“The Pure Event”—Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo

J.J.H.L. Gourley

Doctor of Philosophy

2011

University of Western Sydney

© James Gourley 2011
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

........................................
Note on the Text

Thomas Pynchon’s use of stylised ellipses throughout his novels creates difficulty in distinguishing authorial omissions in quotations. Pynchon’s ellipses relevant to a quotation have been included in their original form (…), whilst authorial omissions are indicated by an ellipsis in square brackets […]. To maintain clarity, all authorial omissions from others works are also indicated by an ellipsis in square brackets.
Acknowledgements

To my colleagues at the School of Humanities and Languages, and the Writing and Society Research Group at the University of Western Sydney, from who I received a great deal of support. Many thanks for the assistance, encouragement, and intellectual guidance provided by Chris Conti, Ben Denham, Gavin Smith, Michael Symonds, and Marise Williams. Jason Tuckwell proved a constant foil, engaging concepts in discussion and providing an example of intellectual rigour. Thank you to Chris Peterson, whose analysis of earlier versions of this work was of great assistance. And, of course, my complete gratitude to Anthony Uhlmann, whose clarity of mind and breadth of knowledge provided great assistance throughout my candidature.

To my friends, who ensured I maintained perspective throughout the last four years. Special thanks must go to Nick Felton.

And to my family, who I cherish always. Thanks to John, Odette, Jackie, Lil, Leigh, Pete, Jo, and Pam.

To Nikki.

There at the beginning, and at the end.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figures</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mao II: Pre-figurations of Terrorist Temporality</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Futurity of the 10\textsuperscript{th} of September</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckett’s <em>Proust</em> and <em>Falling Man</em></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>At: Pre-cursors to Pynchon’s Reconsideration of Temporality in Gravity’s Rainbow</strong></td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Inherent Vice</em> and the Chronotope</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures

1. Mourning Crowd at Khomeini’s Funeral, 5 June 1989 38
2. The Perpetrators of the September 11, 2001 Attacks 129
3. Botticelli, La Carte de L’Enfer 190
4. Tarot Card XV 205
5. The Light Cone 223
6. Caravaggio, The Taking of Christ 244
8. Seurat, Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte 253
9. Boccioni, The Street Enters the House 265
10. Balla, Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash 268
Abstract

"The Pure Event"—Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo’ examines the influence of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the oeuvres of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo. This analysis begins from the viewpoint that the 9/11 attacks constitute an event, following the paradigm established by influential thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, that precipitates change not only in the political sphere, but in the cultural sphere as well. The 9/11 attacks constitute the beginning of the 21st century, and engender a new approach to the role of art, and especially of literature in America, and the West.

The primary focus of this thesis is to explicate the ways in which Pynchon and DeLillo have grappled with the changes wrought by these terrorist attacks. This thesis contends that the primary focus of both authors is time, and that after the 9/11 attacks, the conception, and presentation, of time changes for both authors. The work begins with reference to Georg Lukács, who, writing on the development of the novel as the outstanding, and dominant, literary form of the twentieth century, argues that the twin concepts of form, and of time, provide the constitutive elements for the groundbreaking author to represent modernity in their work. This thesis then harnesses these concepts, arguing that there is an identifiable change within the works of DeLillo and Pynchon in their output before, and after, 9/11.

In ‘Mao II: Pre-Figurations of Terrorist Temporality’, DeLillo’s 1991 novel is examined, identified as an exemplar of DeLillo’s approach to time, and to terrorism, before 9/11. This approach is complicated by the fact that Mao II has been repeatedly invoked in the aftermath of 2001, as ‘prophetic’, a novel that seems to anticipate the
concerns of the post-9/11 world. With reference to the DeLillo Archives held at the University of Texas at Austin, Mao II is explicated through George Steiner’s In Bluebeard’s Castle, a work that formulates DeLillo’s pre-9/11 approach to terrorism. Time in this novel is accelerated, a phenomenon that DeLillo argues in his first response to the 9/11 attacks, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, is no longer possible.

In ‘The Futurity of the 10th of September’, this thesis examines DeLillo’s novel Cosmopolis, which stands at the cusp of the September 11 attacks—written before the events, but published after. Much of the critical attention afforded this novel was focused on the supposed prophetic elements of this novel, and indeed, DeLillo has done much to promote this view. This chapter takes a contrary view, arguing that DeLillo is, in fact, reiterating an understanding of temporality that is still uninflected by the ‘pure event’ of 9/11. This is achieved through a focus on DeLillo’s understanding of Paul Virilio’s concept of dromology, and the allusion to Virilio’s work throughout Cosmopolis. Incorporated throughout this chapter is the development of the twin concepts of parachronism and prochronism—two concepts that serve to provide further complexity to the concept of anachronism, from which they are derived. In essence, as with Cosmopolis’ perceived straddling of 9/11, parachronism and prochronism refer respectively to the incorporation of the past into the present, and the future into the present.

In ‘Beckett’s Proust and Falling Man’ we encounter DeLillo’s ‘9/11 novel’, his specific response to the September 11 attacks. The attacks are an inescapable presence within Falling Man, the main character of the novel emerging from the wreckage of the Twin Towers as the novel begins. In this chapter, Samuel Beckett’s strong
influence on DeLillo is explicated, and especially DeLillo’s allusion to Beckett’s monograph on the author of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. What we discover is that DeLillo seems to have mapped Beckett’s conceptualisation of time, habit, and memory, onto the narrative of *Falling Man*. In this sense, DeLillo’s 9/11 novel presents a new conceptualisation of time, and one that revels in the complexities of time, and especially in the contemplation of what time is.

‘Δt: Pre-cursors to Pynchon’s Reconsideration of Temporality in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’ serves to begin an analysis of Pynchon’s approach to time. The main motif of Pynchon’s most famous novel—the V-2 rocket—serves to elucidate the complexity of time. The V-2 is confounding precisely because it subverts the normal process of time; that is, the rocket arrives before its sound. Identifying this motif as emblematic, this chapter then analyses further examples of Pynchon’s manipulation of time. The chapter concludes with reference to the emerging interpretation of the novel as incorporating elements of prochronism, albeit in a defiantly complex manner. The novel, set in the period during the conclusion, and aftermath, of the Second World War, appears to be written from the viewpoint of a character participating in the Vietnam War. In this sense, we can begin to understand the complex manipulations of time within Pynchon’s work.

In ‘The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell’ Pynchon’s 2006 novel *Against the Day* is the focus. The novel is interpreted, at least in part, as a response to the 9/11 attacks, the events which are related, through prochronism, early in the novel. Pynchon’s representation of the 9/11 attacks is rendered more complex through his accompanying series of parachronistic references to Dante’s *Inferno* from his
Commedia, which parallels the destruction of the September 11 attacks. The incorporation of hell into the world of Against the Day also resonates with Pynchon’s reference to the concept of eternal return. This concept is addressed in relation to the novel’s Dantean frame of reference, addressing eternal return as it is posited by both Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze.

With Pynchon having established this anachronistic approach to time, the chapter then explores four concepts that serve to elucidate Pynchon’s manipulation of time, these being bilocation, time travel, the possibility of counter-worlds posited within the novel, and Pynchon’s use of mathematical analogy as a means of analysing temporality within the novel. This chapter also examines Pynchon’s allusion to Zeno’s Paradoxes and the interrogation of time contained in this ancient example. What emerges is Pynchon’s reconceptualisation of temporality—he posits an understanding of time that brings together the concepts of parachronism and prochronism and seeks to present a novel that looks both to the past, and to the future, to understand the present.

In ‘Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto’ the focus is the visual arts, and the role they play in Against the Day. Pynchon develops his reconceptualisation of time with reference to the Futurists, the movement begun by Filippo Marinetti in 1909. This chapter argues that present throughout Pynchon’s reference to the visual arts is the work of Henri Bergson, who, through the concepts of simultaneity and dynamism, provides a framework for the reconsideration of time that Pynchon pursues.
Finally, in ‘Inherent Vice and the Chronotope’ the concepts explored above are related to Pynchon’s latest release. Although Inherent Vice may be more easily linked with his other detective-style novel, The Crying of Lot 49, this novel is interpreted as continuing on the project begun in Against the Day, that of the reconsideration of time precipitated by the 9/11 attacks. This chapter examines Pynchon’s presentation of the internet (a technology just emerging during the period of the novel), and what Pynchon calls ‘Doper’s Memory’, in relation to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope—a theorisation of the novel that focuses on the author’s presentation of time, privileging temporality even over the spatial. Inherent Vice incorporates elements of both parachronism and prochronism, and serves to reinforce the discoveries made above.

““The Pure Event”—Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo’ functions primarily as a work of literary criticism. The thesis does not, ultimately, seek to analyse the actual effect of the 9/11 attacks, so much as the response to the 9/11 attacks that these two emblematic authors (both New Yorkers, both the canonical authors of American late modernism and early postmodernism) provide. Although Pynchon and DeLillo’s responses to the 9/11 attacks differ, especially in their conceptualisation of the temporal breadth of the September 11 attacks, what is undeniable is the fact that both respond to the attacks with recourse to time, and an awareness that for art to maintain its power in the 21st century, a reconsideration of temporality is required within their work.
Introduction

The terrorist attacks on the 11th of September, 2001, comprised the flying of American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 into the World Trade Centre, American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon building in Virginia, and a failed attempt upon a target in Washington D.C. in which the passengers and crew of United Airlines Flight 93 diverted the aeroplane from its intended target, which ultimately saw the aeroplane crash into farmland in Pennsylvania. The attacks resulted in the loss of almost 3000 lives, including all 19 of the hijackers aboard the four flights. The terrorist attacks have become the focal point of American foreign policy in the 21st century and have heavily influenced the allied military action in both Iraq and Afghanistan. As such, the 9/11 attacks stand as the conclusion of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st—the 11th of September attacks transformed both America, and the world, producing a new era in which the threat of guerrilla-style attacks upon Western sovereign nations became reality. The violence of these attacks seems to have somehow been removed from the collective memory, and yet September 11 stands as an event, and a concept, that has dominated the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The 9/11 attacks prompted a great outpouring of writing, affecting a number of disciplines, amongst them most notably philosophy and literature. Jacques Derrida called the 9/11 events a trauma, though not as concerning as the “threat that is worse and still to come” whilst Judith Butler saw them as the manifestation of an

---

“unexpected and fully terrible experience of violence”.\textsuperscript{4} Whilst accepting that the major twentieth century thinkers have all contributed to a conceptual analysis of the event, I wish, however, throughout this dissertation to analyse the effects of the 9/11 attacks on the literary milieu of the United States. This is not to elide the importance of those dominating figures—instead my project focuses on the means through which American letters has attempted to grapple with these events. I will refer to philosophical and theoretical analyses of 9/11, but my main focus will always be the literary response to 9/11, with theoretical and critical works assisting my interpretative focus. In doing this, I have chosen to focus on two emblematic American authors, Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, for a number of reasons. First, both DeLillo and Pynchon are canonical authors of the twentieth century, and as such reflect the dominant cultural focus of their peers and of the American, and Western, literary scene. Secondly, both are long-time residents of New York City, and, as such, were radically affected by the 9/11 attacks, especially considering their proximity to the World Trade Centre complex. And thirdly, as I will argue below, both DeLillo and Pynchon develop novels that specifically respond to the 9/11 attacks, comprising part of the ‘9/11 novel’ genre, that includes a large array of both American, Western, and international authors and their responses to the paradigmatic attacks on the United States.\textsuperscript{5}


Mikhail Bakhtin argues that changes in the novel are always precipitated by changes in society—it is the formative events of the world that alter the formal strictures of the novel. Indeed, almost all of the theorists and philosophers that I refer to throughout this work focus on the fact that changes in the nature of the novel are engendered by concomitant changes in society. Thus, my primary focus is on the September 11 attacks, the transformative event, and the novel, the artistic form so clearly affected by the 9/11 attacks.

Throughout my argument I will return repeatedly to the question of time; it is my contention that the most noticeable, but also the most logical, change we can identify in the novels of both Pynchon and DeLillo after the 9/11 attacks is a change in the conceptualisation, and also the quality, of time. This is what Shawn Smith calls “the torturing of time […] in narrative, to conform to a damaged perception of the world.”

Although the damage that changes the perception of the world is not, for Smith in regard to Gravity’s Rainbow, the 9/11 attacks but an earlier trauma, the push toward a temporal focus is the same. Time can be understood to mean many things—time is not only time as we perceive it in our world, but also the linear (or otherwise) time of narrative, the concept of duration, but also, and tellingly, the ‘time’ in which we live. Considering the multiplicity of ideas encapsulated within the concept and the obvious relationship between the 9/11 attacks and a change in time, it is no wonder that DeLillo and Pynchon attempt to work through a reconsideration of time within their

---


novels produced after September 11. What I will emphasise throughout, however, is that time is not only a concern for both authors after the September 11 attacks. Rather, what we can identify in their works is a change in the consideration, and nature of time, by comparing novels written both before and after those events.

Don DeLillo’s essay, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, published less than two months after the September 11 attacks, provides an effective framework to introduce the many issues that the transformative events of September 2001 have produced. DeLillo argues, as we will also see in ‘The Futurity of the 10th of September’, below, that America at the conclusion of the 20th century had established itself as a technological, economic, and political powerhouse that was functioning permanently “in the future”.\(^8\) This futurity is emblematised by the Twin Towers, the image of American might that DeLillo has depicted repeatedly throughout his oeuvre, the buildings that Habermas describes as a “powerful […] projection toward the future.”\(^9\) As DeLillo continues on, we are able to see the transformative shift he identifies in the 9/11 attacks, writing: “[a]ll this changed on September 11.”\(^10\) He writes:

> Today, again, the world narrative belongs to terrorists. But the primary target of the men who attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Center was not the global economy. It is America that drew their fury. It is the high gloss of our modernity. It is the thrust of our technology. It is our perceived godlessness. It is the blunt force of our foreign policy. It is the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, every home, life, and mind.\(^11\)

DeLillo lists precisely those elements that define the America that both Pynchon and DeLillo wish, not to reject, but to critique, to analyse, and to reconsider. We can also

see the beginnings of a turn towards the concept of time in the early stages of DeLillo’s essay. The concept of America (and, I would argue, the West) living ‘in the future’ is one that DeLillo explored in his novel *Cosmopolis* written before the 9/11 attacks and published after. DeLillo argues that the “catastrophic event changes the way we think and act, moment to moment, week to week, for unknown weeks and months to come, and steely years.”12 This change is not simply a reconsideration of the position of the United States in the world, but something far more pressing. As DeLillo argues, “[t]he terrorists of September 11 want to bring back the past.”13 It is precisely this pressure, the uncertainty surrounding time in the years after the 9/11 attacks that is the focus of this work. It is neatly encapsulated in the title of DeLillo’s essay, in which the often-desired progress of the West is now in ruins, ruins that remain in the future, struggling against the push back into the past that DeLillo sees as the main aim of the 9/11 attacks.

Indeed, Thomas Pynchon has also provided some small hints as to his interest in time as well. In Pynchon’s 2003 ‘Foreword’ to the centenary edition (of George Orwell’s birth) of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Pynchon analyses the novel in regard to two competing elements, prophecy and prediction. Prediction, Pynchon argues, is encapsulated by “a game some critics like to play, worth maybe a minute and a half of diversion, in which one makes lists of what Orwell did and didn’t ‘get right.’”14 Dismissing prediction, Pynchon valorises prophecy, writing:

---

What is perhaps more important, indeed necessary, to a working
prophet, is to be able to see deeper than most of us into the human
soul.\textsuperscript{15}

Pynchon’s lauding of Orwell’s prophetic ability illustrates a growing awareness of
time, and especially the ability of an author to incorporate elements of what he or she
anticipates in the future into the present of their writing. To be sure, Pynchon’s
comment does not reach the level of complexity with which DeLillo analyses time, but
it nonetheless illustrates Pynchon’s awareness of the political, and artistic,
implications of considering time, only a year or so after the 9/11 attacks. Pynchon’s
approval of Orwell’s prophetic focus also reflects back on to his works. Aside from \textit{V.}
and \textit{The Crying of Lot 49} all of Pynchon’s subsequent novels retreat into the past,
seemingly seeking the answers to the current state of America, and the world, not in
the present, but always in the past.\textsuperscript{16} In the same way that Dante temporally positioned
his \textit{Commedia} around 20 years before the period in which he wrote the work,
Pynchon, by focusing on the past, affords himself, and his works, a position of
enforced prophecy. That is, the author, with the benefit of having lived in the period
after the temporal focus of his work, is able to reflect upon the influences these past
incidents have had on his present.

Georg Lukács, one of the outstanding twentieth century theorists of the novel, focuses
in his text, \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, on what he identifies as the “utopian” aspects of
the novel, but also on the utopian nature of his conceptualisation of the novel.\textsuperscript{17} The

\textsuperscript{15} Pynchon, ‘Foreword’, p. xvi.
\textsuperscript{16} Burns presents a slightly different interpretation of Pynchon’s historic
focus, writing: “Pynchon creates a form of history that stages an exchange between the past and the present.” See Burns, C.,
\textsuperscript{17} Lukács, G., \textit{The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic
‘utopian’ nature of the novel that Lukács identifies is what I believe, we can see in the
novels of both Pynchon and DeLillo—a search for the root cause of the direction in
which our society is heading, and a wish to propose an alternative view—not
necessarily to alter the course in which society is heading, but at the very least to
acknowledge the possibility of other avenues for society to take.\textsuperscript{18} I also link Lukács
with Pynchon and DeLillo because they are two of the very few authors in American
literature, writing in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century who can be said to give “form to the extensive
totality of life, drama to the extensive totality of existence.”\textsuperscript{19} Lukács is here talking
about the epic form, which he argues is the literary style which produces the impetus
toward the emergence of what we now understand as the novel. I would argue,
however, following on from Edward Mendelson, whose work is reconsidered and
extended by Franco Moretti, that we can identify in the works of both Pynchon and
DeLillo an encyclopaedic structure that is the modern correlate of the ancient epic
form.\textsuperscript{20}

The motivation for DeLillo’s \textit{Falling Man} and Pynchon’s \textit{Against the Day}, as I argue
in the main sections of this text, is to grapple with the changes in the world that have
been created by the 9/11 attacks. In this sense, my argument can be seen to be in
accord with Lukács, who argues that:

\begin{quote}
The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God […]
the objectivity of the novel is the mature man’s knowledge that
meaning can never quite penetrate reality, but that, without meaning,
reality would disintegrate into the nothingness of inessentiality.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} cf. Henry Veggian’s discussion of Lukács, and the theorist’s intersection with Pynchon’s work in his
\textsuperscript{19} Lukács, \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{20} See Mendelson, E., ‘Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon’, in \textit{Modern Language Notes},
\textsuperscript{21} Lukács, \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, p. 88.
In DeLillo and Pynchon’s responses to 9/11 their main aim is always to attempt to make clear the link between reality and meaning—indeed to produce some form of meaning from the events of the 11th of September—the same event that Jean Baudrillard argues is a response to the lack of meaning within the Western world. Indeed, what these authors are responding to is “the absolute event […] the pure event uniting within itself all the events that have never taken place.” Baudrillard’s classification of the 9/11 attacks is crucial to my work for it emphasises the period of ennui (interestingly, a focus also for George Steiner in In Bluebeard’s Castle, which will be examined in ‘Mao II: Pre-figurations of Terrorist Temporality’) that existed before the September 11 attacks—a vacuity that is ended by the artistic impulse to grapple with the 9/11 event. Baudrillard’s argument also informs my focus on time throughout this work, with his emphasis on the modernity of the conflict after the 9/11 attacks suggestive of a change in the nature of the world, and crucially, of the nature of time.

It says much for the artistic integrity of both DeLillo and Pynchon that their responses to the 9/11 attacks focus not on the outrage and the indignity that was experienced by America and the West, but rather, they have seen a path for re-evaluation through the reconsideration of time. The move toward a reconceptualisation of time has the additional purpose of reorienting the artistic reaction to the 9/11 attacks not to politics, or to foreign policy, but back onto the purpose or art, and of literature, itself. The beginning of the 21st century might be seen as a time for introspection, a time for analysis, in opposition to the largesse of the end of the 20th century, paralleled in the

---

excess of the 19th century fin de siècle, coincidentally the period which Pynchon returns to in what I will argue is very specifically his ‘9/11 novel’. What is finally at stake for both Pynchon and DeLillo is precisely the value, purpose, and form of the novel itself.

It is significant that in Lukács’ analysis of the modern novel, and the development of a synthetic form which incorporates elements of both the epic and novel form, that he focuses on time. Lukács acknowledges the difficulty for the novelist in grappling with time, for it is “that ungraspable, invisibly moving substance”.24 Crucially, however, the method through which the author can attempt to wrestle with the concept of time is through the formal requirements of the novel, or what Lukács terms the “form-giving” imperative of the author.25 Both DeLillo and Pynchon’s focus on time follows a similar path to that which Lukács identifies, utilising time as the constitutive focus, both of narrative, but of conceptual breadth within the work as well.

Hence, Lukács posits two alternatives, seeking to distinguish the epic and the novel’s approach to time. He writes:

> Only in the novel, whose very matter is seeking and failing to find the essence, is time posited together with the form: time is the resistance of the organic—which possesses a mere semblance of life—to the present meaning, the will of life to remain within its own completely enclosed immanence.26

This is a relatively cool position to take on the form of the novel and would seem to posit the novel as, although entertaining, unable to reach the kernel of vitality, the

---

truth of existence which is the root of the epic. Only a few pages on Lukács returns to
the same question, this time addressing the conceptualisation of time within the epic.
He writes:

[... ] there spring experiences of time which are authentically epic
because they give rise to action and stem from action: the experiences
of hope and memory; experiences of time which are victories over
time: a synoptic vision of time as solidified unity ante rem and its
synoptic comprehension post rem [... ] in them the form-giving sense
of comprehending a meaning; they are experiences in which we come
as near as we can, in a world forsaken by God, to the essence of
things.\textsuperscript{27}

In my mind this is exactly what we see in the post-9/11 works of both Pynchon and
DeLillo. There is no doubt, and especially if we consider Baudrillard’s analysis of the
9/11 attacks, that we have experienced an event that opens out the possibilities of
analysing the visceral reality of existence, hence my reference to Baudrillard’s
classification of 9/11 as ‘the pure event’—and this reality is specifically accessed
through analysis and consideration of time. Both Pynchon and DeLillo, do finally
‘comprehend a meaning’ in their reaction to the September 11 attacks. Precisely in this
sense can we then understand Lukács’ reference to “real time—Bergson’s durée”,
which we will see discussed in regard to DeLillo’s Cosmopolis and Falling Man, as
well as Pynchon’s Against the Day.\textsuperscript{28} Lukács also refers to memory, which he calls the
“creative force affecting and transforming” the author’s work.\textsuperscript{29} The temporal
conception of memory is analysed specifically in regard to DeLillo’s work, but is, of
course, always present, operating, as both DeLillo and Pynchon are, under the
oppressive cultural memory of an event that is already almost ten years past, and yet
retains its presence and its immediacy, not only in the memory, but throughout the
world.

\textsuperscript{27} Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, p. 124. (Lukács’ emphasis).
\textsuperscript{28} Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{29} Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, p. 127.
Parachronism and Prochronism

Central to the conceptual focus of my work throughout this thesis are the twin concepts of parachronism and prochronism. I cannot claim these concepts as my own, for they are extant within the Oxford English Dictionary. Parachronism and prochronism are crucial concepts, functioning as they do to emphasise the temporal complexities that are elided within the more general term ‘anachronism’.

Anachronism can literally refer to the incorporation of temporal elements from either the past or the future, whilst I define parachronism as the incorporation of temporal elements from the past into the present of the literary work, and prochronism as the incorporation of temporal elements from the future into the present of the literary work.  

The development of these two concepts also has the associated benefit of emphasising the complexity of temporality as it is engaged with by both Pynchon and DeLillo, not only in their writing after 9/11, but throughout their oeuvres. Complex narratalogical temporality can be seen most clearly in Pynchon’s work, in which each novel seems to provide an anachronistic reference, whether parachronistic or prochronistic, to another time period, usually examining relationships between the present of a novel to a period from the past, thus producing an emphasis on the perspective that can be gained through this approach. The most commented upon of Pynchon’s manipulations of temporality can be seen in Mason & Dixon, in which the early development of America is analysed from a temporal standpoint that can include references to characters that remind us of the television age: “a […] nautical-looking Indiv. with

30 The two terms provide an extra layer of detail to the concept of anachronism that fits neatly with, and affirms, James Der Derian’s approach to 9/11 as a conflict that is both “new and old.” See Der Derian, J., ‘The War of Networks’, in Theory & Event, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2001, 7.
gigantick Fore-Arms, and one Eye ever a-Squint from the Smoke of his Pipe”\textsuperscript{31} saying “I am that which I am”,\textsuperscript{32} suggest the impinging of the future into the novel, as does Pynchon’s tongue in cheek reference to the “Italian Wedding Fake Book, by Deleuze & Guattari” which he includes in \textit{Vineland}.\textsuperscript{33} Although DeLillo does, on occasion, adopt a similar approach to Pynchon and present a modern analysis of previous events (most notably in \textit{Underworld} and \textit{Libra}), DeLillo seems to prefer a focus on events occurring in the present, what he calls in \textit{The Body Artist}, the “unrolling into moments” of time in our world.\textsuperscript{34} More crucial than the manipulation of time, for DeLillo, is time’s theorisation. Thus, throughout \textit{The Body Artist}, even in the “dead times” time is still the motivating factor—the desire to continually strive to understand time in its entirety.\textsuperscript{35}

Lukács includes a comment in \textit{The Theory of the Novel} which I believe illustrates the importance of these twin concepts, and also the importance that I have placed on them in regard to DeLillo and Pynchon’s works, and to the novel as concept. Lukács writes:

\begin{quote}
That is why it is not only the sole possible \textit{a priori} condition for a true, totality-creating objectivity but also why it makes that totality—the novel—the representative art-form of our age: because the structural categories of the novel constitutively coincide with the world as it is today.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

There is much to be made from this comment. Lukács is initially arguing for the novel, as form, to have emerged organically out of the condition of the world. What flows from this, however, when considered with the twin concepts of parachronism and

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{32} Pynchon, \textit{Mason & Dixon}, p. 486.
\textsuperscript{35} For an engaging discussion on the Heideggerian influence on DeLillo in \textit{The Body Artist} that falls outside the focal scope of this work, see Bonca, C., ‘Being, Time, and Death in DeLillo’s \textit{The Body Artist}, in \textit{Pacific Coast Philology}, Vol. 37, 2002, pp. 61-67.
\textsuperscript{36} Lukács, \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, p. 93.
\end{footnotes}
prochronism, is that this is exactly what constitutes the world of the 21st century—combined temporal pressures, both on the past and the future, reminiscent of the argument that DeLillo proposes in ‘In the Ruins of the Future’. Jacques Derrida takes the ironies inherent in the dual temporalities of the West to their final extreme when he argues that we may view the 9/11 attacks one day as emerging from the “archaic theater of violence” contrasted with potential attacks on the “computer and informational networks” that the West depends upon. The accelerating emergence of technology seems to be combined, in the West, with a return to nostalgia, an attempt to understand how to marry together the competing pressures not only on the world, but also on the time of the world. If we can maintain an awareness of the pressures from both the past and the future, as both DeLillo and Pynchon have, we can aspire to represent the totality of the world today.

Finally, we must consider one more influence on the work of both Pynchon and DeLillo. DeLillo has himself enunciated it clearly, when he wrote that, after the 9/11 attacks, “the world narrative belongs to terrorists.” He continues on, later in the essay, stating: “[t]he narrative ends in the rubble, and it is left to us to create the counter narrative.” It is the second half of this comment that is most crucial. Perhaps the most powerful effect the 9/11 attacks have had on art, and especially on literature, is to place into relief the urgency with which it is incumbent upon literature to assert its primacy, and the importance of its position in representing the world. In this sense, the works that we will encounter below reflect an urgent and obvious desire not to

40 DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 34.
reconceptualise the novel, but to reclaim the work of art as an important, human, and applicable performance of the reality of our experience.\textsuperscript{41} This is what Peter Boxall, in his discussion of \textit{Falling Man} as counternarrative argues is a “poetic utopianism”, illustrating the explicit focus of DeLillo’s call after the 9/11 attacks.\textsuperscript{42} What we encounter in the novels analysed below is the counter-narrative, not only to the position of flux the West has been placed in, but also to the irrelevancy art and literature was moving toward in an era in which the technological seemed to be on the verge of sweeping all before it.

\textbf{Pynchon and DeLillo}

I have addressed my decision to pair the works of Pynchon and DeLillo, described by David Cowart with some little irony as “the mythic cousins of American postmodernism”, above.\textsuperscript{43} I wish, however, to readdress this issue with reference to one’s opinion of the other, contained in a letter that, as far as I am aware, has not been made available in this format beforehand. The letter is from Don DeLillo to the noted literary critic and novelist Frank Lentricchia, an author whose publications have guided some of my work throughout this text. The letter was most likely written after 1996, and sets out DeLillo’s thoughts on his contemporary, on \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, and on James Wood’s unequivocal analysis of modern fiction, from which the term ‘hysterical realism’ emerged. I include here DeLillo’s letter in full aside from some personal remarks contained in a two-sentence final paragraph, as I copied it from the

\textsuperscript{41} This is then, in effect, the same response that Derrida calls for when he states that 9/11 should engender “a response that calls into question […] the most deep-seated conceptual presuppositions in philosophical discourse […] a reflection on philosophy”. For Pynchon and DeLillo, the first of Derrida’s calls is heeded, whilst the second is melded to their own purposes, a reflection on art. See Borradori, \textit{Philosophy in a Time of Terror}, p. 100. (Derrida’s emphasis).


DeLillo archives at the University of Texas at Austin, including as close to the original as possible, DeLillo’s emendations.

Aug 15

Dear Frank

The importance of Gravity’s Rainbow is that it gave American writing an unapologetic global range—even a sort of cosmic range. It made a world with enough psychic links to the real world to induce in readers a new kind of referential relationship to the inner and outer hemispheres of their experience. GR made people extend their natural networks (forgive the term) deeper into the mysterious spaces between what they see and what they half-perceive and half-dream. His earlier work did this too. But GR dealt with mass death and global war and had a kind of operatic scope—Wagnerian, Jungian etc.

I was never very fond of TP’s college humour or some of the other things Wood brings up. But look at it this way: Hemingway died one day and Pynchon was born the next. The new creature was necessarily radically different—even a little deformed. Mostly he was new.

I’m not an expert, even remotely, on his work. I have practically nothing to say about M&D. Have not gone deeply into it. Maybe soon. Maybe never. I think he deserves to be a force in our literature. I also think his supporters have staked so much conviction and trust and belief in his work that they can’t bear not to praise it, even when they don’t know what it is they’re praising.

Wood’s piece, like such pieces in general, is a response to the earlier pieces that have appeared about M&D. And his sense that TP’s allegories are tyrannical and that his belief in plurality is inflexible is a pretty desperate ploy. But I’m sure he also makes some worthwhile points. Questions about the depth of TP’s characters are hard to answer. Is the author looking for depth? Or is he trying to animate intentionally flat characters—to make cartoons walk and talk. This seems to be what he was doing in the first two or three novels. Although not, I don’t think, in the new book.

I think of Pynchon as a writer who struggles hard with his characters and themes—and, in the new book, with his language. In the end what’s probably most important and vital about him is that he has a world vision, part science, part psychology, part history, part fiction—and that the difficulty his work exudes sometimes (not always) seems an aspect of the complexity and density of the reality that inspires that vision. That’s a mouthful, I know. And I think it speaks more pertinently to GR than to M&D.

What I admire I don’t necessarily defend page by page or even book by book. Just the size and range and sense of large psychic underpinnings.

[...]
Don

[Typed on typewriter with signature by hand.]^{44}

DeLillo’s analysis of Pynchon’s work is most perceptive in the first paragraph, in which he cites his approval of Pynchon ‘unapologetic global range’. This is, in my mind, an incisive analysis of what Pynchon attempts throughout his work. I believe, however, that this is something that DeLillo aspires to as well. We shall see this reflected in my analysis of *Mao II*, DeLillo’s 1991 novel, in which DeLillo moves his character (eerily reminiscent of Pynchon, the absent author, who coincidentally provided a note of recommendation for the back cover of the novel) from the United States, through the United Kingdom, to Greece, and finally the novel concludes with Bill Gray attempting to enter Lebanon.^45 This is, I believe, reflective of the ‘global range’ of DeLillo’s work as well.

For this is precisely the focus that my work assumes. To write about the 9/11 attacks does not merely suggest that I am attempting to ascertain a peculiarly American view of these events—not, I aim to understand how these events have operated throughout the West. Unfortunately it is not in the ambit of my focus to address the East, a criticism that could be levelled at both Pynchon and DeLillo’s work as well.

Over the course of my work, however, I attempt to provide as full a coverage of the interaction of the ‘pure event’ and the West, to facilitate an understanding of how this seminal event refocuses the world of art and literature, and the effects it produces in

^{44} *DeLillo Archives*, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 97, Folder 8.
^{45} Pynchon’s note is: “This novel’s a beauty. DeLillo takes us on a breathtaking journey, beyond the official versions of our daily history, beyond all easy assumptions about who we’re supposed to be, with a vision as bold and a voice as eloquent and morally focused as any in American writing.”
the conceptual focus that is constructed through the literary representation of these events. In Chapter 1 ‘Mao II: Pre-figurations of Terrorist Temporality’, I examine DeLillo’s 1991 novel, a text that has been, especially after the 9/11 attacks, interpreted as ‘prophetic’, seeming to anticipate the rise of fundamentalist terrorism that now exists within our world. Rather than concentrate primarily on the possibility of prophecy I focus, instead, on the idea of the ‘quickening’ of time, a concept that I believe DeLillo derives from his reading of George Steiner’s *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, a work he made extensive notes on in preparation for the novel. It is through the process of the speeding up of time that facilitates my return to the prophetic nature of this novel, and especially its links with DeLillo’s 2001 publication *Cosmopolis*.

My second chapter focuses on *Cosmopolis*, and makes use of the productive similarities between this novel and *Mao II*, despite the ten year gap between the two novels’ publication dates. *Cosmopolis* is, in many ways, the emblematic novel of DeLillo’s response to 9/11—written before the event and published after—and in this sense, the prophetic nature of DeLillo’s analysis becomes clear. What is also clarified is DeLillo’s conceptualisation of time, which in this novel (once again derived from my research in the *DeLillo Archives* at the University of Texas at Austin) moves beyond Steiner’s analysis of time, moving to the work of Paul Virilio. Virilio maintains focus on the quickening of time, but provides an analysis which seems to explain the effects of the quickening of time on the technological world that DeLillo depicts.

I then turn to DeLillo’s 9/11 novel, *Falling Man*. In this novel, DeLillo returns to Samuel Beckett, a writer who is emblematic of DeLillo’s rejection of the
encyclopaedic form which characterises his work up to Underworld. DeLillo focuses on Beckett’s monograph on Proust, and utilises a very similar conception of time, whilst developing the twin concepts of habit and memory that are the centrepiece of Beckett’s analysis of À la Recherche du Temps Perdu. Throughout these three chapters, I identify DeLillo’s conceptualisation of time as contingent, a reactive time that is in reality, the primary narrative focus of all three works. My analysis of DeLillo’s works seeks to confirm Mark Osteen’s contention as to the intertextuality of DeLillo’s oeuvre, identifying a key thinker that influences each of DeLillo’s novels I analyse.46

In my focus on Pynchon I begin by analysing his most famous work, Gravity’s Rainbow, for suggestions of the same reconceptualisation of time I identify in DeLillo’s work. What we discover is that Pynchon has considered time from the 1970s, incorporating as a productive motif, and the emblem of the novel, the V-2 rocket, which disrupts time through its ability to travel faster than the speed of sound. Pynchon also addresses mathematical and philosophical analyses of time incorporating the temporal into this novel. I conclude with brief reference to Shawn Smith’s Pynchon and History, and utilise some of Smith’s perceptive analysis to emphasise the role that time plays in this novel.

I then devote two chapters to Thomas Pynchon’s 1100 page, 2006 novel, Against the Day. In ‘The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell’ I interpret Pynchon’s novel through his inclusion of five factors that incorporate disjunctive temporality: his allusion to (and inclusion of) Dante’s Inferno, incorporated into a very specific series of

references to the 9/11 attacks. Using these allusions as a basis for establishing *Against the Day*’s conceptualisation of time, I then investigate these issues with relation to time travel, bilocation, Pynchon’s positing of counter-worlds, and finally, his use of mathematical analogies to further explicate his understanding of time.

In ‘Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto’ I turn to Pynchon’s analysis of the visual arts in *Against the Day*, and focus especially on his reference to Franco Marinetti’s Futurists. Throughout this chapter I return to the work of Henri Bergson, and two concepts, simultaneity and dynamism, which allow Pynchon to develop a complex and considered reconsideration of temporality in light of the 9/11 attacks.

Finally, I focus in ‘*Inherent Vice* and the Chronotope’ on Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of time in the novel. Pynchon’s 2009 novel reflects an understanding of the importance of time, whilst also furthering the project I argue is begun with the publication of *Against the Day*.

**What is Terrorism?**

After providing the bare facts of the September 11 attacks at the beginning of this introduction, it is useful to examine briefly exactly how both authors understand terrorism in their written work. For DeLillo, terrorism, and the act of terror, is something that always exists within the present of his world. Thus, in *Mao II*, terrorism is the act of the partisan, a literary representation of the terrorists that exist in the real world, who can control a level of power that the novelist can only ever aspire to.\(^47\) George Haddad, the intermediary between Bill Gray and the terrorists of *Mao II*

\(^{47}\) The idea of the author-figure as terrorist, or aspiring to the power of the terrorist, will be examined below, although primarily with the focus of how this concept relates to Bill Gray’s actions. For further examination of the concept see Simmons, R., ‘What is a Terrorist? Contemporary Authorship, the
calls terrorism “pure trauma”. I understand this as pure violence, the physical effect of the terrorist act.

After 9/11, in *Falling Man*, terrorism remains, for DeLillo, an effect. He presents a visceral understanding of the event—not focused on the representation of the event or how it was promulgated through the media, but the actual violence of the act—represented most effectively in the penetration of the victim’s body by the terrorist body, in what I will term in my discussion below, the ‘biological shrapnel’ metaphor. The penetration of bodies is represented not only through specific bodily penetration, but also through a more mental penetration. DeLillo writes:

> A bottle fell of the counter in the galley, on the other side of the aisle, and he watched it roll this way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc one way and rolling back the other, and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. He found himself walking into a wall. He didn’t drop the telephone until he hit the wall. The floor began to slide beneath him and he lost his balance and eased along the wall to the floor. What DeLillo presents here is a reiteration of the biological shrapnel metaphor, but rather than the body of Hammad, the terrorist, penetrating the body of Keith, it is the two voices that interpenetrate and mingle, the shift from Hammad’s voice to Keith’s occurring in the moment of impact of the plane into the World Trade Centre. The violence that DeLillo identifies in the terrorist act is real physical and psychological trauma.

---

Terrorism is, for Pynchon, a different beast. Despite the allusions to 9/11 that will be examined below, the act of terror is far more general, not related to one specific historical event, but rather to the history of the powerful dominating the powerless. I do not perceive Pynchon as an apologist for the terrorist or for terrorism, but his oeuvre-wide project to advocate for the preterite at the expense of the elect questions the conventional definition of terrorism. In Against the Day, Pynchon’s representation of terrorism departs from Baudrillard’s description of modern terror: “senseless and indeterminate…non-explosive, non-historical, non-political terrorism” and in its place assesses terrorism as specifically political, historical, and, indeed, explosive. Pynchon refers back to the anarcho-syndicalist struggle for labour rights, and more generally to the anarchist movement, both in the Americas, and in Europe. But even in this iteration of terrorism, uncertainties abound, as Lew Basnight appreciates, when he realises that the bombs that explode within Against the Day may have been set off not by the anarchists, but by the elect who would benefit from the turmoil created. Terrorism is then, for Pynchon, a historical event, an effect that has its cause both in the present and in the past.

50 See Duyfhuizen, B., “‘The Exact Degree of Fictitiousness’: Thomas Pynchon’s Against the Day”, in Postmodern Culture, Vol. 17, No. 2, 14.
In Against the Day, Pynchon implies that there is a justification for terrorism, a similar outcome to that which DeLillo toys with in both Mao II and Falling Man. Although their approach to, and understanding of, terrorism differs—at the base, as throughout my argument—the motivating force is the 9/11 attacks which make necessary a reconsideration of terrorism, whether through DeLillo’s conceptual reconsideration or Pynchon’s historical one.

***

Throughout this work, two major focuses are returned to throughout. The first being the pressure upon both authors to come to grips with the September 11 attacks in 2001, the second being the resultant pressure on the arts, and literature specifically. It is my contention that despite the tragedy of the 9/11 attacks, this event allows both Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo to reassess both their own work and their entire field, and to propose a new method for literature. Following on from Lukács’ argument that ‘form-giving’ is the most crucial element of the novelist’s work, both can be said to respond to Lukács’ despairing view of modern literature, when he argued that “[l]iterary development has not yet gone beyond the novel of disillusionment […]” Neither DeLillo, or Pynchon, exhibits any disillusionment with the world or with their craft. Rather, and in response to the 9/11 attacks, they reassert the primacy of their interpretation of the world, and, crucially, the importance of their artistic endeavours, and those of their contemporaries, in grasping to explain, to interpret, and to produce new meaning from the tragedies of the 11th of September, 2001.

---

Mao II: Pre-figurations of Terrorist Temporality

Introduction

Don DeLillo’s 1991 novel, Mao II, is the text that affirms DeLillo’s interest in, and knowledge of, terrorism.⁵⁶ It is also the novel, crucially, that allows an interpretation of DeLillo’s writing on terrorism, and especially the specific brand of Muslim fundamentalist terrorism that the West has been encountering since the September 11 attacks in 2001, as prophetic.⁵⁷ It is this suggestion of prophecy and the implicit manipulation of time that it suggests, which is most alluring when writing about the relationship between the 9/11 attacks and a New York writer. Despite the novel’s conceptual focus on terrorism, I will propose in this chapter that Mao II’s fundamental analysis is of time.

Throughout the novel the reader encounters continual theorisation of temporality within the narrative, and in DeLillo’s characterisation he employs. It comes as no surprise then to also discover that in DeLillo’s notes and drafts for Mao II, held at the Harry Ransom Research Centre at the University of Texas at Austin, we can see lengthy consideration and analysis of temporality, and especially consistent reference to the arguments concerning the temporal and literature’s ability to interact with societal conceptions of time of George Steiner in his In Bluebeard’s Castle. In this chapter I will explicate how the conceptualisation of time that DeLillo develops out of his analysis of Steiner’s work unfolds in Mao II, and how the prophetic paradigm Mao II is interpreted through facilitates the focus on temporality that occurs within the novel.

⁵⁶ Although we should note, as Allen argues, that terrorism has influenced the majority of DeLillo’s works. See Allen, ‘Raids on the Conscious’, 1.
Throughout the main notebook DeLillo kept in preparation for his writing of *Mao II* he returns a number of times to *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, focusing especially on one quotation that becomes very influential to DeLillo’s composition of the novel. DeLillo notes this sentence with interest: “[t]he quickening of time, the new vehemence of private consciousness, the sudden nearness of the messianic future […]”\(^{58}\) These lines are from the first section of Steiner’s text, ‘The Great Ennui’. Interestingly, DeLillo does not quote verbatim from Steiner, omitting “and historicity” after ‘vehemence’ in the quotation above.\(^{59}\) This omission is an intriguing one, especially considering DeLillo returns to Steiner’s comment a number of times in his notebooks. This issue will be addressed further below in relation to DeLillo’s exclusion of historicity in his reference to Steiner’s work.\(^{60}\)

Steiner’s text argues that, contrary to many previous interpretations, the period from “the 1820s [to] 1915”\(^ {61}\) is a period of ennui, resulting in an extreme outbreak of violence and aggression throughout the world, manifesting itself in the period of turmoil between 1914 and 1945, including both World Wars.\(^ {62}\) The so-called ‘100 years peace’, Steiner argues, actually masks a developing and consistent sense of dissatisfaction both within the arts and society in general. The motivation for this building concern is derived, Steiner argues, from a shift in temporality. Time itself is the progenitor of the subsequent violence, and especially a shift in our societal

---

\(^{58}\) DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.


\(^{60}\) As far as I am aware there has been no published work on Steiner in relation to *Mao II*. David Coward mentions Steiner’s theories of language in his analysis of *End Zone*, whilst Cornel Bonca discusses Steiner in relation to *The Body Artist*. See Cowart, *Don DeLillo*, p. 25 and Bonca, ‘Being, Time, and Death in DeLillo’s The Body Artist’, p. 66.

\(^{61}\) Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, p. 5.

\(^{62}\) We will see this ennui repeated in *Falling Man*. See especially, Versluis, *Out of the Blue*, pp. 33-34.
perception of time. That is, the population experienced an acceleration of time—the progress of change was understood to be faster than ever before—new technologies, and the possibilities they facilitated, emerged at a staggering rate. Steiner argues that the importance of this period manifested itself in an understanding that radical changes were taking place and that these changes were no longer of limited influence, but rather effected the entire western population. He writes:

As Goethe noted acutely on the field at Valmy, populist armies, the concept of a nation under arms, meant that history had become everyman’s milieu. Henceforth, in Western culture, each day was to bring news [...] Steiner exhibits a similar sentiment regarding the human perception of time. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century being:

[...] a time span more crowded, more sharply registered by individual and social sensibility, than any other of which we have reliable record. Hegel could argue, with rigorous logic of feeling, that history itself was passing into a new state of being, that ancient time was at an end.

History, usually the domain of the past (‘ancient time’), was being shifted quickly into the present, a condition that created a maelstrom of concern and confusion as to how time could be understood and interpreted. The previous concepts of past, present, and future were placed under interrogation, for they no longer seemed entirely appropriate, considering the immediacy, and growing speed, of events in this period.

The City—New York City

---

63 We should note that Lentricchia and McAuliffe develop the same view of quickening time producing violence in the ‘Preface’ to the Lyrical Ballads and in the Unabomber’s Manifesto. See Lentricchia and McAuliffe, Crimes of Art + Terror, pp. 18-19.
64 Steiner, In Bluebeard’s Castle, p. 13.
65 Steiner, In Bluebeard’s Castle, p. 15.
Steiner argues that we can identify this change in time in, amongst other literary manifestations, the poetry of Romanticism. He argues: “[i]n romantic pastoralism there is as much of a flight from the devouring city as there is a return to nature.”

And again, just prior, Steiner reveals the same sentiments:

The immense growth of the monetary-industrial complex also brought with it the modern city, what a later poet was to call *la ville tentaculaire*—the megalopolis whose uncontrollable cellular division and spread now threatens to choke so much of our lives. Hence the definition of a new, major conflict: that between the individual and the stone seas that may, at any moment, overwhelm him. The urban inferno, with its hordes of faceless inhabitants, haunts the nineteenth-century imagination.

We can see already how there are parallels to be made between the period that Steiner is describing and the present day. Considering that many of the historical events that motivate *Mao II* occur in the midst of the 1980s, the decadent era to end all decadence, then we may elucidate DeLillo’s motivation for presenting disdain for the city quite easily. Indeed, it may be observed that *Mao II* can be viewed in light of two other works that, in very different ways, critique a similar sense of ennui and languor that existed in the 80s: Donald Antrim’s *Elect Mr Robinson for a Better World*, and Bret Ellis’ *American Psycho*. For Antrim, his focus is America as a whole, but for Ellis, as for DeLillo, New York City, commonly referred to by its residents simply as ‘the City’, presents itself as the perfect synecdoche for America in its entirety, whilst also presenting itself as the ultimate world city—the epitome of the ‘urban inferno’.

---


67 Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, p. 20. (Steiner’s emphases).

68 Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, pp. 18-19.


The immediate narrative of *Mao II* (that is, the narrative that occurs in the present) begins in Chapter One, after the ‘At Yankee Stadium’ prologue’s narration of Karen’s Moonie wedding, and ties the theorisation of temporality that DeLillo develops to the quickening of time identified by Steiner in the modern city. We encounter Scott, Bill’s assistant, in New York City, waiting to meet Brita, the photographer who will finally reveal Bill Gray to the world after all his years of seclusion. Two incidents within the first few pages of this chapter immediately foreground the sense of isolation within the city and the alienating effects it provides for the characters. The first is, in many ways, little more than a humorous anecdote: Scott sees as he leaves a bookstore:

> [...] a man in a torn jacket come stumbling in, great-maned and filthy, rimed saliva in his beard, old bruises across the forehead gone soft and crumbly. People stood frozen in mid-motion, careful to remain outside the zone of infection [...] It was a large bright room full of stilled figures, eyes averted. Traffic pounded in the street [...] A security guard approached from the mezzanine and the man lifted thick hands in a gesture of explanation. ‘I’m here to sign my books,’ he said.71

The idea of the homeless man encroaching into a space in the city that he is explicitly excluded from is not without its comedic element. And yet, at the same time, the reader is alerted, by DeLillo, to the numbing effects of the city. The ‘zone of infection’ is of more concern to the bookstore patrons than the actual condition of the individual. DeLillo’s conclusion to this vignette reinforces his argument: “People saw it was all right to move again. Just another New York moment.”72 For this very brief period of time within the novel, the accelerating time of the city is stopped. A temporal disjunction, which, in its metaphorical nature, argues for the absurd, and accelerated, nature of time within the modern city.

A second incident involving Scott reinforces this point. As he moves down a New York street he is confronted by a woman, who he believes is trying to force him to take her child. She identifies him as trustworthy simply because he appears not to be a resident of the city. She badgers Scott, telling him: “‘[y]ou’re from out of town so I can talk to you.’”73 The city has a violent effect on its inhabitants, as she asks: “‘[t]ake it outside the city, where it’s got a chance to live.’”74 DeLillo establishes, with these two short anecdotal passages, the concerns that exist within the City as concept—how the megalopolis operates on a different ethical and temporal scale to the rest of the country and the rest of the West. As DeLillo’s narrator observes as these two anecdotes are concluded: “‘[w]hen there is enough out-of-placeness in the world, nothing is out of place.’”75

As Scott and Brita meet for the first time, their collective focus is still New York. For Brita, a long-time resident, New York is her “official state religion.”76 Scott’s view of the city, however, as we have already been alerted to, is completely different. They first get to converse at a revolving bar, able to survey the entire city. Scott’s sense of disorientation is palpable at his sudden realisation that the bar is moving. He professes confusion as to where they are in the world and Brita responds: “‘Isn’t it strange. New York has fallen.’”77 We can assume from DeLillo’s allusion to Steiner, both within his notes, and within Mao II itself, that the concept of the city is what has fallen—the shifts in time the city engenders creates the sensation both of decay, and of existence outside, or in a disjointed, temporality. DeLillo describes Scott’s observations in the revolving bar:

73 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 21.
74 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 22.
75 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 22.
77 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 23.
He watched Broadway float into the curved window and felt as if blocks of time and space had come loose and drifted [...] The signs for Mita, Midori, Kirin, Magno, Suntory—words that were part of some synthetic mass language, the esperanto of jet lag.\(^78\)

Once again, DeLillo reinforces the sense of temporal and spatial disorientation that the city creates. The inhabitants of the city, locked in their routinised perception of time, require these forms of shorthand to survive. The section concludes with Scott considering the city once more: “What does Bill say? The city is a device for measuring time.”\(^79\) Interestingly, DeLillo makes use of a very similar phrase twice in his latest novel, published in 2010, *Point Omega*. DeLillo writes: “[c]ities were built to measure time, to remove time from nature.”\(^80\) And later: “the city that was built to measure time”.\(^81\) Obviously this concept is a central one for DeLillo, an understanding of time that seems to resonate for the author.\(^82\) For DeLillo, as for Steiner, the temporality of the city is a different temporality than that of the rest of the world. Time and its effects are understood in a different manner within the city. By constructing New York as ‘a device for measuring time’ DeLillo also emphasises the critical relationship that exists between the megalopolis and temporality—time exists, and occurs, in a very different way, both in non-urban areas, but in other cities aside from New York as well.

\(^79\) DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 27.
\(^81\) DeLillo, *Point Omega*, 59.
\(^82\) There is an example of further resonance with DeLillo’s use of the same concept in *Point Omega* as in *Mao II* in DeLillo’s notes to *Mao II*, where he creates a list of potential titles for the novel that becomes *Mao II*. His list is, presented as it was written in DeLillo’s notebook: “The Cult Writer Point Omega Mao II Storm King The Bicycle Dead The Shining Path” (DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.) This observation is not intended to argue the similarities between *Mao II* and *Point Omega*, but rather to illustrate that the temporal analyses in *Point Omega* parallel similar lines of thought with those expressed in *Mao II*.\(^82\)
When Bill escapes from Scott he does so in the middle of New York. DeLillo’s narrator immediately turns to a description of the sensation of the city to describe the impending acceleration of time. DeLillo writes:

The rush of things, of shuffled sights, the mixed swagger of the avenue, noisy storefronts, jewelry spread across the sidewalk, the deep stream of reflections, heads floating in windows, towers liquefied on taxi doors, bodies shivery and elongate, all of it interesting to Bill in the way it blocked comment, the way it simply rushed at him, massively, like your first day in Jalalabad, rushed and was. Nothing tells you what you’re supposed to think of this.  

