynchon's paranoid characters provide an analogy of how contemporary individuals navigate the complexity of digital postmodernity, through the only organizational principle that remains feasible in a fragmented and algorithmically driven content economy: conspiratorial logic.

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Note to Reader

This thesis and the bibliography have been formatted according to the Rhodes University Literary Studies in English “Style Sheet for Writers of MA and PhD Theses 2025”.

The edition of *The Crying of Lot 49* referred to is Vintage Books (2000).

The edition of *Gravity’s Rainbow* referred to is Penguin Classics, Deluxe Edition (2006).

Scare quotes are represented by double quotation marks: “...”.

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Preface

The central claim I am making in this thesis is that postmodern subjectivity is fundamentally constructed through a relationship to information technology. I am suggesting that the subjective experience of modern individuals, whose lives are dominated by the Internet and information technology, is defined by a certain degree of paranoia. This paranoia emerges from the subject's inability to orient themselves within the environment of digital postmodernity.

Secondly, Thomas Pynchon prefigures this phenomenon through his representation of paranoia within *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. He achieves this by positioning his characters within societies dominated by bureaucratic apparatuses premised on surveillance, and emboldened by technology and technical procedures.

Finally, Pynchon's work is relevant to an analysis of the contemporary postmodern condition, due to the similarity between the technologically dominated bureaucracies premised on surveillance and control that he depicts, and the Internet, particularly social media, as a bureaucratic structure.

In situating Thomas Pynchon in relation to technology and the post-industrial world, Pynchon scholar Joseph Slade succinctly outlines that:

Norbert Wiener, one of Pynchon's principal influences, has asserted that the 17th and 18th centuries were the age of steam, the 19th the age of clocks, and the 20th the age of cybernetics. Whether Pynchon accepts the first two stages is unimportant; he certainly accepts the third. And less important than accepting the notion that the postindustrial era diverges from eras of the past is seeing that accelerated technology has exacerbated the ancient dualisms of our culture: individual and society, duration and change, determinism and free will, perception and reality, time and space, man and machine. Such dualisms, especially the last, abound in Pynchon's fiction. (Slade 55-56)

Thomas Pynchon's fiction is eclectic in the sense that it draws from a multitude of discourses and positions on culture and on the experience of human beings within culture. He is perhaps best known for his lengthy considerations of communication breakdown and the difficulties of coming to a consensus about the state of reality. His idiosyncratic method of representing this is often through paranoid individuals who exist within a contingent reality that is comprised of competing conspiracy theories. For Pynchon, the discontinuity, the contingency, and the absurdity of reality is often represented in the form of reality as a conspiracy. I think through this, he touches on the most prescient anxiety of human existence: can we truly know anything for sure? How can we be really sure we are making any progress

at all in truly representing and understanding reality? Perhaps one answer to this question is that a continuity with the structure of reality is expressed in the ability to create technology, to progressively, through logic, create things that function, and can be progressively improved with that function in mind. Throughout Pynchon's work, this possibility is treated with extreme suspicion. Drawing from the above excerpt, I would like to look into how Pynchon represents technology as exacerbating discontinuities and the dualisms Slade points out. The site where I conduct this analysis is post-industrial society, and the object of interest is the Internet, or more broadly, cyberspace.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I became curious about the ways in which social media was changing human behaviour. Upon reflection, what intrigued me was the strange relationship between reality and narrative, and the real and virtual. What I am concerned with then is the effect of social media, but more broadly, information technology, on contemporary culture. Its effect, and more so its structure is revealed by examining its proclivity to produce conspiratorial discourse at a mainstream level. This fusion of a technologically dominated society, the crises of globalized capitalism, and the rampant conspiracy against a hidden threat, be it the virus or the shadowy forces that may or may not be capitalizing on it, brought me to the work of Thomas Pynchon.

What stands out in the work of Thomas Pynchon is the impossibility of clarity; the impossibility of anything within the social realm to be reduced to a fixed and stable position. In Pynchon's earlier work, like his short story "Entropy" and *The Crying of Lot 40*, there seems to be an emphasis placed on the possibility of meaning through examining the intricacies of communication.

His stories describe the complexities of capitalism and bureaucracy, such as the lengthy consideration of these themes in *Gravity's Rainbow* and its rendering of World War II through the lens of a postmodern historical fiction, but also riff on concepts like thermodynamics and information theory, and deconstruct fictional texts to interrogate the process of interpretation and communication *within* his own texts, such as *The Courier's Tragedy* in *The Crying of Lot 49*, a novel fundamentally concerned with the breakdown, or even the possibility, of consensus knowledge in post-industrial society. This leaves the reader with difficulties in experiencing Pynchon's work as a coherent totality.

This inability to capture the essence of a text is applicable to the modern online media landscape. Because social media, perceived as an object and even a text, is constantly being restructured due to the overabundance of subjective narratives that compete and synergize, it becomes difficult for the user to extract a precise meaning. Rather than a definitive act of

communication, which produces a somewhat definitive meaning, the user of social media is left floating in a pool of intensities, a vague summation of a concept or essence that leaves the individual continually probing for more clarification. The import of Pynchon's literature is the way in which he intuits the underlying tendencies of postmodern discourse as being deferred or conspiratorial. Rather, he sees conspiracy as inseparable from ontological enquiry in modern society. But why is this the case? Why are the perspectives of postmodern literature and postmodern philosophy, primarily from the 1970s, applicable to diagnosing the current societal condition?

To answer this question, in this thesis, I examine the changing perceptions of subjectivity and the evolving cultural and technological spaces it interacts with to explore the challenges faced by the modern individual. The central theme, in this relationship between the contemporary subject and its culture, is cyberspace. I aim to show that this relationship is rooted in a necessarily paranoid response to the vast, decentralized information network of the World-Wide-Web.

I begin by analysing how the concept of subjectivity has developed from the pre-industrial Enlightenment, through the industrial landscape of modernity, to the post-industrial landscape of postmodernity. Pynchon's use of the WWII setting in *Gravity's Rainbow*, through which he critiques 1960s American society, illustrates how the war can be construed as an origin for the technologies, techniques, logics, and ideologies of postmodernity. Furthermore, I examine *The Crying of Lot 49* to illustrate how paranoia and conspiracy theory are common reactions to the disorienting reality of postmodernity.

My goal is to develop an account of how subjectivity is conceptualized in postmodernity by engaging with key thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard. At the same time, I analyse Pynchon's novels to show how issues of subjectivity in post-industrial societies, especially as they relate to knowledge, and communication, are central to his narratives.

Ultimately, drawing on Fredric Jameson, I suggest this illustrates how the subject tries to extract meaning from a system that continually defers it. A stable sense of meaning would ground the subject in a fixed identity, something which is incompatible with the productive demands and politically cynical, apathetic attitudes required by advanced capitalism and postmodern ideology. Paranoia, understood as the deferral of truth at the end of a rational process, is a precondition for the postmodern subject to function as an interpellated participant in the globalized and capitalist networks of postmodernity. When examined retroactively, the experience of being caught within a vast and unknowable network, which

defines the lives of Pynchon's characters, reflects the experience of the Internet as the primary influence on post-industrial subjectivity.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the work of Thomas Pynchon and contextualize *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* as postmodern literature. In defining some of the formal characteristics of postmodern literature and its relationship to postmodern philosophy, I also approach some of the general characteristics of postmodernity as an epoch through understanding the concerns of these discourses as attempting to represent the experience of postmodernity.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I present the first part of my argument, which is drawn from a reading of how paranoia functions in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. I propose the idea that paranoia is generated by the experience of living under pervasive bureaucracies, which, in Pynchon's novels, are premised on surveillance and control and that this is an experience that is distinctive to postmodernity.

In Chapter 3, I link the notion of bureaucracy to the notion of a network. By making this link, the experience of living under a bureaucracy premised on surveillance is analogous to the use of the Internet, which can be construed as a bureaucratic structure premised on surveillance. I conclude that the emerging symbol of subjectivity in postmodernity is that of the network.

In Chapter 4, I develop a definition of subjectivity by illustrating how it is defined and how it functions. Here, I conduct a lengthy consideration of the passage from the Enlightenment to postmodern philosophy, and the ways in which these discourses attempt to represent fundamental changes in social infrastructure. I refer to thinkers such as Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Slavoj Žižek.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I consider the relationship between globalized capitalism and cyberspace and the ways in which this infrastructure disorients the postmodern subject.

In Chapter 7, I consider how the prevalence of conspiratorial and paranoid discourses is supported by the infrastructure of cyberspace as a content economy. Through an analysis of Jürgen Habermas and his concept of legitimation crisis, I show that the crisis-ridden tendency of capitalism, and its proclivity to erode more conventional meaning structures, allows the space for paranoid conspiracy to emerge as a discourse revolving around orienting oneself. However, the content economy, due to its algorithmic design, perpetuates these discourses as products. I finally return to Pynchon and attempt to argue that this picture is analogous to the one he illustrates in his novels, regarding the way his characters feel caught within a complex bureaucratic network that is intensified by technology.

My conclusion is that Pynchon portrays subjects who engage in conspiratorial logic in order to resist a technological and capitalist other. I conclude by arguing that the tension between subject and system, and the mobilization of conspiratorial logic as a necessary effect of the socialization processes of advanced capitalism, provides a strong literary representation of what is an analogous picture of the contemporary subject navigating the vast, decentralized and de-legitimized bodies of knowledge on the Internet. In the wake of a milieu of cynicism through the perceived illegitimacy of institutions of knowledge legitimation, what is most available to the subject is indeed conspiratorial logic.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Selected Texts and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Introducing Thomas Pynchon and Literary Postmodernism

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon Jr was born in New York in 1937. He was reportedly an avid reader and writer in his youth. Upon leaving school, Pynchon was awarded a scholarship to study engineering at Cornell University in 1953. At the end of his first year of college, he enlisted in the Navy and served for 4 years, being posted in the Mediterranean during the Suez Crisis of 1956. He returned to the US in 1957 and completed his education at Cornell, however, this time pursuing a BA in English, which included being a student of Vladimir Nabokov's literature courses. Most interestingly, especially when considering some of the mathematical jargon that is present in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon worked at Boeing as a technical writer from 1960 to 1962. The fusion of his appreciation for mathematics and engineering, Navy experience, and technical work at Boeing positions Pynchon as a worthy candidate to tackle the complexities of post-industrial society (Slade 53). His breakout novel, *V*, was published in 1963, followed by *The Crying of Lot 49* in 1966, and then a more experimental novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, only ten years later, in 1973. This could be described as "classic" Pynchon, fraught with 1960s counterculture and Cold War-inspired conspiracy. Other well-known novels are *Vineland*, (1990) and *Inherent Vice* (2009).

Stylistically, Pynchon's writing is generally considered to be a part of the postmodern genre. Postmodernism is notoriously difficult to define, since it remains radically resistant to categorization and meaning. Some of the broader themes of postmodernism are the questioning of the notion of objectivity, the possibility of an objective truth, and the questioning and interrogation of various categories that purportedly support the structure of society. Instead, postmodern texts interrogate the possibility of structure as an effective and essential principle itself. I would like to introduce postmodernism as a concept by defining two related terms: postmodernity and postmodernism.

To understand postmodernity, some attention should be given to the concept from whence it draws much of its meaning: modernity. Modernity can be understood chronologically as the last phase of the process that began in the Enlightenment. Typically, modernity as a concept deals with the rapid transformation in the lives of individuals brought on by industrialization in the 1800s¹, and the scientific and ideological innovations that this

¹ Colonization should also be considered as an important variable in this process, both in the development of capitalism, as a forerunner to character of the globalized world, as well as an environment unto which

influenced, reaching a climax in both a material and ideological sense in World War II. As Lawrence Cahoon succinctly encapsulates it:

“Modernity” implies that this civilization is modern in the strong sense that it is unique in human history [...] Everyone admits that Europe and North America developed a new, powerful technique for the study of nature, as well as new machine technologies and modes of industrial production [...] It is this form of “modernity” that is today described as “modernization”. (Cahoon 11)

While not to be confused with the artistic and cultural movement of modernism, this movement certainly operates within the context of the era of modernity and is concerned with thinking about how society should approach the increasingly industrialized world. Other notable developments are “a largely secular culture, liberal democracy, individualism, rationalism, and humanism” (11), as well as the rise of nationalism. Modernity as an era, and a concept, could very broadly be asserted to be most relevant from 1800 to 1945. I will give closer attention to the transition from this period to “postmodernity” in Chapter 2, and again in Chapter 4.

Postmodernity can be understood as the cultural epoch that emerged after World War II, until the end of the Cold War (Bradbury 764). Some argue (Coker 189) that the postmodern only truly begins at the end of the Cold War, and still constitutes an ongoing categorization of the period we live in. Postmodernity, as a cultural epoch, has as its primary object of focus post-industrial society, which, while on the one hand denotes a move away from primary industrial economies to advanced capitalist market economies, also denotes a concern with the ever-increasing spread of institutionalized market capitalism in a context of expanding globalization and transnational flow of goods and people. Within this epoch, postmodernism exists, which is a theoretical and artistic discourse. Postmodernism arrives in broadly two forms: philosophical (or theoretical postmodernism) and cultural postmodernism (within which can be located *literary* postmodernism).

Ultimately, literary postmodernism emerges as a reaction against – though some argue the possibility of it being an extension of – literary modernism (Jameson 4), hence the term “post” denoting what comes *after* modernism (Jameson x). Daniel Green argues that

Although the term has come to denote a general attitude toward traditional intellectual presuppositions or, more specifically, certain related practices in philosophy, the social sciences, and all of the arts, “postmodern” was originally a critical label attached to an emergent group of American fiction

industrialization could be applied in ways that most intensely juxtapose it to “pre-industrial/non-western” modes of living. In short, it would be remiss to talk about the industrial age without the colonial periphery it extorts.

writers perceived to be challenging established literary convention. (Green 729)

Green situates the genesis of what is conventionally understood as postmodernism in an American literary movement in the 1960s, which, according to Pynchon's own reflections, was influenced by the preceding Beat Generation of poets and authors such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac (Pynchon 7). Some of the notable characteristics of this specific variety of literary postmodernism are the questioning of traditional narrative forms. For example, where its precursor modernism often includes unreliable narrators – *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and *Ulysses* by James Joyce – postmodernism often deconstructs and interrogates the function of the narrator entirely. Regarding this progressive transformation from realism, through modernism, to postmodernism, Green notes that

Conventional storytelling and the protocols of realism had been challenged, to be sure, by the previous generation of modernist writers, but this new fiction was “post-modern” in extending the modernist rejection of existing assumptions to include assumptions even the modernists still accepted, about the integrity of character, for example, or about the intricate effects of “point of view”. (Green 729)

The interrogation of point of view and narrative can be described as a greater degree of reflexivity, or a jump out of the novel as self-contained. For example, it is not uncommon for postmodern literature to showcase a self-reflexive narrator, a narrator that is aware of their role in narration. This goes beyond the level of a formal narrator being aware of their fallibility as a transmitter of knowledge within the textual universe; this is an awareness by the author of the continued presence of the reader. A literary postmodernist often shows an awareness of the novel as an object within a cultural context and awareness of how its consumption is practiced (Jameson 20). Essentially, the level of reflexivity from modernism to postmodernism concerning the novel as a form expands another layer outwards.

This was developed first by writers like Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Vladimir Nabokov, and Samuel Beckett. This tendency was developed further by postmodernists of Pynchon's era, and at its most extreme is displayed in brief lapses of narration where the narrator at times “breaks the fourth wall” and directly addresses the reader in some way, like in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969) and certainly in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. For example, the narrator in *Gravity's Rainbow* remarks “[b]ut now rudely, here's that London again. But something's different . . . something's been . . . been *changed* . . . don't mean to bitch, folks, but – well, for instance he could almost swear he's being followed, or

watched anyway” (Pynchon 116) during one of Tyrone Slothrop’s paranoid episodes, directly addressing the reader(s) as “folks”. Beyond this, common features are intertextuality, where frequent references to other works of art and cultural materials, be they high art or low art, are included. *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a prime example of this feature. In this way, the author understands the text as a component in an interrelated field of cultural content. Finally, pastiche and parody are often present, where the author may make allusions to other literary tropes and modalities in the case of pastiche, or in the case of parody, satirize these modalities for comedic purposes (Jameson 17-18). Pynchon’s novels are filled with various allusions to other genres, sudden breaks of poetry and song, newspaper articles, and dialogues in the form of a play or film script, such as *The Couriers Tragedy in Crying of Lot 49*: a fictional text within a fictional text. The fusion of high art and low art that is prevalent in the postmodernism of the 1960s and 1970s, when it emerged alongside the American counterculture, is notable in Pynchon’s early work, again particularly in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, where Pynchon shows a particular propensity to reference both European silent films and early American westerns. Other well-known novels in postmodern style are *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) by John Barth, *The Name of The Rose* (1980) by Umberto Eco, *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo, and *Infinite Jest* (1996) by David Foster Wallace. With the exception of Umberto Eco, all are American authors, and there does seem to be a proclivity for the postmodern novel in the U.S.

Placing literary postmodernism and elements of philosophical postmodernism in context shows that there is a degree of crossover. Philosophical postmodernism emerges as a cultural phenomenon primarily in the context of developed nations of the global north, especially those with predominantly capitalist systems. It is, as the formal strategies of its literary variety hint at, often a perspective that sees the world not as a totality, but as fragmented and decentralized in nature, through a plurality of different competing discourses and subjective perspectives (Ning 264). Literary postmodernism forms the dominant current of literature to emerge out of modernism and extends its avant-garde experimentation. Particularly, in reacting against the perceived bourgeois elitism of modernism, it extends this experimentation to popular culture, to artworks previously characterized as “low art”. Like philosophical postmodernism, literary postmodernism also displays a suspicion towards “metanarratives”, and as Ning argues, displays a certain “schizophrenic” structure of text through “fragmentary narration” (264).

Expanding on this, and noting crossover between philosophical and literary postmodernism, regarding their formal and thematic concerns, Green further argues:

Exactly how a concept originating in literary criticism came to carry the great cultural weight it now bears is a potentially confusing story relevant to a consideration of postmodern fiction only in that it highlights the extent to which it was identified, at least for a time, as an avant-garde movement calling into question not only particular literary practices but also more generally held beliefs about the value of representation, whether in art or in critical and philosophical discourse, as well as about the capacity of language itself to represent “reality” in any ultimately trustworthy way. (Green 729-730)

What Green seems to be alluding to is the absorption of various interrelated discourses by postmodern literature, possibly with all of those which share the prefix “post”. French poststructuralism emerges towards the end of the 1950s and commonly includes thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault. On the other hand, theoretical postmodernism includes, again, Foucault, as well as Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Fredric Jameson. This may constitute a more mature engagement with the post-war and postindustrial world order that has come to be known as postmodernity. Therefore, literary postmodernism seems to occur at a junction between post-structuralism and postmodernism as theoretical discourses that all existed within the same cultural context in the 1960s and 1970s.

To understand the context within which literary postmodernism emerges, one would have to untangle the relationship between poststructuralism and postmodernism as theoretical discourses. Ben Agger points out that “There is substantial overlap between poststructuralism and postmodernism” (111). He makes the distinction between “poststructuralism (Derrida, the French feminists) [...] a theory of knowledge and language” and “postmodernism (Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard, Baudrillard) [...] a theory of society, culture, and history” (Agger 111-112).

To summarize, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, being influenced by the linguistic philosophy of Ferdinand de Saussure and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger², contributed towards a movement in modern philosophy known as “the linguistic turn” (Toews 881). The linguistic turn in philosophy denotes a shift towards considering language systems and discourse as the primary ontological and constitutive categories of reality for the human being. It is also, through this focus, concerned with representation. By extension, this also precipitates a shift towards an analysis primarily concerned with cultural objects such as literature. Derrida, especially so, presents a focus on

² Mention should be given to the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* too, in the case of Derrida.

interpretation through textual analysis. French intellectuals like Derrida and Barthes, in the early part of their careers were adjacent to the structuralists and eventually constructed elaborate critiques of structuralism. For example, the linguistic approach to ontology, or the focus on linguistics and language as a primary category, presupposes a fundamental structure that underlies the social reality of the subject.

This structuralist revolution in philosophy, by the late 1950s and 1960s, through the influence of thinkers like Derrida, evolved into what is known as post-structuralism. Post-structuralism is a reaction against the structuralist position. It takes the notion of subjective interpretation further by arguing, at its most extreme, that only subjective experience exists and that no one interpretation of a text or of reality could be valid enough to be prescriptive. In this way, it argues that all systems, like language or society, are premised on a structure that is contingent and not essential. Simply put, post-structuralism opposes ultimate categorizations, as it argues that any taxonomy is premised on principles that are ultimately the product of a particular bias.

What becomes clear is that the notion of truth itself is no longer an unchanging axiom. In poststructuralist discourse, any single truth fragments into a multitude of competing interpretations based on cultural and historical contexts (Agger 117). While noting a distinction between poststructuralism and postmodernism, Green argues that the influence of both these intellectual traditions is expressed through literary postmodernism. Green notes that this makes it difficult to categorize what exactly postmodern literature is in a historical sense:

These characteristics, however accurately they may have been ascribed to the original American postmodernists, have largely been appropriated to the broader cultural concept of postmodernism and its various academic branches. As a result, postmodern fiction has been left as a kind of curious collection of eccentric works, vaguely considered “experimental” at best, frivolous or unnecessarily difficult at worst, and for many already mostly a historical phenomenon with little if any relevance to currently notable writers and their work. (Green 730)

It is easier to understand the relevance of postmodern literature if it is conceptualized – along with poststructuralism and theoretical postmodernism – as a method of representing the experience of postmodernity, or as being mimetic of the environment (the 1960s, 70s, and 80s) out of which it emerged. What follows post-structuralism is philosophical postmodernism as distinct from but contemporaneous with postmodern literature and art.

What is commonly referred to as philosophical postmodernism denotes a particular cultural turn in philosophical discourse, most intense from the early 1970s to the end of the 1980s. Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Fredric Jameson were at the height of their fame, turning their philosophical investigations on society itself, as well as all its available cultural objects. The expansion of philosophical inquiry into the domain of culture is what characterizes postmodernism as such an eclectic discourse, because all cultural materials: novels, films, plays, music, TV, news media, and advertisements, become valid objects in the study of how culture represents itself. But in widening the scope and including cultural materials that fall outside of the previously elitist spheres of philosophy and literature, it also interrogates the efficacy of older, highly prescriptive and universalizing narratives. In this way, postmodern discourse can treat works like George Orwell's *1984* and an easy reading airport novel as equally relevant representations of culture. In clarifying a brief summation of postmodernism in this context, Agger notes:

[T]he most explicit philosophical postmodernist is Lyotard. His (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* represents the core of postmodern thinking on central issues of modernity and postmodernity. Lyotard rejects totalizing perspectives on history and society, what he calls *grand narratives* like Marxism [...] He maintains that one cannot tell large stories about the world but only small stories from heterogeneous "subject positions" of individuals and plural social groups. (Agger 116)

What Agger is explaining is that postmodern discourse tends to favour the small over the large. It views the presence of grand narratives as a type of epistemological imperialism, which overdetermines certain views of the world over others. Thus, when one says a piece of artwork seems "postmodern" to them, they are often denoting the general characteristics ascribed to postmodern art: literature, visual and musical, which often but not always represent some of the fundamental concerns of post-structuralist and postmodernist philosophy. To summarize, Lawrence Cahoon asserts that

At a minimum, postmodernism regards certain important principles, methods, or ideas characteristic of modern Western culture as obsolete or illegitimate. In this sense, postmodernism is the latest wave in the critique of the Enlightenment, the critique of the cultural principles characteristic of modern society that trace their legacy to the eighteenth century, a critique that has been going on since that time. Modernity has been criticizing itself all its life. (Cahoon 2)

Cahoon goes on to add that the term became fundamentally linked with "post-industrialism" in the sense that societies, in the wake of World War II, were "radically changing their earlier industrial character" (3). Therefore, if someone were to speak of a "postmodern condition" or

environment, they would usually be denoting social conditions of a technologically advanced post-industrial society. All of this is generally housed under the category of postmodernity as an epochal categorization. So the “post”, in postmodernism as an artistic movement, on one hand, refers to it as succeeding modernism as an artistic movement. On the other hand, postmodernism, as the broad movement of thought in *postmodernity*, refers to its arrival after modernity, which can be applicable as a concept and epochal categorization from the 1800s, with rapid industrialization, and concluding at the end of World War II (Bradbury 764). Thus, when one speaks of *modernism*, one might be referring to the distinct artistic movement, but one might also be referring to a more general cultural movement, of *modernization* and progression, of modernity. The same can be said for postmodernism as a literary, artistic, and theoretical discourse, and postmodernism as a broad description of post-industrial culture: postmodernity.

Therefore, Pynchon is classified as a literary postmodernist on one hand, due to his extreme experimentation with literary form and genre, as well as his ability to create texts that are resistant to a single interpretation. On the other hand, by virtue of the proximity of literary postmodernism to theoretical postmodernism, Pynchon concerns himself thematically with many of the pressing social concerns of post-industrial society, such as effects of late-stage capitalism, the nature of bureaucracy as dominant in the life of the individual, the effect of technological advancement, and the way modern media impacts the status and production of knowledge.

1.2 Representations of Postmodernity and Pynchon’s Penchant for Paranoia

What is particularly characteristic of Thomas Pynchon, in his diagnosis of postmodern culture, is the role of paranoia and conspiracy. In Pynchon’s work, the “postmodern” individual is paranoid as a result of living in post-industrial society. This paranoia is a consequence of the networks of power that form complex economic and social infrastructures, as well as the ever-increasing speed of the flow of information, capital, and people through advances in media communications and the globalized free market. Beyond this infrastructural sense, even in an intellectual and ideological sense, paranoia has an important relationship with postmodernism, precisely because postmodernism concerns itself, as aforementioned, with subverting the perceived hegemony of the received discourse of the Enlightenment and early modernity:

[T]he celebration of the unreliability of discourse and the disbelief in a guaranteed authoritative discourse or metanarrative – may be read as

consistent with a certain paranoid vision which refutes the accepted authoritative or consensual version of reality [...] This suggests that postmodern discourse might be considered “paranoid” insofar as it results from a fundamentally projective act where narrative is read as a function of idiosyncratic and contingent perspective rather than as a transcription of any verifiable reality. (Flieger 89)

What emerges as a result of the contestation of such grand teleological systems of thought, argues Flieger, is a breakdown into heterogeneity and uncertainty. So, while on the one hand, it is the consequence of theoretical and philosophical developments that inspire the sense of uncertainty and paranoid speculation that underlie postmodern discourse. On the other hand, this sense of uncertainty and paranoia is compounded by the concomitant material and cultural conditions that characterize postmodernity as a period of rapid transformation and change across the globe. It is into this context that Pynchon’s representation of paranoia can be most appreciated. Jon Simons expands on this by asserting that

Pynchon's novels are mimetic of the postmodern condition of schizophrenic subjects, who perceive a multitude of worlds or ontological orders because they lack the means to represent the capitalist global order. (Simons 212)

The general scene of postmodernity, which Simons describes as containing a multitude of ontological orders, is no doubt the consequence of globalization. It has been argued, by Edward Said (*Orientalism*, 1978) and Herbert Schiller (*Communication and Cultural Domination*, 1976), for example, that this occurs through the mode of global capitalism and at the behest of American hegemony, which links together disparate local realities and juxtaposes them with an encroaching homogenous global identity based on consumerism and the institutions of Western liberal democracy³.

Pynchon, in the 1960s and 1970s, represents the emerging capitalist culture of the United States, especially the fusion of media technology and consumerism, as a disorientating experience. This is best observed in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and its erosion of faith in any truthful narrative consensus. He also situates bureaucracy and bureaucratic societies as complex and inherently based on surveillance and control, particularly in works like *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Both of these interpretations of the postmodern condition also operate in cyber-culture. By cyber-culture, ultimately what I mean is a post-industrial society largely constituted and represented by the Internet.

³ Generally referred to as Cultural Imperialism. See Kroes, Rob. “American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: A View from the Receiving End”. *Diplomatic History*. Vol 23, No.3. 1999. Pp 464.

The greatest innovation of the Internet is that, beyond the propensity the technology has for information flow, it homogenizes social processes into one medium. It is a knowledge database, in the sense of an historical archive. It is an advanced form of TV and radio, in the sense that entertainment and infotainment content is readily available. It is a marketplace, for material goods as well as the trade of virtual currency: social media, likes, subscriptions, advertisements etc. It erodes older institutional and class-based barriers to knowledge consumption and knowledge production: anyone can create and upload content, and based on the degree this content can be commodified, anyone can, in theory, rise to the same level of prominence and influence as a news station or a popular radio show. Most crucially, it also renders the older notions of borders and national boundaries fluid, as information from one side of the globe is instantly available on the other the side, in a higher fidelity compared to previous mediums such as telegram, radio, and even television. Even the computer terminal is becoming increasingly antiquated, all one requires is a handheld cellular device with net access.

This is one view of the Internet, and one that is generally the more positive and libertarian approach. In a broad sense, one can say that this is a more emancipatory interpretation of the Internet, as a liberator of knowledge, a medium that is, in both a libertarian sense and even in some Marxist perspectives, on the side of the people. However, there is another point of view, one that could be construed as oppressive. This interpretation considers the Internet as a bureaucratic apparatus that fundamentally enables increased levels of surveillance and operates as an ideological apparatus in neo-liberal capitalist society. A phone can be, by IP address or other means, tracked in both cyberspace and real physical space via satellite. A phone can also, if a particular institution were interested, function as an ideological apparatus which constantly streams particular flows of information, through algorithms. The design of these algorithms, the way in which they organize information, and the people receiving that information, are often kept secret within the walls of the institutions that create them, as an intellectual technology. Paranoia, it can be argued, is directed to a type of extortion that the Internet itself enables in favour of the powerful corporate entities that are often speculated to have “captured” the Internet. Captured is perhaps a misnomer, because it is companies like Google, META (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook), and Amazon, that form the very architecture of the Internet we understand today, they created the very systems now being “captured”. In other words, there is the possibility that the Internet was always, in some sense, a bureaucratic apparatus based on a certain degree of extortion in order to keep individuals online to keep on making use of its infrastructure and services. I am not

definitively claiming the Internet is a mass surveillance apparatus, though it very well might be. What I am claiming is that the structure of the Internet, and its function in society, signifies the possibility of mass surveillance. The use of the Internet, the awareness of its potentials, and the broader social milieu it operates in (discourse about algorithms, data privacy, surveillance, misinformation, degradation of mental health and attention etc.) facilitates a particular kind of dialectic between it and individuals. The character of this relationship is, among other things, increasingly paranoid as cyber-culture changes the way we interact with the world.

These two perspectives frame the Internet as the foremost generator of a paranoid subjectivity in post-industrial society. The first view entails construing the Internet as embodying some of the principles of postmodernism as an intellectual and ideological discourse, in the sense that the Internet destabilizes older approaches to knowledge. This goes hand-in-hand with Flieger's previous assertion about how postmodernism reacts against authoritative metanarratives. The structure of the Internet lends itself to a discourse of this type, based on the degree to which the overabundance of information, liberalized in its ability to flow in all directions, disorients any attempt at a grounded approach to consensus knowledge. It is this disorientation and destabilization of authoritative knowledge that creates an environment where there is an epistemological, perhaps even an ontological, crisis brought about by such a heterogeneity of discourse, which is able to be perceived through the scope of the Internet and its ability to break down borders, as one chaotic totality.

The other perspective involves a more dystopian articulation which sees the Internet as ultimately an extended bureaucratic apparatus, premised on surveillance. Due to the characteristics outlined in the first perspective, it also has the possibility of functioning as an ideological apparatus, one that rests on disorientation and deferral of consensus knowledge, to support an ever-increasing consumerist society.

The institutionalization and bureaucratization under modern capitalist conditions, which is supported by an ever-expanding sphere of technology and technical procedures, creates an environment where individuals feel like they are being gazed upon by the all-seeing eye of a technocratic global system. This is made exponentially more intense by the Internet and modern information technology in shrinking both the globe and the possibilities for alternative ways of life:

The transparency of our information-saturated global monad, in an age of instantaneous "contact" and access, doubtless confers a paranoid modality to "postmodern" life, giving us the feeling that we are watched everywhere, monitored and transcribed by a ubiquitous information bank. Much

postmodern writing reflects this feeling of being under the gaze of an anonymous surveillance – the sense that the ever-growing database which catalogues us all has its eye on us, tracking our social and economic history, sometimes for political reasons, sometimes to facilitate the new economic or cultural order. (Flieger 87)

The most important point that Flieger raises is the notion that our economic and social history is tracked for political reasons, or, most notably, “to facilitate the new economic or cultural order”. This is precisely the paranoia that emerges in many of the classic conspiracy theories of postmodernity, such as The New World Order or the Illuminati, which find more contemporary expression in conspiracies such as Q-Anon and its rallying cry against the “globalists” (Koblentz-Stenzler and Chavez 4-5). On a more palpable level, this is also the root of the anxiety around the Brexit movement, and much of the immigration paranoia which has become especially prominent since the ascendancy of Trumpism as a mainstream political doctrine in the United States (4-5). This is expressed in theories such as The Great Replacement Theory (Obaidi et al. 1677), or American political anxiety around George Soros, who many right-wing pundits accuse of systematically allowing immigrants into the United States in order to change the social and political landscape (Santini et al. 984). All of this, whether it be conspiracy about a Big Brother-like state in league with contemporary tech giants like Palantir (Crawford and Shultz 1941-1942), or secret groups conspiring to change the world, stems from the effect of globalization and post-industrial society on modern individuals.

This picture of postmodernity is nowhere more present than in the work of Thomas Pynchon. His literature presents, through its foresight, a helpful way of thinking through our relationship to technology in a postindustrial society. We may look to his diagnosis of the “postmodern condition” to reveal the contours of our own time better. If anything, Pynchon, in his diagnosis of postmodern culture, seems to offer a solidarity through absurdity, showing that we should, at least, recognize the paranoia and uncertainty that permeates our experience as a foundation from which possibility emerges, and not as the end point of a process of disintegration. The path to that realization though, is not without peril. In his work, Pynchon seems to capture the vastness of American society, as its contents pour out through its various pores in the technologically dominated networks of media and advertising, right into the consciousness of the everyday American. The perspectives of his novels are often from the everyman looking up at the hulking behemoth of post-industrial society in its complex webs of bureaucracy, corporate paper trails, news media spectacle, and political scandal. More than this, he seems to capture the mood of the postmodern individual as they face the complexities

of a new, interconnected, and globalized world. The experience of the individual as lost within a labyrinth of modern procedures is central to Pynchon's representation of paranoia and conspiracy, whether this reveals a pervasive bureaucracy or the encroaching dominance of technology on modern life. This is particularly so in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. In the following section, I will introduce these two novels and illustrate the concerns of Pynchon's particular strand of literary postmodernism.

1.3 *The Crying of Lot 49* and the American Counterculture

The most appropriate introduction to the literature of Thomas Pynchon would be *The Crying of Lot 49*. This may be Pynchon's most succinct and clear articulation of many recurring themes throughout his work, including paranoia and conspiracy. It is also, compared to *Gravity's Rainbow*, far more accessible formally and stylistically. Pynchon conducts this novel from the perspective of Oedipa Maas, who is the interface for the reader to the central mystery of the novel, which is that there may be a web of conspiracies which may (or may not) be woven tightly into the fabric of American society itself.

The Crying of Lot 49 was written and set in the early 60s, on the western American seaboard: California. It is set in the fictional town of San-Narciso. The story is told through the perspective of Oedipa Maas, who is described as a "young republican". I think this is one of Pynchon's strategies in distancing her from the revolutionary fervour of the American countercultural movement, especially its assortment of hippies, dopers, drifters, investigative reporters, and anti-Vietnam pacifists. Possibly aided by his evident experimentation with marijuana and psychedelic substances and his distrust of authority, Pynchon has his finger on the pulse of American culture during this period. This novel emerges alongside the development of the countercultural movement, and what Pynchon seems to capture is the emergence of this broad aesthetic of resistance, and how the subversion of established norms came to dominate the social and political milieu of the American 1960s.

The Crying of Lot 49 was only published in 1966. I would imagine the seeds of this novel were germinating from the release of *V* in 1963. What Pynchon seems to grasp is the transition from the overly conservative, perhaps even jingoistic, America of Eisenhower in the 1950s to a more turbulent time in the 1960s. Pynchon witnesses the transition from Eisenhower's America, with the triumph of World War II still fresh and the anti-communist fervour against Stalin's USSR, Mao's China, and the Korean War hot in the public consciousness, to the early 60s. The 1960s in America were a period where civil rights movements were gaining traction with the likes of Martin Luther King, Malcom X, as well as

the mythical figure of John F. Kennedy, a liberal statesman who was campaigning to reform the military, industrial, and bureaucratic powers that had dominated US society after World War II. As Pynchon states in the introduction to *Slow Learner: Early Short Stories*:

One of the most pernicious effects of the 50's was to convince the people growing up during them that it would last forever. Until John Kennedy, then perceived as a congressional upstart with a strange haircut, began to get some attention, there was a lot of aimlessness going around. While Eisenhower was in, there seemed no reason why it should all not just go on as it was. (Pynchon 14)

The growing pains of the American empire in this period manifest through increased social activism and resistance. This is a nation that was flirting with its adolescent years of global hegemony. There is an uncertainty that permeates the novel, which I would argue is a result of the transition from the 1950s to the 1960s.

In his novella, Pynchon shows how, inevitably, Oedipa loses faith, loses her naivety, and her belief in things as they appear to be. She loses her faith in the legitimacy of the system, and realizes that the social contract benefits the powerful over the powerless. What underpins the novel is the conspiratorial notion that the powerful are always directing the powerless. The core takeaway seems to be that power, in its most pervasive form, is always hidden, disguised, and that it misdirects the attention of would-be subversives through its almost magical power to disorientate. Pynchon seems to intimate that there is something within the way liberal-democratic and capitalist societies operate that creates this perception of a network of power relations, of which the real centre of power is never seen in clear view, or, even more radically, only exists as an idealistic mirage in the form of a longing for a central point of power and organization that does not exist.

It begins with a letter. Oedipa learns that her ex-lover Pierce Inverarity has passed away and that she has been tasked to be the executrix of his vast estate. What follows is a strange descent into an anti-hegemonic and anti-authoritarian underground. Whilst at a bar that services Yoyodyne – a tech company Pierce had a majority share in – she discovers a strange symbol, a muted post horn that has been drawn in the bathroom. The muted post horn appears like a trumpet with a block stuck in its opening. This symbol comes to represent the Trystero system, a secret postal service. This scene suspiciously takes place at the same time that Mike Fallopian, a right-wing “conspiracy-nut” whom she had met in the bar, introduces her to the intra-company mailing network that they, at Yoyodyne, make use of as a means of resistance to established norms, against the “system”.

Through deciphering Pierce's connections to a plethora of business ventures such as Beaconsfield Cigarettes supposedly made from the bones of long dead allied commandos, and strange synchronicities that appear in a play called *The Couriers Tragedy* that she watches, Oedipa slowly forms an intuition with the help of Fallopian and other eccentrics that the muted post-horn she sees is the symbol of The Trystero that operates throughout the American underground. Trystero is, through Oedipa's research, a rival postal service to the Thurn and Taxis postal service, which operated throughout Europe in the 18th century. She comes to the belief that Trystero became a secret society after it was crushed by Thurn and Taxis, who sought a monopoly on postal services.