The acceleration of time implicit in the city has an interesting effect on Bill, limiting his ability with language, the one thing that defines him throughout the novel. But there is a sense in which language must always fail Bill. The novel he is working on is never finished, and the writing he undertakes later on in the text is doomed to failure as well. The production of language and literature is obfuscated by the power of time, and the inherent, and accelerating, speed of urban time. As DeLillo writes in his notes in preparation for *Mao II*: “[s]ense of quickened time […] writer trying to keep pace with flying time.” For Bill, this is an impossible task: the quickening acceleration of time is something he cannot, finally, keep up with. It is crucial then that DeLillo provides an allusion to this, as Bill finally effects his escape from Scott. He writes:

He exited by the last single door, peeling the visitor’s badge from his lapel and moving out onto the sidewalk, where he joined the surge of the noontime crowd.  

---

83 DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 94.  
84 cf. Gourley, “‘Whenever said said said missaid’: Diminishment in Beckett’s *Worstward Ho* and DeLillo’s *The Body Artist*, pp. 222-224. DeLillo, in his analysis of the Tuttle character from *The Body Artist* makes a pertinent observation on the power of time, writing: “Time itself is a culture […] deeper than language or customs.” DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 6, Folder 5.  
85 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.  
As DeLillo has established, writing “[t]he future belongs to crowds”, crowds are the exemplar of the acceleration of time resulting from urbanisation and development.\(^\text{87}\)

Despite Bill moving willingly into the crowd, from this moment on the reader apprehends that Bill’s struggles with temporality will never be successful.\(^\text{88}\) Indeed, the ‘futurity’ of crowds can be contrasted with George Haddad’s view, in which he argues “that history is passing into the hands of the crowd.”\(^\text{89}\) The dual pressures of the future, and history residing in the future, illustrate the temporal disjunction at the heart of Gray’s narrative.\(^\text{90}\) Surrendering to time leads Bill into the second half of the novel, and ultimately to his death.

This is not the last time that New York figures in *Mao II*. A formative moment in DeLillo’s conceptualisation of New York and urban temporality occurs earlier in the novel, as Brita conducts her photo shoot with Bill. He is intrigued by New York and asks Brita to describe it to him. DeLillo writes:

> ‘Where I live, okay, there’s a rooftop chaos, a jumble, four, five, six, seven storeys, and it’s water tanks, laundry lines, antennas, belfries, pigeon lofts, chimney pots, everything human about the lower island—little crouched gardens, statuary, painted signs. And I wake up to this and love it and depend on it. But it’s all being flattened and hauled away so they can build their towers.’\(^\text{91}\)

There is a certain sense of irony in Brita’s description of her vision of New York encompassing ‘everything human’. And yet, the way DeLillo constructs this section, it is as if the reader can be led to believe that the city is a natural thing, the antithesis of

---

\(^\text{87}\) DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 16.


\(^\text{89}\) DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 162.

\(^\text{90}\) cf. Cowart, *Don DeLillo*, p. 119.

Steiner’s arguments. Bill response to Brita’s description points out, however, that this irony is unsustainable: “[e]ventually the towers will seem human and local and quirky. Give them time.” DeLillo argues, in fact, that the urbanisation of New York, as evidence of Steiner’s argument of the acceleration of time, will never be familiar. Rather, the gradual numbing of the populace requires acceptance of less and less familiarity exactly because of the acceleration of time. Bill and Brita’s conversation continues, showing the denial of community that is explicitly related to the quickening of time. DeLillo writes:

‘I’ll go and hit my head against the wall. You tell me when to stop.’
‘You’ll wonder what made you mad.’
‘I already have the World Trade Center.’
‘And it’s already harmless and ageless. Forgotten-looking. And think how much worse.’
‘What?’ she said.
‘If there was only one tower instead of two.’
‘You mean they interact. There is a play of light.’
‘Wouldn’t a single tower be much worse?’
‘No, because my big complaint is only partly size. The size is deadly. But having two of them is like a comment, it’s like a dialogue, only I don’t know what they’re saying.’
‘They’re saying, “Have a nice day,”’
‘Someday, go walk those streets,’ she said. ‘Sick and dying people with nowhere to live and there are bigger and bigger towers all the time, fantastic buildings with miles of rentable space. All the space is inside. Am I exaggerating?’

Bill maintains his ironic tone, full of the bravado that leads him to escape from Scott and emerge into New York. Despite the struggle against time that DeLillo plans for Bill in his notes, he engages with the urban city without thought at this stage of the novel. It is interesting to note, however, that in an earlier draft of Brita’s speech DeLillo develops Brita’s views fundamentally differently, and focuses again on Brita’s

---

92 There is an insistent similarity in the discussion between Bill and Brita of the City, and of the World Trade Centre, with the description of the Twin Towers as “no less transient for all their bulk than some routine distortion of light” which DeLillo proposes in Players. See DeLillo, D., Players, Vintage, London, 1991, [1977], p. 19.
93 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 39.
concern with the emblematic buildings of New York City—the World Trade Centre complex. DeLillo writes:

"I’m convinced they built two towers to make some awful point about thought control or state terror, show us what thought control looks like in its purest state." […] They built the first tower to show us what thought control looks like in its pure state. They built the second tower to put it into practice." 95

This notation to DeLillo’s first draft obviously was not exactly what DeLillo was looking to say (especially noting that the entire section has been crossed out, as indicated above). We can see, however, that Brita’s characterisation is altered by a consideration of the power of the World Trade Centre. Further, the Towers stand as an example of the power of America as a whole. In the published copy of this section of dialogue, Brita’s confusion at her final conclusion (‘I don’t know what they’re saying’), suggests she herself does not apprehend the process of accelerated time, nor the power that the Towers, and New York as a whole, exerts on its inhabitants. 96

Time, Terror, and Art

Implicit in my argument above is the proposition that with the acceleration of time, the possibility of terror is heightened. Indeed DeLillo poses a question to himself during his research in preparation for Mao II, which I will use as a guide for this next section. He writes: “If time accelerates, does terror result?” 97 The question that DeLillo asks in his notes is one that is addressed throughout Mao II. In the same way that the acceleration of time manifests itself in the over-urbanised city, the acceleration of time

95 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 39, Folder 3.
96 A large number of critics have focused on the figure of the terrorist as a possibility for recuperating art after 9/11. This work ties the supposed ‘prophetic’ nature of Mao II with a desire to reassert the primacy of literature. See, for example, Thurschwell, A., ‘Writing and Terror: Don DeLillo on the Task of Literature after 9/11’, in Law and Literature, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2007, pp. 281-286, and Rowe, ‘Mao II and the War on Terrorism’, pp. 26-29.
97 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.
pushes society towards terror. Brita’s photo shoot with Bill effectively anticipates this concept, as it does in their discussion of New York. Brita travels constantly, making her the target of DeLillo’s ‘esperanto of jet lag’. Before a terrorist act has even been contemplated in the novel, Brita anticipates the possibility in conversation with Bill, saying: “there is no moment on certain days when I’m not thinking terror.”

She continues:

‘They have us in their power. In boarding areas I never sit near windows in case of flying glass. I carry a Swedish passport so that’s okay unless you believe that terrorists killed the prime minister. Then maybe it’s not so good. And I use codes in my address book for names and addresses of writers because how can you tell if the name of a certain writer is dangerous to carry, some dissident, some Jew or blasphemer. I’m careful about reading matter. Nothing religious comes with me, no books with religious symbols on the jacket and no pictures of guns or sexy women. That’s on the one hand. On the other hand I know in my heart I’m going to die of some dreadful slow disease so you’re safe with me on a plane.’

Brita’s carefulness in her travel is a result of the acceleration of time, manifesting itself in the heightened possibility of terrorism. DeLillo expresses this neatly at the end of the excerpt above when he contrasts the speed of an aeroplane with the slow death that she anticipates. It is as if death itself is one of the few phenomena that is not subject to the acceleration of time. Brita also signifies, in her conversations with Bill, as a form of artistic muse, the two artists, photographer and writer, engaging because of their shared understanding of artistic practice, and the challenges this practice is being placed under by the acceleration of time. It is instructive, then, that Bill unfolds into speech and delivers one of the more quoted-from arguments within the novel.

DeLillo writes:

---

100 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 41.
'There’s a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we became famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence. Do you ask your writers how they feel about this? Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated.'

We can hear in this passage an echo of Salman Rushdie and his experiences suffering at the hands of what DeLillo and Paul Auster called the “tightened […] binds between language and religious dogma.” And yet, this passage is intensely personal, the beginning of DeLillo’s characterisation of Bill Gray that not only presents him as a writer struggling against the diminishing power of art and the growing influence of terrorism, but also against the acceleration of time (which precipitates terror according to DeLillo’s notes) that is central to the novel. As quoted above, DeLillo observes in his notes that Bill Gray is the ‘writer trying to keep pace with flying time.’ Indeed, DeLillo makes this even clearer in a note made shortly after:

> How terrorism mocks the writer; effects change in consciousness, making the writer seem harmless, overshadowing his efforts to cause a shift in the nature of his time.

Bill Gray’s character, then, emerges from the same tradition as the Romantics Steiner cites in In Bluebeard’s Castle. Through this relationship, DeLillo develops the purpose of art to reclaim narrative as something personal, rather than totalising.

---

101 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 41.
104 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.
returns to Steiner in his notes, quoting from *In Bluebeard’s Castle*: “The artist becomes hero. In a society made inert by repressive authority, the work of art becomes the quintessential deed.” After quoting Steiner DeLillo continues with his own thoughts:

Or: The terrorist becomes the secret hero. In a society made inert by glut and bloat, the work of terror becomes the only meaningful act.

Continuing on, DeLillo makes a similar argument, linking artists and terrorists, but also with the suggestion of a third element—a struggle against prevailing culture:

Secret envy of artist for terrorist. The terrorist commits acts that can’t be absorbed and forgotten so easily. The terrorist makes an impact without irony, mockery, ambiguity, etc.

It is obvious that DeLillo’s notes in preparation for *Mao II* strongly influence the comparison between art and terror within the novel. What is apparently excised from the novel itself is the more specific links between Bill’s novel, and indeed Bill’s writing in general, and these arguments. The reader may perceive that these links are implicitly made through the terrorist narrative in which the young Swiss writer is held hostage by a shadowy terrorist organisation, their ultimate target being Bill himself.

Considering Bill’s own novel, it is useful to consider the struggles with time he has always experienced in his writing. A subtle shift in Bill’s perception of temporality is communicated by DeLillo: “Used to be that time rushed down on him when he started

---

106 Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, p. 21. DeLillo’s note from DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.

107 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1. (DeLillo’s emphasis).

108 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.

109 For a perceptive analysis of the art/terror nexus and the postmodern tendency to conflate the two concepts, see Kubiak, ‘Spelling it Out’, pp. 295-297.
a book, time fell and pressed, then lifted when he finished. Now it wasn’t lifting’

The acceleration of time has finally made Bill its subject—he can no longer escape the effects of time, be it manifested in his illnesses and self-medication, the novel that he cannot finish, or his desire to assist the Swiss writer being held hostage. In Bill’s final succumbing to the power of time we can see again that what results, both in the narrative, and conceptually, is a resulting growth in the power of terror.

**Death and Time**

One comment from DeLillo’s notebook that I have referred to previously in this chapter stands out for me as pivotal, and orients the next section of this chapter. The statement comes from DeLillo’s main *Mao II* notebook—he writes: “If we can’t think of space without time, we can’t think of time without death.”

DeLillo’s note is crucial, emphasising, as it does, the centrality of temporality in his thinking during the development of *Mao II*, but also in the way that it distils the relationships between complex concepts into simple relational bonds. The following section will explicate the relationship between time and death that DeLillo develops throughout the novel. We should note, however, that DeLillo does emphasise the nexus between the spatial and temporal a number of times within *Mao II*, as can be seen in the following quotations. In reference to Rev. Moon, DeLillo writes:

> He lifts them out of ordinary strips of space and time […]

During his description of the photo shoot Brita conducts with Bill, he writes:

> Space was closing in the way it did when a session went well. Time and light were narrowed to automatic choices.

---

111 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.
And, in his description of Bill’s perception of time, continuing on from a quotation used above which analyses Bill’s subjection to time, DeLillo writes:

There is the epic and bendable space-time of the theoretical physicist, time detached from human experience, the pure curve of nature, and there is the haunted time of the novelist, intimate, pressing, stale and sad.¹¹⁴

As we can see from these three quotations, the connection between time and space is a simple one, and a relationship that seems to eliminate creative impetus within the novel. It is only when DeLillo describes the ‘time’ of the novelist that we approach fertile ground—it is telling, then, that DeLillo does not provide a spatial corollary of the novelist’s time. Considering the unproductive nature of the relationship DeLillo proposes, I will focus rather on time and death, following on from DeLillo’s own example that elides the importance of the spatio-temporal relationship.

Figure 1 Mourning Crowd at Khomeini’s Funeral, 5 June 1989

DeLillo’s major exposition of the relationship between time and death is expressed in Chapter 12, halfway through Part Two of the novel, Part Two being prefaced by a picture of the mourning crowd at the funeral of Ayatollah Khomeini (that took place on the 4th of June, 1989), similar to Figure 1 above.\footnote{See DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 105.}

DeLillo introduces the nexus between time and death with reference to the concept of crowds that he has engaged with repeatedly throughout \textit{Mao II}. DeLillo writes, observing Karen and Brita watching the events of Khomeini’s funeral unfold on television:

> It was the body of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini lying in a glass case set on a high platform above crowds that stretched for miles. The camera could not absorb the full breadth of the crowd. The camera kept panning but could not inch all that way out to the edge of the anguished mass. On the screen the crowd has no edge or limit and kept on spreading.\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 188.}

Immediately after DeLillo’s description of the situation at hand, the reader is lead to a discussion of time and death, and an intriguing analysis of the manipulation of time possible \textit{in} death. DeLillo writes:

> The voice said, Crowds estimated, and the picture showed the crowds of mourners and Karen could go backwards into their lives, see them coming out of their houses and shanties, streams of people, then backwards even further, sleeping in their beds, hearing the morning call to prayer, coming out of their houses and meeting in some dusty square to march out of the slums together.\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 188.}

At the early stage of this section it is not possible to argue that Karen is exactly manipulating time.\footnote{We should also note that for some critics, Karen, and other secondary characters constitute the “future”. See Osteen, M., ‘Becoming Incorporated: Spectacular Authorship and DeLillo’s \textit{Mao II}’, in \textit{Modern Fiction Studies}, Vol. 45, No. 3, 1999, p. 644.} Rather, DeLillo affords her the ability simply to see time from a different perspective, back into what we understand as the past. I sense, however, that
Karen apprehends past, present, and future in this section as being all intertwined in the same concept. It is as if past, present, and future have been collapsed into one multi-dimensional temporality, the moment of Khomeini’s funeral pushing time itself towards complete immanence.\textsuperscript{119}

DeLillo implants in this section a temporal disjunction that operates not only on the mourner’s experience of time, but on Karen’s as well. Tellingly, the televised report of Khomeini’s death manipulates time, creating a disjunctive temporal synthesis. The first reference to the event actually represents the day of Khomeini’s death, the 3rd of June, 1989. The funeral took place the next day, the 4\textsuperscript{th}. The technological manipulation of time takes Karen aback:

\begin{quote}
The voice said, Rivers of humanity, and Karen realized this was the next day now, the funeral, with crowds estimated at three million and everybody dressed in black […]\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

Of course, DeLillo’s representation of the crowds mourning Khomeini’s death mirror the crowds of Moonies participating in their mass wedding at the beginning of the novel, the first scene in which the reader discovers Karen, and an event that provides a personal resonance for DeLillo’s character. DeLillo describes the experience of that crowd in a similar style, emphasising the power of time as subjectifying, but also the accelerating nature of time:

\begin{quote}
[…] there is a sense those chanting thousands have, wincing in the sun, that the future is pressing in, collapsing toward them, that they are everywhere surrounded by signs of the fated landscape and human struggle of the Last Days […]\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{119} The following analysis of Karen’s experience of time can be understood as reflective of her experience with the Moonie’s at the beginning of the novel. See especially Cowart’s discussion of the Moonie concept of ‘hurry-up time’ in his \textit{Don DeLillo}, p. 173.

\textsuperscript{120} DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 188.

\textsuperscript{121} DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 7.
As DeLillo’s description of Khomeini’s funeral continues the parallels between the mourning described and the Moonie mass wedding at the beginning of the novel become clearer. The religious fervour of both events precipitates a shift in time—for the crowd, a sense of time becoming clearer and more concrete, whether it be the future coming closer, or the past. As DeLillo observes at the end of the Moonie wedding: “[t]he future belongs to crowds.”\(^\text{122}\) Perhaps it is more appropriate to observe that in *Mao II*, time belongs to the crowd.

Karen’s apprehension of time becomes more nuanced as DeLillo’s description of Khomeini’s funeral continues:

There were aerial shots of the burial site surrounded by crowds. Karen thought they were like pictures of a thousand years ago, some great city falling clamorously to siege.\(^\text{123}\)

DeLillo continues, reinforcing the temporal disjunction Karen experiences:

The living were trying to bring the dead man back among them. Karen’s hands were over her mouth. The living forced their way into the burial side, bloodying their heads and tearing at their hair, choking in the thick dust, and the body of Khomeini rested in a flimsy box, a kind of litter with low sides, and Karen found she could go into the slums of south Teheran, backwards into people’s lives, and hear them saying, We have lost our father. All the dispossessed waking to the morning call. Sorrow, sorrow is this day.\(^\text{124}\)

DeLillo is at pains throughout this section to emphasise the horror that Karen feels, in empathy, for Khomeini’s mourners. There is a palpable sense of trauma here that does not exist anywhere else in the novel.\(^\text{125}\) The power of Khomeini’s death, and the power

\(^{122}\) DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 16.


\(^{125}\) Hal Foster’s paper ‘Death in America’ seeks to explicate a whole series of cultural acts through the purview of death, one of those being a sort of Warholian trauma, which he links to *Mao II* (see n43). More generally, his discussion of death serves as a counterpoint to Karen’s empathetic response to
he held over such a large population seems to motivate Karen’s ability to see into the past. It is important to note that DeLillo specifically constructs the visceral reactions of the mourners as not for the past, but for the future, for a future without the guidance of their spiritual ‘father’.

As I observed at the beginning of this section, DeLillo sets out to emphasise the links between time and death, arguing not only for the manipulability of time when in relation to death, but also to emphasise the causal and philosophical links between time and death. As DeLillo continues to pursue the link between time and death he begins to engage specifically with the conceptual relationship he identifies. He writes:

The living do not accept the fact that their father is dead. They want him back among them. He should be the last among them to die. They should be dead, not him.
[…]
The living beat themselves and bled. They ripped the funeral shroud and tried to take the dead man into their tide, their living wave, and reverse the course of time so that he lives.¹²⁶

The reader apprehends in the excerpt above that Khomeini occupies an analogous position to his followers, as does Rev. Moon to Karen and the Moonies, and, crucially, Bill Gray to his readers. In this relationship we can understand DeLillo’s emphasis throughout his notes that a writer must be struggling against time, for it is the incipient event of Bill’s death that drives the novels continued engagement with the temporal. The futility of attempting to ‘reverse the course of time’ as it relates to death is one of the most productive ironies that DeLillo returns to throughout Mao II.

¹²⁶ DeLillo, Mao II, p. 189.
Again and again, DeLillo reinforces the traumatic effect this scene has on Karen—the trauma being a combination of horror at the scenes in front of her and the traumatic experience of the shift in her perception of time:

Karen went backwards into their lives, into the hovels and unpaved streets, and she watched the pictures on the screen.

[...]

It was possible to believe that she was the only one seeing this and everyone else tuned to this channel was watching sober-sided news analysis delivered by three men in a studio with makeup and hidden mikes. Her hands were pressed against her temples.

[...]

It was the delicate tending of the dead that was forgotten here.¹²⁷

Karen’s awareness of death seems to precipitate her altered perception of time. Her experience is an alien one, the death of a religious figure requiring consideration not only of the loss in the present, but the causal links to the mourners, the effect of his death not only on the present, but on the past and future as well. Karen’s pain at this news broadcast takes on a new light if we compare Karen’s attitude to a note DeLillo made during the drafting process, concerning the phenomenon of news and the media. DeLillo writes:

News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative. News is the last addiction before — what? I don’t know. Maybe no news.¹²⁸

DeLillo’s notation seem to find a subtle accord with Karen’s continued amazement at the news bulletin she is viewing:

Karen could not imagine who else was watching this. It could not be real if others watched. If other people watched, if millions watched, if these millions matched the number on the Iranian plain, doesn’t it mean we share something with the mourners, know an anguish, feel something pass between us, hear the sigh of some historic grief? She turned and saw Brita leaning back on the far arm of the sofa, calmly

¹²⁷ DeLillo, Mao II, pp. 190-191.
¹²⁸ DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 39, Folder 3.
smoking. This is the woman who talked about needing people to believe for her, seeing people bleeding for their faith, and she is calmly sitting in this frenzy of a nation and a race. If others saw these pictures, why is nothing changed, where are the local crowds, why do we still have names and addresses and car keys?\textsuperscript{129}

As I argue below, DeLillo presents the Iranian mourners and the crowds of the United States as completely different entities. There is no connection established, apart from Karen’s empathy, between the West and the rest of the world. Instead the crowds of the West embody a rush into the future, ‘the frenzy of a nation’, whereas the Iranian nation mourning for Khomeini represents a completely different form of temporal pressure, and one that is solely exemplified in \textit{Mao II} by Karen.

DeLillo represents Karen’s awareness of the influence of the past one final time before Khomeini’s death is banished from the novel:

Karen went backwards into the lives of the women, she saw them coming toward the camera in the narrow streets, then back even further to when they were growing up, to when they put on the veil and looked out at the world from the black wrapping, backwards to what it felt like dressed head to foot in black the first time, calling out a name under the burning sky.\textsuperscript{130}

Again, Karen is represented as the sole bearer of this temporal agility, her empathy for what she is viewing in front of her, and her experiences both with the Moonies and the New York homeless facilitating her awareness of the past in a society which privileges only the future. Interestingly, Karen is not always affected by the news media in this way (to see into the past). Indeed, DeLillo provides her with impetus to see into the future much earlier in the narrative:

There were times she became lost in the dusty light, observing some survivor of a national news disaster, there’s the lonely fuselage

\textsuperscript{129} DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 191.
\textsuperscript{130} DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 192.
smoking in a field, and she was able to study the face and shade into it at the same time, even sneak half a second ahead, inferring the strange dazed grin or gesturing hand, which made her seem involved not just in the coverage but in the terror that came blowing through the fog.\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 117.}

DeLillo’s description of Karen as able to ‘sneak’ into the future anticipates her peculiar ability during the coverage of Khomeini’s funeral. It is instructive to note that in the modern manifestation of terror, utilising Bill’s formulation, “midair explosions and crumbled buildings”,\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 157.} the temporal pressure is on the future, the only available movement of time further into that which impinges constantly on the West.

Khomeini’s death, and the spectacle that it creates seems, in \textit{Mao II}, not to be an example of the acceleration of time. Instead, the crowds that DeLillo envisages in this section of the novel do not call forth the future, but rather evoke the past. Thus we can see that DeLillo’s repeated references to the third world conditions he identifies in Iran suggest a move back to the past, at odds with the opposite effect he identifies within America. We can see then the temporal pressure inflicted on Karen, a woman previously associated with the Moonies, and so concerned with the plight of the homeless in New York City itself (the disassociated, the direct antithesis of the modern crowd), requires a move to the past. This pressure is manifested in Karen’s repeated visions of what has occurred before the mourning for Khomeini, rather than that which follows in the future.

**Bill’s Death/Novel—‘In Beirut’**

In this section I will extrapolate out from the connection between terrorism and writing that DeLillo establishes very clearly throughout \textit{Mao II} (see Time, Terror, and Art, above). I will argue that the links and analogies between terrorism and writing are
developed in full when they are considered in light of Bill’s constantly withheld (and constantly rewritten) novel. These links in turn reflect Gray’s degeneration and final slide toward death. I have quoted Bill’s views on terrorism and the novel above, but three comments Gray makes serve as a frame for the argument I will pursue. When Bill is sitting for his portrait with Brita, DeLillo makes clear the peculiar relationship between the terroristic act and the act of writing. Bill Gray states:

‘There’s a curious knot that binds terrorists and novelists. In the West we become effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence […] Years ago I used to think that it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated.’

During the same conversation he argues again that writing is losing its power to terror:

‘[W]e’re giving way to terror, to news of terror, to tape recorders and cameras, to radios, to bombs stashed in radios. News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative.’

Later in the novel Bill proposes a similar argument again. DeLillo places this comment in a specific artistic context, the reference to Beckett an example of the seriousness of the exchange:

‘What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they represent equals our own failure to be dangerous.’

[…] ‘Beckett is the last writer to shape the way we think and see. After him, the major work involves midair explosions and crumbled buildings. This is the new tragic narrative.’

---

Gray is not suggesting that the action novel is taking over from a more serious literature, but that the idea of narrative itself has shifted, taken over by cinema and television, the desire for sight and sound dominating the ‘sensibility’ of the novel. The central motivation of all these comments on literature and its competition with terror is not an academic discussion of the power of the novel, but rather motivated by Gray’s concern over his own novel, the continually deferred guillotine blade hanging above Bill’s exposed neck.

As Bill waits for the arrival of Brita for the photo shoot, DeLillo first introduces the reader to the pain that Gray is experiencing with his novel. His writing for the day is described as: “the scant drip, the ooze of speckled matter, the blood sneeze, the daily pale secretion, the bits of human tissue sticking to the page.” Bill’s writing is visceral, a painful struggle to drag from the body art which will have the desired effect on society. In Gray’s formulation of writing as a painful extrication from the body the reader can identify a number of resonances with Samuel Beckett’s writing, seen, for example in Worstward Ho as the “ooze” that stands in for language. Beckett writes: “[o]oze back try worsen blanks.” This ‘ooze’ is both language and the body, the crippling effort required of Beckett (and the author as cipher) to attempt to express satisfactorily. We can see a similar comparison between the body and language in the often quoted ‘German Letter of 1937’, in which Beckett argues for a “literature of the unword”:

---

136 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 28.
As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.¹⁴⁰

Beckett’s system requires violence against language (‘bore one hole after another in it’), whereas Gray’s viscerality is directed against his own body, a bodily reinterpretation of Beckett’s violence against language, and a process that emphasises the painful process of Gray’s writing. Indeed, we can see the violence that Bill forces upon his body in the search for his novel manifested in the self-medication that he undertakes. As Bill gives up on his novel and searches for another means to struggle against the growing power of terrorism his desire for self-medication evaporates.

**Jean-Claude and Bill**

Once Bill effects his escape from Scott, his self-medication emerges more insistently throughout the narrative. Bill attempts to numb himself, and the insistent pain of his work-in-progress, through a speculative combination of different drugs. After the photo shoot with Brita, returning to his work he feels “an old watery moan deep in the body” which inflames his desire for “some pink-and-yellow fluoride multivitamins”.¹⁴¹ Again, the work-in-progress is personified, manifesting itself not only in Bill’s various ailments, but emerging as a figure in Bill’s mind:

[…] a neutered near-human […] humpbacked, hydrocephalic, with puckered lips and soft skin, dribbling brain fluid from its mouth. Took him all these years to realize this book was his hated adversary.¹⁴²

After escaping from Scott, the medication is slightly sinister, “precut segments of three brands of amphetamine tablets”.¹⁴³ As he recedes further from his former life, his

---

desire for self-medication grows stronger. DeLillo describes the widening range of medicines Gray desires:

Depressants, anti-depressants, sleep-inducers, speed-makers, diuretics, antibiotics, heart-starters, muscle relaxants. In front of him now were three kinds of sedatives and a single pink cortical steroid for intractable skin itches.\(^{144}\)

All these different concoctions, and the different combinations possible allow Bill to:

[... ] shop among the colors for some altering force that might get him past a momentary panic or some mischance of the body or take him safely through the long evening tides, the western end of the day, a wash of desperation coming over him.\(^{145}\)

The self-medication that Bill conducts is inevitably related to the panic and distress the work-in-progress continually generates within him. There is a perplexing relationship between Bill’s desire for self-medication and the predicament of Jean-Claude the Swiss poet-hostage. Bill’s medication seems primarily aimed at preventing a sort of temporal vertigo, to resist the power of the work-in-progress, and how it keeps pulling Bill, both back to the desk, and back into the temporality of writing. For Jean-Claude, however, no relief is available—for him, time is insistent and immediately present.

DeLillo’s first reference to Jean-Claude, in free indirect discourse, makes the centrality of time to his experience immediately clear. This is the same experience of time that Bill encounters through the powerful temporality of his work-in-progress, and the one he attempts to defer through his self-medication. DeLillo describes Jean-Claude’s experience:

Time became peculiar, the original thing that is always there. It seeped into his fever and delirium, into the question of who he was. When he

spat up blood he watched the pink thing slug into the drain and it carried time quivering in it.\textsuperscript{146}

Jean-Claude’s experience, as detailed above, describes almost exactly the same experience that Bill has had. Whilst Jean-Claude is a hostage, Bill is a hostage to his work-in-progress, sneezing onto his page blood-filled mucus as he attempts to continue work on his novel.\textsuperscript{147} As such, the reader must be led to think that Jean-Claude’s experience of time correlates with Bill’s—the two hostages, for writing and for terrorism, experiencing a forceful and dominant temporality which is at the heart of DeLillo’s investigation of time throughout \textit{Mao II}.\textsuperscript{148}

DeLillo posits a question in his notes to \textit{Mao II}, which resonates with the experiences of both Bill and Jean-Claude. DeLillo asks himself:

\begin{quote}
Why does terrorism make an impact while mass murder does not? \\
Because it’s calculated, not random; because it’s often played out over days and weeks; because hostages are kept for years.\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}

It is DeLillo’s final point that is most crucial. Both Bill and Jean-Claude are concerned with time, finally, because the fact of their existence as hostages to literature, to terrorism (both alternatives apply to both characters) is not timeless, but unfinished. Their experiences of time are inflected by the fact that the duration of their experiences can only be altered by death or release. So, for Jean-Claude, the experience of time is everywhere: “[t]ime permeated the air and food. The black ant

---

\textsuperscript{146} DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 107. \\
\textsuperscript{147} See DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 55. \\
\textsuperscript{148} My argument takes the opposing view to Laura Barrett, who argues that Jean-Claude experiences a “compromise[d] subjectivity because he cannot place himself spatially.” I would argue that, if anything, an imposition on subjectivity proceeds from \textit{Mao II}’s disjunctive temporality, although both Bill and Jean-Claude can place themselves in time. See Barrett, L., ‘Here But Also There”: Subjectivity and Postmodern Space in \textit{Mao II}, in \textit{Modern Fiction Studies}, Vol. 45, No. 3, 1999, pp. 789-794. \\
\textsuperscript{149} DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.
crawling up his leg carried time’s enormity, the old slow all-knowing pace.” The terrorist’s torturing of Jean-Claude provides, perhaps, the most revealing commentary on time throughout the novel. DeLillo writes that: “[t]he pain extended long past the boy’s departure from the room. This was part of the structure of time, how time and pain became inseparable.” Thus, for Jean-Claude, as for Bill. The pain that Bill experiences—both the bodily pain, and the mental mortification of his work-in-progress, oozing and painful, are intimately related to time. As we see throughout the narrative of Mao II, despite the painful efforts of both Jean-Claude and Bill, the struggle against being the subject of time is futile. Jean-Claude fades out of the narrative, whilst Bill’s life ends, subject at the end both to the terrorist plot and to his own never-ending novel.

The violence that I identify in DeLillo’s allusion to Beckett is of course rendered ineffectual by the power of the terrorist act. DeLillo himself emphasises this point in his notes in preparation for Mao II, observing the inevitable powerlessness of literature within the novel: “How terrorism mocks the writer; effects change in consciousness, making the writer seem harmless, overshadowing his efforts to cause a shift in the nature of time.” I have analysed above the relationship between the work of art and time itself, but the influence of terrorism that hangs over Bill’s novel is just as crucial a concept.

151 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 108.
152 Thomas Carmichael argues that Gray is not so much subject to time as losing his subjectivity through self-reflexivity. See Carmichael, T., ‘Lee Harvey Oswald and the Postmodern Subject: History and Intertextuality in Don DeLillo’s Libra, The Names and Mao II’, in Contemporary Literature, Vol. 34, No. 2, Summer 1993, pp. 214-215.
153 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.
We can see the power of this perception in Brita’s desire to investigate Bill’s endlessly deferred novel. DeLillo writes:

Bill’s work-in-progress was stored in hard black binders, each marked with a code number and a date […] maybe two hundred thick binders representing drafts, corrected drafts, notes, fragments, recorrections, throwaways, updates, tentative revisions, final revisions.\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 31.}

After this description, however, the danger and viscerality of the work-in-progress is emphasised. The room the manuscript is housed in is associated with violence and the terroristic. It is made up of “slit windows high on the walls […] and […] two large dehumidifiers […] She waited for Scott to call this room the bunker”\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, pp. 31-32.} The security of the work is paramount, and yet this security reinforces an allusion to the violence that the novel is analogous to later in \textit{Mao II}.

The security arrangements described above lend the reader insight into the lengths to which Bill has gone to develop this latest novel. Brita senses this in their photo session the next day, feeling in Bill “a doggedness […] a sense of all the limits he’d needed to exceed, getting on top of work that always came hard.”\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 39.} Of course, despite Bill pushing his body violently beyond its limits his work has not been successful, the power of the terrorist act overtaking all efforts at pushing his body to ‘effect [a] change in consciousness’.

As Brita and Bill conclude the photo shoot, Bill sets out an understanding of his novel, seemingly at odds with his comments on writing and art quoted above, but a system that, in the narrative arc of the novel, justifies his decision to fight against the
kidnapping of the young Swiss writer at the heart of the second half of *Mao II*. Bill argues:

‘The language of my books has shaped me as a man. There’s a moral force in a sentence when it comes out right. It speaks the writer’s will to live […] This book and these years have worn me down. I’ve forgotten what it means to write […] I’ve lacked courage and perseverance. Exhausted. Sick of struggling […] I’m sitting on a book that’s dead.’\(^{157}\)

What Gray does not enunciate here is that the failure of his novel is, at heart, caused by his despair at the diminishing power of literature. Bill righteously fights for the possibilities the novel encapsulates, especially in concert with Charlie Everson, and yet, the fight is always despairing, and always doomed to failure.

The corollary conflict that accompanies Bill’s continued agonising over his work-in-progress is Scott’s perception of the power of Bill’s continued absence from the world. His disappearance into an anonymous countryside and his overwhelming silence, exemplified by his complete lack of publication, elevates Bill to a status that other novelists cannot hope to achieve. Scott argues that Bill’s possible influence is extended by not being “published in years and years and years.”\(^{158}\) He continues:

‘When his books first came out, and people forget this or never knew it, they made a slight sort of curio impression […] It’s the years since that made him big. Bill gained celebrity by doing nothing. The world caught up […] Bill gets bigger as his distance from the scene deepens.’\(^{159}\)

According to Scott’s argument, the despair that Bill feels at the state of the literary world is not a new phenomenon but a fact that goes back at least a generation. The


\(^{158}\) DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 52.

\(^{159}\) DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 52.
power of literature has been ceded, and the only possibility is to adopt a performative posture, that is the performance of absence, to re-establish the possibility of novelistic power.

The combination of Scott and Bill’s views on the possibility of the novel provides an effective summary of the different pressures within this first section of Bill’s narrative. After this, as Bill escapes from Scott, the power of the novel is never under such sustained analysis, for Bill is finally acting on the suspicions he has harboured for such a long time. The quotation below is Scott arguing, amid a tense final dinner before Brita leaves to return to New York after the photo shoot. DeLillo writes:

‘The novel used to feed our search for meaning. Quoting Bill. It was the great secular transcendence. The Latin mass of language, character, occasional new truth. But our desperation has led us toward something larger and darker. So we turn to the news, which provides an unremitting mood of catastrophe. This is where we find emotional experience not available elsewhere. We don’t need the novel. Quoting Bill. We don’t even need catastrophes, necessarily. We only need the reports and predictions and warnings.’

We should note that the argument Scott makes here is not the same argument that Bill makes in identifying a nexus between the novelist and the terrorist. Instead, it is only the manifestation of the violent that is required. The narrative leads us to the argument made in the second half of Mao II. We should note, however, the subtle difference in argument, especially considering notes such as this from DeLillo:

“Terrorism is not a piece of global theater; it’s an attack on theater, on global communications, on the idea […]”

Finally as the theoretical analysis of the first part of Mao II concludes we have a two-part argument established, either in favour of the

160 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 72.
162 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 38, Folder 1.
power of theatre and the work of art, or the opposite, an attack on theatre, the idea of spectacle, and instead only the transmission of the event.\textsuperscript{163}

**In New York: Everson and Gray**

From the first moment of interaction between Bill and his publisher, Charlie Everson, the reader can see DeLillo’s significant use of irony that inflects their exchanges and ultimately comments on the project Bill sets out to achieve, namely fighting for literature in the face of the overwhelming power of terrorism. Everson describes Bill: “‘[y]ou look like a writer. You never used to. Took all these years.’”\textsuperscript{164} Of course, the irony of this statement is clear to the reader, who knows now that Bill’s work-in-progress is a failure—he has turned into the image of a writer at the exact point when his ability to write has deserted him. DeLillo’s ironic eye, however, is not only focused on Bill. Everson is encapsulated entertainingly through his clothes:

```
The custom suit. The traditional loud tie that preserved a link to collegiate fun, that reminded people he was still Charlie E. and this was still supposed to be the book business, not global war through laser technology.\textsuperscript{165}
```

DeLillo’s ironic tone joins writing and terroristic violence again. Considering the manipulations and terrorist methodologies that Everson attempts later in the narrative, the linking of the character with global violence serves to illustrate Bill’s unique relationship to his art, and thus his distinct opposition to terror and violence.

Everson leads Bill into his organisation’s scheme to assist the Swiss poet with his own version of the nexus between writing and violence:

\textsuperscript{164} DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{165} DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 96.
'You have a twisted sense of the writer’s place in society. You think the writer belongs at the far margin, doing dangerous things. In Central America, writers carry guns. They have to. And this has always been your idea of the way it ought to be. The state should want to kill all writers. Every government, every group that holds power or aspires to power should feel so threatened by writers that they hunt them down, everywhere.'

Everson’s reference to ‘every group’ implies, in a sense, that he believes in the power of the writer over the terrorist. Once again, the irony of the situation is clear—Everson identifies the power over the terrorist in the same way Bill does, but cannot enunciate this concept and guarantee Bill’s participation in his scheme. And finally, Everson’s scheme, and the most dominant plot of Mao II is unveiled, as DeLillo describes:

[A] young man held hostage in Beirut. He’s Swiss, a UN worker who was doing research on health care in the Palestinian camps. He’s also a poet […] We know next to nothing about the group that has him. The hostage is the only proof they exist.'

The idea of a terrorist group coming into being, existing in society only through their unveiling of a hostage is an enticing one. Just as the writer’s work is unveiled through publication, this terrorist group exists only because of the release of information, the fact of their own act becoming available to society.

Everson’s plan provides publicity for both the terrorist group and for his own “high-minded committee on free expression.” It is an opportunistic idea mirroring the understanding of art and violence that Scott enunciated in the ‘quoting Bill’ excerpt above, whilst also providing an ironic reflection on DeLillo’s own participation in attempts to secure the freedom of Salman Rushdie. Everson’s concern is not for the hostage but for the news bulletins that will be generated by the plan he has hatched:

---

166 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 97.
167 DeLillo, Mao II, pp. 97-98.
168 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 98.
'[A] news conference, small and tightly controlled. Day after tomorrow in London. We talk about the captive writer. We talk about the group that has him. And then I announce that the hostage is being freed at that moment on live television in Beirut.'

In this sense Everson is hijacking the methodology of the terrorist as DeLillo presents it in the novel, as he notes: “[n]ews is the last addiction.” In a sense, one could argue that Everson’s plan emasculates the terrorist act, beating the terrorist group to the punch for media coverage. This argument fails in two ways—firstly, because it disregards the fact that the Swiss poet has already been held hostage for a considerable length of time, as DeLillo describes later in the novel, and secondly, because of the control the shadowy terrorist group would have over the media coverage throughout the stage-managed release. Ultimately, Everson illustrates that his supposedly ‘high-minded’ group is indeed little more than the Western manifestation of terrorist methodology, seeking to harness the media for an informational gain.

DeLillo then extends this argument out, illustrating the extent to which Gray is manipulated, placed in a position of weakness by the terrorist group (later in the novel) and in the terroristic methodology adopted by Everson. Always, however, the societal regard for Bill dominates the thinking of those around him:

‘There’s an excitement that attaches to your name and it will help us put a mark on this event, force people to talk about it and think about it long after the speeches fade. I want one missing novelist to read the work of another. I want the famous novelist to address the suffering of the unknown poet. I want the English-language writer to read in French and the older man to speak across the night to his young colleague in letters.’

170 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 98.
171 DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 39, Folder 3.
Everson manipulates Bill, utilising his desire to ‘effect [a] change in consciousness’ by turning him into a cipher for his previous work. Bill is forced into this sacrificial position by his absolute desire for the work of art to exceed the power of the act of terror. He is transformed, however, in this moment and begins to stand in for the power of literature, a power the reader already senses from repeated analysis will end up ineffectual. Crucially, as Everson’s plan moves towards realisation, Bill’s writing becomes embodied by failure. As he spends his final night in New York, he lies awake making “notes for some revisions of his novel.”

Even this will become impossible as Everson’s plan moves forward.

**In London**

Bill flies to London, experiencing a strangely different reaction to the city as to that he experienced in New York, earlier in the novel, where that city was ‘interesting to Bill in the way it blocked comment’. Bill’s reaction to London is antithetical. DeLillo writes:

> He wasn’t interested in seeing London. He’d seen it before. A glimpse of Trafalgar Square from a taxi, three routine seconds of memory, aura, repetition, the place unchanged [...] a dream locus, a doubleness that famous places share, making them seem remote and unreceptive but at the same time intimately familiar, an experience you’ve been carrying forever. The pavement signs were the only things he paid attention to [...] They seemed to speak to the whole vexed question of existence.

It seems that Bill’s experience of cities, and especially of London, parallels his changing understanding of writing itself. DeLillo’s description of Bill’s perception of London mirrors a conceptualisation of literature that fits effectively into our understanding of Gray’s work. Time is deferred in London, and remains in existence.

---

174 DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 120.
through the ‘memory, aura, [and] repetition’ of the place, as if time is beginning to decelerate, in a way that is not possible in New York.

Bill begins to regret his decision to go along with Everson’s plan, experiencing:

[…] a foreboding, the little clinging tightness in the throat that he knew so well from his work, the times he was afraid and hemmed in by doubt, knowing there was something coming up ahead he didn’t want to face, a character, a life he thought he could not handle. 175

It is not Bill’s life _per se_ that is creating this concern, but Everson’s plan to release the Swiss hostage. Bill’s concern with his writing and the novel he will never complete is reflected in his concern for the events to come, which make up the conclusion of the novel. I don’t wish to argue that Bill’s character is descending into a metatextual moment in which author and his novel are doubled, although this argument has been made previously. 176 I see, instead, that Bill’s novel and Everson’s plan are intimately related—Bill’s failure with his latest novel compels him into participating in Everson’s plan, but it is precisely the failure of Bill’s work-in-progress that anticipates the failure of Everson’s plan.

As Bill’s failure with his novel is alluded to, so is the incipient failure of Everson’s plan. The first venue for the press conference has to be rejected after the site begins to receive anonymous bomb threats. 177 The theatre of Everson’s plan begins to unravel as the shadowy forces of terrorism begin to amass. Everson arranges a second location, which he and Gray travel to, accompanied by the police, before this venue receives bomb threats as well. Bill and Charlie are evacuated, and wait across the road “for the

175 DeLillo, _Mao II_, p. 121.
177 DeLillo, _Mao II_, p. 121.
bomb unit to arrive and search the building.” DeLillo describes Bill’s reaction to this imposition:

‘The point is control […] They want to believe they have the power to move us out of a building and into the street. In their minds they see a hundred people trooping down the fire stairs […] Some people make bombs, some people make phone calls.’

This conversation mirrors a conversation between the two after their first experience of a bomb threat. Bill’s bravado is, of course an ironic anticipation of what immediately occurs—the manifestation of terrorism, not in phone calls, but in bombs themselves. The bomb that explodes in Everson’s alternative venue means that his plan must be delayed for a day or two, mirroring Bill’s continued rewriting of his work-in-progress and his continued deferral of publication. The terrorist act is presented here, by DeLillo, as specifically interfering with the work of art Bill is so invested in. The conflict is also further complicated by Everson’s increasingly obvious motivation for Bill’s involvement in his plan—not only is Bill a seductive media presence, but Bill’s interaction with Charlie allows him time to work on him and attempt to extricate the work-in-progress from him. Bill’s reaction is important: “‘I’d just as soon have my books rot when I do. Why should they outlive me? They’re the reason I’m dying before my time.” Bill is dying not only because of his struggle with his latest novel, but also because of the simple fact of his existence as a writer. The growing power of terrorism means that his life is under threat.

As Everson’s plot becomes thicker, Charlie introduces Bill to the terrorist groups’ intermediary, George Haddad. DeLillo’s ironic manipulation provides comedic value, but also emphasises the sinister power of Charlie’s multinational publisher which is

paralleled with the terrorist group of the narrative. Bill protests the innocence of the Swiss poet in captivity—George’s reply reasserts the terrorist novelist nexus at the heart of the conflict:

‘Of course he’s innocent. That’s why they took him. It’s such a simple idea. Terrorize the innocent. The more heartless they are, the better we see their rage. And isn’t it the novelist, Bill, above all people, above all writers, who understands this rage, who knows in his soul what the terrorist thinks and feels? Through history it’s the novelist who has felt affinity for the violent man who lives in the dark. Where are your sympathies? With the colonial police, the occupier, the rich landlord, the corrupt government, the militaristic state? Or with the terrorist? And I don’t abjure the word even if it has a hundred meanings. It’s the only honest word to use.’

Haddad lays bare the conflict at the heart of the Bill Gray narrative within *Mao II*. The diminishing power of the novelist makes the violent act of the terrorist captivating, providing the novelist with the enticing possibility of recapturing the power that their kind used to maintain. The power of the terrorist is reinforced by Haddad’s comparison of the two cities, Beirut and London. He argues: “‘Beirut has learned from the West. Beirut is tragic but still breathing. London is the true rubble.’” Western cities have becomes a victim of the acceleration of time they embody, paralleling, in Haddad’s view, the declining power of the novelist. The vital temporality of the world is now located in the ‘terrorist stronghold’ embodied in *Mao II* by Beirut.

As Bill is lured to Beirut by Haddad his work-in-progress is personified again, illustrating the final failure it is rapidly becoming. Bill’s novel is a looming presence, and one that cannot be ignored. We read: “[h]is book, smelling faintly of baby drool, was just outside the door. He heard it moan solemnly, the same grave sound that

---

welld in his gut.”\textsuperscript{184} Gray’s physical degradation, and his quickening slide into ill health and death is mirrored by the intensifying presence and pain of the work-in-progress itself. As Bill departs for Athens to begin a dialogue with Haddad, the narrator concludes with one final sentence, instructive at this stage of the narrative: “For the first time [Bill] thought about the hostage.”\textsuperscript{185}

\textbf{In Athens}

After Bill arrives in Athens he returns to the hostage, who had so recently become a part of his thoughts. The reader understands that Gray’s motivations before this point did not include concern for the hostage, but rather concerned the conceptual question of the power shift between terrorists and writers. DeLillo writes:

\begin{quote}
He tried to put himself there, in the heat and pain, outside the nuance of civilized anxiety. He wanted to imagine what it was like to know extremes of isolation. Solitude by the gun. He read Jean-Claude’s poems many times. The man remained invisibly Swiss. Bill tried to see his face, hair, eye color, he saw room color, faded paint on the walls. He pictured precise objects, he made them briefly shine with immanence, a bowl for food, a spoon constructed out of thought, perception, memory, feeling, will and imagination.\textsuperscript{186}
\end{quote}

What the reader finally encounters, after the midway point of the novel, is Bill’s imaginative faculties, his creative ability with word and image. Indeed, what the reader encounters here is DeLillo’s first description of the depths of Gray’s literary talent. His reconsideration of the kidnapping of the Swiss poet facilitates a reinvigoration, however short-lived, of his literary ability, albeit a resuscitation that is motivated by Bill’s desire to obtain, or at least share in, the emerging power of the terrorist group.

\\textsuperscript{184} DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{185} DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 138.
\textsuperscript{186} DeLillo, \textit{Mao II}, p. 154.
George Haddad reveals that the terrorist group’s hastily made plans have them “‘look[ing] more carefully at the available writers […] One man taken released in Beirut, another taken in London. Instantaneous worldwide attention.’” Haddad is at pains to emphasise the similarities between the shadowy terrorist leader, Abu Rashid, and Bill. They are: “‘[t]wo underground figures. Men of the same measure in a way.’” Of course, this is flattery from Haddad, placing the power of the terrorist and the writer on the same level. Bill, presumably from his desire to recapture power for the novelist, provides a strange sense of acquiescence throughout these proceedings, as if the will of the terrorist organisation is inevitable.

Bill and Haddad’s conversation then returns again to the comparison between novelists and terrorists, much of which has been quoted in the sections above. I have not, however, addressed Haddad’s conclusion, an argument that places both the terrorist and the novelist on a privileged plane of power and societal influence. DeLillo writes:

“The way they hate many of the things you hate. Their discipline and cunning. The coherence of their lives. The way they excite, they excite admiration. In societies reduced to blur and glut, terror is the only meaningful act. There’s too much everything, more things and messages and meanings than we can use in ten thousand lifetimes. Inertia-hysteria. Is history possible? Is anyone serious? Who do we take seriously? Only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith. Everything else is absorbed. The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated. Give him a dollar, put him in a TV commercial. Only the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn’t figured out how to assimilate him. It’s confusing when they kill the innocent. But this is precisely the language of being noticed, the only language the West understands. The way they determine how we see them. The way they dominate the rush of endless streaming images. I said in London, Bill. It’s the

188 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 155.
novelist who understands the secret life, the rage the underlies all obscurity and neglect. You’re half murderers, most of you.”

We can see the alluring nature of Haddad’s argument, and how his argument seduces Bill further into relation with the terrorist group. Bill is seduced, however, because he seems to understand that the language of the novel is no longer sufficient, and to rejuvenate his work, he must adopt the language, the affect, of the terrorist. It must be established, however, that notwithstanding how much the reader identifies Bill’s acquiescence to the terrorist aim, at this stage of the novel he is still defiant, arguing that the novelist and the terrorist aim and achieve different things. Bill argues:

‘The experience of my own consciousness tells me how autocracy fails, how total control wrecks the spirit, how my characters deny my efforts to own them completely, how I need internal dissent, self-argument, how the world squashes me the minute I think it’s mine.”

Bill continues to argue for the power of the novel, bringing the thought of his acquiescence into relief:

‘You know why I believe in the novel? It’s a democratic shout. Anybody can write a great novel, one great novel, almost any amateur off the street […] Something so angelic it makes your jaw hang open. The spray of talent, the spray of ideas. One thing unlike another, one voice unlike the next. Ambiguities, contradictions, whispers, limits. And this is what you want to destroy.”

Once again, Gray is defiant, still believing in the power of the novel, the power of literature. In this regard, Bill’s comments here place the notion of his acquiescence under interrogation in a way that does not seem to accord with the conclusion of the novel. It is, finally, the failure of Bill’s writing that leads me to argue that the terrorist eventually gains the power the novelist attempts to maintain. Gray’s final statement in his conversation with Haddad reinforces this perception: ““And when the novelist

189 DeLillo, Mao II, pp. 157-158. (DeLillo’s emphasis).
190 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 159.
191 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 159.
loses his talent, he dies democratically [...] wide open to the world, the shitpile of hopeless prose.”

As Mao II moves closer to the resolution of the terrorist narrative, Bill continues to attempt to write, his struggles becoming more clear, each time he attempts to write again. Bill is “near the point where he wanted to eliminate things that no longer mattered [...] and why not begin with words.” Mirroring Beckett, and mirroring my references to Beckett above, despite Bill attempting to eliminate words, he is still caught in his desire for the ‘shitpile of hopeless prose’. Writing is, for Bill, “the only way he knew to think deeply in a subject.” Bill struggles, missing his typewriter, finding it difficult to develop the image of the abducted Swiss poet he continues to strive after. Bill cannot develop a complete image, questioning himself and the purpose of his writing:

Who do they send? What does he wear?
The prisoner perceives his own wan image in the world and knows he’s been granted the low-status sainthood of people whose suffering make everyone ashamed.
Keep it simple, Bill.

The free indirect discourse of this section indicates the difficulty of the writing process for Bill, but also suggests how Bill and Jean-Claude begin to merge. Bill’s visualisation of the poet’s surroundings in captivity, reflect the sacrificial position Gray begins to adopt, both in the machinations of the terrorist group, but in the narrative of the novel as a whole.

---

192 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 159.
194 DeLillo, Mao II, p. 160.
196 We should note that the merging of saviour and hostage parallels the merging of writer and terrorist. See Simmons, ‘What is a Terrorist?’, pp. 677-679.
The scope of *Mao II* narrows once Bill enters Athens. The episodes of the novel become shorter, and DeLillo insistently returns to Bill and his quest to uncover the terrorist group, or to free the hostage, whether by sacrifice or not. Considering the insistence with which DeLillo depicts this narrative arc, it is no surprise that there is only a few short pages of focus on other characters before the reader is returned again to Bill. After a long paragraph detailing the incident in which Bill is hit by a car, and the moment that will eventually lead to his demise, DeLillo returns to the importance of writing, and, significantly, the importance of the writing that Gray has taken up since entering Athens, his literary investigation of the conditions Jean-Claude is enduring. DeLillo writes:

> There was something at stake in these sentences he wrote about the basement room. They held a pause, an anxious space he began to recognize. There’s a danger in a sentence when it comes out right, a sense that these words almost did not make it to the page […] The work had a stunned edge, a kind of whiteness […] He smoked and wrote, thinking he might never get it right but feeling something familiar, something falling into jeopardy, a law of language or nature, and he thought he could trace it line by line, the shattery tension, the thing he’d lost in the sand of his endless novel.197

If time has accelerated beyond Bill’s control for much of the novel, the flow of time here is recuperated, the ‘pause’ of his writing here contrasted with a minor allusion to an hourglass, the rapidly passing time that existed during Bill’s flailing attempts to continue on with his work-in-progress. In the passage above the reader apprehends both a rejuvenation in Bill’s writing, but also a fundamental, and final, failure. Although writing about the ‘basement room’ has provided Bill with a new literary focus, it is a piece of writing that is doomed to failure—a piece of writing that will be just like the ‘endless novel’, continually reworked. Bill’s writing has become an

intellectual exercise, his means for deep thought, and will no longer effect the consciousness of society, as his previous, successful work had.

This sense of failure reorients Mao II, in line with the arguments Steiner posits in the latter stages of In Bluebeard’s Castle. Steiner argues that the violence of the holocaust is reflected and anticipated in the desire for sacrifice and purity evident in those writers and philosophers that seem to anticipate the incipient violence. This is not exactly the case for Bill, and yet, his strong desire to provide some form of sacrifice for Jean-Claude suggests an anticipation of the violence of terrorism, and a desire to, by sacrifice, obliterate the power of the terroristic. Steiner argues that the sacrificial poet (or novelist, or philosopher) “set[s] anarchic love against reason, an end of time against history.” Thus as Bill’s body, and writing, continues to move toward exhaustion time begins to slow. The sacrificial moment approaches and with it another exhortation for the reconsideration of time. As Steiner writes:

The thrust of will which engenders art and disinterested thought, the engaged response which alone can ensure its transmission to other human beings, to the future, are rooted in a gamble on transcendence. The writer or thinker means the words of the poem, the sinews of the argument, the personae of the drama, to outlast his own life, to take on the mystery of autonomous presence and presentness. The sculptor commits to stone the vitalities against and across time which will soon drain from his own living hand. Art and mind address those who are not yet, even at the risk, deliberately incurred, of being unnoticed by the living.

The sacrificial element of Bill’s actions, in his writing and otherwise, is his final struggle against the acceleration of time addressed repeatedly in Mao II, and above. Even as Bill moves closer and closer toward his demise his writing continues to reflect

198 See Steiner, In Bluebeard’s Castle, pp. 41-43.
199 Steiner, In Bluebeard’s Castle, p. 43.
200 Steiner, In Bluebeard’s Castle, p. 89.
a desire to reject the power of time, and of terrorism, and reclaim some of this power for art.

**Toward Beirut**

As Bill inexorably continues on his path toward Jean-Claude and Beirut, the wider implications of terrorism and violence become overlayed on what was, in the earlier stages of this narrative, Charlie Everson’s plan. The historical conflict between Christians and Muslims, and the states of Syria, Israel and Lebanon flares again, effectively closing the ferry crossing from Greece to Lebanon. As travel is difficult, Bill returns to his work again:

[… he looked at the pages he’d written and didn’t think he could do anymore. It was too hard. It was harder than major surgery and it didn’t even keep you alive […] Writing was bad for the soul when you got right down to it. It protected your worst tendencies. Narrowed everything to failure and its devastations. Gave your cunning an edge of treachery and your jellyfish heart a reason to fall into deeper silence. He couldn’t remember why he wanted to write about the hostage. He’d done some pages he liked but what was the actual point?201

As Bill’s body fails (the impact from the car in Athens has given him life-threatening injuries) his writing also reaches a maximum point of failure. Writing for Bill is now something that he uses to keep him alive, and yet even in this regard his writing is a failure. Of course, Bill is still striving for a sacrificial rebirth, both of his writing and of his body, through attempting to help Jean-Claude, continually striving to reach Beirut and effect some sort of change which will remedy the power imbalance between writers and terrorists. Bill’s reasons for writing about Jean-Claude are never entirely clear, especially to Bill himself:

He could have told George he was writing about the hostage to bring him back, to return a meaning that had been lost to the world when they locked him in that room. Maybe that was it. When you inflict punishment on someone who is not guilty, when you fill rooms with innocent victims, you begin to empty the world of meaning and erect a separate mental state, the mind consuming what’s outside of itself, replacing real things with plots and fictions. One fiction taking the world narrowly into itself, the other fiction pushing out toward the social order, trying to unfold it. He could have told George a writer creates a character as a way to reveal consciousness, increase the flow of meaning. This is how we reply to power and beat back our fear. By extending the pitch of consciousness and human possibility. This poet you’ve snatched. His detention drains the world of one more thimble of meaning. He should have said these things to that son of a bitch, although actually he quite liked George, but he’d never considered the matter in a quite this way before and George would have said that terrorists do not have power and anyway Bill knew he’d forget the whole thing before much time went by.²⁰²

Despite the unequivocal ending to Bill’s thoughts, this moment is the most potent argument in which the power of the novelist is argued convincingly against that of the terrorist. DeLillo’s writing here calls to mind Jean Baudrillard, who DeLillo refers to in his notes to Mao II.²⁰³ Baudrillard questions both the power of the terrorist and the novelist, arguing: “the real is no longer possible. It is the […] problem of parody, of hypersimulation”.²⁰⁴ For Bill, however, the novelist still eternally grasps after the authentic possibility of altering society, forever bulwarking against the growing power of the terrorist act.

Bill’s work-in-progress is, even in the last days of his life, still an eternal presence. At a nightclub, whilst waiting to travel to Beirut he thinks he spies the book across the room. It is “obese and lye-splashed, the face an acid spatter, zipped up and decolored,”⁰²

²⁰² DeLillo, Mao II, pp. 200-201.
with broken teeth glinting out of the pulp.” DeLillo’s personification of Bill’s writing mirrors the dismal state of his own body, with a severely injured liver, suffered when struck by a car. Bill’s death, on the ferry to Beirut is his final escape “from the gaping page”. DeLillo reinforces the fact that Gray’s life, and death, was always contingent on writing: “[i]t was writing that caused his life to disappear.” And finally Gray does disappear. He dies, and a member of a cleaning crew from the ferry Bill has boarded removes his passport and other forms of identification, rendering his body without identification, but finally, also, without the pressures of writing.

**Conclusion**

*Mao II* provides an effective means with which to begin an analysis of DeLillo’s work on terrorism, and especially on the 9/11 attacks, despite the fact that the novel was written a decade before 2001. DeLillo’s focus on time, seen in both his notes in preparation for the *Mao II* and in the novel itself, illustrate that time is not solely a concern for DeLillo after 9/11. My analysis of *Mao II* also emphasises the interpretation of DeLillo as a prophet of terrorism, an issue that will be assessed again in the following chapter, ‘The Futurity of the 10th of September’.

Finally, however, it is the connection that DeLillo establishes between art and terror that is fundamental. We can see in the arguments that emerge from *Mao II* a nexus that is undeniable, especially after terrorism strikes at the heart of the West, and the heart of both DeLillo and Pynchon’s hometown. In a sense, the analysis of the works that follow returns to Bill Gray’s argument, attempting to understand the sometimes

---

inexpressible power of art, and of literature, which attempts to push back at the burgeoning power of terrorism.

As we will see, DeLillo’s temporal focus in *Mao II* is continued, and expanded, in his novels from *Cosmopolis* on, and also reflects Thomas Pynchon’s focus on the same concept. It is the awareness of conceptual interactions that allows these two authors the most considered and the most appropriate responses to the trauma suffered by America in 2001.
The Futurity of the 10th of September

Introduction

Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, published in April 2003, is his first novel published after the September 11 attacks in 2001. The novel seems reactive to the catastrophic events of that day, and the effect they had, both on America and the world. In reality, however, *Cosmopolis* was effectively completed before the September 11 attacks. DeLillo points out, in an interview with Peter Henning published in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, that he never felt any compulsion to alter *Cosmopolis* after the September 11 attacks occurred. Taking this statement with a grain of salt, we can still see the effect of September 11 on the novel. Indeed, DeLillo argues that *Cosmopolis* “deals with the events of September on a deeper level.”

DeLillo’s construction of 9/11 is instructive:

*FR:* What does September 11 mean to you today?
*DeL:* For me it marks that actual beginning of the 21st century. Because while the zeitgeist before the events was shaped by a belief in the omnipresent power of money and in America’s invulnerability, which was rooted in the late 90s, that belief has now been replaced by fear. On that day we entered into a new age of fear and uncertainty. If, up to that point in the US, we were occupied primarily with watching the streams of money in internet cafes or at home in front of the computer, we are now governed by different laws, more humane ones. The collapse reactivated worries and fears that were thought to be lost.

By distinguishing *Cosmopolis* as not effected by the September 11 attacks but still, in a sense anticipating them, he is afforded the position of prophet, as is alluded to in the

---

209 Henning, P., “„Vielleicht sehe ich eniges klarer und früher als andere.””
German title of the *Frankfurter Ruchschau* interview. DeLillo confirms his desire for maintaining both the pre- and post-9/11 classifications, when he describes the genesis of the novel:

DeL: [...] I started out simply with the idea of letting my protagonist drive across town in one day, a person who is already living in the future and fails to notice how susceptible he is to the destructive mechanisms of the present.

DeLillo distorts a coherent temporality by inflecting what he argues is a pre-9/11 novel with post-9/11 concepts, what Aaron Chandler calls a “productive ambiguity” with *Cosmopolis* a “kind of prelude” to 9/11. These concepts are especially visible in his description of Eric Packer as ‘living in the future’, the same concept enunciated by DeLillo for the United States and the West in his ‘In the Ruins of the Future’ essay.

Therefore in this chapter I will analyse *Cosmopolis* in light of these shifts in temporality—between pre-9/11 time, and post-9/11 time—emphasising that the reception of the novel as prescient of the September 11 attacks is not necessarily a product of DeLillo’s ability to anticipate the future, but rather part of a larger project seen in DeLillo’s post-9/11 works in which time is understood to have changed after the September 11 attacks. DeLillo’s insistence that *Cosmopolis* can occupy both pre- and post-9/11 temporalities alludes to the substance of my argument, in which I elucidate two anachronistic tendencies within the novel—the parachronistic, DeLillo’s incorporation of elements from the past, and the prochronistic, his

---


incorporation of elements from the future. Thus I argue for *Cosmopolis* as a novel very closely related to the temporal theorisations of Paul Virilio, and the concept of dromology that Virilio developed in his works in the 1990s and the early 2000s.

The reception of *Cosmopolis* as prophetic is not of central import for me, although the concept is not without interest in regard to my overall project; rather the importance of illustrating the coherence of DeLillo’s conceptualisations of temporality solidifies how this effect was achieved. Finally I will argue, as I have emphasised in the title to this chapter, that there is a very different quality of time on the 10th of September, 2001, as opposed to the 11th. In *Cosmopolis*, effectively the 10th of September in DeLillo’s career, the future is still accessible, albeit as a conceptualisation of time that requires stringent critique.

**Dromology and Anachronism**

*Cosmopolis* is a novel ultimately concerned with temporality, and especially a similar temporal phenomenon as that I have identified in ‘*Mao II*: Pre-figurations of Terrorist Temporality’, that is, the acceleration of time. In *Cosmopolis*, the acceleration of time is taken to its limit, with both the past and the future impinging on the present. As such, I will illustrate the effects of the acceleration of time that DeLillo identifies, and the importance of anachronism within *Cosmopolis*.

Prochronism is a type of anachronism, in which elements from the future are included in the work of art. For DeLillo, the motivation to analyse a concept such as this is very clear—for he believes, and has stated in his work—that the future impinging on the present is actually occurring right now, in the Western world. DeLillo makes a note in preparation for the writing of *Cosmopolis* that sheds light on this concept, but
also illustrates the depth of his concern, anchoring the relationship between the shifting of the future into the present and the September 11 attacks on the United States. DeLillo writes, before September 11:

It tells us that we must live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital. Because there is no memory there and because this is where everything is faster, better, bigger and simultaneously shapeless, heightless & fleeting.\textsuperscript{214}

This ‘it’ is technology, the technological power of the United States and the Western world conspiring to pull the entire population into a futuristic present. The dominance of technology engenders a complete shift in temporality, in which the past and the future collapse in, rendering the present eternal.\textsuperscript{215} DeLillo’s note is not utilised in \textit{Cosmopolis}—rather the sentiment and concept are the overall theoretical parameters of the novel as a whole. It is intriguing, then, that DeLillo’s note does finally emerge in his published work; not in the corresponding text to which the notebook related (i.e. \textit{Cosmopolis}), but in his essay in response to the 9/11 attacks, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’. Indeed, DeLillo’s note, made before the 9/11 attacks, becomes the majority of the first paragraph of this essay. I quote below DeLillo’s entire first paragraph:

In the past decade the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments. The dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the Internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has no limit.\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{214} \textit{DeLillo Archives}, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Box 9, Folder 8.

\textsuperscript{215} The construction of the ‘eternal present’ is analogously similar to Peter Boxall’s construction of the growth of abundance in which “space and time […] might aspire towards limitlessness.” As Boxall observes, however, this superabundance, and its desire to supersede the limit is always shadowed by its opposite—for Boxall, waste, and in my formulation, an incipient reaction against the timelessness of the virtual present. See Boxall, P., “‘There’s No Lack of Void’: Waste and Abundance in Beckett and DeLillo’, in \textit{SubStance}, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2008, pp. 57-59.

\textsuperscript{216} DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 33.
We can see that there is little, if any, conceptual change from the note made before 9/11 and the published version, in response to 9/11. It is also crucial to establish the resonances that exist between the published version of DeLillo’s note and the novel it was intended for. Eric Packer, the central character of *Cosmopolis*, makes his money through international currency exchange, manipulating ‘global consciousness’ through gigantic investment in the Yen, a strategy that is ultimately unsuccessful, and precipitates the unravelling of Packer’s life. Packer’s previous success, however, is reliant on a system of modelling that effectively anticipates the future. As DeLillo writes in description of Packer’s life, technology, money markets and the future are all linked together:

> He thought of the people who used to visit his website back in the days when he was forecasting stocks, when forecasting was pure power, when he’d tout a technology stock or bless an entire sector and automatically cause doublings in share price and the shifting of worldviews, when he was effectively making history […]

Eric Packer, the fictional dominator of money markets, on one day in April, 2000, is successful because his technological system of modelling allows him access to the future, facilitating effective purchases and the ability to anticipate changes in the markets themselves. For DeLillo, after the 9/11 attacks this would seem to be no longer possible. For, as he states in ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, “[t]he terrorists of September 11 want to bring back the past.” For DeLillo, this manifests itself in a move back to the present, rather than the future impinging upon the present. It is instructive then that DeLillo’s novels after the 9/11 attacks exhibit little interest in technology, especially when compared to a novel such as *Cosmopolis*.

---

218 We should note that *Cosmopolis* takes place in a single day, as if DeLillo’s novel is a dromological appropriation of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. See Cowart, *Don DeLillo*, p. 220.
219 DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 34.
It appears as if much of DeLillo’s theorisation on temporality within *Cosmopolis* is a literary manifestation of Paul Virilio’s concept of dromoscopy and the corollary collapse of the past and the future, manifesting itself in the future and the past existing in the present, what Virilio characterises as an “eternal present”. Indeed in DeLillo’s notes in preparation for *Cosmopolis*, he specifically notes Virilio’s *Open Sky* as a book he has read whilst researching the novel.

Virilio’s concept of dromoscopy argues that technological advances, both scientific and material, have resulted in the requirement to add an additional axis to that of experience: this axis is light. Virilio argues that the development of real-time communication, achieved through satellites means that the world now operates at the limit of the speed of light. This in itself causes the temporal distortion, in which the present subsumes the past and the future. As Virilio observes:

> **Time** (duration) and **space** (extension) are now inconceivable without **light** (limit-speed), the cosmological constant of the **speed of light**, an absolute philosophical contingency that supersedes, in Einstein’s wake, the absolute character till then accorded to space and to time by Newton and many others before him.

Time itself is fundamentally altered by the technological and scientific advances that are identified, by DeLillo, as being the basis of New York’s existence (and synechdochically the rest of the Western world). Thus Packer’s comment that “Freud

---

221 See *DeLillo Archives*, Box 9 Folder, 8, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin. Randy Laist proposes a reading of *Cosmopolis* relating the work to Virilio, although he focuses on both DeLillo’s novel, and Virilio’s work, as responding to the September 11 attacks. See Laist, R., ‘The Concept of Disappearance in Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*’, in *Critique*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 2010, pp. 257-275.
is finished, Einstein’s next”, seems to reinforce the fact that the new temporality emerging at the border between the 20th and 21st centuries must be fundamentally different to conventional twentieth century conceptions of time as precipitated by Einstein’s work at the beginning of the century.  

The acceleration of technological development up to a level in which the limit of speed is the speed of light means that past, present, and future collapse into the ‘eternal present’. As Virilio observes:

> Since time-light (the time of the speed of light) is now used as an absolute standard for immediate action, for instantaneous teleaction, the intensive duration of the ‘real moment’ now dominates duration, the extensive and relatively controllable time of history—in other words, of that long term that used to encompass past, present and future.  

Scientific and technological advances that make the illusion of accessing the future possible (e.g. ‘real-time communication’) require the collapse of the past and future as concepts. What remains is the eternal present—past, present and future collapsed into a single whole—and the rejection of history.  

**Prochronism in Cosmopolis**

For DeLillo the collapse of the future into the present, mirroring the anachronistic process of prochronism, is manifested primarily through the dominant motif of the

---


227 It is important to note that Virilio’s analysis of ‘time-light’ as it applies to warfare exceeds the development of this concept as we will discover it in the V-2 of *Gravity’s Rainbow* (see ∆t: Pre-cursors to Pynchon’s Reconsideration of Temporality in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, pp. 163-167). For Virilio’s application of dromology to modern warfare, see Virilio, P., ‘War in Real Time’, in *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light*, trans. Degener, M., Continuum, London, 2002 [1991], pp. 46-50.

novel: the spycam that shows Eric the future, despite Packer himself expecting only to see the present. From the moment that Packer emerges into the streets of New York on what will be the last day of his life, the technological apparatus of his limousine, and especially the spycam, dominate his thoughts. Packer considers the array of technology within his limousine, what amounts to a mobile office, technological development rendering the public space of the office obsolete.\textsuperscript{229} Indeed we read: “[t]he context [of the technology] was nearly touchless.”\textsuperscript{230} DeLillo alerts us immediately to the manipulation of space whereby one does not require movement to interact with technology. Packer’s technological innovations, and the technological systems he uses privilege the temporal (accessing the future) over the spatial (the process of activating a machine by physical touch).

From the very first time Packer contemplates his image, in the small screen projecting the captured image from the spycam, the temporal disjunction is reinforced. During a conversation with an associate in which Packer is attempting to convince him that he has anticipated the market trend of the Yen correctly (that is, seen into the future), Packer glances at the spycam screen. DeLillo writes:

\begin{quote}
Eric watched himself on the oval screen below the spycam, running his thumb along his chinline. The car stopped and moved and he realized queerly that he’d just placed his thumb on his chinline, a second or two after he’d seen it on screen.\textsuperscript{231}
\end{quote}

No further comment is made on this first temporal disjunction within the narrative. The emergence of the future into the present is met with little surprise at all—the technological futurity of Packer’s limousine and his desire to anticipate the future

\textsuperscript{231} DeLillo, \textit{Cosmopolis}, p. 22.
movements of the value of the Yen render surprise incongruous for a character who is situated fundamentally in the future.

We can see in this first manifestation of the future impinging on the present a consistent allusion to the dromoscopic theory proposed by Virilio. DeLillo establishes the spycam as an exemplar of Packer’s visibility. He writes:

His image used to be accessible nearly all the time, videostreamed worldwide from the car, the plane, the office and selected sites in his apartment. But there were security issues and now the camera operated on a closed circuit. A nurse and two armed guards were on constant watch at three monitors in a windowless room at the office.\textsuperscript{232}

The purpose of the spycam is unveiled. The spycam no longer has application as an interactive technology, but, rather, is required simply so that the fact of Packer’s existence can be monitored in real time. Virilio argues that technological development taken to this extent destroys the outside world.\textsuperscript{233} Virilio theorises that:

\begin{quote} [...] such an end implies forgetting spatial exteriority as much as temporal exteriority (‘no future’) and opting exclusively for the ‘present’ instant, the real instant of instantaneous telecommunications.\textsuperscript{234}\end{quote}

This is the fundamental purpose of Packer’s spycam: to facilitate his surveillance \textit{all the time}, to ensure that neither space, nor time, can intervene in ensuring Packer’s existence. Virilio then moves on to establish his fundamental conclusion: the speed of communication destroys conventional temporality:

\begin{quote} \textit{Terminal}—and final—\textit{sedentarization}; a practical consequence of the emergence of a third and final horizon of indirect visibility…a \textit{transapparent horizon} spawned by telecommunications, that opens up the incredible possibility of […] a \textit{live} (live-coverage) society that has no future and no past, since it has no extension and no duration, a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{232} DeLillo, \textit{Cosmopolis}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{234} Virilio, \textit{Open Sky}, p. 25.
society intensely present here and there at once—in other words, 
telepresent to the whole world.\textsuperscript{235}

And this is indeed what DeLillo describes in the surveillance spycam that is so central
to \textit{Cosmopolis}, containing Packer within time, whilst, as the spatial becomes defunct
(consider that his office is operated primarily through voice commands) and thus
forces the individual into sedentariness. The future has already begun to impinge upon
the present, for Eric, precisely because there is no longer, in Virilio’s argument, any
means of differentiating past, present, and future. DeLillo’s inclusion of the future
impinging upon the present is the most effective means for him to mobilise this
philosophical concept in a literary work.

It is important to note, despite the spycam being the most effective means for DeLillo
to incorporate Virilio’s concept, it is not the only way in which the future impinges
upon the present in \textit{Cosmopolis}. As Packer’s day continues and the circus of analysts
and advisors come and go from the internal space of the limousine, the reader is
alerted to the fact that Eric seems to anticipate the future in other ways. Packer’s chief
of staff, Jane Melman, is scrambled to meet the limousine in its journey across town,
meeting Packer at a pre-arranged location. But for Eric, it is as if the meeting has
already taken place. DeLillo writes:

\begin{quote}
He knew what she would say to him, first line, word for word, and he
looked forward to hearing it […] He liked knowing what was coming.
It confirmed the presence of some hereditary script available to those
who could decode it.\textsuperscript{236}
\end{quote}

Packer’s supposed ability to anticipate the future is not an ability with fortune telling,
but, crucially, a process of decoding, alluding once again to the technological

\textsuperscript{235} Virilio, \textit{Open Sky}, p. 25. (Virilio’s emphases).
\textsuperscript{236} DeLillo, \textit{Cosmopolis}, p. 38.
imperatives that dominate his life. Indeed, Packer’s parting words with the advisor he converses with prior to Melman entering the vehicle emphasise the technological element of anticipating the future. Chin, the advisor, states that he needs to reconsider, looking for trends in archived records of the financial market, looking back “into the misty dawn.” Packer has no patience for this, rejecting the suggestion and reasserting the power of the technological and his reliance on the market system.

The next time the spycam shows the intrusion of the future into the present, Packer’s reaction is more quizzical. DeLillo writes, using free indirect discourse:

He saw his face on the screen, eyes closed, mouth framed in a soundless little simian howl. He knew the spycam operated in real time, or was supposed to. How could he see himself if his eyes were closed? There wasn’t time to analyze. He felt his body catching up to the independent image.

DeLillo presents a more complex temporality here. In these early instances of Packer’s acknowledgment of the future appearing on the screen from the spycam feed, the confusion seems genuine—for Packer, the future is to be found through manipulation of money markets, not extant in his limousine. At this stage of the novel, he has not yet accepted the power of this image of the future. Thus, DeLillo concludes the paragraph by presenting Packer as attempting to reassert the conventional order of temporality—an ironic attempt considering both the conclusion of the novel and the fortune Packer makes and loses through anticipation of the future himself.

As Packer and Vija Kinski’s progress across New York is halted by what Kinski terms “a protest against the future”, the temporal disjunction of the future in the present

---

239 DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, p. 52.
manifests itself once again.\textsuperscript{240} As with previous examples DeLillo crafts, the impinging of the future into the present is accomplished through the spycam, emphasising the personal nature of the temporal shift—it is focused solely through the character of Eric—the one individual committed to living in the future. DeLillo describes the phenomenon:

> His own image caught his eye, live on the oval screen beneath the spycam. Some seconds passed. He saw himself recoil in shock. More time passed. He felt suspended, waiting. Then there was a detonation, loud and deep, near enough to consume all the information around him. He recoiled in shock.\textsuperscript{241}

The gap between the present and the future is lengthening: Packer, in this example of the future encroaching on the present, has two separate sensations of occupying the future from the moment he engages with the spycam screen. At the same time Packer invokes himself four times, seemingly struggling against the virtualised incorporeality during this temporal disjunction. DeLillo’s phrase as the bomb blast occurs is interesting, emphasising that the blast itself destroys the presence of the future in the present. Of course, the bomb consuming all the information around Packer also alludes to the technological systems of the money market, insistently attempting to read the future, which are the primary targets of this attack. Kinski presents a cogent analysis of the temporal disjunction Packer experiences, as he relates the sensation to her. She argues that Packer himself is the cause of this disjunction. DeLillo writes:

> ‘Think of it this way. There are rare minds operating, a few, here and there, the polymath, the true futurist. A consciousness such as yours, hypermaniacal, may have contact points beyond the general perception.’
> […]
> ‘Technology is crucial to civilization why? Because it helps us to make our fate. We don’t need God or miracles or the flight of the

\textsuperscript{240} DeLillo, \textit{Cosmopolis}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{241} DeLillo, \textit{Cosmopolis}, p. 93.
bumble bee. But it is also crouched and undecidable. It can go either way.\textsuperscript{242}

Kinski alone seems to appreciate the allure and the danger of such radical reliance on technology. The human reliance on technology facilitates access to the future but also poses grave threats to humanity as a whole.\textsuperscript{243}

The final example of the future manifesting itself in the present through the spycam occurs at the denouement of the novel, as Packer willingly confronts Benno Levin, his would-be killer. Levin is a disaffected former employee intent on destroying Packer to gain a sense of fulfilment in his own life. Levin reacts violently against the technological systems of modelling the future that facilitated Packer’s rise and, of course, his fall. Levin’s admiration of the system is tempered only by his understanding of the unnatural state that it places humanity in. DeLillo writes:

‘You tried to predict the movements in the yen by drawing on patterns from nature […] The mathematical properties of tree rings, sunflower seeds, the limbs of galactic spirals […] The way signals from a pulsar in deepest space follow classical number sequences, which in turn can describe the fluctuations of a given stock or currency. You showed me this […] You made this form of analysis horribly and sadistically precise […] But you forgot something along the way […] The importance of the lopsided, the thing that’s skewed a little. You were looking for balance […] But you should have been tracking the yen in its tics and quirks. The little quirk. The misshape.’\textsuperscript{244}

As Cosmopolis draws to a close we begin to see the shape of an overarching argument, in which Packer’s technological systems that predict the future are no longer reliant on natural symbols, but are now solely facilitated by technology itself, a doubling that becomes self-defeating. Packer professes a realisation that Levin is indeed correct, but

\textsuperscript{242} DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{243} Aaron Chandler identifies a conflict between Kinski and Packer, and theorises this moment as a clash between the Heideggerean and Levinasian conceptions of time and futurity. See Chandler, “An Unsettling, Alternative Sell”, pp. 253-257.
\textsuperscript{244} DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 200.
even in this admission, he cannot escape from a technological mode of thought.

DeLillo writes: “Benno […] was probably right. There was something in what he said. It made hard sense, charting sense.”

And thus, the inevitable comes to fruition. Despite Packer agreeing in principle with Levin, and despite the complete collapse of Packer’s global financial dominance, Levin feels he must still kill Eric. As the final machinations of Levin’s plot play out, Packer has one final exterior vision of himself. No longer in the limousine, the vision is provided not by the spycam, but by an “electron camera” contained in his wristwatch. After seeing a beetle on a wire on the screen, and being absorbed by the beauty of nature, the vision abruptly changes. DeLillo writes:

 [...] something changed around him. He didn’t know what this could mean. What could this mean? He realized he’d known this feeling before, tenuously, not nearly so dense and textured, and the image on the screen was a body now, facedown on the floor. He felt a blood hush, a pause in midbeing.

Packer has experienced the brief sensation of being able to view the future before, even, indeed, to feel that he was inhabiting the future whilst remaining within the present. Now, however, the future is insistently present, and Packer cannot escape from it. In the future-present, Eric Packer lies dead, an incorporeality that exceeds the technological rejection of the body Packer manifests in Cosmopolis. He attempts to refocus the camera, moving it back to focus on the beetle, attempting to bring another image on to the screen. In this final moment of the future impinging on the present, escape back into the present, what occurred earlier in the novel, is no longer possible.

245 DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 200.
246 See DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 201.
247 DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 204.
248 DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 205.
249 DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 205.
The vision continues showing Packer’s body inside an ambulance and then placed in a body vault within the hospital morgue. With the less than imaginative comment, “O shit I’m dead”, Packer suddenly emerges into realisation of his demise.\(^{250}\)

In these final moments of *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo reorients the prochronistic elements of his novel with Virilio’s arguments contained in *Open Sky*. The resonances between the passage below and Eric’s last moments are entirely clear. Development of technologies predicated on the speed of light, of real-time communication facilitate:

> [...] the technological re-creation of one of our most ancient myths: the myth of the **double**, of an electromagnetic double whose presence is spectral—another way of saying a ghost or the living dead.\(^{251}\)

Eric Packer’s life, predicated on predicting the future via rapid advances in real-time communication and modelling, finally subsides into a splitting of his body, in which the technological apparatus, so crucial for his success in the financial world, now perceives him as dead, whilst the natural experience of life shows the reader he is still alive. Eric is, however, no longer alive. The ‘light-speed’ of technology has rendered him spectral even in the physical space he occupied, viewing his own corpse.\(^{252}\)

**A Counter-Narrative?**

DeLillo seems to provide at least a minor counter-argument to the insistent collapse of the future that the reader observes throughout the novel. DeLillo makes this counter-argument predominantly through the character Vija Kinski, Packer’s chief of theory. Kinski is the only character to arrive late throughout the novel for a scheduled meeting with Packer, and is dressed differently to the rest of the characters, wearing “a button-


down business shirt, an old embroidered vest and a long pleated skirt of a thousand launderings”. In Kinski’s dress, and in her characterisation, DeLillo constructs a character at odds with the views of the rest of the characters, a character who seems to emerge from the past, and thus a character who can present a counter-narrative within the novel. Kinski’s argument with Packer is crucial as she warns against his present course of investments, seeming to anticipate the future, in her own way, seeing Packer’s demise both in the market and his final encounter with Benno Levin. DeLillo writes, detailing Kinski’s warning to Packer:

‘[…] time is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market system. The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. The future becomes insistent. This is why something will happen, maybe today […] to correct the acceleration of time. Bring nature back to normal, more or less.’

Kinski’s argument is prochronistic in that it anticipates the catastrophes, both financial and physical that will befall Packer at the conclusion of *Cosmopolis*. At the same time, DeLillo engages with Virilio’s theories, arguing that just as money markets will ‘correct’ themselves over time, that is to move toward equilibrium after an artificial high or low, so also will time correct itself, repudiating the moment in time in which past and future collapse into the present.

Kinski is far more concerned with the collapse of the past than the future impinging on the present. She observes that “‘the past is disappearing. We used to know the past but not the future. This is changing […] We need a new theory of time.’” The human

---

254 DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, p. 79.
255 Boxall, and following him, Laist, have argued that irrespective of the focus, on temporality, of the reader, there is an implicit reference to the 9/11 attacks being this event that Kinski foresees. See Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 229, and Laist, ‘The Concept of Disappearance’, p. 258.
256 DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, p. 86,
conceptualisation of temporality resists the collapse of both the future and the past. Kinski’s invocation of “spectacle” as the main sensation of the future-present, refers not only to Packer’s demise, both physical and financial, but also to the 9/11 attacks, famously referred to by Jean Baudrillard using the same term. As DeLillo himself argues, the terrorist’s aim in the 9/11 attacks was to reinvigorate the past. It is in this sense that we can read *Cosmopolis* as prophetic, in that DeLillo argues for a ‘correction’ of time, which we later come to realise has been manifested in the 2001 attacks on the United States.

**Parachronism in *Cosmopolis***

For DeLillo the collapse of the past into the present is manifested in Packer’s concern for the anachronistic quality of words and concepts that seem to describe phenomena ill-suited to his futuristic present. From the moment that Packer emerges to begin the final day of his life the reader is alerted to the parachronistic qualities of New York City. DeLillo writes:

> He took out his hand organizer and poked a note to himself about the anachronistic quality of the word skyscraper. No recent structure ought to bear this word. It belonged to the old soul of awe, to the arrowed towers that were a narrative long before he was born.

Packer argument is a curious one, especially considering how Eric seems to identify with the tower, observing that he feels “contiguous with it”, that tower and individual share “an edge or boundary”. The concept that DeLillo is enunciating here seems to make reference to the futurity of Packer’s life. He is a man, by the end of the novel, solely inhabiting the future, and as such considers himself in a relationship with the

---

259 DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 34.  
skyscraper, physically moving beyond the technological development that facilitated the building of these massive structures.

Despite the curious comparison between building and individual, Packer’s observation is not without justification. Etymologically, Packer may indeed be correct. The term ‘skyscraper’ emerged in the 1890s in the United States as a description of tall buildings, borrowing a term originally used to describe large sails on yachts, then variously, tall horses, tall men, bike riders riding high on penny-farthings and tall stories.262 Considering the organic and human nature of the objects described by the term before it was co-opted for the description of buildings, it is little wonder Packer views the term as anachronistic.

The evolution of the skyscraper, and the obsolescence of the term used to describe it is tied, for Packer, to the technological possibilities that dominate his life, from the advanced modelling systems that have allowed him to build his fortune, to his limousine, which includes, aside from the spycam, technological apparatus that allow him to have ever-present “medleys of data on every screen […] flowing symbols and alpine charts”.263 The most ironic of the parachronistic references made in the early chapters of Cosmopolis, is Packer’s dismissal of the ‘hand organizer’ he uses to make his note on ‘the anachronistic quality of the word skyscraper.’ DeLillo presents Packer’s thoughts through free indirect discourse—he writes:

The hand device itself was an object whose original culture had just about disappeared. He knew he’d have to junk it.264

262 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.
264 DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 9.
Later in *Cosmopolis*, Packer returns to the obsolescence of technologies that seem to recall, for him, the past, rather than the future. Packer argues that “[i]t was time to retire the word phone.”265 This brief reference reinforces the abortive temporality of the novel, in which those technologies that Packer is reliant on, both for communication and success in his occupation, are the most abhorrent. What is left is the end result, the future. Rather than acknowledging the time that has passed for Packer to become successful, he only delights in the future. It is as if, considering the prochronistic elements of the text discussed above, and the fact that Packer finally seems to inhabit the future, that the present itself becomes obsolete.266 For DeLillo to communicate this fact he is required, instead, to dismiss those technological elements of the present that, for Packer, suggest the past.

It is important to establish that Virilio argues in *Open Sky* that the term ‘cosmopolis’ is itself obsolete, in the very same way that ‘skyscraper’ is for Packer, and in a similar sense to the technological obsolescence of Packer’s ‘hand organizer’. Virilio argues that the ‘cosmopolis’ implies “the old industrial and political complex [which] will be superseded by an informational and metropolitical complex, one associated with the omnipotence of the absolute speed of [light].”267 Instead of the comsopolis, the “omnipolis” will emerge, “whose major clinical symptom is the stock exchange system […] computerized and globalized”.268 In this sense, DeLillo’s title for his novel is parachronistic itself—specifically constructing the past as emerging into the present. DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, then, must be seen as fundamentally aware of the competing

266 The competition between prochronistic and parachronistic elements in *Cosmopolis* is explained clearly by Boxall, who argues that the novel incorporates the experience of déjà vu, but also “the premonitory encounter with an as yet un-lived future […]”. Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 224.
forces of parachronism and prochronism, and the disjunctive temporalities that are present within the novel.

I have addressed the futurity of Packer’s limousine both in this section, and in the prochronism section above. Despite the wealth of technological gadgetry that dominates the vehicle, Packer’s limousine is not solely a cipher for DeLillo to argue the impinging of the future into the present. Indeed, when Packer and Kinski are briefly waylaid by the anti-capitalism protest that Kinski describes as a ‘protest against the future’, Packer’s thoughts return to his limo. But rather than return Packer’s thoughts to the technological elements of his vehicle that imply the future impinging on the present, DeLillo centres Packer’s thoughts on the past. The past is manifested in the limousine through an “inlaid fragment of ornamental Kufic script on parchment, late tenth century, Baghdad” a “priceless” artefact that has been incorporated into the design of the limousine, placed on the partition between driver and passenger spaces.²⁶⁹

Another example of the past impinging into Packer’s present is seen in the floor of the vehicle. DeLillo writes:

The floor of the limousine was Carrara marble, from the quarries where Michelangelo stood half a millennium ago, touching the tip of his finger to the starry white stone.²⁷⁰

Of course, Carrara marble is associated not only with Renaissance art, but also the building of ancient temples throughout the West. DeLillo’s illustrates in these two examples of the past contained within the limousine that we cannot simply read the

²⁶⁹ DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 90.
²⁷⁰ DeLillo, Cosmopolis, p. 22.
vehicle as prochronistic, an example of the future in the present. Rather, the parachronistic and prochronistic coalesce in the limousine, illustrating how both past and future meet, for Packer, in the present, reinforcing Virilio’s conception of time in the modern world in which past and future collapse into the present.

DeLillo’s two examples of the parachronistic impinging into the present in Packer’s limousine are not, the reader must presume, coincidental. Both the Carrara marble flooring of the limo and the Kufic script attached to the partition between driver and passengers are related to the work of art, for the marble, a reference to Michelangelo, and for the script, an acknowledgment of the artistry of these creations. Virilio does not engage with the work of art within *Open Sky*, and indeed it does not seem a concern for his text, especially considering its focus on the political and geographic implications of the acceleration of time, and the telescoping of the past and future into the present.

Virilio’s *Ground Zero*, one part of a three part analysis of the September 11 attacks on the United States (the other two works being *The Spirit of Terrorism* by Baudrillard, and *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* by Žižek), reasserts a similar analysis of Western society as proposed in *Open Sky*, with two major differences. Both differences are, of course, related to the 9/11 attacks that have intervened between the thesis proposed in *Open Sky* in 1997, and *Ground Zero*’s publication in 2002. The first difference is a growing awareness of the competing temporalities of the East as opposed to the West (an issue analysed in ‘*Mao II*: Pre-Figurations of Terrorist Temporality’ and ‘Beckett’s *Proust* and *Falling Man*’, see pp. 39-45, 105-108), and
the second being a growing awareness, on Virilio’s part, of the importance of art and artistic representation in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.\textsuperscript{271}

Considering the parachronistic inclusion of both Eastern and Western archetypes of ancient art within Packer’s limousine, we must address the peculiar parachronism of these examples of art within the exemplar of Packer’s futurity, his limousine. In \textit{Ground Zero}, Virilio writes:

\begin{quote}
And I myself have written: ‘\textbf{Here} is no longer, all is \textbf{now}.’
All the arts—and particularly the arts of re-presentation—were, then, to be fatally damaged, then destroyed, by the constant acceleration of technologies of presentation and reproduction both dromological and dromoscopic which, by reducing the space and time between subject and object to zero, were to eliminate, as a matter of course, not just the concepts of rarity and \textit{durée}, but the \textit{nodal points of the potentiality and the ‘becoming’ of works of art}—its phenomenology.\textsuperscript{272}
\end{quote}

Despite the obfuscating, almost pataphysical, nature of this paragraph, much insight can be gained into the parachronistic elements of \textit{Cosmopolis}. Firstly Virilio establishes the resonance between his argument here and in earlier texts (his quotation of his own work is from \textit{The Art of the Motor}), in which the past and future collapse, leaving only the ‘now’, the living present of dromology. For Virilio the 9/11 attacks are another manifestation of the acceleration of time and the telescoping of the present, and thus, September 11 does not present itself as a transformative moment in the way that has been proposed by other theorists and in other sections of this document. Virilio, rather, despairingly identifies the degeneration and final failure of art simply in the fact of its destruction in the face of technological developments in ‘presentation

\textsuperscript{271} Jürgen Habermas proposes a contrasting argument to the assumptions revisited here, when he argues that it is, in fact, the East that has suffered the most in its own “accelerated modernization.” See Borradori, \textit{Philosophy in a Time of Terror}, p. 32.
and reproduction’ the most obvious being real-time communication, the lifeblood of Eric Packer’s existence.\footnote{273}

What collapses then, in \textit{Cosmopolis}, is finally duration, epitomised by the work of art.\footnote{274} The work of art, the ultimate symbol of the extension and duration of time is futile. Following Virilio’s argument we can see a certain despairing logic in DeLillo’s placement of the ciphers of Eastern and Western art in Packer’s limousine—the work of art is subsumed into the technological, signalling the final failure of art.

One other example of art within \textit{Cosmopolis} reinforces the despairing view of artistic expression shared between DeLillo and Virilio. One of the two private elevators Packer has access to for entering and exiting his technology-filled apartment “‘is programmed to play Satie’s piano pieces and to move at one-quarter normal speed.’”\footnote{275} Packer continues, arguing that the slowing down of the music is “‘right for Satie and this is the elevator I take when I’m in a certain, let’s say, unsettled mood. Calms me, makes me whole.’”\footnote{276}

Packer’s alteration of Satie’s work, an avant-garde composer noted for the brevity of his works, seems to be a futile attempt to return the possibility of duration to the work of art.\footnote{277} By slowing the music playing in his elevator, Packer attempts to elongate the

\footnote{273} It is indicative that Stefan Mattessich identifies a parachronistic decline, after 9/11, not in the arts, but in democracy itself. He writes: “in the years after 9/11 it has become apparent that the political establishment in America […] sees democracy […] as an anachronism.” Mattessich, ‘DeLillo’s Thing’, 2.
\footnote{274} Deleuze and Guattari argue the opposite, presenting the work of art as that which rejects the collapse of duration. See Deleuze, G., and Guattari, F., \textit{What is Philosophy?} trans. Tomlinson, H., and Burchell, G., Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, pp. 163-165.
\footnote{275} DeLillo, \textit{Cosmopolis}, pp. 28-29.
\footnote{276} DeLillo, \textit{Cosmopolis}, p. 29.
\footnote{277} We should also note that the slowing down of Satie’s compositions, that is the elongation of the time they take to play, is a motif reused by DeLillo in his latest publication, \textit{Point Omega}. In \textit{Point Omega}, pp. 28-29.
present moment, drawing in the past through the use of Satie, and the future through
the technological manipulation of the music. Indeed, we can see a reflection of this
desire to retain the present in Henri Bergson’s conceptualisation of duration:

Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states
assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating
its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be
entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the
contrary, it would no longer endure. Nor need it forget its former
states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them
alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms
both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens
when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak into one
another.

Eric Packer’s desire for music from the past suggests an effort to retain duration, to see
past, present and future as indistinct. His technological reliance and the
development of technology render this wish impossible. Packer’s parachronistic desire
for the past, in Kufic script, Carrara marble, and Satie’s compositions, finally
illustrates the collapse of past and future, and indeed of duration. What is left is the
living present of dromological time.

---

Omega DeLillo focuses on Douglas Gordon’s videowork 24 Hour Psycho, in which the Hitchcock film
is slowed down so that the movie takes 24 hours to be played. It is possible to argue that DeLillo may
have seen this work before writing Cosmopolis, as 24 Hour Psycho was first exhibited in 1993. DeLillo
seems to indicate that he did not encounter the work until it was exhibited in New York, from 2006.
See McCrum, R., ‘Don DeLillo: “I’m Not Trying to Manipulate Reality—This is What I See and
Hear”’, in The Guardian, 8 August 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/aug/08/don-delillo-
mccrum-interview, last visited 21/11/10.

278 Eric Packer’s other lift plays songs from Brutha Fez, the Sufi rapper whose funeral Packer
encounters in the latter stages of Cosmopolis. Fez’s character seems to be based on the rappers Tupac
Shakur and especially Notorious B.I.G., both rappers’ dying in the 1990s. DeLillo retained newspaper
clippings from coverage of Notorious B.I.G.’s funeral in his notebooks in preparation for Cosmopolis
(see DeLillo Archives, Box 10, Folder 5, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at
Austin). Needless to say, Brutha Fez’s raps are, for DeLillo, the epitome of modern music.

279 Bergson, H., Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, trans. Pogson,

280 Heath Atchley identifies the same desire; to “experience” or attain the “awareness” of duration. See
Atchley, J. H., ‘The Loss of Language, the Language of Loss: Thinking with DeLillo on Terror and
For DeLillo, however, the September 11 attacks provide the means for reasserting the power of art and artistic practice. The despairing finale of art for Virilio, what DeLillo see as a terrorist claiming of the narrative of society, is the chance for DeLillo to call for the resurgence of art—DeLillo argues that the literary provides an opportunity to reassert the importance of art: “it is left to us to create the counter-narrative.”

Conclusion

Thus to the title of this section, the futurity of the 10th of September. Despite Virilio’s countervailing argument, the September 11 attacks do indeed, at least in DeLillo’s view, facilitate the reconsideration of time, and the rejection of the telescoping of past and future into the present. DeLillo’s preparatory note for Cosmopolis, finally published in ‘In the Ruins of the Future’ is crucial to understanding the relationship between this novel and time. DeLillo identifies, before the September 11 attacks, a temporal imperative that pushes the west into ‘liv[ing] permanently in the future’. It is crucial to emphasise that this situation has now changed. The 9/11 attacks have, for DeLillo, completely altered a temporality that seemed unable to be changed. Rather than inhabiting the future, the West now has the possibility to reassess its engagement with time, because, as he puts it in ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, “[t]he terrorists of September 11 want to bring back the past.” Cosmopolis stands right on the cusp of this moment, written primarily before the September 11 attacks, but published after the attacks have occurred. It is obvious then that this novel serves as a turning point, not only for DeLillo’s oeuvre, but also for the American literary scenes analysis of both terrorism and temporality. Boxall presents the precipitousness of Cosmopolis in a different way, when he characterises the novel in relation to Paradise Lost. He writes:

281 DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 34.
283 DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 34.
“[a]s Milton’s God ‘beholds’ ‘past present and future’ in its post-apocalyptic simultaneity, from his vantage point on high, so all time and space is laid out before us.” What I have argued above develops the same idea—time as altered, and time as telescopic, not because of the imminent 9/11 attacks, but because the movement of the West into the future makes the attacks inevitable.

Eric Packer has the ability, within Cosmopolis, to receive both the advantages and the disadvantages of this futurity, a temporal disjunction which, in DeLillo’s writing is no longer possible. The September 11 attacks transformed both fictional and real world time, and this novel is the most effective example of this transformative moment, embodying both the past, through its pre-9/11 composition, and the future, in its post-9/11 reception. In this sense, and despite the negative reviews that the novel sometimes garnered, it is a very useful starting point for an analysis of DeLillo’s responses to the September 11 attacks. Despite Packer’s demise at the conclusion of the novel, there is still a sense of ambivalence as to whether technological innovation will be successfully negotiated by the West, or if the collapse of past and future is imminent for us all. In this sense, DeLillo’s post-9/11 novel, Falling Man, should be viewed as an attempt once again to address these concerns, albeit in a way that does not address technological domination specifically, but rather returns to analysis of America, and then New York. DeLillo does not adopt the despairing nihilism of Virilio, but uses this viewpoint as a counterpoint to the wry, but carefully hopeful tone, that emerges in his writing.

284 Boxall, Don DeLillo, p. 226.
Beckett’s *Proust and Falling Man*

**Introduction**

The primary focus of this section of my dissertation is Don DeLillo’s 2007 novel *Falling Man*. The novel’s analysis of the September 11 attacks on the United States places *Falling Man* as the central work of DeLillo’s output since his 1997 novel *Underworld*. It is important, however, to place *Falling Man* in context within DeLillo’s oeuvre. DeLillo’s writing reached a peak with the publication of *Underworld*. The novel replicates, and develops, the style and form of the ‘Great American Novel’, encompassing an encyclopaedic view of America, and attempting to bring together influences and viewpoints from a diverse array of eras to present a synthesis of America as a whole. The publication of *Underworld*, considering its broad style and wide range of analysis, necessitated a shift on DeLillo’s behalf in pursuit of another style, both of writing, and a reconsideration of the novel itself. If we understand DeLillo’s output up to the publication of *Underworld* to be similar to his contemporary, Thomas Pynchon, in terms of scope and style, then DeLillo turns away from Pynchonian encyclopaedism after *Underworld*. In its place DeLillo turns to a more minimalist style in direct opposition to the encyclopaedic style (and focus) of his previous works. This change in style is also characterised by a return to the works of Samuel Beckett, whose minimalism in form and focus becomes a guide for DeLillo.

---

286 Mendelson sets out his definition of encyclopaedism in his ‘Encyclopedic Narrative’, see especially pp. 1267-1271.

287 It should be noted that a number of critics have established links between DeLillo’s work and Beckett’s previously. See Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, pp. 9-10, 168-169. Boxall has also examined the influence of Beckett on *Falling Man* in his *Since Beckett*, pp. 166-175, 186-189. Interestingly, Andrew Hoberek, in a recently-released piece, interprets DeLillo’s work in relation to American minimalism, and thus focuses on the similarities between DeLillo’s work and Ezra Pound. See Hoberek, A., ‘Foreign Objects, or, DeLillo, Minimalist’, in *Studies in American Fiction*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2010, p. 104.
I identify this shift not only in the abbreviated form of DeLillo’s post-*Underworld* output—the utilisation of a smaller number of characters, and an attempt to present novels that elucidate the experiences of an individual, or a small number of characters—but also through DeLillo’s own reading and note-taking for his novels written after *Underworld*. The DeLillo archives at the Harry Ransom Research Centre at the University of Texas at Austin contain the majority of DeLillo’s research folios, notebooks, and drafts for all his novels from *Americana* to *Cosmopolis*. In the main notebook DeLillo used in preparation for *The Body Artist*, DeLillo returns a number of times to one single quotation from Beckett’s monograph, *Proust*, noting Beckett’s distinctive phrase: “[t]he poisonous ingenuity of time in the science of affliction.”[^288] DeLillo had previously considered this text, making notes on Beckett including on *Proust* and this specific line from the monograph in preparation for *Mao II*. I will argue in this chapter, however, that DeLillo’s utilisation of Beckett’s formal influence and the conceptual content contained in *Proust* is nowhere more obvious and central than in *Falling Man*.