Oedipa is caught at the juncture between two worlds: the visible and the invisible. One is represented by Pierce Inverarity and his capitalist empire, as well as Thurn and Taxis, the "official" European postal service. This represents the established narrative and the visible power structure. The legitimate structure of society and history that Oedipa does not, initially, question. The second is represented by Trystero, a mysterious, illicit, invisible, underground network of power. Two associations are created for this network, which are very different in tone. The first possibility is that the network is used to fight for freedom and is used by a suppressed network of resistance. For example, it's used by Mike Fallopian and the numerous eccentrics using the W.A.S.T.E postal system, which Oedipa encounters in the underground of San Narciso. This represents the anti-authoritarian and anti-hegemonic counter-culture. An alternative way of life. A picture of reality that, by nature, subverts and attempts to reveal the complex way that power, money, and greed underlie the accepted and legitimate view of American society. The goal for this underground is a type of emancipation, liberation from constraints and expectations.

The other way of understanding Trystero, however, is as a sinister organization, standing behind the visible power structures as their shadow, while manipulating them. Both these images of an underground are by nature premised on conspiratorial and subversive discourses and practices that seek to undermine the legitimacy of the establishment, or even, as is hinted by Oedipa's research into Trystero, make preparations for an organization to replace that establishment when the time comes. What starts as the discovery of an alternative postal service, in resistance to the status quo, blooms into a sinister conspiracy of a shadowy organization, interested not in resisting the status quo, but usurping that status quo. The true nature of Trystero eludes Oedipa to the very end. In attempting to trace the conspiratorial webs that the Trystero system is dispersed across, Oedipa attempts to uncover a central truth about the ways in which America is organized.

None of these conspiratorial webs are ever entirely verifiable. The pull they have on Oedipa is that she can make the linkage between them; she is the point through which they all connect. This is one interpretation: that she does indeed engage in a fruitless conspiratorial discourse. The other interpretation is that there is a very real secret society and that Oedipa's dissolution is really an awakening, much like that of Neo coming to and discovering that he is being harvested as a bio-battery, in *The Matrix* (1999).

The conspiratorial element to *The Crying of Lot 49*, in the sense that conspiracy is to some extent the ability to conceive of worlds beyond the visible, is central to its placement as a postmodern text. Mark Siegel argues that the inability to conceive of the world as one coherent logical system, and the subsequent breakdown into a multiplicity of competing and synthesizing conspiratorial constructions, is representative of the postmodern focus on interrogating inherited narratives of the way the world works:

Reality is relative, but, at the same time, one "reality" is not as good as another. Different conceptions of reality obviously result in different courses of action which increase or decrease man's chances for happiness, for pain, and for continued survival. Oedipa's – and Pynchon's – question of accepted reality poses a desperate situation. However, it also opens the door to possible solutions by calling into question the inevitability of the present conditions. (Siegel 6-7)

What Siegel outlines is that Oedipa's conspiratorial speculation, and the accompanying paranoia that emerges when trying to piece together pieces of information that do not fit in the accepted narrative of social reality, point to the idea that there are other possible worlds in the sense that the structures that underpin a functioning society are not universal, and ultimately arbitrary. Through this questioning of causal structures, *The Crying of Lot 49*, as a postmodern novel, highlights the contingency of present cultural structures that are perceived, or proclaimed, as essential. To this, Siegel presents a positive message regarding the novel's uncertainty by claiming:

[T]he artist realizes the relativity of truth and the multiplicity of possible conceptions of reality, but is not driven to nihilism by this condition. Thus Oedipa is free to continue her search for some pattern of existence other than the one in which she finds herself living, for some way to help herself or others. (Siegel 7)

Viewed in this light, Oedipa's suffering is a type of martyrdom. If she succeeds in her investigation, if she uncovers the deceit that underlies the structure of the world around her, she will be able to reveal a new world. Indeed, early on in the novel, when she starts to intuit the degree of uncertainty she is wading into, the idea that reality does not necessarily have to

be the way it is, she asks herself the question “Shall I project a world?” (Pynchon 65). This illustrates some of the concerns of the American countercultural movement, where individuals sought to project a vision of a different world, against the “system” and against the status quo.

Pynchon illustrates that this realization is not without its difficulties. The ambiguity of the ending and the deferral of any realization of meaning, seems to suggest that at best, Oedipa flirts with the notion that she can create and inhabit any identity she wishes, and at worst, that the system has been successful in rendering her attempts at individuation and the creation of meaning as unsuccessful, inferring that she is still a pawn in the game. This is precisely the criticism of the countercultural movement in that its bourgeois pacifism and flower power only realized a fleeting and illusory emancipation, which turns out to be another kind of cop-out. At the end of the novel, Oedipa, in traversing a conspiratorial labyrinth, is left questioning even her own identity. For all its comedy, the novel ends tragically with a woman submerged in the complexity of her own uncertainty as to what is real and what is not, and what role she plays in discerning and constructing reality.

1.4 Gravity’s Rainbow: Pynchon’s Anxious Relationship to Technology

Gravity’s Rainbow was published 9 years later, in 1973. Here, Pynchon concerns himself with another shift in the fabric of American society from the 1960s to the 1970s. The small hints of optimism regarding the counter-cultural impulse of the 60s had, at this stage, descended into what is almost a total cynicism by Pynchon. This is reflected in the darker tone that *Gravity’s Rainbow* exhibits; a sense of desperation that only subtly peeks its head out towards the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*. By this time, Pynchon would have had time to reflect on the assassination of Kennedy, MLK, and Malcom X. He would have also witnessed the Vietnam War mature into a disastrous foreign policy issue symbolic of the broader Cold War. Given these events, the late 60s would have presented Pynchon with an opportunity to meditate on the contradictions of the burgeoning American empire. In the early 70s, Pynchon would have also witnessed the scandalous Watergate saga, being the archetypal modern political conspiracy, play out during Richard Nixon’s presidency.

Essentially, Pynchon sees the failure of the countercultural movement to enact any sort of meaningful change at the level of organized society itself, at the level of those who direct society. The alternative reality posited in *The Crying of Lot 49* is seen finally as a sort of social self-immolation. Pynchon seems to question whether the society he interrogated in 1964 in *The Crying of Lot 49* is on an irreversible trajectory towards imposing itself entirely

on its constituents and dominating them, rendering their compliance complete and even their non-compliance part of the plan. At the novel's core, the themes of conspiracy and paranoia, as being fuelled by the complexity and contradictions of modern capitalism, remain. While *The Crying of Lot 49* seems to be contained within its setting, *Gravity's Rainbow* ranges across various timelines, various realities, some "real" and some not. It also engages with many of Pynchon's anxieties on a far more mystical level.

He deals with the ethics of Pavlovian conditioning and the limits of subjectivity: where does the person start and end? At what point is one's consciousness still contained within the body? Through tracing the trajectory of European society from early modernity to World War II he interrogates notions of the Enlightenment, of fascism and socialism, of the "death-cult" of European society, and of organized bureaucracy taken to its extreme; all of this funnelled through the figure of the V2 rocket and what it represents as the culmination of a phallogocentric death-drive-obsessed European impulse.

Gravity's Rainbow begins with the crashing of a rocket. This is indicative of the novel's momentum, which could generally be described as ballistic. It stews and plots its trajectory through meticulous planning and finally explodes. At some point, the novel is hurling through space like a V2 rocket riding on the momentum of the launch. The V2 as a symbol raises questions about determinism. Are we, like the rocket, a product of a propulsive launch at conception that cannot change the course of its trajectory? These broader metaphysical anxieties are peppered throughout the novel and are no doubt part of Pynchon's interrogation of his Puritan heritage, a Christian doctrine profoundly premised on predestination and the notion that we are saved or damned in advance.

The central character in *Gravity's Rainbow* is Tyrone Slothrop. He is from Massachusetts and hails from a long lineage of Puritan forefathers all the way back to the first settlers of America. The events of the plot (such as it is) take place between the end of 1944 and 1945, before, during, and after Germany's official surrender. The European continent is in a state of turmoil, and various Allied and Axis entities evolve, reform, and reinvent themselves in relation to the changing nature of the post-war landscape.

Tony Tanner explains that the primary mechanisms underlying the novel are those of assemblings and disassemblings. He describes the novel as being based around

two related assemblings and disassemblings – of the rocket, and of the character or figure named Slothrop. Slothrop is engaged in trying to find out the secret of how the rocket is assembled, but in the process he himself is

disassembled. Similarly, the book both assembles and disassembles itself as we try read it. (Tanner 81-82)

Commenting on Tanner's remark, Kathryn Hume expands his figuration by adding subsequent pairings, noting that

If we double these terms, we get a more complete picture: the rocket and Slothrop make up one such pairing, but technology and Western humankind constitute the other. (Hume 131)

Hume points out that in the same way the assembling of the rocket results in a disassembling of Slothrop, so too can the assembling of technology be paired with a disassembling of humankind. As Tanner alluded to, what drives the main narrative is that Slothrop responds with an erection to the presence of the V2 rockets that are striking London. Slothrop seems to become aroused before a rocket strikes. This is discovered when his colleagues find a map of his sexual exploits, which corresponds precisely to the V2 rocket strikes. For the Allied wartime bureaucratic apparatus, this coincidence is not seen as *simply* a coincidence.

It transpires that in his infancy, Slothrop was experimented on by a German scientist named Lazlo Jampf, who was linked to his family through transatlantic business ventures. Essentially, Slothrop's university education and much of his family's success seem to be linked to the deals made with Jampf and his constituents in Weimar Germany. Jampf, for some reason never entirely explained, experiments on inducing an erection in the infant Slothrop with a cotton swab. The presence of the strange substance called Imipolex-G in these proceedings, which is a polymer with analgesic qualities, develops a reflex in the infant Slothrop, in that he responds with an erection to Imipolex-G. This is at least what the narrative, through its multiple perspectives, attempts to suggest. The reader, like the characters in the novel, is left to grapple with whether these connections are causal or coincidental.

Colonel Blicero, a Nazi commander who is in charge of rocket production, has a personal mission to encase his sex-slave Gottfried in the final V2 Rocket he produces before the German infrastructure falls apart. Gottfried is encased in a compartment lined with Imipolex-G. Therefore, it is hinted at that the V2 Rockets all contain Imipolex-G, since this is what Slothrop understands to be the material that set off his reflex as an infant. The Imipolex-G theory slowly becomes more complex and difficult to believe, and its possibility – the fact that it would have to be present in every V2 Rocket, and not just Blicero's climactic rocket – is never explored further. Indeed, at the end of the novel, the Allied bureaucracy attempts to put the entire conspiracy to bed, causal mechanism or not, by attempting to cut off Slothrop's penis. This last-ditch swipe at equilibrium fails miserably as they kidnap the wrong individual

and remove the wrong member. Therefore, Slothrop's erections and their connection to the rockets from start to finish remain a mystery that is never solved, much like the mystery of Trystero in *The Crying of Lot 49*, which is also left unsolved.

At the start of the novel, in wartime London, Tyrone Slothrop works as a low-level bureaucratic lackey for ACHTUNG (Allied, Clearing House, Technical Units, North Germany), which is primarily concerned with investigating debris from V2 rocket strikes. Pynchon's humorous use of foreboding is, of course, the fact that "Achtung" means caution/danger in German. Slothrop is monitored by Dr. Pointsman, who is also a Pavlovian and is aware of Dr. Jampf's prior experimentation. It is implied that Slothrop, through strange dream-like sequences that Pynchon constructs, is routinely brought to Pointsman's headquarters at the White Visitation, which is a repurposed mental asylum, and experimented on with various substances and techniques to extract the truth about his strange relationship to the V2 rocket:

They've cut Slothrop loose again, he's back on the street [...] Why didn't they keep him on at that nut ward for as long as they said they would [...] But now rudely, here's that London again. But something's different . . . something's been . . . been *changed* . . . don't mean to bitch, folks, but – well, for instance he could almost swear he's being followed, or watched anyway [. . .] A hint of conspiracy to what shows up on the rearview mirror of his Humber, no colour or model he can pin down, but *something* always present inside the tiny frame [...] Things on his desk at ACHTUNG seem not to be where they were. Girls have found excuses not to keep appointments. He feels he's being gently separated from the life he lived before going into St Veronica's. (Pynchon 116)

The experiments, inside St Veronica's, and the surveillance Slothrop fears is being conducted on him, are implied to be part of the machinations of Dr. Pointsman. He wants to understand this erection mystery because he believes the future of society is premised on a perfect understanding of stimulus and response. He hopes for a society without contingency, a perfect society built on Pavlovian mechanisms of control. Slothrop's erections are to Pointsman both a threat, in their evasion of scientific explanation, and a gift in what solving the mystery may supply to science. It is the latter that drives Pointsman's obsession with understanding Slothrop's phallus. It would be remiss to not briefly bring attention to how this is a deeply – yet also comically and absurdly – Freudian figuration: the relationship between erections and rockets, violence and sexual energy, and Eros and Thanatos⁴.

⁴ Terms that Freud uses to describe creative and productive energy (Eros) and self-destruction, aggression and compulsion which is usually denoted by his figuration of "death-drive" (Thanatos). See: Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*. Dover Publications. 2015.

Eventually, Pointsman devises a plan. Rather than keep Slothrop in London, he endeavours to release him into post-war Germany. He believes that through Slothrop's Pavlovian mechanism, he and the rocket will eventually find one another. It is implied that at every step of the way, Pointsman is constructing challenges, sending in agents, and manipulating events so that he can funnel Slothrop towards the V2 rocket. Certainly, this is what Slothrop comes to suspect, though he does not explicitly believe it is Pointsman; rather, he refers to a collective and elusive "Them" who pursue him. Slothrop's journey begins in France. He is kept secure at a repurposed casino, the Casino Hermann Goering, for a while, where he is monitored and prepared. Slothrop is unaware of just what exactly he is doing in France. Here, he meets Katje Borgesius, an undercover Dutch partisan who has recently escaped the clutches of Colonel Blicero, being Gottfried's co-captive. She is planted by Pointsman to become Slothrop's lover and keep him on track. Through a sequence of events, Slothrop seems to uncover the level of manipulation at play, and Katje is removed. With the loss of Katje and any residue of trust in the world around him, Slothrop finally escapes into post-war Germany. While out in post-war Europe, he is involved in numerous interweaving plots on his journey to find the infamous Schwarzgerät (the black device), which is constructed out of Imipolex-G, and is supposedly being prepared for the Rocket numbered 0000, the very same rocket in which Colonel Blicero is planning to fire his boy-lover Gottfried.

While in *The Crying of Lot 49*, there is a singular narrative running through the point of view of Oedipa Maas, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, there are a plethora of narratives, some about inanimate characters such as the extraordinary story of "Byron the Bulb", a lightbulb that slowly becomes conscious. There is Enzian, a Herero, and also a past lover of Colonel Blicero, who is one of the leading figures in the Herero quest to construct their own V2 Rocket, which they see as a symbol of religious deliverance. There is Ttitcherine, a Russian intelligence operative, who is actually the brother of Enzian, and who is at once tracking Slothrop under orders from the Soviet high command, as well as tracking Enzian, whom he intends to kill. There is also the cast of would-be "good-guys", those who have some personal connection to Slothrop and rise up towards the end of the novel in resistance to the growing military-industrial cartel that is taking over the management of the post-war world. This comprises frequently occurring characters in the first part of the novel, such as Pirate Prentice, Roger Mexico, Pig Bodine⁵, and Katje Borgesius. This group is named the

⁵ A recurring character from *V* (1963).

“Counterforce” and symbolizes, like Trystero in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon’s estimation of an underground network which seeks to subvert and resist the machinations of the dominant, oppressive order.

Pynchon’s representation of an almost Manichean battle between oppressive bureaucracy (maintained by technology), and the mankind it is meant to serve, is a familiar theme in dystopian works of art, especially dystopian science fiction, where often the essence of what it means to be human is eroded by the technological procedures of an ever-modernizing society. World War II in *Gravity’s Rainbow* becomes a turning point in which this dystopian impulse of technological accelerationism is fully realized.

Hume aids this perspective of the novel being about the fracturing, destruction, and transcendence of worlds by arguing the notion that at the core of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a “mythic cycle”. This mythic cycle concerns itself with a decline from a state of paradise, through turmoil, into apocalypse. For Hume, “The commonplaces of a mythic cycle are most clearly seen in Pynchon’s history of modern Western culture. The constituent parts of this cycle are the initial paradise, the fall, the central symbolic action, and the predicted apocalypse” (Hume 131).

Readers of *Gravity’s Rainbow* will notice this apocalyptic imagery particularly in its final section, where frequent allusions to T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* are made. Towards the end of the novel, Slothrop comes upon a mass of those dispossessed by the war, wandering across the wasteland of post-war Europe:

Handfuls of hundred-year-old agates soaked in honey that sweetened greatgrandfather tongues long gone to dust, then into sulfuric acid to char the sugar in bands, brown to black, across the stone, deathless piano performances punched on Vorsetzer rolls, ribboned black lingerie, flowered and grape-crested silverware, faceted lead-glass decanters, tulip-shaped Jugendstil cups, strings of amber beads... so the populations move, across the open meadow, limping, marching, shuffling, carried, hauling along the detritus of an order, a European and bourgeois order they don’t know yet is destroyed forever. (Pynchon 506)

He sees human detritus as the by-product of this culture of rapid modernization, which destroys itself through its own techniques and advancements. Most pressingly, the central force in this mythical cycle of paradise-apocalypse-re-invention in *Gravity’s Rainbow* arises from the effect of technology, and the technologically dominated procedures of modern bureaucracy. The war, in this way, is only an extension of the clinical bureaucratic apparatus, its final appendage. Hume argues that

Paradise was America as virgin continent. Pynchon does not argue that it was an actual, historical paradise, only that it represented an immense potential for new beginnings, an alternative to Europe's culture of "Analysis and Death." The potential, however, was never realized; the Europeans brought along their death culture. Slothrop, as he drifts through the Zone, comes to value rural landscapes and their denizens – cows, storks, rabbits, and trees – and starts to sense what has been lost in the development of technological America. (Hume 131)

This juxtaposition that Hume draws, between the crumbling European nations and the simplicity of the natural world as something we have lost, or purposely ignored, can be framed as a commentary on the modernization of the early 20th century. More specifically, it can be argued to represent the concerns of Pynchon's own historical context, regarding what Hume calls the development of "technological America". In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon makes a commentary on the bureaucratic and organized nature of violence in the old world of European society, what he calls the culture of "Analysis and Death". The novel recounts its climactic fall through the events of World War II. This is most explicitly shown through the Nazi state. European culture, through Pynchon's apocalyptic allusions, is already lost. However, what he fears is that the baton has been passed directly from the Nazis (as the epitome of what European culture can produce through a violent union with technology) to the Americans. Even Colonel Blicero (also known as Weissman), the master of the rocket program in *Gravity's Rainbow*, intuits this possibility through the relationship between the downfall of Europe and the rise of America as its successor. Weissman, in one of his last moments with his boy-lover Gottfried, before he is launched into the sky inside a V2 Rocket, laments further on the American inheritance of European death-culture

"America was the edge of the World. A message for Europe, continent-sized, inescapable. Europe had found the site for its Kingdom of Death, that special Death the West had invented. Savages had their waste regions, Kalaharis, lakes so misty they could not see the other side. But Europe had gone deeper – into obsession, addiction, away from all the savage innocences. America was a gift from the invisible powers, a way of returning. But Europe refused it. It wasn't Europe's Original Sin – the latest name for that is Modern Analysis – but it happens that subsequent sin is harder to atone for". (Pynchon 736 – 737)

There is a tragic tone to Weissman's perspective. He sees history from a truly modernist perspective, in that progress and its teleological end in perfection are waiting for us; we need only to align ourselves correctly and forge ahead. America is, as he claims, a gift from the "invisible powers". Interestingly, he sees these events as not revealing a fundamental flaw with this ideology, but rather as the consequence of a mistake, a European pathology, a

weakness. The shunning of America, as the new hope by Europe, he sees as being the tragic arrogance of the European spirit. Pynchon seems to imply that this inability to properly conceive of America as a chance at enlightenment is the cause of America itself continuing the European culture of death, another continent traced over by its systems. Weissman, looking at this historical progression of death-culture, continues:

“In Africa, Asia, Amerindia, Oceania, Europe came and established its order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered. In time the death-colonies grew strong enough to break away. But the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on. Now we are in the last phase. American Death has come to occupy Europe. It has learned empire from its old metropolis”. (737)

Finally, America is seen as returning to Europe, moulded in Europe's own image, to defeat and overcome Europe's final expression of death culture, in the Nazis. Weissman, as part of the defeated party, sees America as overcoming this European culture, utilizing what it can use and discarding what it cannot, and replacing it with its own. Pynchon interestingly depicts the Nazis not as a faceless killing machine, but rather as the tragic and desperate last attempt of European culture to define itself in its own terms. America, however, he depicts as the younger, more vital iteration of this imperial impulse, which has returned to dethrone its father. Slothrop while witnessing American military police in Zurich, hints at this:

Later he will recall what surprised him the most was the fanaticism, the reliance not just on flat force but on the rightness of what they planned to do ... he'd been told long ago to expect this sort of thing from the Nazis, especially the Japs – we were the ones who always played fair. (Pynchon 260)

Returning to Weissman, he continues to meditate on what is ultimately an accelerationist and trans-humanist longing. This is, namely, the idea that man can transcend his mortal bondage on earth, that he can overcome gravity, as the symbolic force keeping him rooted in the natural rhythms of moral life on earth. He seems to imply the tragedy is that it is the Americans, and not the Nazis, that will realize this dream:

“Is the cycle over now, and a new one ready to begin? Will our new Edge, our new Deathkingdom, be the Moon? I dream of a great glass sphere, hollow and very high and far away... the colonists have learned to do without air, it's vacuum inside and out ... it's understood that men won't ever return ... they are all men. There are ways for getting back, but so complicated, so at the mercy of language, that presence back on Earth is only temporary, and never 'real' ... passages out there are dangerous, chances of falling so shining and deep ... Gravity rules all the way out to the cold sphere, there is always the danger of falling” [...] “I want to break out – to leave this cycle of infection and death. I want to be taken in love: so taken that you and I, and death, and

life, will be gathered, inseparably, into the radiance of what we would become . . .” (738)

In this excerpt, Pynchon voices an anxiety around the moon landing (occurring only four years prior to the publication of the novel) and its consequences for the spiritual health of mankind⁶. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon uses the modernist, trans-humanist philosophy of the Nazi war machine, and its obsession with going beyond and transforming a people into *Übermenschen*, to speculate about the possibilities that the technology of “The Rocket City” (Pynchon 687) enables. Gravity in the novel comes to symbolize a natural and semi-mystical force that roots mankind to the natural world and to mortality. In looking at Blicero’s lamentation and longing for transcendence, one can see precisely the root of Pynchon’s Luddite anxiety. He is explicitly making the connection that science, unconstrained by the force of gravity, unconstrained by the natural barrier that binds us to the soil of the earth, can colonize even the moon and beyond. If we view this possibility alongside the concerns of American imperialism, what Pynchon seems to be hinting at is that the “virus” of technological accelerationism, expressed through a culture of control and death, can contaminate the universe.

Gravity's Rainbow and its critique of the Enlightenment, through its eventual fulfilment in the Nazi war machine, shares the same view that underpins most of postmodern philosophy which reacts against the narratives of the Enlightenment as part of the problem of modernity and not the solution. Many of the positions against the Enlightenment, and the relationship it has to World War II seem to mirror the Frankfurt School, with thinkers like Theodor Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. This is also the tendency of later postmodernists such as Foucault and Lyotard. *Gravity's Rainbow* can be positioned as a postmodern text if only for its critique of the Enlightenment, as well as its style, including an irreverence for character and plot.

Through Weissman, Pynchon seems to be lamenting the loss of America’s potential, the potential of “returning” to the more enlightened principles of living in accordance with nature. What starts to emerge, however, is an illustration of America as a continuation of European “death-culture”. Pynchon’s obsession with the V2 Rocket as the epitome of the

⁶ The connections are both thematic and historical. It was the V2 that was the first functioning ballistic missile. It was also Werner von Braun (who is featured in the opening epigraph of the novel), among others, who were recruited by the Americans into the NASA program. Much of the novel plays out in the context of the Allies attempting to harvest the remnants of the German rocket program. Gottfried, lined in a compartment of Imipolex-G, sent on a journey of transcendence by Blicero, can certainly be argued to be born out of a fascination with the moon landings.

Nazi technological program, its association with the moon landings, to the development of nuclear ICBMs, and the projection of US power through nuclear superiority, seems to suggest that America is the spiritual successor to the bureaucratic culture of control and violence, what Pynchon, in his dystopian imaginings of the future in *Gravity's Rainbow* calls "The Rocket City" or "Der Raketenstadt" (687). The juxtaposition Pynchon seems to be constructing here is ultimately a romantic one, where being human and being in a harmonious rhythm with nature is contrasted with the transcending function of technology, to destroy humanity through control, analysis, death.

Similarly, Siegel argues that *Gravity's Rainbow* can be perceived as a comprehensive "mythos" of our time – or at least to the degree the society Pynchon interrogates is still present in our own – which investigates the possibility of apocalypse but also the possibilities of a "return" to a more natural existence.

Gravity's Rainbow can be completely appreciated only as something much greater than the sum of its parts. Pynchon has assembled mythos of our time, and the result is a novel of apocalypse, not in the limited sense of predicting total annihilation, but in the more meaningful sense of chronicling the chaos from which a new culture may be born. (Siegel 4)

Linking these remarks to the broader cultural focus of postmodern discourse, Siegel finally concludes this notion with the claim that

Although the physical annihilation of the world as we know it is a possibility examined by countless science fiction writers, it is the destruction of the contemporary culture and not that of the whole world which Pynchon seems to be predicting. Therefore, his major concern in *Gravity's Rainbow* is with the patterns of technology and culture which will determine, in conjunction with the physical laws of the universe, what is born out of the chaos into which we have descended. (Siegel 4)

As Siegel mentions, Pynchon's concern is not with destruction per se, but with deterioration. Pynchon's problem is in some sense an ethical and spiritual one. His Luddite anxiety is predominantly expressed towards the way in which technology and technological procedures transform what it means to be human. By extension, Pynchon presents an anxiety around what exactly technology can offer us in a positive sense. This is the strange enigma of Pynchon's political stance. One would think that a postmodern perspective would welcome the progressive change of technology and its potential for emancipation. Pynchon here has somewhat of a romantic and conservative stance. He often sees technology not as a method of emancipation, but as a continuation of those structures that previously functioned to control and oppress. And yet, this is precisely postmodern in so far as it is suspicious of the

metanarrative of progress. Pynchon often depicts progress as a veiled form of dystopian control and oppression, much like the Nazi state. In order for society to progress on a collective level, one has to be, in some way, whipped into motion by forces that imagine a very particular image of the future. Alternatively, one has to become the whip that mobilizes others. In this way, he often positions technology as an extension of bureaucracy and systems of control. Pynchon's suspicion of technology emerges not out of the function of technology itself, but from his critique of power. He views technology as operating within the context of the powerful and the powerless and mostly used to maintain the existing status quo. The notion that hidden forces, be it CEO's in a boardroom or a shadowy council, are directing and manipulating the infrastructure of society in order to tighten their grip on the everyman is central to Pynchon's "postmodern paranoia".

1.5 Conclusion: The Matrix of Paranoia in Postmodernity

To conclude, paranoia in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* emerges out of a particular matrix of cultural conditions. At its most basic level, this paranoia emerges from fundamental religious and metaphysical questions that are relevant to Pynchon's interrogation of Puritan, and Protestant Christianity⁷. Particularly in *Gravity's Rainbow*, it is a meditation on the concept of pre-destination and the notion that one's life is already determined in advance, and their ensuing passage to heaven and hell has already been organized for them by an angelic bureaucracy. However, this theme becomes more sociological than religious when one frames it within a broader meditation on the way power works. As is common with paranoia, and paranoid conspiracy, it seems Pynchon is frequently concerned with hidden forces that are directing the world, and these forces, which hold real power, are merciless in their designs for the powerless, who are ultimately pawns in a historical chess match.

When this notion is applied to modern society, at least in the work of Pynchon, it manifests itself as a distrust of sophisticated bureaucracy. Particularly, the idea that bureaucracy functions on surveillance, where those under its jurisdiction are tracked, monitored, and made use of by virtue of their subordinate position. Paranoia, in this regard, emerges from the fact that the bureaucratic machine is faceless. Unlike a king or emperor, it

⁷ Pynchon's ancestry can allegedly be traced back to William Pynchon, author of a banned critique on Puritanism in 1650. Tyrone Slothrop (Thomas Pynchon) and William Slothrop (William Pynchon) are argued to be analogues in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Based on available sources on the web, Pynchon himself was not raised Protestant, but Catholic. I assume his engagement with Protestantism comes from a fascination with his ancestor, and not his own religious experience. The difficulty in asserting any well researched claim about Pynchon is the lack of reliable information.

is based on complex interconnections and often has no visible centre. While bureaucracy, on the one hand, works to organize and utilize the potentials of the human body, it also works to deter and disorient the individual in their attempt to express free will and agency, because such free will, such uncertainty, may threaten the homeostasis of the system itself.

Finally, in a context more befitting of postmodernity, it is technology where this paranoia is expressed in its most extreme instance. Technology is a double-edged sword. While it creates quality of life improvements for most human beings, increases the effectiveness of societal infrastructure, and even prolongs life, it facilitates an ever more efficient method of control over urban populations. As I illustrated through a brief analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon represents the world-shattering violence of World War II as the final conclusion of a bureaucratic state, premised on analysis, surveillance, and control, and emboldened by technology and technical procedures. At its most extreme, Pynchon's fears for technological postmodernity are a type of technological holocaust, where the misuse of technology allows those who hold power to tighten their grip on the powerless. As Joseph Slade puts it, Pynchon

manages to evoke the particularity of things and the resonance of machines and systems as they impinge on human lives. Pynchon understands technology in large ways as well as small; his qualifications as a modern humanist stem from his awareness that accelerated technology has created a postindustrial era of profound dislocations in modern consciousness and culture. (Slade 54)

The fusion of bureaucracy and technology in social control is particularly insidious when viewed in this light because it appears as an inhuman other, which herds flesh and blood humans, much like the Nazi Holocaust, through its channels of perfect calculation and efficiency. So while in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the complicated nature of urban America, dominated by the complex interconnections and lack of consensus knowledge in late-stage-capitalism, deters Oedipa Maas from realizing a true stable sense of identity, in *Gravity's Rainbow* these fears are painted in far more apocalyptic brush strokes as Pynchon considers the passage from an older idealized world, to a new technological dystopia premised on surveillance, control, and ultimately death. The key theme running throughout both novels is that the individual interfaces with a bureaucratic, or technological network that is labyrinthine, elusive, and exerts pressure on the individual. One could argue that this is very similar to Kafka's figuration of bureaucracy in *The Castle*, however, in Pynchon's novel the modernist aesthetic has been transposed into a postmodern, and post-industrial, aesthetic.

Therefore, the most important feature of Pynchon's literature, in this context, is that he proceeds in constructing elaborate world systems within his novels that seem to function

almost entirely on the principle of paranoia: the notion that everything is connected. More importantly, this connection is, in some way, malevolent in nature. This is in contrast to various eastern representations of interconnection, such as that proposed by Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism. What is interesting is how the positive connection in these ideologies usually derives from a unity with nature, much like the Romantics valorised. And yet, other western ideologies are premised on a break with nature. Christianity, for example, sees the origin of man in a postlapsarian world after the fall from Eden.

A sense of malevolent interconnection and the paranoia it inspires is a theme that Pynchon maintains throughout his career. For example, in *Inherent Vice* (2009), private detective Doc Sportello attempts to trace a real-estate conspiracy, where, similar to *The Crying of Lot 49*, he encounters a shadowy organization called the Golden Fang. Similarly, in *Bleeding Edge* (2013), Pynchon creates a labyrinthine narrative around the September 11 attacks, which includes, almost directly related to this thesis, the inclusion of the Internet as a source of anxiety and conspiracy in the wake of 9/11 and the “dotcom” bubble of the late 90s and early 2000s, which catches the curiosity of protagonist Maxine Tarnow.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the narrator elucidates the juxtaposition between what he deems as the only two possible orders of the world: the paranoid who believes everything is connected, and the anti-paranoid who believes nothing is connected (Pynchon 441). There are moments where protagonist Tyrone Slothrop “feels himself sliding onto the anti-paranoid part of his cycle” and stresses the anxiety that “either they have put him here for a reason, or he’s just there. He isn’t sure that he wouldn’t, actually rather have that *reason*” (Pynchon 441). While in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa’s paranoia centres around projecting an alternative reality, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon seems to expand this to represent paranoia and anti-paranoia as antithetical poles of the same frenetic activity, both of which leave the individual powerless in relation to the designs of those who hold power. This paranoid interconnection between society and subject that Pynchon represents tends to revolve around the presence of a system that displays total omniscience. This omniscience comes to form an elusive other to the subject, where the subject perceives the other – the totality of all that is other than themselves – as part of an interconnected network which is aware of, gazes upon, and seeks to extract something from the subject, or coerce the subject into a particular course of action. Ultimately, bureaucracy and its extension into a vast technologically dominated network seem to be at the root of this paranoia. Given this reading of Pynchon as a basis for this thesis, I will briefly reintroduce my core argument within the context I have constructed.

Firstly, the central claim that I am arguing is that postmodern subjectivity is fundamentally constructed by a relationship to information technology. This subjectivity, insofar as it is in a dialectical relationship with information technology, is profoundly paranoid. This paranoia emerges from the subject's inability to orient themselves within the environment of digital postmodernity.

Secondly, that this phenomenon is foreshadowed by Pynchon through his representation of paranoia in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. He achieves this by positioning his characters within societies dominated by bureaucratic apparatuses premised on surveillance, emboldened by technology and technical procedures.

Finally, the relevance of an analysis of Pynchon's work to the contemporary postmodern condition is in the similarity between the technologically dominated bureaucracies premised on surveillance and control that he depicts, and the contemporary Internet, particularly social media in its most negative expression, *as* a bureaucratic structure premised on surveillance and control.

Chapter 2: Bureaucracy and Paranoia

2.1 Bureaucracy and Capitalism: Power as Decentralized in Postmodernity

In this chapter, I am primarily concerned with two concepts: bureaucracy and paranoia. I will outline the particularly globalized character of postmodernity and the relevance of bureaucracy through Zygmunt Bauman and his idea of “liquid” modernity. I will then introduce a reading of Thomas Pynchon, which illustrates how he represents paranoia and conspiracy as the central components of the subjective experience of postmodernity, in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*. This is best observed when looking at the two novels through the lens of bureaucracy as a dominant theme in the life of individuals in post-industrial society. After presenting this argument, I will then define paranoia and illustrate the way in which it functions in terms of Pynchon’s configuration of entropy.

To begin, I will juxtapose two pictures of modernity. Zygmunt Bauman aids this endeavour by conceiving of modernity and postmodernity as two different regimes of power. The first is the modernity of the late 19th and early 20th century, which Bauman calls a “solid” modernity. The description of a solid, or hard, modernity refers broadly to how power was expressed socially: mass-scale industrial projects, totalitarian movements, expression of political hard power, and great power conflict.

This image of culture correlates primarily with an industrial society. Daniel Bell argues that to understand post-industrial society and postmodernity, it is key to understand the difference between pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial modes of economy:

The concept of “post-industrial” is counterposed to that of “pre-industrial” and “industrial”. A pre-industrial sector is primarily *extractive*, its economy based on agriculture, mining, fishing, timber, and other resources such as natural gas or oil. An industrial sector is primarily *fabricating*, using energy and machine technology, for the manufacture of goods. A post-industrial sector is one of *processing* in which telecommunications and computers are strategic for the exchange of information and knowledge [. . .] Broadly speaking, if industrial society is based on machine technology, post-industrial society is shaped by an intellectual technology. And if capital and labour are the major structural features of industrial society, information and knowledge are those of the post-industrial society. (Bell 426)

The pre-industrial and industrial modes of organization that Bell outlines correlate to Bauman’s solid modernity, where society is based around the extracting and fabrication of resources through physical labour and machine technology. This can be juxtaposed with the second picture of modernity, or the “postmodernity” of the later 20th and 21st centuries, which

Bauman characterizes as a “liquid” modernity (Bauman 7). What Bell outlines as post-industrial society correlates to Bauman’s articulation of liquid modernity. A society based on flows of knowledge and information, and “intellectual technology”. Bell’s articulation of post-industrial society is one where the lives of individuals are defined more by the tertiary sector of the economy, in the form of processing information, as opposed to the primary and secondary sectors, which are based around extraction and fabrication, respectively⁸. If bureaucracy can be construed as concerned with processing information, it can be argued that post-industrial society, as Bell describes, is on the one hand primarily bureaucratic. On the other hand, regarding Bauman’s liquid modernity, postindustrial society is largely globalized. Bell’s analysis and Bauman’s concept of liquid modernity are best understood when framed through the lens of globalization. The key theme that links their sentiments together is the breakdown of borders, in an abstract and physical sense.

The classic critique of globalization is the degree to which local resources are captured by global entities, or more powerful nation-states. Labourers in Congo and their relation to their immediate physical environment, and its resources, is mediated by a multinational corporation from China, for instance. The groceries available in a supermarket are available due to the gargantuan global trade network, which hinges on the efficiency of sea and air travel, and the complex organization and technical procedures which support it. There is an external system at work, external to the defined borders of a nation that renders that nation perforated or accessible. In this way, conceptually, borders cease to be solid in the liquid environment of globalized culture. Nancy Wonders presents an illustration of this reality through the tension between nation state and the globalized world, with the concept of borders:

[T]he nation-state is the critical site for facilitating globalization. Global cross-border flows are "not only endured, but are also facilitated, by states in order to facilitate their interests" (Rudolph, 2005: 3). Nonetheless, some features of globalization do threaten the traditional power held by nation-states. "As the traditional politics of interstate rivalries cedes place to the global market, governments lose unique attributes of their power. Armies and territory count for less," and the critical "levers, many of which used to be in the hands of government, pass to the private sector" (Treverton, 1999: 47). Under globalization, state capacities have been "questioned" in ways that have required states to (re)act in order to reassert authority. (Wonders 33)

⁸ A consequence, among other things, of automation. Many theorize a similar transition is coming with the advent of AI.

This speaks to a tension between definition and flexibility which characterizes globalized postmodernity. As Wonders points out, on the hand one, action still emerges from the nation state, however the broader milieu in which it functions works to undermine its status as a self-contained and defined entity. What I am trying to show is that this tension between definition and fluidity, between solid and liquid, is a tension that underlies much of the experience of postmodernity.

This is why liquidity is the term Bauman utilizes to characterize the decentralized structure of the globalized world. Solid modernity demands borders and demarcations. In liquid modernity borders – virtually and to some extent physically – erode in the environment of globalized consumerism (7). But these borders still exist as abstraction, where state power is perceived as self-contained. What underlies this abstraction is the pressing reality that, for example, multinational corporations elusively flow between boundaries that were once solid. Wonder’s again aids this assertion by outlining what she describes as “border reconstruction projects”, where nation states attempt to redefine themselves in the context of liquid modernity:

The concept of a "border reconstruction project" recognizes that borders are socially constructed and are in a constant state of re-creation. In fact, borders might better be conceived of as a "performance" rather than a location (Wonders, 2006). Borders are performed and constructed via changing laws and policies, but also via daily practice; similarly, they can be made irrelevant by daily practice. Today, national sovereignty – that is, the power and control a nation-state has over its own future – is determined in large part by the ability of nation-states to create the architecture for what I have elsewhere termed "semi-permeable" borders, facilitating the mobility of capital. (34)

Thus, liquid modernity, and the process of globalization that undercuts it, is where expressions of hard political power give way to soft power. Methods of social control appear more coercive than oppressive, if they are visible at all, and the broad symbol of global society becomes a *network* of free flow of information and capital. To be included in this network necessarily means a nation state needs to perforate its borders, and the subject needs to perforate their local identity with the global homogeneity that surrounds it. This reorganization of the way power operates seems to coincide with the ascent of US hegemony and its particular brand of globalized capitalism. Whether or not this relationship is correlational or causal can be contested, though what is certainly clear is the presence of US hegemony alongside the emergence of this transformation. Thus, while military hard power is still frequently observed across the globe, what is most indicative of this liquid modernity are processes such as economic restructuring, through the IMF or World Bank, which present

themselves as complex bureaucratic exercises. Another example is regime change, and clandestine operations, which are funded through cash flow which is often difficult to trace to a source. Another, is the Patriot Act (2001), which is the United States' mass surveillance program, and their broad strategy to combat the purported "global terror network". These exercises are ultimately still based on the expression of power, but in a more elusive "softer" form.