**Falling Man—Time, Habit, Memory**

As I have suggested above, DeLillo’s work after *Underworld* makes a turn toward the Beckettian. Of course, DeLillo has referred to Beckett, both in his published work, and in his notes prior to *Underworld*, including describing Beckett, in *Mao II*, as “the last writer to shape the way we think and see.”[^289] It is in *Falling Man*, however, that Beckett’s work is most influential.[^290] DeLillo continually alludes to the first three

concepts that Beckett discusses in *Proust*: time, habit and memory. Beckett identifies these three concepts as crucial to *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Beckett’s analysis of Proust was a commissioned text, one in a series of monographs on influential authors. Yet, Beckett’s *Proust* is not simply a critical monograph—as John Pilling argues, it should be understood more as a “creative encounter between one great writer and another.”²⁹¹ This suggests that DeLillo is not alluding to Proust, but to Beckett himself, utilising Beckett’s reconsideration of Proust’s concepts, rather than a Proustian model. DeLillo utilises the creative elements of *Proust* as a conceptual and thematic structure for *Falling Man*. Briefly, time is a central concern for DeLillo as it is for Beckett, both as a motivating force for narrative, but also as a concept itself—a philosophical or theoretical analysis of time is shared between *Proust* and *Falling Man*. Habit and memory are utilised by DeLillo as thematic signposts, driving his two main character’s changes throughout the text.

**Time**

Beckett begins his monograph with the enigmatic sentence: “[t]he Proustian equation is never simple.”²⁹² As we continue to read we are immediately alerted to the central concept that Beckett engages with, which is time. The *Proust* monograph attempts to elucidate the key conceptual and stylistic elements of Proust’s work—a writer who influenced Beckett in greater ways than is generally allowed by much Beckett criticism.²⁹³ Time is immediately placed under interrogation when Beckett writes:

> For the purposes of this synthesis it is convenient to adopt the inner chronology of the Proustian demonstration, and to examine in the first place that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation—
> Time.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ See Pilling, ‘Beckett’s *Proust*’, n17.
Proust’s time, for Beckett, is inherently literary. Time is the ultimate ruler of literature as a whole, and especially within *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. The function of time within literature is as a controlling force over the experience and life of a character, not as a controlling mechanism for the narrative itself. Indeed, time is characterised as violent in some regard—an author’s characters are generally not conscious of time, and then are suddenly “confronted” by the power of time and become “victims”.

Beckett’s conception of time can be seen reflected in his own works: for example, the nameless characters of ‘Imagination Dead Imagine’ and ‘The Lost Ones’ are both subject and victim of time. The changes of light and heat in both stories communicate the viscerality of time. Time is not, for Beckett, something that facilitates the progression of a narrative, but a concept that is in itself violent. We can see this reiterated later in *Proust* when Beckett constructs time as subjective to each character. Beckett writes:

> But the poisonous ingenuity of Time in the science of affliction is not limited to its own action on the subject, that action as has been shown, resulting in an unceasing modification of his personality, whose permanent reality, if any, can only be apprehended as a retrospective hypothesis. The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantations from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours.

---

This is, in itself, a reaffirmation of the subjective interpretation of time that Beckett proposes. Time is fluid and constantly moving. There is also a sense in which Beckett is conceptualising time as infinite. The metaphor of the decantation of time from the future to the past suggests that time itself is never at a point to stop. The movement from future to past does not suggest an end point. Beckett’s most crucial observation on time, however, addresses the present, making his conception of time more complex again. In his conclusion to the section on time, Beckett writes:

> At the best, all that is realized in Time (all Time produce), whether in Art or Life, can only be possessed successively, by a series of partial annexations—and never integrally and at once.\(^{299}\)

The partial nature of the present is not a concept that Beckett himself created—indeed this concept, amongst others, owes much to Zeno (of the Paradoxes) and Henri Bergson. The distinction between finite and infinite time is a crucial one, which I will address in the next section, focusing also on the interpretation of *Proust* and the critical weight of material that aligns *Proust* with the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer.

**Proust: Schopenhauer and Bergson**

As I have briefly alluded to above, the issue of time in *Proust* is a contentious one. Critical analysis of *Proust* has focused on Beckett’s references to Schopenhauer, assuming that he is the most dominant influence throughout the text.\(^{300}\) There is a developing school of interpretation, however, whose members argue that it is not Schopenhauer, but Henri Bergson that maintains the strongest influence over *Proust*.

A Bergsonian interpretation of *Proust* is proposed by Uhlmann, who provides

---


evidence that Beckett had read Bergson’s work prior to the writing of Proust.

Uhlmann quotes from a Trinity College, Dublin manuscript from one of Beckett’s students, whose notes include references to a lecture on Bergson. Uhlmann argues that we can be confident that: “Beckett was well aware of the links which had been made between Bergson and Proust, and the different understandings of time each developed”. 301 I will not, at this stage, attempt to analyse the differences in conceptions of time proposed by Proust, Beckett and Bergson: rather, I wish to focus on a similarity in the theorisation of time identifiable between Beckett (in Proust) and Bergson.

There is a strong relationship between a chapter from Bergson’s influential Creative Evolution, ‘The Cinematographic View of Becoming’, and Beckett’s conception of time. ‘The Cinematographic View of Becoming’ is Bergson’s response to Zeno’s Paradoxes and provides both mathematical and philosophical analyses of the paradoxes. In this chapter, Bergson argues that becoming, that is the application of time to the human world, should be separated into three distinct categories: qualitative, evolutionary and extensive. He proposes that becoming is understood in an alien way in the human world, especially in the arts. To represent becoming artistically, he writes:

Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompense their becoming artificially. 302

That is, we are placed, as readers, and as viewers of time, as able to understand the relationship of past, present, and future in a way that those within an artwork cannot.

Bergson goes on to argue that this method of ontology must be fraught with failure. The method that Bergson identifies in ‘The Cinematographic View of Becoming’ is “discontinuous”, and opposite to what we experience in the world.303 The artistic does not fail then, but is predicated on a system of knowledge and performance that is not sufficient to communicate the sensation of the world.304 And yet, the artist still strives for a sense of authenticity, despite the artificial nature of the system of time that art attempts to utilise.

Bergson then makes the appropriate comparison, pointing to the illusory nature of the cinematographic view of becoming as embodied in the first of Zeno’s Paradoxes, that of the arrow flying from one point to another. Bergson writes:

At every moment, says Zeno, it is motionless, for it cannot have time to move, that is, to occupy at least two successive positions, unless at least two moments are allowed it. At a given moment, therefore, it is at rest at a given point. Motionless at each point of its course, it is motionless during all the time that it is moving.305

What we encounter is the heart of the paradox—that is, the linking of the temporal and the spatial in an example that must only deal exclusively with the spatial. Bergson refutes Zeno’s argument, pointing out that the arrow’s mobility does not then require an infinite series of analogous immobilities. Bergson writes:

We thus obtain a series of absurdities that all express the same fundamental absurdity. But the possibility of applying the movement to the line traversed exists only for an observer who keeping outside the movement and seeing at every instant the possibility of a stop,

303 Bergson, Creative Evolution, p. 324.
304 See Bergson, Creative Evolution, pp. 324-325.
305 Bergson, Creative Evolution, p. 325.
tries to reconstruct the real movement with these possible immobilities.\textsuperscript{306}

Irrespective of the mathematical and critical value of Bergson’s argument, the passage quoted above has a number of similarities with the arguments that Beckett makes on time in \textit{Proust}. The episodic nature of the artistic, and for Beckett, specifically the literary, is undeniable: ‘At the best, all that is realized in Time (all Time produce), whether in Art or Life, can only be possessed successively, by a series of partial annexations—and never integrally and at once.’ For Beckett, as for DeLillo, the temporal and the spatial are separate concerns. Both are focused on developing an understanding of the temporal which facilitates a theorisation of literary time, and an understanding of how this facilitates the creation of an authentic literary work.

Zeno’s paradoxes do not specifically address time (or duration) and yet these are the paradoxes’ fundamental concern: the division and subdivision of the temporal and the spatial. Beckett argues that time in literature cannot be fluid, the writer can only attempt to harness the episodic nature of his or her form, a similar argument to that which Bergson makes. As such, and having taken into account the evidence of Beckett’s knowledge of Bergson, it should be argued that the influence of Bergson on \textit{Proust} is undeniable and enlightening. In this sense, DeLillo owed a debt to Bergson as well as Beckett, and the episodic nature of \textit{Falling Man} is evidence of this.

\textbf{Episodic Time in \textit{Falling Man}}

Indeed, Beckett’s concept of the violence or pejorative power of time is most applicable to \textit{Falling Man}. This can be most effectively seen in the short section ‘On Marienstrasse’, in which DeLillo details the thoughts and experiences of the 9/11

\textsuperscript{306} Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, p. 327. (Bergson’s emphasis).
terrorists. DeLillo evokes Beckett’s suggestion of episodic time both through the compartmentalised style of the narrative, but also specifically in his narration—we see this reflected in the narratorial observation: “[e]verything happened in crowded segments of place and time.”³⁰⁷ The episodic nature of this section of the narrative is at least in part because of the shortness of the section—DeLillo has made the decision to limit *Falling Man*’s focus on the terrorists of 9/11 to very short parts—and as such, with the weight of information that needs to be included, DeLillo must cover a number of diverse situations. As Hammad and his comrades move towards their act, the speed of the section increases. At the same time, DeLillo’s discussion of the temporal becomes more obvious. When discussing Hammad’s love interest, DeLillo writes: “[t]here was a rush, a pull that made it hard to see beyond the minute.”³⁰⁸ Once again, DeLillo emphasises the way in which literature places its characters as ‘victims’ of time; DeLillo makes his characters subjects of time, in the full sense of the word—their power is continually diminished, and their fundamental struggle, against the temporal, is the most difficult, and fundamentally the most futile.

As ‘On Marienstrasse’ comes to its conclusion, the reader encounters one final comment on the temporal: “The time is coming.”³⁰⁹ This is the exact correlative of Beckett’s comment in *Proust*: “[t]he future event cannot be focussed, its implications cannot be seized, until it is definitely situated and a date assigned to it.”³¹⁰ As the section comes to a close and the terrorist attack comes closer and closer DeLillo’s emphasis on the temporal becomes more obvious. That is not to say that the temporal structure of *Falling Man* is necessarily altered, but that the reader encounters

---

³⁰⁷ DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 81.
³⁰⁸ DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 82.
³⁰⁹ DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 82.
continued references to time, and an understanding of how crucial this concept is to the novel.

DeLillo utilises an episodic view of time not only when he is engaging with the 9/11 narrative from the terrorist point of view, but throughout *Falling Man*. DeLillo describes the attacks on the World Trade Centre in the present tense twice, once at the beginning, and once at the end of the novel. *Falling Man* begins in the moments after the September 11 terrorist attacks, in the vicinity of the World Trade Centre, after an unnamed character the reader eventually discovers as Keith Neudecker, has been evacuated from one of the towers immediately prior to its collapse. In the first sentence, DeLillo immerses us fully in the cataclysmic world of this catastrophe: “[i]t was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night.”

Over two hundred pages later, *Falling Man* returns to the same scene, the same incident that drives the novel and is an oppressive presence throughout. The final chapter of *Falling Man* is entitled ‘In the Hudson Corridor’ and presents the experiences of Keith again, after first describing the experiences of Hammad, part of one of the hijacking teams as the first plane descends towards New York and the World Trade Centre. I will return to DeLillo’s representation of these moments below, but it is sufficient to observe that in the temporal and narrative structure of *Falling Man*, because of the episodic style of the text, events can recur, as I have discussed above. Time is reiterated and repeated, an exception to Beckett’s conceptualisation of time flowing continually from future to past.

311 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 3.
Finally, the two main characters of *Falling Man* are represented by DeLillo through an episodic structure. Keith and Lianne’s respective experiences and obsessions are dealt with individually, so that we have three distinct strands in this portion of the narrative: Keith and Lianne together, and then Keith and Lianne as separate entities. Apart from the moments after Keith is evacuated from the Tower is it very rare for Keith or Lianne to enter into each other’s presence. Rather, DeLillo’s use of this episodic structure means that they are kept apart throughout the novel, except in the passages in which the narrative begins with them together.

**Habit**

It is important to note that Beckett, whilst talking about time, observes that both habit and memory are: “attributes of the Time cancer.” Habit is, for Beckett, a concerning concept, one that speaks of human frailty. It would be difficult to find a more emotive passage within *Proust*, as Beckett writes:

> Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual’s consciousness (an objectivation of the individual’s will, Schopenhauer would say), the pact must be continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date.

It should be noted that Beckett’s conception of habit is similar to Bergson’s, enunciated in *Matter and Memory*. Beckett, however, proposes a negative analysis of habit, as opposed to Bergson’s positive view of habit. Once again, as with Beckett’s analysis of time, habit is constructed as episodic. The nature of literature means that the individual (that is, the character) can be split up; personality made subjective and

---

split into myriad parts. Beckett’s definition of habit speaks to the mundanity of human life. As Versluys observes in his analysis of *Falling Man*, habit functions as a repetitive ennui, similar to Steiner’s concept discussed above. We must note, however, that when habit is deferred, even for a short amount of time, Beckett writes: “the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.” We will observe the movement from habit to memory many times within *Falling Man*, especially in relation to Keith’s short relationship with Florence, whose briefcase he emerges with out of the World Trade Centre, in which we see that the shift from habit to memory encapsulates DeLillo’s allusion to Beckett’s *Proust* and his harnessing of the productive theorisations Beckett creates.

**Memory**

Memory is, for Beckett, a far more authentic experience than habit, and one that is far harder to grasp. Beckett’s conceptualisation of memory is complex. Firstly, memory is fraught in and of itself: “[t]he man with a good memory does not remember anything because he does not forget anything.” This form of memory has been habitualised, and becomes what Beckett terms voluntary memory. The character who has a memory like this:

> […] is uniform, a creature of routine, at once a condition and function of his impeccable habit, an instrument of reference instead of an instrument of discovery.

Beckett conceptualises voluntary memory as in essence inauthentic, and unable to access what he calls the ‘real’. As Beckett writes:

---

[i]n extreme cases memory is so closely related to habit that its word takes flesh, and is not merely available in cases of urgency, but habitually enforced.\(^{319}\)

Voluntary memory is a crucial concept for DeLillo throughout *Falling Man*, as he attempts to ascertain what the authentic experience of the 9/11 attacks really was. Voluntary memory is discussed at length below.

Involuntary memory facilitates access to reality which can never be fathomed through voluntary memory. Beckett describes involuntary memory as: “[…] explosive, ‘an immediate, total and delicious deflagration.’”\(^{320}\) Beckett goes on in a more poetic vein:

> It restores, not merely the past object, but the Lazarus that it charmed or tortured, not merely Lazarus and the object, but more because less, more because it abstracts the useful, the opportune, the accidental, because in its flame it has consumed Habit and all its works, and in its brightness revealed the mock reality of experience never can and never will reveal—the real.\(^{321}\)

This is, in many ways, a curious position. And yet, at the same time, it asserts the centrality of the artist to the creation and perception of reality, a point that emphasises the importance with which Beckett views this concept.\(^{322}\) There is a similar motivation for DeLillo, who in *Falling Man* is allowed a chance to respond to what he describes as terrorist control of the world narrative.\(^{323}\) *Falling Man* and his search for involuntary memory of the event is his attempt to “create the counter-narrative” in response to the September 11 attacks.\(^{324}\)

\(^{322}\) The dual levels of voluntary and involuntary memory can also be seen to reflect two of the orders of memory Philipp Wolf identifies in *Underworld*. See Wolf, P., *Modernization and the Crisis of Memory: John Donne to Don DeLillo*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2002, pp. 169-172.
\(^{323}\) DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 33.
\(^{324}\) DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 34.
Time, Habit, Memory—Surviving the World Trade Centre Collapse (Keith and Florence)

One of the crucial interactions within *Falling Man* is between Keith and Florence, the owner of the briefcase that Keith picks up during his evacuation from the World Trade Centre tower. The briefcase itself is a useful metaphor for DeLillo, its progress down the emergency stairs and into Keith’s hands serving as a temporally disjunctive anticipation of the collapse of the towers. DeLillo repeats the instruction four times as the workers evacuate: “This goes down.”\(^{325}\) Keith eventually returns the briefcase to its owner, and their interaction and brief relationship illustrates the method through which DeLillo melds Beckett’s three concepts of time, habit and memory together into one in the novel. What emerges in this strand of the narrative is a composite concept of literariness, which is reliant on the violent and visceral effects of the 9/11 attacks.

DeLillo is at pains to emphasise the difference between Keith’s mental state and the rest of the city. As Keith walks through New York, DeLillo implies a certain sense of the hallucinatory, in that Keith seems completely uncomfortable within the crowds. Consider the detached narration within this section:

> He watched an elderly woman on a bench who was thinking distantly of something, holding a green apple pressed to her cheek. The road was closed to traffic and he thought you come to the park to see people, the ones who are shadows in the street.\(^ {326} \)

Keith’s interjection into the narration creates this sense of detachment, and confirms the effects of the September 11 attacks. Thus, the combination of time, memory and habit, seems to directly comment on 9/11. DeLillo reinforces the sense of oddity within New York City: “[t]he ordinariness, so normally unnoticeable, fell upon him

---

\(^{325}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 245.

\(^{326}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 51.
oddly, with almost dreamlike effect.” What DeLillo constructs here is a sense of disorientation that speaks specifically to Keith’s apprehension of time. The oddity of New York is, in a sense, constructed by the fact that life and time have gone on. The City continues to progress, whilst Keith is anticipating a temporal disruption, hence the sense of oddity within this section.

Keith and Florence’s first attempt at a conversation of their memories and experiences is a failure. They are awkward together, engaging in a jilting conversation where their questions and answers do not correspond. Eventually Keith seems to resolve to leave and moves towards the door. In this moment, DeLillo places *Falling Man* into congruence with Beckett’s *Proust*. The section continues, as DeLillo writes:

Finally he moved toward the door and then picked up the briefcase. He paused, reaching for the doorknob, and looked at her, across the room, and she was smiling.

‘Why did I do that?’

‘Habit,’ she said.

‘I was ready to walk out the door with all your property. *All over again*. Your priceless family heritage. Your cell phone.’

DeLillo’s evocation of habit is obvious here. What I find most instructive is DeLillo’s aligning of the phrase ‘all over again’ with the crucial concept of habit. The phrase ‘all over again’ interests me, as much of *Falling Man* concerns the strange process of memory in which an event is returned to over and over again. Of course, we know from Beckett’s essay that habit and memory are in many ways inextricably linked. The repetition of an event in a character’s memory, however, explains the linkage of time and memory. DeLillo does not propose to separate time, habit, and memory, but rather

---

328 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 53. (My emphasis).
to present them in synthesis to attempt to analyse the effects of the September 11 attacks.

Keith and Florence’s acknowledgment of habit, an acknowledgment by both characters, serves to break the hold of habit itself. Indeed, the briefcase, so crucial throughout the early pages of *Falling Man* serves as a metaphorical example of habit. In the encounter between Florence and Keith, DeLillo is always at pains to return to the contents of Florence’s briefcase. DeLillo lists: credit cards, Florence’s wallet, a bottle of ‘Poland Spring’ water, a toothbrush, a cell phone, and a pack of cigarettes.\(^{329}\) It is presumably no coincidence that the final two items, the phone and the cigarettes are described after habit is first mentioned, and that both items are associated with addiction as well as habit. Florence’s reaction to these final two items develops the rejection of habit that DeLillo is describing as the section progresses. For Keith and Florence to get to the reality of their experiences in the 9/11 attacks they need to together reject habitualised voluntary memory and instead begin to access their involuntary memories. Florence’s response to her cell phone is a rejection of habit: “‘I stopped needing it when I didn’t have it.’”\(^{330}\) Her response is not as equivocal for the cigarettes, but still implies a desire to reject habit: “‘[…] my guilty secret. But I’m down to four a day.’”\(^{331}\) In this short section DeLillo cunningly includes a number of different elements that relate to the rejection of habit, which then facilitates the scene progressing on to Beckett’s next concept, memory.

As this section shifts from habit to memory, the items in Florence’s briefcase that are referred to change. The most important is a voice recorder—an electronic means of

\(^{329}\) See DeLillo, *Falling Man*, pp. 52-53.

\(^{330}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 53.

\(^{331}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 53.
guaranteeing memory—DeLillo’s inclusion of electronic aids to memory anticipates Keith and Lianne’s continual referral to the television as they themselves attempt to discuss their memories of the 9/11 attacks. Florence’s voice recorder is only discussed fleetingly, but ensures that the concept of memory is central to their conversation. DeLillo writes:

‘Why do you have a better voice recorder than I had?’
‘I think I’ve only used it twice.’
‘I used mine but then never listened to it. I liked to talk into it.’
‘What did you say when you talked into it?’
‘I don’t know. My fellow Americans,’ he said. 332

Accepting the irony of Keith’s final statement, Keith and Florence’s reaction still seems inauthentic, a prosaic acknowledgment of the power of the device. Irrespective of Keith’s glibness, the statement is important. DeLillo’s argues that memory is crucial to processing the September 11 attacks, and that this memory is a shared memory, accessible, or experienced, by America as a whole. Thus the reader can identify the resonance in DeLillo’s use of a universal American expression, especially considering its favour in the speech of American Presidents. 333

Finally the authentic memory comes. Florence speaks first, her memories halting but evocative:

‘I was at my screen and heard the plane approach but only after I was thrown down. That’s how fast,’ she said.
‘Are you sure you heard the plane?’
‘The impact sent me to the floor and then I heard the plane.’ 334

In the moment of involuntary memory it seems we come across a temporal disjunction, not dissimilar to the V-2 rockets in Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s

332 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 54.
333 Despite the ubiquity of this phrase, there may be additional significance in George W. Bush’s use of it in his address to a joint session of congress in response to the 9/11 attacks.
334 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 54.
The technological aspect of memory interacts with the concept of the eternal return, and will be readdressed below. DeLillo continues with his focus on Florence:

She went through it slowly, remembering as she spoke, often pausing to look into space, to see things again, the collapsed ceilings and blocked stairwells, the smoke, always, and the fallen wall, the drywall, and she paused to search for the word and he waited, watching.

The memories that Florence is accessing here are involuntary, they are not processed by consideration or even language, but are communicated immediately. The visceral nature of the images that DeLillo evokes here is important. Crucially, DeLillo posits this conversation between Florence and Keith as a reconsideration—both characters are seeing their experiences again. Florence’s memories from in the Tower are then linked, by DeLillo, once again to the temporal. During the moments Florence describes above, she was: “dazed and had no sense of time”. DeLillo’s evocation of the temporal here is not related to Beckett’s analysis of time as discussed above. What it does do, however, is emphasise the authenticity of the memories that Florence is experiencing at this point of the narrative. This then moves the use of the temporal more into line with Beckett’s conceptualisation, in which the time of involuntary memory is a universal, an experience of memory “between the memory of a dream and the memory of reality.”

---


336 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 55.
337 The passage quoted above seems also to affirm DeLillo’s statement that memory functions “backwards”. See Chénetier and Happe, ‘An Interview with Don DeLillo’, p. 104.
338 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 55.
The authenticity of this section is reinforced not only by the viscerality of the memories being recounted but also through both Keith and Florence’s reactions to each other throughout. Florence relates the fear she feels when she momentarily loses her footing on the emergency stairs. She stops herself and says: “I know I can’t sit here alive and safe and talk about falling down some stairs when all that horror, all those dead.” The authenticity of Florence’s memories is emphasised by Keith’s reaction to them. One moment in particular sticks out for him, when their memories briefly coincide—they both remember an individual moving up the stairs to, they presume, force open a lift:

No reason ever to remember this if she hadn’t mentioned it. Means nothing, he thought. But then it did. Whatever had happened to the man was situated outside the fact that they’d both seen him, at different points in the march down, but it was important, somehow, in some indeterminate way, that he’d been carried in these crossing memories, *brought down out of the tower and into this room.*

We can begin to see the overall scope of *Falling Man* in the final phrase of the passage above. Keith and Florence’s memories are not of the past, but still existing in the present, as is much of the novel. The power of the 9/11 attacks is reconfirmed by the desire of DeLillo’s characters to maintain memories of the reality of the attacks. This in turn illustrates the disjunctive nature of time after 9/11 in which the present and past begin to merge.

DeLillo refers to this act of memorialisation later on in this text, in a section that has a strong resonance with Florence’s reference to her voice recorder referred to above. DeLillo’s emphasis on the importance of the technological, and the means through

---

340 We can also see this authenticity in Mattessich’s definition and analysis of the real in *Underworld.* See Mattessich, ‘DeLillo’s Thing’, 45.
341 DeLillo, *Falling Man,* p. 56.
342 DeLillo, *Falling Man,* p. 57. (My emphasis).
which it alters memory has two important points of congruence. Firstly, it is important to point out that Beckett himself establishes the manipulability of memory through electronic means, especially in a plays such as *Krapp’s Last Tape*. The electronic manipulation of memory is returned to repeatedly throughout *Falling Man*.

Keith and Lianne watch the retransmission 9/11 attacks on their television; DeLillo is at pains to reiterate the importance of the electronic storage of these events:

> Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching. The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting spirit that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone’s, into some other distance, out beyond the towers.  

This is indisputably a moment in which Lianne experiences Beckett’s ‘suffering of being’. The memory of the event is not solely hers, but extends beyond, encompassing both attacker and attacked, but also, and the reader encounters this in the last sentence, a concept of memory that is universal rather than individual, recalling Florence and Keith’s shared memory discussed above.

The section continues:

> The skies she retained in her memory were dramas of cloud and sea storm, or the electric sheen before summer thunder in the city, always belonging to the energies of sheer weather, of what was out there, air masses, water vapor, westerlies. This was different, a clear sky that carried human terror in those streaking aircraft, first one, then the other, the force of men’s intent. He watched with her. Every helpless desperation set against the sky, human voices crying to God and how awful to imagine this, God’s name on the tongue of killers and victims both, first one place and then the other, the one that was nearly

---

343 Consider, for example, the effect of Krapp’s recorded voice on Krapp in the final stages of the play. See Beckett, S., ‘Krapp’s Last Tape’, in *Krapp’s Last Tape and Embers*, Faber and Faber, London, 1989, p.20.

cartoon human, with flashing eyes and teeth, the second plane, the south tower.  

It is tempting, especially because of the visceral nature of DeLillo’s prose, to argue that this entire section details the importance of memory. I argue instead that only the first half of this passage really engages with memories. Lianne’s memories do not pertain specifically to the 9/11 attacks. Rather they are memories of other times, when ‘the boredom of living’ has been replaced. The experience of 9/11 narrated here is routinised, or using Beckett’s terms, habitulised. The habitualisation of September 11 is accomplished exactly because the memory is not human, but is the product of the videotape. Thus, even in the specific moment of violence which motivates *Falling Man*, the moment itself cannot be pushed into memory, but remains another invocation of ‘the boredom of living’. In the technological reproduction of memory, what appears to be authentic and an involuntary memory instead becomes habitual and voluntary.

The technological repetition of 9/11 has, especially at this stage of the novel, for Lianne enforced a return to voluntary inauthenticity. Beckett anticipates this, describing memory making way for the impetus: “to create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat—and also of its beauty.”

**Habit as Memory—Alzheimer’s Disease**

DeLillo’s most extended invocation of memory is explicated through Lianne’s volunteer work as a counsellor for people with Alzheimer’s disease, an affliction that specifically targets memory, rendering an individual disassociated simply because of their inability to utilise, or maintain, their memory. DeLillo allows the reader to see counselling sessions that occur only after the September 11 attacks. Lianne’s patients

---

write their memories of the 9/11 attacks and the aftermath, both to exercise the mind and to record their memories for posterity.

The main focus of these parts of the text is not on Lianne’s patients themselves, but on Lianne’s thoughts on, and reactions to, the writing exercises the patients undertake. The concern that Lianne exhibits is derived from her father’s death—a suicide, in response to the quick onset of Alzheimer’s symptoms—but also from her ongoing confusion after September 11. Dr. Apter, who facilitates the sessions, make a clear observation the first time they discuss the counselling Lianne is undertaking. DeLillo writes:

‘From this point on, you understand, it’s all about loss. We’re dealing inevitably here with diminishing returns. Their situation will grow increasingly delicate. These encounters need space around them. You don’t want them to feel there’s an urgency to write everything, say everything before it’s too late. You want them to look forward to this, not feel pressed or threatened. The writing is sweet music up to a point. Then other things will take over.’

He looked at her searchingly.

‘What I’m saying is simple. This is for them,’ he said.

[…]

‘It’s theirs,’ he said. ‘Don’t make it yours.’

Apter’s comments here are worthy of close analysis. If we take these comments not as defining memory inflected by Alzheimer’s, but as defining memory as a whole, we may see congruence with Apter’s view and Falling Man in its entirety. Apter immediately establishes that memory is unreliable and continually ineffective. Indeed, memory seems to be absolutely unreliable. What the reader encounters in this section is not, however, an analysis of memory (the Beckettian concept), but rather of habit. Memory for Lianne’s patients has to be habitualised, so that some semblance of

348 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 60.
349 An interesting parallel can be seen here with Atchley’s analysis of ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, in which he argues that the 9/11 attacks destroy language, a corollary destruction, I would argue, to memory. See Atchley, ‘The Loss of Language, the Language of Loss’, pp. 333-335.
the function of memory can be retained. Thus, as Beckett argues, habit, or the habitualisation of memory engenders loss of experiential authenticity.

The habitualised memory DeLillo describes here has its parallel in Beckett’s *Proust*, in his concept of voluntary memory, described as: “[t]he memory that is not memory.”

Voluntary memory is:

> [...] the uniform memory of intelligence; and it can be relied upon to reproduce for our gratified inspection those impressions of that past that were consciously and intelligently formed [...] It presents the past in monochrome.

Beckett’s phrase ‘consciously and intelligently formed’ may divert the force of his argument a little, seemingly able to be interpreted as arguing that writing itself can only ever attain voluntary memory. Perhaps voluntary memory is only accessed in poor writing, such as the examples included by DeLillo from the Alzheimer’s patients writing about 9/11, returning to the generic religious concern: “[i]f God let this happen, with the planes, then did God make me cut my finger when I was slicing bread this morning?” Voluntary memory is the only form of memory available to Lianne’s group—and this form of memory, as we see in Beckett’s formulation, is more habit than memory itself.

The Alzheimer’s group’s struggles with their memories are mirrored in the inefficiencies of their minds, which means that they cannot ever gain access to an authentic appreciation of the 9/11 attacks. Rather, they are mired in trivialities, as we have seen above. Alternatively, they are unable to think in abstractions, recalling

---

Beckett’s argument that involuntary memory does not only take in memory, but experience—the ‘opportune’ or ‘accidental’ memories of Keith and Florence’s conversation discussed above. Thus, Lianne’s patient’s inhibited use of memory (and the habitualised forms of the memories they retain) means that their thoughts are presented simply, without approaching the reality that Beckett argues is the truest aim for memory.

The next time we encounter Lianne’s Alzheimer’s patients in *Falling Man* the general disintegration of memory has accelerated. DeLillo presents the dulling of memory not as visceral but as mundane, a slow decline into another state. One character gets lost, disoriented, and finally has to be assisted to make her way home. Another has difficulty putting on his pants; he still has the capability to take them on and off, but cannot maintain the confidence that his pants are on correctly, checking that the zipper is in the front, and that the legs are the right length. Another character gets lost on his way to the meeting, unable to recall getting on the subway for the journey downtown. The final Alzheimer’s sufferer referred to in this section, Curtis B., breaks the veil between memory loss and violence. He loses his watch, finds it, and then can’t remember how to put it on his wrist. DeLillo writes:

> There was a spatial void, or a visual gap, a rift in his field of vision, and it took him some time to make the connection, hand to wrist, pointed end of wristband into buckle. To Curtis this was a moral flaw, a sin of self-betrayal. Once at an earlier session he read a piece he’d written about an event fifty years earlier when he killed a man with a broken bottle in a bar fight, gouging the face and eyes and then severing the jugular. He looked up from the page when he spoke these words: *severing the jugular.*

---

354 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 94.
355 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 95.
He used the same deliberate tone, dark and fated, in his account of the lost watch.\textsuperscript{356}

The habitualised, voluntary memory of Lianne’s other patients is countermanded by the insistent corporality of Curtis’ memories. To link the loss of a watch, and the violent act described above emphasises the viscerality of the memory, and the insistent nature with which the reader understands how crucial this passage is. Coming almost immediately after DeLillo’s section where he details the thoughts of the 9/11 terrorists, and considering Curtis’ suggestion of ‘sin’ and ‘moral flaw’, DeLillo emphasises the important role that memory and habit play not just in the literary world of \textit{Falling Man}, but in a real-world analysis of the September 11 attacks. For what else can be created by such an event but a reconsideration of memory, and the continual reassessment of what the population’s memories of this event are. DeLillo emphasises this in the last sentence of the section (the last sentence of the excerpt above). These are moments of loss, moments of violence, and with them comes the resonance of a visceral, involuntary memory, an experience that “opens a window on the real”.\textsuperscript{357}

As \textit{Falling Man} continues, DeLillo presents the Alzheimer’s patients beginning to fall into a steep decline, memories and personalities fading together. Lianne imagines one patient, Carmen G., as steadily separating out into two people, the first her final self as she succumbs to the disease, and the second, her former self: “a spirited woman in her reckless prime.”\textsuperscript{358} As Lianne’s patients begin to disintegrate, DeLillo links memory to truth, writing: “[t]he truth was mapped in slow and certain decline. Each member of the group lived in this knowledge.”\textsuperscript{359} The ability to maintain memory is likened to truth, linked both to personality and the events of 9/11. At this stage, however, truth

\textsuperscript{356} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 95. (DeLillo’s emphasis).
\textsuperscript{357} Beckett, \textit{Proust}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{358} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{359} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 125.
and reality begin to reveal themselves to Lianne, and the relationship between Lianne and her patients becomes more personal. DeLillo writes:

Lianne herself, bearing her father’s mark, the potential toll of plaque and twisted filaments, had to look at this woman and see the crime of it, the loss of memory, personality and identity, the lapse into eventual protein stupor. 360

The slow disintegration of memory is the opposite of the violent demise of 9/11. There is, however, a link posited in Falling Man between the violence of the loss of memory and the violence of terrorism. In one of the most crucial scenes of the novel, DeLillo describes Keith’s experiences in a hospital after the September 11 attacks. He writes:

Someone took the glass out of his face. The man talked throughout, using an instrument he called a pickup to extract small fragments of glass that were not deeply embedded […] He would use a clamp for deeper fragments.

‘Where there are suicide bombnings. Maybe you don’t want to hear this.’

‘I don’t know.’

‘In those places where it happens, the survivors, the people nearby who are injured, sometimes, months later, they develop bumps, for lack of a better term and it turns out this is caused by small fragments, tiny fragments of the suicide bomber’s body. The bomber is blown to bits, literally bits and pieces, and fragments of flesh and bone come flying outward with such force and velocity that they get wedged, they get trapped in the body of anyone who’s in striking range […] They call this organic shrapnel.’

He tweezered another splinter of glass out of Keith’s face.

‘This is something I don’t think you have,’ he said. 361

The organic shrapnel metaphor, one of the dominant original concepts of the novel, is crucial in understanding DeLillo’s focus on memory and also seems congruent with Carmen’s apprehension of falling into ‘eventual protein stupor’. 362 The 9/11 attacks

360 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 125.
361 DeLillo, Falling Man, pp. 15-16.
362 cf. Michaels, W., ‘Empires of the Senseless: (The Response to) Terror and (the End of) History’, in Radical History Review, Vol. 85, No. 105, 2003, pp. 110-111. Michaels’ interpretation of Bill’s Gray’s personified body equates it to the violence of terrorism. This concept then intersects neatly with the ‘biological shrapnel’ metaphor, as does Jürgen Habermas, in his description of the 9/11 attacks as the manifestation of a “living weapon.” See Borradori, Philosophy in a Time of Terror, p. 28.
are visceral in the extreme, and the idea of a terrorist body being blown apart and physically penetrating the body of the victim presents itself at the other extreme from the slow decline waged upon the body by Alzheimer’s. Yet both these experiences seem to be congruent with Beckett’s comment that when habit is escaped, “for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.” 363 Both Alzheimer’s, and DeLillo’s organic shrapnel metaphor speak to a sense of knowledge, and of memory, that is no longer habitual—it is the involuntary memory that Beckett praises so highly. I have quoted Beckett on involuntary memory above, but it is crucial to reinforce that both the experiences discussed here, engage with what Beckett calls the ‘real’. The destruction of habit is integral to both examples quoted above.

Finally Lianne’s Alzheimer’s patients question her experiences of the 9/11 attacks. They have all written about their own experiences, and want to understand Lianne’s. Her account is prefaced by a single line: “[s]he owed them a story, didn’t she?” 364 Lianne relates again the story we have heard numerous times throughout the novel; Keith’s escape from the Towers, his arrival at Lianne’s home, and their progression up towards the hospital, Keith covered in glass and blood. DeLillo then moves the narrative from the events of September to Lianne’s thoughts on communicating it:

She wanted to stay focused, one thing following sensibly upon another. There were moments when she wasn’t talking so much as fading into time, dropping back into some funnelled stretch of recent past. They sat dead still, watching her. People, lately, watched her. She seemingly needed watching. They were depending on her to make some sense. They were waiting for words from her side of the line, where what is solid does not melt. 365

363 Beckett, Proust, p. 8
364 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 126.
365 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 127.
The final sentence assumes that Lianne retains power over memory. This is not only power over memory in the way that Alzheimer’s patients cannot have, but to distinguish the habitual memory from the visceral, to attempt to access and to reveal the real.

It is instructive that Lianne’s memory, a memory that is in essence involuntary, and accesses the real, is also related, by DeLillo, to time. The 9/11 experience for Lianne isn’t able to be related by speech, but becomes a different process altogether, a ‘fading into time’, moving back into the past. *Falling Man*’s preoccupation with the past and the continual reanalysis of the September 11 attacks means that all characters strive for a sense of authenticity in their memories. Lianne’s memories of the attacks, as opposed to her patients’, maintain an authenticity that is specifically related to her ability to harness an involuntary memory. Lianne’s ‘fading into time’ specifically alludes to Beckett’s concept, and illustrates how involuntary memory accesses the real in a way that the habitualised memory of those affected by Alzheimer’s can never achieve.

After the passage excerpted above, the tone of Lianne’s memories change, and DeLillo reinforces the authenticity of these experiences. He writes, forcing Lianne’s memories into the future, and to Justin, her son:

> She could not look at him sleep. He became a child in some jutting future. What do children know? They know who they are, she said, in ways we can’t know and they can’t tell us. There are moments frozen in the routine run of hours. She could not look at him sleep without thinking of what was yet to come. It was part of his stillness, figures in a silent distance, fixed in windows.\(^\text{366}\)

\(^{366}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 127.
The authenticity of this memory is created by DeLillo precisely because Lianne’s memory does not focus on the past, but instead, on the future. In the paragraph above, Lianne evokes Justin’s ‘jutting future’, the ‘yet to come’. Lianne’s concern evokes the real as DeLillo places it centrally in the present—‘moments frozen in the routine run of hours.’ The next paragraph completes the nexus between past, present, and future: “Please report any suspicious behavior or unattended packages. That was the wording wasn’t it?367 Lianne’s memories are episodic, as Beckett’s conception of time proposes. The present is communicated through the ubiquitous phrase, familiar to readers even now, whilst the past (the 9/11 attacks) and the future (Justin) all coalesce into one sensation, communicated effectively in three paragraphs by DeLillo.

A few pages later, DeLillo reveals the extent to which Alzheimer’s has affected Lianne’s life. DeLillo writes:

‘My father shot himself so I would never have to face the day when he failed to know who I was.’
‘You believe this.’
‘Yes.’
‘Then I believe it too,’ he said.
‘The fact that he would one day fail to recognize me.’
‘I believe it,’ he said.
‘That’s absolutely why he did it.’368

Lianne’s father’s predicament is not my focus here, but rather what can be made of Lianne and her father’s difficult relationship with memory. Lianne’s father’s suicide illustrates only the power of memory over the human. What follows is the most instructive. Keith and Lianne turn back towards the television, and watch a news report, “a correspondent in a desolate landscape, Afghanistan or Pakistan […]”369

Keith remarks later that time has somehow changed, linking memory to their

368 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 130.
experience of the present. And finally, Keith makes an ominous pronouncement—the time before September 11, 2001 is “the other life.” The memories created by the violence of the 9/11 attacks have forced Keith and Lianne, and implicitly America, to move into another ‘life’, another time, the time that DeLillo returns to again and again throughout *Falling Man*.

Finally, Lianne’s Alzheimer’s patients fade from *Falling Man* entirely. DeLillo writes them out of the novel with one final reference to memory: “[a]fter that day, when she could not remember where she lived, Rosellen S. did not come back to the group.”

The final reference to the counselling group is a curiously touching passage, one of the passages that seems to approach an authentic development of emotion throughout the novel and is, as such, one worth quoting from at length. DeLillo writes:

> The members wanted to write about her and Lianne watched them at work, folded over their legal pads. Now and then a head would lift, someone staring into a memory or word. All the words for what is inevitable seemed to crowd the room and she found herself thinking of the old passport photos on the wall of her mother’s apartment, from Martin’s collection, faces looking out of a sepia distance, lost in time. […]
>
> She’d begun to see the people before her, Omar, Carmen and the others, in the same isolated setting, with the signature of the bearer sometimes written across the photo itself, a woman in a cloche, a younger woman who looked Jewish, *Staatsangehörigkeit*, and eyes showing deeper meaning than an ocean crossing alone might account for, and the woman’s face that’s almost lost in shadow, the printed word *Napoli* curled around the border of a circular stamp. Pictures snapped anonymously, images rendered by machine. There was something in the premeditation of these photos, the bureaucratic intent, the straightforward poses that brought her paradoxically into the lives of the subjects. Maybe what she saw was human ordeal set against the rigor of the state. She saw people fleeing, there to here, with darkest hardship pressing the edges of the frame. Thumbprints, emblems with tilted crosses, man with handlebar mustache, girl in braids. She thought she was probably inventing a context. She didn’t

---

know anything about the people in the photographs. She only knew the photographs. This is where she found innocence and vulnerability, in the nature of old passports, in the deep texture of the past itself, people on long journeys, people now dead. Such beauty in faded lives, she thought, in images, words, languages, signatures, stamped advisories.\textsuperscript{372}

DeLillo is not commenting solely on the interconnectedness of lives within America, but is also evoking, I believe, the 19 mugshots of the terrorists that perpetrated the attacks on New York and Washington on the 11\textsuperscript{th} of September. DeLillo is emphasising the power of encapsulating memory within a photograph, simple technology capturing something that has been created as elusive, a point reinforced by the Alzheimer’s group narrative throughout \textit{Falling Man}.\textsuperscript{373} As this group of characters fade from the novel their power is retained exactly because they remain in the memory—those that cannot harness their memories effectively, being harnessed for that same thing.\textsuperscript{374}

As we can see in Fig. 2 below, Lianne’s likening of her Alzheimer’s group to passport photos in Martin’s collection seems to recall the portrayal of the 9/11 attackers as they are regularly displayed. Fig. 2 recalls Lianne’s thoughts: ‘[p]ictures snapped anonymously, images rendered by machine. There was something in the premeditation of these photos, the bureaucratic intent, the straightforward poses that brought her paradoxically into the lives of the subjects.’ These men also live on in the memory, and the power they hold over \textit{Falling Man} is commensurate with that of Lianne’s patients.

\textsuperscript{372}DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, pp. 141-142.

\textsuperscript{373}We should also note Catherine Morley’s argument that encapsulated in \textit{Falling Man} is an argument that the 9/11 event is beyond portrayal solely through language. See Morley, C., ‘Plotting Against America: 9/11 and the Spectacle of Terror in Contemporary American Fiction’, in \textit{Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism}, Vol. 16, 2008, pp. 293, 303-307.

\textsuperscript{374}In an interview with Jody McAuliffe, DeLillo reveals that he possesses two passport photographs of Beckett, an intriguing idea that combines the idea of memory that Lianne identifies in passport photos with DeLillo’s use of Beckett’s concept of memory within \textit{Falling Man}. See McAuliffe, J., ‘Interview with Don DeLillo’, in \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly}, Vol. 99, No. 2-3, 2000, p. 610.
She watches the members write about Rosellen S. A head lifts, then drops, and they sit and write. She knows they are not looking out of a tinted mist, as the passport bearers are, but receding into one. Another head comes up and then another and she tries not to catch the eye of either individual. Soon they would all look up. For the first time since the sessions began, she is afraid to hear what they will say when they read from the ruled sheets.  

The habitualised memory that Apter and Lianne have been proposing as a means to extend the span of memory is coming to an end, and finally, memory fails. What the reader apprehends in this, the last mention of Lianne’s group, is that the voluntary memories that have been analysed throughout this narrative in *Falling Man* lack some of the authenticity, some of the reality of the final memory that is evoked through the

---

photographs of the 9/11 attacks, and the potent involuntary memories that these images evoke.\textsuperscript{376}

As Lianne’s Alzheimer’s patients fade from \textit{Falling Man}, the spectre of Alzheimer’s remains. As discussed above, much of the concern surrounding Alzheimer’s is engendered by Lianne’s father’s suicide as he faced the degeneration of his own memory. The demise of Lianne’s patients seems to drive Lianne to concern over her own memory (bearing in mind that Alzheimer’s is a hereditary disease). Lianne consults with a doctor, and begins the same habitualisation of memory that we encountered previously within her counselling group:

She counted down from one hundred by sevens […] There were mishaps now and then. Odd numbers were tricky, like some rough tumble through space, resisting the easy run of what is divisible by two […] The most anxious transition was twenty-three to sixteen. She wanted to say seventeen.\textsuperscript{377}

Despite being “troubled by memory lapses, steeped in family history”, Lianne’s diagnosis is positive.\textsuperscript{378} DeLillo emphasises the allure of the habitual, the assuredness that comes with rejecting involuntary memory, linking Lianne’s mental exercises with the writing of habitualised memory accomplished by her group of patients:

It made her feel good, the counting down, and she did it sometimes in the day’s familiar drift, walking down a street, riding in a taxi. It was her form of lyric verse, subjective and unrhymed, a little songlike but with a rigor, a tradition of fixed order, only backwards, to test the presence of another kind of reversal, which a doctor nicely named retrogenesis.\textsuperscript{379}


\textsuperscript{377} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{378} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{379} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 188.
The final comment is instructive—the degenerative processes of Alzheimer’s are always a movement away from what Beckett calls the real—a gradual process in which the real and the authentic can no longer be accessed. What is left is simply a new habit, echoing Beckett’s concern that the destruction of habit will eventually engender a return to habit. Access to the real is only fleeting, as the mind will “create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat—and also of its beauty”.

Finally, a conclusive diagnosis of Lianne comes through: “the findings [are] unremarkable.” And yet, as DeLillo closes off this section of the narrative, the habitualisation of memory is reinforced. DeLillo writes:

Then she laughed and said, ‘Listen,’ and she began to recite a series of numbers, pausing a beat between each, using a happy sort of singsong. One hundred, ninety-three, eighty-six, seventy-nine.

The ‘singsong’ that Lianne uses is DeLillo’s final emphasis of the possibilities of habitualising memory. As we see throughout *Falling Man*, Lianne’s memories are sometimes failures, and her impressions of the 9/11 attacks are not so much the esteemable involuntary memory that Beckett argues Proust valourises but memories reliant on technology, and the reproduction and consumption of images that become so familiar they can no longer hope to access the authentic real which is the aim of both literature and memory as conceived by Beckett and adopted in *Falling Man* by DeLillo.

**Habit as Memory—Poker**

As with Lianne and her Alzheimer’s counselling group, DeLillo focuses much on the habitualised forms of memory that Keith develops after the September 11 attacks. In

---

382 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 207.
the same way as Lianne, Keith’s habitualised memory is developed through personal experience occurring before the attacks, in this case through the game of poker.

Indeed, it is instructive that Lianne and Keith’s habitualised memories are introduced together by DeLillo at the beginning of chapter four of *Falling Man*. He writes:

> Their separation had been marked by a certain symmetry, the steadfast commitment each made to an equivalent group. He had his poker game, six players, downtown, one night a week. She had her storyline sessions, in East Harlem, also weekly, in the afternoon, a gathering of fix or six or seven men and women in the early stages of Alzheimer’s disease.\(^{383}\)

It is tempting to believe that Keith and Lianne’s respective activities are motivated not by the trauma of 9/11 but by the trauma of the breakdown of their relationship. I am convinced, however, that both Lianne and Keith’s exploration of habitualised memory is motivated by the September 11 attacks—Lianne’s, through her group’s writing on the attacks, and Keith’s growing obsession with poker related to the members of his group that were victims of the 9/11 attacks.

The next time Keith’s poker group is mentioned is around one hundred pages into *Falling Man*. DeLillo provides these details in analepsis, a memory from before the 9/11 attacks. The analepses that DeLillo employs function parachronistically, drawing the past into the present. Because DeLillo does not incorporate temporal matter from outside the scope of *Falling Man*, however, I have not defined them specifically as parachronistic. The men “play, game-faced, testing the forces that govern events.”\(^{384}\)

This early narratorial comment blurs the distinct understanding of time the reader believes they have. The ominous tone of the last phrase quoted above bleeds the

---

\(^{383}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 29.

\(^{384}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 96.
memory of the 9/11 attacks into the memory of ‘the other life’, the time before the
attacks.

Keith, searching for clarity after 9/11, eventually removes himself again from his
family, playing poker around the United States, seemingly in search of the memories
he had from before the 9/11 attacks. There is a sense, even in Keith’s estrangement,
that time is at the base of his concerns and his actions. In the weeks after the attacks
Keith’s awareness of time is emphasised. DeLillo writes:

He began to think into the day, into the minute. It was being here,
alone in time, that made this happen, being away from routine
stimulus, all the streaming forms of office discourse. Things seemed
still, they seemed clearer to the eye, oddly, in ways he didn’t
understand. He began to see what he was doing. He noticed things, all
the small lost strokes of a day or minute, how he licked his thumb and
used it to lift a bread crumb off the plate and put it idly in his mouth.
Only it wasn’t so idle anymore.385

DeLillo describes Keith’s character as transformed by his experience in the World
Trade Centre. His transformed awareness is specifically related to the experience of
time. Time for Keith is, crucially, transformed not only by his increasing awareness of
it, but the way in which his perception of time has changed. To utilise Beckett’s terms
again, the nostalgia present in the quotation above suggests an alteration of time, habit
and memory that requires a recuperation of the authentic in Keith’s experience. The
9/11 attacks have been transformative specifically because of the visceral nature of his
experience, both in losing members of his poker group during the attacks and the fact
that he was part of the attack itself. Keith’s different perception of time also seems to

385 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 65.
brings *Falling Man* into congruence with Beckett’s contention that time must always be subjective for each character within a text.\(^{386}\)

DeLillo constructs the narrative concerning Keith’s poker group primarily through memory—the present time narrative is suspended and the reader is returned to a time before 9/11, in which time, habit and memory have not yet been called into account. DeLillo’s analepsis to the time prior to September 11, 2001, provides him with the means to question the function of habit before the 9/11 attacks. Keith’s poker group quickly develops a rigid set of habits that govern their games. In the course of one paragraph, DeLillo describes the habitualisation of the game of poker itself. The group first reduce the “dealer’s options”,\(^{387}\) before finally settling on the “classical retro-format”.\(^{388}\) The group’s manipulations of habit are not conceptualised at this point, they are justified solely as a “joke in the name of tradition and self-discipline”\(^{389}\) developing into a “shrinking of choice”\(^{390}\) and a “raising of stakes”.\(^{391}\)

As this section goes on, more and more options are removed. Different variations of the game itself are outlawed. Food is no longer allowed during the games, and then the only drinks allowed are dark spirits. All conversation not related to the game is excised as well.\(^{392}\) Much of this habitualisation is driven by Hovanis, a victim of the 9/11 attacks, unemotionally dismissed in two words as “dead now”.\(^{393}\) Bizarrely, the only dissenter, Rumsey, experiences the same fate, and is simply ‘dead now’ as well.

\(^{386}\) See Beckett, *Proust*, p. 5.
\(^{387}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 96.
\(^{388}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 97.
\(^{389}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 97.
\(^{390}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 97.
\(^{391}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 97.
\(^{392}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 97.
It should also be noted that to be ‘dead’ is a poker term that describes a player who is still playing a hand, but can no longer win, a phrase that is used by DeLillo later on in Keith’s poker narrative. The group return to a story that encapsulates their idolisation of habit:

[F]our good friends, cardplayers in a game that had lasted four or five decades, were buried in the configuration in which they’d been seated, invariably, at the card table, with two of the gravestones facing the other two, each player in his time-honored place. The loved this story. It was a beautiful story about friendship and the transcendent effects of unremarkable habit.

The veneration of habit that is proposed here is at odds with the scepticism towards habit that Beckett proposes and which DeLillo seems to approve of in other section of *Falling Man*. The final paragraph in the section I have analysed above provides an explanation of the shift from habit to the group’s rejection of it:

Then one night it all fell apart. Somebody got hungry and demanded food. Somebody else pounded the table and said, *Food food.* This became a chant that filled the room […] Other prohibitions fell, banned words were reinstated […] and they tried not to wonder what four other players would think of them, in this wallow of wild-man poker, tombstone to tombstone […]

This is not the simple rejection of habit it seems. It is also instructive to emphasise the foreboding tone of the first sentence of the excerpt above: it is as if the violence of the September 11 attacks has arrived early, DeLillo’s use of analespsis is not as stable as the reader may assume—indeed time here is confused and unstable. As the poker group narrative continues, we will see how this early consideration of habit inflects much of the remaining narrative, and coincides with Lianne’s habitualisation in her corresponding narrative.

---

396 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 100. (DeLillo’s emphasis).
Before Keith’s poker group narrative continues, DeLillo situates a scene in which Keith and Lianne are required to interact, introducing the importance of Keith’s poker to the narrative. Keith is watching a televised poker game, prior to leaving his family again, impassive to Lianne and Justin watching the television with him. For Lianne: “[i]t meant nothing. It was outside her interest or sympathy. But the players were interesting […] she thought, making a leap to Kierkegaard.” Lianne’s apprehension of inauthenticity in the televised poker game is matched by Keith’s sensation of authenticity: “[h]e was thinking of being here […] and not thinking of it, but only feeling it, alive to it.” DeLillo’s uses similar language to Beckett to demarcate Keith and Lianne’s characters, and their reaction to the game. For Keith the game itself, but for Lianne the players.

Lianne’s reaction to the players returns her thoughts to her initial reference to Kierkegaard, and her reading of his texts in her youth:

She read her Kierkegaard with a feverish expectancy, straight into the Protestant badlands of sickness unto death […] Kierkegaard gave her a danger, a sense of spiritual brink. *The whole of existence frightens me*, he wrote. She saw herself in this sentence.

Both Keith and Lianne’s reactions in this scene convey the sense of authenticity in experience that Beckett argues is the most important aim for literature; the rejection of habit and voluntary memory for the real, one which is doubled by Lianne’s reaction to her Alzheimer’s patients.

---

397 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 117.
398 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 117.
Keith separates himself again from his former life, moving nomadically around the United States playing poker. DeLillo constructs a slow sense of realisation, how poker and the rules and habits of the game provide a structure, not solely for the game, but for those who play it:

[H]e began to sense a life in all of this, not for himself but the others, a small dawn of tunneled meaning […] This was never over. That was the point. There was nothing outside the game but faded space. She blinked and called, blinked and folded.  

Keith still believes in his rejection of the inauthenticity of habit, irrespective of his compulsive desire to play a game based on the stylisation of habit. DeLillo presents Keith as overwhelmingly numb, seeking a system that will allow him to assimilate his experiences during the 9/11 attacks.

Slowly Keith bows to the power of habit, spending months mastering the game of poker to a level sufficient to make money playing the game professionally. He returns home to Lianne and Justin sporadically, but succumbs repeatedly to the habitual embrace of the poker game. DeLillo describes Keith’s experiences: “there was no language, it seemed to tell them how he spent his days and nights.”  

We understand another strand of an argument encountered before, which suggests that there is an inherent inauthenticity in language, a moment in which language fails and cannot encapsulate the enormity of the experience that Keith has gone through.

DeLillo continues:

Soon he felt the need to be back there […] There were standard methods and routines. Taxi to the casino, taxi back to his hotel […] At  

---

400 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 189.  
the table he didn’t study players for tells, didn’t care why they coughed or seemed bored or scratched a forearm. He studied his cards and knew the tendencies […] He drank hard liquor sparingly, nearly not at all, and allowed himself five hours’ sleep, barely aware of setting limits and restrictions. Never occurred to him to light a cigar, as in the old days, at the old game.  

The disjunction in Keith’s poker playing is linked to 9/11. Both his actions and his thoughts are fundamentally inflected by the September 11 attacks. Keith’s regulation of his life is now so intrinsic that it seems as if he does not notice the habits he has fallen into at all. The sense of numbness and inauthenticity is pervasive—he does not look at anyone, “seeing essentially no one”  —except for on the planes he catches, where he looks “at faces on both sides of the aisle, trying to spot the man or men who might be a danger to them all.” The reality of Keith’s post-9/11 mindset requires some shielding from the visceral nature of his experience: his poker playing, and the set of habits, rules and rituals that are incorporated wards off the possibility of involuntary memory and a return to the horror of his experience.

Keith finally encounters another member of the pre-9/11 poker group after attempting to defer or mediate his pre-9/11 poker memories for so long. Interestingly, Keith seems unable to anticipate this event: “When it happened he wondered why he hadn’t known it would.” DeLillo continues:

[A] man was standing to do a series of flexing exercises, loosen the neck and shoulder muscles, get the blood running. There was an element of pure ritual in his movements, something beyond the functional […] The man was strangely familiar […] It had to be Terry Cheng, easing back into his chair now, dropping out of Keith’s line of vision, and of course this is who it was because how could any of this be happening, the poker circuit, the thunderous runs of money, the

402 DeLillo, Falling Man, pp. 197-198.
403 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 198.
404 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 198.
405 DeLillo, Falling Man, p. 198.
comped hotel rooms and high competition, without the presence of Terry Cheng.\textsuperscript{406}

The final sentence is both serious and ironic, for it traces Keith’s interest in poker from before the 9/11 attacks up to the moment in which the excerpt takes place, whilst also alluding to Keith’s search for habit and ritual after his 9/11 experience, which he has found in poker itself. Terry’s rituals, emphasised by the narrator, seem to operate on a different level to the desire for habit that Keith exhibits. The exchange between Keith and Cheng is minimal, as they take their seats for the tournament and do not plan to meet up again, presumably anxious not to interrupt their habits. The timelessness of the casino, and of ‘the other life’ after September 11 has effected both of them, as DeLillo writes in the conclusion to this section: “[t]he idea of later was elusive.”\textsuperscript{407}

Soon afterwards, however, we encounter Keith and Terry again, at a major tournament this time, discussing their lives. Their memories of each other are indistinct, despite their only link being the poker games they engaged in before the 9/11 attacks. It is not only their memories, however, that seem to be faulty. The change in time (i.e. ‘the other life’) precipitated by September 11 seems to have rendered Keith and Terry different people:

‘Did you smoke back then, when we played?’
‘I don’t know. Tell me,’ Terry said.
‘I think you were the only one who didn’t smoke. We had a number of cigars and one cigarette. But I don’t think it was you.’

There were isolated instants, now and then, sitting here, when Terry Cheng seemed again to be the man at the table in Keith’s apartment, dividing chips in swift and artful fashion after the high-low games. He was one of them, only better at cards, and not really one of them at all.\textsuperscript{408}

\textsuperscript{406} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 198.
\textsuperscript{407} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{408} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, pp. 202-203.
Keith’s first comment illustrates this disjunction in time, in habit and memory. It is instructive, also, that both Terry and Keith have been changed by 9/11, their characters made subjective by the power of the September 11 attacks. Both Keith and Terry have returned to their primary habit, but are recreating the habit, making it appropriate to the time after the attacks.

For Terry this is a crucial element of his regeneration of habit:

For all his looseness of manner, the clothing that didn’t fit, the tendency to get lost in the hotel’s deeper reaches and outlying promenades, Terry was set inflexibly in this life. There was no rule of correspondence here. This was not balanced by that. There was no element that might be seen in the light of another element. It was all one thing, whatever the venue, the city, the prize money. Keith saw the point of this. He preferred this to private games with easy banter and wives arranging flowers, a format that appealed to Terry’s vanity, he thought, but could not match the crucial anonymity of these days and weeks, the mingling of countless lives that had no stories attached.\textsuperscript{409}

Perhaps this is the final, and fundamental, search that both Terry and Keith are undertaking—not really the search for habit, although this is certainly an element of the process, but a removal from society, from conversation and language, from the memories of what came before, and to be enveloped by anonymity. Anonymity for both characters is related to time and to memory, to what has gone before.

DeLillo finally reveals to the reader that importance of poker as a concept, a combination of memory and luck, and an approximation of life.\textsuperscript{410} DeLillo writes:

\textsuperscript{409} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 204.
The cards fell randomly, no assignable cause, but he remained the agent of free choice. Luck, chance, no one knew what these things were. These things were only assumed to affect events. He had memory, judgment, the ability to decide what is true, what is alleged, when to strike, when to fade. He had a measure of calm, of calculated isolation, and there was a certain logic he might draw on. Terry Cheng said that the only true logic in the game was the logic of personality. But the game had structure, guiding principles, sweet and easy interludes of dream logic when the player knows that the card he needs is the card that’s sure to fall. Then, always, in the crucial instant ever repeated hand after hand, the choice of yes or no. Call or raise, call or fold, the little binary pulse located behind the eyes, the choice that reminds you who you are.\(^{411}\)

Poker is not truly a game of memory: counting cards is not possible, and one only needs to know the different hand formulations to have a reasonable chance of success. Poker instead is a game of habit and appraisal, attempting to read others’ expressions to one’s own advantage. Thus, when Keith disagrees with Terry’s argument that the only logic in poker is the ‘logic of personality’ he is implicitly arguing for the logic of habit. We can see this later on in the quotation above in the exultation of the choices that poker allows. Through this game, Keith is allowed to fall into the habitual, the ability to make choices, rather than to be subjected to random acts of violence which cannot be altered by him.

The invocation of luck above is also crucial in another way, in reference to Rumsey, another member of Keith’s poker group who is referred to sparingly throughout *Falling Man*—and yet may figure more than the reader anticipates. In the previous poker scene, where Keith discussed poker with Terry Cheng, they briefly discuss Rumsey, a victim of the 9/11 attacks. His fate is described in one throwaway line: “‘I heard he went out a window’”.\(^{412}\) Rumsey, who is no longer a member of the poker group, was given one final choice, to die in the collapse of the World Trade Centre or

\(^{411}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, pp. 211-212.
\(^{412}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 205.
to die after jumping from the tower. Thus, poker facilitates Keith’s memorial to the choice Rumsey had to make. Rumsey is not afforded the luck that Keith has in his poker playing, but poker stands in as a habitualised memorial for Rumsey, one of the falling men of 9/11 and of the novel.

The argument that I have made above, that the choices made in poker stand in for Keith as a habitualised memorial to the choice Rumsey made on the 11th of September, 2001 is reinforced in the next section of *Falling Man*. Keith has returned to his family in New York, spending a few days with his wife and child before moving on to the next poker tournament in Paris or Atlantic City.413 Lianne, watching television, comes across a televised poker tournament, and the following description evokes numerous echoes with the scene, discussed above, in which Keith and Lianne watch a replay of the 9/11 attacks on the television:

She saw three or four tables, in long shot, with spectators seated among them, clustered in pockets, in spooky blue light. The tables were slightly elevated, players immersed in a fluorescent glow and bent in mortal tension. She didn’t know where this was taking place, or when, and she didn’t know why the usual method was not in effect, close-ups of thumbs, knuckles, cards and faces. But she watched. She hit the mute button and looked at the players seated around the tables as the camera slowly swept the room and she realized that she was waiting to see Keith […] She wanted to see her husband […] She imagined herself in cartoon format, a total fool, hurrying to Justin’s room, hair flying, and dragging him out of bed and standing him up in front of the screen so he could see his father, *Look*, in Rio or London or Las Vegas. His father was twenty feet away at the desk in the next room reading bank statements and writing checks. She watched a while longer, looking for him, and then she stopped.414

Once again, DeLillo alerts us to the power of technology, and the means through which memory and time are altered by the technological capabilities available. Keith

---

413 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 216.
414 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 213. (DeLillo’s emphasis).
is potentially doubled, in two places at the same time, and yet Lianne is fixated by the possible audiovisual representation of her husband, information stored and able to be repeated whenever desired. Obviously this footage does not have the power of the recording of the 9/11 attacks, but the effect on Lianne is just as strong. The disjunctive time created by technology dominates.

The last poker scene in *Falling Man* presents Keith’s final thoughts on poker. His ruminations are generally prosaic, but there are mentions of both habit and memory which are important, and illustrate the progression of the character throughout the novel. Keith describes “rare moments” of awareness, when he is not completely immersed in the game and becomes briefly aware of his surroundings. Interestingly, it is at these times that: “there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory that he might unknowingly summon in this routine run of cards.” The game of poker is, in effect, removing Keith from his memories within the tower after the plane had struck the building. As we will see below, much of the power of these memories is related to his friend and colleague in the poker group, Rumsey, who worked for the same business. The habitual nature of poker seems to have transformed Keith. He wonders if he is turning into “a self-operating mechanism, like a humanoid robot that understands two hundred voice commands, far-seeing, touch-sensitive but totally, rigidly controllable.”

The narrator intervenes:

> You have to break through the structure of your own stonework habit just to make yourself listen. There it is, the clink of chips, the toss and

---

And yet the ‘breaking through’ is merely breaking into a new form of habit, as Beckett argues. In this final poker section Keith returns to the comfort of playing with his chips a number of times, allowing them to provide a distraction from Beckett’s ‘authentic real’, the reality of the 9/11 attacks. And indeed, in the casino, Keith is relieved of the memories of Rumsey’s demise, for, in a single sentence paragraph, surely meant to be interpreted not solely in relation to poker: “[t]he lucky jack did not fall.”

In the alternative habit of poker, the choices facing Keith are not life and death, but simply a game, one that defers the visceral events that drive the narrative of *Falling Man* and especially Keith’s deepest concern—the horrifying choice Rumsey may have been left with—to jump to his death or to be consumed by the encroaching flames.

**Rumsey’s Compulsion**

As I discussed above, the relationship between Keith and Rumsey is crucial to the overall scope of *Falling Man* and especially to DeLillo’s analysis of habit. Rumsey is generally referred to during DeLillo’s analepses, as he perished in the September 11 attacks, jumping from the towers after not being able to evacuate. Rumsey’s character does not indulge in habit the same way that Keith and Lianne do, but rather, is compelled to do so. DeLillo writes:

> Rumsey had compulsions. He admitted this to his friend. He admitted everything, concealed nothing. He counted parked cars in the street, windows in a building a block away. He counted the steps he took, here to there. He memorized things that crossed his consciousness, streams of information, more or less unwillingly. He could recite the

---

personal data of a couple of dozen friends and acquaintances, addresses, phone numbers, birthdays. Months after the file of a random client crossed his desk, he could tell you the man’s mother’s maiden name. This was not cute stuff. There was an open pathos in the man.\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 121.}

It is tempting to argue that this constitutes the same sort of habitual behaviour that Beckett conceptualises in \textit{Proust}. Yet, DeLillo’s conclusion in the final sentence quoted above, and the habitual behaviour of both Keith and Lianne suggest that what the reader encounters here is something different, habit taken so far that it becomes involuntary, as opposed to the voluntary habits of other characters in the novel. The power of Rumsey’s habit is in some way rooted to the idea that there is still a sense of the ordinary about Rumsey’s character. DeLillo’s describes him thus: “ordinary in many ways [...] a broad and squarish body, an even temperament, but he took his ordinariness to the deep end at times.”\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 121.} DeLillo’s description of Rumsey’s habits continues:

He was compelled to count things including the digits that constitute the foreparts of a woman’s foot. He admitted this. Keith did not laugh. He tried to see it as routine human business, unfathomable, something people do, all of us, in one form or another, in the off moments of living the lives others think we are living. He did not laugh, then he did. But he understood that the fixation was not directed toward sexual ends. It was the counting that mattered, even if the outcome was established in advance. Toes on one foot, toes on another. Always totalling ten. [...] The counting always led to ten. This was not a discouragement or an impediment. Ten is the beauty of it. Ten is probably why I do it. To get the sameness, Rumsey said. Something holds, something stays in place.\footnote{DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, pp. 121-122.}

DeLillo distinguishes Rumsey precisely because he met his demise in the September 11 attacks. In this way, Rumsey’s involuntary habit is differentiated from the other...
habitual responses throughout *Falling Man*, and indicates the recourse to habit is a product of the desire to mediate the visceral nature of the 9/11 attacks.

Keith’s first habitual response to the 9/11 attacks is necessitated by the injuries he received. Keith requires physiotherapy, but the physiotherapy is a series of exercises he can do at home. Very quickly, the exercises become more than just a process to alleviate injury. Keith’s immersion in habit immediately after the 9/11 attacks goes beyond the more wide-ranging and more engrossing habit of poker discussed above.

DeLillo writes:

> He found these sessions restorative, four times a day, the wrist extensions, the ulnar deviations. These were the true countermeasures to the damage he’d suffered in the tower, in the descending chaos. It was not the MRI and not the surgery that brought him closer to well-being. It was this modest home program, the counting of seconds, the counting of repetitions, the times of day he reserved for the exercises, the ice he applied following each set of exercises.\(^{423}\)

Keith’s habits, at this stage, do not have the compulsive edge to them that characterises Rumsey’s habitual counting. They are a restorative process, and yet at the same time DeLillo makes it completely clear that the allure of the exercises, and the power of the habit, is not about healing an injury, but a method of mediating the reality of the 9/11 attacks. Keith, immediately after September 11, retreats into habit to deal with the memories that he has gained. In the paragraph following the quotation above, DeLillo makes clear how habit functions for Keith in the aftermath of September 11:

> There were the dead and maimed. His injury was slight but it wasn’t the torn cartilage that was the subject of this effort. It was the chaos, the levitation of ceilings and floors, the voices choking in smoke. He sat in deep concentration, working on the hand shapes, the bend of the

\(^{423}\) DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 40.
wrist toward the floor, the bend of the wrist toward the ceiling, the forearm flat on the table, the thumb-up configuration in certain setups, the use of the uninvolved hand to apply pressure to the involved hand.\textsuperscript{424}

We should note the repetition of both ‘floor’ and ‘ceiling’, making a parallel between the collapse of the towers of the World Trade Centre and the exercises that Keith undertakes. We can recall here Beckett’s comment on the renewal of habit quoted above, which we can see reflected in the ‘reality’, or viscerality of Keith’s experiences in the tower:

\begin{quote}
[Re]ality, intolerable, absorbed feverishly by his consciousness at the extreme limit of its intensity, by his total consciousness organised to avert the disaster, to create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat—and also if its beauty.\textsuperscript{425}
\end{quote}

This seems to be the exact process that Keith is going through, the rejection of his experiences, and their hollowing out and excision by the development, and embrace, of new habits that control his previous experience. As Keith continues the habitual exercises, DeLillo suggests that there is a purpose beyond the physical, and yet they are not entirely successful: “[h]e was not quite returned to his body yet. Even the program of exercises he did for his postsurgical wrist seemed a little detached”.\textsuperscript{426}

Keith’s wrist exercises are described in almost identical terms each time DeLillo returns to them throughout \textit{Falling Man}. As the exercise become more habitual, DeLillo describes them as “automatic”.\textsuperscript{427} Although they may not occur for long sections in the novel, they keep on recurring, a motif central to Keith’s character, and to DeLillo’s characterisation and conception of habit.

\textsuperscript{424} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 40.  
\textsuperscript{426} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 59.  
\textsuperscript{427} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 106.
Finally, just before the conclusion of *Falling Man*, Keith’s exercises return again. He seems to be uncertain about the role of his poker career in his life, and has begun to perform other forms of exercise that provide an “offsetting discipline, a form of controlled behaviour”, rather than the heavily ritualised process of poker. And yet, just before DeLillo returns one final time to the moment of impact at the World Trade Centre on the 11th of September 2001, Keith performs the wrist exercises once more, without comment. It seems as if, in this final machination of Keith’s habit, the performance has one real purpose—to lend regularity to the passage of days.

**Rumsey in the Towers**

As I have argued above, Keith’s memories of Rumsey are much of what is driving him to the habitualised behaviours of the poker game, and professional poker. The memory of Rumsey is a constant motivating factor for Keith, and one the reader encounters very early in *Falling Man*, during Keith’s surgery for his injuries sustained in the 9/11 attacks:

> On the table he thought of his buddy Rumsey, briefly, just before or after he lost sensation. The doctor, the anesthetist, injected him with a heavy sedative or other agent, a substance containing a memory suppressant, or maybe there were two shots, but there was Rumsey in his chair by the window, which meant the memory was not suppressed or the substance hasn’t taken effect yet, a dream, a waking image, whatever it was, Rumsey in the smoke, things coming down.

There is a suggestion of irony in this passage—Keith is unsure whether he has had two injections or one—yet he is adamant that his memory of Rumsey has had a powerful effect on him. In the discussion above we can see the powerful influence that Beckett’s concepts of habit and memory have on *Falling Man*, and its main two characters. Indeed, much of the novel is concerned with understanding, and

---

429 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 22.
explaining, the processes through which one can attempt to deal with the visceral power of the 9/11 attacks, whether that be through memory, or habit. DeLillo does not make an argument for the primacy of involuntary memory like Beckett does—DeLillo cannot afford to be this equivocal, nor is *Falling Man* ever overtly theoretical—rather DeLillo harnesses Beckett’s concepts in an effort to create a ‘counter-narrative’ or an assessment of the effects of the 9/11 attacks on America.

**Eternal Return in *Falling Man***

As has been discussed above, DeLillo makes obvious use of his ability to represent events from multiple viewpoints, and indeed to repeat events a number of times, both to emphasise the importance and power of these events (and what more visceral image than that of the September 11 attacks) but also to illustrate how the perception and representation of these events can be mediated and altered via the influence of memory, as well as a number of other factors.

In DeLillo’s final presentation of the 9/11 attacks, the reader’s focus is split between two characters, Keith, the main character of the novel, and Hammad, the terrorist character from whom we gain a few short insights. The narration shifts from Hammad to Keith at the moment that the plane hits the tower. Keith is struck by an object as the plane hits the tower, and is struck also by confusion. His major concern seems to be to get to Rumsey, and to ascertain his condition. Rumsey is critically injured, “hit by something large and hard when the ceiling caved in or even before”\(^{430}\). Keith attempts to pull Rumsey out of the debris in his office, intending to help him down the stairs and out of the tower. Rumsey is critically injured, and too unwieldy for Keith to carry. DeLillo writes:

He looked at Rumsey, who’d fallen away from him, upper body lax, face barely belonging. The whole business of being Rumsey was in shambles now. Keith held tight to the belt buckle. He stood and looked at him and the man opened his eyes and died. This is when he wondered what was happening here.\textsuperscript{431}

This is at odds with what the reader encounters earlier in the novel when we are told that Rumsey jumped from the tower. As the final section of the novel continues DeLillo reinforces this confusion:

\begin{quote}
[\ldots] for an instant he saw it again, going past the window, and this time he thought it was Rumsey. He confused it with Rumsey, the man falling sideways, arm out and up, like pointed up, like why am I here instead of there.\textsuperscript{432}
\end{quote}

This moment refers back to moments before when Keith is attempting to help Rumsey, as DeLillo writes:

\begin{quote}
Then something outside, going past the window. Something went past the window, then he saw it. First it went and was gone and then he saw it and had to stand a moment staring out at nothing, holding Rumsey under the arms. He could not stop seeing it, twenty feet away, an instant of something sideways, going past the window, white shirt, hand up, falling before he saw it.\textsuperscript{433}
\end{quote}

There are two temporal disjunctions at play here. The first is described in the excerpt immediately above. Keith sees something, presumably the falling man of the title, the individual that motivates David Janiak to create his requiem performance of the famous image, and then \textit{afterwards} realising what he has seen. DeLillo encapsulates here the fallibility of memory. Keith’s poker playing attempts to ward off his memories of Rumsey, and yet the memories are unavoidable.\textsuperscript{434} The second temporal

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{431} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 243.
\textsuperscript{432} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{433} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{434} Indeed, this is a similar idea to the analysis of \textit{Falling Man} Peter Boxall provides when he writes that the image (and the performance of the Falling Man) “brings the event back, as if in a kind of déjà
\end{footnotes}
disjunction is held in the comparison between the two passages quoted above: that is, the confusion Keith encounters in believing he sees Rumsey falling, when, in the process of evacuating the tower Keith convinces himself he is seeing the same man falling again, despite also having seen Rumsey die in his arms whilst attempting to help him prior to evacuating.

This temporal disjunction is a product of Keith’s experiences in the attacks, a moment that seems to dominate the rest of Keith’s life that we are privy to throughout *Falling Man*. Indeed, it is as if DeLillo is arguing that time itself is suspended once the initial moment of the first plane striking the building takes place. For as Keith is descending the tower we read: “[i]t did not seem forever to him, the passage down. He had no sense of pace or rate.”

What DeLillo constructs in the repetition of the moment of the plane’s hitting the World Trade Centre is the familiar concept of eternal return. My motivation for this argument is derived from the novel itself (and the fact that eternal return is a crucial concept for Pynchon’s novel *Against the Day* as we will see in ‘The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell’, below). It must be pointed out, however, that this argument has been posited before, in Cheryl Miller’s scathing review article ‘9/11 and the Novelists’. Miller’s position on *Falling Man* is clear—she views the novel as a failed attempt to reconsider what she views as DeLillo’s positive view of terrorism enunciated in *White Noise* and *Mao II*. Miller argues that DeLillo is not, even after the vu.” (Boxall, *Since Beckett*, p. 175). I would argue that Rumsey is the primary focus of Keith’s memory, and yet Rumsey’s fate and that of the almost three thousand individuals in the towers is mirrored in this event.

435 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 245.
September 11 attacks, able to “repudiate ‘the act of terror.’” She sees DeLillo’s use of eternal return as “nightmarish”, terrorism “presented in its most chilling form.”

I don’t conceive of DeLillo’s use of eternal return in the same terms. Eternal return seems to be an effective means of conceptualising time after the September 11 attacks—not in terms of understanding time as it applies to the real world—but useful for understanding novelistic or literary time. Miller’s criticism of DeLillo’s application of eternal return to the events of 9/11 would seem to respond to a simplistic understanding of the concept, in which eternal return stands in as a cipher for nihilism, and nihilism is then interpreted as a senseless form of terrorist *apologia*. Whilst Nietzsche’s conception of the eternal return, characterised as “terrible [...], existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale” seems bleak, the eternal return is in essence a call for stoicism, and an understanding of the essence of the world. Nietzsche proposes that acceptance of the fact of the eternal return facilitates something very similar to the sense of authenticity that Beckett understands as crucial to literature in *Proust*. As such, eternal return does not always call for an interpretation that includes time, and yet the temporal is crucial to the concept: I will elucidate this comment with reference to another example of return in the novel.

DeLillo’s repetition of the 9/11 attacks does not only occur at the beginning and the end of the novel, but becomes a motif that emerges through other concepts as well. As

---

discussed above, DeLillo’s utilisation of technology is a means through which he investigates eternal return and begins to create his own conceptualisation of it:

Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching […] [A] clear sky that carried human terror in those streaking aircraft, first one, then the other, the force of men’s intent […] Standing by the wall he reached toward her chair and took her hand. She bit her lip and watched. They would all be dead, passengers and crew, and thousands in the towers dead, and she felt it in her body, a deep pause, and thought there he is, unbelievably, in one of those towers, and now his hand on hers, in pale light, as though to console her for his dying.439

Once we begin to consider this passage we can see how complex some of the issues become. I want to first emphasise the phrase that DeLillo uses to describe Lianne’s unease. A ‘deep pause’ of course suggests a number of different meanings, but the application of ‘pause’ in technology, and specifically to the video recorder is crucial. The ability to manipulate time is central to this form of technology, and DeLillo harnesses this ability to emphasise the possibilities of the concept of eternal return, and also to illustrate that he is creating a new conception of the eternal return.440

The technological ability to manipulate time is then reflected in the alteration of tense in the middle of the excerpt quoted above. Despite the fact that Keith was in the World Trade Centre, and Lianne knows exactly what happened on 9/11, DeLillo still narrates the 9/11 attacks here as if they were in the future. It is not as simple as this, however, because DeLillo’s narrator has the privilege (as the reader also does) of knowing what will occur, and yet the events are still in the future. What is also important to note in this passage is that Lianne is compelled to view the 9/11 attacks over and over—this

440 This is the first of the three senses in which Jacques Derrida uses the term ‘loop’ in his analysis of the September 11 attacks. See Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, pp. 94-96 and n8, p. 188.
parallels Nietzsche’s exhortation to accept the eternal return but also emphasises the inevitable cycle of time in the eternal return model.

In *Falling Man*, DeLillo attempts to deal specifically with the concept of the September 11 attacks residing in some idea of the future. Keith and Lianne’s son, Justin, along with two of his friends, have a very different apprehension of the 9/11 attacks to their parents. The three children monitor the skyline of New York City from their bedrooms, attempting to identify the next planes that will attack the city. Keith and Lianne are concerned:

‘[...] you’re looking for more planes.’
‘Waiting for it to happen again.’
‘That scares me,’ she said.
[...]
‘That scares the hell out of me. God, there’s something so awful about that. Damn kids with their goddamn twisted powers of imagination.’
[...]
Finally she said, ‘The only thing I got out of Justin. The towers did not collapse.’
‘They were hit but did not collapse. That’s what he says.’
‘He didn’t see it on TV. I didn’t want him to see it. But I told him they came down. And he seemed to absorb it. But then, I don’t know.’

Justin seems to epitomise the stoicism that Nietzsche requires to accept the eternal return. Irrespective of the televisial evidence of the attacks, Justin is convinced that the same events will happen again. The possibility of repetition is crucial to this section of the novel.

The three children believe they are receiving messages from ‘Bill Lawton’, their misinterpretation of ‘bin Laden’. After much coaxing, Justin admits to Keith and Lianne what bin Laden is telling him. He says:

---

441 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 72.
‘The whole point [...] is that he says things about the planes. We know they’re coming because he says they are. But that’s all I’m allowed to say. He says this time the towers will fall.’

DeLillo illustrates to the reader the instability of knowledge in the aftermath of 9/11. He invokes the Nietzschean concept of eternal return, but complicates it, possibly pushing it towards the Deleuzean disambiguation of the eternal return, in which difference is incorporated into the eternal return.

The three sections of *Falling Man* are named respectively ‘Bill Lawton’, ‘Ernst Hechinger’ and ‘David Janiak’. As the reader progresses through the novel, one discovers that each of these three names has a significance that is not immediately obvious. As I stated previously ‘Bill Lawton’ refers to Osama bin Laden. The second part, ‘Ernst Hechinger’ is the real name of Martin, Lianne’s mother’s partner. This fact in itself is not essential. The reader does find out, however, that Martin has had to change his name because of his involvement in radical left-wing terrorism in the 1960s and 70s—Martin was a member of the terrorist group Kommune One during this period in West Germany. The third part of *Falling Man* is titled ‘David Janiak’. Once again we are finally allowed to realise that David Janiak is the name of the performance artist Falling Man who the reader encounters throughout the text. I will return to the Falling Man below but I first want to ponder DeLillo’s act of (mis)naming the three parts and a possible interpretation of this.

If we consider my discussion of the name ‘Bill Lawton’ above we will remember that Justin believes that bin Laden will attack again. In effect then, the 9/11 attacks remain in the present, or what I want to characterise as the ‘immanent present’. The second

---

misnaming we encounter, ‘Ernst Hechinger’ refers to terrorism of the 60s and 70s. Martin, when arguing with Lianne’s mother, Nina, is adamant that there is a relationship between terrorism as we understand it now, and the terrorism he participated in in the 60s and 70s. Nina says:

‘He thinks these people, these jihadists, he thinks they have something in common with the radicals of the sixties and seventies. He thinks they’re all part of the same classical pattern. They have their theorists. They have their visions of world brotherhood.’

Simply considered then, there is a relationship that DeLillo is proposing between the 9/11 attacks (the immanent, and eternally recurring, present of *Falling Man*) and the past. Similarly, the third misnaming that the reader encounters, ‘David Janiak’ refers us to the future, or at the very least to the immediate present. The Falling Man replicates the famous photograph of a victim of the 9/11 attacks choosing to jump from the tower rather than be consumed by the flames. This act takes from the present and projects into the future. As such, I want to argue that we have in these three different misnamings another manifestation of past, present and future representing the eternal return—irrespective of the temporal zone that is being referred to, all these events transfer their meaning metaphorically back to the events of the morning of the 11th of September 2001. This, I believe, is an effective motif on DeLillo’s part, which continually reasserts the concept of eternal return as it applies to 9/11.

The final thread that I want to trace in addressing *Falling Man* is the performance artist Falling Man. DeLillo describes his jumps as assuming an “awful […] stylized

---

443 DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 147.
pose, body and limbs, his signature stroke."\textsuperscript{445} Falling Man represents once again the return of the 9/11 attacks—the replication of an image that represents the attacks as a whole. Lianne, however, does not interpret Falling Man’s performance as art. DeLillo writes:

\begin{quote}
She wished she could believe that this was some kind of antic street theater, an absurdist drama that provokes onlookers to share a comic understanding of what is irrational in the great schemes of being or in the next small footstep.\textsuperscript{446}
\end{quote}

Lianne, of course, is never allowed to reach this belief. It seems as if there is no difference here between the 9/11 attacks and its artistic representation. The immanence of the attacks means that an attempt to reconstitute the 9/11 attacks is bound to fail. What the characters are left with in \textit{Falling Man} is a desire to refer back endlessly to 9/11, to attempt to understand the eternal return which is created through the ubiquity of the September 11 attacks.

\textbf{Conclusion}

My final analysis of \textit{Falling Man}, taking in the concept of eternal return elucidates what I see as the vital importance of this novel. DeLillo’s synthesis and development of Beckett’s conceptualisation of time as it pertains to memory and habit is crucial to explicate the technical aspects of the novel. It is, however, in the concept of the eternal return and its inherent ability to completely alter our understanding of time itself that the most fruitful ground is reached. For, in \textit{Falling Man}, the fact that the traumatic events of the September 11 attacks are replayed and returned to over and over again implies not only the power of the event—crucially it proposes a complete reconsideration of the nature of time. Time, after the 9/11 attacks, can no longer be

\textsuperscript{445} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{446} DeLillo, \textit{Falling Man}, p. 163.
simple and linear. Instead the absolute power of the event, and indeed the compulsion to talk, think and write about the event, renders time non-linear. Past, present, and future coalesce into one multi-dimensional phenomenon—the same time that we see DeLillo moving towards throughout his post-9/11 novel, *Falling Man*.
At: Pre-curators to Pynchon’s Reconsideration of Temporality in *Gravity’s Rainbow*

Thomas Pynchon’s 1973 novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, provides an effective means through which to investigate Pynchon’s conceptualisation of temporality and his deployment of time, as these issues begin to emerge as important concepts for the author. At the same time, *Gravity’s Rainbow* functions as a useful counterpoint to what I will characterise as a reconceptualisation of temporality in *Against the Day* that is motivated by the transformative event of the September 11 attacks on the United States in 2001. Within *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the reader can identify a number of analyses of temporality, and a similar use of time as a concept in relation to the construction of ‘the novel’. I will argue throughout this section that despite the surface similarities, Pynchon engages with time in a sense that is different to that which can be seen in his novels published after 9/11. *Gravity’s Rainbow*, then, serves as a counter-example to establish that, despite Pynchon’s engagement with temporality in 1973, it is only after the 9/11 attacks that temporality becomes the dominant conceptual focus of the author.

*Gravity’s Rainbow* is a novel that attempts to grapple with the changes engendered by the Second World War in the same way that *Against the Day* is consistently focused on the transformative events of the 11th of September, 2001. The novel is concerned with two manifestations of time, these being time as an abstract concept and ‘times’, the transformative eras which appear to drive the creative impetus of the novel. The World War Two era is a transformative one for Pynchon, changing not only his and our understanding of the world, but of time as well. Indeed, Pynchon

---

447 It is important to note at this early stage that I will engage with Shawn Smith’s interpretation of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, following on from Joseph Slade’s work, which argues for the novel as being focused just as much on the Vietnam War as it is on World War Two. See below, pp. 172-176.
observes in *Gravity’s Rainbow* that: “[t]he [Second World] War has been reconfiguring time and space into its own image.” The dominant image of the novel, the V-2 rocket, is the vehicle through which much of Pynchon’s post-World War Two figuration of time is developed. Indeed, it is the physical and conceptual attributes of the V-2 that become a constructive motif for Pynchon’s understanding of time, looking back from the 1970s, itself a period of massive upheaval, to the World War Two era. From the opening pages of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon emphasises the ways in which the rocket operates on a physical and temporal scale that places it outside the realms of human experience up to this point—indeed, the rocket functions outside the limits of the human body and its normal perception of experience.

The first character the reader encounters in the novel, Pirate Prentice, experiences the first manifestation of the V-2, the motif that dominates the novel; this experience is the sighting of a burst of star-like light, to be revealed as the “Most Secret, German rocket bomb.” Prentice effectively ignores the weapon in its flight, at odds with what the reader must assume at this point is conventional human behaviour. Pynchon makes the reasons for Prentice’s actions clear shortly afterwards:

He won’t hear the thing come in. It travels faster than the speed of sound. The first news you get of it is the blast. Then, if you’re still around, you hear the sound of it coming in.

The most important characteristic of the V-2 rocket, and the one that Pynchon establishes from the outset, is the temporal disjunction that the rocket implies, and, indeed, produces. This first temporal disjunction is, however, a very human disjunction—it is the break in causation precipitated by an object moving faster than

---

the speed of sound—in effect, destroying the normal assumption that an object moving towards us will be preceded by the noise that it makes. As Pointsman observes when discussing Tyrone Slothrop’s relation to the rocket: “I have only the reversal of rocket sounds to go on […] and what appears to be a reversal of cause-and-effect.”

Hanjo Berressem identifies this motif as “the first time loop” of the novel, in which the reversal of causality implies a looping of time. There is an inherent irony in the V-2’s reversal of causation—considering this, the black humour employed throughout the novel in relation to the V-2 seems a reasonable response considering the hovering death that the rocket signifies, and its ability to alter the normal human understanding of the world and how it operates.

The omnipresent danger of the Second World War and the change in time it creates is manifested in the experiences of Tyrone Slothrop, the central character of the novel. Much is made at the beginning of the novel concerning Slothrop’s sexual conquests in London seeming to precipitate V-2 strikes, the same breakdown in causation we can see in the disjunctive temporality created by the V-2 arriving to cause devastation before the sound it creates. Without addressing in detail the narrative of Slothrop’s conditioning to the rocket, we can see that Pynchon makes clear that time is at the heart of this concern as well. Roger Mexico is striving to understand the relationship between Slothrop’s conquests and the arrival of V-2 rockets in their aftermath, a relationship he believes is to do with some stimulus not able to be perceived by the

---

451 This reversal of causation is what Stephen Weisenburger identifies as Pynchon’s use of the “rare and all but forgotten trope” of hysteron proteron. See Weisenburger, S., ‘Hysteron Proteron in Gravity’s Rainbow’, in Texas Studies in Literature and Language, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1992, pp. 91-94. We should note, also, the impasse that seems to be reached between a ‘reversed causality’ and the uncertainty principles discussed by Alan Friedman. See his ‘Science and Technology’, in Clerc, C., (ed.), Approaches to Gravity’s Rainbow, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1983, pp. 90-94.

452 Pynchon, Gravity’s Rainbow, p. 90. (Pynchon’s emphasis).

rest of the population. Pynchon, however, extends his hypothesis out into far more disturbing territory, writing:

But if it’s in the air, right here, right now, then the rockets will follow from it, 100% of the time. No exceptions. When we find it, we’ll have shown again the stone determinacy of everything, of every soul. There will be precious little room for any hope at all. You can see how important a discovery like that would be.\textsuperscript{454}

Although Mexico is ostensibly working to attempt to minimise the rocket attacks on the United Kingdom, his overall concern is not focused on the allied war effort, but rather the issue of determinacy. Pynchon is extrapolating out the temporal disjunction inherent in the V-2, and arguing that this effect, when looked at objectively, correlates to an inability to access the future, to effect it in any way. Weisenburger argues that even in the naming of the V-2, translated as “revenge-weapon-two”, the weapon is focused on the past—the V-2 is supposed to “literally get back at the Allie[d]” Forces.\textsuperscript{455} In this sense, the future is closed off from the population of London. What the world is left with is a despairing life, excluded from the possibility of anything other than an entirely determined future. The breakdown of causation inherent in both the V-2, and in Slothrop’s relationship to the rocket creates a narrative impetus towards exhibiting the confusion and despair of the World War Two era, and the lack of hope, or indeed belief, in the future that this period, and its conflicts, produced. Pynchon writes:

\[\ldots\] subsumed in the blast and he never hearing the approach, the sound too late, after the blast, the rocket’s ghost calling to ghosts it newly made.\textsuperscript{456}

This is the most disturbing factor of the temporal disjunction of the V-2—that the rocket precedes its own sound means that there is no possibility of seeking shelter, no

\textsuperscript{454} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{455} Weisenburger, \textit{Hysteron Proteron} in \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 91. (Weisenburger’s emphasis).
\textsuperscript{456} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 138.
warning of the imminent devastation. Hence, the entire population is rendered as ghosts, dead before the event occurs, what Berressem calls “(the simulation of) death” the future entirely determined, and, indeed, the future made obsolete.\textsuperscript{457}

As the V-2 looms larger within \textit{Gravity's Rainbow}, Pynchon emphasises the central role the rocket plays in his conceptualisation of temporality within the novel. He writes:

Imagine a missile one hears approaching only \textit{after} it explodes. The reversal! A piece of time neatly snipped out . . . a few feet of film run backwards . . . the blast of the rocket, fallen faster than sound—then growing \textit{out of it} the roar of its own fall, catching up to what’s already death and burning . . . a ghost in the sky. . . . \textsuperscript{458}

It is here that Pynchon makes entirely clear the temporality he sees manifested in the V-2 rocket—a temporality that is completely at odds with how the world before World War Two operated. The technological development that preceded these weapons reaches its apotheosis with the development of weapons that now appear to contravene the governing laws of the world. What Pynchon is specifically constructing is a view of time in which time is compartmentalised, with the present looming and holding an ever-present danger. Time is fractured, precisely because the Second World War makes death eternally present—as Roger Mexico believes is manifested in “the explosion over his head always just about to come”.\textsuperscript{459} This danger is because the future and the present are no longer clearly demarcated, rather they are confused, and it is this temporal disjunction, the disturbing link between present and future which is the disjunction in time so critical to \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}.

\textsuperscript{457} Berressem, \textit{Pynchon’s Poetics}, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{458} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 48. (Pynchon’s emphases).
\textsuperscript{459} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 58,
It is significant that Pynchon specifically refers to the connection between the
temporal disjunction of the V-2 and film and cinema, with two primary lines of
argument being established. The first affirms a line of critical inquiry in the
interpretation of Gravity's Rainbow which proposes that the novel is, in essence, a
film. That is, what the reader encounters throughout the novel is the reported
experience of a film, narrated at some distance from the events the novel describes.\textsuperscript{460}
Implicit in this understanding of the novel is the temporal manipulability of film,
which manifests itself in a temporal scheme which operates outside the conventional
conceptions of past, present, and future.\textsuperscript{461} Indeed, what is crucial to temporality
within film, as John Stark argues, is the manipulability of time that is allowed within
the medium.\textsuperscript{462} Time is non-conventional exactly because, despite appearing linear,
film presents only the illusion of conventional, linear, time, whilst the opposite is manifested.

$\Delta t$

Secondly, Pynchon’s reference to film in regard to the temporal disjunctions of the V-2
allude also to another series of references accreted around this motif, especially the
mathematics of rocketry, its relationship to calculus, and the change in time ($\Delta t$,
pronounced ‘delta t’) that is crucial to these processes. As with the temporal
disjunction inherent in the V-2 travelling faster than the speed of sound, Pynchon’s

\textsuperscript{460} See, for example, Johnston, J., ‘Post-Cinematic Fiction: Film in the Novels of Pynchon, McElroy
Theater of War: Gravity's Rainbow as Film’, in Pearce, R., (ed.), Critical Essay on Thomas Pynchon,
(ed.), Approaches to Gravity’s Rainbow, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1983, pp. 140-144,
148-151.

\textsuperscript{461} We should note, however, Steven Kellman’s warning of the dangers of conflating cinema and the
novel, whilst also noting the applicability of this concept to disjunctive temporality. See Kellmann, S.,
470, 473-475.

\textsuperscript{462} Stark, J., Pynchon’s Fictions: Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information, Ohio University
second reconsideration of time in its relationship to the rocket addresses how time is compartmentalised, or partialised, when the temporality of the rocket is addressed.\textsuperscript{463} So, as the rocket alters our assumptions about time by arriving before the sound it produces, resulting in an inversion of conventional understandings of temporality, there is a companion effect in attempting to understand the passage of the rocket \textit{through} time. Pynchon focuses on this passage through time as broken into discrete parts, from launch, through ascent, to ‘brennschluss’ (the moment in which the rocket reaches its highest point) and then through the descent of the rocket into its final impact.

For Pynchon, the passage of the rocket is intimately related to calculus. Calculus can be applied to specify the rocket’s passage through both time and space. Calculus, however, was first applied in ballistics not to the rocket but to an earlier missile, the cannonball, as Pynchon establishes. He observes:

\begin{quote}
Three hundred years ago mathematicians were learning to break the cannonball’s rise and fall into stairsteps of range and height, $\Delta x$ and $\Delta y$, allowing them to grow smaller and smaller, approaching zero […]\textsuperscript{464}
\end{quote}

In an attempt to understand the passage of missiles, mathematicians perform a metaphoric partialisation of time in an attempt to understand the movement of the object—that is, the object’s relationship to, and in, space.\textsuperscript{465} Hence, as Pynchon continues on from the excerpt above, the metaphoric partialisation of time in operation is emphasised. We read:

\textsuperscript{463} cf. Friedman, ‘Science and Technology’, pp. 73-74.

\textsuperscript{464} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 567.

This analytic legacy has been handed down intact—it brought the technicians at Peenemünde to peer at the Askania films of Rocket flights, frame by frame, $\Delta x$ and $\Delta y$, flightless themselves . . .

For Pynchon the most crucial aspect of the mathematical analysis of ballistics is its relationship to time.\textsuperscript{467} Time is explicitly constructed here as partial and discrete, hence the description of the viewing the rocket as ‘flightless’, as each exposure of the rocket renders time fractured, and the rocket stationary in space.\textsuperscript{468} Crucially, the temporal disjunction inherent in the compartmentalisation of time is described with reference back to film—indeed Pynchon identifies cinema and calculus together, making explicit the link between “film and calculus, both pornographies of flight.”\textsuperscript{469}

Franz Pökler, a rocket engineer who was also drafted in to work on the mystical 00000 rocket details the relationship between time and rocketry that is developed within the novel. Pynchon writes:

\begin{quote}
There has been this strange connection between the German mind and the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement, for at least two centuries—since Leibniz, in the process of inventing calculus, used the same approach to break up the trajectories of cannonballs through the air. And now Pökler was about to be given proof that these techniques had been extended past images on film, to human lives.\textsuperscript{470}
\end{quote}

Pynchon is not arguing here that time is in any way ‘counterfeit’ or illusory, but exactly the opposite. It is, instead, the application of these mathematical and analytical

\textsuperscript{466} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 567.
\textsuperscript{468} It is important also to note here that the concept Pynchon employs in relating calculus and ballistics relates also to Zeno’s Paradoxes, and especially to Zeno’s paradoxical observations on the nature of time. Friedman establishes that the major mathematical operation at play is the role of calculus in allowing the modelling of the rocket’s path, rather than having to calculate every “infinitesimal interval”. See Friedman, ‘Science and Technology’, p. 73. I briefly discuss Pynchon use of Zeno’s Paradoxes in \textit{Against the Day}, cf. ‘The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell’, pp. 189-192, and DeLillo’s allusion to the same concept in ‘Beckett’s Proust and Falling Man’, pp. 102-105.
\textsuperscript{469} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 567.
\textsuperscript{470} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 407.
conceptualisations of time which provide insight into the concept of time, not only as an abstraction, but to times relation to humanity as well.

The other concept that Pynchon deploys in relation to the mathematical understanding of time is the concept of the $\Delta t$, that is, the change in time. Strictly speaking, $\Delta t$ relates to the specific moment in the course of a rocket’s flight in which the missile changes from ascent to descent. This occurs at the very top of the rocket’s parabolic arc, at the moment of brennschluss, in which the rocket engine burns the last of its fuel and thus can no longer project itself upward. $\Delta t$, however, is utilised not only in relation to the V-2, but in a number of instances in which a ‘change in time’ is produced throughout the novel. Indeed, as we see Franz Pökler begin to appreciate the human element in his specialist analysis of rocketry, the $\Delta t$ is applied to Slothrop, and the main character’s own interaction with time throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

It has been widely observed that Tyrone Slothrop, despite being the main character of the novel, seems to disappear from the narrative, disintegrating into traces that are, at times, difficult to identify, or to grapple with. Pynchon applies the concept of the $\Delta t$ to Slothrop at the very beginning of his disintegration. The novel’s narrator confirms that Slothrop is beginning “to thin, to scatter” and then illustrates the relationship between this disintegration and the concept of the $\Delta t$.471 Pynchon writes:

‘Temporal bandwidth’ is the width of your present, your *now*. It is the familiar ‘$\Delta t$’ considered as a dependent variable. The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. But the narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are.472

---

We should first acknowledge the similarities developed in this passage and the concept of the fracturing of the future discussed above. In this sense, Slothrop’s disintegration, his falling victim to the $\Delta t$ is inevitable. Of course, the technical sense of $\Delta t$ is completely removed when utilised here—in turn, however, the removal of the mathematical sense of the term allows Pynchon to establish the number of ways in which the change in time can be utilised as a concept throughout the novel.\footnote{cf. Friedman and Puetz, ‘Science as Metaphor’, pp. 69-70.} So, rather than Slothrop’s change in time (a change in the perception of time) constituting some form of transformation as occurs when the concept is applied to the rocket, for Slothrop, his $\Delta t$ constitutes the changing of time. As Slothrop begins to scatter, the reader is instructed that what drives this change in the character is specifically his perception of time, and his inability to engage with present and future. *Gravity’s Rainbow* is now specifically concerned with the immediate perception of time.

Pynchon asserts his preference for a conception of time which, despite affirming the distinction between past, present, and future, produces a new understanding of time in which all three categories also simultaneously meld into one. This is Pynchon’s rejection of what he calls the “hopeless […] one-way flow of European time.”\footnote{Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, p. 724.} Thus, Slothrop’s scattering results from his altered perception of time, paralleled in the partialised time of calculus viewing the rocket, and the temporal disjunction in which the V-2 approaches before its own sound.

What emerges in the connection between the life of the characters and the rocket is Pynchon’s emphasis on the perceptions and conceptualisations of time that are contained in the nexus between life and rocket. Pynchon proposes that the reconsideration of temporality encapsulated in the disjunctive time of the rocket, is
analogous to the fractured time experienced by the characters in the chaos of World
War Two and its aftermath. Pynchon develops this concept, examining, via Katje, at
this point in a relationship with Slothrop, the relationship between the rocket and life.

He writes:

‘Between you and me it is not only a rocket trajectory, but also a life.
You will come to understand that between the two points, in the five
minutes, it lives an entire life. You haven’t even learned the data on
our side of the flight profile, the visible or trackable. Beyond them
there’s so much more, so much none of us know. . . .’

The reader slowly begins to understand that the time of the rocket, dissected and
partialised, both throughout the novel and through calculus, stands as an analogy for
life—the same reconceptualisations of time are at play.

Earlier in the novel, Leni, another of the raft of female characters that appear and then
disappear, functioning as foils for the male characters, proposes a view of time that
Franz Pökler rejects. Interestingly, the view is very similar to what Pökler proposes
later in the novel, discussed above. Pynchon writes:

She even tried, from what little calculus she’d picked up, to explain it
to Franz as Δt approaching zero, eternally approaching, the slices of
time growing thinner and thinner, a succession of rooms each with
walls, more silver, transparent, as the pure light of the zero comes
nearer. . . .

Setting aside the conceptual disagreement that emerges in Franz’s understanding of
the relationship between the rocket and time, we can see that time is again
conceptualised as broken up into a series of parts. As opposed to Katje’s
conceptualisation of rocket time, however, these partialised moments which constitute
time during the era of the rocket grow smaller and smaller. What is implied here is the

destruction of time, or at least its devolution into a concept that no longer functions effectively.\textsuperscript{478} This is the same process that is identifiable in the fractured future that the overdetermined Slothrop struggles against and finally succumbs to, and, also, a very similar process to what occurs in the mathematical analysis of the rocket, in which temporality is gradually excised from calculus, in favour of the ability to specify the rocket’s position in space. There is also another additional accretion here, with Pynchon alluding again to Zeno’s paradoxes. As with the construction of time in the paradox, we have to grapple with the simultaneous existence of time, coupled with the irony that time is partialised, and in Leni’s observation growing ‘thinner and thinner’ approaching zero. It is as if time in the Rocket-State must finally succumb to the power of the objects that continually manipulate it.