2.2 Gravity's Rainbow: Conspiracy Theory as a Response to Bureaucracy

Gravity's Rainbow can perform a dual function. On the one hand, Pynchon uses World War II to stage a historical fiction in postmodern style, where he subverts and critiques what are ultimately real historical occurrences by means of a fictional narrative. However, I also believe his use of World War II is ultimately a tool to stage some of the concerns he has with the American – and Western – capitalist society of the 1960s and 1970s. *The Crying of Lot 49*, being set in the 1960s, provides a more obvious estimation of that period, whilst *Gravity's Rainbow* attempts to explain it by showing the violent end of "old Europe" and the reconstruction of the world order in its wake as its origin. *Gravity's Rainbow* in particular, foreshadows the dominance of bureaucracy in the life of the postmodern subject. I raise the argument that this is the foremost generator of paranoia and conspiracy, as it emerges out of a basic interaction with individuals and their infrastructure. The link to the *present day* is based on the fact that the genesis of the current globalized system, as we could retrospectively argue, and as Pynchon perhaps foresees, is bound up with the emergence of America as global hegemon in the 1950s and 1960s, and its eventual ascendancy to unipolar dominance after the fall of the Soviet Union at the end of the century.

However, this juxtaposition between early modernity and post-modernity also allows me to introduce the other aspect of my argument: the Internet as a source of the modern subject's instances of paranoid and conspiratorial logic within the context of globalized capitalism. The point I am arguing towards is that in the present era, the Internet, as ultimately a bureaucratic structure that has notions of surveillance and social control hardwired into its processes, functions to the modern subject in a similar manner as the bureaucratic networks that Pynchon illustrates in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In this way, one could argue that Tyrone Slothrop's subjective experience in the novel, where he feels he is trapped within a complex network of surveillance, and the ensuing paranoia that assembles and disassembles his sense of identity, could be framed as analogous to the modern subject's experience of cyberspace.

I believe that conspiracy, in the way Pynchon portrays it, is part of his critique of a broader post-industrial society. Particularly, I want to draw attention to Pynchon's focus on bureaucracy as the core component of post-industrial society. Ultimately, bureaucracy in this context is the organization and utilization of information towards outcomes, as well as the control and processing of individuals under its jurisdiction. It could be argued that a core component of post-industrial bureaucracy – and bureaucracy in general – is the notion of surveillance. Bureaucracies process information, but this includes information about those under its jurisdiction. From the point of view of a bureaucracy, or an institution with certain strategic goals, perhaps observing and controlling the natural contingency that human actors generate is vital to a systems stability. This is where I believe much of Pynchon's meditations on paranoia, and its expression in conspiratorial thinking, emerge from in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon's characters often fear that everything has been planned out in advance for them, even their attempted deviations from what they perceive to be the scripted order of events. There is no escape from the designs of the plotters. Thus, while conspiracy theories commonly involve some shadowy elite, or evil cabal hell bent on world domination, Pynchon offers a more mundane and cynical outlook: that conspiracy theories as we understand them and the paranoia they inspire are the product of living under the gaze of sophisticated bureaucracies.

This is a perspective that is supported by a contemporary anthropological analysis by Michael Vine and Matthew Carey entitled "Mimesis and Conspiracy", where they investigate the emergence of chem-trail conspiracies. They argue that conspiracy theories are mimetic of the dominant infrastructure that characterizes the environment they emerge from:

Although such theories often focalize around spectacular one off events [...] conspiracists complexify the picture to an inordinate degree, introducing false flags, air defence stand-downs, concealed explosives, and of course, the cover up. In other words they represent events in such a way that only a particular kind of apparatus could be responsible for them – one, we suggest, that borrows its key characteristics from the bureaucratic form [...] Our contention is that the ways in which people imagine the enemy are shaped by the key social infrastructures of their everyday existence [...] these infrastructures are essentially comprised by bureaucratic forms. (Vine and Carey 53)

Vine and Carey's assertion lends credence to my argument that Pynchon's representations of paranoia and conspiracy stem from the dominance of bureaucratic forms in postmodernity. The bureaucracies that Pynchon depicts are not simply concerned with organizing and filing paper trails, but rather extend to the human body itself; indeed, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, it is the observation and management of Tyrone Slothrop's phallus that sets in motion much of the

plot. Slothrop's experience of his own penis is, in a sense, mediated by bureaucratic procedures. Furthermore, the reader is forced to consider if the sprawling technological bureaucracy of the V2 Rocket program is in some way mediating Slothrop's relationship to his penis. Vine and Carey's articulation of paranoid conspiracy and the way it is mimetic of the bureaucratic form, can be interpreted in two ways. The first is the idea that the subject enacts the same procedures they feel are enacted on them by a bureaucracy. The conspiracist enacts the same sort punitive surveillance they feel is being conducted on them, and through a pseudo-intellectual approach where they consider complex interconnections of disparate data points, they assume the role of the bureaucracy in which they are enmeshed, as they try to uncover the potential "bad actor", which stands in for the position they feel they occupy within a bureaucratic network. The second level is, and this is primarily the point Vine and Carey argue, that the subject construes malevolent actors as bureaucratic in form, because of the dominance of bureaucracy in their lives. Thus, the bad actors resemble, in form, the same kinds of institutions the individual is subject *to*.

This can be seen playing out for Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The central form which Slothrop's conspiratorial machinations mimic is that of a laboratory. This is on the one hand, a result of his childhood experimentation at the hands of Dr Jampf. It also resembles his experience of Dr. Pointsman at the White Visitation. The root of his paranoia is that he is constantly being probed and experimented on for a certain reaction while he is in Germany. Similarly, Oedipa Maas constructs a conspiracy based around a secret postal service. Throughout the novel her conspiratorial constructions constantly repeat her initial exposure at The Scope bar, where she comes upon the Trystero symbol at the same time she witnesses a secret Yoyodyne intra-company mail run take place before her. Thus, if one can construe conspiracy theory as mimetic of a certain form or environment that is dominant in the subject's psyche, it is not far-fetched to assert that bureaucracy, in post-industrial society, could be that dominant form.

The bureaucracies that Pynchon represents in *Gravity's Rainbow*, through the lens of World War II as the central conspiratorial "event", are concerned with total control over the human mind and body. They are concerned with controlling, manipulating, and utilizing the material, biological body. For Pynchon, I believe it can be argued that advanced capitalism is at the heart of the dizzying experience of the postmodern subject and their experience of bureaucracy. Adding to this, globalization, as the natural extension of pure capitalism, shapes this paranoid experience. This paranoid perspective is particularly prominent within the technologically advanced and bureaucratically organized global north.

The particular marriage of technological advancement, social control – ideology, organization, and workflow efficiency – and the generative potentials of unchecked capitalism coalesce in a state bureaucracy, and even further a “global bureaucratic network”. For Pynchon the United States, as the clear hegemonic power of the post-war years, embodies this new type of society. Crucially, under the guise of democratic, free market, and liberal principles, this form of bureaucracy ultimately *appears* as decentralized. Referring back to Bauman’s “liquid modernity”, the postmodern subject floats in a sea of bureaucracy. In a solid modernity, a bureaucratic apparatus may be conceived of as an island in the ocean, a visible landmass. In postmodernity, the bureaucratic network can be conceived of as a vast ocean.

Conspiracy theories often exacerbate a tension between centralization and decentralization. The conspiracy theorist, in longing for a centre, sees the scope of bureaucracy, and intuits that it eventually feeds back to a centralized point, back to the White House, the CIA headquarters, the IMF, the World Bank, or the apparatuses of the EU. The scope of bureaucracy is what fuels the paranoia, because the individual intuits that these structures are so pervasive that they have entirely surrounded them. What this approach fails to recognise is the possibility that the bureaucracies can be fragmentary, decentralized, and modular.

The possibility that there is no central organization behind this, that it is in some sense anarchic and contingent, leads a conspiracy theorist to the nihilistic position that such a body is headless. To retain some sense of meaning, the conspiracy theorist links the disparate tentacles of this complex machine back to a source. The same goes for the perception of the state. While the state itself is still centralized, it is the blurring of public and private sectors, and local and global spaces that emboldens this decentralized character of modern bureaucracy. There is a tension between considering power as one continuous flow, and, the more disorientating perspective, that it emerges from multiple points, which may or may not be linked to one another. As a consequence, the nexus of power in bureaucratic networks is perceived as hidden, ephemeral, and, like a spectre, whose existence is only seen for a moment on the periphery and disappears when gazed upon.

My argument, in linking this to capitalism, rests on a particular articulation of late-stage capitalism. Late-stage capitalism, or advanced capitalism, denotes a particular form of free market capitalism that exists in the context of the globalized liberal order. In other words, the scope of US imperial hegemony. Jürgen Habermas makes a key distinction between advanced capitalism and the previous incarnation of “liberal” or “competitive”

capitalism, in that advanced capitalism has as its key characteristic the imperative intervention in the market system by the state. Habermas posits two key themes in advanced capitalism. One is the rise of multinational corporations. The second is, as aforementioned, “the fact that the state intervenes in the market as functional gaps develop” (Habermas 1973: 33). So, while Habermas sees power flowing from the state, as opposed to corporations, he still believes that the spread of oligopolistic market structures marks the end of the era of competitive liberal capitalism: “Supplementation and partial replacement of the market mechanisms by state intervention marks the end of liberal capitalism” (33). Yet, the symbiotic relationship between oligopolies and government, the fact that they need to intervene on behalf of oligopolies, implies that power is not simply flowing in one direction. For capitalism to advance to increasingly more productive stages, it needs to shed its competitive liberal philosophy. In Habermas’ estimation, gargantuan multinational corporations that straddle various national borders and tend towards global oligopoly are the core engine of advanced capitalism.

We can understand late-stage capitalism as the dominant element of post-industrial society as a whole (Jameson 39): of a society that has all the technological procedures brought about by the enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and the two World Wars, at its disposal (Bauman 13), as well as the homogenizing ideology of free-market capitalism and of liberal individualism that supposedly heralds the “end of history” (Fukuyama 2). The political anxiety of Pynchon is that, despite these “mirages”, the authority of the state, as the representation of what was previously held by kings and emperors, and the monopoly on violence they held, is still just as pervasive as ever in the form of sophisticated bureaucracies that order liberal-democratic societies.

Through Bauman and Bell, I showed that post-industrial society is primarily based around the tertiary sector: the processing of information. Because of this, it is primarily bureaucratic in function. The primacy of information and capital flows across borders also constitutes it as a globalized society. A globalized society then, is one where borders, and the degree to which they constitute a local identity, are increasingly subsumed by a homogenous global identity. This goes hand in hand with advanced capitalism. The result is a subjective experience where local identity, in the sense of one’s relationship to their surroundings is increasingly mediated by bureaucratic forms. On a global level, the perception of a complex bureaucratic network that crosses national boundaries leaves the subject disorientated as to where borders begin and end. The most important aspect of this environment is that it constitutes a type of power that is not easily traceable to a visible centre. Power is a network,

or a web, as opposed to a monolithic palace or castle. This deferral, or as Bauman asserts, in *Liquid Modernity*, the “falling apart, the friability, the brittleness, the transience, the until-further-noticeness of human bonds and networks” (Bauman 14), could be at the root of paranoid approaches to ontology in postmodernity.

2.3 Defining Paranoia

So far, I have frequently made use of the term “paranoia” and I need to distinguish my literary usage of the term with the formal, medical definition. I am not implying that Pynchon or any specific individuals are psychologically suffering from the technical definition of paranoia. And yet, of course there are similarities with the condition. The DSM-5 defines Paranoid Personality Disorder as “a pervasive distrust and suspicion of others without sufficient basis” (DSM-5). While this definition is helpful in situating paranoia as concerned with a suspicion of malevolence, I want to move away from the medical and pathological context. Rather, I am situating paranoia as an underlying mood, or proclivity, almost a kind of social discourse. By virtue of its presence in social discourse, individuals increasingly adopt paranoid approaches in identifying and engaging with cultural phenomena. To this end, I want to distinguish between pathological paranoia and paranoia as a broad approach to social and political discourse. Following Hofstadter I would like to use the word as a way of “borrowing a clinical term for other purposes” (3).

To start, I will use Pynchon’s definition from *Gravity’s Rainbow*: “The reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible” (Pynchon 212). Illustrating the workings of this reflex further, Leo Bersani interrogates what he believes to be the innate conspiratorial nature of theorizing itself:

The paranoid intuition is, then, one of an invisible interconnectedness. Technology can collect the information necessary to draw connecting lines among the most disparate data, and the very drawing of those lines depends on what might be called conspiratorial interconnectedness amongst those interested in data collection. To put things in relation to one another is already a conspiratorial move, or at the very least a *gesture of control* [emphasis my own]. (102)

Given this very broad articulation of paranoia in the context of organizing information, I have devised three terms that illustrate its functioning: paranoid logic, paranoid reflex, and conspiratorial logic. What I call a paranoid mode of logic is a logic that is debilitated by uncertainty to a degree that it mobilizes the subject to intensify their attempts at rationalization. This occurs because subjects cannot make totalizing explanations of modern

culture with the terms available to them. They have to instead attempt to take an extraordinary step outside of the known. Paranoid logic is very interested in various kinds of unknowns. When, colloquially, one speaks of logic, one often refers to the set of capabilities a particular person has at a particular time to order things. I certainly do not mean only formal logic and mathematics, though this is part of the equation, so to speak, but rather the active discourse that one makes use of in approaching a context. By a paranoid mode of logic, then, I describe a person whose “framework” is fundamentally premised on paranoid connections. Ultimately, the notion that there is always something hidden, some key piece of information that is behind the functioning of even the most mundane phenomena, and that ontologically the world is premised on a complex interconnectedness that is premised on a fundamental deceit⁹. The root of this paranoid discourse is the ideal hope that if we can uncover the hidden cause, we can restore things to how they should be. One can understand Bersani’s sentiment better now, where he posits that to put things in relation to one another is already a conspiratorial move; it is a “gesture of control”. By extension, the term paranoid reflex, which is the term Pynchon ascribes to the phenomenon, can be understood as the automatic triggering of paranoia. This paranoid logic, which has now become the underlying framework of the individual’s capacity to connect disparate pieces of data, becomes automatic and intuitive, and discourse itself becomes fundamentally conspiratorial. While this certainly can be so for an individual person, what I am arguing more so is that the proclivity of paranoid logic in socio-cultural discourse generates approaches to the world that frequently take the form of Pynchon’s aforementioned definition of paranoia (Pynchon 212).

The difference between paranoid discourse and perhaps an older method of rational enquiry is that, in an Enlightenment paradigm, the answers may be hidden from us and revealed through enquiry. In contrast, within a paranoid logic, the answers have deliberately *been* hidden from us. To reveal the answer in this paradigm, one must pursue those who conceal it and reveal their deceit. Finally, this process culminates in what I term “conspiratorial logic”, where the aforementioned terms are raised to the level of discourse, and other paranoid views may intersect and develop ever greater and complex articulations of

⁹ An interesting consideration is how this is essentially a type of Gnosticism. If one looks at the influence of Gnosticism on various New Age spiritual movements, and the proclivity these movements in our contemporary era have for various degrees of conspiracy: food and water supply is contaminated and calcifies your pineal gland, vaccines are a method of mind control etc. What essentially is described is a demiurge like entity or cabal keeping people trapped within a false reality. This can be seen in contemporary online narratives such as “Escaping the Matrix” or “Taking the Red Pill”, which references the 1999 film *The Matrix*, which I referred to previously in this thesis.

the way the world is organized. This is very different to the older top-down paradigm of the Enlightenment, where legitimate knowledge flows downwards, transmitted from its source in an authority figure. Rather, this “legitimate knowledge” is fragmented and constructed from the bottom up, with no normative or institutional control on its shape. It is not legitimate precisely because of its anti-hegemonic position. Therefore, conspiratorial logic sees the truth as being hidden behind a complex web of deceit. This almost always, in one form or another, includes the suspected presence of a pursuing entity or elusive other. The function of paranoia, on an individual level, has elevated itself to the level of discourse and defined how that discourse articulates itself. This is what I describe as conspiratorial discourse.

One might wonder how this process differs from general political and social discourses, where individuals speculate about the way power functions. What makes discourse paranoid and conspiratorial is the way in which discourse relates to the social system it is directed to. By this, I infer that paranoid and conspiratorial discourses are a response to conditions of a particular system. Something about the way modern capitalist society functions, its bureaucratic and technological milieu, and its spread across the globe in an institutionalized process, inspires paranoid and conspiratorial discourse as a response.

This is at least what some, like Fredric Jameson, have argued. What is perhaps the most helpful product of Jameson’s theoretical enterprise is his concept of “cognitive mapping”. To preface this concept, one can look briefly to the Althusserian conceptualization of ideology. Althusser conceives of ideology as lived experience, in the sense that the individual is caught up within ideology as real: “this reality which each person lives is an image of society which gives him or her an identity and a place in that society” (Tomaselli et al 7). This claim, taken at face value, provides a version of what a cognitive map is, and indeed Jameson himself makes mention to Althusser (Jameson 50-52) whilst talking around the concept of cognitive mapping, which itself, not to discredit Jameson’s rigor, never really appears in a fully-fledged form in *Postmodernism: Or The Cultural Logic of Late Stage Capitalism*. What Jameson does do, however, is focus on the need for a “spatial” logic in the context of postmodernity. As he says, “the conception of space that has been developed here suggests that a model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organizing concern,” he continues to say, “I will therefore provisionally define the aesthetic of this new (and hypothetical) cultural form as an aesthetic of *cognitive mapping*” (Jameson 51). Where the Althusserian definition of ideology hints at a sort of cognitive map, Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping proper, envisions a method, emancipatory in nature, of locating oneself in the complex cultural

matrix of late-stage capitalism: “these are not merely theoretical issues; they have urgent practical and political consequences, as is evident from the conventional feelings of First World subjects that [feel] existentially (or “empirically”) they really do inhabit a “postindustrial society” from which traditional production has disappeared and in which social classes of the classical type no longer exist” (Jameson 53). This aesthetic of cognitive mapping is then part of a “pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with a new heightened sense of its place in the global system” (54). While throughout this thesis I make use of the term mimesis to describe Pynchon’s work and its relation to postindustrial society, Jameson stresses that cognitive mapping is “not exactly mimetic in that older sense; indeed, the theoretical issues it poses allow us to renew the analysis of representation on a higher and much more complex level” (51). While it is not entirely clear what that “higher and complex level” is exactly, Jameson seems to stress the need for a type of mapping that is not wholly nested in a 1:1 mimetic representation of reality, but rather facilitates a degree of imagination.

It is here that Pynchon’s enterprise enters the picture. If one applies the concept of cognitive mapping to Pynchon, as Steven Best does, one can see that a novel like *Gravity’s Rainbow* facilitates ways of imagining our relationship to postindustrial space. This is very much what I am trying to assert when I use the term mimetic with regard to Pynchon: that the experience of reading *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in all of its absurdity and paranoid adventures, is at once a product of postindustrial society, as well as a reflection (certainly not a 1:1 reflection, but a sort of collage of intensities that match the moment of postmodernity) of it. As Best argues:

Gravity’s Rainbow simultaneously seeks to engage the metatextual field of “real history” while undermining its own attempts at representation through metafictional devices. It tries to show how “objective reality” has been vitiated in a postwar society of media, advertising, propaganda, and publicity, and to reawaken a sense of history in order to change our seemingly hallucinated past and present. Hence, its efforts at cognitive mapping have the same ambiguous status as Jameson’s reconstructed theory of representation... (Best 68)

What Best is arguing is that *Gravity’s Rainbow* is not simply a nihilistic exercise in postmodern pastiche, but rather a rigorous political commentary on postmodernity. Here Pynchon can be seen constructing his own version of a cognitive map, paranoia included, with which the postmodern subject can use to help situate themselves in “objective reality” through engaging with Pynchon’s “metafictional” devices. Pynchon’s map is not conventionally mimetic, but absurd enough that it counter-intuitively gives the reader a sense

of the experience of postindustrial society in their attempts to understand the novel. The function of *Gravity's Rainbow* in this sense seems to be to foreground the absurd nature of postindustrial society as its zero-level. In this way, as Best later argues, Pynchon makes use of a "creative paranoia" as a means of emancipatory reason that the subject can utilize in attempt to locate themselves: as his characters seem to do within the novel with results that are ambiguous at best. Of course, the kind of cognitive mapping that Pynchon utilizes in writing *Gravity's Rainbow*, in its meta-textual awareness of paranoia, is a far more comprehensive instance of cognitive mapping than the real-world conspiracies that Pynchon is enthused by, and often uses satirically. So, if Jameson conceives of cognitive mapping as not a mimetic process, it seems that *Gravity's Rainbow* provides for us, as Steven Best concurs, a good working example of what a cognitive map may look like, if we consider the socio-political import of Pynchon's work, or how it represents elements of "objective reality" in a self-reflexive and satirical manner, precisely to enact back on that objective reality a critique of sorts, which allows for a degree of "mapping".

What is at stake then, is paranoia, and conspiracy, as a response to the conditions of late-stage capitalism, as an attempt at a particular kind of cognitive mapping. I offer that this response is premised on a breakdown of the *legitimacy* of the global capitalist order in the sense it's epistemological (and ideological) structures are falling short in the enterprise of providing the subject with a sense of placement. Thus, creating the need for a process of cognitive mapping to reorient oneself. What differentiates a healthy speculative discourse from a conspiratorial one, and what allows the possibility for conspiratorial discourse is the health, or condition, of the system these discourses take as their object. This concept I will explore further in Chapter 7 through an analysis of Jürgen Habermas and his conceptualization of a "legitimation crisis".

Regardless of how one categorically defines paranoid and conspiratorial discourses, for the time being, it can be asserted that, as a general form, they can be observed in American culture throughout postmodernity. Richard Hofstadter, in his essay *Paranoid Style and American Politics*, describes what he believes to be a recurring trend in American political expression based on Paranoia:

I call it the paranoid style simply because no other word adequately evokes the qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy that I have in mind [...] It is the use of paranoid modes of expression by more or less normal people that makes the phenomenon significant. When I speak of the paranoid style, I use the term much as a historian might speak of the

baroque or the mannerist style. It is, above all, a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself. (3-4)

He goes on to assert that it is a mode of logic that is prevalent across partisan lines. He references, in the history of the “left”, the Stalinist purges and juxtaposes them with, on the “right”, the McCarthyist movement of anti-communism in the 1950s. Parallels can be seen here with the more institutional action of woke-politics in the “cancel-culture” movement, as well as the alt-right which incorporates a plethora of “conventional” conspiracy theories based on various prejudices in American culture: socialist takeover, Anti-Semitic conspiracy that Jews have infiltrated American culture, specifically banking and Hollywood; anxieties regarding illegal immigrants through the “Great Replacement Theory”, and the infiltration of government by woke ideologues. Whereas the left has traditionally seemed more of a home for conspiracy theories, with the rise of Q-Anon and the so called “alt right” in the USA, conspiracy theories today are mostly the provenance of the right. Similarly, the intentions of the more extreme inflections of woke culture, while they may be claiming to be emancipatory in nature, project a particularly prescriptive vision of the future. This pathological purifying towards an enlightened image can be construed as paranoid because it implies a conflict between those who “get it” and opt in and those who do not. The idea that this generation is existentially threatened, in terms of climate catastrophe or otherwise, is mobilized to a more general cultural discourse based on identifying as existentially threatened in perpetuity. What the left achieves through cancel culture, the right achieves through conspiracy theory.

What Hofstadter supplies here is a general form that is then mobilized to whatever context is necessary on both the left and right sides of the partisan divide in American politics. It is interesting that there is a similarity between this mode of discourse and the one that Mike Fallopian and the Peter Pinguid Society, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, make use of¹⁰:

It is a common ingredient of fascism, and of frustrated nationalism... though it appeals to many who are hardly fascists, and it can frequently be seen in the left-wing press. The famous Stalinist purge trials incorporated, in a supposedly juridical form, a wildly imaginative and devastating exercise in the paranoid style. In America, it has been the preferred style only of minority movements. It can be argued, of course, that certain features of our history have given the paranoid style more scope and force among us than it has had in many other countries of the Western world. (7)

¹⁰ Upon meeting Oedipa, Fallopian conducts a misguided historical revision about the Russian role in the American Civil War, to the extent they were interfering on the side of the north. Essentially, Peter Pinguid is an anti-authoritarian and anti-communist organization looking to protect the true nature of the American constitution. All of this resembles a 1950s McCarthyism. Essentially, as Hofstadter says, it is a “frustrated nationalism”.

Paranoid Style is certainly a characteristic of postmodern literature and also of postmodernity as a cultural epoch itself. Paranoia emerges in the work of Pynchon from his suspicion of self-perpetuating systems. I claim this is heavily influenced by his experience of the American 1960s and 1970s, and the degree to which the rapid pace of technological modernization, brought about by the Cold War, stimulates Pynchon's suspicion of a future where technologically supported systems of control dominate the lives of individuals. What underlies this systematic suspicion of reality is the fact that, despite the emancipatory potential of technology, the perception of the global capitalist system in contemporary discourse has only continued to decline into an apathetic disillusionment. This social and political stasis under the homogenous form of institutionalized global culture is precisely the fear Pynchon expresses in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. This disillusioned state – that there seems to be no viable way out of the self-perpetuating system of modern capitalism – prompts individuals to respond with paranoia and conspiracy.

2.4 Paranoia in Postmodernity

According to Jon Simons, Fredric Jameson conceives of postmodernity as a space in which it becomes “increasingly difficult to represent our current experience” (Simons 207). Simons argues that Jameson identifies the cause of this experience in the decentred global network of transnational communication and capital, where the individual is unable to locate themselves (Simons 208; Jameson 38). Reading this in relation to Pynchon’s proclivity to represent reality as a conspiracy, Jon Simons notes that:

All the conspiracies, the paranoid fears, all the faulty, distorted, and degraded figurations of totality, refer obliquely or unconsciously to the ‘absent cause’ which is accessible to us only in textual form. Jameson thinks that the postmodern paranoid’s fears are misdirected, because they are based on faulty representations, whereas the sane view of the situation (which would be neither paranoid nor schizophrenic) entails recognition that global capitalism lies at the centre of the plot. (210)

Simons introduces this statement as the basis of a Jamesonian reading of Pynchon, but later argues that this perspective is, in fact, incompatible with the way conspiracy works in Pynchon. By taking his initial claim as true, I will present my own argument as to why this may or may not be the case.

I concur to an extent with the initial assertion. However, it can be contested by interpreting what exactly Simons means when he argues that the “sane” view entails

recognition that global capitalism lies at the centre of the plot. This can be interpreted in one way to suggest that the enemy is globalized capitalism. The mystery has been solved; there is no further need for investigation. It is, in fact, not so simple, as this does not provide any degree of clarity as to who or what drives this global system. The proclivity of those faithful to conspiracies in contemporary culture, as well as in the work of Pynchon, is to work towards identifying who or what is behind the system. There is, however, a degree of agency and contingency implicit in the functioning of conspiracies that this structural view does not entirely account for. Simon's initial reading of Jameson defers this realization by arguing instead that paranoia is an epiphenomenon of a broader structural cause. What Simon's interpretation of Jameson illustrates is that those in power directing world events are not necessarily an evil cabal, for example, but processes are the result of the totality of globalized capitalism as a structure. There is no sentient "enemy" in this view; there are only the effects the system produces as a by-product of its function. However, something as abstract as capitalism in a conceptual and ideological sense, and as complex and multi-layered in a real infrastructural sense, in no way renders the causal chain any clearer. Global capitalism, as the enemy, due to its structure, is precisely why the enemy appears hidden and decentralized. So Jameson could be correct if he posits capitalism to be at the centre of the plot, but this realization does not in any way render the enemy clearer.

If this were presented to a conspiracy theorist, or someone in a similar position to Oedipa Maas, for example, it would place them right back where they started, precisely because it defers any accountability to a human actor, some final authority, or definite source of power. One response to Simon's initial interpretation of Jameson, would be to retreat into the Marxist narrative that underneath all adverse global conditions is the fundamental logic of capitalism. One would simply retreat into a metanarrative. The way Pynchon represents conspiracy is by positing that the structure of reality is ultimately premised on power relations between people, in the sense that human action is the contingency that destabilizes structural and totalizing narratives. It is the possibility, and the problem, of agency that underlies Pynchon's conspiratorial realities. He consistently stresses an underlying conflict between good and evil, represented between the powerful and the powerless, which is something that structural Marxism diminishes to a certain degree insofar as it argues these categories of powerful and powerless are only constituted by the structure of capitalism.

For Pynchon, global capitalism may stimulate conspiracy theory, but unmasking capitalism as a totalizing explanation at the centre of all the paranoid's fears presents two paradoxical outcomes. Firstly, it appears to function in the exact same way that conspiracies

work. Secondly, its position as a totalizing, intellectual, narrative is exactly why the conspiracy theorist would resist it. It is the type of hegemonic metanarrative the conspiracy theorist is trying to delegitimize by indulging in conspiratorial thinking in the first place. Jameson's response is the precise form of narrative that conspiratorial thinking attempts to contest by fragmenting it into a form that constantly defers a centre. In this way, Pynchon situates paranoia as a generative and creative enterprise, as opposed to a reductive one.

When Jameson is construed this way, I contest the notion that realizing globalized capitalism lies at the centre of the plot reveals the "enemy". I think it is ultimately far more complex and hinges more on the interactions of individuals than a structuralist and Marxist view would allow. Conspiratorial and paranoid discourses are a postmodern phenomenon precisely because they reject Jameson's approach.

Simons criticizes his initial statement about Jameson in a similar way, by arguing that Jameson's figuration of conspiracy and global capitalism rests on the narrative that Marxism is able to systematically overturn it, a relationship which is ultimately extremely prescriptive and totalizing in its vision:

His commitment to conceiving of capitalism as a systematic totality is matched by his belief that socialist politics stands on an alternative totalizing Utopian vision of a global society without markets, commodities or hierarchy. (210)

Taking Jameson's claim as true seems to argue the notion that if one realizes capitalism lies at the centre of the plot, one can systematically overturn this system through the praxis of Marxism. But in postmodernity, it is the erosion of the legitimacy of Enlightenment metanarratives and the ensuing cynical attitude of postmodern discourse that renders the subject into a kind of stasis. Simons finally argues that, indeed, yes, Jameson's view is incompatible with Pynchon:

Pynchon's novels need not support Jameson's perspective at all. Rather, they can be used to critique significant aspects of Jameson's approach and are instructive about its costs. This Pynchonesque critique is both epistemological and political, relating to the way in which Jameson requires the knowledge of Marxist science as a basis for political action. (213)

Jameson's argument seems to imply that one simply trades one type of conspiracy for another, more academically "legitimate" one, in the form of Marxism. This is precisely the criticism Pynchon seems to be making throughout his work in the sense that to grapple with the totality of postmodernity and uncover this true image of reality, one needs to ultimately conduct an investigative process where one starts from scratch, rather than from a

metanarrative and then working backwards. Due to the structure of globalized capitalism, this investigative process often becomes a conspiratorial enterprise as it shifts and reforms its focus. The conspiratorial discourse is one that, ultimately, is, by nature, suspicious of the hegemony of received metanarratives as perpetuating the very system the conspiracy theorist sees as oppressive. Its openness to transformation and inclusion of various competing or synthesizing components is what differentiates it from more conventional metanarratives. This is precisely why conspiracy theory is also a profoundly postmodern phenomenon, because it advances from a position of disorientation, as opposed to an Enlightenment discourse like Marxism, which advances from an overarching principle.

However, if Jameson is examined further in *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Stage Capitalism*, he seems to be aware of why this may be the case. Regardless of what Jameson believes the remedy to be – perhaps Marxism– his figuration helps understand why conspiracy is such a difficult phenomenon to remedy in postmodernity. Pynchon would perhaps ask if it needs to be remedied at all. Essentially, Jameson argues that postmodernism emerges as a supporting ideological structure of advanced capitalism, and is part of the way in which it represents itself culturally. Therefore, ideological narratives essential to capitalism, like individualism, find their counterpart in postmodernist narratives of subjective experience and the questioning of totalizing metanarratives. In this way, postmodern discourse, ironically, works as a way to inhibit the postmodern subject from utilizing universalizing narratives in their approach to how the world works and how it may be changed. Rather, the mainstream principles of postmodern discourse, as they are disseminated into culture, equip the subject to respond with ideological positions that oppose totalizing narratives. This is why, in the contemporary climate of global capitalism and US hegemony, Marxism, or a narrative of a similar form, simply does not work because it cannot mobilize a culture that is ideologically conditioned to reject its principles. By principles, I do not mean socialism, but the underlying form of the discourse as totalizing. What emerges as the postmodern response is conspiracy theory. If Jameson sees capitalism as the real enemy at the centre of the plot, one would then find the remedy to their conspiratorial fears if only they were to adopt a position, such as Marxism.

If Pynchon's characters like Tyrone Slothrop and Oedipa Maas, at the height of their paranoid fears, were presented with this remedy, they would insist that there must be something more behind it, something more insidious and more human. By relying on a purely structural explanation, the agency of those who stand behind the conspiracy is taken away, because they only act as products of the system. But by extension, the agency of the

conspiracy theorist is also taken away, because in the end, it is only a determined structural phenomenon. Conspiracy theory stems from an impulse to enact agency and take back control; however, if the actions of those who are on the other side of the conspiracy theory are simply determined by structure, so are the actions of the conspiracy theorist themselves.

Therefore, global capitalism could be a structural cause. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, much of the narrative seems to suggest it is, though, this in no way remedies the proclivity for individuals to engage in conspiratorial discourse, because the structure is ultimately still perceived as decentralized and anonymous. It is precisely because there is no clear enemy that the paranoid subject needs to construct one. But for Pynchon, it often seems like this is not a problem, because conspiracy is the way in which we break out from the totalizing narratives, whether capitalist or Marxist.

Therefore, I am situating paranoia as a mode of investigative discourse, where the subject attempts to rationalize their position in relation to the broader network they suspect themselves to be enmeshed in. It is not that the subject is paranoid, in a delusional sense, but that they are attempting to locate a cause which ultimately evades them due to the nature of the system they are contained in. Ultimately, they are doing this to restore a sense of agency. This surely does not *only* apply to globalized capitalism as the root of all paranoid reflexes, but certainly the remarks made by Jameson will be shown to be of great importance as my argument unfolds, as it relates to the relationship between the subject and networks of varying natures.

2.5 Pynchon's Configuration of Entropy

The reading of Pynchon that I advance is primarily concerned with the specific characteristics of capitalist society that are expressed through his depiction of social systems. This tension between the subject and system and their attempts at producing some kind of redemptive meaning really hinges on the larger theme of the possibility of communication and the tensions that come about in the use of language to form stable identities. Pynchon's configuration of paranoia seems to ultimately come from an anti-hegemonic position, one that is characteristic of postmodern literature.

Similarly, much focus in Pynchon scholarship has been on the topic of entropy, which supports this fragmenting and disintegrating function of knowledge and language, and its ability to express totality, within a closed system. In understanding the root of paranoia in Pynchon's worldview, or the worldview he expresses in his writing, understanding his figuration of entropy can be illuminating. Pynchon's musings on entropy seem to operate on

a paradox. This paradox is the notion that for something to be legitimate, secure, and stable, it is already in the process of ossification, it is dying. For something to be alive and vital, it needs to be subject to contingency. In this way, meaning itself, in the sense of meaning being some sort of stable truth, is bound to lose vital energy and “die”. Drawing from an analysis of Pynchon’s early short story “Entropy” one can see this notion of entropy applying to processes of meaning production. Entropy, in this scenario, refers to “inevitable decline of heat-energy into equilibrium” (Vine 162), which is a definition drawn from its context in the field of Thermodynamics.

In the short story, Pynchon sets up his representation of entropy through two contrasting scenes. In one apartment, there is a lively party being thrown in the apartment of Meatball Mulligan, where guests keep entering and the party becomes increasingly chaotic. In the apartment above is Callisto, who has locked himself inside with his female companion, Aubade. Callisto, over a period of time, has endeavoured to construct a perfect, essentially utopian, environment within his apartment, so much so that even his and Aubade’s role in this environment has become vital to its internal dynamics: “Through trial-and-error Callisto had perfected its ecological balance” (Pynchon 279). Thus, they no longer even leave the apartment; things are delivered to them. As the chaotic party rages on downstairs, Meatball decides to take action to impose a semblance of order on his unruly guests.

In contrast, Callisto stays locked up in his apartment, trying to heal a dying bird by transferring heat energy from his body. Eventually, the bird dies, and Aubade opens the window of the apartment, breaking the homeostasis of Callisto’s tightly curated environment. What Pynchon is trying to communicate here is that homogenous and static environments eventually run out of heat energy; the lack of chaos or contingency really belies an underlying entropy. Contained here is a sentiment that, for postmodern philosophy, is somewhat of a stereotypical characteristic: the celebration, or indeed the necessity, of heterogeneity and of difference. There is a direct link created between death and the stasis of Callisto’s perfectly stable environment. This is contrasted with the chaotic but alive environment of Meatball Mulligan, who, even in attempting to impose a temporary and short-lived order in his extremely variable and heterogeneous environment, which will eventually again descend into some sort of contingent or unforeseen chaos, represents the circulation and transformation of heat energy rather than its decline.

While Pynchon riffs on various thermodynamic themes and weaves them into a societal critique, there is something fundamentally “1960s” going on here. From the perspective of two systems, one dying and one alive and transforming, Pynchon seems to be

showing the contrast between the paralysis of utopia, of sameness, of the societal project of balance, with the almost Dionysian reality of organic life that thrives on change and transformation. This is so very clearly a representation of the counterculture of the 1960s with its spirit of anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment ethos. In this view, all forms of “system” and bureaucracy, which organize and tend towards a state of balance, are in some way a sort of death-cult, or a process of mummification; that the need to control is premised on some pathological fear of a loss, of chaos, and ironically, death. In contrast, to resist, to *live*, is about embracing contingency and disorder. Regarding the 1960s, this is a juxtaposition that cuts to the very heart of the emerging consumerist culture of American capitalism. Steve Vine argues that:

The entropic “sameness” of American culture, Callisto [Pynchon’s character] reasons, is the result of “consumerism,” which he envisions as a totalising system that is inured from otherness and reduces difference to uniformity. Callisto believes that the levelling or “heat-death” of his culture will occur through the encroachment of the shopping malls and advertising businesses of “Madison Avenue” on the totality of American life, with the result that everything will be reduced entropically to its rule: thus the improbable, differentiation, individuality, ideas and “intellectual motion” will be banished from the “closed system” of America, as capital assumes all to itself. (162)

Vine is arguing that on the one hand, “the market” seems on the surface to be similar to Meatball Mulligan's party: chaotic, vital, and heterogeneous. Rather, this is just a simulated heterogeneity. Instead, the real reality of American consumerism is homogeneity under the sign of the exchange value. The closed system of American culture is slowly heading towards a heat death based on the homogeneity – the sameness – it experiences under the all-pervasive consumerism of American capitalism.