Again we can identify the conceptualisation of time as it plays out within the novel as effectively destructive. As I have argued above, the temporality that is exhibited in 

\textit{Gravity’s Rainbow} is a strange time, a conceptual framework that seems to operate against itself, paradoxically affirming and denying time as it exists. In this final, and most crucial, example, Pynchon reunites time and space again to highlight that both the temporal and spatial are relative and contingent. It is, ultimately, Slothrop’s understanding of the rocket, the technology he is so intimately related to, which reflects the most coherent understanding of time within the novel. Pynchon unravels, and reconceptualises time again, whilst Slothrop is closest to the rocket, in the tunnels of the Nordhausen Mittelwerke. Pynchon describes the relationship between mathematics, “the dynamic space of the living Rocket”,\textsuperscript{479} and time:


\textsuperscript{479} Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 301.
To integrate here is to operate on a rate of change so that time falls away: change is stilled. . . . ‘Meters per second’ will integrate to ‘meters.’ The moving vehicle is frozen, in space, to become architecture, and timeless. It was never launched. It will never fall.\(^{480}\)

Pynchon here conceptualises time not only as stilled but as destroyed. As with earlier examples discussed above, the ever-present rocket, always just about to bring destruction, is present, clouding the future—this is also the rocket that looms over the reader both at the beginning, and end, of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Finally, however, time is excluded from the narrative. The reader, and, indeed, the characters are left in a space of temporal suspension, referring back to the films of rocket launches that have been viewed throughout the novel, in which temporality is subsumed and fractured. Time is shifted aside from reality, and becomes an additional concept manipulable by all who challenge it.

The understanding of temporality that Pynchon develops within *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a complex one, incorporating elements of a number of disciplines to propose a despairing view of time which, despite its manipulability, renders all characters as its slave. As with Pynchon’s characters, the reader is left suspended in the bleak assumption that the world of the novel is timeless, or if temporality is still a concept with any appropriate value, that time consists of partially-connected compartments, reversible and manipulated at will, the manipulation, of course, only being effected by the elect, whilst the preterite remain eternally subject to time.

To provide a final explication of the role of time and space, and their relationship in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, I will turn to an enlightening interpretation of the novel which

\(^{480}\) Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, p. 301.
sheds light on both Pynchon’s unique conceptualisation of time, and develops a useful connection between time and history and their relationship in the novel’s conceptual schematics.

**Pynchon and History**

Shawn Smith’s analysis of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in his *Pynchon and History*, a text which primarily seeks to interpret the novel as a literary manifestation of Hayden White’s theories of historiography, follows on from the early explicatory work of Joseph Slade, and interprets the narrator of *Gravity’s Rainbow* as a Vietnam War veteran. Smith points to a narratorial comment—“Between two station marks, yellow crayon through the years of grease and passage, 1966 and 1971, I tasted my first blood. Do you want to put this part in?**481**—and argues that this pinpoints the period from which the text emerges; that is, the narrator is speaking from the period of the novel’s development and publication, in 1972 and 1973.**482** In essence, Smith argues for an interpretation of *Gravity’s Rainbow* which places as its central focus the presence of an “anachronistic narrator”.**483**

I want to consider this interpretation as providing crucial insight into the way that Pynchon employs time within the novel. If we accept Smith’s interpretation of the novel as being narrated from a position outside the temporal scheme of the novel, that is outside the World War Two period and its aftermath—and I think we should—then temporality is placed in a tenuous position reflective of the multiple conceptualisations of time that have been discussed above. Firstly, we need to consider Smith’s interpretation of the narrator as anachronistic. As I have developed throughout this

---

482 See Smith, *Pynchon and History*, p. 59.
483 Smith, *Pynchon and History*, p. 59.
dissertation, I believe that the term ‘anachronistic’ excludes some of the conceptual complexities that are encapsulated in the inclusion of perspectives, events, objects, and characters that fall outside the specific temporal scheme of a text. Thus, rather than accepting Smith’s classification of the narrator as simply anachronistic, I wish to argue that the narrator is, rather, prochronistic. That is, to read the narrator as a Vietnam veteran means that the narrator intercedes into Gravity’s Rainbow from the future. Of course, this is complicated by the fact that the novel was published in 1973, and we tend to conflate the time of publication into the Vietnam War era in general. All in all, however, the novel is concerned with the period from 1944 until around 1949; the narrator then narrates the events from a point which is outside of (and in the future from) the temporal scope of the narrative.

Having said this, the final pages of the novel place even this observation in flux. If Smith is correct, and the rocket that features in the opening pages of the novel is metamorphosed into “an ICBM one second from impact over Los Angeles’s Orpheus Theater sometime in the early 1970s” then, by the end of the novel, the narrator is no longer prochronistic, but is centrally within the temporal purview of the novel. It is this constantly shifting temporality, and the resultant shift in the readers interpretation of the narrator that then brings my interpretation of Pynchon’s construction of fractured time in the novel into accord with Smith’s analysis and my synthesis of his argument. For, ultimately, it is the compartmentalisation or partialisation of time that defines Gravity’s Rainbow. From the episodic (and filmic) structure, to the continued influence of mathematics and calculus within the novel, and the ever-present concept

---

484 Smith, Pynchon and History, p. 61.
of the $\Delta t$, time is established within the novel as something that can, and does, shift radically throughout.

A couple of examples from Smith’s interpretation establish that, although his interpretative focus is *Gravity’s Rainbow* as emblematic of metahistory, the same concepts can be applied in an analysis of the novel that focuses on time. Smith interprets the V-2 as a precipitative stage of the development of the atomic bomb. Thus, the fear created by the V-2 rocket anticipates the awful reality of nuclear weapons. Smith argues that: “[t]he Rocket alters reality, and hence the means available to the narrator of representing reality.” As we have established above, the V-2 also alters temporality. It is not so simple as following Smith’s interpretative structure and then arguing that the altered temporality of the rocket also changes the narrator’s means of representing temporality. Instead, the example of the V-2 and the disjunction in time it establishes means that the narrator, but more importantly Pynchon, must provide an alternative view of temporality which can follow the disjunction of the rocket. It is the mathematical view of time, compartmentalised and purely rational, which emerges from this. Smith’s interpretation and mine function neatly together, incorporating, as they do, the narratorial perspective and the conceptual focus of the novel.

Smith ultimately argues for the V-2 as the dominant motif of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, an interpretation I entirely agree with. Smith’s argument, however, interprets the rocket’s arc, that is its spatial movement, as symbolic of the narrative impetus of the text, and then incorporates temporality into his interpretation. He writes:

---

485 Smith, *Pynchon and History*, p. 63.
Time and space both come together and separate in the text as the forward trajectory of the narrative outpaces the closed, hermetically-informed ‘container’ of its narrative field. Most of GR concerns itself with the past, the world of history. In the Nixon parody and the episode involving the futuristic ‘Rocket-Stadt,’ however, the world of the present, which will become history, and the world of the future, the world of speculation and prophecy, intrudes to foreground the previously covert analogy between World War II and Vietnam-era America.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Pynchon and History}, p. 67.}

This is, in my opinion, the truly incisive analysis in Smith’s interpretation of the novel. By identifying the narrator as occupying a position that begins outside the temporal structure of the novel, but in a position that consistently becomes closer to the final temporal focus of it, Smith emphasises the conceptualisation of temporality that is crucial to Pynchon within this novel, an understanding of time and, finally, time’s interactions with societal perceptions of history.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Pynchon and History}, p. 71.}

\textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, through Pynchon’s use of prochronism, attains a position of prophetic power, which is the centrepiece not only of this novel, but as I will argue further, below, Pynchon’s oeuvre in general. This allows Smith to conclude that:

\begin{quote}
The progression from past to present to future demonstrates the historical, as well as narrative, ‘force’ behind the representation of the rocket, whose trajectory literally pulls the text forward into the present and on into the future to mimic the V-2’s historico-political impact.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Pynchon and History}, p. 67.}
\end{quote}

This is the crucial force (as Smith terms it) of the V-2; it “traverses time”.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Pynchon and History}, p. 95.} One of the first rocket strikes that occurs within the novel allows Pynchon to establish the temporal conceptualisation that is crucial to the productive motif of the rocket. We read: “a rocket has suddenly struck. A terrific blast quite close beyond the village: the

\footnote{Smith, \textit{Pynchon and History}, p. 67.}

\footnote{Smith, \textit{Pynchon and History}, p. 67.}

\footnote{Smith, \textit{Pynchon and History}, p. 95.}
entire fabric of the air, of time, is changed".\textsuperscript{490} The rocket, following Smith, is the transformative object, that not only allows the retheorisation of temporality, but that also provides the narrative impetus for time to be changed within the novel.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Both Shawn Smith’s interpretation of \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow} and my analysis of the novel foreground the importance of the historical, and the development of history within the novel. Intimately related to Pynchon’s theorisation of time and temporality is his awareness that what is ultimately at stake is the way that history is constructed—how the narrative of past time is to be presented to the future. Using the same conceptual focus as I will in regard to Pynchon’s other works, I have set out to read \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow} as a literary manifestation of its time, and to see the context in which it was written as intimately related to what the author produces. Pynchon’s brief narratorial comment on the nature of the World War Two era is instructive. He writes: “It’s 1945. Still early, still innocent.”\textsuperscript{491} Ultimately, what concerns Pynchon is the future. The future is constructed via a strong causal link to the present, with the issues of the present-day magnified with the passing of time. Indeed, it’s not only the future that is the focus for Pynchon but that which occurred in the past, and what may lead to different alternatives for the present and the future, as is encapsulated in Pynchon’s creation of Slothrop’s puritan ancestor, a character entirely reminiscent of Pynchon’s own ancestors, who may present a failed possibility for a brighter alternative.\textsuperscript{492}

Pynchon writes:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{490}] Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 59.
  \item[\textsuperscript{491}] Pynchon, \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}, p. 501.
  \item[\textsuperscript{492}] This process of looking to the past is encapsulated in the metahistorical concept of the \textit{longue durée} David Campbell discusses in his ‘Time is Broken’, 8-12.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Could he have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from? 493

The alternative histories and alternative narratives are the final focus for Pynchon, the conclusion which is reached through his focus on temporality. Smith observes, pertinently:

The slow pressure that over time transforms [...] visible and invisible experience [...] into ‘history’ is invisible, patient and inevitable. Historical processes are so imperceptible that, in terms of human perspective, they do not seem to exist, until at some point in the future their effects become evident. 494

What we have seen in Gravity’s Rainbow is that Pynchon is already assessing the future, a future he sees as fractured. As he observes in the novel, “[o]ur history is an aggregate of last moments.” 495 Gravity’s Rainbow seeks to identify shifts in the world precipitated by the Second World War and its aftermath and trace these into wider application in the world, as dreams of “alternate Histories”. 496 Although Pynchon’s temporal focus is materially different to the reconceptualisation of time that we will see he proposes in Against the Day, the major purpose of both novels is clear—to examine formative points of American history in an attempt to understand how America, and the world, has reached the point that it has reached, and what will come, in the future.

Postscript

Hanjo Berressem’s Pynchon’s Poetics argues that the temporal structure of Gravity’s Rainbow is imagined in the figure of a Möbius strip. He argues that the Möbius strip, representing “a temporal loop, in which past, present, and future are no longer defined

493 Pynchon, Gravity’s Rainbow, p. 556.
494 Smith, Pynchon and History, p. 64. (Smith’s emphasis).
495 Pynchon, Gravity’s Rainbow, p. 149.
along a straight line but constantly fold back onto each other” is the most constructive image of time in the novel.\textsuperscript{497} I believe that, in all likelihood, the Möbius strip is a model that may, in fact, be applicable to all of Pynchon’s novels. Moving, as we are, on to \textit{Against the Day}, the Möbius strip provides an effective analogy for the melding of past, present, and future into a seamless singularity which can be applied to Pynchon’s 2006 novel, and a temporal scheme I will analyse through different concepts and analogies in the following chapters.

\textsuperscript{497} Berressem, \textit{Pynchon’s Poetics}, p. 121. (Berressem’s emphasis).
The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell

Introduction

This chapter sets out a series of claims that seek to explicate the conceptual focus of Thomas Pynchon’s 2006 novel, *Against the Day*. As in ‘Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto’, my focus is on temporality, and to illustrate how the novel’s wide conceptual scope facilitates analysis of this one central thematic concern. My first claim is to argue that Pynchon sets out, throughout the novel, a series of submerged references to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. These allusions can be seen most clearly in a short section at the beginning of the second chapter of the novel, in which New York City, temporally dislocated, comes under attack. The conclusion to this section echoes the experiences of the population of New York after the 9/11 attacks and focuses on one character, Hunter Penhallow, and his frantic attempts to escape from the carnage. The New York City of *Against the Day* is temporally dislocated not solely because Pynchon’s creates a series of allusions to an event that occurs around one hundred years after the notional setting of the novel, in what I term a prochronistic allusion, but also because Pynchon’s references to the 9/11 attacks are accompanied by a mirrored series of parachronistic references, into the past, in which he systematically links the disaster-struck New York City with the *Inferno* of Dante’s *Commedia*. Thus I establish that Pynchon mobilises both parachronistic and prochronistic influences on this section of the novel, creating a text that engages with the fundamental nature of time, and attempts to reconsider temporality, both as it applies to the novel, and narrative in general, and also to

---

498 See Cowart, D., ‘Pynchon and the Sixties’, in *Critique*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1999, p. 5, for a similar interpretation of Pynchon’s work—in this case, Cowart is analysing *Mason & Dixon*. Christy Burns’ ‘Postmodern Historiography’ also discussed *Mason & Dixon* in a similar light, expressing these concepts clearly. She writes: “Pynchon’s temporal or historical coordinates are the mappable difference, measurable via his synchronization of the 1760s charted alongside the 1990s.” Of course, for *Against the Day*, the synchronisation is between the fin de siècle and the 2000s. See Burns, ‘Postmodern Historiography’, 3. (Burns’ emphasis).
philosophical analyses of ‘real world’ time, the time of human experience. To analyse temporality in Against the Day I then turn to four concepts that influence these ideas throughout the novel, discussing time travel and its obvious implicit analysis of time, establishing the links between bilocation and time, investigating Pynchon’s buried allusions to the possibility of a ‘counter-Earth’ and this concept’s interaction with time, and analysing Pynchon’s allusion to competing mathematical theories from the turn of the century and time. I finally wish to propose that we must read Against the Day as reactive to the 9/11 attacks, and that the terrorist attacks, striking at the heart of Pynchon’s native city, require a reconsideration of time, both in the novel, and in the real world. In this sense it is not only the short sections of Against the Day in which Pynchon makes allusions to the 9/11 attacks that are important. It is crucial to emphasise both the novel’s reaction to the 2001 terrorist attacks, and the pressure this places on the conceptualisation of temporality in American fiction after 2001.

9/11 in Against the Day

Despite the epic spread of Against the Day, both in terms of time, and of space, the most urgent section of the novel is a short section detailing a disaster-stricken New York, at the beginning of the second chapter of the novel. This six-page section (pp. 149-155), which I will refer to as the ‘New York 9/11 section’ encompasses the theoretical scope of the novel, serving to elucidate some of the ideas that at times become submerged over the course of the 1100 page text.

The New York 9/11 section begins with the Chums of Chance returning to New York, after being deputised to watch over the Vormance Expedition, a group with shadowy aims involving geological profiteering. The Vormance expedition has brought what they believe is a meteor, but is actually a living mountain, a prehistoric spirit of the
Earth, into New York City, for scientific analysis and exhibition. This narrative is not without an element of the slapstick, as a brief exchange between a shadowy “Board of Inquiry […] of the Museum of Museumology” establishes.\footnote{Pynchon, \emph{Against the Day}, p. 149.} Pynchon writes:

> ‘It deceived us into classifying it as a meteorite, you see. . . .’
> 
> ‘[. . .] Your whole Expedition got hypnotized by a rock? that what you’re asking us to believe?’\footnote{Pynchon, \emph{Against the Day}, p. 149. (Pynchon’s emphasis).}  

Despite the jocularity of the scenario that accompanies the beginning of the New York 9/11 section, there is also an incipient warning of the seriousness of what is to come, with the narrator posing a question to the reader that suggests the far more important issues to be addressed in this strand of the narrative: “But who could have forseen that the far-fallen object would prove to harbor not merely a consciousness but an ancient purpose as well, and a plan for carrying it out?”\footnote{Pynchon, \emph{Against the Day}, p. 149.} Pynchon’s evocation of an ‘ancient purpose’ serves to warn the reader of the imminent threat to New York, and also serves to resonate with the interpretation of the events that follow as reflecting Islamist fundamentalist terrorism, a movement that justifies its actions, in part, through reference back to both ancient scriptures, \textit{and} ideals.

As the interview between the Board of Inquiry and the Expedition is taking place, New York City already lies in ruins. The narrator shifts from a focus on the discussion taking place to a view out of a window, the view through which depicts New York burning and in the grip of disaster. Pynchon describes a scene that alludes specifically to the events experienced in New York on the 11$^\text{th}$ of September and shared throughout the world via television images:
[C]harred trees still quietly smoking, flanged steelwork fallen or leaning perilously, streets near the bridges and ferry slips jammed with the entangled carriages, wagons, and streetcars which the population had at first tried to flee in, then abandoned, and which even now lay unclaimed, overturned, damaged by collision and fire, hitched to animals months dead and yet unremoved.\textsuperscript{502}

The scene that the narrator describes resonates with the collective understanding of the horrors of the 9/11 attacks. The ‘flanged steelwork leaning perilously’ calls to mind the visceral images of the collapsed towers at the epicentre of the attacks, the rest of the section evoking the chaotic scenes that were broadcast repeatedly in the aftermath of the attacks.\textsuperscript{503} Pynchon, however, is strict with the temporality of the narrative throughout the section. Despite the similarities with the 9/11 attacks, he is careful to always maintain the period-style of the text—hence, the littered detritus of those trying to flee is of a society not reliant on the automobile, and yet the resonances with the event in 2001 are undeniable.\textsuperscript{504}

Pynchon’s appropriation of the 9/11 attacks centres not only on the images of destruction that we are all so familiar with, but also attempts to present the entirety of the event, from the Mayor of the city “no more dishonest than the standards of the time provided for”, referring to both Rudolph Guiliani, but also seeming to retain an implicit scorn for the President of the time.\textsuperscript{505} The depiction of a heroic public force shouldering the burden of the rescue and clean up processes resonate undeniably with the effectiveness of the New York emergency services after the 9/11 attacks. Pynchon

\textsuperscript{502} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{503} This is what David Wyatt identifies as the temporal disjunction of \textit{Against the Day}: “it becomes a question as to which kind of terrorism and which turn-of-the-century [Pynchon] means to invoke.” See, Wyatt, ‘September 11 & Postmodern Memory’, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{505} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 150.
renames these forces the White Wings, alluding to their heroism in the face of grave danger:

The only organized units to brave the immediate aftermath were the White Wings, who with exemplary grit continued to go wading into the inconceivable cleanup job with never less than their usual cheer and discipline.506

Aside from describing the aftermath of the event, and the images and groups that are an indelible part of this collective memory, Pynchon also details the event itself. His depiction of New York under attack does not appropriate exactly the events of the September 11 attacks, but the basis of the entire narrative is underpinned by the events of 2001.507 The beginning of the event is described in suitably apocalyptic terms, the narrator stating that “[f]ire and blood were about to roll like fate upon the complacent multitudes.”508 In the immediate aftermath, we read:

Later, fire alarms would go unanswered and the firemen on the front lines find themselves too soon without reinforcement, or the hope of any. The noise would be terrific and unrelenting, as it grew clear even to the wilfully careless that there would be no refuge.509

The resonances here with the 9/11 attacks are obvious and strong. The chaos of the attacks is Pynchon’s main appropriation, and he effectively captures that confusion and tragedy of the event that dominates his reader’s recent memory. Even where the details of the events in this section of Against the Day depart from the events of the 9/11 attacks, Pynchon still maintains a series of allusions to 2001. The mayor of the

506 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 150.
508 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 152.
509 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 152. The only ‘refuge’ will be for Hunter Penhallow, who will fantastically escape from the ‘world brought low.’
city, addressed previously is referred to again, a figure described as “[f]led, dead, not
right in the head”. The figure Pynchon refers to here can be interpreted as referring
both to Mayor Guiliani, but also to President Bush who appeared in New York in the
days after the September 11 attacks. There is even mention of a figure who appears to
be very similar to Osama bin Laden, the reputed mastermind of the attacks—in
Pynchon’s appropriation of the 9/11 attacks, his image is projected onto the side of a
building in the days after the disaster has struck, reminiscent of Big Brother’s ever-
present visage in Nineteen Eight-Four, a text we know Pynchon addressed after
9/11.

Finally, however, Pynchon establishes that time is the most crucial concern in the New
York 9/11 section of Against the Day. The spirit that runs amok in New York is all-
powerful, it has never been bested in its “as-yet-unwritten history”. Those
attempting to escape from the disaster that is about to occur attempt to find “refuge in
time”. And the event itself is linked to the passage of time, and our understanding of
it, as Pynchon makes clear:

This city, even on the best of days, has always been known for its
background rumble of anxiety. Anyone who dwelt here gambled daily
that whatever was to happen would proceed slowly enough to allow at
least one consultation with somebody—that ‘there would always be
time,’ as citizens liked to put it. But that quarterless nightfall, events
were moving too fast to take in, forget about examine, or analyze, or
in fact do much of anything but run from, and hope you could avoid
getting killed.

Finally, and fundamentally, this catastrophe that erupts in New York is a catastrophe
of time. Time is suddenly passing too quickly, and all that can be done is to attempt to

510 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 152.
512 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 151.
513 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 152.
514 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 151.
survive, to escape the inevitability of passing time. In these six pages, Pynchon constructs an extensive series of temporal allusions that motivate much of the rest of the novel. He incorporates both parachronistic and prochronistic references and allusions (his allusion to Dante and the 9/11 attacks respectively), whilst also incorporating the speeding up of time that seems inherent in this disaster. The reader will also discover much later in the text, that Hunter Penhallow’s escape from New York seems to rely, at least in part, on some form of time travel. Thus, time becomes the fundamental concern of the New York 9/11 narrative. Having identified the 9/11 attacks as the motivating event for Pynchon’s focus on temporality, I will now move through a number of different concepts that Pynchon relates to temporality, always with an acknowledgment of the terrorist attacks on the United States as motivation.

The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell

Pynchon’s New York 9/11 section of Against the Day is dominated by the competing disasters of “fire, damage to structures, crowd panic, disruption to common services”, a list of events resonant with the 9/11 attacks. This section of the novel is not, however, solely constructed by Pynchon to develop a series of prochronistic references to the events that I argue motivate the novel. Pynchon also includes a series of parachronistic allusions and references, which serve to balance out the temporal scheme of both the section and the novel, but also serves to drive various other elements of the narrative, including the novel’s investigation of the infernal. It is then no surprise that after the downtown area of Pynchon’s New York is abandoned, the reader comes across, at the entry to the wasteland, a propitiatory arch, erected by the state in memorial to the event, bearing the inscription: “I AM THE WAY INTO THE

---

515 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 151.
DOLEFUL CITY—DANTE.” 516 This is not the only time the reader encounters this arch in the novel, which re-emerges an indeterminate amount of years later—in this new temporality the arch shows the signs of the passing of time. It is described as: “a memorial arch, gray and time-corroded, seeming to date from some ancient catastrophe, far older then the city” itself. 517 The existence and recurrence of the arch throughout Against the Day illustrates the complex manipulations of time that Pynchon exhibits in the novel, incorporating elements of an event from our relative present, into the past, and then creating a memorial to that event, which seems to be older than the event the arch itself memorialises. 518 It is also important to note that the combination of New York, the archetypal globalised city, and hell calls to mind what Lentricchia and McAuliffe call the “vision of modern hell”, the “emerging wasteland of smoky cities […]”—violence and the infernal is inherent to the modern city. 519

The inscription on the arch is taken from the third canto of Dante’s Inferno, and is the first line of the inscription on the gates of hell that Dante and Virgil see before entering into hell itself. 520 Pynchon’s conceptualisation of temporality is altered here in a dramatic way. On top of what is already a very complex temporal structure within the novel is now added the concept of eternity—not only in the strange response to time that the arch itself has, but also, and more importantly, because if hell is somehow located in the earthly realm of the novel, then eternity must intersect with

516 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 154.
517 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 401.
518 Pynchon also discussed abandoned gateways to hell in Vineland, p. 383.
519 See Lentricchia and McAuliffe, Crimes of Art + Terror, p. 21.
the other ‘times’ of the novel. Throughout this section I will establish that locating
hell on earth, and the repetition of the Dantean arch leading to hell, establishes the
concept of the eternal return as crucial to Against the Day.521

The ideas of eternity and infinity are central to the investigation and analysis of
Dante’s Inferno and, for that matter, crucial to the conceptualisation of hell itself.
Jorge Luis Borges, whose essay prompted my analysis of the Dantean arch within the
novel, and whose title I have alluded to in this section, sets out in his essay ‘The
Duration of Hell’ the conventional attributes of hell. Hell is, for Borges, definable by
a number of strict guidelines:

the strict notion—a place of eternal punishment for the wicked—
constituted by the dogma with no other obligations than placing it in
loco real, in a precise spot, and a beatorum sede distincto, different
from the place of the chosen.522

It is not crucial whether Pynchon’s hell that lingers throughout Against the Day
ascribes to the parameters that Borges sets out—despite the interesting resonances in
Borges’ emphasis of the specific spatial parameters of hell with the earthly nature of
hell in the novel.523 What is most important is the application of time to hell. Borges
continues: “[i]he attribute of eternity is what is horrible. The continuity—the fact that
divine persecution knows no pause, that there is no sleep in Hell—is unimaginable.”524

521 We should also note that DeLillo posits a similar idea, albeit in a different conceptual mode, when
he writes that the 9/11 event is “heaven and hell.” See DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, p. 34.
522 Borges, ‘The Duration of Hell’, in Weinberger, E., (ed.), The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-
523 Richard Hardack, interestingly, argues that Borges influences Pynchon’s conception of time, and
especially, of time travel. See Hardack, R., ‘Consciousness without Borders: Narratology in Against the
critics have examined the relationship between Pynchon and Borges. See, for examples, Cooper, P.,
Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World, University of California Press,
524 Borges, ‘The Duration of Hell’, p. 49.
Despite Borges ultimately arguing against the eternity of hell within his essay, the summary he makes of the doctrine of the eternal infernal is still fundamental to the hell that exists within Pynchon’s novel.

What is important to observe is that like hell, the concept of eternal return, as posited in the naming of the concept, is presupposed upon the assumption that time is both eternal and infinite. Gilles Deleuze in his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, which repeatedly addresses Nietzsche’s construction of the eternal return concept, sets out the temporal requirements both of eternity but implicitly also of hell.\(^{525}\) He writes:

> Nietzsche says that if the universe had an equilibrium position, if becoming had an end or final state, it would have already been attained. But the present moment, as that passing moment, proves that it is not attained and therefore that an equilibrium of forces is not possible […] That is to say, past time being infinite, becoming would have attained its final state if it had one.\(^{526}\)

It is precisely the infinite nature of time in Nietzsche’s understanding that drives the importance of the eternal return.\(^{527}\) Thus, Deleuze implicitly opposes the construction of hell that Borges argues for in opposition to his statements above, reaffirming the special nature of infinity and its effect on time. What is also crucial to observe is that if past time is infinite, then eternal return is implicit in the temporal system because the world is still under the power of time, and time continues infinitely.

---


Dante’s *Inferno* presents a unique spatial model for the temporal concept of eternal return, fitting analogously with the eternal and infinite characteristics of time itself.\(^{528}\) It is this model that Pynchon utilises throughout *Against the Day* to solidify (and, indeed, to spatialise) the temporal scheme he employs. Dante describes his vision of hell in the shape of a funnel, or, using the mathematical term, in the shape of a vortex.\(^{529}\) The nature of the vortex is that it represents an infinite system; the vortex becomes smaller and smaller and the lines of the vortex closer and closer together, but, despite this the lines of the vortex never meet in a singular point in the depths of the vortex. Of course, the vortex, as a theoretical shape is not reflected exactly in the world, and we imagine, and indeed Dante describes his hell as an inverted cone, in which the lines of the vortex terminate at the centre of hell, in which Lucifer is held captive by the ice of Cocytus (see Fig. 3, Botticelli’s 15\(^{th}\) century depiction of Dante’s hell).

In this way, Dante’s vortical hell has a number of similarities to the first of Zeno of Elea’s paradoxes, ‘Achilles and the Tortoise’, another of Borges literary and theoretical obsessions.\(^{530}\) Zeno holds that the paradox of ‘Achilles and the Tortoise’ is observed in the fact that, in a race between the two, with Achilles giving the Tortoise a headstart, Achilles must reach the position the Tortoise formerly occupied before

---

\(^{528}\) There is surprisingly little in the way of extended analysis on Dante and Pynchon. Mendelson uses Dante’s *Commedia* as a model for the encyclopaedic nature of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. See Mendelson, ‘Encyclopedic Narrative’, pp. 1267-1275; whilst Mark Quinn presented a paper at the 2008 International Pynchon Week conference, ‘In the Shadows of the Masters: Dante, Joyce, and Pynchon’, that engaged with Pynchon’s allusion to the *Commedia* in *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

\(^{529}\) The vortical shape of hell has a correlate in W.B. Yeats’ concept of the gyre as examined in ‘The Second Coming’. The despairing vision of this poem with the “blood-dimmed tide [...] loosed” then also implies a link to the “unreal city” of T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’. Interestingly, David Cowart identifies a different link to ‘The Waste Land’, arguing that many of Pynchon’s main characters constitute a modern “democratized” reiteration of the Fisher King. See Cowart, ‘Pynchon in the Sixties’, p. 10.

moving on to pass the Tortoise. In the period of time it takes for Achilles to reach the
Tortoise’s former position, the Tortoise will have moved on, thus retaining a lead.
Separating time out into a series of discrete fragments, Achilles can never overtake
the Tortoise let alone catch up to it, for he is always required first to reach the
previous position of the Tortoise. This paradox is simply manifested in the idea of
trying to walk toward a stationary object. The essence of Zeno’s paradox argues that
before one can reach the object, one must first progress half of the distance to the
object, then a quarter (half of the remaining distance), then an eight and so on *ad
infinitum*, meaning that the wall can never be reached under the strictures of Zeno’s
observations.

![Figure 3 Botticelli, La Carte de L'Enfer](image)

I link Zeno’s paradoxes and the concept of the eternal return together with the vortical
design of Dante’s hell because of the simple fact that Dante and Virgil have the ability
to *break out* of a system that is predicated on infinity (both in the sense of hell being
infinite and eternal, and the infinite nature of the vortex), a breaking out which
parallels the power of the eternal return in breaking free of conventional and non-
infinite conceptions of time. That is, Dante and Virgil escape the power of the paradox embodied in the vortical shape of Dante’s hell.

Dante’s description of this moment of power is contained in Canto XXXIV. Dante writes:

[…] downward, tuft by tuft, he made his way between the tangled hair and frozen crust.

When we had reached the point exactly where the thigh begins, right at the haunch’s curve, my guide, with strain and force of every muscle, turned his head toward the shaggy shanks of Dis and grabbed the hair as if about to climb— I thought that we were heading back to Hell.

‘Hold tight, there is no other way,’ he said, panting, exhausted, ‘only by these stairs can we leave behind the evil we have seen.’

When he had got me through the rocky crevice, he raised me to its edge and set me down, then carefully he climbed and joined me there.

I raised my eyes, expecting I would see the half of Lucifer I saw before. Instead I saw his two legs stretching upward.

If at this sight I found myself confused, so will those simple-minded folk who still don’t see what point it was I must have passed.

[…]

‘Before we start to struggle out of here, O master,’ I said when I was on my feet, ‘I wish you would explain some things to me.

Where is the ice? And how can he be lodged upside-down? And how, in so little time, could the sun go all the way from night to day?’

‘You think you’re still on the center’s other side,’ he said, ‘where I first grabbed the hairy worm of rottenness that pierces the earth’s core;
and you were there as long as I moved downward but, when I turned myself, you passed the point to which all weight from every part is drawn.

Now you are standing beneath the hemisphere which is opposite the side covered by land, where at the central point was sacrificed the Man whose birth and life were free of sin. You have both feet upon a little sphere whose other side Judecca occupies;531

We should note how much of an effort Virgil has to make to push into the area below Lucifer; it requires ‘strain and force of every muscle’, and leaves Virgil ‘panting, exhausted’. Dante’s short explanation of the force that Virgil is required to use to break out of hell is crucial to our understanding of the relationship between the concepts of infinite time and eternal return. What occurs in this passage above is not only Dante and Virgil’s movement from one ‘space’ to another, but far more importantly, their escape from the paradox of the vortical (hence infinite and eternal) nature of hell and their movement from one ‘time’, that of hell, to another ‘time’, that of purgatory.532 Tellingly, Deleuze, in his analysis of the eternal return refers to the relationship between the spatial and the temporal in regard to infinite time, arguing that “eternal return is [...] an answer to the problem of passage”.533 Deleuze relates the spatial and the temporal, not to create a composite concept such as space-time, but rather to illustrate that time, when infinite, will inevitably impinge upon space as well.

531 Dante, ‘Inferno’, Canto XXXIV, ll. 74-93, 100-117, pp. 381-383. (First emphasis mine, second emphasis original).
532 Unsurprisingly, for Pynchon, another Virgil appears in Against the Day, albeit almost 1000 pages later, declaiming “‘Sometimes […] I like to lose myself in reveries of when the land was free, before it got hijacked by capitalist Christer Republicans for their long-term evil purposes. . . .’ A prochronistic reference that seems to affirm the centrality of Dantean reference to the novel. See Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 1058.
533 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, p. 45. (Deleuze’s emphasis).
We have thus established the important link between Pynchon’s use of the Dantesque conception of hell (reliant on infinite time) and the concept of the eternal return. That is, if hell is infinite, and we must take this as true, being the fundamental building block of divine punishment, then time must move in a specific cycle that will, at some point, return and begin again. It is my contention that both Dante and Pynchon do not allude to the eternal return as merely a repetition of time, a simple process that creates the possibility for the eternal continuation of time. Rather, both allude to eternal return as it is posited a posteriori by Deleuze, in what amounts to a disambiguation of the concept.\(^{534}\) In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze modifies, or re-reads, Nietzsche’s conception of the eternal return by arguing that the eternal return must not facilitate the return of the same, but instead the eternal return of difference itself.\(^{535}\) Deleuze famously concludes: “[t]his is why we can only understand the eternal return as the expression of a principle which serves as an explanation of diversity and its reproduction, of difference and its repetition.”\(^{536}\) The eternal return of difference fits neatly with the implicit stance repeated throughout *The Divine Comedy*, replicated even in the structure of the work, in which the *Inferno* is repeated differently in the *Purgatorio*, and again in the *Paradiso*. That is, setting aside the first introductory canto, all three parts of the *Commedia* consist of 33 cantos, a repetition contingent on difference. It is also important to note that after the moment of disorientation that

---


\(^{535}\) Whether Deleuze’s understanding of Nietzsche’s concept is a reading of the concept that understands eternal return more clearly than previous readers over the last 120 years, or if, in the vein of much of his other work, Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche’s eternal return is indeed a productive modification of Nietzsche’s preceding iteration of the concept is not a question possible to address in full detail here. Deleuze in his ‘Preface to the English Translation’ asserts that he is reading Nietzsche’s concept literally, whilst the tone of his writing suggests a reconsideration. See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. x, 43-45. Indeed, there is a strong similarity between Deleuze’s conception of eternal recurrence and Nietzsche’s presentation of the concept in his early analysis of the Greek tradition, especially in his focus on Anaximander and Heraclitus. See Nietzsche, F., *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Cowan, M., Gateway, Washington, 1962, pp. 49-56.

\(^{536}\) Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 45.
Dante and Virgil experience when they emerge from hell they encounter a mirror image of hell, the mountain of purgatory that they then must climb. That is, they have emerged into the southern hemisphere and must ascend to the surface, just as they have descended into earth during their journey through hell.

Having addressed the Dantean process of breaking through the paradox of infernal, vortical, time, it is useful to see how Pynchon deals with the same issue. The following passage details Hunter Penhallow’s experience of the apocalyptic night in New York and illustrates the theoretical allusions between Dante’s *Inferno* and *Against the Day*. Pynchon writes:

He was abruptly lost in an unfamiliar part of town—the grid of numbered streets Hunter thought he’d understood made no sense anymore. The grid in fact had been distorted into an expression of some other history of civic need, streets no longer sequentially numbered, intersecting now at unexpected angles, narrowing into long, featureless alleyways to nowhere, running steeply up and down hills which had not been noticed before. He pushed on, assuming that far enough along he would come out at an intersection he could recognize, but everything only got less familiar. At some point he must have come indoors, entering a sort of open courtyard, a ruined shell of rust-red and yellowish debris towering ten or twelve stories overhead. A sort of monumental gateway, unaccountably more ancient and foreign than anything in the known city. The streets had by now grown intimate, more like corridors. Without intending to, he soon was walking though inhabited rooms. At one end of a mostly empty hallway, he found a meeting in progress. People were sitting clustered about a fireplace, with cups and glasses, ashtrays and spittoons, but the occasion was more than social. Both the men and women had kept their coats on. Hunter approached tentatively.537

This is New York transformed into hell, a city now adept and providing the ‘civic need’ of eternal discipline and punishment. Of note is Pynchon’s manipulation of the topography of the city. Gone are the grid-like layout of streets and the relatively flat expanse of land that New York is sited on. Instead, New York’s topography is

transformed into the vortical shape of Dante’s *Inferno* after Hunter passes through New York’s Dantine arch—the spaces that Penhallow is moving through become smaller and smaller and more restrictive, just like the lines of a vortex as it reaches its deepest point.

The final paragraph of the section then describes Penhallow’s journey out of Pynchon’s hell. He writes:

How stupefied he must have looked. He followed the group dumbly down a flight of winding metal steps to an electric-lit platform where others, quite a few others in fact, were boarding a curious mass conveyance, of smooth iron painted a dark shade of industrial gray, swept and sleek, with the pipework of its exhaust manifold led outside the body, running lights all up and down its length. He got on, found a seat. The vehicle began to move, passing among factory spaces, power generators, massive instillations of machinery whose purpose was less certain—sometimes wheels spun, vapors burst from relief valves, while other plants stood inert, in unlighted mystery—entering at length a system of tunnels and, once deep inside, beginning to accelerate. The sound of passage, hum and wind-rush, grew louder, somehow more comforting, as if confident in its speed and direction. There seemed no plan to stop, only to continue at increasing velocity. Occasionally, through the windows, inexplicably, there were glimpses of the city above them, though how deep beneath it they were supposed to be travelling was impossible to tell. Either the track was rising here and there to break above the surface or the surface was making deep, even heroic, excursions downward to meet them. The longer they travelled, the more ‘futuristic’ would the scenery grow. Hunter was on his way to refuge, whatever that might have come to mean anymore, in this world brought low.  

We should note immediately that Pynchon seeks to reinforce the disorientation that Penhallow experiences in this passage, from the ‘stupefied’ look Hunter adopts at the beginning of the passage, to his confusion at the end of the passage in which it appears as if his understanding of the world is collapsing because of his immediate experiences. This confusion parallels Dante’s experience as he is helped out of hell by

---

Virgil. The disorientation that Hunter Penhallow experiences is not, however, solely produced by a general confusion—rather, it is exactly the same bodily disorientation that Dante experiences—a confusion as to whether the train-like technology Hunter is aboard is heading down or up, or whether the surface itself is making ‘heroic excursions downward’. The experience Pynchon details here is exactly the experience of entering the threshold point of the earth, where northern hemisphere gives way to southern. Rather than the efforts of a guide (Virgil in the *Inferno*) to facilitate Penhallow’s breaking through this disorientation it is an unspecified ‘futuristic’ machine that allows Hunter to escape what is the vortical paradox of Pynchon’s apocalyptic New York. Hunter escapes into the future, that is, he breaks out of the temporality of disaster-stricken New York, escaping also the power of hell implicit throughout this section.

**Dual and Duelling Temporalities**

The above two sections set out the main claim of my analysis of *Against the Day*—that is, that the primary concept driving the narrative of the novel is Pynchon’s ability to set different temporalities side by side—to reject the absolute nature of time that we live through in the physical world—and thus to develop a fictional world in which time is relative and different ‘times’ can be experienced simultaneously or in succession. The following analysis will develop this idea again, taking four of the dominant narratives of the novel, time travel, bilocation, the possibility of a ‘counter-Earth’, and mathematics, and illustrate that by utilising each of these concepts,

---

539 This is the experience Jennifer Bloomer describes in the centre of the vortex “which will again draw you toward the centreless middle which flings you out again.” Bloomer, J., ‘Vertex and Vortex: A Tectonics of Section’, in *Perspecta*, Vol. 23, 1987, p. 39.

540 For an additional analysis of the significance of the ‘futuristic’ machine that facilitates Hunter Penhallow’s escape from New York in this section, see ‘Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto’, pp. 257-263.

Pynchon develops a world within Against the Day in which time and space are contingent upon the experiences of the characters and the ability of the narrator to communicate the strange temporal and spatial experiences that the characters undergo.

**Time Travel**

I have argued that Hunter Penhallow’s escape from disaster-stricken New York owes much to the concept of time travel as it is developed throughout Against the Day. Whether Hunter’s escape from New York is a specific example of time travel (as I argue in ‘Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto’), or movement from one temporal scheme to another, as argued above, is never made entirely clear in the novel.\(^{542}\) Out of a huge amount of submerged allusion the only concrete fact that the reader can ascertain is the temporal confusion which dominates Penhallow throughout the novel. This is not the only incident, however, in which temporal confusion is addressed. Indeed the most interesting of these events is specifically referred to as time travel, and the similarities with the shift in time Hunter experiences is instructive.

Our next encounter with the Chums is 130 pages later, when they are on leave in New York. Their leave follows the pursuit of the Sfincunio Itinerary—a map that appears to be a metaphorical manifestation of the spatial realm—and a relic that leads the Chums toward a growing awareness of the possibility of time travel. After following a lead on time machines that leads them to a gang of criminal children, described as “children of the depths”, the Chums are led, through a devastated New York, to the warehouse of Dr. Zoot, who claims to hold a functioning time machine.\(^{543}\) It is no coincidence that as the two Chums deputised for the group, Darby Suckling and Chick

---

\(^{542}\) Hardack argues that the narrator of the novel occupies the position of “time machine”. See Hardack, ‘Consciousness without Borders’, p. 104.

\(^{543}\) Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 402.
Counterfly, pick their way through the devastation they encounter the Dantean arch discussed above. Pynchon writes:

Passing beneath the colossal arch, they continued to grope along over fog-slick cobblestones, among decaying animals, piles of refuse, and the smoldering fires of homeless denizens of the quarter, till at length, the pungent triatomic signature having become overwhelming, along with a harsh buzzing that filled the vicinity, they stood before a stone gateway, the dwelling beyond largely invisible […]544

In my reading of the Dantean arch, above, I have implied that passing through the arch in New York involves both a temporal and spatial shift into Dante’s hell. This is surely what Counterfly and Suckling encounter here—the images of fire and death, signal another series of allusions to Dante’s Inferno. At this stage of the novel, however, Pynchon returns to, and develops, the relationship between hell and time again. Counterfly and Suckling are offered a free sample of the time machine and encounter an experience that seems to owe much more to the infernal and to Dante than to more popular conceptions of time travel such as H. G. Wells’ The Time Machine, referred to specifically in this same section.545 Pynchon describes their experience:

They seemed to be in the midst of some great storm in whose low illumination, presently, they could make out, in unremitting sweep across the field of vision, inclined at the same angle as the rain, if rain it was—some material descent, gray and wind-stressed—undoubted human identities, masses of souls, mounted, pillioned, on foot, ranging along together by the millions over the landscape accompanied by a comparably unmeasurable herd of horses. The multitude extended farther than they could see—a spectral cavalry, faces disquietingly wanting in detail, eyes little more than blurred sockets, the draping of garments constantly changing in an invisible flow which perhaps was only wind. Bright arrays of metallic points hung and drifted in three dimensions and perhaps more, like stars blown through by the shockwaves of creation. Were those voices out there crying in pain? sometimes it almost sounded like singing. Sometimes a word or two, in a language almost recognizable, came through. Thus, galloping in unceasing flow ever ahead, denied any further control over their fate,

544 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 401.
545 See Pynchon, Against the Day, pp. 398, 407.
the disconsolate company were borne terribly over the edge of the visible world... 546

This is, again, an unmistakeable allusion to Dante’s vision of hell, and is later described as a journey into “that apocalyptic sweep of masses” 547 Pynchon presents time travel not as a journey along a linear conception of time, but rather as travel in which one can move from one ‘time’ to another. It is not clear whether time travel always results in the traveller experiencing the infernal, but it is clear that time travel does not facilitate the popular notion of moving backwards and forward solely in time, and being able to arrive at a specific date removed from the physical time of the individual. In this sense, Pynchon rejects linear conceptions of time for a multi-dimensional understanding, perhaps approximating the “four-space” referred to later in the novel. 548

Time travel is then, for Pynchon, an experience that impinges upon the temporal integrity of the participant—the shifting of time facilitates the shift in space as well. Thus, when Pynchon describes Counterfly and Suckling’s vision of ‘metallic points’ drifting ‘in three dimensions and perhaps more’ the implication is not that time travel is spatial, but that the temporal shift involved in time travel facilitates manipulation of the spatial as well. The passage quoted above continues, describing the moment in which time travel occurs:

The chamber shook, as in a hurricane. Ozone permeated its interior like the musk attending some mating-dance of automata, and the boys found themselves more and more disoriented. Soon even the cylindrical confines they had entered seemed to have fallen away, leaving them in a space unbounded in all directions. There became audible a continuous roar as of the ocean—but it was not the ocean—

546 Pynchon, Against the Day, pp. 403-404.
547 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 409.
and soon cries as of beasts in open country, ferally purring stridencies passing overhead, sometimes too close for the lads to be altogether comfortable with—but they were not beasts. Everywhere rose the smell of excrement and dead tissue.  

Solidifying the link I have established between time and travel and Pynchon’s allusions to Dante’s depiction of hell is that at the exact moment when Chick and Darby achieve travel through time, they are disoriented, the same sort of disorientation experienced by Penhallow as he escapes New York, and Dante as he is carried, by Virgil, out of hell. This moment of vertigo occurs, in both examples and in this passage, at the moment when the shift in time occurs. This Dantean disorientation then suggests that Pynchon is alluding to the very specific conceptualisation of time that exists in the tripartite vision of the universe that Dante employed—that is, multiple, infinite times that can be placed in comparison to each other. Time is relative, but not necessarily in the sense of Einstein’s view of relative time.

Indeed, the issue at hand is not the competition between absolute (Newtonian) or relative (Einsteinian) time, but rather the fact that, for Pynchon, time is inevitably related to space. In the world of Against the Day, however, it is not the space that is primary, but time. Space, in effect, becomes contingent on the temporal scheme observed and experienced by the character in question.

**Bilocation and Time**

Having argued in the section above that space is reliant on time for definition and specification within Against the Day it is useful then to discuss a concept that appears to be solely focused on the spatial—bilocation. The concept of bilocation is crucial to the novel, and yet remains an obscure and highly theoretical concept. Generally,

---

549 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 404. (My emphasis).
bilocation is understood as the reputed ability of Catholic saints to appear in two places at the same time; in Against the Day, however, Pynchon sites this power not in the Catholic tradition, but describes it as a “mysterious shamanistic power.” In the same section, Pynchon also defines shamanic time. He writes: “[t]heir notion of time is spread out not in a single dimension but over many, which all exist in a single, timeless instant”, similar in essence to the ‘four-space’ of later in the novel, which approximates the vision of time encapsulated in the Möbius strip.

Two important points need to be established from Pynchon’s definitions on bilocation: the first, that shamanic time is much more in tune with the vision of time that Deleuze proposes when discussing existence and eternal return in Nietzsche and Philosophy. The ‘present’ is, for Deleuze, allied to ‘being’, whilst the active and positive understanding of the eternal return that he proposes requires one to define time as immanent, existence as always ‘becoming’, a conceptualisation that fits neatly with Pynchon’s definition of shamanic time. Secondly, the use of bilocation in a shamanic context rather than a Christian one would seem to distinguish the arguments made above and to confirm that bilocation and time travel are different concepts, especially considering the piety of Dante’s Catholicism. The arguments I have made on the nature of Dante’s time, above, however, actually falls into a middle ground that is not Catholic time as we assume it here. Rather, the ‘times’ of Dante’s poem are separate—aside from this, temporality as it is addressed here is similar to what Pynchon’s describes as shamanic time—time that is accessed via dimensional changes (similar to Dante’s movement from hell to purgatory) rather than the linear time of conventional earthly experience.

---

550 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 143.
551 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 143.
552 See Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, pp. 43-45.
The most instructive use of bilocation in *Against the Day* is of two professors, Renfrew and Werfner, the former of Cambridge and the latter of Göttingen. Pynchon makes this manifestation of bilocation more complex, because for close to the first half of the novel, it appears as if Werfner and Renfrew may very well be different individuals, rather than one individual bilocating. These difficulties are reinforced by Werfner and Renfrew’s implied manifestation together in their first appearance in *Against the Day*. Despite all these difficulties, The Renfrew/Werfner characters give great insight into the importance of the concept of bilocation and the intersections between bilocation and time. Pynchon writes:

> The professors’ manoeuvrings had at least the grace to avoid the mirrorlike—if symmetries arose now and then, it was written off to accident, ‘some predisposition to the echoic,’ as Werfner put it, ‘perhaps built into the nature of Time,’ added Renfrew.”

Even in this first brief interaction with Renfrew and Werfner Pynchon is developing complex levels of meaning, especially with regard to the two characters relationship, made more complex by the fact that their names are absolutely ‘mirrorlike’:

**RENFREW**

Reading right to left, and then left to right produces both names, suggestive of the subterfuge Pynchon employs, with two characters merging later into one. Considering that the information provided above operates, at this early stage of the novel, to confirm the incorrect—that is, that Renfrew and Werfner are separate individuals, the ironic slant of the statement is crucial. Despite this irony, however, a crucial point is made, in which Renfrew/Werfner argues that a similarity exists between bilocation and other temporal phenomena included within the novel. That is, bilocation serves to

---

reinforce the argument made throughout *Against the Day* that time is not linear, but can be multiple and continuous, and that, as in Pynchon’s bilocation, different ‘times’ can be layered upon each other. For within bilocation, time is doubled, with two strands of the temporal operating at the same time, with the individual participating in both at the same instant. As much is admitted later in the novel, where Pynchon writes:

‘[…] staggering subsets, fellows—you see what this means don’t you? those Indian mystics and Tibetan lamas and so forth were right all along, the world we think we know can be dissected and reassembled into any other number of worlds, each as “real” as this one.’

Prof. Heino Vanderjuice is speaking here, the Chums’ scientific mentor throughout the novel. Vanderjuice’s focus here is not spatial, but temporal, indicated by his reference to ‘Indian mystics and Tibetan lamas’ who are central to many bilocation narratives throughout the novel, but also serve as exemplars of the alternative shamanistic view of time. What is emphasised is that time can be split, and, contrary to a conventional approach to time, these splits are all ‘real’. Thus, time is radically altered from linear to partial, and yet, throughout the world of *Against the Day*, each successive ‘time’ that is proposed is a complete reality.

Considering the nature of Pynchon’s use of bilocation it is enticing to read the Renfrew/Werfner character as reflective of the twins paradox, proposed by Albert Einstein in his work on relativity. The twins paradox is based on the assumption that the laws of physics always exhibit symmetry; if one twin is aboard a rocket that accelerates close to the speed of light and then returns whilst the other twin has remained on earth, then the rocketeer will appear younger after his journey, thus

---

refuting the symmetry of the laws of physics and, crucially, the absolute nature of time. Pynchon does not propose time as absolute, but his representation of the temporalities of bilocation posits time as incorporating elements that are relative and absolute.\(^{555}\) Indeed, Pynchon’s analysis of time generally owes much more to Henri Bergson (see ‘Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto’, pp. 264-270) than it does to Einsteins. Considering the difficulties in reconciling Einstein’s and Bergson’s views of time, the analogy between Renfrew/Werfner is enticing, but requires much work for effective analysis, space that is not available here.\(^{556}\)

The Renfrew/Werfner character is of further interest and relevance because early in Against the Day, Pynchon specifically links the two (for it has not been ascertained yet that the two are indeed one) with Dante and the Inferno. In the section of the novel that includes the first mention of Renfrew and Werfner, Lew Basnight, a detective figure that appears regularly throughout the novel, is working with the True Worshippers of the Ineffable Tetractys, or, T.W.I.T..\(^{557}\) The T.W.I.T. believe that there exists a human manifestation of each tarot card, and are seeking to identify and to observe these individuals. Basnight is taken with the leader of T.W.I.T to observe Renfrew and Werfner who are described as the manifestation of Tarot Card XV, the Devil (see Fig. 4). Renfrew and Werfner are, Pynchon writes:

> the two chained figures found at the bottom of the card, imagined by their artist Miss Colman Smith, perhaps after Dante, as simple naked man and woman, though in the earlier tradition these had been shown

---


\(^{557}\) A reference to the worship of Pythagorean mathematics and the possibilities of transcendence within.
as a pair of demons, genders unspecified, whose fates were bound and who could not separate even if they wanted to.\(^{558}\)

Pynchon seeks to establish a relationship not only between Renfrew/Werfner and his previous allusions to Dante, but also, and more importantly, to reinforce the temporal concepts that underpin not only the Dantean allusion throughout the novel, but which are also explicitly referred to in reference to bilocation. Thus Colman Smith’s depiction of man and woman tethered to the Devil illustrates bilocation’s similarity to, and relationship with, the threshold moment experienced by Dante and Virgil as they exit hell. Although Renfrew and Werfner cannot ‘separate even if they wanted to’ the character retains instead the ability to manipulate time in a peculiar and powerful way, illustrating the contingency of time in the world of Against the Day.

\[\text{Figure 4 Tarot Card XV}\]

Despite many of the occurrences of bilocation within Against the Day being brief it is possible to develop out a wider application for the concept to the novel as a whole. As discussed above, the version of bilocation that Pynchon refers to throughout the novel is always linked to an eastern viewpoint, and is related to the shamanic view of time.