This theme of entropy is also present in *The Crying of Lot 49*. In the novel, Oedipa meets with a strange eccentric, John Nefastis. Nefastis introduces her to a thought experiment known as “Maxwell’s Demon”:

She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of entropy. One having to do with heat engines, the other to do with communication [...] The two fields were entirely unrelated, except at one point: Maxwell’s Demon. As the Demon sat and sorted his molecules into hot and cold, the system was said to lose entropy. But somehow the loss was offset by the information the Demon gained about what molecules were where. (Pynchon 79)

What Pynchon constructs here is a working relationship between thermodynamic entropy, previously represented in the short story “Entropy”, and informational entropy. While this concept is entirely theoretical, Nefastis claims he has a physical machine that replicates this

process. He produces a box and a picture of John Clerk Maxwell, the originator of this thought experiment. Nefastis prompts Oedipa to place her hand over the box and allow the demon to speak to her. How the process works, according to Nefastis, is that within the box is a cylinder and piston which form a rudimentary heat engine. The demon, in sorting fast molecules from slow ones, concentrates enough fast molecules in an area to create heat energy. Another eccentric, Stanley Koteks, explains to Oedipa that “[S]ince the Demon only sat and sorted, you wouldn’t have to put any real work into the system, so you would be violating the Second Law of Thermodynamics, getting something for nothing, causing perpetual motion” (Pynchon 64). Unsurprisingly, this strange experiment does not cause any noticeable movement to the piston when Oedipa places her hands over the box and attempts to communicate with the sorting demon:

“Communication is the key”, cried Nefastis. “The demon passes his data onto the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind” [...] The sensitive must receive that staggering set of energies, and feedback something like the same quantity of information. To keep it cycling. On a secular level all we can see is one piston, hopefully moving. One little movement, against all that massive complex of information, destroyed over and over with each power stroke”.
(79)

This strange, almost mystical, approach to the concept of entropy that Pynchon outlines is difficult to understand, for Oedipa and for the reader. What Pynchon seems to be arguing is that randomness and contingency must be interfaced and translated by the “sensitive” so that the system receives new data to stop its decline into heat death. Mark Siegel provides clarification by explaining how this sequence links the thermodynamic concept of entropy, in the short story, and the informational concept of entropy, which seems to be more present in *The Crying of Lot 49*:

Information theory entropy is a measure of the amount of information about a system that is unavailable for analysis. However, information theory does not concern itself with “order” as structure, as the thermodynamic theory does, but with the quantity of available information about a particular system: here, “order” is seen as predictability. The most information is contained in the event which is most improbable, since the information contained in probable events is already known and predictable. But the most unpredictable event is the most random, and therefore, total randomness and disorder provide a maximum of information. (Siegel 6)

Essentially, Pynchon seems to be communicating that uncertainty and randomness are essential to life. As Siegel mentioned, the most information is contained in events that are unknown, because probable events, and the information they carry, are, in a sense, already known. As with the example of Meatball Mulligan, his ability to deal with the contingency of his

environment and pose a semblance of temporary order represents life. This is juxtaposed with Callisto, who seeks to know his environment entirely and thus exercises complete control over it. Callisto, in this way, seems to stand in as a symbol of the self-perpetuating systems of control in society. The critique Pynchon makes of Callisto is that this is ultimately a process that leads towards death, because both heat energy and new information are declining as homeostasis is established. Siegel summarizes this by arguing that

In “Entropy” Pynchon depicts only two alternative modes of response to this breakdown of organization: complete withdrawal from social life, or a human attempt at restoring partial order and at making conditions bearable during the collapse of a “culture”. (5)

Here is also the central dilemma of the paranoid, who, in confronting the contingency of life, attempts to impose order. In imposing order, the paranoid is slowly ossifying themselves as there is a continuing decline in the possibility for contingency to arise and present new, unknown information. But on the other hand, the generative potentials of paranoia, in the sense that it allows the individual to dream worlds beyond the visible, is paradoxically the only escape from this process of ossification and stasis. Its detriment lies in its proclivity to place the individual in a subordinate and fearful position to the system that dominates them; however, its promise lies in the kernel of resistance enacted in refusing to accept the visible reality as the only reality. The betrayal of a conspiracy theory, the deceit that underlies its injustice to the individual, is also the means of hope for an escape into a new world.

The question then is, what bearing does this have on technology? The answer is in the ability of technology and systems of control to create homeostasis. The ability for a bureaucratic, technological, or any self-perpetuating system to create a homeostatic environment where all possibilities can be dealt with through the paradigms provided by the system, essentially, leads to stasis, namely, death. This process mirrors Callisto’s paranoid plan to seal his apartment off from externalities. On the other hand, Oedipa’s paranoid conspiring is paradoxically the source of her vitality, as with Meatball Mulligan, who has a constantly moving flux of people in and out of his party. Oedipa lauds over a revolving door of conspiracy theories, which constantly reshape and reorient her perspective. While Oedipa may be ontologically “lost”, she is, in a sense, still on the move, still alive.

In this way, Pynchon positions technology and self-perpetuating systems as a source of a paranoia due to the control they exert over the lives of individuals that live within them, though as a consequence of his representation of entropy, he also views paranoia as a response individuals utilize in order to combat the ossification of the system, as it attempts to

render all within its scope as known, and thus run out of heat energy and “die”¹¹. However, this is a gambit that rests on the paranoid's ability to constantly shift their fixations. If the paranoid settles into a singular fixation, say a single conspiracy theory, they start to ossify. If they use paranoia as a fundamentally active process of continual reinvention and re-orientation, they are still, like a prey animal, “on the run” so to speak. Siegel argues this is best seen through “Gödel's Theorem”, where essentially one can only gain perspective on the true efficacy of a system by moving outside of its parameters:

Gödel's Theorem, to which Pynchon refers in *Gravity's Rainbow*, states that it is impossible to prove that any logical system does not contain contradictions inherent in the theorems derived from that system, because to prove a system correct one must get outside of the system. (Siegel 6)

Therefore, Pynchon depicts technology, bureaucracy, and the self-perpetuating systems of culture as fundamentally concerned with stasis and control. Siegel's description of Gödel's theorem offers the possibility that paranoia and conspiracy may be a method of getting outside the system. When an individual is contained within a system, they are simply another known component – a pawn – in the functioning of the system. Pynchon seems to be showing that paranoia emerges from the slow realization that one is trapped within this self-perpetuating system. To break out, it seems, one must like Oedipa, dream of worlds other than this one through paranoid conspiracy. What can be drawn from this is that technology, as an extension of bureaucratic systems of control, inspires paranoia by virtue of its omnipresence in the life of the individual, and that this paranoia in turn functions as a mode of resistance to break out.

The point Pynchon is making, I think, is that it is irrelevant whether or not the conspiracy is true. What I think Pynchon is trying to show in his novels is that societies that are enthused by conspiracy are necessarily paranoid societies, based on control. Ultimately Pynchon illustrates, in what is a common post-industrial critique, that highly bureaucratic and controlled societies of the modern era are maintained through the sublime power of technology on the human body – the oppressive function of the non-human: the steel radar towers, the camera lens, the vast digital networks, the hovering satellites.

¹¹ In the sense that the system ceases to transform. Utopia is, in a way, death in the sense it is unchanging and eternal. True paranoia mimics this entropic function of a self-perpetuating system where the paranoid wants a total cessation, because it is the uncertainty of stimulus that sets off a paranoid reflex. A hypochondriac in a sense longs for “death”: total numbness, or what can be framed through a psychoanalytical lens as a “return to the womb”.

Chapter 3: Networks: Panopticon to Post-Panopticon, Bureaucracy-Premised-on-Surveillance, and Cyber-Subjectivity

3.1 Orders of the Panopticon and Post-Panopticon

In the previous chapter, I developed a relationship between bureaucracy, bureaucratic forms, and paranoia. The image I am trying to cultivate is one where the postmodern subject feels themselves caught within a complex bureaucratic system, which by virtue of its function, is concerned with organizing and controlling not only information but the individuals under its jurisdiction.

Ultimately, subjects are situated within a network, where their relation to other subjects, or nodes, in that network is unclear. Furthermore, their perception of a central nexus of power, and their relationship to it is unclear. What I want to illustrate in this chapter, with reference to *Gravity's Rainbow*, is how conceiving of one's social reality as part of a complex network, a web-like structure, makes it increasingly difficult to develop an orientation, especially when the nexus of power is not clearly traceable to a central point. Through this analysis, I aim to make the analogy between the bureaucracies Pynchon depicts, and the experience of the cyber-subject – that is, one whose subjectivity is predominantly moulded by their use of cyberspace – clearer.

Pynchon draws an analogy between the experience of living under the United States and its bureaucratic techniques of control, and the functioning of the wartime bureaucracies he depicts in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Regarding the degree to which bureaucratic networks dominate the experience of the modern subject, Robert Poirier argues

In Pynchon [. . .] paranoia is often the pre-condition for recognizing the systematic conspiracy of reality. So much so, that to think of oneself in any pejorative sense as a paranoid constitutes in Pynchon a kind of cop out, a refusal to see life and reality itself as a plot, to see even dreams as an instrumentality of a bureaucracy intent on creating self-perpetuating systems. (Poirier 161)

Poirier outlines the pervasive effect of bureaucracy by positing that in Pynchon's work even the dreams of individuals are not safe from the instrumentality of bureaucracy, and “self-perpetuating systems” are a consequence of its omnipresence in the rhythms of postmodern life. When I speak of bureaucracy, I refer to the conventional notion of a bureaucratic apparatus that organizes and maintains the functioning of states. I also use it as a descriptive term to describe the nature of globalized capitalism in postmodernity. When I refer to it in this way, I am referring to the broader institutionalization of global society and global

economies, particularly in the developed West, or “global north”, under the advance of US hegemony and its neoliberal ideologies. I will develop this idea with reference to Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson, to argue that the bureaucratic structure comes to dominate subjectivity in postmodernity.

The image of bureaucracy that emerges initially in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a very specific one that was previously defined by Max Weber. Furthermore, the notion of disciplinary procedures and surveillance, being built into bureaucratic and institutional structures, has long been argued by Michel Foucault. Therefore, to better define the terms bureaucracy, discipline, and surveillance in a way that is relevant to Pynchon, I would like to take a closer look at Weber and Foucault. The immediate linkage between Weber and Pynchon is their shared emphasis on Protestantism. The notion of predestination is a central theme in *Gravity's Rainbow* and plays out through Tyrone Slothrop's Puritan heritage. The through line is also in the similarities in their views of bureaucracy. Schroeder states that:

The Protestant idea of predestination has become transformed into a secular feeling that one's life is constantly subject to assessment, except that the individual must now do without the comforting knowledge that this assessment serves a meaningful purpose within a larger design. Weber calls this a “mundane determinism,” the idea that one's life is predestined in a certain way. (Schroeder 72)

What characterizes Weber's estimation of modernity is a “sense of persecution and guilt” and also the ensuing “routinization of social life” (72). This is also one of the core themes of *Gravity's Rainbow*, where ultimately much of the plot follows individuals caught within the bureaucratic infrastructure of institutions.

As in Weber's work, the rationalization and bureaucratization of the world is a major theme in *Gravity's Rainbow*. This process is represented by the extensively cartellized industries and the sprawling bureaucracies involved in the research, manufacture, and administration of the rocket program. (73)

Even though there is a clear aim, in the development of the rocket programme, the bureaucratic network disorients the employees so that they cannot locate its nexus of power. On the one hand, they cannot trace where the effects of power – the force they feel is acting on and watching them – emerge from. On the other hand, they do not have a teleological totality to work from. The participants in the rocket program are only concerned with their specific function, and not the “master plan”. This is most observable through Franz Pökler, a German scientist in the service of Weissman, who is tormented by his overseer's mercurial

approach to management. Pökler never seems to be able to orientate himself within the larger totality of the project; he can only occupy himself with the specific mathematical equations required to complete his job. This strange torment, where he feels himself confined to a cell and has limited knowledge about what is going on around him, is an illustration of the bureaucratic employee, caught within a cubicle or at a workstation.

Pökler's duties at the Mittelwerke were routine: materials, procurement. He slept in a bunk next to a wall of dynamited stone painted white, with a bulb over his head burning all night long. He dreamed that the bulb was representative of Weissman, a creature whose bright filament was its soul. They held long dream-dialogues whose substance Pökler could never remember. The bulb was explaining to him in detail – it was more grand and sweeping than Pökler could ever have imagined, it seemed many nights to be purely music, his consciousness moving through the soundscape at bay, observing compliant, still, precariously safe, but not for long. (Pynchon 434)

Weissman, who is portrayed as an enigmatic madman, hardly constitutes a stable centre. He moves around Pökler and the other employees like a wolf on the periphery of a herd of prey. While they, of course, understand he is their overseer, they are often unclear about his motives. As the excerpt shows, Pökler constructs an abstraction of Weissman, in the form of the light bulb, an object that is central and casts an illuminating light: something that is entirely missing from Pökler's experience as an employee. Yet, even this light only communicates to him in fragments, in dream sequences that he cannot recall; he only has a vague sense of Weissman's master plan, as opposed to any concrete knowledge of it. The borders of his specific environment, his cell or workstation, are shrouded entirely in darkness. All he knows is that Weissman prowls around, plotting and organizing for those under his jurisdiction. When Pökler encounters Weissman, he knows that he will receive some instruction; however, it is in these punctuated periods of isolation that his torment grows as he awaits the arrival of his master. In another scene, Weissman once again approaches Pökler cryptically:

“Do you miss Dr. Thiel?”

“Yes. He wasn't in my section. I didn't know him well.”

“A shame he got caught in the raid. We all move in an Ellipse of Uncertainty, don't we?”

Pökler allowed himself a look at the cluttered desk, quick enough to be taken either for nervousness or a comeback – Weissman, looks like you have your

own Ellipse all right – “Oh I don’t have the time usually to worry. At least the Mittelwerke is underground.”

“The tactical sites won’t be”

“Do you think I might be sent – “

Weissman shrugged and favoured Pökler with a big fake smile.

“My dear Pökler, how can anyone predict where you’ll go? We’ll see how it all develops”. (435)

Weissman, of course, knows exactly when and where he will be placed. This is perhaps a familiar feeling for many employees: being summoned by a line manager. Pökler, like many others in the novel, experiences the reality of the employee within a bureaucratic network. The way in which he begins to conceptualize the relationship he has to his work is based on highly specific tasks, which, when completed, offer him the gift of another task. Periodically, these tasks also afford him brief encounters with Weissman. With each task and the excess of cryptic information he attempts to read into it, he gains a small sense of clarity as to where in this complex network he is situated. He is also aware, however, that Weissman has a greater degree of knowledge of all the moving parts of the rocket program. Pökler knows that Weissman is aware of the experience Pökler is currently undergoing, insofar as Weissman is the one responsible for its design and its perpetuation. Pökler then becomes more and more aware that each task, or each kernel of intelligence he gathers is multi-layered or purposely creating a certain view that Weissman wants him to adopt.

The structure of this game is also represented by the arrangement Weissman sets up between Pökler and his daughter. His half-Jewish daughter Ilse is periodically delivered to him, from the concentration camp where she is being kept, as a reward for his work. Over time, he starts to fear that the girl who visits him each year is actually a different girl, and not his daughter, whom he suspects is dead (she is, in fact, not, and will cross paths with Slothrop later in the novel). The fracture that Pökler experiences with reality, and his ensuing paranoid ruminations, are a result of being enmeshed in a network in which he cannot orientate himself. There are others like him in this network, but they too cannot orient themselves. They all seem to organize around the central figure of Weissman, however, it is unclear to what degree Weissman is truthful with Pökler or the others, and it is unclear whether he is using a Machiavellian strategy or telling the truth. What emerges is an environment of suspicion in which everyone is conspiring against everyone else, not out of malevolence, but from an understanding that information constitutes control, which is exercised through the

enigmatic figure of Weissman, who seems to slip in and out of the lives of the rocket program employees. What I am trying to illustrate is that bureaucracy, as a network based on surveillance, and without a stable centre, at least perceptibly from the employees' perspective, generates a paranoid subjectivity.

Foucault's analysis of power highlights this illustration. Particularly important are his ideas on the penal system, which he develops in *Discipline and Punish*, and how these methods of control are extended into what he deems a largely institutional society premised on disciplinary procedures to maintain normative codes (Palmeri 18). Through various institutional settings, Foucault would argue that subjectivity is entirely structured by the disciplinary procedures that work upon the body.

What is particularly important regarding the relationship between Foucault and Pynchon is the growing neo-liberal and capitalist influence, in postmodernity, on what was otherwise conceived of as the centralized state in Weber's work. Foucault's notion of governmentality, which describes "the ways in which the populace become positioned in a triangle of sovereignty, discipline and government" (Eve 105), is integral to this notion. This becomes, in the neo-liberal era, premised on a far less centralized nexus of power that is based on the relationship between state, free markets, and globalized capital (105).

Describing Pynchon's representations of governmentality in *Inherent Vice* and *Vineland*, Eve argues that in these books, "neo-liberal rulers deploy heavy-handed police tactics to quash the hazy hippies." However:

it is only at these points of free-market-devoted government that the State appears with any prominence as an entity in Pynchon's works. This suggests an underlying affinity with Foucault's stance for, in 'Governmentality', Foucault notes that '[m]aybe, after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think'. (Eve 105)

The latter remark of Foucault reveals the perception of statehood in postmodernity. Eve seems to be arguing that the legitimacy of state power is eroded as its functions are blurred with the increasing prominence of the private sector. The presence of neo-liberalism, as a model of social organization, starts to deconstruct the older notion of a centralized state. With multinational corporations straddling various national borders, global migrant flows that construct distinct transnational networks of identity and community, and the perceived global terror network, the notion of the state as a centralized unified entity starts to break down.

There are two pictures of bureaucratic society emerging. The first is the Weberian notion of a centralized bureaucracy, which finds expression in much of the totalitarian impulses of the early twentieth century. This is a more classical view of state control, disciplinary techniques, and control through bureaucratic networks and surveillance. It also premises the functioning of the state on a centralized model. The second, however, is the more nebulous and decentralized nature of the neo-liberal model, where state power and corporate power blur the distinctions between public and private, and express methods of control which are not locatable at any central point of origin. It is not that a head of state in this context cannot be held accountable, but that the structure of neoliberal capitalism delegitimizes them.

In *Liquid Modernity*, Zygmunt Bauman differentiates between the modernity of the early 20th century and the postmodernity of the latter 21st century with a juxtaposition between what he deems orders of Panopticon and Post-Panopticon. These two figurations correspond, respectively, to Bauman's descriptions of solid and liquid modernity, which has already been discussed. Regarding the conventional Panopticon, Bauman argues:

Michel Foucault used Jeremy Bentham's design of the Panopticon as the archmetaphor of modern power. In Panopticon, the inmates were tied to the place and barred from all movement, confined within the thick, dense, closely guarded walls and fixed to their beds, cells, or work benches. They could not move because they were under watch. . . (Bauman 9)

The Panopticon is a prison designed with a central tower surrounded by cells. The guard in the tower can see into the cells, but the prisoners cannot see the guard from their cells. So they are never sure when they are being watched or not. Here is in some way, the reality that Pöckler experiences. The prisoners are therefore confronted with the threat of constant surveillance; it is safer to act like someone is always watching. This exists within the context of the Weberian and modernist approach to statehood. The centralized state has a centralized bureaucracy which, like in the image of the Panopticon, watches from a central tower. But regarding this transformation into the "liquid" nature of decentralized postmodernity, it is as if the tower has disappeared, yet the function of the Panopticon, in that it situates surveillance as omnipresent, remains. To some extent, this resembles the way Weissman phases in and out of the rocket program, though to a greater extent, it resembles how Slothrop is monitored throughout *The Zone*. Bauman argues that our contemporary era is above all defined by what he calls the "Post-Panoptical":

The end of the Panopticon augurs the end of the era of mutual engagement: between the supervisors and the supervised, capital and labour, leaders and their followers, armies at war. The prime technique of power is now escape, slippage, elision and avoidance, the effective rejection of any territorial confinement with its cumbersome collaries of order-building, order-maintenance and the responsibility of the consequences of it all as well as the necessity to bear their costs. (Bauman 11)

What Bauman refers to when describing this environment is the structure of globalized society. In a structural sense, the Post-Panopticon can perhaps best be appreciated when considering the function of surveillance cameras. Often, these are littered throughout densely populated urban areas. In especially busy areas, such as a city centre, the disorienting layout and continuous movement of people create an environment where these cameras hide in plain sight. Often, they are purposely hidden or camouflaged. Most importantly, they are also remote. The camera's feedback to a screen in an office somewhere, but where? And which feeds are received at which office? This is what Bauman is describing when he describes power as moving from a place of implying, and displaying itself, to a place where it becomes hidden; it can perform its function better if you do not know it is there.

Therefore, speculates Bauman, instead of solid modernity, a liquid modernity has emerged. The older notion of state, bureaucracy, or any nexus of power, being centralized and visible, has transformed. Surveillance, as the signifier of the authority of a state or its bureaucracy, is hidden. The individual is submerged and surrounded by it, like water. This Post-Panoptical configuration is vital to understanding the function of bureaucracy in postmodernity. Furthermore, it illustrates how this relationship generates paranoia through the absence of any visible centre.

3.2 Bureaucracy Premised on Surveillance in *Gravity's Rainbow*

The notion of a bureaucratic apparatus premised on networks of surveillance and control is exemplified in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Beyond the more fantastical and conspiratorial elements of Tyrone Slothrop's experience his story is ultimately, at its purest, the experience of an employee. He is constantly entrenched within the bureaucratic networks of the wartime Allied institutions.

For instance, the second part of the novel is focused on his time at the Casino Hermann Goering. This is before he finds himself off on his quest to track his sinister connection to the V2 rocket. Slothrop is assigned, at the behest of Dr. Pointsman, leave in the south of France. The casino has been repurposed to function as a forward operating base for

the Allied war bureaucracy, though it appears more like a conventional casino in which various off-duty officers and bureaucrats partake in leisure activities. Slothrop arrives with his friend Tantivy Muffer-Maffick and Teddy Bloat, who is in the employ of Pointsman. The real reason for Slothrop's placement here is to guide him, eventually, to the V2 Rocket. What Pointsman designs for Slothrop at the Casino is essentially "rocket school". While part of the experience is designed to teach Slothrop about the programme, perhaps hastening his flight towards it, it also serves as a slow disintegration of Slothrop's personality into paranoia. Whether the latter is part of Pointsman's design is unclear, but certainly represented as probable. What is important is the Casino's dual function as an educational centre – he is briefed and educated daily on matters related to the V2 Rocket – but also as a site of surveillance. Surveillance and control are fundamentally baked into the structure of bureaucracy and as a fundamental reality of the "employee".

Upon his entry into the Casino, a sequence of events transpires where Slothrop's clothes are stolen from him: "What the fuck. Groaning, he rummages in the desk. Empty. Closets empty. Leave papers, ID everything, taken" (Pynchon 203). This is important for two reasons. The first is the notion of surveillance within bureaucratic institutions, and ultimately, modern surveillance societies as an extension of it. Perhaps better put, bureaucracy itself is a process of surveillance, if one considers the possibility that the object which produces the most useful information, especially in cyber-society, is the human being.

A brief glance at cyber-culture, both in a speculative and paranoid lens, as well as, to a certain degree, a tangible lens, can show that one's data is tracked, in some cases legally but in other cases illegally. Our attention spans, many claim, are being sold to massive corporations who are paying to watch (or record) individuals, through their data and metadata, and think nothing of attempting to manipulate reactions to their environment, taking money for targeted ads and content which may influence an individual's ideological positions. A well-known example is the Cambridge Analytica scandal, where Facebook users' data and metadata was allegedly harvested without consent to inform targeted ads, which affected the outcome of the 2016 US election (Sarcasas 35). A recent lawsuit has alleged that they also used data without consent to train their AI models (36). Since then, there has been a notable increase in suspicion towards META and its applications (including Instagram and WhatsApp), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 US

election¹². Other notable defendants in the case are Peter Thiel from Palantir Technologies¹³, and Reed Hastings, the CEO of Netflix. While this is just one of the real tangible cases of alleged data theft, what is perhaps more interesting is the way in which data theft has become more prominent in public consciousness, as increasingly paranoid views develop around Big-Tech and cybersecurity morph into a Pynchonian paranoia. This paranoia is not directed towards cybercriminals, but rather the apparatus itself, such as Facebook, Instagram, Google, WhatsApp, and TikTok.

The other important aspect of Slothrop's situation is that his clothes and his identity documents, those things that define and represent Slothrop as he is, have been taken from him, so that his emerging identity can be formed within the correct channels of institutional control, essentially positioning the Casino as an ideological pipeline. Thus, where the first interpretation speaks to actual tangible data theft, the second point speaks to the role of the Internet as an ideological apparatus which reshapes public opinion through virtual construction, usually through misinformation and algorithmic suggestion. Similarly, Pynchon's critique of bureaucracy and the ideology of modern liberal states exaggerates and satirises the interpellation through surveillance and control, which takes on a far softer and shadowy appearance than in outright totalitarian instances. The Casino episode shows the plight of the subject existing within a particular bureaucratic network premised on surveillance. What I am trying to show is that this can be construed as analogous to the modern subject's experience of cyberspace.

Immediately after this sequence of events, Slothrop has a revelatory experience in the form of paranoia, when he gains an insight into the shadowy nature of bureaucracy. He starts to intuit that the events he has experienced thus far are no longer a product of chance, as the narrator describes: "There is another enterprise here, more real than that, less merciful, and systematically hidden from the likes of Slothrop" (Pynchon 205). The narrator expands on this notion:

There may, for a moment, have been some golden, vaguely root-like or manlike figure beginning to form among the brown and bright cream shadows and light here. But Slothrop isn't to be let off quite so easy. Shortly, unpleasantly so, it will come to him that everything in this room is really being

¹² Notable, amongst other things, for the prominence of Q-Anon and other conspiratorial narratives, as well as the ensuing January 6th attack on the US Capitol Building.

¹³ Noted to be thoroughly intertwined with the US State infrastructure (military, police, and intelligence services) as an information-technology company which specializes in, what is for all intents and purposes, surveillance software.

used for something different. Meaning things to Them it has never meant to us. Never. Two orders of being, looking identical. . . [sic] (205)

As his days at the Casino continue, he is frequently tutored by a gentleman named Stephan Dodson-Truck in various matters ranging from the science behind the V2 Rocket to various Germanic runes. All this is kept in check by the frequent sexual relations he has with Katje Borgesius, whom he starts to suspect, rightly, as it turns out, of having been planted as a mechanism of sexual control. The narrator again explicates Slothrop's suspicions:

Were They trying to seduce his brain now, his reading eye too? There are times when Slothrop actually can find a clutch mechanism between him and Their iron-cased engine far away up a power train whose shape and design he can only guess at. . . [sic] (210)

His awareness of what is ultimately a surveillance-based bureaucracy that is an extension of a society premised on hidden methods of control is based on the fact that he cannot locate the source of his intuition, and “he can't fit any of it into a pattern” (210). Crucially, the mention of a clutch mechanism ultimately refers to the subject as being engaged in a constant dialectic with a bureaucratic mechanism, a surveillance state, or an institution. The subject is constantly caught within a network which seems to have a greater degree of knowledge, foreknowledge, of the subject's position than does the subject.

Slothrop slowly starts to unravel the conspiracy that surrounds him. After luring his tutor, Stephan Dodson-Truck, into a drinking game, he manages to extract the truth out of him:

My ‘function’ is to observe you. That’s my function. You like my function? You like it? Your function . . . is, learn the rocket, inch by inch. I have . . . to send in a daily log of your progress. And that's all I know. (Pynchon 219)

Pynchon ends this sequence with a song entitled “The Penis He Thought Was His Own”, in reference to Jampf’s experimentation and Slothrop's connection to the rocket:

(Lead tenor): ‘Twas the penis, he thought-was, his own—
Just a big playful boy of a bone . . .
With a stout purple head,
Sticking up from the bed,
Where the girlies all played Telephone—

(Bass): Te-le-phone. . . .

(Inner Voices): But They came through the hole in the night,

(Bass): And They sweet-talked it clear out of sight—

(Inner Voices): Out of sight. . .

(Tenor): Now he sighs alone,
 With a heartbroken moan,
 For the pe-nis, he thought was his owwwwn!
(Inner Voices): Was, his, own! [sic] (Pynchon 219)

What is happening here on one level is that Slothrop is starting to extract the conspiracies out of those who are involved in it. On another level, Pynchon, through the narrator¹⁴, with his sing-song tangents, is hinting to the reader how this factors into Slothrop's past, which at this stage of the novel has not been fully developed as a conspiracy theory. What is interesting is the fact that Stephan Dodson-Truck has a highly specialized function; he only knows his direct orders and has no knowledge of the wider conspiracy within which Slothrop is embroiled. Dodson, being in service to the bureaucracy that tracks Slothrop, has almost as little knowledge about it as does Slothrop. This links to Eve's interpretation of Foucault in the previous section, and the notion of the nation-state and its bureaucracy as virtual, or as Foucault noted, "a mythicized abstraction" (Eve 105).

Regarding Pynchon's own time, it is not that Cold War America is entirely organized around one goal. Rather, it is the internal fractures, fissures, and contradictions that begin to create a complicated picture of a subject, where the bureaucratic nexus – the state – appears as some disembodied other, some shadow force. Further, it is not that those employed within bureaucracies are representative of those institutions; they are rather manipulated and socialized into patterns of behaviour that fundamentally form a decentralized network. Again, as Eve noted, it is not that subjects, like Stephan Dodson-Truck, "act for the system" but crucially, they do not act "against it" (Eve 88). This is, of course, compounded by the eroded ability to resist such entrenched structures from within and according to the terms prescribed by them.

Having explored Bauman's conceptualization of the *Post-Panopticon* order, and referencing Slothrop's experience of a shadowy apparatus, and its origin, which he cannot locate, I can now move away from describing the methods of control of the early 20th century, to describing the more prescient methods of control as they are expressed in postmodern and post-industrial societies.

3.3 Postmodern Bureaucracy: The Cyber-Subject and the Symbol of The Network

¹⁴ Here again surfaces some of the Freudian undertones to Pynchon's narrative: the connection between sexual desire (libido) and war mongering.

This idea of a decentralized and elusive apparatus of control is central to understanding the role of paranoia and conspiracy in Thomas Pynchon's critique of post-industrial society. It is ultimately a story of the subject pitted against an elusive other, an other that takes the form of society, of the bureaucratic apparatus, of the nation state, as containing a singular and directed agency, which is aware of, gazes upon, and plots for the subject, but which cannot be tracked and located to a point of origin.

This notion of subjectivity (subjectivity as a concept I will define in Chapter 4) provides the basis for a conceptualization of a cyber-subjectivity in an important way; it is a type of network logic where notions of subjectivity are less important than notions of data transfer: participants exist as sites of data transfer, to perpetuate that data transfer, as opposed to individuals with a particular subjective experience¹⁵. For example, there is no point of origin to the Internet; it is an entirely decentralized flow of information. There is also, perceivably, no centre of control on the Internet¹⁶. While information certainly originates from *an* origin, in the sense that it is uploaded, once it exists on the network, it is essentially a spectre. It floats away from its point of origin, and it disseminates into the network.

Take Slothrop, for instance; he arrives at the Casino Hermann Goering with a particular identity, which functions as an original point of entry. However, soon after the origin of this identity is erased and disseminated, his belongings and identity documents are stolen. He now functions as an element of the network he is enmeshed in. He becomes a system effect of the casino, rather than an agent or an origin. Throughout his stay at the casino, his identity increasingly comes under strain. Once he escapes, this process is repeated throughout his travels in post-war Germany, an area that is known as “The Zone”. His identity starts to fragment as he is frequently presented with various roles to fill, which he in turn moulds into much like the Good Soldier Švejk in Jaroslav Hašek’s satirical novel (1921-1923).

Out in The Zone, Slothrop has a bizarre interaction in the town of Nordhausen while on his way to investigate the Mittelwerke V2 rocket facility and the mystery of “Imipolex-

¹⁵ One is reminded of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “Rhizome”.

¹⁶ What is possible in the future is that Internet will descend into various centralized local networks, evidenced through China’s “Great Firewall”. So as opposed to a globalized Internet (in the context of a globalized world) rather there will be a balkanized Internet in a multipolar world. One could similarly posit the same formula to AI, where rather than globalized open access large language models, we see local AI’s that essentially exist as virtual avatars of the cultural environment they emerge from, so a localized Chinese Internet that is to some extent regulated from outside interference, with a localized AI model that functions according to its cultural context: older configurations of the world functioning on new technology. Essentially, the Internet as we perceive it currently is wound up with US global hegemony.

G”. Slothrop encounters a self-described “witch”, Geli-Tripping, who interviews Slothrop, who is at the time in disguise as one Ian Scuffling, a British war correspondent. “You’re not a war correspondent” she guesses and then, further flipping the dynamic of journalist-interviewee, intuitively leads him on: “Oh. Then I imagine you wouldn’t be looking for the Rocket Number 0000”. This is the rocket containing Imipolex-G. She continues, saying that he “couldn’t care less about the Schwarzgerät either” (297). At this point, from Slothrop’s perspective, there is no logical way Geli could know this information without being connected to the plot. Geli never lets on how exactly she knows this information¹⁷, and the description of her as a witch seems to imply there is something otherworldly at work. The beginning and the end of this episode both commence with Geli’s philosophical contemplation on the nature of the Zone: “It’s so unorganized out here. There have to be arrangements. *You’ll find out* [emphasis my own]” (295). The narrator again steps in to frame Slothrop’s position: “Slothrop, though he doesn’t know it yet, is as properly constituted a state as any other in the Zone these days. Not paranoia. Just how it is” (295). The final interaction follows similarly to the first, where in sensing Slothrop’s confusion, Geli proclaims “You sound like a German. Forget frontiers now. Forget subdivisions”, and finally “*You’ll learn* [emphasis my own]. It’s all been suspended. Vaslav¹⁸ calls it an ‘interregnum.’ You only have to flow along with it”¹⁹ (297).

What is telling about this interaction is the constant tension between subjects as agents, and subjects as modulations or effects of a seemingly larger network: one that appears to have a character of its own. The narrative is purposely framed in such a way that the reader is forced to seriously consider the fact that this has all been scripted in advance for Slothrop. A second observation is the possibility – and Pynchon constantly implies this too – that there is no script in the sense that this still focuses on a sense of agency regarding an element of “plotting” and ultimately a conscious telos. Rather, these characters are simply part of one emergent network in which movements are interpreted as synchronous. Within the paranoid view, Slothrop has been “found out” and his internal thoughts discovered by those “plotting” events. The synchronicities he sees as clues to uncovering the machinations of those tracking

¹⁷ She is the lover of Titcherine: A soviet agent, and a recurring POV character in the novel. Later it becomes possible that Geli was informing on Slothrop, or at least aware of him somehow, as Titcherine gradually closes in on Slothrop.

¹⁸ She is referring to Titcherine: his first name.

¹⁹ While this foreshadows Slothrop’s general trajectory, it more specifically foreshadows his time on the pleasure barge “Anubis” later in the novel, and his sexual encounter with the underage Bianca (who is implied to be the lost daughter of Frans Pokler) and Slothrop’s increasingly moral (perhaps even ontological) relativism.

him. However, approaching this from an alternative view of subjectivity, in line with a network logic, we would see these coincidences as part of a wider synchronicity playing out in the Zone where the subject is less an individual than a cellular component. Geli's opening and closing lines evidence this idea with her notion of arrangements, "there have to be arrangements". There is a double meaning here. On one hand, one can speak of arrangements as being *arranged*, but on the other, as affects that self-organize or emerge despite conscious organization.

Slothrop moves between different identities, such as Ian Scuffling, a war correspondent, and the infamous "Rocketman", which is a persona he takes up after donning a Viking helmet and dealing dope in Potsdam with a hashish dealer named Saure Bummer (Pynchon 371). Finally, wandering around the Zone at the end of the novel, he is dressed in a pig suit that a village in north Germany coaxes him into wearing:

Being a soft touch these days, Slothrop gives in. They roust him up out of his grass bed and down to the city hall. In the basement are costumes and props for Schweinheldfest — shields, spears, horned helmets, shaggy animal skins, wooden Thor's hammers, and ten-foot lighting bolts, covered in gold leaf. The pig costume is a little startling — pink, blue, yellow, bright sour colors, a German Expressionist pig, plush outside, padded with straw inside. It seems to fit perfectly. Hmm. (Pynchon 578)

Tyrone moves into identities that seem to be there waiting for him, like a perfectly fitting pig suit, as if the Zone itself has an emergent design, which Slothrop organically factors into. However, what is crucial is that Slothrop himself starts to lose the ability to decline, and differentiate between, these various identities. As Slothrop and the formal narrative of the novel both start to disintegrate, the narrator reflects on the events that have transpired:

There is also the story about Tyrone Slothrop, who was sent into the Zone to be present at his own assembly [. . .] The plan went wrong. He is being broken down instead, scattered. (Pynchon 752)

Like Slothrop, one can conceive of the cyber-subject as being deconstructed and reconstructed within the dominant flows of information and media on the Internet. The surveillance on, and the awareness of surveillance by the subject, fundamentally reconstructs the subject on both the virtual and the non-virtual levels. Though increasingly the virtual itself comes to reorganize our relations to the non-virtual "real". The modern cyber-subject is similarly presented with conceptualizations of subjectivity that increasingly revolve around metaphors of the network, or electric current through circuit boards: fundamentally materialist and post-humanist logics where the essence of the subject is overlooked and the notion of the subject as a system effect is preferred.

Notions of surveillance, of data tracking, and of algorithmic suggestion all point towards a world where networks, by virtue of their structure and function rest on the possibility of surveillance and on the idea that the subject can not only be gazed upon but tracked. Surveillance in the physical world rests upon the presence of surveillance technology. In cyberspace, surveillance is possible by the use of the network itself. In the physical world, there are ways to escape bureaucratic and systematic methods of control. However, in cyberspace, one is trapped *within* that infrastructure. The anxieties Pynchon illustrates regarding the nature of bureaucracies can be projected onto the Internet *as* a bureaucracy, as a network operating on the same logic of control and surveillance as bureaucracy, with almost all activity tracked, logged, located, and recorded. Pynchon's representations of subjectivity remind one of contemporary technological metaphors, such as networks, in that the subject increasingly appears as a node in the system, rather than an active and agential system element.

Tiziana Terranova in *Network Culture: Politics of the Information Age* attempts to sketch out the defining features of what she deems a "network culture". She argues that

As geographers have pointed out, one of the most fundamental aspects of communication lies in the ways in which it forms and deforms the fabric of space and time. Communication technologies do more than just link different localities. Pathways and roads, canals and railways, telegraphs and satellites modify the speed at which goods, ideas, micro-organisms, animals, and people encounter and transform each other. They actively mould what they connect by creating new topological configurations [. . .] As should be expected [with the rise of the Internet], such reconfiguration of the overall communication system is linked to the emergence of new geopolitical formations and, in particular, it seems inextricably linked to the open and unbounded space of the post-Cold War global empire. (Terranova 40)

Regarding the Internet as a network, she describes the interrelated nature of globalized infrastructure as forming a hyper-network: a network of networks. Looking at a network as a symbol she notes "network is becoming less and less a description of a specific system, and more a catchword to describe the formation of a single yet multidimensional 'information milieu'" (Terranova 41). Thus, just as important as the actual infrastructural network is, Terranova insists that the network as a symbol, and consequently as an explanation of the way reality functions, at least socially, is crucial. In highlighting the functions of the IP (Internet protocol) and DNS (Domain Name System), Terranova describes some of the more dystopian features of the Internet as a particular kind of network:

The Domain Name System associates each number with a cell in a table and also gives it a name. The DNS is thus an idea single spatial map of the Internet, comprising a system of unique addresses that makes each IP-coded host and server locatable [. . .] if we compare the Internet to a global city, with its addresses and neighbourhoods, its overall layout as expressed by the DNS database structure is hypermodernist. Its global electronic address space is structured like a grid of discrete locations - all of which, from the point of view of the system, have equal probability of being accessed. (Terranova 42)

The type of paranoid world systems in Pynchon's work also often have no barrier between inside and outside²⁰, and one's thoughts are not safeguarded by the borders of one's physical body: the skin and skull in which the subject is housed and which defines them as a self-contained and self-constituted agent. The subject, like Terranova's description of IP and DNS protocols, is accessible. In Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, the strange synchronicities that plague Oedipa Maas on her reverie-like journey, tracking the Trystero system through late-night San Narciso, exemplify this experience that is all too common for Pynchon's characters. She complains that the "gem-like clues were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word" (Pynchon 80). But who or what is planting these clues, and how this force even comprehends the degrees to which she is "in" or "out" of reality is unclear to the reader. Indeed, Oedipa feels as if information is being fed to her, not by anyone in particular, but by a sort of emergent movement of the network itself. Her inability to trace this information to any meaningful origin also exemplifies the notion of the subject being a vessel of information flow.

This is, in effect, Pynchon's perspective on bureaucracy and surveillance, as it relates to the subject's experience of post-industrial society and the Internet. However, there is also a broader theme at play in his work. This theme, I believe, is the interrogation of discourses on subjectivity as they appear in philosophy and art. Inherent in this critique is the development of the notion of subjectivity from the Enlightenment: the centred subject of the cogito, to the decentred and deconstructed subject of postmodernity. Rather, in parallel to the development of methods of control and how they are expressed, there is a development in how subjectivity is theorized, in philosophy, and expressed in works of art such as literature and film. To refer to Zygmunt Bauman again, this broadly mirrors his notion of a movement from a "solid" modernity to a "liquid" modernity.

The changing organizations of the world – the effect of what we call postmodernity – are continuing to have an influence on a particular way of conceiving of subjectivity. This

²⁰ This representation of paranoia can also be thought of as a type panpsychism.

view of subjectivity perhaps most aligns with the view of postmodern and poststructuralist philosophy in the form of the “decentred subject”. Therefore, I would like to extend this analysis of Pynchon, regarding this transformation of various methods of control on the subject, to consider the broader transformation in notions of subjectivity. These transformations in subjectivity themselves are also a core theme of Pynchon’s project, as it stands in relation to postmodern literature.

Chapter 4: Defining Subjectivity

4.1 What is a “Subject”?

The previous chapters dealt with some of the key terminology under discussion. These included postmodernity, post-industrial society, postmodernism as a literary movement, late-stage capitalism, bureaucracy, paranoia, and cyberspace. In this chapter, I will define two more key terms. These terms are subject and subjectivity. The primary goal is to develop an idea of what a “postmodern subject” entails.

It is important to clarify that this is not a sociological study on real people, even though it may be informed by an interpretation of how the Internet affects them. Ultimately, I am conducting analysis of a work of fiction, which presents the reader with an analogy to better conceptualize the relationship between themselves and cyberspace. By drawing from theorizations of subjectivity, the way it is depicted in the work of Pynchon, and combining it with an autoethnographic analysis of the experience of Internet culture, I am presenting an analogue between the experience of Pynchon’s characters and modern individuals in late-stage capitalist culture. In order to speak of a subject at all, I first need to define it, through one of its many theoretical definitions.

When one speaks of subjectivity, one often speaks of the subjective experience of an individual: my subjectivity, my subjective viewpoint, and the confluence of all effects that create the “thing” that I am. At the most basic level, when I use the term subject, I am referring to the experience of the human being. On one hand, I refer to the subject as the individual, but in other places I refer to the subject as a general category, such as the “subject of Enlightenment”, or, in another way, the type of person that exists in that time and is subject to the conditions and discourses of that time.

I will argue that subjectivity, to some degree, is culturally constructed. But which culture? The primary object of focus of this thesis, beyond the literary analysis of the novels, is the Internet, or cyberspace. For the Internet to modulate or affect subjectivity, the subject in question needs to have regular access to the Internet. This is then a class distinction. To have frequent access to the Internet, and to have the luxury of engaging with its ideological functions – news media, infotainment, leisure, conspiracy-themed YouTube etc. – situates this analysis on people who have the most uninterrupted access to these elements of culture.

Through a Marxist lens, it would be accurate to say I am analysing a bourgeois subjectivity as inherently paranoid. It would be better to say I am dealing with a western,

globalized subjectivity. In other words, a subjectivity which is culturally constructed out of the global liberal order, in which the United States has taken the role of a cultural, political, military, an ideological hegemon²¹.

First, I will consider the history of the term subject. Regarding the subject as an individual, Aristotle regards the subject as the origin of action and thought (Strozier 10). The subject in this case is *a priori*: it comes before. The subject is also the producer of culture. Reason, order, or even, for Plato, something like justice, are seen as emanating from within the subject, granted that the subject practices the correct virtues. This way of theorizing the subject remains prevalent throughout the Enlightenment, among thinkers like René Descartes or Immanuel Kant. Essentially, in a simplified view, it is what the human *has* at their disposal from the outset that provides the foundation for the production of knowledge.

However, a view that has become more popular since Marx, is that the subject is culturally constructed. In this way, it is no longer *a priori*. Later materialist thinkers, especially from the Marxist lineage, put less attention on the metaphysical spheres of ontology and focus purely on the material. Thus, what is left when this subtraction is completed *is* the cultural subject because that is what can be accounted for materially. This view can be construed as a product of the broad trends of secularization and humanism that the Enlightenment and scientific thinking brought about. Robert Strozier notes that “The individual is nothing more than material prior to being produced as a discursive subject” (12). The subject in this way is the individual, in addition to an extra dimension of collective cultural operations, such as ideology or normative frameworks. The individual – a person – is a subject insofar as they are subject to culture.

Therefore, if classical Greek thinkers see the subject being animated through divine logos, or Kant sees the subject as being animated by the innate capacity for reason, this way of thinking is very different. By considering these two constructions of subjectivity, there is a tension in that the subject can be described as both an *a priori* producer *of*, as well as an *a posteriori*, which is *produced*. On one hand, I am referring to the individual like myself, who, empirically speaking, makes choices and decisions. On the other hand, I am referring to how a person such as I would be understood retroactively and historically, as *one* component in a general cultural network of a particular time. That particular time, or segment to which such a subjectivity is posited, is only revealed through retroactive analysis of history. This is one of the core methods of historical materialism as a method of inquiry. In this sense, I am a

²¹ At the time of writing, this hegemony is being contested during Trump’s second administration.

subject, but my “subjectivity” is necessarily a culturally informed practice and, to that extent, can be spoken of in more generalized language than the particular “I”. I think it is important to grasp that when I speak of subjectivity, I refer to it as something virtual. I am a subject, but my subjectivity can be perceived as something I practice or adopt. This is, as I previously offered, dependent on the relationship between “I” (the subject) and others, and “our” (intersubjective) relation to the objective material world.

4.2 Theorizing Subjectivity through Dialectical Materialism

My approach to subjectivity is a materialist position, through the paradigm of dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism aims to view things for “(a) in their relatedness and (b) in the process of development and change” (Saksena 2). The implications of this outlook, argues Sushil Saksena, are that:

Reality is only in its relatedness and in its unfolding or development. Contradictions, unity of opposites, or their resolution in an inevitable higher synthesis, is neither a thought alone, nor is it a characteristic of reality at the surface only. It is fundamentally and basically the very essence of whatever we understand by "Reality itself". (Saksena 2)

Saksena argues that a dialectical view of reality implies that things are in constant opposition to one another, and by virtue of this relationship, interact in order to achieve synthesis. In other words, tensions in history are resolved, but this then creates a new thesis, which can be countered with a new anti-thesis. There is, then, never a definitive answer, but only an ongoing, never-ending²² process of transformation. In a dialectical relationship between two entities, neither of the entities advances unchanged; both are transformed to create something new. For example, if a person were to view themselves in a dialectical relationship with the world around them, the person is affected by the world, but then acts in a way that affects the world around them; therefore, both are simultaneously shaped by the other.

Historical materialism, on the other hand, applies this dialectical method retroactively to history. I find this approach to subjectivity useful in examining a subject that is constantly in the process of structuring and being structured by its environment. I also think it provides a suitable paradigm for the effect of technology as a material extension of subjectivity and as

²² Though it must be noted that in the classical accounts of dialectics – Hegel and Marx – there is an ultimate telos in absolute spirit and the classless utopian society respectively. However, a dialectical process as an abstract concept *can* be theorized as never-ending. One such example, possibly, is that of evolutionary adaption in a biological sense. Hegel and Marx of course would argue that the telos of such a process is in their respective assertions on the end point of the dialectical process: absolute spirit and classless society.

the material conditions (the organizations of the means of production and the technical tools in the production process) that subsequently interact with subjectivity. In some sense, subjectivity emerges out of a dilemma, or is defined by a dilemma, a lack, or limitation, around which it organizes²³. Marx, for example, attributes this to the way labour is divided and consequently the way surplus value is extorted from labourers. In developing a clearer picture of subjectivity as it stands in postmodern philosophy my strategy is to start at the more orthodox Marxist interpretations of subjectivity, with their insight into the importance of the organization of the material world and its objects on the formation of subjectivity, and gradually supplement and challenge these approaches with poststructuralist readings of subjectivity.

According to Marx, the organization of the means of production informs human subjectivity. More generally, it is the organization of the material world, to the degree this world is based on the production of goods to satisfy the needs of survival for the human being and their community. For Marx, then, all products of subjectivity and of man: history, philosophy, cultural media (myth, fables, tales, oral history), are informed by the organization of the production process and by the relation of human beings to this organisation. Marx argues that the conditions of production inform the particular type of subjectivity required to reproduce those conditions of production. So, in order to maintain the conditions of production, a particular type of subjectivity which supports it also needs to be maintained. His primary argument here is the notion of superstructure and infrastructure. The infrastructure/base, which consists of all real material organizations of production, is crystallized by the superstructure, which contains all the abstract and, to a degree, “non-material” cultural contents, such as normative codes, the limits of imagination, of artistic expression, and of language, that reproduce the infrastructure with the least resistance. Althusser offers one of the most comprehensive views of ideology in the Marxist school. For Althusser ideology itself constructs the subject. Subjectivity for Althusser is an ideology, or rather, is seen *through* ideology. Ideology constitutes subjectivity. Althusser argues that ideology hails the subject, and the subject, in answering, confirms their position as subject... subject *to* ideology (Althusser 45). As Althusser argues, “The category of the subject is the

²³ Essentially, humans need food to survive. The fundamental process of subsistence, which emerges out of a lack/need (starvation, death), functions to overcome this lack, in order for humans to survive. It seems to me that this is Marx’s thesis down to its bare essentials: Subjectivity forms around a community’s approach to subsistence, and on top of this fundamental process culture gets progressively more complex as a superstructure which rationalizes the way in which communities approach subsistence (or infrastructure/base).

constitutive category of ideology” and “ideology constitutes concrete individuals as subjects” (Garcia and Sanchez 4); (Althusser 139). Similarly, Slavoj Žižek claims that “ideology discursively rationalizes the deep reasons by means of which the subject thinks or acts in certain ways” and “to this extent ideology always implies a concealment” (Garcia and Sanchez 3); (Žižek 15). Žižek says that for ideology to be effective, “the logic of legitimation of the relations of domination must always be hidden” (15). This echoes Althusser's notion that ideology is the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser 45). Ideology is a culturally constructed phenomenon. Therefore, culture informs and directs subjectivity through ideology, which is what constitutes subjectivity as reproducible. This is not dissimilar to the earlier notion of classical philosophy, positing that the practice of virtue produces “true” subjectivity. The difference is that Althusser and Žižek are arguing that this is a cultural construction, rather than a fundamental spiritual essence.

Althusser’s approach to ideology can be better understood if it is read into *The Crying of Lot 49*. On some level, Pynchon seems to interrogate the notion that the subject is never apart from the “thing” it is augmented by, whilst simultaneously trying to identify itself apart from the thing. Put less abstractly, the subject is never apart from the order – let us say society – it is trying to individuate itself from. The subject, as it understands itself, is *already* constituted by society. This is the logic behind the African philosophy of Ubuntu. The only difference is that Ubuntu is framed from the ethical view of being supportive of the subject. Pynchon seems to be showing that, at least in Western society, this could be a source of instability for the subject, that the subject is somehow “infiltrated”, the horrifying thought that an individual has no essence of their own to “possess”. The similarity to Althusser in this reading of Pynchon is important in the sense that he is depicting characters who struggle to find what is left of their subjectivity when the “social” has been subtracted. Althusser would argue that there is nothing; there is no subject prior to *interpellation*. Interpellation is a term Althusser uses that essentially denotes a process of socialization into a social system through ideology, to the degree one cannot recognize that ideology *as* ideology but simply as the zero level of reality (45). When a particular subject finds themselves at odds with characteristics of a society, such as Oedipa Maas and her adventures in the Californian underground, they attempt to individuate themselves from this “negative” aspect, but as a result find themselves rudderless as they realise how much their subjectivity was constituted by what was viewed as other to them.

This is the function of Pierce Inverarity in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Oedipa loses a part of her identity through the death of her lover. But really, in grieving Inverarity, being the executrix to his estate is somewhat of a capitalist-ritual funeral procession. Oedipa tries to sort the contents of his vast estate, herself included. Though really, she cannot achieve this because she herself is already constituted by Pierce's estate. The scope of his estate functionally is most of California. This is also Pynchon's keen sense to make him a real estate mogul. His assets are really the building blocks of individual subjects in the sense that private property and location are such fundamental elements to socialization within a capitalist system. Therefore, the postmodern cynicism in Pynchon is that his characters begin to intuit just how constituted they already are by the *social*, but rather than revert to a classical notion of individuality or celebrate a newly decentred fluidity, they simply exist in a state of contingency as they navigate between paranoia and anti-paranoia. These poles are expressed through this craving to secure and possess a subjectivity which is self-contained, and to resist the dissolution suggested by a decentred fluid notion of subjectivity. Pynchon seems to be presenting the idea that this tension between being paranoid and having an excess of meaning, and being anti-paranoid and lacking meaning, is the mechanism by which the subject gains a sense of embodied vitality, through a frenetic balancing act between being possessed by a paranoid resistance and being dispossessed through an anti-paranoid cessation.

In another way, the subject either feels a part of its cultural and ideological environment and carries the prescriptive burdens of that particular culture, or feels "other", or cast out. The core dilemma in Pynchon's writing, just like the juxtaposition between Callisto and Meatball Mulligan in "Entropy", where one implodes into homeostasis and one takes necessary action, is that both the poles of paranoia and anti-paranoia present a problem for agency. One is either paranoid and locked into the labyrinthine cultural system, and therefore powerless, or anti-paranoid and disconnected from this cultural matrix, and therefore powerless. The root of Pynchon's paranoia seems to be the following question: how can I really be sure that even in my sense of easy-going, anti-paranoid harmony, that this is not exactly what those in power want me to feel, and that I am not currently a piece in some plot? Pynchon's interrogation of Protestantism and Puritanism here comes into play as a cause of anxiety. This is, in some sense, reminiscent of the protestant work ethic as it relates to Protestant theology, where activity is necessary in order to show one's devotion to God, that being complacent, idle or passive is an affront to the supreme authority of God, and

importantly, that God is *watching*. This theological figuration is, in a way, reminiscent of a surveillance state²⁴.

What I read into Pynchon's description of subjectivity is that the subject becomes paranoid in an effort to organize against a dilemma, which ultimately becomes the source of its subjectivity. The subject is in a dialectic with that which is other to them, be it another subject, a particular cultural system, God, or the whole of the material world as one unified object that the subject faces alone. Pynchon demonstrates a view of subjectivity that is structurally similar to the dialectical materialist/historical materialist approach which I introduced through Marx, Althusser, Žižek, and Foucault.

To conclude my approach to subjectivity, I would like to reaffirm three things. Firstly, the experience of being a "subject" refers to an individual human experience, though it is a generalized estimation of an individual in a particular context. Secondly, subjectivity refers to culturally constructed discourse that the subject inherits in order to experience, perceive, express, and act within its social context. This subjectivity is, at least partly, the function of ideology according to Althusser. Thirdly, I advance the notion that this culturally constructed subjectivity, which is supported by the domain of ideology, is in part informed by the way humans engage with culture, technology, and ultimately the organization of the material world. This informs a dialectic between subject and object, or subject and other, or subject and system.

4.3 History as Archive: Foucault's Episteme, Metanarratives, and the Notion of "Dominant Subjectivity"

In developing his notion of subjectivity, Foucault produces the concept of "episteme". Foucault uses this idea to posit that there are certain "epistemic frames" that structure, or rather limit, the ways in which the subject is able to express itself, but also "how they can be seen, described and counted on by others" (Saar 234). This approach relies on the observation of what Foucault calls *basic* discursive practices, which are "any set of practices that constitute the conditions of existence for other discursive practices". Discursive practices are an "anonymous socially sanctioned body of rules that govern one's manner of perceiving, judging, imagining, and acting" (Flynn 31). Ultimately, what Foucault is saying is that networks of power, at their simplest being material relationships, influence the possibilities of

²⁴ See Chapter 6 Section 6.5. An analysis of Lacan and big-Other, through Slavoj Žižek, expands this idea further.

subjectivity, and subjectivity as a “practice” is reproduced through these discursive practices that sanction subjectivity *as* reproducible. Rather, the discursive practices are the reproduction process. Thomas Flynn demonstrates how this “categorizing” view of subjectivity can be framed onto history by outlining Foucault’s early archaeological methodology with the following:

Rather than study the “arche”, or the origin, these archaeologies examine the “archive”, by which he means “systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) as things (with their own possibility and field of use). More simply put, the archive is “the set of discourses actually pronounced”; not just any discourses, but the set that conditions what counts as knowledge in a particular period. (Flynn 30)

The complexities of human subjectivity are mysterious, but one means of accessing it is through what has been recorded, what exists in the “archive”. This view of subjectivity, which emerges from an analysis of cultural materials, can only be understood through what survives. What survives, arguably, can be understood as the “dominant-subjectivity” that informs that particular “episteme”. That episteme then comes to denote a certain normative limit on subjectivity.

The Enlightenment and its many discourses, for example, contain within them a certain discourse on subjectivity. Rather, subjectivity is the reflection of all these discourses. Therefore, there is a certain limit to what counts as “practicable” subjectivity. It is these discourses that dictate what counts as knowledge, which then survives *as* knowledge. Thus, we can theorize the Enlightenment, through its surviving products, as characterizing a certain “episteme”, a certain master-discourse.

The aspect of power, as opposed to *truth*, in this concept draws from the insight of Marx regarding the reality of the subject being structured by the relation they have to the means of production. This distinction between truth as essence and power as a contingent process is critical to the postmodern reaction to the Enlightenment. The general insight that can be drawn from this is that it is the organization of the material world that creates subjectivity, since the subject is at all times relating to the external world. Rather than investigating the nature of the material world – or what is *behind* it in essence – the materialist approach takes the material world as is; there is only the material, and further, there is only the historical archive. Flynn explains that the discursive practices at the core of this process, on the one hand, “establish and apply norms, controls, and exclusions” and on the other “render true/false discourse possible” (Flynn 31). Foucault’s very supposition is that

history is “false”, in the sense that it is organized and archived according to relations of power and not “truth”. The picture is, to a certain degree, always relative or partial. The inference is that there are many lost shadows of history or facts and perspectives that are not reproduced *explicitly*. In this way, in a poststructuralist view, history as an archive itself is in a sense an “overdetermined” subjectivity.

This can be illustrated clearly with the example of referencing the eras of the Enlightenment and early modernity. The Enlightenment, when viewed this way, is a certain epistemic framework that permitted certain conceptualizations of subjectivity to be expressed. Foucault’s focus on power makes sense because the prevailing notions of subjectivity that survive this process are the notions that serve as the presuppositions upon which the next evolution is based. Certain developments, of a material nature, ask of society, of subjectivity, particular responses, and in those responses, new conceptualizations regarding the relationship between subject and world emerge. But these questions can only be gauged through the limits on subjectivity already inherited. As the episteme changes through the interplay between material forces and subjectivity, the possibilities for the subject’s self-conceptualization evolve. Therefore, if we consider the early modern era as a period, the modifications that subjectivity undergoes through the transformation of culture in that period serve as the preconditions for post-modernity to emerge in the sense that post-modernity is based around a specific episteme: a specific limit on what is available to the subject to conceptualize itself. For example, in an artistic and literary view, postmodernism is the reaction against modernism in terms that modernism has supplied. The response is the development of postmodernism as a mature reaction to modernism. The dismantling of modernism, for example, cannot take place without the preconditions modernism itself has established as canonical. Foucault’s episteme is essentially this process, the changing general themes that tie together certain historical periods.

Therefore, for Marx, Althusser, and Foucault, what is common is the notion that subjectivity is offered by the organization of the material world: be it power relations for Foucault, or ideology for Althusser. This way of thinking implies that there is a certain “zero-level” of subjectivity inherited that is imbued with particular ideological dimensions that the subject is unaware of. This does not preclude the possibility of the individual deviating or not accepting what is a general or overdetermined subjectivity; however, the intricacies dissecting such an approach revolve around analysing the psychology of the individual, the context of their society, and their various normative codes with their accompanying virtues and deviancies. However, the sum of these intricacies, whether the causation is bottom-up or

top-down, is perceived historically as the changing of the episteme, or colloquially, a changing of eras.

4.4 The Enlightenment

What should be coming clearer is the relation between the Enlightenment and postmodernity as distinct epistemes, where one gives way to another, through a turning point or a transitional climax during World War II. Rather, the Enlightenment sets the stage for modernity, to which a cataclysmic event like World War II²⁵ creates the necessity for postmodernity to arrive as a concept. In fact, the schism which the prefix “post” denotes can be thought of as World War II. Its position in history occurs at the climax of the technological innovation brought about by the Enlightenment and sets the tone for the century to follow. It is the climax of one historical trajectory, and the start of another. It is in a way, the canonical event of postmodernity, the “zero point”, at least from the perspective of a westernized view of history. This is why Pynchon’s choice of World War II is so effective, insofar as *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a representation of one era giving way to another. Postmodernity, and postmodern philosophy as a core expression of its episteme, are often construed as a reaction or interrogation of the received discourses of the Enlightenment. Early modernity can be seen as the transformation of the Enlightenment, through technological modernization and industrialization, into postmodernity. Realistically, these distinctions are blurry. Therefore, postmodernism as a philosophical school, and postmodern literature and art, can be seen in this way as a mature modernist reaction to the Enlightenment, a reaction from beyond the transition, or break that WWII might be construed as historically²⁶.

Given this relationship between postmodernity and the Enlightenment, I want to trace the changes in the theorization of subjectivity from the Enlightenment to postmodernity. My goal is, firstly, by positing the Enlightenment as a particular discourse, dominated by a particular, overdetermined, notion of subjectivity, and then observing the transformation of this discourse, to come to an idea of the limits of Enlightenment subjectivity as a reproducible practice. Based on this, I will then explore the poststructuralist and postmodernist response to

²⁵ An argument could be made to consider both world wars as one continuous event.

²⁶ I think it needs to be said that the efficacy of this argument rests on the emergence of postmodern discourse, and how it is in many ways, tied up with the emerging western liberal order – US Hegemony – after World War II. It is within that context that I work through this argument, as relevant to the logic of postmodernism. I would not venture to argue that World War II has somehow enlightened humanity to its violent nature, conflict has been ceaseless since then. However historical discourse seems to construe World War II as the moment humanity “woke up”, and thus somehow construed as the zero-point of postmodernity(US Hegemony).

the Enlightenment and its challenges to, and reconceptualization of, subjectivity. This new set of conditions is precisely what postmodern philosophy sets out to define, particularly in its relationship to post-industrial society. Through this process, I will arrive at an estimation of the postmodern subject, to apply my argument that Thomas Pynchon's literature offers insight into the experience of the postmodern subject and its relationship to cyber-culture.

Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, provides a framework with which to critique the Enlightenment. Lyotard's most notable contribution is the notion of a "metanarrative" (Lyotard 4), which refers to overarching narrative legitimations that appeal to one or more "universal" or "fundamental" claims taken as absolute.

The most obvious example of a metanarrative, and the one that Lyotard argues against, is the Enlightenment as the gradual emancipation of man through the faculty of reason. Another clear example of a metanarrative is that of Marxism, and its goal to overturn the oppressive system of capitalism and realise the utopian end of humanity: a socialist society. The prevailing metanarrative of the Enlightenment is the notion of reason, especially the kind that rests on the scientific method for revealing objective truth. Ideologically, it is the belief that we cannot dispute the "evidence", that is the underlying metanarrative of a broader movement of quantifying and categorizing the nature of reality in line with objective truth. This objectivity, for postmodernists, is only relatively applicable as a truth.

This aspect of the Enlightenment can be understood with Richard Rorty's idea of an "over-zealous philosophy of science," which has created an "impossible idea of ahistorical legitimation" (Rorty 35). It is ahistorical because, in conducting the scientific method – the framework of the Enlightenment's reason – the results are considered sterilized of cultural or human influence and, thus, rational. Charles Fox and Hugh Miller refer to this as an "authoritative real" which must necessarily privilege "positivist domains of mathematics, science, and empirical fact" (Fox and Miller 66). Rorty further illustrates this idea by referring to a discourse that privileges "Galilean mechanics, analytic geometry, mathematical optics, and the like, as having more spiritual significance than they in fact have," and most crucially, he mocks the view that "the ability to do such science [can be seen] as a mark of something deep and essential to human nature" (Rorty 39). At the heart of this is the enlightenment subject, which Fox and Miller assert begins with the cogito:

The problem revolves around the *cogito*. European philosophy (largely arising from the philosophical culture of France) has been, for at least a century, obsessed with the implications of the formulation "I think therefore I am"

(*cogito* for short) of René Descartes. To the existentialist-phenomenological, poststructuralist, and then postmodern left, the *cogito* flashes to mind a logo or image of the bourgeois white male contemplating, in a study of his own, the means to enhance and implement the unquestionable values (or metanarrative) that solidify the cultural/economic hegemony of his kind. (Fox and Miller 66)

What this excerpt touches on is an underlying power relation that informs the Enlightenment. As Fox and Miller claim, the Enlightenment is a discourse that works to implement unquestionable values and thus generate a certain cultural hegemony, which some, like Jacques Derrida, term “Phallogocentric” (Grandi 1). In contemporary critical theory this denotes the primacy of the white male. The Enlightenment cannot be divorced from its cultural context. While this does not render its advances invalid, it does show that even something like reason or a contemplation into the way the human mind works, is always coloured by a particular cultural flavour.

This also underlies much of Pynchon’s representation of European culture as violent, based on a certain kind of death-drive in its pursuit of totality, of finality, of checking every last box until “truth” has been revealed. This teleological thrust, which Pynchon very cleverly weaves into the motif of the V2 Rocket, is contrasted with the Herero. In the novel the Herero are an ethnic group indigenous to South-West Africa, who are almost exterminated by the German colonists (the Herero genocide is a real historical event that Pynchon fictionalizes), and then recruited as rocket technicians in the service of Nazi Germany. In the novel they operate as a juxtaposition and critique of European subjectivity. The Herero do not view life as a mystery to be uncovered or a quest to complete, such as the Grail quests of canonical Christian literature. Rather, the Herero, as an alternative to European subjectivity, see the world as a sort of mandala²⁷, where the living and dead walk amongst each other. This portrayal is certainly not without criticism, for Pynchon essentially constructs a noble savage myth out of the Herero, and the notion that indigenous cultures live in some sort of natural harmony can be seen as a fetishized construction. Though I suspect Pynchon is trying to highlight the way in which technology, and what is deemed as progress, can actually deteriorate the spiritual health of society if left unchecked. It seems to me his main strategy is to juxtapose the pastoralist Herero with the modernized Europeans.

²⁷ In *Gravity’s Rainbow* Pynchon describes their villages as being constructed in a mandala, signifying the holistic nature of their world view, and the emphasis on cycle and repetition. This is in contrast to the phallic V2 rocket or perhaps a space shuttle, trying to break through the barrier of gravity. In the novel, the Herero live alongside their spirit world, the Europeans are, in a sense, trying to ram their way into their spirit world through pure upward thrust.

The longer the Herero are in the service of the Nazis, the more depraved they become. The longer they are in the presence of the teleology of the “rocket”, the more death-drive obsessed they become. This is seen in the splintering of the Herero into two factions. One is led by Enzian, who seeks to find a religious deliverance in the construction of the V2 rocket. The other is led by Josef Ombindi, who seeks to implement a program of mass suicide amongst the Herero. The pastoral simplicity of the pre-war Herero is contrasted with the mad scientist Dr Pointsman, or the equally twisted Colonel Blicero. Through Nazi Germany, through World War II, Pynchon satirises an ecstatic, frenetic, almost orgiastic approach to violence by European civilization. What is important, though, is his almost romantic²⁸ sentiment of how science and technology, and how the society of the enlightenment, pursue a totality of knowledge in a process that is fundamentally violent. In this way, *Gravity's Rainbow* positions World War II as the climax of the Enlightenment.

4.5 World War II as the Climax of Enlightenment and the Birthplace of Postmodernity

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer set out to describe what they believe is the social product of the Enlightenment. If the Enlightenment is conventionally understood as an emancipatory movement based on the liberating function of a social and ethical life guided by reason, Adorno and Horkheimer argue quite the reverse. In reviewing Adorno and Horkheimer, Jurgen Habermas notes the following:

Enlightened thinking has been understood as both a contrast to myth and as a force opposing it. As a contrast, because it counters the authority of tradition with the non-coercive coercion of the better argument, as an opposing force to the extent that it breaks the collective spell of the mythical powers by means of individually acquired insights which gain motivational strength. In this manner, the Enlightenment was supposed to contradict myth and thereby escape from its power. Challenging this opposition, of which enlightened thought is so certain, Horkheimer and Adorno instead propose a thesis of secret complicity: “Myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology”²⁹. (Habermas 14)

Here, Habermas elaborates on what is the common postmodern position towards the Enlightenment, that it is a certain “metanarrative” or instrumental discourse, which, rather

²⁸ Romantic in the sense that, at least in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon seems to lament mankind's separation, or continuous drift, from “nature”. This drift is primarily embodied in technology which makes man master of nature rather than a being *in* nature.

²⁹ Habermas is quoting from: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York, 1972), p. XVI.

than releasing the subject through appeals to a universal reason, is simply just a more sophisticated and deceptive form of the pre-modern religious and mythological ideologies of the Middle Ages and antiquity. As Habermas notes, “Reason itself destroys the humanity which it had made possible in the first place” (17). Finally, Adorno and Horkheimer offer their encapsulation of what they believe is the totalitarian impulse of the Enlightenment as it relates to subjectivity:

According to enlightened thinking, the multiplicity of mythical figures can be reduced to a single common denominator, the subject. Oedipus’s answer to the riddle of the Sphinx—“That being is man”—is repeated indiscriminately as enlightenment’s stereotyped message, whether in response to a piece of objective meaning, a schematic order, a fear of evil powers, or a hope of salvation. For the Enlightenment, only what can be encompassed by unity has the status of an existent or an event; its ideal is the system from which everything and anything follows. (Adorno and Horkheimer 4)

Therefore, regarding the status of the principles of Enlightenment as they are expressed in the processes of modernization, Anthony Elliot asserts that “[I]n the wake of Nazism, the Holocaust, Hiroshima, Stalinism and other socio-historical catastrophes this century, the veil of illusions which underpin the moral and political practice of modernity has been lifted for all to see” (11). What Elliot is alluding to here is to be understood as the waning of the utopian and emancipatory metanarrative. Utopian metanarratives, to the degree they claim to emancipate society from its present conditions, are a hallmark of Enlightenment-modernist sensibility.

Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman claims that the Nazis themselves, despite their conservative rhetoric of returning to some glorious German past, the myth of the “Volk”, were staunchly progressive in their use of technology and modernizing paradigms. They are, for Bauman, the limit of the Enlightenment project. Bauman, in a similar manner to Adorno and Horkheimer, notes that “Enlightenment as a myth, deeply entrenched in the self-consciousness of our Western society, is the morally elevating story of humanity emerging from pre-social barbarity” (Bauman 12). Bauman advances this thesis by introducing the Holocaust not as human nature short-circuiting, an “abreaction”, but actually as necessarily the product of Enlightenment and modernity. Bauman notes:

Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's sufficient condition; it was, however, most certainly its necessary condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable. The Nazi mass murder of the European Jewry was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also

the organizational achievement of a bureaucratic society.' Just consider what was needed to make the Holocaust unique among the many mass murders which marked the historical advance of the human species [. . .] The civil service infused the other hierarchies with its sure-footed planning and bureaucratic thoroughness. From the army, the machinery of destruction acquired its military precision, discipline, and callousness. Industry's influence was felt in the great emphasis upon accounting, penny-saving, and salvage, as well as in factory-like efficiency of the killing centres. Finally, the party contributed to the entire apparatus an 'idealism', a sense of 'mission', and a notion of history-making. (Bauman 13)

One of the underlying themes of *Gravity's Rainbow*, as I have already highlighted, is the intense bureaucratic organization of every aspect of the individual's life, a theme that is expressed through the wartime bureaucracies of the Allies and the Axis in the novel but is equally applicable to the post-war capitalist society that Pynchon was writing from in the 1970s. Thus, the concerns of Bauman, as well as Adorno and Horkheimer, are echoed by Pynchon's staging of the novel in World War II. What is important, I think, is Pynchon's keen sense to stage some of the characteristics of capitalist society, as a product of the Enlightenment rationality in this view, as being emboldened by the war. The technological and organizational advancement that the war brought could be seen as the birthplace of modern society, the same way it is paradoxically the graveyard of the Enlightenment. What modern society is for Pynchon is seemingly an undead spectre which defies its death by continuing to exist as something not quite alive and not quite dead – postmodernity.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the idea of the war as a bureaucratic apparatus premised on control with aims of extracting value, viewed as being characteristic of an emerging late-stage capitalism, is something many of the characters gradually suspect throughout the novel. They seem to recognize that the meaning of the war, in historical context, is in service of the same violent cycles that have underpinned humanity from the beginning. Enzian, the de facto leader of the Herero, notes towards the end of the novel an account of the future that seems to prefer the agency of technology over the agency of the subject in a trans-humanist and accelerationist spirit, fuelled by the ephemeral forces of capital which the ruling elite operate as mediums in communication, as priests³⁰:

It means this War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted... secretly, it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology ... by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques, by something that needed the energy-burst of war crying... I need

³⁰ There are obvious parallels here to American "Big-Tech", Wall-Street finance, Artificial Intelligence, and the interrelationship between all three.

my night's blood, my funding, funding, ahh more, more... The real crises were crises of allocation and priority, not among firms—it was only staged to look that way—but among the different Technologies, Plastics, Electronics, Aircraft, and their needs, which are understood only by the ruling elite... (Pynchon 521)

Postmodern philosophy, then, emerges from social and political tensions that were dominating post-war Europe. Implicit in this transformation from the Enlightenment to postmodernism is the growing historical awareness of ideology, increasing secularization, and the waning of utopian modernist projects. All of which seems to be a consequence of the erosion of the idea of reason as “centered around an isolated individual (either a concrete ego or a world spirit)” (Elliot 154). Rather, it has become *decentred*.

4.6 Deconstructing the “Postmodern Subject”

The decentring of the subject, to a more progressive postmodernist position, seems to open up new possibilities of heterogeneity and expression. However, to the degree it erodes the traditional concept of the subject – and, importantly, the type of subject much of modernity has been built upon – there is a certain ontological anxiety that it brings with it³¹. In relativizing knowledge and standing against universalizing explanations, postmodern discourse creates the possibility of isolated fragments of knowledge that only operate instrumentally, which creates difficulty in synthesizing knowledge into a cohesive discourse. This is, according to Jean-François Lyotard, very much the status of knowledge in postmodernity, characterized by the dominance of advanced capitalism in postindustrial society. Lyotard summarizes this notion of instrumental reason in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*:

Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its "use-value." It is widely accepted that knowledge has become the principle force of production over the last few decades. (Lyotard 4-5)

Essentially, Lyotard is arguing that knowledge, which was once held in the esteemed domain of universality, of “truth”, collapses into the homogenous structure of the market. It ceases being an end in itself, and becomes a means to an end. This is precisely why Lyotard states it

³¹ This is not an argument for the type of conservatism that this viewpoint espouses – which would require a nuanced discussion – simply an observation that it certainly could be argued as an on-going phenomenon.

will be produced in order to be sold. Knowledge, or more radically, *truth*, becomes a product that can be bought and sold.

This decline in the universality of knowledge, in its legitimacy as something transcendent and imbued with some fundamental truth, emerges in tandem, or is perhaps the cause, of a broader transformation in the status of subjectivity. Fredric Jameson also offers an interesting insight relating to the formation of modern subjectivity. The death of the subject – the postmodern process of displacing the rational subject as the centre of reality – is, for Fredric Jameson, a decline of the centred Enlightenment subject:

The "death" of the subject itself – the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual – and the accompanying stress, whether as some new moral ideal or as empirical description, on the decentering of that formerly centered subject or psyche... has today in the world of organizational bureaucracy dissolved; and the more radical poststructuralist position [has emerged], for which such a subject never existed in the first place but constituted something like an ideological mirage. (Jameson 21)

What Jameson seems to be suggesting is that the decline of Enlightenment metanarratives results in a decentred subject in the sense that the subject no longer has a universalizing paradigm to support the construction of a stable cultural identity. In signalling an end to the bourgeois ego, in the sense of it being self-contained, he also signals an end to what he calls the “psychopathologies of that ego” (Jameson 15). In modernist art, Jameson argues that common representations of pathology are anxiety and alienation in the sense that the self is plagued by internal battles. In postmodernity, he argues, this is replaced by representations of schizophrenia in the sense that the self is fracturing. Jameson evidences this by drawing a distinction between high modernism and postmodernism as modes of artistic representation:

the notorious cases of burnout and self-destruction of the end 1960s, and the great dominant experiences of drugs and schizophrenia, would seem to have little enough in common any more either with the hysterics and neurotics of Freud’s own day or with those canonical experiences of isolation and solitude, anomie, private revolt, Van Gogh-type madness, which dominated the period of high modernism (14)

It is the dissolution of self that most characterizes postmodernity. Jameson concludes this movement into postmodernity as “not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling” (15). Essentially, representation of subjectivity moves from a state of alienation in modernism to fragmentation in postmodernism (15).

Therefore, in postindustrial society, the rise in digital information technology, for Lyotard, requires a new type of subject to be proficient in using it. Lyotard suggests that “the nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation.” (Lyotard 4). Lyotard’s concern centres on the growing influence of technology and its integration with capitalist processes. He believes, as aforementioned, that this process creates a growing “mercantilization” of knowledge where knowledge is bought and sold for its use value rather than any intrinsic value in knowing it. This is in stark contrast to the Enlightenment’s perspective on knowledge as a pure, emancipatory force that can help the subject transcend its state of ignorance. Rather, for Lyotard, knowledge cannot escape its context within the social field. The most important notion raised by Lyotard here is that knowledge and its relationship to concepts such as reason and rationality are inevitably transformed by technology.

Lyotard argues that the Enlightenment subject's capacity to legitimate itself is encountering difficulties due to the changing nature of knowledge, which is exacerbated by an increasingly technologically dominated postmodernity. Fredric Jameson argues that the fragmentation of the subject is a result of the conditions of late-stage capitalism. In both of these perspectives, the through line is the same in the sense that the subject has increasing difficulty in placing itself within reality, with the terms it has received from the preceding “episteme”. I characterized this episteme as the broad period of the Enlightenment and early modernity. This is illustrated through Steven Best’s views on the importance of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which he believes has a role in illustrating the “transition to a new multinational postmodern terrain of late-capitalism that takes shape after the Second World War” (Best 62). For Lyotard, the changing nature of knowledge is a result of technological progression. This technological progression is housed within a larger globalizing moment of multinational capitalism. This multinational capitalism is part of a broader context of a post-industrial environment of postmodernity.