\(^{558}\) Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 226. (My emphasis).
that rejects a construction of time as linear and singular, proposing instead time as multifaceted and many-dimensional, rather than the singular dimension of linear time. Two examples of bilocation that Pynchon presents in Against the Day open out the concept, illustrating bilocation’s interaction with time and eventually with space as well.

The first reference to bilocation I will address is reported by Fleetwood Vibe, the son of Scarsdale Vibe, the character to which most, or all, of the novel’s plots can be traced back. Fleetwood is his father’s representative on the Vormance expedition, the same mission that brings the living meteorite back from the Arctic waste that wreaks devastation on New York. The expedition happens upon a shaman, Magyakan, who is presumed to be bilocating during the time the expedition is in contact with him. Vormance describes Magyakan’s bilocation without scepticism: “not only is he here visiting with us but also and simultaneously […] back in the Yensei watershed with his people as well.” Magyakan finally speaks, and presents a prophecy that describes the inevitability of Trespassers from the future impinging upon the time of the novel. The Trespassers narrative is a substantial issue, and will be addressed again below in relation to the possibility of ‘counter-worlds’. At this stage of the novel, however, none of the characters involved have the ability to see the importance of Magyakan’s prophecy. The moment does allow Pynchon to establish the competing temporalities of Against the Day—as Hastings Throyle explains it, Magyakan’s comments are not really prophecy, for an individual who has the skill of

559 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 143.
560 Miles Blundell, one of the Chums, converses with a representative of the Trespassers’ later in the novel. The Chums briefly attempt to aid the Trespassers before ending their association, believing they are being forced into acts not helpful to themselves or to their present. See Pynchon, Against the Day, pp. 551-554.
bilocation already manipulates time.\textsuperscript{561} Incorporating the temporal power of bilocation with his shamanic understanding of time (as non-linear) means that Magyakan can speak of the future (in a linear understanding of time) with assurance that confronts the members of the expedition, and indeed the reader’s comprehension of time. What is really proposed here does not engage with linear conceptions of time, but rather, is better represented later in the novel, in which time is “future, past, and present […] all together.”\textsuperscript{562}

The second incidence of bilocation relevant here is much more flippant, but begins Pynchon’s incorporation of the spatial into the temporal scheme of bilocation and, then, the novel in its entirety. Lew Basnight, still in the employ of the T.W.I.T., attends “the comic operetta \textit{Waltzing in Whitechapel, or, A Ripping Romance},” based on the Jack the Ripper murders in the 1880s.\textsuperscript{563} As Basnight surveys the audience he sees who he thinks is Professor Renfrew, still believing that Renfrew and Werfner are two different people. In the intermission of the show Lew is introduced to Renfrew, who, of course, as it turns out, is actually Werfner, visiting London. Werfner is bilocating, adopting the second of his alternate personalities that facilitate his ability for duality. Renfrew/Werfner and his companion, Max Khäutsch, see a strong parallel between the Ripper murders and an incident that occurred in Austria, in which the Austrian Crown Prince Rudolf was murdered, resulting in Franz Ferdinand ascending into his position. Khäutsch is convinced that Rudolf was murdered by the same individual that perpetrated the Jack the Ripper murders, the murderer bilocating to

\textsuperscript{561} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{562} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 617. Hardack argues that bilocation is simultaneously a “doubling and eradication of time.” See Hardack, ‘Consciousness without Borders’, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{563} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 678.
achieve his aim. The group argue the possibilities, their dialogue beginning to shed some light on the seriousness behind the comic possibilities:

‘Hundreds, by now thousands, of narratives, all equally valid—what can this mean?’
‘Multiple worlds,’ blurted Nigel, who had floated in from somewhere.
‘Precisely!’ cried the Professor. ‘The Ripper’s “Whitechapel” was a sort of momentary antechamber in space-time . . . one might imagine a giant railway-depot, with thousands of gates disposed radially in all dimensions, leading to tracks of departure to all manner of alternate histories. . . .’

There are two crucial ideas included within what first appears to be a comic interlude. The first is the concept of bilocation, which is formalised by Pynchon throughout this section. Indeed it is Basnight’s contact with Renfrew/Werfner here that drives him to the ultimate conclusion that Renfrew and Werfner are the same individual. Lew understands that bilocation explicitly impinges upon the temporal, whilst appearing to generally relate to the spatial. Thus, when Nigel interjects into the conversation suggesting the possibility of multiple worlds the reader is conditioned to consider this as a reference to multiple, relative times, set side by side to each other, just as much as spatial transportation.

Secondly, the possibility that “certain hidden geometries of History” had conspired, via a bilocated Jack the Ripper, to murder Crown Prince Rudolf and replace him with Archduke Franz Ferdinard, thus precipitating Europe into overbalancing into World War One resonates with Nigel’s claim as well. What is posited here is not simply the bilocation of one individual and the resultant doubling of time that this requires, but rather the bilocation of entire worlds. Although there are some suggestions within the novel of worlds outside the world of the novel, and these will be addressed below, the

---

564 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 682. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
565 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 373.
full scope of Pynchon’s complex view of temporality is unveiled—with entire populations experiencing different courses of history to those which are accepted in an orthodox view of history, time is reinforced as something different to the relative time we assume in the real world. Later in Lew’s musing on the subject of bilocation another term is introduced that is crucial to these concepts: bilocation is characterised as a “disjunction”, primarily in time.566

Basnight is advised by Otto Ghloix, who suggests that bilocation requires learning “the secret geographies of the […] hidden lands”.567 Pynchon now begins to incorporate the spatial into the concept of bilocation. This is not to suggest that bilocation does not relate to time, but as the scale of bilocation widens, the spatial is combined with what is a temporal concept. The physical abilities of the individuals who can bilocate (such as flying, walking through walls, etc) now appears more logical, in that it is not only the manipulation of time, but space as well.

A Counter-Earth? Or Something Even More Confronting?
The following section is probably the most complex of this chapter, primarily because the possibility of alternate worlds co-existing, or operating independently of the primary world of the novel exceeds the logical bounds of conventional thought. As I have attempted to make explicit in the sections above, the possibility of a counter-Earth existing is not merely a narrative conceit peculiar to Against the Day—rather it is particular to the temporal conceptualisation that is central to the entire novel.

566 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 686.
567 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 686.
The posited concept of a counter-Earth (Pynchon’s shorthand for the myriad alternate spaces that make up the novel) is explicitly reliant on the temporal manipulations that Pynchon presents at the beginning of *Against the Day*, the first of these being the simultaneously parachronistic and prochronistic events of New York’s devastation by fire discussed above. This brief passage entails a complex understanding of time as it functions not only in this novel, but in the ‘novel’. Pynchon incorporates a modern-day event (the 9/11 attacks, that is, the future), into a time period from the past (the fin de siècle, which is the present of the novel). By including a series of allusions to Dante’s *Inferno*, however, a parachronistic level of time is included, incorporating past, present and future into one short section.568

Whilst anachronism is crucial to the temporal structure of *Against the Day* (whether parachronistic or prochronistic), the rumoured possibility of a counter-Earth, counter-Hell, or counter-Heaven, or the more general counter-worlds, does not operate entirely at the same level of complexity as the New York 9/11 section. Tellingly, Pynchon introduces the possibility of concrete counter-worlds whilst Fleetwood Vibe and Kit Traverse are surveying the sprawl of New York City. Fleetwood is convinced of this possibility, as Pynchon details:

‘When I came up here by myself, it was to look at the city—I thought there had to be some portal into another world. . . . I couldn’t imagine any continuous landscape that would ever lead naturally from where I was to what I was seeing. Of course it was Queens, but by the time I had that sorted out, it was too late, I was possessed by the dream of a passage through an invisible gate. It could have been a city, but it didn’t have to be a city. It was more a matter of the invisible taking on substance.’569

568 Richard Hardack argues that the result of this process is that time becomes the “causal casualty” of *Against the Day*. See Hardack, ‘Consciousness without Borders’, p. 112.
The natural assumption for the reader to make is to interpret the ‘invisible gate’ as another reference to the Dantean arch sprung up in downtown New York.\textsuperscript{570} And to a certain extent this impulse is correct, for what Fleetwood is proposing is a portal through which access to the ‘invisible’ is possible—access to parallel worlds, always in existence, but only through these passages able to be accessed, and solidified into ‘substance’. Fleetwood continues, outlining his theory of counter-worlds:

‘There are stories, like maps that agree . . . too consistent among too many languages and histories to be only wishful thinking. . . . It is always a hidden place, the way into it is not obvious, the geography is as much spiritual as physical. If you should happen upon it, your strongest certainty is not that you have discovered it but returned to it. In a single great episode of light, you remember everything.’\textsuperscript{571}

At this early stage of the novel the possibility of counter-worlds is still theoretical, a spiritual idea rather than physical. We should note that Fleetwood is certain, however, that memory is somehow involved—memory of course, suggests that he is imagining a world somewhere in the past, the ability to return to a time that has been left behind. Accessing this counter-world is then, a temporal shift, just as much as it is spatial, imagined by Fleetwood as “being taken back into a dark womb.”\textsuperscript{572} Fleetwood’s wistful desire to access this space anticipates the Chums’ search for the Sfincunio Itinerary, which serves as a guide to Shambhala. Before we leave Fleetwood’s musings on the counter-world, one more comment he makes is important. He tells Kit: “‘[…] all I’m looking for now is movement […] the vector […] Are there such things as vectorial unknowns?’”\textsuperscript{573} Pynchon posits that the counter-world may be accessed through a mathematical analogy, in which an unknown value is identified by time-manipulating mathematics. It is instructive then that despite the large conceptual leaps

\textsuperscript{570} cf. Pynchon, \textit{Vineland}, p. 383.
\textsuperscript{571} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{572} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{573} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 165.
that abound within *Against the Day*, each of the concepts examined here suggest similar relationships, and focus the novel on the primary paradigm of temporality.

***

Whilst sequestered in Venice the Chums’ receive news of their next mission, to find, and take possession of, the famed Sfinciuno Itinerary, a map that will allow exploration into potential counter-worlds, and hopefully to Shambhala. But all is not as simple as it seems, for immediately, as Chick Counterfly points out, the Itinerary is “not a geographical map”, but something much more “abstract”.\(^{574}\) Pynchon writes: “‘The author of the Itinerary imagined the Earth not only as a three-dimensional sphere but, beyond that, as an *imaginary surface* […]’”\(^{575}\) The Itinerary must be viewed through a complex contraption called a “‘para*morphscope because it reveals worlds which are set to the side of the one we have taken, until now, to be the only world given us.’”\(^{576}\) Pynchon slowly reveals the possible counter-worlds that are set alongside the primary world of human experience.\(^{577}\) These worlds are entirely, and absolutely, real, but must also be theorised in some sense as imaginary. Once again, Pynchon’s emphasis of ‘imaginary’ hides another mathematical analogy to imaginary numbers and transfinite mathematics that will be addressed when my focus turns to mathematics. The reader now, however, has a series of possibilities laid in front of them, in which parallel worlds, both real and imaginary can simultaneously be accessed, if one possesses the appropriate map and viewing devices: a situation that still borders on the theoretical, but one that is far more concrete than the counter-worlds proposed earlier in the novel.

\(^{574}\) Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 248.
\(^{575}\) Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 249. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
\(^{576}\) Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 249. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
\(^{577}\) We can also read this concept as related to the historical analogies Pynchon creates throughout his oeuvre. See Cowart, ‘Pynchon and the Sixties’, p. 5.
By the halfway stage of Against the Day, these counter-worlds that have become more and more possible now begin to impinge upon the world of the novel. In the Chums’ pursuit of Shambhala they happen across Roswell Bounce, another character disaffected by his treatment at the hands of Vibe Corp. He provides the Chums with an invention of his, the “Hypopsammotic Survival Apparatus”, which allows the wearer to walk around under the sandy deserts of inner Asia unencumbered. Of course, nothing is as simple (or not) as it seems. The suits actually manipulate time and space, treating the sand of the desert as if it were light and parting it at will. This is achieved by translating “oneself in Time”, a process which, as Counterfly points out, implies a “form of passage back in Time”. This is one of the first instances in which a counter-world is accessed, as the Chums discover a world beneath the sands. Once again, the suit is reliant on mathematical developments of the time, specifically here, Einstein’s work that places light in an interconnected relationship to time.

Dally Rideout and Kit Traverse specifically experience the possibility of other worlds existing alongside the primary world of the novel in their fateful voyage on the Stupendica. For the Stupendica is not one ship but rather two, doubling as the:

S.M.S Emperor Maximilian—one of several 25,000-ton dreadnoughts contemplated by Austrian naval planning but, so far as official history goes, never built.

In fact the Emperor Maximilian had been built, and was hidden within the Stupendica. The ship: “was a participant in the future European war at sea which everyone was

---

578 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 426.
579 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 426.
580 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 515.
confident would come." And, of course, this future war does come, but only for Kit, with Dally left behind in the previous world of the narrative. The story of this parallel world clashing with the previous one is fantastic, as Pynchon describes:

All hell likewise had broken loose topside. As if synotic wireless messages, travelling through the Æther, might be subject to influences we remain at present ignorant off [sic], or perhaps, owing to the unnaturally shaky quality of present-day ‘reality,’ the receiver’s in the ship’s Marconi room were picking up traffic from somewhere else not quite ‘in’ the world, more like from a continuum lateral to it . . . around midafternoon the Stupendica had received a message in cipher, to the effect that British and German battle groups were engaged off the Moroccan coast, and that a state of general European war should be presumed in effect.

The counter-worlds that have been theorised throughout the earlier stages of Against the Day are now impinging directly upon the narrative. The European war that immediately breaks out for Kit excludes Dally, who remains on the Stupendica heading to Venice and falls in with Hunter Penhallow, another refugee from the war (which he has already participated in). The temporalities of the novel become contingent, so that Dally has no awareness of the war that has already taken place for Hunter, is now taking place for Kit, and will take place in the future for herself.

As the episode continues, the Stupendica transforms, with Kit now aboard the Emperor Maximilian and later disembarking in Morocco, whilst Dally remains aboard the Stupendica en route to Venice. Setting aside the specific narrative with which Pynchon reveals the counter-worlds that exist within the novel, it is crucial to examine the concepts that underpin these counter-worlds as they emerge here.

581 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 515.
582 Pynchon, Against the Day, pp. 517-518. (My emphasis).
The counter-worlds that Pynchon proposes, as he defines them, exist in a continuum (a crucial term for Pynchon throughout *Against the Day*, which I will examine in relation to the associated mathematics, below) of time that exists laterally to the present reality. ‘Lateral’ can be thought to imply a sense of the parallel, but in regard to temporal theory and the relevant mathematical and scientific detail, lateral suggest a temporality running at a ninety degree angle from the present, and primary, temporality.

Pynchon’s theorisation of the counter-worlds then suggests that the spatial geography of the world of *Against the Day* remains similar but that the change in temporality is the most crucial.

**Counter-Worlds, Counter-Earths, But What of a Counter-Hell?**

The final example of counter-worlds that I will address here is the more sinister, more confronting possibility alluded to in the title of this chapter. This is probably the most complex of the ideas that Pynchon incorporates into the narrative of counter-worlds in *Against the Day*, although this is, of course, a relative term.\(^583\)

Pynchon’s first reference to the possibility of a counter-hell, illustrates the links between his Dantean version of hell, time travel and these notional counter-worlds that run laterally with the world of the novel. Pynchon continues on with the narrative of the Trespassers, refugees from the present-day (i.e. 2006), who have travelled back in time to seek shelter from the difficulties of the collapse of the capitalist system.\(^584\)

Miles Blundell is the conduit between the Chums and the Trespassers, and as he discusses the Chums’ assistance of the Trespassers with their representative, Ryder

---

\(^{583}\) As Seán Molloy observes, Pynchon has foreshadowed this concept in *Vineland*. Sister Rochelle argues that Hell and Earth are much more similar, and closer than we realise. See Pynchon, *Vineland*, pp. 382-383.

\(^{584}\) As we shall see, Luc Sante’s pronouncement that *Against the Day* “concerns a hybrid experience of time: the past in the present and the present in the past” is only partially correct as Pynchon’s counter-spaces emerge. See Sante, ‘Inside the Time Machine’.
Thorn, he has a series of revelations, as if Thorn’s comments are not as prophetic as they seem. Thorn prophesies: “‘This world you take to be “the” world will die, and descend into Hell, and all history after that will belong properly to the history of Hell.’”\textsuperscript{585} It appears as if Thorn is actually referring to the imminent European war we know as World War One, referring to Flanders as “the mass grave of History.”\textsuperscript{586}

Miles initially believes Thorn’s prophecies, taking them as true because he is from the future (“‘Of course I believe you. You’re from the future, aren’t you? Who’d know better?’”\textsuperscript{587}). The truth is even more sinister than this: Thorn is describing his present, the present of his world, in which the European war has already taken place: “‘League on league of filth, corpses by the uncounted thousands, the breath you took for granted become corrosive and death giving.’”\textsuperscript{588} His reality is truly hellish, stuck as he is in the “‘Halls of Night […] cursed to return, and return.’”\textsuperscript{589} Aside from affirming the link, discussed above, between the infinite time of hell and eternal return, Thorn’s world is cast as hell, the Trespassers as refugees from eternity. Miles then comes to his realisation. Pynchon writes:

Miles understood that there had been no miracle, no brilliant technical coup, in fact no ‘time travel’ at all—that the presence in this world of Thorn and his people had been owing to some chance blundering upon a shortcut through unknown topographies of Time, enabled […] by whatever terrible singularity in the smooth flow of Time had opened to them.\textsuperscript{590}

Bringing together the other features of the counter-world theory that have been painstakingly developed throughout the novel, Pynchon finally reveals the full scope

\textsuperscript{585} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 554.
\textsuperscript{586} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 554.
\textsuperscript{587} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 554.
\textsuperscript{588} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 554.
\textsuperscript{589} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 554.
\textsuperscript{590} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 555.
of the narrative—a myriad number of counter-worlds, only a few of which intersect with ‘the’ world of *Against the Day*—and that the counter-world of Thorn and the Trespassers is infernal, a counter-world that is also a counter-hell, whether a divine counter-hell, or one created by humanity through the European war, although the distinction may be arbitrary anyway. The threat of a counter-world that is a counter-hell looms throughout the rest of the novel and effects the remainder of the narrative.

As the Chums slowly drift away from their umbrella organisation and begin their flight “toward grace”, they are presented with one final choice, the opportunity to either pursue the heavenly or the infernal. For the Chums’ access into counter-worlds is governed directly by altitude. Pynchon writes:

> Chick Counterfly thought back to his first days aboard the *Inconvenience*, and Randolph’s dark admonition that going up would be like going north, and his own surmise that one could climb high enough to descend to the surface of another planet. Or, as the commander had put it then, ‘Another “surface,” but an earthly one . . . all too earthly.’

Pynchon continues:

> The corollary, Chick had worked out long ago, being that each star and planet we see in the Sky is but the reflection of our single Earth along a different Minkowskian space-time track. Travel to other worlds is therefore travel to alternate versions of the same Earth. And if going up is like going north, with the common variable being cold, the analogous direction in Time, by the Second Law of Thermodynamics, ought to be from past to future, in the direction of increasing entropy.

There seems to be ample evidence here for Pynchon to establish not only the existence of an infinite number of counter-worlds to the primary world of *Against the Day*, but also again, as in the discussion of Thorn and the Trespassers above, the possibility of

---

593 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 1020.
counter-worlds that are counter-hells as well. Randolph St. Cosmo’s warning that the alternate worlds are ‘all too earthly’ may even suggest that, contrary to the Dantean conception of the universe Pynchon seems to rely on in other sections of the novel, there is the possibility of counter-hells that can be accessed through flight. Counterfly’s thoughts also shed more light on the Chums’ journey through, and underneath the surface of, the Earth, in earlier stages of the novel.

The most compelling of these is the Chums’ passage into the Earth through the ‘Telluric Interior’. This journey involves a complex skyfaring manoeuvre, in which the Inconvenience is manhandled into a tunnel pierced through the centre of the earth, allowing quick and hopefully safe passage through to the other side. This ‘Telluric’ passage immediately resonates with the infernal, especially considering the specific earthly connotations derived from the etymology of ‘telluric’. More convincingly, this earthly passage draws the Chums “into some vortex inside the planet”, an allusion which, it seems, is unavoidable to read as a reference to Dante’s construction of the Inferno. Whether hell be accessed by moving up or down in altitude, by the conclusion of the novel the proliferation of counter-worlds, and counter-hells is irrefutable, and illustrates Pynchon’s manipulation of space, but also illustrates that at the heart of all his spatial manipulation is the transformation of time, which is so crucial to this novel, both to drive its narrative and also to play out its theoretical conceits.

Mathematics and Time

---

594 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.
595 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 115.
To begin to analyse the huge number of mathematical allusions and references that Pynchon incorporates within Against the Day is an intimidating task. Throughout this section I will always seek to analyse Pynchon’s inclusion of many different strands of mathematics as a process of producing analogy—that is, rather than focus on the specific mathematics, I will extrapolate philosophical or theoretical analogies that interconnect with the issues discussed in the sections above.\textsuperscript{596}

The first mathematical analogy I will examine is one that Pynchon pursues a number of times within Against the Day. Throughout the course of the novel Pynchon returns to the competing concepts of Minkowskian and Einsteinian spacetime. These two related systems both seem to posit manipulations of time that provide effective insight into Pynchon’s conceptualisation of temporality within the novel. It must be noted, however, that Pynchon’s development of these ideas is far wider than the focus of my work, especially in the interaction between space and time inherent in the mathematical and physical concept of spacetime, and as such, I will only focus on two smaller elements which shed light on my previous analysis of time within Against the Day.

I will begin by returning to the image of hell, and its mirror image of purgatory, that I identified as being present in the New York 9/11 section of Against the Day. I argued that the presence of the Dantean ‘propitiatory arch’ erected in New York after the prochronistic representation of the New York engulfed by disaster posits hell existing on earth in the novel. We have also discovered in my analysis of the possibility of

\textsuperscript{596} This is the same approach suggested by Koehler, who focuses on Pynchon’s “mathematical metaphors”, and similar to the methodology proposed by Stark. See Koehler, D., ‘Mathematics and Literature’, in Mathematics Magazine, Vol. 55, No. 2, March 1982, pp. 85-86, and Stark, Pynchon’s Fictions, pp. 69-74.
alternate worlds and alternate times populating the novel that Pynchon seems to
develop the possibility of hell existing on earth not only in relation to his New York
tableau. We will also recall that Hunter Penhallow’s experience in extricating himself
from the fire-ravaged New York required the assistance of a ‘futuristic conveyance’,
and that his experience, and the resultant moment of disorientation, parallels both
Dante and Virgil’s experience as they escaped from hell into purgatory in the
Commedia, but also the Chums’ experience of time travel elsewhere in the novel.

It appears as if there is another linkage between all these ideas listed above that
emerges out of Pynchon’s reference to Minkowski and Einstein’s mathematical
theorisation of the universe. Einstein is almost entirely absent within Against the Day,
being referred to only when a list of the figures to attend the First International
Conference on Time Travel is provided.\textsuperscript{597} In contrast, Minkowski is referred to a
number of times throughout the novel—in these moments Pynchon allows his readers
some insight into the mathematical issues that seem to be lurking on the borders of
my focus on the novel.

Perhaps the most insightful reference to Minkowski that Pynchon provides is when
Merle Rideout and Roswell Bounce attend a lecture given by Minkowski on “Space
and Time”.\textsuperscript{598} After all the attendees have left the lecture theatre, Rideout and Bounce
remain behind, examining the mathematical formulae Minkowski had written on the
blackboard during his lecture. Pynchon writes, presenting Merle and Roswell’s
musings on the topic:

\begin{quote}
See Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 412.
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 458.
\end{quote}
‘Three times ten to the fifth kilometres,’ Roswell read, ‘equals the square root of minus one seconds. That’s if you want that other expression over there to be symmetrical in all four dimensions.’

[...]

‘Well, it looks like we’ve got a very large, say, astronomical distance there, set equal to an imaginary unit of time.’

In Pynchon’s representation of Minkowski’s mathematics, the temporal scheme is represented by the ‘square root of minus one seconds’, literary longhand for stating that time is imaginary (the square root of minus one being the emblematic imaginary number). In Pynchon’s reference to imaginary time, he begins to elucidate the major development of both Minkowskian and Einsteinian spacetime, which is to rigorously establish that time can no longer be absolute, but is, rather, always relative. As we have seen above, in relation to Dally Rideout and Kit Traverse’s journey on the Stupendica, and will be further analysed in ‘Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto’, Pynchon is at pains to establish the relativity of time in his world, with Dally (Merle’s daughter), Hunter Penhallow, and Kit, emerging into three separate times, Hunter having fought in a European war (the past), Kit Traverse fighting in the European war (the present) and the war still to come for Dally (the future). In this sense, the entire narrative of Against the Day seems to function in accord with the Minkowskian conception of time as imaginary as it is posited here, but intriguingly also as this concept interrelates with the possible presence of hell in the world.

What has not yet emerged is a more literal allusion that Pynchon makes use of in relating Minkowskian and Einsteinian spacetime to the presence of hell in his New York and in the world of Against the Day. Roger Penrose, in his seminal text, The Road to Reality, presents a synthesis of mathematics as it pertains to time (part of a text that seeks to map out the entire mathematical system in relation to physical and

599 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 458. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
mathematical laws and the way they govern the universe). Penrose makes very clear the implicit relationship between time and light that was ultimately solidified by Albert Einstein and Hermann Minkowski.  

The mathematical analogy that Pynchon alludes to is developed from the interaction between space and time, and the understanding that both time and space, are no longer absolute, but relative. These ideas were first explored in the work of James Maxwell (of Maxwell’s demon fame, discussed in The Crying of Lot 49), who analysed the movement of light through space as it was related to electromagnetism. Light here stands in as a cipher for time, because the massive value of the speed of light allows it to be used as a constant, making the focus Maxwell’s analysis of space. These ideas are encapsulated in the image of a light cone, also known as a null cone, represented in Fig. 5, below.

What is immediately evident in the image of the light cone is that it is the exact mathematical correlate of the shape of Dante’s hell, and its mirror image, purgatory. Even more pertinently, the light cone incorporates past, present, and future into the same image. The passage of the light event is indicated by the arrow, showing the passage of time from bottom to top. If we consider again Hunter Penhallow’s experience in escaping from New York transformed physically into hell, and my analysis that his experience must be perceived as alluding to the very similar experience that Dante and Virgil go through in their escape from Dante’s hell, we can see that Pynchon, alluding both to Dante, and to mathematics, presents Penhallow’s

---

movement as from past to future, pushing through the point of disorientation (in the mathematical imagery, the present), and into the future.⁶⁰¹

Figure 5 The Light Cone

Pynchon’s conceptual allusion to this mathematical idea allows us further insight into the reconceptualisation of time within the novel and to the overarching focus of *Against the Day*. The light cone image suggests that both Dante and Penhallow are fleeing from the past into the future—this would seem to shed light on Pynchon’s reference to the train-like ‘conveyance’ that facilitates Hunter’s escape from New York as ‘futuristic’ because, exactly as for Dante and Virgil, his escape is predicated on breaking through the vortical power of time, through past, and present, to emerge into the future.

Another point of interest emerges, for the image of the light cone is, in fact, also a pictorial representation of ‘spacetime’. As Penrose sets out, the application of the light cone as approximation for the spacetime of the world can be understood in two ways, following Minkowski’s analysis or Einstein’s. In Minkowski’s understanding of these elements in operation, we can assume a general certainty—nothing in the world is allowed to accelerate to faster than the speed of light, which seems to imply that although there may be an infinite number of possibilities in the movement from past to future (considering the multiple straight line paths that can be taken from the past light cone through the present and into the future light cone), only one possibility will ever take place.\footnote{Penrose, \textit{The Road to Reality}, p. 407.} Minkowski’s preference for the primacy of the speed of light has one final, and crucial, effect. It produces the final rejection of time as absolute and the movement toward a mathematical understanding of time as relative.\footnote{Penrose, \textit{The Road to Reality}, p. 407.} This is the same relative time we see at play throughout \textit{Against the Day}, especially in the multiple times operating simultaneously, most obvious in the three part experience of time in which Hunter represents the past, Kit the present, and Dally the future, discussed above.

It is Einstein’s response to the light cone and his conceptualisation of the spacetime concept which begins to move us to very fertile, although intensely technical ground. As with Minkowski’s understanding of the light cone, multiple possibilities are admitted within the Einsteinian understanding of spacetime. As Penrose writes: “things can get decidedly more elaborate when we examine the global causality structure of a complicated Einsteinian spacetime \varepsilon.”\footnote{Penrose, \textit{The Road to Reality}, p. 408.} What can arise in utilising
Einstein’s approach are “closed timelike curves” that “admit the possibility of […] time travel”. 605

These ‘closed timelike curves’, predicated on both the relativity of time and space but also on the effects of gravity on these concepts, not only facilitate the possibility of time travel within the world (and the world of Against the Day) but also allude back to the concept of eternal return, which I addressed in relation to Pynchon’s spatial construction of hell. As discussed above, Pynchon’s conceptualisation of hell seems contingent on the eternal return, infinite time being the major predicate for the existence of eternity within the novel. In Einstein’s view of the relativity of time, spacetime can become warped because of the gravitational effect of planetary bodies. This then, in contrast to Minkowski’s analysis, allows for a number of different contingent times to be set alongside each other, effectively multiplying the number of light cones to present the multiple possibilities of time. Rather than these ‘times’ being presented as parallel to each other (which presents only the possibility of multiple absolute times), these light cones are set into a loop, presenting a completely alternative view of the movement of time. 606

This Einsteinian loop then produces an effect which is analogous to the eternal return. As we can see in Fig. 5, the light in the light cone moves from the past, through the present, and into the future. In Einstein’s conception of relative time, the multiple light cones are placed into a loop, all facing the same way. As time progresses, this means that the light from one light cone (already progressed from past, through present, to future) then enters the next light cone and progresses from future back to

605 Penrose, The Road to Reality, p. 409. (Penrose’s emphasis).
606 See Penrose, The Road to Reality, pp. 408-409, and especially Fig. 17.18, p. 409.
past. This is the process through which time travel is posited in Einstein’ system. If this process is then played out in full and a complete loop of time occurs, light travelling through a multiplicity of light cones, when the light event returns to the first light cone we have a scientific replication of the concept of eternal return as it is posited by Deleuze.

Pynchon’s allusion to both Minkowski and Einstein illustrates the allusive depths of Against the Day. The narrative shift between hell in New York and physics and mathematics still incorporates a number of allusions—and allusions that show how wide a focus Pynchon maintains within this novel. It is not within the ambit of my work to explicate these allusions entirely, nor is there space available, but even in this short analysis it becomes clear the level at which Pynchon is operating. Much more could be made of the relationship between space, light, and time within the novel but it is sufficient here to illustrate the analysis of time that exists within Pynchon’s mathematical allusion and the New York 9/11 section of Against the Day.

***

Pynchon gives his readers one intriguing scene in which Kit Traverse, Yashmeen Halfcourt, and Günther van Quassel (a disciple of Minkowski) visit a museum of mathematical discoveries known as the Museum der Monstrositäten, the Museum of Monstrosities. Pynchon is again at pains to link his characters with the concepts they embody—van Quassel exists in “his own ‘frame of reference’” his body and personality subject to various “time-discrepancies”, clearly reflective of Minkowski’s theorisation of spacetime.607

---

607 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 599.
Pynchon’s focus on mathematics and its application to time is obvious from the outset. As Kit, Yashmeen and Günther approach the Museum, Günther offers the following comment, sounding more like one of Pynchon’s narrators than a character. The three are entering “‘An older sort of Germany […] Deeper.’”\textsuperscript{608} Ironically, the building is futuristic rather than from the past, constructed from a “black substance […] not so much a known mineral as the residue of a nameless one, after light, through some undisclosed process, had been removed.”\textsuperscript{609} This structure is unique, as the narrator observes: “Now and then a load-bearing statue was visible in the form of an angel, wings, faces, and garments streamlined almost to pure geometry, and brandishing weapons somehow not yet decipherable, featuring electrodes and cooling fins and so forth.”\textsuperscript{610} It is as if the building reflects the futuristic potential of the mathematics of the time, described earlier in the novel as being twenty years advanced of normal human thought.\textsuperscript{611} The Museum der Monstrositäten presents the entirety of mathematics as it concerns Pynchon, and the scope of mathematical reference in \textit{Against the Day}. The museum is “not so much a conventional museum as a strange underground temple, or counter-temple, dedicated to the current ‘Crisis’ in European mathematics.”\textsuperscript{612} In the short four-page section dedicated to the three’s experience within the Museum Pynchon mentions the mathematics of Clifford, Knipfel, Weierstrass, Frege, Russell, von Imbiss, Kovalevskaiia, Pythagoras, Hilbert, Cantor and Hamilton.

\textsuperscript{608} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 632.  
\textsuperscript{609} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 632.  
\textsuperscript{610} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 623. (Pynchon’s emphasis).  
\textsuperscript{611} See Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 330.  
\textsuperscript{612} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 632.
The museum is a truly strange space, appearing to present life-sized, and disturbingly real, dioramas of a number of crucial moments in the history of mathematics. These dioramas manipulate time and space in very peculiar ways, as Pynchon describes:

According to the design philosophy of the day, between the observer at the heart of the panorama and the cylindrical wall on which the scene was projected, lay a zone of dual nature, wherein must be correctly arranged a number of ‘real objects’ appropriate to the setting—chairs and desks, Doric columns whole and damaged—though these could not strictly be termed entirely real, rather part ‘real’ and part ‘pictorial,’ or let us say ‘fictional,’ this assortment of hybrid objects being designed to ‘gradually blend in’ with distance until the curving wall and a final condition of pure image. ‘So,’ Günther declared, ‘one is thrust into the Cantorian paradise of the Mengenlehre, with one rather sizable set of points in space being continuously replaced by another, smoothly losing their ‘reality’ as a function of radius. The observer curious enough to cross this space—were it not, it appears, forbidden—would be slowly removed from his four-dimensional environs and taken out into a timeless region. . . .’

The space of the Museum’s dioramas moves from the verge of irreality to reality as the eye moves from the backdrop to those items at the front of the installation. The real point is not the contingent reality of the items that make up the diorama, but the final narratorial comment, in which it is suggested that the individual who walks into the diorama will eventually move from the four-dimensional space of the real world, into a space outside of time. Once again, Pynchon seems to point us to the possibility of counter-worlds, and this space may well be a portal to the other worlds discussed above. Günther’s interjection, however, emphasises the mathematical basis of the excerpt above. Cantor’s set theory (the Mengenlehre) was a revolutionary piece of mathematics that established finally the full possibilities of infinity. Cantor developed a mathematical understanding of infinity, and Pynchon utilises this discovery as anticipating his theorisation of time in the novel, in which time, especially infinite

---

time (e.g. eternal punishment in hell), is manipulable. It is this same sense that is implied here.

As the museum section concludes it is not only the spaces within the Museum that are analogous with the shifting nature of time within Against the Day, but the Museum itself. A disembodied voice rings out, informing the three that the Museum is closing: "‘Children […] The Museum is closing now. The next time you visit, it might not be exactly where it stands today.’” The disembodied voice explains that:

‘[…] the cornerstone of the building is not a cube but its four-dimensional analogy, a tesseract. Certain of the corridors lead to other times, times, moreover, you might wish too strongly to reclaim, and become lost in the perplexity of the attempt.’

As the mathematical theories that abound within the novel become dominant, the analogy with possible counter-worlds becomes stronger. The museum, finally, embodies a complex mathematical concept, the tesseract. A tesseract is a four-dimensional cube represented in three dimensions. The museum is reliant on time, even more than it is on space to exist. Thus, the museum exists in the contingent time of the counter-worlds and is therefore not located spatially, but located solely in time. Pynchon utilises these concepts to develop, and then to reinforce, what is primarily an analysis of temporality, as we shall see in the analysis of mathematical analogies that are present within the novel.

Mathematics as Analogy for Time: Infinity and Eternity

---

614 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 636.
615 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 636.
Pynchon’s use of Victorian mathematics influences much of *Against the Day*’s narrative. Kit Traverse and Yashmeen Halfcourt, two of the younger characters of the novel, serve emblematically to illustrate the seismic shifts that characterise the mathematics that Pynchon focuses on throughout the novel. The purpose of this section is not, however, to explicate the specific mathematic theories Pynchon puts on display, but rather to illustrate how these theories work as analogies for the overarching concern of the novel—this concern, of course, being time. The dominant debate that Pynchon reconstitutes is the clash between the Vectorists and the Quaternionists, representing their respective mathematical beliefs, Vectors and Quaternions. These systems are posited by Pynchon in the novel as variously, methods of mathematical notation, forms for mapping numbers algebraically and physically, and most crucially, as analogies for the mathematical consideration of strange manifestations of temporality.

Strictly speaking the debate between the Quaternionists and the Vectorists represents a battle between the two systems over their effectiveness “as competing mathematical notations used in mathematical physics.” An exchange from the early stages of the novel illustrates how this mathematical debate (one that lingered on for around twenty years) is manipulated by Pynchon into a specific consideration of mathematics’ interaction with the temporal. Pynchon presents the discussions of another shadowy group, this one known as ‘The Transnctial Discussion Group’, discussing ‘The Nature of Expeditions’. Two Professors, Blope and Rao, represent the Vectorist and Quaternionist views respectively. Pynchon writes:

---

‘Time moves on but one axis,’ advised Dr. Blope, ‘past to future—the only turnings possible being turns of a hundred and eighty degrees. In the Quaternions, a ninety-degree direction would correspond to an additional axis whose unit is $\sqrt{-1}$. A turn through any other angle would require for its unit a complex number.’

‘Yet mappings in which a linear axis becomes curvilinear—functions of a complex variable such as $w=e^z$, where a straight line in the $z$-plane maps to a circle in the $w$-plane,’ said Dr. Rao, ‘do suggest the possibility of linear time becoming circular, and so achieving eternal return as simply, or should I say complexly, as that.’

Blope’s objections are justifiable if intriguingly conventional. The Vectorists view time as linear, the ‘Christian time’ of the early parts of the novel. Blope protests that to accede to the influence of the Quaternions allows time to be reimagined. But time is not reimagined as the ‘shamanic time’ that is contrasted to conventional linear time in other parts of Against the Day, but in a very different way. A turn in time (facilitated through the inclusion of another axis representing imaginary numbers (the reference to ‘$\sqrt{-1}$’)) is now possible at ninety degrees. As Pynchon emphasises, this would require another axis, another dimension, and results finally in another time. Furthermore, the now multiple times are neither parallel or linear, but run off at a right angles from the conventional linear time we apprehend in the physical world.

The concept of multiple times has been discussed at length above, and is obviously crucial to Pynchon’s reconceptualisation of temporality that is the root motivation of Against the Day. It is instructive to observe that the Vectorist understanding of time, and Blope’s shock at the Quaternionists manipulations of time specifically meshes with the theorisation of counter-worlds discussed above in ‘Counter-Worlds, Counter-Earths, But What of a Counter-Hell?’ and especially in the Chums’ belief that to travel north or up, and, south or down, was a possible method of accessing these multiple...

---

618 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 132. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
worlds. It seems that the theoretical mathematics of the novel conforms to the spatial examples offered throughout the novel as well.

Of course, the Quaternionists do not accept the specific attacks of the Vectorists, and propose a different understanding of time and its application to the world. Rao’s response to Blope is presupposed on an entirely different apprehension of time. From the beginning of Rao’s statement, time is no longer considered as rigidly linear. Instead, time always has the possibility of curving. The curving of time proposed here would seem to be little development on from linear time except for the inclusion of what Rao calls the ‘w-plane’. The ‘w-plane’ corresponds to the addition of a fourth axis into the mapping of numbers, the fourth axis of course adding a fourth dimension, implicitly including time in the application of numbers to space (conventionally represented by the first three dimensions, x, y, and z), the fundamental aim of both Vectorists and Quaternionists. What the Quaternionist view proposes is not the curving of time in three dimensions, a view which approaches a concept similar to a cyclical view of history and time, but, as Rao acknowledges, eternal return. Through all this, the analogous image of time that the Quaternionists propose is not a circle, but rather the vortex, the same image of time Dante employs in his depiction of hell, and the same image that is crucial to Pynchon’s construction of time and hell throughout the novel.

What the reader encounters in these discussions of the nature of time, and the possibility of proposing a coherent image of time as it operates, is a fictional analogy of what Deleuze identifies as the synthetic nature of time. Deleuze writes: “The

---

619 See Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, pp. 43-45.
synthetic relation of the moment to itself as present, past and future grounds its relation to other moments."  

And with a slightly different focus, he comments: “the moment must be simultaneously present and past, present and yet to come”, an observation that accords with the view of time as “future, past, and present […] all together” that is proposed later in the novel. The ‘moment’ in Deleuze’s lexicon can be equated to ‘becoming’ the concept opposed to ‘being’. What is at the root of all this discussion, for Deleuze, is an appropriate theorisation of time. Deleuze’s image of time is the eternal return, and specifically the eternal return of “difference and its repetition.” And this new iteration of the eternal return is precisely what we see proposed by the Quaternionists, and throughout Against the Day—a view of temporality in which time is multiple, with the possibility of multiple times and multiple worlds. What this implies is that Blope and Rao actually have very similar understandings of time, and that their argument above provides an effective summary of time as it exists within Against the Day, with both Blope’s averred image of multiple times running off at angles from each other occurring simultaneously with Rao’s vision for a mathematically coherent explanation of eternal return.

Blope and Rao’s argument is centred on a specific physical concept that illustrates the importance of time to the novel as a whole, but also emphasises the way in which mathematical discussion within Against the Day serves as a series of analogies for the reconceptualisation of temporality crucial to the novel. Pynchon’s demarcates the discussion as emerging from real world issues. He writes:

---

620 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, p. 45.
621 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, pp. 44-45.
622 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 617.
623 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, p. 45.
'We learned once how to break horses and ride them for long distances, with oceangoing ships we left flat surfaces and went into Riemann space, we crossed solid land and deep seas, and colonized what we found […] Now we have taken to the first few wingbeats of what will allow us to begin colonizing the Sky. Somewhere in it, God dwells in His Heavenly City. How far into that unmapped wilderness shall we journey before we find Him? Will He withdraw before our advance, continue to withdraw into the Infinite? Will He send back to us divine Agents, to help, to deceive, to turn us away? Will we leave settlements in the Sky, along our invasion routes, or will we choose to be wanderers, striking camp each morning, content with nothing short of Zion? And what of colonizing additional dimensions beyond the third? Colonize Time? Why not?'

The first thing we should note is that incorporated into Vormance’s rousing speech is a literary analogy for the four dimensions of mathematics that this conversation engenders, the confrontation between Blope and Rao discussed above. America’s plains, the world’s oceans and the planet’s airspace are the earthly manifestations of the first three dimensions, the three dimensions that we physically occupy to this day. Of course, the far more intriguing comment is Vormance’s last, where he questions the possibility of inhabiting time. What is proposed is the embodiment of time, the same project that we can identify both in the mathematical analogies that Pynchon pursues throughout the novel, and that are also the main focus of the narrative of Against the Day. In this sense the two competing levels of the passages discussed above, mathematical analysis and literary metaphors, illustrate the new conceptualisation of time achieved within Against the Day, in which time becomes a new frontier. Whilst much of the impetus for this project can be identified in the historical events Pynchon develops his narrative from, the effect is a consideration of time as physical, not just in the sense of time existing, but rather that the mathematics Pynchon employs facilitates the creation of a new apprehension of time, the fundamental root of the novel.

624 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 131.
Indeed this argument is affirmed later on in the novel, when Merle Rideout stumbles across Candlebrow University, home of the International Conferences on Time Travel. Here Vectorists and Quaternionists are working together, combining forces to reject Euclidean conceptions of space for something very similar to the vortical time of earlier in the novel. This new understanding of space proceeds, ironically, with time as its main focus. Pynchon writes:

‘We thus enter the whirlwind. It becomes the very essence of refashioned life, providing the axes to which everything will be referred. Time no longer ‘passes,’ with a linear velocity, but ‘returns,’ with an angular one.’

These comments continue on from an earlier lecture given by an unidentifiable Professor, who argues that time as it is posited here, that is as a non-linear manifestation of eternal return, being the eternal return of difference, is predicated on the vortical spinning of the earth and its analogy in the “classic prairie ‘twister’”.

As with other incidents of Pynchon’s use of mathematics the reader is provided with a natural example of the mathematical concept in application, now widened from the vortices of hell, to vortices originating on earth as well. The ‘angular’ time that Pynchon espouses then accords with Deleuze’s concept of the eternal return and the positing of alternate ‘times’ that function at angles to the main linear time of the world.

Although the Quaternionists are finally unsuccessful in their battle with the Vectorists, Pynchon’s novel provides a sometimes wistful look at what might have been if the opposite had taken place—the same project he undertakes with a number of other

---

625 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 453.
626 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 452.
historical events, and which seem to motivate the contrary history of the novel. The possibilities of the Quaternion movement are seductive, as Pynchon writes:

‘Actually Quaternions failed because they perverted what the Vectorists thought they knew of God’s intention—that space be simple, three-dimensional, and real, and if there must be a fourth term, an imaginary, that it can be assigned to Time. But Quaternions came in and turned that all end for end, defining the axes of space as imaginary and leaving Time to be the real term, and a scalar as well—simply inadmissible.’627

It seems as if the view proposed here, that of an unidentified, but we can be sure, despairing, Quaternionist, fits neatly with the narrative of Against the Day, in which the historical accuracies of the text are reliant on time rather than space. Pynchon has adopted a temporality very similar to that of the Quaternionists, in which the one concrete factor of the world is time, even in all its manipulability, and that space is contingent on time. As we have seen in the discussion above, this conceptualisation of time works not only with the proposition of counter-worlds, and counter-times, but also with bilocation and time travel, as well as the transplantation of events from disparate times, manifested in the novel through both prochronism and parachronism.

***

There is one final series of mathematical allusions that Pynchon makes use of within Against the Day that it is important to analyse. This is the allusion to transfinite mathematics, and specifically the analogies Pynchon develops from the work of Cantor and Minkowski. These mathematicians, and their work in opening up and explicating the possibilities of infinity in mathematics was also the focus of David Foster Wallace in his text Everything and More: A Compact History of $\infty$, published in

627 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 534. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
2003. Much of the groundbreaking work on transfinite mathematics takes place during the period in which Against the Day is set. At its fundamental base, transfinite mathematics seeks to quantify the infinite. It is no surprise then that Pynchon identifies the importance of these concepts to his work, considering also the time he spends elucidating the relationship between the infinite and the eternal examined above.

Pynchon’s explication of the transfinite is primarily accomplished within the confines of Göttingen, a university town that functions as a cipher for the investigation of infinity—an investigation that is fundamentally controversial. The controversy is derived from the debate over the existence of transfinite numbers, and is exemplified by a clash between Kronecker and Cantor. Kronecker, representing mathematical constructivism, argues that the only numbers that ‘exist’ are the positive integers (1,2,3,4,…,n+1,) and that all other ‘numbers’ are mathematical constructs. As such, Kronecker rejects Cantor’s work in expanding both finite numbers and the transfinite. Pynchon manifests this unrest upon the entire town of Göttingen, describing how: “Fundamentalist Kroneckerites had been known to descend on Göttingen in periodic raids, from which not all of them returned.”

Pynchon introduces the reader to the complexities of the transfinite through Cantor’s continuum, an expansive widening of the potentialities of numbers. Cantor’s early work is encapsulated in the development (but not really the discovery) of the fact that

---

628 I mention this work only because Foster Wallace corresponded frequently with DeLillo, and it seems unlikely that an author of such high reputation, and who is able to correspond with DeLillo, would not be afforded the possibility of corresponding with Pynchon as well. I am then hypothesising a possible discussion between Foster Wallace and Pynchon on a subject of mutual interest, and the possibility that Pynchon may indeed have been influenced by Foster Wallace and his work on the subject.
629 See Foster Wallace, Everything and More, pp. 219-227, and especially n36 and n37.
630 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 593.
between 0 and 1 on a number line there is an infinity of possible points. This is commonly represented in the series \{\text{one half, one quarter, one eighth, one sixteenth, \ldots} \} \footnote{We should also note the similarities with Zeno’s paradoxes discussed above.}

Pynchon’s inclusion of Cantor at this stage is short, but nonetheless significant. He writes:

‘Kronecker did not believe in pi, or the square root of minus one—’
‘He did not even believe in the square root of plus two,’ said Humfried.
‘Against this, Cantor with his Kontinuum, professing an equally strong belief in just those regions, infinitely divisible, which lie between the whole numbers so demanding of all of Kronecker’s devotion.’

Cantor’s belief and work on irrational numbers and what lies between zero and one seems analogously similar to the possibility of counter-worlds discussed above. Whilst the disagreement between Cantor and Kronecker is emblematic, it is the work that is done by utilising Cantor’s reconceptualisation of numbers that is insightful for Pynchon’s work. The conversation quoted above continues:

‘But out here in the four-dimensional space-and-time of Dr. Minkowski, inside the tiniest ‘interval,’ as small as you care to make it, within each tiny hypervolume of Kontinuum—there likewise must be always hidden an infinite number of other points—and if we define a ‘world’ as a very large and finite set of points, then there must be worlds. Universes!’

Pynchon harnesses Minkowski’s extrapolation out of Cantor’s work. What Minkowski proposed is the development of Cantor’s ideas from two dimensions into three. Thus rather than the number line, and an infinite number of points between zero and one, Minkowski’s conception of these ideas in three dimensions seems to establish the possibility of infinity being able to be identified within the smallest portions of space.

\footnote{Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 593. (Pynchon’s emphases).}

\footnote{Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 594.}
The mathematical analogy is obvious and is spelt out by Pynchon with Humfried’s exclamation that there may be universes able to be encapsulated within these tiny theoretical sections of space, and this then develops the plausibility of counter-worlds and counter-times, just as it effects bilocation and time travel.

Later, Kit happens upon Yashmeen, and her response to his needling is instructive as to the importance of mathematics and its application to the concepts central to the novel. Pynchon writes:

‘There is a crisis out there [...] And Göttingen is no more exempt than it was in Riemann’s day, in the war with Prussia. The political crisis in Europe maps onto the crisis in mathematics. Weierstrass functions, Cantor’s continuum, Russell’s equally inexhaustible capacity for mischief—once, among nations, as in chess, suicide was illegal. Once, among mathematicians, ‘the infinite’ was all but a conjuror’s convenience. The connections lie there, Kit—hidden and poisonous. Those of us who creep among them do so at our peril.’

It is at this point that the reader can understand the scope of Pynchon’s inclusion of these mathematical concepts—because they not only encapsulate the concern with time that is crucial to the novel as a whole, but because they also speak to the series of crises that are at the heart of both the narrative and the conceptual focus of Against the Day. The mathematics that Pynchon employs is not included solely for the interest it will generate within the text, but because mathematics functions throughout Against the Day as analogous to all the other concerns of the novel, including the primary focus of a reconceptualisation of temporality, achieved in mathematics by the reconsideration of infinity, and the concomitant retheorisation of eternity.

---

Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 594.
To justify Pynchon’s use of these mathematical ideas is not my aim—rather, I wish to illustrate how the mathematical narrative of Against the Day fits with the other analyses of temporality discussed above. It is useful to point out an exchange between Kit Traverse and Scarsdale Vibe early in the novel, in which Traverse pleads to be allowed to pursue mathematics in Göttingen. Vibe is sceptical, assuming that mathematics cannot be useful. Kit cannot be dissuaded, arguing that: “‘the real world, the substantial world of affairs, possessing greater inertia, takes a while to catch up.’”635 Indeed, Kit believes the mathematical discoveries taking place belong, properly, twenty years in the future.