Chapter 5: Subject Vs System in Thomas Pynchon: The Mechanism of Paranoia

5.1 *Gravity's Rainbow*, Capitalist Conspiracy, and the Tech Industry

In this chapter, I would like to consider the broader characteristics of Internet culture itself and how much of the contemporary discourse on the Internet revolves around paranoid conspiratorial discourses. In short, what is the function of paranoid subjectivity in a high tech post-industrial society?

It is possible that conspiratorial thinking is, in fact, a prerequisite for socio-political engagement through the public sphere function of the Internet, as an attempt by the subject to secure identity. I am positing that the Internet is responsible for this transformation in discourse. I will put forward the idea that paranoid subjectivity, which I am posing as prominent in postmodernity by way of advanced capitalism, is now profoundly shaped by the role the Internet plays in contemporary socio-political discourse. The result of this relationship between paranoia, the Internet, and advanced capitalism produces a particular dominant mode of political and social discourse, which is fundamentally conspiratorial. This discourse is similar to the approach Pynchon's characters utilize in their interaction with their respective social systems.

My argument is that cyberspace is pivotal in the creation of a new public sphere, which, due to the functioning of social media as a "content economy", creates a highly performative cultural space. This performative cultural sphere, creates a space where "truth", in so far as it is knowledge that is sanctioned, is constantly deferred. This deferral is exacerbated by the characteristics of advanced capitalist society and its difficulties in legitimating knowledge by way of traditional institutions, the suspicion of the authoritative power of academic knowledge, the mistrust of the traditional media system, and the overload of information within the decentralized structure of the web.

The consequence of this deferral, which is itself a core feature of conspiratorial logic, is a necessary mode of socialization for the subject in advanced capitalism to the degree that this conspiratorial approach to cultural spectacle is the engine that drives the content economy of cyberspace. In short, the production of new content is driven by deferral.

Pynchon stages his characters in a similar position with regard to their relationship to capitalism, technology, and surveillance. What underlies the numerous conspiratorial webs that structure the novel is the "master-conspiracy" that World War II itself is a spectacle engineered by market forces which have sustained the war as a spectacle and distraction from

reality. This secret reality is only fully understood by the “plotters” of conspiracy in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. I aim to situate Pynchon’s representation of paranoia as a consequence of bureaucracy and state power, within the context of contemporary capitalism. The process, which best represents the marriage between state control and capitalism is surveillance.

This is perhaps best seen, in its most dystopian form, through private corporations that own much of the public space of the contemporary Internet. In a wonderfully synergistic fashion, much of the discourse on social media is often discourse about how social media harvests data. There are common jokes about how your advertisements can suspiciously be related to a recent WhatsApp conversation or frequent “meme” images on Instagram based around the “FBI Guy”, where the format is a screenshotted WhatsApp conversation where the sender says something like “I love you” to a girl he likes, yet the message is shown to be undelivered. The inevitable caption is always something like: “My FBI agent got my back,” inferring that the FBI agent who was assigned to monitor this individual’s conversations has taken a liking to them, and saved them from a faux pas (Know Your Meme 2025). The notion that surveillance is part and parcel of the Internet, as one of the trade-offs of social media, is imminently present in Internet culture itself. This particular milieu of Internet culture peaked during COVID-19³², where fears of government control through bureaucracy were at their highest.

Viewed in this anxious light, the process of surveillance in the USA can be construed to some degree as outsourced by its central government. In a pessimistic view, social media itself can be seen as a voluntary surveillance program. With the ability to covertly collude with social media companies or outright contract them in some roundabout way, the government can essentially render its surveillance activities as a profitable enterprise that stimulates the consumer market. Many of these narratives around Internet surveillance revolve around the anxiety of a link between the government and the private sector. Even to the most cynical, who wave off these narratives as paranoid, there has been indisputable evidence through recent occurrences in the last decade that reveals that these fears may not be entirely misguided. Known scandals include the Cambridge Analytica affair into illegal manipulation of data during the 2016 US elections, Mark Zuckerberg’s purported role in COVID-19 disinformation, and most recently, the purchase of Twitter by Elon Musk, who later went on to finance and briefly serve under President Donald Trump. One of the first

³² Readers of *Gravity’s Rainbow* might appreciate conceiving of COVID-19 as an analogy for the function of World War II function in the novel. One might trade the V2 for vaccines, or The White Visitation for social media platforms. An event that is conspired to be essentially anything except its official narrative.

things which Musk did when rebranding X was to loosen controls on fact checking and to permit more disinformation to be spread.

Furthermore, on a normative level, surveillance as a cultural activity has become ingrained in public consciousness. Social media, but really the digital media space as a whole, makes individuals highly aware of being seen in particular ways. Furthermore, if movements like cancel-culture, the general woke milieu of the last 10 years, or the generally performative nature of social media reveal anything, it is that individuals are also monitoring other people. Behaviour, usually, becomes raised to the level of spectacle through which various cultural positions are projected. In this way, on some level, social media is a novelty machine that is always looking to bring something into awareness in order to either endorse and celebrate it or reject and shun it. There is a strong normative dimension to social media. The difference, to embodied living, is perhaps that these activities are not regulated by the same sort of practices, rhythms, and ethics that are at play in the “material world”. One simply does not have the space to “perform” one’s identity to the degree one can on social media, because one cannot construct an abstract confluence of all their desired characteristics: media and imagery, text, and screenshotted responses to various cultural issues, and objectify it the way they can with social media. Rather, the object in contention in the physical world is their real, embodied existence, which cannot be clinically curated to the degree an online avatar could be.

This monitoring aspect of social media operates on two levels. It operates on a real level, in the sense that there is a possibility that hard data capture by private entities, and possibly the government, can be achieved. However, it is also ideological in the sense that the structure of social media socializes individuals to internalize surveillance as a by-product of their collective intersubjective product, that product being the content of social media itself, its sum total. On the ideological level, its function is also both overt and normative. It is overt in the sense of voicing opinions, commenting, “cancelling”, and “exposing”. This is just the general ability to like or dislike something and be able to voice that opinion virtually.

Monitoring is also normative as a structural phenomenon due to the way likes, shares, and comments train the algorithm and the way this algorithm organizes what receives attention and what doesn’t. There can be a milieu, or to reference Foucault, an “episteme” that governs the sum total of “hot-content” at a particular time. In simple terms, it’s a trend. Though, beyond its simplicity as a trend, I think this reveals a culture that is obsessed with conducting self-surveillance and surveillance based around monitoring appearance, not simply physical appearance, but the way in which one’s profile is perceived, what it says

about a person, but more importantly to what degree they endorse or upset the algorithm, what content are they *providing* for the algorithm. It is *precisely* an operation of ideology. I would not argue that individuals innately use social media for these purposes, however, the structure of the social media landscape socializes individuals to act in such ways inadvertently.

In a contemporary context, the infringement on libertarian values by “profit incentive” is perceived by the public, in its most pervasive form, in the marriage between surveillance, through its traditional points of origin in the state, administrative, policing, and national security spaces, and private sector corporations (Altheide 228). The new site of this surveillance is primarily the Internet. In recent years, the trend in the private sector, particularly the Big-Tech industry of Silicon Valley, has been the consistent collection and subsequent trade of user data (Birchall 28-29). This data is drawn primarily by monitoring user activity and inputting said data into various algorithms, which then mobilize the data to develop more user-specific ways to maintain activity on the various platforms these companies own. This form of “surveillance capitalism” at once serves the market functions of the media economy but also doubles as a conventional surveillance tool. It also stokes considerable anxieties around data tracking and manipulation. As David Altheide explains

It is clear, then, that the Internet mediates interaction in several ways. On the one hand, certain kinds of monitoring are not new to Internet users; most simply take it for granted that various businesses, organizations, and universities collect information from them and sell pieces of their “social identity” for marketing and cash. On the other hand, the mediation of Internet interaction goes well beyond “buyer beware”: it extends to the communicative foundations of trust that may be used to trick and deceive actors. (236)

The continuing trend of oligopoly formation through conglomeration of various tech companies consistently stokes public anxiety around an Orwellian totalitarianism where citizens are monitored and subsequently controlled, through the proclivities social media has for misinformation, ideology, and propaganda production (Fraser 99-100). Indeed, much like Pynchon’s inference that the new world order, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, is constructed by the numerous corporate conglomerates that profited from the war, there is a growing fear that expresses itself in contemporary consciousness through news media, satire, meme-circulation, and discourses about data capture, that tech oligarchs seek to construct a new world order premised on virtual capital, on algorithmic organization, and digital consumerism. These multi-national corporations are the colonizers and rentier capitalists of the virtual space which is increasingly becoming the dominant public sphere. The connection

that these narratives about the tech industry have to the plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* are the parallels between these new tech oligopolies and the early industrial giants of the late 19th century and early 20th century in sectors such as railway, coal, oil, and even pharmacy, that are prominent in Pynchon's choice of setting.

5.2 Subject vs System in *Gravity's Rainbow*

The similarities between this general picture and the picture Pynchon paints of the alliance between the Weimar Republic industrial giants and the Nazi party in the backdrop of *Gravity's Rainbow* are rather stark³³. Pynchon refers to the historical fact of the Weimar Industrial giants bankrolling of the Nazi Party's rise. However, it is also making a deeper connection between the relationship between capitalism and fascism.

In Pynchon's fictional narrative, there is the inference that the capitalist alliance between the Nazi state and the Weimar industrialists extends even further, across the lines of conflict to the Allies' own mega-corporations, such as British Shell. The latter fictional addition to the historical narrative forms the central conspiratorial chain that Slothrop traces. Slothrop opines that British Shell and a subsidiary of IG-Farben are in cahoots to facilitate the production and circulation of the polymer Imipolex-G. Further, the headquarters of the British Shell Dutch division is precisely the location of the radio transmitter that guides the V2 rockets. The crux of Pynchon's conspiratorial construction here is, in some roundabout way, that British Shell is funding the V2 rocket strikes as part of an elaborate business deal with German Industry. In one of Slothrop's many lapses into "detective mode", he reads the following on a document he has stealthily extracted from his time at the Casino:

Imipolex-G shows up on a mysterious "insulation device"[that Slothrop finds in a stock take document] on a rocket being fired with the help of a transmitter on the roof of the headquarters of Dutch Shell, who is co-licensee for marketing the Imipolex – a rocket whose propulsion system bears an uncanny resemblance to one developed by British Shell at around the same time . . . and oh, oh boy, it just occurs to Slothrop now where all the rocket intelligence is being gathered – into the office of who but Mr. Duncan Sandys, Churchill's own son-in-law, who works out of the Ministry of Supply located where but at Shell Mex House, for Christ's sake (254)

This takes place around 200 pages into the novel. To understand the matrix into which this conspiracy falls, first, Tyrone Slothrop's trajectory must be understood. The first part of

³³ Pynchon also weaves in a plot line that resembles an Illuminati-like organization, through the character of Lyle Bland, and his trans-Atlantic business ventures. He illustrates a "global capitalist elite", interwoven amongst secret societies (in the style of the Bilderberg group, the Rothschild's, the Illuminati and the Free Masons).

the novel takes place while Slothrop is still in London. Slothrop's erection reflex is introduced to the reader through his colleague Teddy Bloat, photographing a map next to Slothrop's desk, upon which he places a gold star on the location of his sexual exploits. They notice that the map exactly correlates to the V2 strike points:

It's the map that spooks them all, the map Slothrop's been keeping on his girls. The stars fall in a Poisson distribution, just like the strikes on Roger Mexico's map of the Robot Blitz. But, well, it's a bit more than a distribution. The two patterns also happen to be identical. They match up square for square. The slides that Teddy Bloat's been taking of Slothrop's map have been projected onto Roger's, and the two images, girl-stars and rocket-strike circles, demonstrated to coincide. Helpfully, Slothrop has dated most of his stars. A star always comes before its corresponding rocket strike. (Pynchon 87)

This information is exchanged via Pirate Prentice to Roger Mexico, a statistician in the employ of the White Visitation and reluctant sidekick to Pavlovian scientist Dr Pointsman. What the reader learns through a series of exchanges between Dr Pointsman and his superior, Kevin Spectro, is that an influential Pavlovian scientist, Dr Lazlo Jampf, in fact experimented on the infant Slothrop. The experiment of Dr Jampf is outlined briefly:

Unconditioned Stimulus = stroking penis with antiseptic cotton swap

Unconditioned response = hardon

Conditioned Stimulus = x.

Conditioned response = hardon whenever x is present, stroking no longer necessary, all you need is that x. (86)

This blunt exploitation of libido, a cold and rational scientific formulation of an act of intimacy, which is then corralled into the war effort, juxtaposes some of the extremes of the novel. It is implied that the stimulus is the polymer Imipolex-G, which follows an intricate web across the lines of conflict into the hands of the German V2 Rocket Technician Colonel Blicero (or Weissman). The infant Slothrop is experimented on, in a Pavlovian fashion, and is conditioned to respond with a particular reaction to a stimulus. I would like to frame this process as representing, in an extreme articulation, a form of socialization. The White Visitation and its team of scientists are well aware of Slothrop's history of experimentation: "many there have always known him as the famous infant Tyrone" (Pynchon 86). Dr Rozavolgyi, in explaining to the less convinced members of the institute the plans for Slothrop, explicates the same picture I am trying to develop regarding the contemporary subject:

We are now proposing to give Slothrop a completely different sort of test. We are now designing for him a so-called, projective test. The most familiar example of the type is the Rorschach ink blot. The basic theory is that when given an unstructured stimulus, some shape-less blob of experience, the subject will seek to impose structure on it. How he goes about structuring this blob will reflect his needs, his hopes— will provide us with clues to his dreams, fantasies, the deepest regions of his mind . . . The subject can falsify, consciously, or repress, unconsciously. But with the projective technique, nothing he can do, conscious or otherwise, can prevent us from finding what we wish to know. We are in control. He cannot help himself. (83)

Pynchon's formulations of conspiratorial paranoia towards malicious experimentation of the everyman by shadowy figures in state-financed institutions are centred around anxieties of his time, particularly those regarding the exploits of the CIA in programs such as MK-Ultra (Birchall 15-16). However, this framework can be applied to modern anxieties of the Internet user as they confront a world of data-collection, cyber-surveillance and the "projective test" that social-media and its content economy operate as, if we approach the extended social media landscape and all its concomitant political and ideological functions as a sort of laboratory of social experimentation, much the same way Pynchon situates Slothrop within the war as large scale sandbox of technological and social experimentation.

The similarities to the modern experience of the digitally mediated public sphere in postmodernity are striking. This is particularly so if we consider the mechanism by which social media platforms drive engagement by collecting user data to create a personalized browsing experience for each user. The user's responses to stimuli are tracked and fed back out to the user to drive a pattern of engagement. Ultimately, this mechanism creates anxieties around issues of control and manipulation in digital society. Social media is the ultimate Skinnerian experiment where attention is carefully controlled by stimulus-response in a very subtle and precise manner. With the advent of AI, sometimes the workings of the algorithm is mysterious to humans, and often perceived to be configured to work for the greatest benefit to the corporation which created it.

Slothrop, by prior experimentation, is socialized to exhibit certain conditioned responses to certain stimuli. I use socialization in the sense that the way in which his own body relates to the external environment has been mediated by the institutional meddling of Dr Jampf and further Pointsman and Spectro. As Dr Rozavolgyi elaborates, the Pavlovian framework applied by Dr Jampf takes on a far more pervasive and reality-altering form for Slothrop once he is released into wartime Europe, and becomes increasingly convinced –

whether his perceptions are founded or not – that he is interfacing with a “laboratory” that spans the entirety of post-VE day Europe.

This prior experimentation and data are then used by the White Visitation – in which Spectro and Pointsman are direct successors to Jampf – in combination with a continued surveillance of Slothrop, with hopes of harnessing a degree of predictive power out of the Pavlovian “mechanism” Slothrop has become. The surveillance on Slothrop is conducted through the web of interconnected institutions (A.C.H.T.U.N.G, P.I.S.C.E.S), which ultimately fall under the scope of the White Visitation. In this sense, the surveillance is conducted on Slothrop by his colleagues, from within the very institution where he is employed. He is monitored by the very structure of the network of which he forms a part.

This echoes the ideas of David Altheide, that surveillance is an integral component of the structure of the Internet. In fact, the genesis of the Internet itself was in the physically connected LAN (Local Area Network) networks of corporate entities in the United States, which was the original ‘Ethernet’. The term *inter-net* essentially describes a network of (local) networks that later become remotely connected. Crucially, its genesis is, much like the institutional structures in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in intra-corporation communication and surveillance networks (Schiller 11). The Internet was incubated as an intra-corporation communication apparatus. It is already, from its outset, a function of bureaucracy.

Slothrop is socialized into a particular controlled system and is trained (or engineered) to be sensitive to particular stimuli. This sensitivity is then weaponized for its potential predictive power. This is similar to the mechanisms of the modern social media economy. Simply put, institutions of control, such as the state, are virtual. What is emerging, then, is a dialectic between subject and system. Rather than viewing individuals as engaging with a particular momentary regime of control, which certainly is an important mode of analysis, we can view individuals, even those in power, as interfacing with a broader social system. When analysing social systems from this vantage point, even those in power who might be seen as driving the system, can be viewed as particular symptoms of the system. Viewing society in this way resembles very much the thought of Althusser, and how he argues that the infrastructure of society (or the material processes of production), is kept in place by the superstructure (the realm of ideology). While Althusser argues that in the last instance, it is the infrastructure that organizes society, he does advocate for a reciprocal action between the two, so that the superstructure in turn influences the base. Cyberspace can be viewed in this way, as a profoundly superstructural force (Althusser 38-39).

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa is positioned as a sort of reluctant counter-cultural figure conspiring herself into the centre of a plot woven tightly into the fabric of American society. Furthermore, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, we have the subversive and continually disintegrating subject Slothrop, as well as his comrades in the revolutionary "Counterforce" made up of those peculiar personalities – Roger Mexico, Pirate Prentice, and Katje Borgesius – who have been used and abused by the allied war effort and its bureaucratic machine. All of these individuals display a sort of pathological conspiring and paranoia against the unnamed and unseen forces of the status quo. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, this is framed within a wider religious commentary on the tension between Pynchon's concepts of "elect" and "preterite" which he attributes to Calvinist and Puritan Christianity. The elect are those chosen by God for predestination, while the preterite are passed over. The parallels to the Marxist critique of capitalism are clear if we look at the elect/bourgeoisie and preterite/proletariat as somewhat analogous. The importance of this dialectic is its depiction of plotters, who hold power; and victims, who lack power. Pynchon's question is what recourse to change do we have? The outlook in *Gravity's Rainbow* is at times rather grim and always cynical.

Given this question, I want to contextualize Pynchon's work as a depiction of an individual's resistance to capitalism, but really any system within which they are contained and which presents the subject with challenges that impede their freedom. By freedom, I mean the degree to which the subject's individual identity is impeded by the system's identity. A perfectly socialized subject is a subject who cannot differentiate between individual identity and system identity³⁴. Any attempt at generating a stable sense of individual identity rests on a healthy resistance to the forces of socialization that act upon the subject. This is especially pertinent with the continued questioning of normative codes that structure various societies, for example. This is precisely what the dialectic between subject and system is: a tension between submission and resistance, between socialization and individual identity.

5.3 Subject Vs System in *The Crying of Lot 49*

This dialectic between subject and system is, in effect, my reading of Pynchon's views on subjectivity. Pynchon's characters are not pathologically paranoid, even though they do appear as the stereotypical paranoid individual navigating the nebulous and intellectualized sphere of bourgeois society. Their paranoia is a response, a defence mechanism. It is also

³⁴ One might recall the opening sequence of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where Mustapha Mond explains the way the genetically engineered social classes function.

unlike pathological paranoia, in that it isn't an anxious reflex that fires on a particular chain of thought which leads inevitably back to the notion that the subject is facing some kind of threat, be it external or internal, in the mode of a hypochondriac. Paranoia in Pynchon is organized and structural. It is, for Pynchon, what the subject has at its disposal by virtue of their relationship to the system.

Therefore, I want to home in on what *generates* this paranoia within this dialectic. I previously located this paranoia in the presence of bureaucratic networks. However, this is an explanation that is "system-side", regarding the notion of bureaucracy causing paranoia. I now want to consider paranoia from the perspective of the subject. In other words, in the space between where paranoia is produced³⁵, where it comes into existence as a particular phenomenon, and the subject, there is something that happens that pushes the subject to adopt paranoia as a particular strategy with a particular end.

Thus, while I have been rigorously investigating paranoia as something that affects the subject from the outside, I want to consider paranoia in this chapter as something the subject *adopts* and utilizes. To briefly clarify again, my definition of paranoia, what I mean here is a paranoid mode of logic: a logic that is under attack by uncertainty to a degree that it mobilizes the subject to intensify their attempts at rationalization. It is a discourse that has a fundamental lack of legitimation of any utterance because it emerges as an alternative and anti-hegemonic discourse in reaction to the perceived contradictions of legitimate discourses. Pynchon's characters, such as Oedipa Maas, Mike Fallopian, or Tyrone Slothrop, are socialized through the structure, ideology, and imperatives of their social system into paranoid thinking.

The key term here is "anti-hegemonic". Paranoia appears to the subject as a revolutionary activity. Its practice is premised on a kind of resistance. This is the primary difference between the "literary" paranoia I've been exploring and literal, pathological paranoia. It is a certain mode of discourse with certain ends; it is an active process, rather than a passive process that the subject is "afflicted" with. Where this resistance is directed is ultimately the system the subject feels themselves enmeshed in. An even more radical interpretation of paranoia in this regard is that, where in previous epochs, such as the Enlightenment and early modernity, intellectual rigour is seen as an emancipatory weapon with which the subject can free themselves, perhaps in postmodernity, it is the inverse. In postmodernity, it seems, if we take the contemporary movements in American politics as any

³⁵ The external stimulus that informs a paranoid response.

indicator, that paranoid discourse is perceived as a revolutionary discourse which works to free the subject from their entrenchment in what they perceive as an increasingly entropic system.

Interestingly, construing paranoia this way aligns it with some of Pynchon's Luddite tendencies. Even more so, with the prevalence of Big Tech and the dominance of social media, paranoid and Luddite perspectives neatly present themselves as counter-cultural activities to the hegemony of technology, where technology as an industry, as a philosophy, and as a mode of social organization, succeeds the bourgeois intellectualism of preceding eras. This is perhaps also why paranoid conspiracy in general often emerges, in our contemporary era, from the American right – more specifically, the Alt-Right – and its strong libertarian and anti-intellectualist impulses. This tension is housed within this dialectic of subject and system, which sees the subject as enveloped by a system that maintains a degree of hegemony over the subject. The very “image” of the system that the paranoid receives is precisely a false image disguising the real relations of power that the paranoid must uncover.

Pynchon presents this dialectic of subject and system in both novels in the form of a mystery. The mystery ultimately unfolds into a larger, more intricate web of conspiratorial connections. The character is met with a puzzle that, over the course of the novel, starts to inspire a sense of paranoia to the degree it represents an other. Due to the constant deferral of any legitimate answer to the mystery, it grows in scope until this other – the mystery – comes to stand in *for* the system. It has outflanked and surrounded the subject. Thus, the character as a detective attempts to solve the case, which has been extrapolated to the level of the system. The subject's attempts at resistance are necessarily transposed into conspiratorial logic – this is precisely how a conspiracy theory functions. The character is presented with a case, much like the traditional detective form. Over the course of the investigation, they find out that the case goes deeper than they could have ever imagined, and consequently, the mystery itself rises to the very structure of society, or, in my argument, becomes the structure of advanced capitalism³⁶. Thus, attempts to solve the case are an act of resistance in the form of a competition between the detective and the “plotters” who are embodied as the pervasive societal structure itself – capital – as an Other.

The trajectory of Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* is interesting because it shows a slow capitulation into the logic of paranoia and conspiracy theory. At first, Oedipa sees herself as separate from the eccentrics she encounters in the underground. She sees them as

³⁶ Concurring with the arguments of Frederic Jameson alluded to previously on p. 46.

kooky paranoids who amuse themselves with intricate conspiracies or counter-cultural practices. This appears primarily as a consequence of Oedipa as the point of view, with which the reader can juxtapose the “normal” Oedipa with the strange and eccentric personalities that populate the novella. Though this is also a consequence of Oedipa’s own view of herself. She believes, at least in the first part of the novel, that she is acting from a position of rationality. The irony, I believe, is that the eccentric and often paranoid-conspiratorial characteristics of those she encounters are also informed by what these individuals believe to be rational calculations and conclusions.

Oedipa’s encounters with these denizens of the underground are numerous: the meeting with Metzger, the appearance of “The Paranoids”, and the encounter with Mani Di Presso. However, the most illustrative instance of this notion is her entry into The Scope: a local bar in San Narciso. The Scope is described as “being a haunt for electronics assembly people from Yoyodyne” who are described as having “je ne sais quoi [I don’t know what]” about them: “they all wore glasses and stared at you, silent” (Pynchon 31). The scene contains elements of parody in that it is, in some sense, a transposition of the saloon entrance trope from Western films, where the protagonist’s entry as an outsider is immediately recognized in a suddenly uncanny atmosphere. Metzger and Oedipa’s “otherness” to this environment is portrayed immediately on entry. Perhaps the most useful illustration is the subsequent first encounter with Mike Fallopian, who Oedipa sees “proselytizing for an organization known as the Peter Pinguid Society” (32). It is elaborated that this particular society is a right-wing anti-authoritarian group, not dissimilar to what today could be labelled “Alt-Right” in American discourse. The following interaction illuminates my argument regarding the distance between Oedipa and this “underground”:

Fallopian Twinkled. “They accuse *us* of being paranoids.”

‘They?’ inquired Metzger, twinkling also.

‘Us?’ asked Oedipa. (32)

This interaction illustrates a few components of what I am arguing. Firstly, it evidences this distance that Oedipa perceives between herself and these “eccentrics”. Though secondly, it foreshadows her induction into this paranoid underground, with Fallopian acting as the gateway. If the entry to the bar showcases to Oedipa what exactly goes on here, it is Fallopian who induces Oedipa into the flow of “they” do things. “They”, in this instance, are those dispossessed or destabilized – necessarily, I claim – by the structures of their society. This

occurs primarily through Fallopian's style of discourse, which posits a global conspiracy at the root of most of his rationalization of world history.

Yet, at the end of the novel, Oedipa finds herself in much the same position as those she deemed to be peculiar or lost. She has, as it were, traversed the very same labyrinth and realised that there is no way out. Rather, she sees the impotency of her purported rationality. The most telling illustration of this is when she eventually makes use of the Inamorati Anonymous. The I.A. is a call service through which people request someone to talk to when they are "about to fall in love". The members of this group believe that love is a dangerous and destructive element, inhibiting the function of individuals in society. The anonymous user Oedipa encounters explains to her the logic of the IA, in that they are "isolates" and that the system is "careful to not have any repeats" (85), meaning it is made sure that two people are not connected twice, lest they develop some sort of connection and sabotage the whole point of the program. This transactional social connection appears to Oedipa as odd as it appears to be aimed at endorsing and encouraging a sense of alienation. Yet, it is precisely the position she finds herself in towards the end of the novel, once she has become a part of this underground. At her lowest point, she makes a call to the service:

'[S]o you are, she said, 'the only one I have. I don't know your name, I don't want to. But I have to know whether they arranged it with you. To run into me by accident, and tell me your story about the post-horn. Because it may be a practical joke for you, but it stopped being one for me a few hours ago. I got drunk and went on driving on these freeways. Next time I may be more deliberate. For the love of God, human life, whatever you respect. Help me. (136)

This occurs after Oedipa has lost all her traditional avenues of consensus and of momentary catharsis from uncertainty. Slowly, she observes those in her life: her husband Mucho Maas, a quaint pillar of support, her therapist Dr Hilarius, and her love interest Metzger. They have all, either retreated from her, or fallen into some sort of perceivable psychological decline. She has undergone the same process and fails to realize that this disintegration into absurdity is a process at work on everyone she has encountered. In this process she has been socialized, or at least undergone the very same socialization procedures and exhibited the very same tendencies as the others in this alternative underground reality of America. In some way, the message of the novel is that they have socialized themselves into the underground to *stay* underground. They stay underground because their particular, and isolated, languages of "truth" keep them alienated from the "mainstream lie"; as well as *each other's* isolated conspiratorial rationalizations. What ends up taking place is a battleground of ideas where

conspiracies compete for reproduction. Given these depictions and the ambiguity that the martyr-through-paranoia process creates, one might wonder whether paranoia is subversive or *symbiotic* to the status quo. From the perspective of a system, such as capitalism, either paranoia is a negative symptom in the sense of it being deviant and thus a revolutionary potential, or it is reactionary and a core component of the process of socialization through alienation. It seems, ultimately, that paranoia and conspiracy seem to further entrench the subject in the system they are trying to subvert. It is, due to its relationship to consumerism and capitalism, reactionary rather than revolutionary. This is similar to the contemporary user of social media. The more one is online, the more one is socialized into using conspiratorial logic. The explosion of conspiratorial logic in contemporary culture dwarfs the worlds of Pynchon because the media infrastructures that exist today are gargantuan in comparison to the primarily non-digital communication networks in Pynchon's novels. The relationship Pynchon constructs between these elements, however, seems to be prognostic of our own time.

Chapter 6: Cyber-culture

6.1 Chronology: Summary of Preceding Arguments

The core thread developed throughout this thesis has been how paranoid subjectivity is produced and represented in two works by Thomas Pynchon. To introduce this, I honed in on the presence of bureaucracy as a generator of paranoid subjectivity. Extending this, I related this bureaucratic and institutional environment to a broader occurrence in post-industrial society, namely, the prominence of globalized capitalism. In the previous chapter, I framed this into a dialectical structure of subject vs system, which operates in Pynchon's novels.

In this chapter, I want to substitute both the subject and system of Pynchon's novel. The "system" in question in the analysis of Pynchon is ultimately his depiction of advanced capitalist societies, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. Embedded in this analysis is also a continuous reference to the role of technology and Pynchon's anxious relationship to it, especially in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. A substantial amount of time has passed since Thomas Pynchon wrote these novels, and if the form of globalized capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s can be referred to as "advanced" or "late-stage", then it is crucial to characterize the contemporary system of globalized capitalism, the "latest" stage of late-stage capitalism³⁷.

In preceding chapters, I constructed a definition and a theory of subjectivity. In doing so, I made use of the Enlightenment as a particular epoch, episteme, or metanarrative that informs a more traditional, Western form of subjectivity. In response, I came to a characterization of a "postmodern subject". In this chapter, I will more openly develop what, I hope, has been slowly building in the background: a description of postmodernity as an epoch. Terms like advanced capitalism, post-industrial society, postmodernity, cyberspace, and transnational networks of capital and information have frequently occurred throughout. What I want to construct now is a cohesive picture of postmodernity, of the "contemporary" epoch with which to substitute the "system" in my argument, and consequently come to a better estimation of the subject that is in a dialectical relationship to it. The quilting point, and the core proposition of this thesis, is that cyberspace, digital culture, or simply just the "Internet", is the primary structural force in this current era, or again, to return to the frequently cited term of Foucault, this episteme. If I posit that in Pynchon's novels, paranoid

³⁷ Perhaps, as many argue, the contestation of American global hegemony calls the legitimacy of this mode of organization into question as an explicitly imperial structure, and heralds the return of a "multipolar" world.

subjectivity emerges out of a dialectic of subject and system, in contemporary postmodernity, I am arguing that cyberspace, being the overdetermined characteristic of the contemporary system of globalized capitalism, is one of the primary forces in the construction of paranoid subjectivity.

Having developed a view of the postmodern subject, I want to now develop an understanding of how paranoia potentially comes to dominate experiences. My focus is on contextualizing the postmodern subject within a late-capitalist society that is premised on vast globalized networks of various flows: air traffic, shipping lanes, multinational corporations, multilateral military alliances, large swathes of migration and undocumented migrants, asymmetrical and global warfare against insurgent terror groups, and, most crucially, information. Much of what allows this global organization to function is the vast information flows facilitated by the Internet. As Terranova put it, this is a “Network Society” (40). Similarly, Jameson sees much of postmodern experience as arising from “the global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught” (Jameson 39). I want to now explore that notion with regard to the concept of the “network” as a broad symbol of postmodern society, as well as the Internet, particularly social media, as a specific example.

Firstly, I will refer to Narita and Morelock and their book *The Society of the Selfie*. The aim is to first foreground the modern experience of paranoia in techno-capitalist society. Further, I will develop an argument that portrays the way that paranoia operates in Pynchon’s novels, specifically related to attempts at communication in cyberspace. With help from Emily Apter, who also provides a psychoanalytical explanation of modern paranoia through Lacan, I will contrast two distinct approaches to conceptualizing globalized culture. Finally, I want to synthesize these arguments through Patrick Whitemarsh’s analysis of *Gravity’s Rainbow* and the degree to which communication might take on a supernatural character. The key theme I hope to develop here is twofold. The first is a sense of an internal schism within the subject due to the blurring of real and virtual spaces. The second is the concept of the virtual, as well as the network itself, as “other”, and how this disembodied space as a whole affects the subject.

6.2 Late-Stage-Capitalism, Networks and Postmodernity

Late-stage capitalism is, for Jameson, the generator of the “latest mutation in space”. He characterizes this environment as a “postmodern hyperspace” which has “succeeded in

transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself” (Jameson 39). What he means is that this mutation is caused by globalization and the increasing complexity of its structure, which creates an inability for the subject to map what is for Jameson a “global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught” (39). Finally, regarding the actual definition of late-stage capitalism, Steven Best provides an explanation of Jameson’s thought:

Jameson identifies three fundamental stages of development in capitalist society: market capitalism, monopoly capitalism, and multinational capitalism. Each stage has a corresponding form of cultural production, where realism predominates in market capitalism, modernism in monopoly capitalism, and postmodernism in multinational capitalism. As the present and most advanced stage of capitalist development, multinational capitalism occurs when national barriers of trade and production erode and an international capitalist mode of production is constituted where national economies co-exist in a mutually interlocking system rather than as discrete units. (Best 62)

This conceptualization of late-stage capitalism also bears similarities to George Lioudakis’ perspective about the development of a fairly homogenous and yet undeniably hierarchical world system. What he posits as the third stage in the development of capitalism, which correlates with Jameson’s concept of “late-stage”, is the prevalence of a *transnational* organization of capital, in what tends toward a unipolar organization of global power (Lioudakis 349). It is in this supposedly homogenous – what I believe Lioudakis is describing as incipiently imperialist – space that the Internet emerges and provides particular potentialities for capitalism to adapt. This is in an environment where there is a world culture increasingly based on technological information networks. Fredric Jameson seems hesitant to overestimate the role of technology as a generator of this postmodern condition. He suggests that:

Our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating not so much in its own right but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp. (Jameson 36)

He sees the rise in technology as partially a consequence of the “whole new decentered global network” (36) of late-stage capitalism. Jameson seems to be arguing that technology offers a sort of distraction from the truly complex nature of multinational capitalism. In

focusing the cause of the postmodern condition in the landscape of late-stage capitalism, Jameson wants to avoid the scare tactics of "high-tech paranoia" in which "the circuits and networks of some putative global computer hook-up are narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies" (Jameson 36). But this "global computer hook-up" is one of the fundamental engines of modern capitalism. This "high-tech paranoia" has become a fairly commonplace phenomenon in contemporary society. Indeed, current debates around Artificial Intelligence have foregrounded technology, and paranoia towards its effects, as central to the *Zeitgeist*. Tiziana Terranova elaborates changing perspectives on information technology. She notes that

If the early debate on information networks was dominated by the image of a Gibsonian [in reference to his novel *The Neuromancer*] cyberspace in which users would lose consciousness of the real world and lose themselves in a universe of abstract forms and disembodied perspectives, the contemporary debate has shifted onto the terrain of globalization. Where the most common image of cyberspace used to be that of a virtual-reality environment characterized by direct interface and full immersion (data gloves, goggles, embedded microchips, and electrodes), now the image is that of a common space of information flows in which the political and cultural stakes of globalization are played out. (Terranova 42).

I concur with this notion, since when observing the function of cyberspace in contemporary culture, it is not that subjects only escape into the virtual, but rather that the virtual bleeds into the real. Better put, the existence of the virtual begins to shape the relationship individuals have to the "real". It is in this sense, perhaps, ideology at its most pure and most mechanical expression. This also feeds into the argument I am developing, which seeks to link Pynchon's representations of bureaucracy, social control, and surveillance to the structure of the Internet and the global information network.

Therefore, viewing them in retrospect, the concern that postmodernists like Lyotard have with the decline of the Enlightenment subject is based on the fact that they foresee a growing disjuncture between the capacities of Enlightenment rationality and the rapid development of a technologically fuelled postmodernity that works synergistically with a global network of capitalism.

6.3 The Fractured Subject and Cyberspace

The genesis of the Internet, writes Roy Rosenzweig

needs to be rooted in the 1960s – in both the “closed world” of the Cold War and the open and decentralized world of the antiwar movement and the counterculture. Understanding these dual origins enables us to better understand current controversies over whether the Internet will be “open” or “closed” – over whether the Net will foster democratic dialogue or centralized hierarchy, community or capitalism, or some mixture of both. (1531)

As Rosenzweig alludes to, the birth of the Internet is attributed to the advent of ARPANET, which was an American government sponsored program to develop a technology which could resist the communications breakdown that a Cold War catastrophe might bring. It was for many years incubated amongst elite professionals across American universities (Rosenzweig 154). In the 1980s the TCP/IP protocol was developed, forming the primary architecture of the Internet. In tandem, local area networks were made use of for intra-company communication and bureaucratic function throughout the 80s (Schiller 11)³⁸. In 1989, hyperlink technology was created, which is essential to the act of “surfing” the web. In 1991, this technology was liberalized, so to speak, and released from the circles of elite government, intellectuals, and business communication, out into the public domain. This first iteration of the web evolves throughout the late 90s and early 2000s. Finally, with the advent of social media, YouTube, and early smartphones, the web evolves into what is known as The Web 2.0 around 2005, which constitutes the information technology dominated society being experienced today. Some argue, the web has now evolved into The Web 3.0, with the continued development of algorithmic filtering, and Artificial Intelligence. What began as a government funded program, has transformed the world into a media society.

In *The Society of the Selfie: Social Media and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy*, Narita and Morelock trace the development of modern media society with reference to Guy Debord and his concept of the “society of the spectacle”. This is a concept Debord developed to characterize how media plays a pivotal role in modern society. He argues that modernity, and the degree it is generated by capitalism, relies heavily on the circulation of images to fuel consumerism. The spectacle is “not a collection (ensemble) of images, but a social relation mediated by images”. This social relation forms the interface through which subjects engage with their reality (Narita and Morelock 15). Reality, then, is not only interpreted through images but becomes augmented by them. Narita and Morelock link this phenomenon to what

³⁸ Local Area Networks are not “Internet” networks per se, but physically connected computers. The pre-existing infrastructure of locally connected computers in corporate environments provides an infrastructure, the network of (local) networks, that the Internet would then fuse together, in tandem with the pre-existing University infrastructure that had existed to foster the development of this technology. See J, Galbreath. “The Internet: Past Present, and Future”. *Educational Technology*. Vol 37, No. 6. 1997. Pp 39-40.

they describe as a “capitalist geo-culture” (16). This term is essentially a characterization of a global society that revolves heavily around consumerism through “image-mediated socialization” (16).

This capitalist geo-culture is built on the “spread of automate, technical artifacts” which are both an “effect and a condition of the structures of capital accumulation and valorization” (16). The relationship between technology and capitalism works in a sort of self-perpetuating symbiosis. The productive synergy of man and machine is neither a technical nor a social phenomenon but a “sociotechnical relation” because “technical processes were intertwined with new forms of sociality mediated by non-human mechanisms” (16). This is, in fact, exactly what I have been trying to argue regarding the changing nature of subjectivity. It is a dialectical view of subjectivity as a process between the subject (human) and the object (technology).

It is with the emergence of digital technology that Narita and Morelock see the most influential developments regarding subjectivity. With contemporary Internet usage, they argue the appearance of what they label as two incongruous trends. On the one hand, the decentralized nature of the Internet allows for an explosion of heterogeneity as image production has been “liberalized” (31) in the sense that users themselves can populate this new libertarian space with their own content. Though in contrast, they also mention the corporate infiltration of the Internet by capitalist forces (29). A helpful analogy is to view the adolescent Internet as a wild west, where there is a keen sense of “lawless” honour: digital cowboys pirate and distribute content for the masses, messages boards spring up where discourse is unrestrained by public norms and censorship, and hackers subvert any sense of official control. This can be contrasted with the more contemporary Internet, the Old-West town has been colonized by corporate conglomerates, the saloon is now a shopping mall, there are security cameras on every avenue, and old urban buildings have been gentrified into rustic-themed consumer hubs.

Much of this phenomenon is theorized to be caused by the “neo-liberalization” of society and the entrepreneurial ideology of capitalist systems. For example, Narita and Morelock argue that in relation to social media trends, digital imagery – what we refer to now colloquially as “content” – becomes the product of the Internet economy. They argue that the increased presence of digital imagery and the transactional nature of the Internet allow users to essentially trade in “images of life” (28) in the sense that “digitally mediated social relations” are “prone to forms of economic transaction and self-marketing” (28). In contrast to earlier media revolutions, they note:

If the mass diffusion of television between the 1950s and the 1970s was a turning point in the constitution of the spectacle, the pervasive effects of the digital and its personal uses in computers and smartphones provided the annexation of the entire individual life. (Narita and Morelock 28)

The term they give to this type of subject is a “prosumer” (33), where individuals are both producers and consumers in a marketplace of digital imagery. For example, the contemporary Instagram user cultivates a virtual image of their life, which they then project for “views”, “likes”, “upvotes”, and “shares”. The exchange is the positive (or negative) feedback the user receives. Furthermore, the user also consumes other individuals' projections. Critically, the user also consumes their own projected content through the received reaction of viewers of their profile: the likes they receive, the direct messages they receive in response to posts, the shares their stories receive, etc. The Instagram user, in a process of voyeurism, also consumes a virtual image of themselves in an objectified form to the degree it is objectified as other to them, through the reaction of other users responding to not the actual person, but the “spectre” they have uploaded in virtual space. The effect of this digital spectacle for Narita and Morelock is that we tend toward “creating an image of ourselves and attempt to resemble the image despite the dissonance between the image we have projected and ourselves” (Narita and Morelock 30).

Through the intensification of an economy of imagery on the Internet, users become, *especially* in the social media space, entrepreneurs (32) in the sense that the currency of the Internet is pure media content. Because there is an increased online presence generally, what develops are networks of production that are based on Internet usage and based within the “virtual”. The content industry as a business model rests on keeping individuals online as much as possible. On social media networks, like Instagram, profiles are specifically curated to express certain themes. Often, these profiles are stylized versions of the user’s actual life. Through these trending forms of enterprising social media use, the user’s identity morphs into a “brand”. This shows a growing alienation from the real as subjects are “split off from any reality beyond images” as the distinction between the real subject and the social media “avatar” is blurred (32). Central to this notion is the observation that images come to exist in a realm of their own, and seem to be beyond the grasp of the subject, yet still exert influence on the subject. Even the digital presence of one’s *own* imagery seems to exist apart from their real self.

6.4 Cyber-Politics

Relating the digital spectacle to broader effects that the Internet has on civic society, Ralph Negrine and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos analyse the way the Internet has affected politics. Their primary argument is that the function of politics has been colonized by the media in what they deem a “mediocracy” (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 40). Therefore, the media is no longer simply a channel through which a political party may engage with the populace; rather, the media itself becomes an autonomous force. They argue that the modern media environment, particularly the Internet, discourages political action and social engagement because there is a “diversion of time away from political participation” (41). This diversion of time is due to the increased role of media and “infotainment” in the subject’s existence.

If we consider the postmodern idea, particularly in the arts, of an implosion of styles, we can start to understand this homogenization of entertainment and news information into a composite of the two that exists on the “same plane”. A similar occurrence can be observed with the concept of reality TV and daytime talk shows, where the line between the real and the scripted becomes increasingly blurred. This contributes to a “paralysis by analysis” operating in the media sphere, where the quality and the goals of information become unclear. Can the gravity of serious global news exist alongside a format fundamentally geared towards light entertainment? Or is it rather that the entire form of news itself is becoming a simulated spectacle in presentation and function to the consumer? Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (hereafter N&P) describe it as a “video malaise” (40). This malaise relates to the function of consumerist infotainment in the sense that what was once real and political news media occupies the same function as a movie would: it is engaged with as imagery for purposes of leisure. This does not change the fact that these are real events, but it significantly distances the subject from these events *as* real.

I do not agree with this assertion entirely. Rather than discouraging political engagement, cyberspace instead reduces the complexity of the political sphere and encourages simplification (as a reactionary response to the overwhelming complexity of information networks), sensationalism, and performativity. The Internet, in circulating information, far exceeds traditional forms of media. For N&P, this excess of information leads to a sense of fragmentation. This fragmentation is caused by an inability to process and cope with the amount of information available, and users need to engage in “filtering processes” (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 30). On the one hand, then, yes, N&P very clearly diagnose an inability to engage in “constructive” political engagement, but that does not mean there is a lack of engagement. Quite the contrary.

In the current cyber climate, these filtering processes are facilitated through algorithmic functions that automatically monitor the user's preferences. Much of the paranoia regarding cyberspace is due to an increasing notion that the subject's ability to filter information has been automated, and their agency has been eroded. More recently, this can be observed around debates on the ethics and practicality of Artificial Intelligence. But even when the user is actively filtering information, it is inevitable for them to fall into isolated pockets of information. This is a phenomenon described as "cyber polarization" (30) and is more conventionally understood with the term "echo chamber" or "silo". The filtering processes that the subject carries out tend to "exclude that which is disturbing or challenging" (30), and this creates a push towards narratives that the subject responds to positively, but also, due to the influx of information on the Internet, towards narratives and positions that are *not* nuanced. There is, therefore, a drive towards simplicity and digestibility. This simplicity naturally breeds polarity in political spheres.

Thus, the "old" ideologies of localized and tribal identity (Cook 316) that are thought to be erased in the decentred and heterogeneous and radically libertarian nature of the world-wide-web – *and* in the supposedly homogeneous nature of a unified global liberal culture – actually return in the structure of the Internet, because filtering processes are concealed under the illusion that the subject is freely accessing and interpreting this information. The reason this illusion of control emerges is due to what is described as a "pull" system (Thussu 70). Traditional news media is a push system, whereby information is pushed onto the subject. The Internet is a pull medium, whereby the subject needs to *search* for the information. But as I claimed, the growing automation of information filtering by algorithmic processes erodes the sense of control the subject has in "pulling" the information they seek. Algorithmic filtering actually returns to the Internet to the earlier "push" system of traditional media. The difference, though, is *what* is pushing the information. In older forms of media these centres of control could be linked to media conglomerates, but now they take on a decentred and disembodied appearance as the subject struggles to create a pattern for the information it receives. Rather than a corporation pushing certain narratives, what is observed now is that the network itself – Algorithms, Artificial Intelligence, etc. – produces, or supplements, the narrative, and to this end, the network itself comes to form an emergent identity.

What I hope this contemplation of the nature of network society is illustrating is that the Internet and its functions as global network is at its core a mass bureaucratic network of surveillance. The incentive to submit oneself to the structures of this network, in all its data

sharing, data tracking, and data predicting capacities, is linked to, if not generated by the entrepreneurial, neo-liberal ideology which supports an “image-based” economy.

6.5 The Virtual Other and Globalized Society

There is a substantial sense of anxiety, then, towards the role of information in the lives of the postmodern subject. The excess of information and the inevitable sense of contradiction that arises from it seem to exacerbate this experience. In digital postmodernity, what emerges is a mass information network that the subject is a part of. Sometimes, individuals may feel included within the interconnected communication network, and sometimes they may feel that they are at the mercy of this network. The most important point is the notion that the communication network itself comes to develop a character beyond the subject’s participation in it. This reinforces the point made earlier that subjects do not escape into the virtual, as theorized by Hollywood blockbusters like *The Matrix* – rather, the virtual starts to bleed out into the “real” and reshape real relations. Previously, the virtual was almost entirely constituted by the real. The early Internet in many ways presents a virtual representation of the real³⁹. The lifecycle of the Internet, however, has developed a virtual space that is increasingly in a reciprocal relationship with the real. The contemporary relationship between “virtual” and “real” is almost akin to the infrastructure-superstructure relation of Marx. The virtual in this way becomes almost entirely superstructural, and possibly begins to shape – if one follows the Althusserian definition of ideology – the real which once constituted it.

Conceptualizing the virtual space as something superstructural and ideological, as a sort of externalized normative and ideological structure, bears resemblance to Jacques Lacan’s concept of big-other. Cyberspace can be conceptualized as a kind of big-Other. To understand Lacan’s figuration of the big-Other, it is helpful to recount some of the Freudian concepts that influence it. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the superego is the part of the human psyche that is responsible for holding the subject to ethical and moral standards. In colloquial language, this might be seen as the “conscience” of the human. To use Freudian language, it is the “ideal-ego” which the ego aspires to replicate. An argument could be made that this is a “virtual” ego, imagined. It necessarily exists apart from the conscious ego, and is for Freud

³⁹ Here I make use of the terms virtual and real in a rather shallow common sense manner. The virtual constitutes the domain of cyberspace and what is perceived through the digital screen. The real constitutes the embodied experience of reality unmediated by technology. Of course this definition is rather vague, as one could argue, for example, that a hearing aid is a technologically mediated experience. However, what I am referring to primarily is the broader culture of Internet use through digital devices and the way it takes over the, somewhat, unmediated (by devices connected to the Internet) experience of embodied living.

semi-unconscious: not quite at the level of the inaccessible unconscious, but not quite at the level of conscious awareness. What is important is that it appears as other in the sense that it critiques the ego. Its function is a sort of “surveillance” of the ego.

The superego, by virtue of being a moral and ethical compass, is also culturally constructed because it necessarily manages the development of an acceptable representation of the subject within the family and, further, within society. The big-Other is, in a sense, an extension of this function. It forms part of – in some sense *is* – the symbolic order. Lacan’s Symbolic order, O’Hara claims, is analogous to “the production, distribution and operation of structures of society” (O’Hara 138), which appears to the subject primarily in the symbolic nature of language. The symbolic order is a distinct limit on “reproducible” subjectivity. The symbolic order is a sort of normative code which delimits, or rather provides, possibilities of subjectivity. In a religious sense, the big-Other would be God. The symbolic order would be God, himself, and his law. The psychological function of these abstractions to the subject is a metaphysical zero-point: the way things are or ought to be. Describing the big-Other, in a form that very closely resembles Louis Althusser’s notion of ideology, O’Hara notes:

When the child hears itself being hailed by the Big-Other (represented by a caregiver), his or her “third ear” (the unconscious) also hears the whispers of a secret desire being murmured amid the rest of the utterance. What does Mommy want of me? What do they want, what does It want, what does It want of my body? My soul? The Symbolic Order cuts itself into the psyche of the child with such probing. (O’Hara 138)

The Internet, with its trending waves of narrative such as the “woke” and “far-right” echo chambers on Twitter (Cook 316), could be seen as representing a sort of collective superego. Construed this way, it is prompting the subject to act on certain impulses which the subject comes to believe are necessary for it to identify with in order to be properly inducted into the symbolic order. Or more simply put, for them to be legitimate and recognized participants in the cultural space. This notion of normative power can be conceived of in relation to surveillance, in relation to the idea that the subject is, possibly, being observed and their digital footprint tracked⁴⁰. This anxiety that the subject has towards the omnipotence of the big-Other in a psychoanalytical context is mirrored by the relationship the subject has to the Internet as a vast and complex cultural network.

⁴⁰ Recall the earlier explanation of Bentham’s Panopticon: due to the possibility of surveillance, by virtue of the *structure* of the Panopticon, participants are better off acting as if they are being watched, and therefore internalize surveillance foundational.

Slavoj Žižek provides further clarification on the role of the big-Other. Interestingly, he also mentions the Calvinist notion of predestination, already mentioned in Pynchon's plot twists involving Preterites and Elect. Žižek claims that

The paradox of Predestination is that the theology which claims that our fate is determined in advance and that our redemption does not depend on our acts served as the legitimization of capitalism, the social system that triggered the most frantic productive activity in human history. The very fact that things are decided in advance – that our attitude to Fate is that of a passive victim – prompts us to engage in incessant frenetic activity. We act all the time in order to sustain the big Other's (in this case: God's) fixity. (Žižek 27)

When viewing Christianity in this way, particularly Protestantism, it becomes clear that the Protestant cosmology, when viewed through the metaphor of God's kingdom, *is* a surveillance state. Žižek further explicates this notion of an omniscient other:

Such a displacement of our most intimate feelings and attitudes on some figure of the Other is at the very core of Lacan's notion of the big Other; it can affect not only feelings but also beliefs and knowledge – the Other can also believe and know for me. In order to designate this displacement of the subject's knowledge onto another, Lacan coined the notion of the *subject supposed to know*. (27)

The subject's estimation of the big-Other as omniscient, as somehow having advance knowledge of the subject, immediately positions the subject as guilty. The subject's innate anxiety towards the scope of the big-Other makes the subject believe that the presence of this anxiety signifies the subject is on some level trying to cheat the big-Other, trying to evade it, and that the big-Other already knowing this will work to draw that transgression out of the subject. From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, the super-ego function of the big-Other becomes clearer. It is, for psychoanalysis, the subject's strategy to constantly realign itself within the terms provided by the symbolic order. It is a kind of self-surveillance that is informed by the normative codes of one's cultural context, of its "symbolic order". To expand this idea, I would like to refer to Emily Apter and her paper "On Oneworldedness: Or Paranoia as a World System".

The first idea Apter writes about is a positive approach to globalism and a negative approach. The negative approach states that the globalized world is a web of interconnected surveillance systems run by conspiratorial logic. The positive approach is the conventional transnational idealism towards the globalization of liberal society through free trade leading to a homogenous world community. The second idea is her rooting of paranoia in a Lacanian

analysis of the subject. Regarding the Lacanian argument, she posits the Lacanian subject is compelled to submit themselves to “the domination of the sadistic super-ego through an expected punishment” (Apter 373), and this is concomitant with the previous description of the super-ego function in relation to my explanation of the concept of the big-Other.

However, more importantly, she notes

It is important to retain, then, that the Lacanian subject is posited in terms of a destructive, persecutory misrecognition of itself and a masochistic submission to the symbolic order that propels subjective ontology to the brink of psychosis. (Apter 373)

This misrecognition of self refers back to what Narita and Morelock argue is a growing consequence of the presence of a virtual space dominated by the trade of imagery, where subjects increasingly relate to images separate from the real. But it also relates to the influence of trending waves of narrative on the Internet that are perpetuated through algorithmic filtering. Furthermore, Apter provides an important description of how the subject relates to a global interconnected network, which in the context of her discussion relates to the globalist world system, but can also be applied to the perception of the World Wide Web as a virtual manifestation of this system:

The delusional structure of thought – giving rise to endless mirroring – defines not only the paranoid character of knowledge but also the condition of subjective rivalry with intellectual globality; the subject's jealousy of an alienating object-thought-that threatens to subsume or englobe it entirely. (Apter 372)

I believe a “subjective rivalry with intellectual globality” (372) sums up the relationship the contemporary subject has to the sustained use of online media. It also encapsulates the way in which I have been representing Pynchon’s critiques of bureaucracy, surveillance, and global capitalism. Drawing from this psychoanalytic reading, I would like to refer to the first component of Apter’s argument. As already mentioned, she distinguishes between what I will term a positive view of globalism, (transnational idealism and cosmopolitanism), and a negative one, which Apter refers to as “oneworldedness”. The positive view of globalism is one that looks to notions of globalization and transnationalism as progressive and liberal functions. For example, Jürgen Habermas believes in the rational capacity of the individual and progress through communicative action. This is inherently a cosmopolitan position where the individual becomes a world citizen in a unified global civic space, or public sphere. Essentially, the internal dynamic of a nation state, in democratic form, is abstracted to the

level of the globe. This is also what is commonly referred to as the international liberal order. Habermas states that the effects of globalization require that:

Governments certainly cannot be expected to enter international agreements and to establish regulations [...] as long as they are perceived as independent actors in those national arenas where they have to gain support and re-election. The individual states must be tied into the binding procedures of cooperation within a transnational community of states in such a way that this commitment is in each case visible on the stage of domestic policy. (Habermas 317)

This is concomitant with his idea of universal communicative reason, which Apter diagnoses as inferring a world built on “morally enlightened calculations of how to distribute fairly the earth’s common property” (Apter 370). This is put in contrast with her concept of oneworldedness, which “envisages the planet as an extension of paranoid subjectivity vulnerable to persecutory fantasy, catastrophism, and monomania” because the world is connected through complex webs of deceit, double logic, and evasion, as opposed to an open, communicative, and productive connection in Habermas’ schema (370). It certainly appears as though she is extending the inherently paranoid relationship between the subject, the super-ego, and the big-Other to a larger interconnected web of mutual surveillance. Thus, rather than a global connection being a homogenous cosmopolitan world culture, she sees this increased possibility of connection as a breeding ground for paranoia. The globalized world, as a particular network, breeds paranoid and conspiratorial subjectivity in order to make sense of its structure. Perhaps better put, the reproduction of its structure is premised on a paranoid and conspiratorial response as a type of false consciousness.

Apter continues to contextualize oneworldedness by referring to it as based on an “ethics of remote responsibility that refuses acknowledgment of the butterfly effect [a law of causal linkage through time]” (370). This might be seen as a sophisticated critique of globality, everything is connected but only when it is given permission. Her estimation is that the current strain of what she describes as “planetary paranoia” emerged after 9/11, with the fears of a global terrorist network that is hidden and at all times plotting to infiltrate “civilized society”. Expanding on this, Apter creates a distinction between this extreme connection and a total lack of connection, harkening back to Pynchon’s concepts of paranoia and anti-paranoia, in relation to the Gulf Wars:

In this scheme, what we are told is connected is rivalled only by what we are asked to believe is not connected: there is apparently no link between oil and the Iraq invasion, no coincidence between electioneering politics and war, no cause-effect relationship between the media-hyped epistemology of insecurity

and the abrogation of civil liberties, no common thread of sadism between Iraqi and US treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. This logic of non-connectivity condemns you as a paranoid if you suspect that the case for war is less than solid, and doubts your credibility if you fail to see that only when it comes to terrorism are all the dots connected. (Apter 369)

Apter is describing a world where power misconstrues discrete entities as unrelated, where in reality there is a causal connection between global events. The disjuncture between being prompted to respond to entities as disconnected, when in reality there could be a working causal chain, starts to develop an excess, in which an individual's intuitive sense that things must somehow be connected leads to a conspiratorial logic, in the absence of a "legitimate" narrative of connection. There is a sort of double logic at play, which in an idealized view of globalized culture, such as Habermas', does not exist as pervasively because the clarity of communicative rationality acknowledges causal connection. I would like to reintroduce a quotation from *Gravity's Rainbow*, which I presented in the context of Slothrop's slow descent into paranoid-conspiracy, to better contextualize just how relevant Pynchon's meditations on bureaucracy and surveillance are to modern society, as it is expressed by Apter. As aforementioned, this sequence takes place at Slothrop's time at the casino, where he is ultimately monitored, manipulated and educated (that is to say: interpellated, disciplined, and controlled).

There may, for a moment, have been some golden, vaguely root-like or manlike figure beginning to form among the brown and bright cream shadows and light here. But Slothrop isn't to be let off quite so easy. Shortly, unpleasantly so, it will come to him that everything in this room is really being used for something different. Meaning things to Them it has never meant to us. Never. Two orders of being, looking identical. . . (205)

This speaks directly to what Apter describes in her concept of oneworldedness, a dual logic of paranoia and anti-paranoia in which interconnections take on different values and meanings depending on who has access to them and who is observing them.

Apter posits that this oneworldedness is an extension of paranoid subjectivity. The explanation for this effect she lays on a "delirious aesthetics of systematicity: a match between cognition and globalism held in place with the paranoid promise that everything is connected" (366). Therefore, rather than being a productive homogeneity of culture under late capitalism, Apter describes a system that is built on a profoundly conspiratorial logic. She counters the Habermasian notion of a unified global community with examples of militarized border control and clandestine intelligence networks in the wake of a growing

global anxiety that emerged post-9/11 (355). For Apter, then, planetary paranoia is marked by “cyber-surveillance” and “webs of international relationality” existing in a world dominated by super-states which, she argues, really conceal a “pressing reality of NGO’s, underground economies and clandestine insurgency groups” (370). This is similar to the background of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in which large industrial conglomerates acted in cartel-like activities across the lines of conflict during World War II, in what is ultimately a global capitalist conspiracy where the war is simply a distraction and a spectacle. Pynchon’s foresight about the tendencies of American empire is eerily prophetic; one can argue these conspiratorial narratives are of the type that coloured American expeditions in the Middle East: The Gulf War, The 2003 Iraq War, the scandalous relationship with Israel and Saudi Arabia as US backed regional hegemony through the Abraham Accords, and the on-going proxy war with Iran (through Israel). The Pynchonian critique, I imagine, would be similar to the conventional cynical critique of these outings, namely the craving for oil, oil, and more oil.

Fittingly, Apter also argues the relevance of this paranoid subjectivity in American literature, particularly its expression at the height of the postmodernist movement. One of her claims is that the paranoid subject, specifically a subject exhibiting paranoid psychosis, has been the preferred literary archetype of Western literature for much of modernity. Apter refers to Pynchon as well as Don DeLillo as examples of this American fascination. With writers like Pynchon, there is an intense presence of what she describes as “narrative articulations of oneworldedness” or, more simply put, narrative articulations of an interconnected paranoid world system. Thus, Pynchon, in her estimation, “enshrines paranoia” as the “trope of national allegory” (375).

However, concerning digital modernity, Apter also stresses the importance of cyber-surveillance in the characterization of oneworldedness as a paranoid world system. Supporting the argument of this thesis, Apter likens the logic of a paranoid system to that of the binary configuration of a digital circuit board. The “Us vs Them” or “I vs Other” logic of the paranoid, she says, illustrates the binary on-off process of digital technology, or in her words: “confirms the cybernetic: on-off, us-them” (367). There is an emerging relationship between cybernetic processes and the processes of cognition that the postmodern subject makes use of.

This again references Lyotard’s notion that knowledge cannot survive unchanged in the techno-capitalist world. It also draws on my previous claim that subjectivity has to adapt to the environment that it creates. Regarding Pynchon’s novels, perhaps the most important development by Apter is the degree to which she explores how a cybernetically influenced

paranoia – or paranoia in general – works at “dissolving the discrete limits of an autonomous self” by abolishing its mechanisms of agency. Her estimation of its effect is the internalization of the “Schizoid ontology of the enemy” (367) or simply put: “I” vs “them”. I emphasize “I”, instead of “us” and “we”, because in the paranoid consciousness, there is only an I, there is no room for a “we” as the ruminations of the paranoid always revert to, what Apter describes as, an “intellectual unipolarity” (371) where the paranoid devises a “system of omniscience capable of binding everything into coherence, through rendering discrete orders of signs *pan-translatable* [emphasis my own]” (371). Fundamentally paranoid subjectivity cuts off its own foundations because the unipolarity of an obsessive paranoia renders it incapable of arriving at true coherence. After all, it cannot include external narratives, because these external narratives naturally upset the internal dynamic of the “coherent” paranoid world view. The paranoid becomes ossified by the structure of paranoia. The subject’s attempt to universalize a coherent worldview through this paranoia isolates or particularizes them. This paranoid “unipolarity” can only come into conflict with that which is other, which then further sustains the paranoid dialectic; the paranoid cannot be “penetrated” because paranoia is, by nature, a process of demarcation, of enclosure, of wall building. In this process, the agency of the self, its possibility for agency, becomes paralyzed in the face of the “autonomous” paranoid dialectic between subject and system, between subject and other, that takes over.

6.6 The Technological Network as the Object of Paranoia

This erosion of agency – dissolving the discrete limits of the autonomous self – is one of the key aspects of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, particularly as it relates to communication (Whitemarsh 528). The process of communication is also appropriate to considerations of cyberspace because, on all levels, what is occurring – even the level of the circuit board – is the sending and receiving of data. Regarding communication networks, Patrick Whitemarsh develops an interesting articulation of the supernatural elements of *Gravity’s Rainbow* and how they might mirror some of the experiences of the postmodern cybernetic subject. Whitemarsh notices that Pynchon has profound anxiety around technological communication within his novels; for example, the plot of *The Crying of Lot 49* is essentially an elaborated metaphor of a broken telephone. Pynchon takes this further in the sense that the telephone appears to transcend the sum of its users: the communication network itself becomes – or is perceived as – autonomous. This anxiety can be seen, Whitemarsh argues, with Oedipa Maas noting that

the radio has a “hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate” (Pynchon 14). What seems to be taking place here is a privileging of the interface with an autonomous nature: it speaks for an entity. Whitemarsh develops this idea with Pynchon’s focus on “interfaces” in his novels (Whitemarsh 530). The terminal, whether it be the computer screen or the TV, appears as a “portal” through which data from another realm is transmitted, much like the image of a crystal ball.

In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the intelligence agency P.I.S.C.E.S. is open to all methods of gaining data, particularly making use of séances through its resident medium, Carol Eventyr (528). The interface in this example is the Ouija board through which the medium Eventyr contacts the “spirits”. It is key to note here the parallels between the spirits being a collective disembodied realm of data and that of cyberspace. The core theme in the Eventyr plot thread is the fact that he cannot remember what the spirits say through him; he can only recollect it later in minutes from the session. So in the process of communication, he has his own subjectivity eroded so that there is “space” for the data to be transmitted (528). Whitemarsh links this to a broader concept in *Gravity’s Rainbow*: The idea that subjects are displaced from their “self-assigned roles as instigators and organizers of communication” (526). This displacement matches the process that Apter attributes to being characteristic of her notion of oneworldedness.

The through line between Apter, Whitemarsh, and Pynchon as a postmodern author is the erosion of the Enlightenment subject. A subject position in a world of this kind, Apter says, rests on a type of self-estrangement (Apter 372). Through Whitemarsh, Narita and Morelock, and Apter, I have tried to illustrate the notion that cyberspace exists in a way that is similar to the “spirit realm” of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Put another way, this could also refer to the big-Other as it is theorized by Lacan, and developed by Slavoj Žižek’s cultural analysis. Or, even further, to Pynchon’s descriptions of the pervasive nature of the bureaucracy and its methods of surveillance and control as an elusive Other. The similarity rests on the observation that the Internet, and networks in general, appear as a disembodied force of communication that displaces the agency of the subject. Something – the network itself, possibly – speaks through the subject⁴¹. The subject is only a vessel for information flows in a wider, emergent, information milieu. An individual, enmeshed in a network of this kind might justifiably become paranoid, since the network – and whatever or whoever exercises

⁴¹ It reminds one of the way in which language becomes cut loose from meaning in Eugene Tonesco’s *The Bald Primadonna*.

control over it – may have a degree of foreknowledge about the subject’s position within it. This is, returning to my core argument, the relationship between Pynchon’s representation of bureaucracy and the Internet, namely that surveillance is a fundamental aspect of such networks. To the individual caught within these networks, the individual whose cultural reality is premised on the product of these networks, the individual who is at once a core component of these networks, whilst at the same time feeling like an effect of these networks, paranoia emerges as a fundamental discourse in their attempt to contextualize themselves.

Chapter 7: The Cause and Expression of Conspiracy Theory in Contemporary Global Culture as it is Represented on the Internet

7.1 A Crisis in the Legitimation of Knowledge and Paranoid Culture

The previous chapter developed a broad picture of post-industrial society, with which to apply my reading of Thomas Pynchon and the way paranoia emerges in the advanced capitalist social systems characteristic of a post-industrial postmodernity. In this chapter, I would like to extend that analysis further and consider contemporary mechanisms of conspiracy theory. In the opening chapters, I mentioned that the culmination of paranoid subjectivity is in the emergence of a conspiratorial logic. I defined this conspiratorial logic as paranoia raised to the level of discourse, where other paranoid views may intersect and develop ever-greater and complex articulations of the way in which the world is organized. Where the previous chapter characterized the paranoid relationship modern culture has to information technology, in this chapter, I want to provide a more detailed description of how conspiracy theory becomes a dominant mode of discourse on the Internet.

Having constructed my particular reading of *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, and referred to various readings of Pynchon, that deal with concerns that are generally housed under an examination of the breakdown of communication and meaning production within social systems, I would like to next refer to a reading of Habermas. In arguing the emergence of paranoid and conspiratorial logics as a consequence of advanced capitalist society, as individuals engage in a dialectic between subject and system, I will attempt to investigate possible structural explanations of this phenomenon through a reading of Jürgen Habermas's *Legitimation Crisis*.

To begin, I will situate the development of paranoia, as I previously explicated it through Pynchon, within the context of the Habermasian critique of legitimation in advanced capitalism. Using Habermas, Peter Sloterdijk, and an account of network surveillance through David Altheide, I will try to illustrate that paranoia, in late-stage capitalist society, emerges as a dominant characteristic of discourse through a sense of ideological cynicism⁴².

⁴² This is essentially the Marxist argument for alienation. Cynicism alienates individuals from developing collective structures of meaning. So "rational" discourse is seen as cynical. More value (in an ethical sense, not an economic) driven ideologies are pushed to the flanks as "extreme" whilst the centrist position remains cynical, rational and secular (bourgeois). The Internet, as the new public sphere, is not able to constructively reconcile extremes on the left-right spectrum. In order to combat alienation (cynicism) individuals radicalize and migrate to the left or right. In America, for example, this dialectic between left and right is what fuels the media spectacle. What is supposed to be an attempt at emancipation (through whichever side of the spectrum individuals gravitate towards) is commodified and fed back to individuals as a consumable media product.

Cynicism, then, to the degree it appears as the underlying mood of the public in advanced capitalism in Habermas's *Legitimation Crisis*, is the point on which I link my notion of paranoia as a necessary force of socialization in capitalist society. Through Habermas' critique, I will attempt to demonstrate how this cynicism is a consequence of the advanced-capitalist social system and its eroding of traditional institutions of knowledge legitimation. Thus, ultimately, a crisis in the legitimation of knowledge vis-à-vis the proclivities of the capitalist system towards crisis states generates a cynical attitude towards knowledge, which then creates a space between individuals and legitimate and collective bodies of knowledge, allowing for paranoia and a subsequent conspiratorial logic to manifest.

Habermas approaches systems analysis from an Enlightenment-style discourse. By systems analysis, Habermas means that he is perceiving complex social systems – a nation state, for example – from the perspective of self-regulating systems that adhere to internal structural dynamics. His focus is on societies that use capitalism as their primary principle of organization. Ultimately, the question Habermas is asking is how one extracts meaning from their existence, as it is premised on participation in a particular system. The answer to such a question rests on the degree to which capitalism as a social system restricts the ability for individuation and further restricts the individuated subject from building intersubjective relations with other subjects.

Habermas' seems to argue that the healthy functioning of a social system is premised on the degree to which consensus knowledge can be legitimated and utilized for various purposes: inter-subjective communication, normative codes, practical and technical purposes. The erosion of the legitimacy of institutions or the perception of those institutions as illegitimate creates a space where consensus knowledge falls apart. For example, the widespread waning importance of academia in the public consciousness, or even the waning legitimacy of news media as a reliable and objective narrative. There is then a crisis in the legitimation of knowledge, and out of these crises alternative discourses emerge. The import of this to paranoia, or paranoid subjectivity, is the relationship the subject has to knowledge in postmodernity, where what previously was consensus knowledge frequently gives way to competing discourses. Ultimately, I am arguing that a crisis in the legitimation of knowledge, as Habermas outlines it, is the reason there can be such a rich conspiratorial underground within *The Crying of Lot 49*, and also within modern cyberspace.

In *Legitimation Crisis* Habermas' investigates what he posits is an inherent tendency towards crises in capitalism and advanced capitalism. His paper considers how society might be thought of from the point of view of systems analysis as a self-regulating system. One of

the key aspects in the functioning of a social system for Habermas is the ability to legitimate utterances: to legitimate what counts as “truth”. Knowledge needs to be construed as legitimate, before it can be utilized for practical and technical activities as well as for governing normative codes of intersubjective communication.

The effects of the unravelling of consensus can be observed as a progressive unravelling of the status quo through a widespread reaction to institutions such as the university system. It can also be applied to “qualified professionals” such as doctors and physicists, as well as to the notion of liberal democracy and its orbiting societal structures. Most pressingly, however, and here lies somewhat of a paradox, Habermas, as well as thinkers like Slavoj Žižek and Peter Sloterdijk, find an increasing cynicism towards ideology, an anti-ideology if you will, which has been gaining credence in capitalist societies.

The Marxist critique of capitalism is that what underlies the capitalist system is an inherent contradiction through the process of surplus value extraction from the labour force: the contradiction is that capitalism presents itself as a meritocratic free market system where one is paid for what they produce (Habermas 27). Habermas argues that this fundamental contradiction⁴³ is increasingly transposed into different forms and migrates to different areas of society. Essentially, a latent class conflict inherent to capitalism expands across all sectors of society.

By Habermas’ logic, a crisis in the normative structures of society will eventually bleed over into the technical spheres of society – the real physical productive processes of society – as utilizable technical knowledge is derived from the “utterances of truth” that are sanctioned in the normative sphere. If a society cannot develop coherent bodies of knowledge and consensus on this knowledge, eventually its productive processes will fall apart. However, the real root of these crises is ultimately in the economic sphere, particularly with class conflict. The reason these institutions of knowledge legitimation erode is that the economic reality transforms to such a degree that institutions of knowledge legitimation are not able to account for the reality of the system. However, this is not broadly expressed as an

⁴³ Habermas clarifies: “growth is regulated through a mechanism that establishes and at the same time partially conceals a relation of social power. Because the production of value is controlled through the private appropriation of surplus value, a spiral of contradictions results that can be reconstructed within systems theory. The accumulation of total capital involves periodic devaluations of elements of capital. This form of development is the crisis cycle. Under the aspect of the accumulation of capital, the self-negating pattern of development is represented in such a way that [. . .] capital and social wealth accumulates by raising the relative surplus value, that is, by way of technical progress that is capital intensive and that, at the same time, cuts down expenses” (Habermas, Jürgen. *Legitimation Crisis*. 1973. Pp 27-29). Essentially, people are paid less as capital realization comes to the forefront through surplus value extraction, which creates a consumption crisis (unemployment) which is transposed into a socio-cultural crisis.

economic crisis but as a cultural one. Therefore, Habermas is arguing that a decline in a system's normative spheres, such as a national identity, is ultimately the symptom of an underlying economic contradiction that is transposed into a cultural one.

The crucial notion is that cultural spectacle is, to a certain extent, by this logic, virtual. The crisis-ridden tendency of advanced capitalism, which is inherently necessary for its hyper-productive processes, is reproduced by transposing the crisis into terms other than what it is. Therefore, a crisis in the legitimation of knowledge is harmful to the creation of subjective meaning, but is a necessary process in sustaining the short-term productive processes of the capitalist economy, which fundamentally rests on crisis to reproduce itself.

7.2 Privatism

The structures of liberal capitalist and bourgeois culture, fused with democracy, develop a particular style of social ideology which Habermas brands as “bourgeois privatism”, or “civil privatism” (Habermas 76-77). Privatism can be described as the general individualist trend in modern capitalist society, as individuals become increasingly politically abstinent and cynical, increasingly focused on leading professionalized lives centred on their career identity, and the prominence of the nuclear family as an isolated unit. This can be described more generally as a withdrawal from the communal public sphere.

To understand privatism, I would like to illustrate how Habermas conceives the relationship between subject and system. Pivotal to understanding this concept are two notions he develops of system integration and social integration. Social integration occurs amongst individuals who secure identity and communicate through shared normative structures. Further social integration, as a process of socialization, allows certain normative frameworks to be put into place, which allow for the creation of empirical knowledge that sanctions certain knowledge claims as technical and utilizable, for the further appropriation of outer nature (the process of production) (Habermas 10)⁴⁴.

Social integration appears as if it affects subjects from within the life-world – the linguistically and symbolically rich realm of intersubjective communication. System integration, however, acts on the subject from without, and can be gauged as pressures from the state and administrative systems which work – from a systems perspective – at reconciling not only the productive capacity (and by extension social cohesion/socialization

⁴⁴ Habermas notes “The exchange between social systems and their environments takes place in production (appropriation of outer nature) and socialization (appropriation of inner nature) through the medium of utterances that admit of truth”. (Habermas, Jürgen. *Legitimation Crisis*. 1973. Pg 8).

of individuals) but also the interlocking of all the various sectors of the system: political-administrative, economic, and socio-cultural. For example, the pervasiveness of bureaucracy may be construed as an element of system integration: something that is not necessarily digested so easily by individuals but which can be socialized as necessary, given that the requisite processes of social integration take place to allow this component to be tolerated (7-10).

What underlies Habermas' entire thesis in *Legitimation Crisis* is essentially a tension between stability and mobility, or stasis and uncertainty. This is framed within a broader dialectic between the subject, the "life-world", and the system (4). This tension arises from the competing forces of system-side imperatives: political-administrative sector, economic sector, and life-world imperatives: socio-cultural sector consisting of normative structures which secure identity and meaning. The socio-cultural sphere, being rooted in normative structures that are passed down through tradition, is always holding back the advances of the non-normative sectors of the system (the ability to adopt new values and knowledge claims). Thus, inner-nature and the social life-world are at once a "system element and a system environment" (14). It is the space in which the dynamics of the system play out, but it is also a determinant element in the functioning of the system. This is, on some level, the dynamics of the social contract: how individuals negotiate with a "collectively invested" and abstracted nexus of power. Individuals thus objectify their need to be governed in the form of the state, but more so in the form of an objective and self-regulating system that has rules, so to speak, that need to be adhered to by the very occupants and creators of that system.

Habermas describes primitive societies as having a key feature, that social integration and system integration are *undifferentiated* (18-19). This is in stark contrast to the functions of privatism in liberal capitalism. What he means here is that, in terms of production, there is no institutionalized division of labour because there is no regular surplus being pursued in an organized manner. However, in what he describes as traditional societies, which are really agricultural societies, the social contract emerges, and the state, simply describing here a central bureaucratic and ruling apparatus, is born. Similarly, division of labour is implemented as an institutionalized aspect of the bureaucracy, which now redistributes resources in pursuit of surplus value. Now, social integration and system integration are split. However, it is more pressing to understand what develops in the liberal capitalist model of society:

The achievement of the capitalist principle of organization is nevertheless extraordinary. It not only frees the economic system, uncoupled from the political system (through the anonymization of class rule through the ideologies of equal exchange and equivalence in the market and the depoliticization of property), from the legitimations of the socially integrative subsystems, but enables it, along with its system integrative tasks, to make a contribution to social integration. (23)

This is an integral component of privatism and the outsourcing of socialization as the individual's own problem of optimization. Thus, the relative uncoupling of the economic system from the political system, through the processes of the free market and principles of equivalent exchange, allows bourgeois society to shed its reliance on the traditional normative structures as received from the political system and develop a new “strategic-utilitarian action orientation” of the market (Habermas 21). In short, an individualist and entrepreneurial logic becomes the archetypal ideological form of the middle class. Habermas argues that traditional modes of meaning production and identity-securing have been eroded by the withdrawal of the subject from the collective public sphere, through the privatizing ideologies of liberal capitalism, which makes the individual the core component of society, particularly in the sense that interpretation of normative structures and meaning is severed from its origin in the “communicative zones of action”. Ultimately, the individual is forced to conduct a sort of self-optimization in their development of the “correct” normative frameworks. In this way, meaning-production itself in its original collective and communicative form is decentralized and outsourced to the level of the individual and nuclear family (79-80).

Therefore, the erosion of traditional structures of meaning goes hand in hand with the postmodern erosion of grand narratives. The fusion of postmodernism as a particular intellectual discourse (a superstructure) and the forces of free market capitalism (the infrastructure/base) erode the force of ideology in its conventional sense – this will be made clearer in the following section. While in some sense this can be perceived as emancipatory, what also erodes are the holistic structures of meaning that ideology provides. Habermas seems to infer that this process functionally takes place with the growing individualization of social life and the erosion of the public sphere as a source of collective meaning production. Essentially, the erosion of traditional forms of meaning production creates a void in which the instrumental structures of capitalism: professionalism, scientism, institutionalization, and economic reductionism, fill. Ultimately, the individual now becomes responsible for developing their own stable sense of meaning. Crucially, this sense of meaning needs to be

one that is valid within the normative structures of society. However, this becomes problematic when knowledge itself, what counts for consensus knowledge, is increasingly called into question as the legitimacy of institutions that legitimate knowledge are called into question. In fact, in postmodern society, the normative structures themselves are becoming increasingly fractured to the degree that individuals, especially if we use contemporary American society as an example, seem unable to know what counts as valid knowledge. It is in this environment that the subject becomes increasingly paranoid with regard to that status of knowledge, and starts to engage in forms of discourse that are increasingly speculative and conspiratorial.

Finally, as a complement to privatism, and equally important is Habermas's concept of "scientism". This concept highlights the totality of the overly rational ideology that he develops as characteristic of capitalism. Habermas asserts that traditional beliefs, those important for the upholding of normative and identity-securing structures, and which act as a counterbalance (as elements of the life-world) against the steering pressures of the system, cannot resist the impetus of "discursive justification" that is developed by modern science (4-5). In simple terms, this can be framed as the inability of religious, spiritual, and traditional knowledge to stand in good faith against the thrust of observable and reproducible scientific "fact". However, Habermas, in a manner that echoes Lyotard, posits that while this is in some sense positive for developing a reflective and discursive society, it also creates a proclivity for "short-lived popular syntheses of isolated pieces of information" which have taken the place of *global interpretations* (84). By global interpretations, he means views that can integrate different modes of knowledge into a cohesive system of meaning. This echoes the sentiment of Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979, 4). It is in this environment, that conspiratorial logic, as a distorted, decentralized, and non-institutional form of knowledge legitimation, emerges.

Much of Habermas' focus is on how non-normative aspects of the system rend individuals from their own sense of identity as the expanding productive proclivities of the system outgrow the traditional normative and meaning/identity securing structures. This evaporation of traditional forms of meaning from the social life world and their replacement with the hyper-rational ideologies of scientism and economic reduction can be argued to develop a profound cynicism in the modern subject. A cynicism to the extent that, the subject is unwilling to believe wholeheartedly in what they perceive as antiquated ideological and narrative sources of meaning.

7.3 Cynicism and Post-Ideology

In his essay “Cynicism – The Twilight of False Consciousness”, Peter Sloterdijk introduces the form of cynicism from which I draw. He states:

The discontent in culture has assumed a new quality: it appears as universal, diffuse cynicism. The traditional critique of ideology stands by helplessly. It cannot find the lever that would enlighten this cynically alert consciousness. Modern cynicism presents itself as that state of consciousness which follows naive ideologies and their enlightenment. In it lies the real reason for the complete exhaustion of ideology critique, for the latter has remained more naive than the consciousness it sought to expose. Its well-behaved rationality did not follow the twists and turns of modern consciousness toward a cunning, multi-faceted realism. (190)

What he speaks of as a “multi-faceted realism” is an overall disillusionment with the more hermeneutic and narrative forms of discourse. Philosophy and literature, and the interpretation of narrative forms of writing, seem to fall to the wayside as artifacts of a naïve period of history. They, in a sense, appear as fictions compared to the generative, technical, and utilizable aspects of the hard sciences. This notion is what Habermas described as an ideology of scientism. Awareness of the function of ideology makes individuals increasingly cynical to ideology. The absence of ideology as such, in capitalist societies, positions individuals in a paralytic middle ground, around which conspiracy, as a discourse that appears ultimately rational and calculated in form, coalesces. This cynicism that Sloterdijk references is a kind of ultra-realism or ultra-rationalism in the sense that it is formal logic pushed to such a degree that anything that appears to have its base in a narrative form is not quantifiable and certainly, almost embarrassingly, believed in bad faith. To this type of cynic, ideology is something rather quaint.

This is, of course, its own form of contradictory ideology. This hyper-rationalism is contradictory because the market processes that order the economy are becoming increasingly abstract. Wall Street, for instance is a construct of speculation. There is nothing inherently natural or rational about its structure and its trends. Yet, it is often treated as a direct and the trustworthy representation of reality. Some would argue it even elects presidents, as we outsource our ability to decide to the market, it does it for us. This “market determinism” of capitalism is then the core of the postmodern cynicism we find in this, apparently, “post-ideological” form of advanced capitalism. In this sense the postmodern subject is free of illusions because they are, by virtue of being postmodern, already post-ideology and post-theology, in the real sense of the normative power of these processes –

what Habermas describes as identity securing processes – being lost through their defeat at the hands of scientific reason and historical awareness of ideology (Fisher 4). Individuals have, supposedly, been liberated by the truth of the market and by supply and demand. This is analogous to Lyotard’s decline of the “meta-narratives” of the Enlightenment. And yet, the postmodern subject is still caught up in the physical manifestations of ideology, even if they are aware of its “falseness”.

Economic reductionism as a world view highlights the ideological dimension as being false, and that it was always simply about an economic process⁴⁵, is *precisely* the ideological mechanism of capitalism, where the death of ideology is in fact the very ideology of capitalism. Slavoj Žižek explores how the critique of ideology has evolved from the Frankfurt School to more contemporary discourse analysis. He argues that modern discourse conceives of ideology, not as false consciousness, but as the very presuppositions we make use of in positing a “real” that is free of ideology. This is what Žižek describes as the “zero-level” of ideology:

What the tradition of Enlightenment dismisses as a mere disturbance of 'normal' communication turns out to be its positive condition. The concrete intersubjective space of symbolic communication is always structured by various (unconscious) textual devices that cannot be reduced to secondary rhetoric. What we are dealing with here is not a complementary move to the traditional Enlightenment or Habermasian approach but its inherent reversal: what Habermas perceives as the step out of ideology is denounced here as ideology par excellence. In the Enlightenment tradition, 'ideology' stands for the blurred ('false') notion of reality caused by various 'pathological' interests (fear of death and of natural forces, power interests, etc.); for discourse analysis, the very notion of an access to reality unbiased by any discursive devices or conjunctions with power is ideological. (Žižek 7)

Žižek is arguing that the idea that one can step outside of ideology and exist within a “post-ideological world” is precisely an ideology itself. It is therefore cynicism, through the forces of advanced capitalism⁴⁶, which provides the foundations of this postmodern ideology. This formula is similar to the breakdown of authoritative metanarratives discussed in earlier

⁴⁵ Marxist historical analysis, as a critique of capitalism, is not much different, in that both are a materialist and a reductive logic. A historical materialist reading, informed by Marxism, of the Crusades, for example, might posit that its occurrence was due to certain class issues or economic disruptions to the ruling class. An economic reductionist perspective, in a capitalist sense, might also posit that such a world event was ultimately informed by an economic phenomenon, rather than a cultural or ideological phenomenon which might be approached with a degree of cynicism. In both views, the idea that it was in some way a religious war might be overlooked as a secondary ideological justification of a more fundamental economic reality.

⁴⁶ Two core examples were Habermas’ concepts of scientism and privatism and the context in which they emerge. Recall Section 7.1 and 7.2.

chapters, and how postmodern discourse can be construed as containing a degree of epistemological paranoia. What Zizek is bringing attention to is the consequence of this breakdown, and the effects of postmodern discourse itself. So in the development of capitalist society, ideologies such as privatism and scientism inspire a sense of ideological cynicism which makes it difficult to see these ideologies, and capitalism itself, as ideology. Rather, they are seen as natural, logical and structural mechanisms. This cynicism, or inability to root oneself in a cohesive narrative ideology, facilitates conspiracy theory's to emergence as a discourse which is "logical"⁴⁷ form.

7.4 Cynicism as Paralysis: The Case of Normalized Surveillance

David Altheide argues for what he calls "The Control Narrative" of the Internet. His basic premise is that processes of surveillance are inherently baked into the structure of cyberspace due to its highly visual and performative communication processes. Altheide believes that contemporary users of the Internet are aware of these surveillance processes and, in some way or another, acknowledge and even engage with them. Regarding the relationship between the Internet and surveillance, Altheide says:

Surveillance operates as a translucent veil of control that informs use of the Internet, including actors' perceptions, communication styles, and content, reading, interpretation, and use. This examination of the Internet as a topic — how it is constituted, including social power, norms, values, and sanctions of control — focuses on state control and surveillance that is closely related to the organization, licensing, monitoring, and control of information technology that links computers with the Internet. More Internet users are aware that computer and Internet hardware and software promote surveillance and monitoring. (Altheide 223)

Whilst detailing a history fraught with surveillance of citizens by the state, particularly in the Cold War, Altheide implies, similar to that of Emily Apter, that in the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent Patriot Act in The United States, the formal structures of the web have been co-opted to help facilitate a culture of surveillance driven by fears of an invisible other: the global terror network. Altheide elaborates that:

It is becoming more acceptable to compromise privacy. On the one hand, information technology involves numerous electronic feedback processes that

⁴⁷ Conspiracy theory is, in a way, modelled like a scientific or mathematical exercise. It builds its conclusion from the ground up with disparate pieces of data. It is also seen as free of ideological biases, even though many conspiracy theories are precisely the result of an ideological bias that the conspiracy theorist refuses to acknowledge. For example, political correctness censors the discourse of certain ideologies (seen as harmful in that particular societal context) which then re-emerge as the unconscious bias behind a conspiracy theory. This bias is concealed behind the "logical" nature of the conspiracy theory as a factual, scientific exercise.

track messages but not necessarily meanings. On the other hand, the ease with which this is done makes the organization and monitoring of such activities possible and desirable — if you can monitor, why not? The need to know has emerged in a context of popular culture — inspired fear, dread, and victimization wherein cunning agents — at home and abroad — threaten our security and exploit our private and consumer information for their own gain. The rare instance of surveillance is gradually becoming the “norm of surveillance” in order to prevent widely publicized “threats” that evoke “fear.” Surveillance is reflexively joined to fear as audiences seek salvation from a popular culture world of threats and danger. (229)

There is thus a circular process of paranoia producing surveillance culture, and surveillance culture further exacerbating feelings of paranoia. However, what I really want to draw attention to is the underlying cynicism that is expressed in this acceptance of surveillance. Altheide’s argument for surveillance is essentially the notion that the growing private lives of individuals in capitalist society – a growing withdrawal into the individualistic domain of the private household, the commute to the place of employment, and the leisure activities of the individual/family – create a need for surveillance as a method of information gathering.

Thus, contemporary consumers have cameras outside their homes, so that they can monitor the activities surrounding them without actually leaving the security of the building. This process is extrapolated from the house to the neighbourhood block, to the community, and to the city itself at various levels of surveillance infrastructure and culture. Eventually, the web itself provides this function as a one-stop shop for commodity purchase, information gathering, and surveillance. This is primarily what I mean when cynicism – a wholesale withdrawal from the idealized picture of public sphere life as a source of meaning-production – creates a distance, or a space, within which paranoia can manifest. This is, if gauged in a more Marxist lens, ultimately a variation of the argument of alienation. Therefore, the shadow side of the ideology of libertarian capitalism is manifested in a withdrawal and a detestation of the state as a *consequence* of its motivating ideologies of libertarianism, individualism, and privatism (Habermas 82-82).

7.5 Internet Culture and Conspiratorial Discourse: A New Kind of Public Sphere

Habermas argues that there is a growing withdrawal from the public sphere in advanced capitalist society. This older notion of the public sphere has been supplanted by a new public sphere, one that is premised on the function of information technology.

The public sphere might be seen as a space in which cultural ideologies are “performed”. Regarding the role of the public sphere in advanced capitalist societies, Habermas asserts the following:

The public realm, set up for effective legitimation, has above all the function of directing attention to topical areas – that is, of pushing other themes, problems, and arguments below the threshold of attention, thereby withholding them from opinion formation. (Habermas 70)

This is the central dilemma outlined in Habermas's *Legitimation Crisis*. The state acts in a way that contradicts the inherent organizational logic of liberal capitalism, that is, the role of the state as a passive regulator of conditions of reproduction for the market. By interfering in that very process, the state is required to legitimate its actions. However, the state is confined to legitimating itself within the scope of the logic of the already existing system. In other words, because the organizational principle of liberal capitalism is, generally, the “unplanned and nature-like” development of the free market, the state cannot interfere in the economic sector without losing legitimacy by acting in a way that contradicts the fundamental organizational principles that legitimated it in the first place. For Habermas the state cannot legitimately intervene to combat economic crises that occur in the economic sector, because this delegitimizes the logic of free market capitalism. Such an interference is, in this logic, outside of the “legitimate” jurisdiction of the state⁴⁸. The crisis is rather transposed into other terms, like various cultural issues, which then migrate from one sector to the next. So in this view cultural crisis is the inability to develop a class consciousness, and see crisis as economic in nature. Rather individuals engage with the crisis once it has been transposed into other terms: like the game “broken telephone”. Habermas’ formula is eerily applicable to the modern American political landscape. This is, perhaps, because it is an even more developed form of the advanced capitalism that Habermas critiques in the 1970s.

Thus, one way system power can be expanded without risking a legitimation crisis is through socializing (social integration) citizens in a manner that conceals the fundamental contradictions to the organizing principles that legitimate its authority. Thus, for Habermas, the state needs to “be legitimated, although it can no longer rely on the residues of tradition that have been undermined and worn out during the development of capitalism” (Habermas 36). What he means here is that the traditional notions of civil privatism, which supported liberal capitalism: libertarianism, the marriage between democracy and capitalism through the self-reflexive bourgeois public sphere, and notions of fair exchange in the competitive market, have been eroded by the function of advanced capitalism. This process of

⁴⁸ An on-going debate, intensified since Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, on “big” government versus “small” government.

legitimation involves a manipulation of various system elements in order to convince the citizenry, through structures of social integration, that administrative activity *is* legitimate:

Genuine participation of citizens in the processes of political will-formation, that is, substantive democracy, would bring to consciousness the contradiction between administratively socialized production and the continued private appropriation and use of surplus value. To keep this contradiction from being thematised, the administrative sector must be sufficiently independent of legitimating will formation. The arrangement of formal democratic institutions and procedures permits administrative decisions to be made largely independently of the specific motives of citizens. This takes place through a legitimation process that elicits generalized motives – that is, diffuse mass loyalty– but avoids participation. (37)

Habermas believes that the residues of the ideological structures of liberal capitalism, particularly the notion of civil privatism which exists in a structurally “de-politicized” public sphere, allow legitimation to be reduced to ensuring “political abstinence combined with an orientation to career, leisure, and consumption” (37). Finally, he notes that the administrative system attempts to legitimately tackle economic crises by transposing them into wholly different terms. Habermas notes that

On the one hand, administrative and fiscal filtering of economically conditioned crisis tendencies makes the fronts of repeatedly fragmented class oppositions less comprehensible. The class compromise weakens the organizational capacity of the latently continuing classes. On the other hand, scattered secondary conflicts become more palpable, because they do not appear as objective systematic crisis, but directly provoke questions of legitimation. This explains the functional necessity of making the administrative system, as far as possible, independent of the legitimating system. (69-70)

What Habermas is describing is a performative public sphere whose function, at least from the perspective of the administrative system, is to draw attention away from economic crises and to reformulate the terms of that economic crisis into wholly different ones, such as cultural crises. From an orthodox Marxist perspective, this is the idea that all crisis effects stem from internal contradictions within the capitalist system and are, at their core, within the “system” of a given society, class crises. However, Habermas’s articulation of the public sphere as a performative realm neatly aligns with the argument I want to advance about the Internet as a site for cultural performance that, in agreement with Habermas’s assertion, fundamentally does not result in any real systematic change because the resistance is being waged in terms that are at odds with the real origin of crisis effects. For example, through this logic, one would argue that America’s “culture war” is really the incorrect response to an

underlying economic crisis that cannot, on a mass-scale, be perceived as such. The important takeaway from this idea is that the “old” public sphere, as a communal space for collective action, has in some way, undergone a mass exodus of active citizenry, through the individualist ideologies of modern capitalism. However, what emerges in its stead is a new public sphere in the form of cyberspace. The key difference between the old notion of public sphere and the new one is that, where Habermas argues the manipulation of the public sphere by an alliance of corporate and state entities is the primary force which directs the opinions of citizens, in the new cyber public sphere, it is conspiracy. Importantly, it is the proliferation of conspiracy theories that are enabled by the very structure of cyberspace.

7.6 Internet-Based Conspiracy Culture and Online Social Movements

What I am proposing is that the structure of discourse on the Internet socializes individuals to be more and more predisposed to conspiratorial thinking, regardless of partisan dispositions. In fact, as aforementioned, I am proposing that a prerequisite to being included in the political discourses of the online public sphere is conspiratorial thinking. I will develop this line of thought now with reference to the alt-right and the woke-left, and their mutual reliance on the spectacle-based “content” economy that is predominantly a feature of social media platforms such as Instagram, X, Facebook, and YouTube. These two ideologies exist on opposite spectrums of what is broadly conceived of as the “Culture War” that has been predominantly a performative phenomenon through content creation on the Internet.

The alt-right movement is, as the name states, a designation of a new “alternative right” that developed online roughly around the Obama presidency and has arguably reached its peak ideological influence with the second term of Donald Trump. The alt-right is sometimes described as a new form of radical conservatism that “embraces implicit or explicit racism or white supremacy” and, as a predominantly bourgeois ideology, “white nationalism forms the core movement, which includes neo-Nazi elements, with more moderate non-ideological online provocateurs lurking on the edges of the radical right.” (Daniels 60).

It also makes use of, as the name suggests, alternative forms of media. Although what is considered alternative media – net-based media forms – is increasingly becoming mainstream media as it is colonized by corporate interests through the rising prominence of Big-Tech as a central pillar of the US – and global – economy. Bryant Sculos, in *The Comedy of Cancel Culture in a Post-Carlin United States*, situates the primary role of alternative media personalities in this regard:

There is also an increasingly large cottage industry of successful cultural workers making names for themselves precisely on the basis of standing against the scourge of so-called “cancel culture” and its supposed ideological motivator, “wokeness.” Commentators and content-producers like Joe Rogan and Bill Maher epitomize this mode of pseudo-social criticism, and they have each used their enormous platforms to expose their audiences to all manner of opinions, which has often entailed maintaining a safe and welcoming space for overt bigotry. (Sculos 3)

While these cultural commentators often maintain that they are simply safe spaces for free speech, for rational dialogue, they often regurgitate already deeply entrenched ideologies and matter of fact knowledge (as in, dominant ideologies) that are characteristic of the upper middle class. In short, a type of bourgeois reactionary thought. The development of the alt-right is a direct consequence of the “woke” movement. The alt-right is in some ways a repurposing of woke strategies in terms of the conservative right, but in most cases the oppressor-oppressed dynamic has been flipped to service the needs of the predominantly white middle class, those who have felt “culturally dispossessed” and a sense of existential dread regarding their cultural identity, while the Woke movement works to systematically bring awareness to and revise the position of privilege they enjoy. Framed in this way, the alt-right is a reactionary discourse.

The term “woke” stems from discourse in black activist circles in America and has been in use as far back as the 1930s, though emerged as a mainstream discourse in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2010. It quickly filtered into a variety of activist discourses, it has subsumed feminism, LGBTQIA+ narratives (but also been fundamental in developing them further). The term itself has developed into a catch-all phrase to delineate a plethora of left-leaning positions, or rather, any positions that do not align with the mainstream status quo of “traditional” American society. It is, on the one hand, a pivotal move of social activism for minorities who do not find their place in, and especially in terms of social norms and legislation, are not represented in “white male-dominated society”. Jean David Ponci provides a description of what he believes is the contradictory logic of the Woke movement:

There are good intentions behind the egalitarian drive of the woke ideology: to protect the most vulnerable. However, this attempt to restore equality based on inequalities paves the way for the arbitrary domination of some over others, as it forces us to prioritize membership of a group over the actual actions and merits of each individual. (Ponci 1)

His key criticism is that ideology introduces a “distinction into the debate [between oppressor and oppressed], denying those in the “privileged” category the right to criticize another group

or even defend themselves, while those outside this category may be aggressive” (Ponci 1). Woke ideology, although its foundations stem from a real liberal impulse for representation and freedom, mobilizes and conflates a whole variety of postmodern, post-structuralist, and Marxist discourses.

Marxist theorists, such as Catherine Liu, are critical of the effect of woke ideology on the broader efficacy of socialism as a real means of resistance for the working class. In *Virtue Hoarders: The Case against the Professional Managerial Class*, she calls out a “world of performative identity and virtue signalling” which, she claims, “stand in the way of social justice and economic redistribution” (Liu 1). Liu elaborated this position in a 2025 article written for the online magazine *Unherd*:

It is critical to attack the authoritarianism at the heart of contemporary liberal politics from the Left: if the Left fails to sound its own alarm about the professional-class takeover of identity and diversity, then the Right will continue to draw upon the rage that animates working-class, non-college-educated people of all races, genders, and sexualities. They have seen liberalism deliver nothing but empty promises of inclusion when they hunger for an actual change in the political field itself. Trump sees the hypocrisy of woke elites and acts as a vehicle for catharsis. (Liu 2025)

Ultimately, what Liu is arguing, in orthodox Marxist terms, is the predominance of bourgeois ideologies that fundamentally represent and speak to the middle class, generally, and have an extremely limited capacity to actually affect real working-class individuals. This is precisely the argument Habermas already put forward in *Legitimation Crisis* about the effect of the public sphere in directing attention away from economic crisis, class crises, and into the realm of cultural crisis. Woke ideology and alt-right ideology represent a bourgeois centric performativity on opposite sides of the spectrum. The working class, then, is liable to being swept up into populist rhetoric like that of Trump⁴⁹. The key argument against woke-ism, according to Liu, is that the Woke movement, in its more radical forms, has hijacked socialism and its legitimacy as an effective means of working-class resistance in the socio-cultural sphere. Similarly, the alt-right has co-opted a plethora of conservative discourses that are otherwise not radical into its cultural sphere and situated them as diametrically opposed to the “radical left”, which, in terms of the alt-right, is populated by woke ideologues.

⁴⁹ What Liu is saying is that, in a healthy political economy, the working class should be rallying around a socialist cause, because its function is, theoretically, to represent workers (Unions). Liu thinks the tragedy is that the working class is pushed to the right through their inability to realise class consciousness. Their inability to realise a class solidarity is through the rhetoric of the right, which transposes class issues into cultural ones (race, immigration, cultural identity etc.)

Both movements respond to a social system that is perceived as illegitimate to the degree that it facilitates systematic threats to their identity. Where the woke left see the structure itself as fundamentally arbitrary and false to begin with, the alt-right sees the structures of society as eroded and in need of revitalization. Regardless of whatever real kernel of truth exists at the root of these two radical forms of left-right ideology, I want to illustrate that they manifest forms of conspiratorial thinking that are fundamentally produced by the Internet and subsequently socialize individuals into approaching socio-political engagement in a conspiratorial logic. The sustained use of social media and online platforms, especially socio-political content, primes the individual to respond with their own paranoid or conspiratorial rationalization of events. This doesn't have to emerge from the individual per se, but can be a product of the individual's subscription to various strands of conspiracy.

7.7 Conspiratorial Discourse on the Internet

The effect of these otherwise radical ideologies is that the circulation of their approaches to content creation, which often include radical and conspiratorial articulations of socio-political spectacle, creates a general milieu of conspiratorial discourse that comes to dominate the content economy of social media platforms⁵⁰. Clare Birchall provides a contemporary formulation of Hofstadter's thesis on "Paranoid Style", which I alluded to previously, and applies it to the developing industry of "conspiracy entrepreneurs". Critically, she also considers the pivotal role that the alt-right movement has played in this phenomenon.

In its most recent manifestation, stoked by a strand of populism that capitalises on ethnonationalism and associated feelings of relative deprivation —“a sense that the wider group [. . .]is being left behind relative to others in society, while culturally liberal politicians, media and celebrities devote far more attention and status to immigrants, ethnic minorities and newcomers”— this market promises “armchair consumers” of entertaining conspiracy fictions that they can be conspiracist “prosumers”. While conspiracists can certainly become active in the co-production of alternative cosmologies through social media and other communal platforms, only certain online conspiracists will make money from this activity. Because of this, an asymmetry between producer and consumer is affirmed at a time when other configurations are technologically more possible than ever. (9)

Crucially, the idea that “the wider group is being left behind relative to others in society” is something that is prominent in both alt-right circles, as well as in the more extreme

⁵⁰ Debord comes to mind here, and also Baudrillard and his concept of simulacra: The performativity of the discourse quickly outruns any tangible link to transformation: it becomes detached and self-perpetuates due to the stimulus it is providing the digital economy with.

articulations of the woke-left and cancel culture. It seems that what we witness on social media is, in some ways, a war, or a competitive market, of conspiracy and counter-conspiracy, as different groups formulate an all-encompassing theory to rationalize the perceived oppression they deem to be central in impeding their sense of identity. I do not mean to posit that on both sides there is a fundamental falsification, but rather that the way in which resistance is framed, and then mobilized through content production, is almost always on the level of a conspiratorial logic.

The proclivity of a conspiracy to elicit fear and mobilize an in-group vs out-group mentality with a Manichean view of good vs evil makes the emergence of this trend understandable. Birchall mentions Donald Trump as a figure encapsulating this particular paranoid style. If we refer back to Habermas, Trump is a symptom of a legitimation crisis. The primary logic behind much of his campaign, in 2016, 2020, and 2024, is the very conspiratorial logic that traditional media is state-run fake news, in service of the liberal “woke cabal”. This logic has other formulations as the “deep-state”, to which Trump promised voters he would “drain the swamp” of corrupt career bureaucrats. Donald Trump, according to Birchall, “does not offer hyper-coherent 'rationalistic' accounts of events” but “repeats the conspiracist crumbs he has picked up during his travels through social media and partisan news” (Birchall 5). For Birchall, Trump appears as a manifestation of the conspiratorial logic of the social media content economy, which has driven his ascent to power in the first place. He is, I would argue, evidence of the postmodern subjectivity where cynicism, paranoia, and conspiratorial logic, as a means of navigating capitalism, are dominant modes of discourse. Again, mirroring earlier arguments of Altheide in that the structure of the net influences these social processes, Birchall notes

[C]onspiracy fragments and memes today often gesture toward and rely on user knowledge of longer form conspiracy theories elsewhere (in books, manifestos, YouTube videos, or longer posts on message boards). What we have today, therefore, is a distributed assemblage of paranoid styles. (4)

Increasingly, on the Internet, content is made by the public for the public. Thus, what drives engagement is the same thing that drives production. (Narita and Morelock 33). In the view of Habermas, what is driving production are necessary socialization processes which help crystallize the production process. In the content economy, especially in advanced capitalism, the increasing trend is a performance of socio-political outrage and spectacle based on conspiratorial logic. Narita and Morelock advance a sentiment that is similar to my reading of Habermas in positing that “[I]nformation technologies and Web 2.0 have rapidly transformed

social life and as such accelerate the social destabilization, role confusion and drift towards ‘normlessness’ endemic to capitalist society” (90). Further, commenting on the nature of digitalized subjectivity, they posit that

In the society of the selfie, the individual relationship with the pressures of the generalized other forces the coexistence of the self with the many worlds represented in the spectacle on social media. The society of the selfie is a fertile terrain for those new dangers since the basic form of sociality is the generalized other and the invisible audience surrounding the profiles and digital activities. (99)

This “generalized other” bears similarity to the argument I am making regarding *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, where the subject engages with, through a mystery, an elusive other which is perceived as bureaucratic in form. This primes individuals to rationalize from a place of conspiratorial logic, which then fuses with market processes of a spectacle-based public sphere to power the content economy. As Narita and Morelock conclude, it is no surprise that cyberspace produces “a mix of hoax and collective traumas about online exhibition, with memes and viral creepy stories that blur fact and fiction” (99).

If one considers Habermas’ articulation of advanced capitalism as characterized by state interference and oligopoly formation, then any acts of resistance become commodified in the form of content. The process is circular; it breeds increasingly higher levels of conspiratorial thinking, which stimulates the marketplace of ideas. This is not to say that ideological entrepreneurs are unaware of what they are doing. This goes for the many individuals buying into various conspiracy theories. However, it is not really the *belief* in the conspiracy that matters, since individuals drawn to conspiratorial thinking have already dispensed with the idea of belief in legitimate knowledge by way of the milieu of cynicism in postmodern culture. Furthermore, since constant deferral of truth is the defining component of a conspiracy theory, when this truth is realized as legitimate, the conspiracy theory ceases to function as a conspiracy. Rather, the common place of the conspiracy consumer is a sort of suspension, in the opium-like effect of excess digital media that conspiratorial logic offers. Thus, what is dominant is the conspiracy as a particular mode of *discourse*.

In the content economy, any given event is dissected from various conspiratorial lenses and projected out to the respective audiences. Conspiracies do not demand the loyalty of ideologies steeped in tradition, such as religions. Rather, the individual assembles before them a sort of encyclopaedia of conspiracies, connecting ones that are adjacent and juxtaposing ones that are in competition. In this way, as I claim, conspiracy becomes the

dominant mode of socio-political discourse and might be seen as a postmodern form of self-reflexive and discursive analysis regarding the social reality of the subject.

7.8 Conclusion: Returning to Pynchon

Returning to Oedipa Maas, one can observe a similar process operating within the The Scope, the Yoyodyne intra-corporation mail network, and the wider underground of San Narciso, where Oedipa perceives the “W.A.S.T.E.” postal network in operation. What occurs is essentially a free market of conspiratorial formulations, which work to uncover and rationalize a “secret” history where those in power have fundamentally manipulated the course of history in their favour, having hijacked means of communication, at the cost of the dispossessed common man. These networks also operate as anti-hegemonic bodies of knowledge, which act as alternatives to legitimate bodies of knowledge. Mike Fallopian is, in some sense, the novel's characterization of an Alex Jones-like conspiracy entrepreneur who trades in conspiratorial logics. He operates on Oedipa as a gateway to conspiratorial logic, much the same way these ideological entrepreneurs of the content economy operate on the Internet user. The contemporary YouTuber user may stumble upon a certain genre of conspiratorial or pseudo-scientific podcasts. If they engage with it, then their algorithm will suggest more and more content of this nature. Suddenly, the contemporary YouTube user starts to see conspiracy everywhere and starts to speak in the language of conspiracy. It becomes a discourse that colours the reality of those who are excessively online. Given the rapid advances of technology and the online industry, modern individuals *are* excessively online. This is similar to how Oedipa's experience in *Crying of Lot 49* is represented. The more she considers the possibility of conspiracy, the more fluent in its language she becomes, the more she starts to see conspiracy everywhere. Rather, similar to the algorithmic processes of social media, it comes to *find* her.

The nexus of the Internet as a market, an ideology pipeline, and a surveillance centre, all concentrated in one medium, has similarities to the situation that Slothrop finds himself in within the “projective test”⁵¹ purportedly designed for him by the White Visitation. Given the endemic crisis effects of capitalism vis-à-vis Legitimation Crisis, the algorithmic nature of the content economy, premised on the capture of user data and browsing habits, works to reinforce the dominant logics in the system which tend towards a conspiratorial rationalization of socio-economic spectacles.

⁵¹ Dealt with in Chapter 5 Section 5.2.

My reading of Pynchon posits that in the reality of *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, the conspiracy is the structure of advanced capitalist society itself, in the form of a bureaucratic capitalist-other. Using Habermas' analysis in *Legitimation Crisis*, I argued that it is the fundamental mechanism of advanced capitalist society, on the level of the system, to migrate what are fundamentally economic and class crises into the sphere of cultural crisis. The absence of traditional institutions of legitimation, which have been eroded by the forces of capitalism, offers no terms with which to rationalize these crisis effects and therefore, individuals revert to conspiratorial logics which work to further defer the realization of crisis effects. This process is visible through the decline of legacy-media institutions in favour of decentralized conspiratorial content.

This goes to show the equivalence of all forms of knowledge on the content economy, where the degree to which it sells, to which users buy into it, dictates its degree of legitimacy. Therefore, again referring to Habermas and the effects of advanced capitalism on legitimation crisis, the market form becomes the legitimating organ of knowledge. This is my reading of Pynchon. It is a reading which, I think, in its focus on the conspiratorial logic of vast interconnected networks of power, accurately describes the contemporary experience of the subject attempting to rationalize the media spectacle of the contemporary content economy on social media platforms.

My core argument in this chapter was that this tension between subject and system, which in advanced capitalist societies produces paranoia, plays out in the performative public sphere in what I labelled the content economy. I posited that due to crises in the legitimation of knowledge, conspiratorial logic emerges as the dominant mode of discourse in the content economy, which is driven by a response to social-political spectacle. I premised this on the notion that the Internet, and the way in which the content economy functions on market principles, naturally enforces conspiratorial logics in an advanced capitalist society that has endemic crisis effects. I framed this argument onto the contemporary movements of alt-right and woke-left, and illustrated how they influence a market competition of conspiratorial theories.

My conclusion is that Pynchon portrays subjects who, through his use of the mystery-form, engage in conspiratorial logic in order to resist a capitalist "other". I argue that the tension between subject and system, and the mobilization of conspiratorial logic as a necessary effect of the socialization processes of advanced capitalism underlies much of *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon provides a strong literary representation of what is an analogous picture of the contemporary subject navigating the vast, decentralized,

and de-legitimized bodies of knowledge on the Internet, and being conditioned by that very structure, and its fusion with late-stage capitalist society, into conspiratorial discourse.

Briefly, in these concluding remarks, I would like to draw attention to some of the finer details of the argument and clarify, perhaps, its limits. The first is the use of analogy and, contained therein, frequent reference to mimesis. The greatest danger of an overreliance on analogy seems to be that in the process, one separates what could be two entities as “different” but also “similar”: “x” is like “y” because they are both structured on “a”, “b” and “c”, but x cannot be reduced to y because they are ultimately particular instances which share similarities. The risk here is that one tends to erase the historical significance of both entities whilst also glossing over the fact that there is a causal continuity between them, where one entity may follow from another, but not necessarily along the causal logic the argument implies. I am speaking here, of course, about the tendency to argue that Thomas Pynchon’s writing in the 1960s and 1970s presents a direct analogy to our own contemporary era. I am also referring to the problem with positing a contemporary era from within that timeframe itself while not knowing where in a retroactive historical analysis we may sit: in the middle of an epoch, at the end, or at the start? And I am acknowledging the ways in which this blurs the historical intricacies of both points in time, as well as the causal chain (in all its contingency) that is glossed over in viewing both these objects (Pynchon in the 1960s and 1970s, and contemporary society) as separate, parallel objects of study. So, it is true that Pynchon’s time and our own time are distinct contexts, but it is also true that one follows from the other. What I have been trying to show is the development of a certain cultural impulse (let us say postmodernity) as it matures (this is neither a positive nor a negative connotation) into a more intensified form. The arrogance is, perhaps, that I am indeed arguing, or searching for, some sort of causal link between the two contexts. That link, I argue frequently, is the environment of late-stage-capitalism, and in other instances, the effect of an age of “American hegemony”. There is underneath this analysis, a strong politico-historical impulse that tends to periodize culture through the dominant imperial hegemon of that time, hence the frequent use of Althusser and his views on ideology, as well as his figuration of base-superstructure. Pynchon is both a product and a critique of this “imperial hegemon”. The effect of this gambit is that Pynchon’s literature has its status as literature erased in favour of a broader sociological argument. I attribute this to the materialist approach I take to theory itself, where it is framed as ultimately a function of some broader realist socio-political reality. Here is, again, a strong Marxist/historical materialist impulse emerging from this thesis that may overpower its status as a literary analysis.

The other element of this endeavour is the frequent reference to mimesis, particularly that Pynchon's work is mimetic of postmodernity. The *faux pas* in arguing this way is the inference that Pynchon is conducting a 1:1 to representation of postmodern culture through his texts, and in examining those texts, we can construct a 1:1 analogy to modern cyber-culture. While at times the argument tends in this direction, the intention was to hone in on how Pynchon's work and the experience of cyber-culture both exist as products of, as well as reflections of, postindustrial society. Pynchon, in this way, is "eerily prophetic" only in the sense that he is engaging with a more "juvenile" (in the sense of its intensity) form of the culture we interact with today. It is not so much that he foresees the advent of the internet and the birth of globalized cyber-culture, but that he is writing in a time when the foundations of that culture were already firmly in place, and we, in the 2020s, are interacting with peak of that cultural impulse, the same way one might (as I do) argue that the cultural impulses of the Enlightenment peak in World War II. This is, again, ultimately a gambit of positing a causal connection, which one cannot fully account for no matter how strong their argumentation is.

Finally, on this note, I became aware very early on in the construction of this argument that I have been, in a way, either mimicking Pynchon, or suffering from the very same destabilizing paranoia I interrogate. The structure of my argument itself, is presented very much in a conspiratorial lens. I found this meta-awareness to be a source of irony throughout the construction of the thesis. Whether it is, in some roundabout way, a subtle confirmation of my argument, that indeed modern individuals tend towards conspiratorial forms of discourse, or whether this is a form circular reasoning which led me into a self-confirming argument, I cannot say.

The last remark, and one that is not given adequate attention throughout the thesis (perhaps because as a, phenomenon itself, it is still highly ambiguous), is the advent and proliferation of A.I. If the Internet can be seen as another evolution in a postmodern consciousness, as it inherits and reshapes the world of written text, radio, and telephone, then A.I can be seen as the next exponential jump. What is perhaps the most interesting aspect of A.I is how some of the aspects of this thesis, particularly epistemological destabilization, the eroding agency of the human subject, and the interference of large corporations on knowledge production, are intensified even further with the advent of A.I. The same way the Internet, at first, brought with it extreme quality of life improvements, it has also, as I have argued, brought with it a widespread restructuring of the way subjects conceive of themselves and their environment. While Pynchon gives us small hints of curiosity at this (let us not forget Byron The Bulb from *Gravity's Rainbow*), the general body of theory that this thesis

engages with, and further articulations of the postmodern condition, I believe, certainly will be bound up with the contemplation of A.I, which is perhaps the next “hyper-object” of the coming era.

Finally, returning to the main thread of my conclusion: In the wake of a milieu of cynicism through the perceived *illegitimacy* of institutions of knowledge legitimation, what is most available to the postmodern subject is indeed conspiratorial logic. In an age where individuals feel so disempowered politically, so disorientated by the complexity of postmodernity, conspiracy theory returns to the individual a sense of socio-political agency that was otherwise lost through traditional avenues of political representation, and socio-political discourse. Whether or not this phenomenon is positive, in an emancipatory sense, or negative, as a form of alienation, remains to be seen. The argument I have presented has certainly tended towards the latter. What is evident, however, and what Pynchon seems touch on in his literature, is that in such an environment, individuals use conspiracy in order to ground themselves, and reclaim a sense of agency, through the “meaningful” ontology that conspiratorial discourses provide. My central claim, the quilting point between Pynchon’s representations of paranoia, and a consideration of the “postmodern” culture of the 2020s, has been that it is the Internet – cyberspace – that generates, and perpetuates, these discourses as a mainstream social practice.

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