It is then the duelling pressures of prochronism and parachronism that are enticing within the mathematical sections of Against the Day—Pynchon can analyse time through Victorian mathematics, said to be ahead of time, whilst also developing a new conceptualisation of time itself appropriate to the world after 9/11. Indeed, the possibility of accessing the future is addressed by Pynchon in describing Ganeshi Rao, the Quaternionist discussed above, whose avowed aim is the “seeking of a gateway to the Ulterior”.636 The ‘ulterior’ here is not only the hidden, but, precisely, the future. Fittingly, Pynchon describes Rao’s method for achieving his aim as “simply finding silence and allowing Mathematics and History to proceed as they would.”637 Although this is not precisely the course of the novel, it approximates Pynchon’s vision of an alternate history that maps out worldly possibilities and the results if certain events had happened to pass.

**Conclusion**

635 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 330.
636 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 130.
637 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 130.
Ryder Thorn, the representative of the Trespassers, and the one character of the novel from what approximates our present, observes around halfway through *Against the Day* that: “‘all investigations of Time, however sophisticated or abstract, have at their true base the human fear of mortality.’” In this observation Pynchon reorients the entire novel, returning the focus to the short early section in which the 9/11 attacks, one hundred years in the future, impinge upon the narrative of the novel. The duelling temporalities of the novel are re-emphasised in Henry Veggian’s formulation:

> *Against the Day* arrives from an indeterminate time to challenge these forces that compete to determine the future—that is to say, the present—as if this were the intention announced with the novel’s title.  

The brutality of those attacks, and the effect they have had not only on New York and America but on the entire world, reflects the ultimate work of Pynchon in this novel. The 9/11 attacks push Pynchon, along with DeLillo, and indeed many others, into reconsidering time—not only time as a defining characteristic of mortality, but time in all its literal manifestations and figurative abstractions. *Against the Day*’s analysis of time speaks to the paradigmatic effect of those events in 2001, and the consistent focus on temporality Pynchon exhibits in this work illustrates the importance that he identifies within those events, but also in this novel as well. Pynchon does not propose an entirely new understanding of temporality in *Against the Day*, but considers the possibilities of what the world would look like if “certain hidden geometries of History” had shaped the world in a slightly different way.  

---

638 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 553.  
640 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 373.
Pynchon’s Futurist Manifesto

This chapter focuses on the influence of the visual arts in a short section, which I have dubbed ‘the Venetian section’, of Against the Day. In the Venetian section, Dally Rideout, fresh from her first encounter with her mother since her childhood, builds a strong friendship with Hunter Penhallow. Penhallow is now living in Venice, working as a painter, after his traumatic escape from New York in the moments before the city was consumed by fire, an event precipitated by the vengeance of a ‘living meteorite’, and an event, which, I have argued in the previous chapter should be interpreted as a prochronistic reference to the September 11 attacks on the United States of 2001. Hunter is also struggling with his participation in the European war, attempting to understand how his experiences in that conflict seem to have occurred outside the time he now occupies. Dally and Hunter continually return to the purpose of art—and this discussion is furthered by their interaction with Andrea Tancredi, an anarchist artist, who sees his work as related to the Futurists, Filippo Marinetti’s avant-garde artistic movement, which first emerged in Italy in 1909. Pynchon’s references to Futurist ideology and the implicit allusion to the work of Henri Bergson, who was a strong influence on the Futurists, provides a means for analysing the temporal experiences of Hunter, who seems to occupy multiple times, and can be then extrapolated out to analyse the temporal focus of the novel as a whole, allowing the reader to understand the means through which Pynchon develops his complex analysis of time in Against the Day.  


Before Pynchon engages with any specific artistic concept within this section, the reader is given a general précis of what will follow. Pynchon emphasises the importance of Venice, and reinforces the importance that Venice has always had to the arts, from the Renaissance, through to the period in which the novel is set. The city is not, however, static. This is a city that is admired for its light (both in the day and during the evening), but a city that is not always light—a city known for its contradictions and the possibility of violence hidden behind an artistic façade. Hunter points this out in his very first comment to Dally as they meet:

‘You’ve seen the old paintings. This has always been a town for seeing angels in. The battle in heaven didn’t end when Lucifer was banished to Hell. It kept going, it’s still going.’

The reference to Hell and Lucifer is intriguing, and illustrates the uniformity of reference throughout the text—my analysis of references to Dante’s *Commedia* shows that Dante’s poem is one of the crucial allusions that underpin the structure of *Against the Day*. What is crucial in the quotation above is what I see as a submerged analysis of the quality of light which reputedly inspires so many painters in Venice. The symbolic battle between good and evil has its artistic corollary in the renaissance concept of Chiaroscuro, one that Hunter spells out specifically only a handful of pages later. Chiaroscuro is a technique of combining light and dark elements into the same work so as to emphasise both the contrast between the two, and the quality of the light being portrayed (see Fig 6, Caravaggio’s *The Taking of Christ*, a painting with a similar theme to Pynchon’s one specific reference to a historical work of Chiaroscuro in this section). The language used in the artistic mode (light and dark, etc) shows how Hunter’s reference to hell and angels can be related to painting, creating an analogy

644 cf. ‘The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell’, pp. 185-194, 204-205.
645 See Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 582.
between art and the power struggles of the novel. Pynchon begins the Venetian section by emphasising a series of dualities. The light and dark of Venice is the most obvious, serving also to include the struggle between positive and negative within the section of the novel. The small part of Venice that Dally and Hunter inhabit, working and painting, serves as a synecdoche for Venice as a whole, and then as a synecdoche of the world of the novel. As Hunter observes, the space of this world is “self-repeating”.

Figure 6 Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*

Hunter Penhallow’s situation is a difficult one for Pynchon to establish, for the confusion that Hunter himself exhibits as to his exact experience in time is similarly disorienting for the reader. Pynchon describes Hunter as:

[…] somehow fetched up here, demobilized from a war that nobody knew about, obscurely damaged, seeking refuge from time, safety behind the cloaks and masks and thousand-named mists of Venezia.

---

646 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 575.
Hunter is seeking refuge from time, precisely because he doesn’t know where he really is located in time. The time he has experienced does not seem to have occurred at this specific point in space, in Venice. The war that Hunter has participated in is not known, and Dally’s confusion when he confesses his situation is palpable. Pynchon notes their exchange:

‘There was a war? Where?’
‘Europe. Everywhere. But no one seems to know of it . . . here . . .’ he hesitated, with a wary look—‘yet.’
‘Why not? It’s so far away the news hasn’t reached here “yet”? […]
Or it hasn’t happened “yet”?’

Pynchon shows the temporality of the novel to be completely contingent on the whims of the author. In an exchange of three comments, Dally and Hunter have communicated their growing confusion in the concept of ‘yet’, illustrating that the immanent future no longer seems present, let alone imminent.

Maintaining assurance about the concept of time is critical for Hunter—his traumatic experiences with time leave him with the desire only to solidify time, to make all time knowable, as we read in Hunter’s comments to himself after his conversation with Dally:

‘Political space has its neutral ground. But does Time? Is there such a thing as the neutral hour? one that goes neither forward nor back? is that too much to hope?’

The reader is swiftly led to understand that despite the ostensible focus of this section being art, it is indeed time that Pynchon returns to again. Hunter, since his experience in the devastating event in New York, is obsessed with time, and strives to understand time in its entire complexity. The Venetian section, then, sets out to solidify the re-

---

648 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 577. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
649 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 577. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
conceptualisation of the temporal so crucial to Against the Day, and to draw together the disparate analyses of time present within the novel.

As Dally and Hunter draw closer, into some sort of pseudo-professional relationship, Dally modelling for Hunter whilst also helping him on his pitch to sell his paintings, Hunter attempts to explicate the importance of Venice and its light to his painting and the art world in general. The example Hunter uses is Tintoretto’s The Abduction of the Body of St. Mark from Alexandria (see Fig. 7). Dally is shocked at the spirits that linger at the edges of the work, described by Pynchon as “ghostly witnesses, up far too late, forever fled indoors before an unholy offense.”

Hunter’s response to Dally’s shock is telling, and sets out not only an aesthetic ideal, but an analogous attitude that can be extrapolated out to his weird experiences with time. Pynchon writes:

‘It’s as if these Venetian painters saw things we can’t see anymore […] A world of presences. Phantoms. History kept sweeping through, Napoleon, the Austrians, a hundred forms of bourgeois literalism, leading to its ultimate embodiment, the tourist—how beleaguered they must have felt. But stay in this town awhile, keep your senses open, reject nothing, and now and then you’ll see them.’

Hunter’s emphasis of Tintoretto’s portrayal of the spiritual world (the light-coloured lines and shapes throughout the picture) function to inflect the readers understanding of Hunter’s attitude to art and Venice, but also to his strange predicament, and finally, to time. We can see in Figure 7 (below) that Tintoretto communicates the spirits that observe and fear the unholy act depicted are always portrayed through the deployment of lighter colours on what is generally a dark canvas. As with the Figure 6 and

---

650 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 579.
651 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 579.
Hunter’s reference to Chiaroscuro, we can see that Pynchon constructs, for Hunter, a similarity in the struggle between biblical good and evil, and light and dark in painting. Hunter’s obsession with the light of Venice, albeit a common artistic conceit, seems to suggest a means to rise above his memories of war on two continents. Later in the Venetian section, Hunter switches from painting during the day to painting nocturnes, but he is still fascinated with light, even in the dark.652

---

Figure 7 Tintoretto, *The Abduction of the Body of St. Mark from Alexandria*

Of course, the Tintoretto painting is important to Penhallow because he occupies the tenuous position of spirit throughout this section of *Against the Day*—captive to a temporality alternative to, or operating simultaneously with, the temporality he is subject to at other stages of the novel. Indeed, as Hunter continues his analysis of *The Abduction* a few days later, the spirit seems to be his focus, despite his insistence he is discussing the body. He argues that *The Abduction* shows “another way to get past the

body’’ a concept repeated in Tancredi’s analysis of his own art, discussed below.653

Pynchon continues on with Hunter’s analysis:

‘[…] not to deny the body—to reimagine it. Even […] if it’s “really” just different kinds of greased mud smeared on cloth—to reimagine it as light.’654

Pynchon reorients painting as an exercise in the manipulation of light, a reconsideration that facilitates Hunter’s growing understanding of the confusion of his position—even in art, with the body made ephemeral, time is still the crucial factor, for the body must be positioned in time. It is thus no wonder that what is fascinating for Hunter in The Abduction is precisely the spectral figures—those figures without a body who do not need to be bound by time, considering as we read above, that they can still be encountered in Venice now, even with the influx of tourists and the commodification of the city. Hunter’s veneration of Tintoretto’s work is motivated precisely by the analogous position he finds himself in—almost as if he is not so much incorporeal as atemporal.

Hunter’s final analysis of The Abduction makes the link between art and time central, conceptualising the subject as:

‘[…] more terrible—mortal, in pain, misshapen, even taken apart, broken down into geometrical surfaces, but each time somehow, when the process is working, gone beyond. . . .’655

In this sense, the breaking down of the body through art, calling to mind cubism, among other abstract and avant-garde movements that Hunter is now addressing, seeks, in Hunter’s mind, to address not only space, but time as well, his fundamental

653 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 579.
654 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 579.
655 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 579. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
Art is reoriented to interact with, and analyse, time, a theme that plays out throughout the rest of this section of the novel. As Pynchon shifts from Renaissance theories of art to twentieth century theories, we will see that the influence of time on artistic practice becomes more pronounced and reflects the concerns not only within this section of the novel, but the novel as a whole.

After Hunter concludes his analysis of Tintoretto, the narrative changes focus to his own art, and his switch to nocturnes. Hunter’s shift to nocturnes precipitates an alteration in Dally’s thinking as well. As she accompanies Hunter on his nightly sojourns, Dally becomes more aware of the danger that seems to exist, hidden within the supposedly tourist-friendly spaces of Venice. Aside from a series of what Dally calls “night predators”, who seem to lay in wait for young people such as herself, attempting to take advantage of their youth, whether sexually or otherwise, there is an even darker edge to the city. Dally characterises these manifestations of evil in exactly the same language that Hunter uses for his art—in terms of light and dark. Pynchon writes:

"Here in this ancient town progressively settling into a mask of itself, she began to look for episodes of counter-light, canal-side gates into dank gloom, sotopòrteghi whose exits could not be seen, absent faces, missing lamps at the end of calli."

For Dally, in contrast to Hunter, the city is made up of ‘counter-light’, that is, darkness. The city is not entrancing for her, but menacing. Darkness occupies a position in which Hunter can still see light—there is no light at the end of a Venetian passageway (the sotopòrteghi), and even faces themselves don’t seem to produce light, a direct contrast with the Chiaroscuro technique that intrigues Hunter (note the light

---

656 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 581.
657 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 581.
that emanates from the faces in Fig. 6). Dally slowly comes to the realisation that there is something a little hell-like in her interpretation of Venice, reflected also in her reference to ‘counter-light’, utilising a very similar term to what has been used in the novel to posit the possibility of ‘counter-worlds’. Pynchon continues:

So there was revealed to her, night by night in ever more depressing clarity, a secret and tenebrous city, down into whose rat-infested labyrinths she witnessed children her age and younger being drawn, infected, corrupted, and too often made to vanish, like a coin or a card—just that interchangeably held in contempt by those who profited from the limitless appetite for young bodies that seemed to concentrate here from all over Europe and beyond.  

It is with this despairing state of mind that Dally views Venice. It is no coincidence that Pynchon constructs Dally’s views of Venice as the opposite of Hunter’s. In this way he can emphasise the concept of the ‘counter’ that he develops throughout Against the Day. In the Venetian section the reader is supplied with two oppositions: light and counter-light, and a more amorphous concept of Venice and counter-Venice—the positive and negative interpretations of what can be seen as the same thing. Hunter sees no irony in his knowledge that the opposition between light and dark is exactly what entices so many people to Venice—it is the literal embodiment of Chiaroscuro—the combination of light and dark. Dally seems unable to reconcile the opposition, as Pynchon describes:

It put her in a peculiar bind, her feelings for the city undiminished yet now with the element of fear that could not be wished aside, each night bringing new intelligence of evil waiting up the end of any little alleyway.

Dally’s growing understanding of the menacing side of Venice re-emphasises the concern that the possibilities of a ‘counter-Venice’ produces, the possibility of not

---

658 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 581.
659 See Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 582.
660 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 582.
only times, but spaces being manipulated by some unseen force. It is in this sense that
Tintoretto’s *The Abduction*, so emblematic for Hunter, begins to influence Dally as
well. The spiritual beings that proliferate throughout the painting summarise the
situation in Venice—and yet the beings at the edge of the frame of view in Dally’s
perception of Venice are far more menacing than in Tintoretto’s work.

Dally’s fear of the underbelly of Venice drives her to seek the guidance of Hunter,
who helps her into the care of “the seminotorious Principessa Spongiatosta”.

Ensconced in the Principessa’s palazzo, Dally’s concern shifts from the unseen, back
to time and space. She is concerned by the appearance of Spongiatosta, who seems to
exist outside of time. Pynchon’s description is intriguing as we read of: “this bright-
eyed dewdrop whom Time seemed not, or maybe in time’s case, never, to have
touched.” Pynchon’s shift from ‘not’ to ‘never’ emphasises the non-corporeality of
his conception of time. This concern with the physical is mirrored in Dally’s concern
over the palazzo she now calls home. Dally’s experiences are narrated thus:

> What intrigued Dally about the interior spaces at Ca’ Spongiatosta […] were the rapid changes in scale, something like the almost theatrical expansion from comfortable, dark, human-size alleyways to the vast tracklessness and light of Piazza San Marco.

The architecture of the palazzo seems to mirror Venice itself, incorporating not only
furnished rooms, but also waterways and bridges, as if the palazzo served as a
miniature synthesis of the city. The Spongiatosta Palazzo mirrors, in this sense,
Hunter’s description of Venice as the epitome of “the labyrinth principle”. Hunter

---

661 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 582.
662 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 582.
663 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 582.
argues that a small area can, in effect, break out of its spatial boundaries by incorporating labyrinthine formations within formations, allowing the Spongiatosta Palazzo to become a “self-repeating microcosm.” The Principessa herself seems to occupy a strange position not only in time but in space as well:

There might in fact be more than one of the Princess—she seemed to be everywhere, and now and then Dally could swear her appearances were multiple and not consecutive [...] These strange manipulations of time and space serve as an introduction to Pynchon’s next theme, in which he examines the Futurist movement, emerging in Italy at about the same time as this section is set. The concept of the Principessa appearing in ‘multiple’ serves as an allusion to the concept of simultaneity, an idea crucial to the Futurists, and derived from the work of Henri Bergson, one of the pre-eminent thinkers of this time. But as the Venetian section of Against the Day draws to a close, both Hunter and Dally find themselves struck by the strange way that time operates in Venice, and are seeking answers to these problems.

**Andrea Tancredi, Anarchist Futurist**

Pynchon’s conclusion to the Venetian section of Against the Day sees the incorporation of a character not previously encountered in the novel. Andrea Tancredi is an anarchist and artist. Pynchon describes the character in exacting detail:

His name was Andrea Tancredi. Hunter knew him, had run into him around town at the fringes of Anarchist gatherings, in cafés at exhibitions of experimental painting. After having been to Paris and seen the works of Seurat and Signac, Tancredi had converted to Divisionism. He sympathized with Marinetti and those around him who were beginning to describe themselves as ‘Futurists,’ but failed to share their attraction to the varieties of American brutalism.
In this introduction, Pynchon is at pains to establish the exact aesthetic lineage of Tancredi, suggesting the importance of the artistic movements he addresses to the Venetian section as a whole. Pynchon first establishes the French avant-garde, post-Impressionist, influence on Tancredi, stating his specific painting style as divisionism, otherwise known as pointillism (see Fig. 8, Seurat’s Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, perhaps the most famous example of divisionism). Pynchon then establishes Tancredi as participating in the Futurist movement, established by Filippo Marinetti in Italy in 1909. The final artistic reference, to ‘American brutalism’, refers to the Futurist movement in architecture and urban design, which called for extensive urban development, generally focused on high towers and urban consolidation, and Tancredi’s rejection of this. In this sense, Tancredi’s aesthetic that Pynchon creates is focused solely on the visual arts, and seems to leave aside some of the fascistic social policy that was an undoubted part of the Futurist movement.

Figure 8 Seurat, Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte

668 See, Martin, Futurism, pp. 15-16.
The Futurist movement was founded by Filippo Marinetti in 1909 with the publication, in *La Figaro*, of a manifesto entitled ‘The Founding and the Manifesto of Futurism’, referred to from here on as ‘The Manifesto of Futurism’. ‘The Manifesto of Futurism’ sets out Marinetti’s idiosyncratic artistic approach, in which previous artistic movements are set aside in favour of a new movement of the moment. This movement prescribed art as a radical process, and a process which sought to represent human experience in a way that had not been attempted before. Marinetti combined ceaseless modernity, with an aestheticisation of violence and war, to seek to “free this nation [Italy] from its fetid cancer of professors, archaeologists, tour guides and antiquarians.”

In Marinetti’s description of the targets of his movement, we can see the applicability of this movement to Venice in *Against the Day*, a city that, as Pynchon reinforces a number of times, is beholden to the tourist.

Violence is central to the Futurist movement. From the opening paragraphs of ‘The Manifesto of Futurism’, Marinetti makes the violent focus of his movement clear.

Marinetti first argues for the destruction of mythology. He writes:

‘At last mythology and the mystical ideal have been superseded. We are about to witness the birth of the Centaur, and soon we shall see the first Angels fly! . . . We have to shake the doors of life to test their hinges and bolts! . . . Let’s leave! Look! There, on the earth, the earliest dawn! Nothing can match the splendor of the sun’s red sword, skirmishing for the first time with our thousand-year-old shadows.’

Much of Marinetti’s manifesto is made up of contradiction—so just as Futurism calls for the destruction of the ‘mystical ideal’, Marinetti also seems to conjure up a new

---

669 Marinetti, F., ‘The Founding and the Manifesto of Futurism’, in Rainey, L., et al. (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009 [1909], p. 52. Note also that Marinetti employs stylised ellipses in the same fashion as Pynchon. All original ellipses have been quoted as in the original. As throughout this text, authorial omissions when quoting from ‘The Manifesto of Futurism’ are indicated by an ellipsis in square brackets […].

670 See Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p. 582.

mythology—one that is, intriguingly, reliant on Dante’s *Commedia*. Futurism, however, “[does] not have an ideal Beloved who raised her sublime form all the way to the clouds” as Dante does, for Futurism is an almost entirely masculine movement.672

Aside from violence, the dominant concept in ‘The Manifesto of Futurism’ is the analysis of the world through time, and its emerging cognate, speed. Point four of Marinetti’s manifesto establishes the dominant concern for the Futurists:

4. We affirm that the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car with a hood that glistens with large pipes resembling a serpent with explosive breath . . . a roaring automobile that rides on grape-shot—that is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.673

Marinetti argues that technological development, embodied in the emergence of the automobile, has created the possibilities for a new aesthetic, an aesthetic that takes its cues from speed, but also from the shift in apprehension of temporality that this new development in movement engenders. Marinetti’s argument has a similar focus to the works of George Steiner and Paul Virilio that have been addressed in previous chapters (see ‘Mao II: Pre-figurations of Terrorist Temporality’ and ‘The Futurity of the 10th of September’). Marinetti’s preference for this emerging aesthetic of speed as compared to the classical aesthetic figure of *The Victory of Samothrace* also implies a theoretical focus on the temporal rather than the spatial, another idea addressed in previous chapters, and one I will return to again in reference to the Venetian section of *Against the Day*.

Marinetti re-emphasises the importance of the temporal in point eight of his manifesto—this time, however, he argues that futurism is moving beyond both the temporal and the spatial. He writes:

8. We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! . . . Why should we look back over our shoulders, when we intend to breach the mysterious doors of the impossible? Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, for we have already created velocity which is eternal and omnipresent.674

Once again speed is linked to time—however, in this iteration of the ideals of Futurism, the speed that Marinetti identifies in his movement actually destroys both time and space, rendering futurist art in the ‘absolute’. This concept, despite seeming to verge on the prosaic, actually focuses on a concept that elicited much debate in artistic and philosophical communities of the time. The concept is simultaneity, which Henri Bergson defines as: “the connecting link between […] space and duration […] the intersection of space and time.”675 Thus although Marinetti argues that time and space are destroyed in Futurism, they are actually drawn together. The concept of simultaneity is crucial both to Futurism and Against the Day, and I will return to the concept in greater depth below—it is important at this stage, however, to emphasise the importance of simultaneity to Futurism, and that Pynchon mobilises the concept of simultaneity through his inclusion and explication of Futurism.

My summary of Futurism’s tenets has emphasised the violent nature of the movement: violence to past mythologies, violence to past aesthetics, violence to time and space. The final point that Marinetti makes in ‘The Manifesto of Futurism’, and one that pervades the entire movement is of the more generalised violence of Futurism. Indeed

675 Bergson, H., Time and Free Will, p. 110.
Marinetti describes the manifesto as: “our manifesto of burning and overwhelming violence”, and a movement that is always related to fire and burning. As he observes in conclusion: “Art […] can be nothing if not violence, cruelty, and injustice.”

These final examples I have cited serve to emphasise my final observation on the Futurist movement, that the Futurists derive a certain pleasure from the violent and the painful that seems to allude to the infernal. As I noted above, Marinetti has claimed he has no Beatrice, and yet the infernal recurs again and again throughout the Futurist movement. In this sense, there is another allusive relationship between the Futurists and Pynchon’s use of the movement within his novel, and a relationship that illustrates the allusiveness of Against the Day, and the interconnectedness of the various conceptual and narrative strands.

Pynchon’s inclusion of Futurism and its cipher, Tancredi, is not effective solely in facilitating analysis of concepts such as have been discussed above. The Futurist narrative Pynchon includes here resonates appropriately with the other character’s narratives that are important to this section of the novel—the most important of these being Hunter Penhallow’s difficulties with time, which seem to come to a head here in the Venetian Section of the novel. Thus, Tancredi’s dismissive response to an aesthetically pleasing view of Venice seems to suggest the beginnings of a deeper response to both the narratives and concepts at play. Pynchon writes:

‘Look at it. Someday we’ll tear the place down, and use the rubble to fill in those canals. Take apart the churches, salvage the gold, sell off what’s left to collectors. The new religion will be public hygiene, whose temples will be waterworks and sewage-treatment plants. The deadly sins will be cholera and decadence […] All these islands will

be linked by motorways. Electricity everywhere, anyone who still wants Venetian moonlight will have to visit a museum.  

Tancredi’s prophetic tone is deceptive in the passage above, for there is a strong sense of irony submerged within Tancredi’s analysis. The reader must assume that Tancredi, as a Futurist, will always be in favour of progress, development and change. But Tancredi here exhibits a distaste for change that seems somehow at odds with his avowed aesthetics. What saves Tancredi’s rant from ineffectiveness is the fact that his comments can be broken up into two halves, the first parachronistic, and hence despairing, and the second prochronistic, and as assumed for a Futurist, far more positive. Even in this small example we can see the disjunctive temporality developed by Pynchon’s inclusion of the Futurists, and the resulting pressures both on the past and the future inherent.

Hunter’s response to Tancredi’s view of the future then develops a very productive relationship between the two. Penhallow claims that he is in Venice “for the ghosts”. Tancredi’s response is dismissive as the reader anticipates it must be, assuming that ghosts equate to memories of the past. Of course, Pynchon then reorients the reader’s perception of time, re-establishing that the mysterious war in Europe that Hunter has already participated in is in the past for him, as is his escape from New York City via some ‘futuristic’ conveyance. It is this final point that Pynchon emphasises in the narrative between Hunter and Tancredi. He writes:

Through God’s blind mercy, as he told it to Dally a few days later […] after escapes from destruction and war in places he could no longer remember clearly, he had found asylum in Venice, only to happen one day upon these visions of Tancredi’s, and recognize the futuristic vehicle which had borne him to safety from the devastated City so

---

long ago, and the subterranean counter-City it took him through, and the chill, comfortless faith in science and rationality that had kept all his fellow refugees then so steady in their flight, and his own desolate certainty of having failed in his remit, one of those mascottes who had brought only bad luck to those who trusted him, destined to end up in cheap rooms down at the ends of suburban streets, eventually indifferent to their own fates, legends of balefulness, banned from accompanying all but the most disreputable and suicidal of voyagers. But lately—was it Venice? was it Dahlia? he was beginning to feel less comfortable as one of the lost.680

Pynchon characterises Hunter as ‘lost’ both in, and because of, time. Tancredi serves as a possible saviour for Penhallow through this narrative, whilst also allowing Pynchon to unravel and analyse a series of temporal concepts that are crucial throughout the novel. Indeed in the quotation above, there seems to be an implication that the ‘futuristic vehicle’ that facilitated Hunter’s escape from New York may be a time machine of some sort—these different manipulations of time provide the impetus for much of the novel. Fundamentally, however, what attracts Hunter to Tancredi is his ‘visions’, that is, his art, and the way that Tancredi approaches temporality within his productions.

Dally is concerned by Hunter’s revelations, and seeks an explanation in Tancredi’s work. The work she examines is entitled Preliminary Studies Toward an Infernal Machine, a work encompassing the “palette of fire and explosion” echoing the violence that Marinetti calls for in ‘The Manifesto of Futurism’.681 Pynchon facilitates the reader’s own revelation, as the idea slowly dawns that what Dally is viewing are theoretical representations of a time machine. One needs strong knowledge of the text to makes these links—the last mention of a time machine is some 180 pages earlier (in a section in which Chick Counterfly and Darby Suckling encounter an Inferno-like

680 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 585.
681 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 585.
view from Zoot’s time machine). Pynchon’s previous mention of a time machine includes minor references to the infernal that confirm the link between hell and time machines within the novel. Pynchon seems to argue that to construct a time machine requires access to the infernal, and that time travel necessarily intersects with hell in some way.

Even when the link between time travel and hell is at its most obvious, Pynchon still seems to obfuscate this link. He writes:

‘He’s a sort of infernal-machine specialist,’ Hunter pointed out. But Tancredi showed a curious reluctance to speak of what the design might actually do. What chain of events could lead to the ‘effect.’

It is perhaps the fact that the central argument of this section is excised from the comment above that provides the most overwhelming evidence for the link between hell and time travel in *Against the Day*. The ‘effect’ of the machine is a manipulation of time that also allows the time traveller some form of access to the infernal. Tancredi is earnest about the seriousness of his hypothetical creation, as he explains. Pynchon writes:

‘The term “infernal” is not applied lightly or even metaphorically. One must begin by accepting Hell—by understanding that Hell is real and that there move through this tidy surface world a silent army of operatives who have sworn allegiance to it as to a beloved homeland.’

Tancredi’s comment here sheds light on the incidents throughout the novel in which Hell seems to impinge upon what is habitually called, in the novel, the Earth. One of the best examples of this is Frank Traverse’s time in Telluride. Pynchon lets the reader

---

in on the pun early, having Frank imagine a “local lunatic” warning of the perils ahead in Telluride: “‘To-Hell-you-ride! Goin’ to-Hell-you-ride! Beware, ladies and gents! Inform your conductor! Warn the engineer! ain’t too late to turn back!’”\textsuperscript{685}

Indeed, Pynchon returns again and again in the subsequent pages to the possibility of the infernal impinging on the Earth. Telluride is constantly inundated by the smell of “telluride ore, and tellurium compounds […] believed here to rise by way of long-deserted drifts and stopes, from the everyday atmosphere of Hell itself.”\textsuperscript{686} Hell is not solely earthly, however. Frank journeys to a mine called Little Hellkite, high in the mountains, in which the smell of telluride is even stronger, suggesting, especially when considering Pynchon’s distinctive enjoyment of suggestive names, that Hell may indeed populate the sky as well.\textsuperscript{687} All these observations of the incidence of Hell on Earth are of little consequence, however, without the issue of time being taken into account also. Time is manipulable throughout Frank’s stay in mining country. One incident is indicative of the shifts in temporality that abound when Hell is mentioned in \textit{Against the Day}.

Frank, caught in a barroom brawl, hunkers down away from the confrontation, and immediately encounters a sensation that seems to imply a shift in time. Others in the bar seem to hear memories from their past. For Frank, however, the temporal shift is accompanied by a spatial shift. He is moved to “some distant geography where creatures as yet unknown thrashed about, howling affrightedly, in the dark.”\textsuperscript{688} A subtle allusion, no doubt, but one that contains sufficient reference to what we imagine

\textsuperscript{685} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 281.
\textsuperscript{686} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 282.
\textsuperscript{687} See Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 297. This strange construction is discussed by Molloy in his ‘Escaping the Politics of the Irredeemable Earth’.
\textsuperscript{688} Pynchon, \textit{Against the Day}, p. 293.
as the ‘infernal’ to reinforce the link between the infernal and time travel within

*Against the Day*.

For Tancredi the ‘silent army of operatives’ are ever present but not readily identifiable to the reader. Despite the Traverse’s desire to strike at Scarsdale Vibe (and coincidentally, this is the only other time Tancredi appears in the novel), the threat from those aligned to Hell is shadowy. Pynchon, however, does set out an overarching aim for Tancredi, an aim that may well involve the ‘turning back of time’. He writes, in an exchange between Dally and Tancredi:

> ‘But what of the died-again who have gone to Hell from a condition of ordinary death, imagining that the worst has happened and that nothing could now terrify them?’
> ‘You’re talking about an explosive device, *vero*?’
> ‘Not in Venice, never. Fire here would be suicidal insanity. I would not bring fire. But I would bring hell in a small bounded space.’

Tancredi’s invocation of the ‘died-again’ points to the strange and jumbled temporality that exists, not only in the Venetian section of *Against the Day*, but throughout the novel. Tancredi’s final comment arguing that fire, the constitutive element of Dante’s *Inferno*, would not be appropriate in Venice, seems to suggest the parallels between Futurist theorisations of time and time travel and Hunter’s experience in the New York decimated by fire. Whilst fire was appropriate for New York, the reader will also recall that twice Pynchon depicts a gate near the scene of the devastation, the same gate that marks the entrance to Hell in the *Inferno*. Thus while the fiery destruction of New York is relatable to the temporal, in the Venetian section we specifically encounter an anarchist attack on time—whether time machine or explosive device, time is Tancredi’s ultimate target.

---

Tancredi’s final argument in his conversation with Dally is to make explicit the link between his infernal (time) machine, and painting, and especially the links between time travel and the Futurist movement that Pynchon is at pains to point out as crucial to the character. Fundamental to Tancredi’s artistic desire is the ability to represent different temporalities at the same time, what Henri Bergson, so crucial to Marinetti and the Futurists, termed simultaneity. Pynchon writes:

‘Some define Hell as the absence of God, and that is the least we may expect of the infernal machine—that the bourgeoisie be deprived of what most sustains them, their personal problem-solver sitting at his celestial bureau, correcting defects in the everyday world below. . . . But the finite space would rapidly expand. To reveal the Future, we must get around the inertia of paint. Paint wishes to remain as it is. We desire transformation. So this is not so much a painting as a dialectical argument.’

The reader has the final argument of the Futurists revealed to them. That is, that Tancredi believes that his painting, and the Futurist movement, can perform some form of prophecy, some form of time travel in which the future is revealed through the work of art. For Tancredi, this work of art seems to be a theoretical proposal for a time machine—and a time machine that exists, as we know that Hunter was aboard this time machine in his escape from the fiery devastation of New York earlier in the novel. In this way, Tancredi’s argument for the dynamism of painting transfers also to any artistic practice, and suggests that Pynchon sees, in this novel, the ability to encapsulate many different temporalities, as has been discussed in this chapter and the previous.

**Simultaneity and Dynamism: The Futurists and Bergson**

---

690 Pynchon, Against the Day, p. 586.
The two dominating concepts of the Futurists were those of dynamism and simultaneity, both of which are derived, in part, from the work of Henri Bergson. These two concepts define the Futurist aesthetic and identify the Futurist movement as unique in attempting to incorporate these concepts into what was primarily a visual medium. Simultaneity in the Futurist aesthetic involves the incorporation of different states of mind or different states of time, or both, within the work of art. The interpenetration of different states of mind or time suggests the possibility of representing multiple experiences in the one static work of art. The first Futurist art exhibition, presented in Paris in 1912, was accompanied by a catalogue entitled ‘The Exhibitors to the Public’—in this text the authors, Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo and Gino Severini begin the establishment of an artistic manifestation of Futurism and specifically link their work to simultaneity. The collective writes:

In painting a person on a balcony, seen from inside the room, we do not limit the scene to what the square frame of the window renders visible; but we try to render the sum total of visual sensations which the person on the balcony has experienced; the sun-bathed throng in the street, the double row of houses which stretch to right and left, the beflowered balconies, etc. This implies the simultaneousness of the ambient, and therefore, the dislocation and dismemberment of objects, the scattering and fusion of details, freed from accepted logic, and independent from one another.691

The work that is referred to is Boccioni’s 1911 painting, *The Street Enters the House* (see Fig. 9). Boccioni was primarily responsible for the drafting of the catalogue, and as such, we encounter the aesthetic ideal of the artist, applied to his own work of art.

As we can see in *The Street Enters the House*, Boccioni’s painting does not accept the logic of the real world, but rather attempts to convey another logic, the logic of sensation. It is in this sense that the Futurists aspire to represent simultaneity, for they can claim a more authentic representation of experience, freed from the strictures of conventional mimesis. Boccioni represents the interpenetration of different ideas and different experiences into the one representation of thought and experience.

![Figure 9 Boccioni, The Street Enters the House](image)

The Futurists interest in simultaneity is reinforced by their interest in dynamism. As with simultaneity, dynamism was a concept addressed by Bergson. In the Futurist aesthetic, however, dynamism is addressed without the metaphysical overtones that occupy much of Bergson’s analysis of the concept. Dynamism, for the Futurists, represented the acknowledgment of the interconnectedness of actions and of time. Movement could not be thought of as a series of discrete motions (cf. my discussion

---

693 Mendilow proposes a similar concept in regard to the novel without, as far as I can ascertain, any knowledge of the Futurists. See Mendilow, A., *Time and the Novel*, Peter Nevill, London, 1952.
of Zeno’s paradox in ‘The Duration of Thomas Pynchon’s Hell’ and also in ‘Beckett’s Proust and Falling Man’, pp. 102-105, 189-192) but was rather a process, and one which whilst broken down into parts through the human consideration of time, was nonetheless entire and whole in itself. The same group as that which presented the first Futurist exhibition in Paris, and the same group that presented their Catalogue cited above, addressed their interest and definition of dynamism in their ‘Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto’. In it they write:

Indeed, all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. A profile is never motionless before our eyes, but it constantly appears and disappears. On account of the persistency of an image upon the retina, moving objects constantly multiply themselves; their form changes like rapid vibrations, in their mad career. Thus a running horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movements are triangular.694

The Futurist conception of dynamism is portrayed in Giacomo Balla’s Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash (see Fig. 10). In Balla’s work, we can see that not only is movement acknowledged as dynamic rather than discrete, but that the artistic portrayal of the series of movements which make up the dog’s walk also incorporates the concept of simultaneity—in this work, the representation of a series of discrete moments of time, combined together and represented in the blur of the dog’s legs.

For Andrea Tancredi it is exactly the conceptualisation of the simultaneity of time that is crucial for his work. It is through this concept, at the heart of the Futurist project and their appreciation of Henri Bergson’s work, that Pynchon is reconceptualising and reconsidering the Futurist movement. Consider Tancredi’s statement here to Dally on the importance of time to his art:

‘Of course it’s to do with Time […] everything that we imagine is real, living and still, thought and hallucinated, is all on the way from being one thing to being another, from past to Future, the challenge to us is to show as much of the passage as we can, given the damnable stillness of paint.’

Tancredi’s analysis of time challenges the accepted linearity of temporality, and proposes an understanding of time similar to that proposed by Hastings Throyle earlier in *Against the Day*, who contrasts linear time with Shamanist time, which is “spread out not in a single dimension but over many, which all exist in a single, timeless instant.”* Tancredi attempts to present in his art a synthesis of dynamism and simultaneity, illustrating his awareness of the temporality of the world. He points out that his chosen artistic medium is generally considered unsuitable for this project, but this is the challenge that motivated the Futurist painters referred to above. And indeed, it is the same project that Pynchon pursues throughout *Against the Day*, establishing the possibility of portraying the simultaneity of different temporalities, and then pursuing this throughout the novel as consistent artistic practice.

As we have seen, Tancredi’s aesthetic, detailed above, owes much to Henri Bergson’s revolutionary theorisation of human experience. It appears as if Pynchon made use of Bergson’s *Time and Free Will*, first published in 1913, in preparing the Venetian section of *Against the Day*. Bergson’s statements on simultaneity especially seem to be a strong influence on the temporal aesthetic Pynchon’s Futurist avows. Bergson writes:

> When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movements of the hand which corresponds to the oscillations of the pendulum, I do not measure duration, as seems to be thought; I merely count

---

This statement reaffirms the two primary claims that Tancredi makes: the first, that the mental and physical process of his art is specifically to aggregate a series of moments, of experiences—this is what Tancredi calls the ‘passage […] of past to Future’.

Secondly, Bergson reaffirms what Tancredi claims, but in a more objective way—Tancredi’s struggle against the ‘damnable stillness of paint’ is the same issue that Bergson addresses when positing that outside the consciousness that establishes the links between simultaneities time cannot be linked together. Each moment is discrete and does not relate to the next. Futurism seeks not to refute this point, but rather to attempt to represent the opposite of that possibility, that is, the subjective experience of the passage of time, including, it seems, the representation of the future.

Figure 10 Balla, Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash

Tancredi comments again on his art, addressing the conceptualisation of his practice:

---

‘This is why […] the energies of motion, the grammatical tyrannies of becoming, in divisionismo we discover how to break them apart into their component frequencies . . . we define a smallest picture element, a dot of color which becomes the basic unit of reality. . . .’

In this sense, Tancredi’s use of divisionism, that is, the layering of dots to build up colour and image as seen in Seurat (referred to by Pynchon earlier in this section, see Fig. 8), serves as an analogy to Bergson’s example of the watched second hand, or the watched pendulum. Each dot, in Tancredi’s Futurism, serves not only as colour and image, but also as the representation of sensation, of time and experience. Thus a painting is not only constructed to convey visual experience but thought as well. In constructing Tancredi’s artistic practice in this way Pynchon again seems to call on Bergson, who writes:

[…] there is neither duration nor even succession in space […] each of the so-called successive states of the external world exists alone; their multiplicity is real only for a consciousness that can first retain them and then set them side by side by externalising them in relation to one another.

Tancredi’s divisionism is, then, extremely complicated. It incorporates the interpenetration of multiple times and sensations into the one work, the ultimate aim of Futurism. Pynchon, however, adds an additional level of complexity by incorporating the post-Impressionist technique of divisionism, an allusion to the similar level of complexity extant in Against the Day.

The final link, of course, is back to the experiences of Hunter, caught in a temporal limbo between multiple temporalities: possibly having been rescued from disaster in

---

698 Pynchon, Against the Day, pp. 586-587.
699 Bergson, Time and Free Will, pp. 120-121.
New York by a time machine that now exists in the theoretical painting of Tancredi the anarchist Futurist. Bergson again lays light on the matter:

If it retains them [the successive states of the external world], it is because these distinct states of the external world give rise to states of consciousness which permeate one another, imperceptibly organize themselves into a whole, and bind the past to the present by the very process of connexion. If it externalises them in relation to one another […] it perceives them under the form of a discrete multiplicity, which amounts to setting them out in line, in the space in which each of them existed separately. The space employed for this purpose is just that which is called homogenous time. 700

These are the conditions to which Hunter’s life is subject. An awareness of his own temporal dislocation, and varied experiences in which the different temporalities of his life seem to be strung out as a line before and after him. In Tancredi’s work, however, time, presented through simultaneity, regains some of its coherence, and Tancredi’s work approaches the experience of dislocation and relation that Hunter’s life consists of. Finally, Bergson proposes a term that I believe fits well with Against the Day as a whole, ‘homogenous time’. In this sense, Against the Day can be seen as Pynchon’s rejection of simplistic conceptualisations of time, whether narrative or theoretical time. Instead what he proposes is a radical recasting of temporality so that in his novel he can present different temporalities inhabiting each other, and strung out in Bergson’s analogical line. Against the Day adopts the theorisations of the Futurists and Bergson to present a unique theorisation of time, and one that reacts to the concern with temporality evident after the 9/11 attacks.

**Conclusion**

What we have seen in the last two chapters is two different approaches in which it becomes possible to access the complexity of Pynchon’s reconceptualisation of time.

---

700 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 121.
Pynchon refers to a number of different concepts which all seek, at their base, to fundamentally critique the conventional, linear representation of time. In its place, the reader is left with a synthesis, a suspicious view of the way the world works. *Against the Day* is critically concerned with how events contribute to the unfolding of the future—the future, of course, moving very quickly to become the past, to become history. Considering my argument that the September 11, 2001 attacks are the motivating event for the production of this novel, it is entirely logical that Pynchon is attempting to understand the ways in which time relates to these concepts. In this chapter, we have seen Pynchon’s consistent focus on parachronistic influences—what we must always keep in mind is that he is not only looking backwards despite his recourse to the past, and this is reinforced by his utilisation of the Futurist movement, and reveals the dual temporal pressures that encapsulate this novel.
Inherent Vice and the Chronotope

Thomas Pynchon’s 2009 novel Inherent Vice, published only three years after Against the Day, provides us with a second example of the shift that occurred in Pynchon’s writing after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Inherent Vice appears to be closely related to Pynchon’s second novel, The Crying of Lot 49, not only in its subject matter (the west coast of the United States, shadowy organisations perpetrating strange and not always logical plots) but also because of the allusions to the detective novel genre that Pynchon emphasises throughout the novel. In this chapter I will argue that alongside the generic similarities to The Crying of Lot 49, Inherent Vice constitutes the continuation of a project begun with Against the Day, a project focused on temporality and an investigation of how time can be used within the novel, and how time is perceived in the world. Inherent Vice emphasises Pynchon’s continued interest in moments of temporal dislocation, when a character (or characters) suddenly find themselves apprehending time in a way that differs from conventional representations of time. Embodied in these experiences is Pynchon’s continued reconsideration of time in the novel, and a further development of the representation of time as non-linear and contingent. After illustrating that time is non-conventional within Inherent Vice, I will examine two of the dominant motifs within the novel: Pynchon’s depiction of the emerging internet, and what he terms ‘Doper’s Memory’, to illustrate how time operates within Inherent Vice. I will utilise Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope to argue that these two motifs fundamentally influence the progress of the narrative and comment upon the way that temporality is understood and presented in the novel. Both the ‘emerging internet’ and the Doper’s

Memory constitute chronotopes that illustrate both the altered nature of time after the September 11 attacks, and the resultant change in the representation of time that Pynchon pursues.

**Temporal Oddities**

From the opening page of *Inherent Vice* Pynchon introduces a similar understanding of temporality to that which is present in *Against the Day*. As Doc Sportello encounters Shasta Fey, his one time squeeze and often-desired love interest of the novel for the first time in a year, Pynchon orients the following narrative as completely reliant on Doc’s memory. Doc’s interaction with Shasta always has one eye on the past; from the first sentence: “She came along the alley and up the back steps the way she always used to” with Shasta “looking just like she swore she’d never look” the events occur in the present, but Doc’s mediation of these events refers them back to his memories of the past. Much of this process is contingent on the fact that Doc himself narrates parts of the novel from some other position in time, as a third person narrator. The reader understands that although the narration is reliant on Doc’s memory of events (both in the present and in the past) these memories are sometimes faulty—Doc’s difficulty with his memory means that time itself is difficult to trust within the novel. The uncertainty created by the novel’s reliance on Doc’s memory is emphasised by Shasta’s first words, responding to Doc’s initial confusion (both literal and temporal), when she states that he is in fact not hallucinating, and that she is indeed present in Doc’s world again. Pynchon writes:

> ‘That you, Shasta?’
> ‘Thinks he’s hallucinating.’
> ‘Just the new package I guess.’

---

It is as if Doc still occupies an uncertain position in the past, returning briefly to his memories of his desire for Shasta, and her observations of his life and living arrangements, described by Pynchon as “everything that hadn’t changed”. In these orienting paragraphs, Pynchon conceives the present and the past bleeding into each other, as the uncertainty of time within the novel manifests itself.

This uncertainty continues unimpeded throughout the novel, culminating in an image of harmony as the novel concludes, with Doc driving through the daily fog, suddenly finding himself in a community of motorists all banded together by their need to be guided by the lights of the car in front of them. Time is still uncertain here, with Pynchon stating that “[t]he third dimension grew less and less reliable” as if, as the novel concludes, the only certainties are the first two dimensions. The novel concludes with Doc driving, effectively for eternity:

[...] maybe he’d have to just keep driving, down past Long Beach, down through Orange County, and San Diego, and across a border where nobody could tell anymore in the fog who was Mexican, who was Anglo, who was anybody. Then again, he might run out of gas before that happened, and have to leave the caravan, and pull over on the shoulder, and wait.

The final image constitutes the resolution of time, and Doc’s memory, within *Inherent Vice*. Doc has been returned to the present, freed from his memory impinging upon his day-to-day experience. Doc is no longer driven to comprehend the movement of time, allowed finally to wait “[f]or whatever would happen. For a forgotten joint to materialize in his pocket.” Doc’s cannabis use is absolutely crucial to Pynchon’s

---

705 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 4.
construction of temporality in the novel, and will be examined below in relation to the
distortion of Doc’s memory. At this stage, however, the waiting is crucial—Doc is no
longer searching for certainty in time, and is now able to process whatever occurs in
the future.

Throughout the majority of the novel, however, Doc cannot avoid his memory and his
memories, a fate amplified by the faulty nature of his memory. Aside from Doc’s
habitual cannabis use, he also dabbles in the hallucinogenics of the time, experiencing
a series of trips that seem to compound within each other, his memory of previous
trips colouring his latest experience. One trip Doc experiences is proposed by Vehi
and Sortilège, a couple who encourage and facilitate Doc’s experimentation. Critically,
Sortilège is not only a purveyor of hallucinogenics but also a fortune teller, able to see
into the future, and according to Doc: “[s]he had never been wrong that [he] knew
about.”709 This trip, occurring during the middle stages of the novel, allows Pynchon
to ruminate on the twin focuses of memory and time. This trip is immediately referred
back to Doc’s previous experiences on LSD and his memories of these. Pynchon
writes: “At least it wasn’t quite as cosmic as the last trip this acid enthusiast has acted
as travel agent for.”710 With Doc operating as narrator as well as central character, his
memories of past trips merge with the visceral experience he is undertaking at the
present point in time—his memory colours his experiences, altering his apprehension
of what is fundamentally a substance that facilitates temporal dislocation. Pynchon’s
description of the concluding moments of Doc’s trip illustrates the conjunction of
memory and time. Pynchon writes:

---

709 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 11.
710 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 108.
Doc was left at this negligible altitude above the Pacific to find his way out of a vortex of corroded history, to evade somehow a future that seemed dark whichever way he turned. . . .

Doc’s trip functions in two ways, referring him back to the past because of his reliance on memory, and especially the dominance of his previous memories of LSD trips that have seemed to cut him off from time. Contiguous with this is an emphasis on the future, Doc’s vision including seeing Shasta, currently incommunicado and presumed kidnapped. This is encapsulated in the excerpt above in which history, that is the past, that which has already occurred, seems to desire to keep hold of Doc, the irony being that the present that Doc wishes to emerge back into, and the future he will encounter, are just as intimidating as his negative memories of the past.

In the final stages of the novel, the confused plots that Doc has attempted to uncover appear to be explained, or at least to approach resolution. Shadowy figures provide Doc with photographs that appear to explain what occurred in Doc’s first loss of consciousness (a result of Doc’s ‘Dopers Memory’, explored further below). Doc’s analysis of these photographs allows Pynchon to ruminate again on how we understand time and its operation within *Inherent Vice*. He writes:

> It was as if whatever had happened had reached some kind of limit. It was like finding the gateway to the past unguarded, unforbidden because it didn’t have to be. Built into the act of return finally was this glittering mosaic of doubt. Something like what Sauncho’s colleagues in marine insurance liked to call inherent vice.

Inherent vice is defined later as the events that are considered inevitable and thus are not covered by insurance. In this sense, the rejuvenation of the past, and of memory detailed above, reflects upon the title of the novel. Doc’s memory, and memory in

---

711 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 110.
712 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 351. Tom LeClair’s short review focuses on this phrase and provides a slightly different interpretation. See LeClair, ‘For a Good Time, Read Tom’, p. 25.
713 See Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 351.
general, is inevitably fallible—as the novel concludes and the strange plots extant within the text are resolved, time itself is reconsidered again. Finally, however, the past is always left in doubt because of the untrustworthiness of memory. Thus, Pynchon concludes with memory as inherently untrustworthy—but incorporated into this is the fact that time itself is also untrustworthy. In the following sections, I will analyse two motifs of the novel, the emerging internet, and cannabis as examples of time manifesting itself through parachronistic and prochronistic references. What is at stake is both time as it is perceived within *Inherent Vice*, but also a reconsideration of temporality as it functions within the novel in general.

**The Internet**

Mikhail Bakhtin’s 1938 essay ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics’ (referred to from here as ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope’) sets out to survey classical literature to understand the development of the novel and its modern manifestations through the novel’s treatment of time. Bakhtin formulates the concept of the chronotope as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.”

Although the concept appears to unite the temporal and the spatial on the same level, reinforced by Bakhtin’s construction of ‘chronotope’ which, he states, is “literally, ‘time space’”, the chronotope, and Bakhtin’s analysis of the development of the novel, privileges the consideration and representation of time over space, both in modern and classical modes. Indeed, Bakhtin observes that “literature’s primary mode of representation is temporal.”

---

714 Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’, p. 84.
715 Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’, p. 84.
‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope’ sets out an understanding of time within the novel that identifies important concepts and illustrates that it is these recurring motifs that are crucial to understanding the way in which time is engaged with by a specific author. Associated with this is Bakhtin’s acknowledgment that structural changes to society engender identifiable changes in the representation of time in the novel. This is most effectively identified in his brief analysis of Romantic poetry and the change in the representation of temporality identified in this movement, which he ties to the rapidly changing nature of society due to the Industrial Revolution.  

Both the rapid technological developments in Western society during the 1960s and the changes identifiable after the September 11 attacks in 2001 provide similar impetus for changes in the representation of time within the novel. Thus, present within *Inherent Vice* is a doubled focus on the temporal, incorporating the transformations inherent in the temporal setting of the novel, and the transformations in time in the period the novel was written.  

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the most appreciable change to society has been the development of what we now know as the internet. It is no surprise then that Pynchon, in *Inherent Vice*, includes the recurring motif of what he calls the “ARPAnet” a primitive internet-type network.  

Pynchon’s ARPAnet is an allusion to the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) operated by the United States Government and partner universities during the 1960s and 70s, and one of the

---

717 See Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’, p. 228. We should also note the similarity of George Steiner’s observations on the same period, cf. Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, pp. 18–20.  
718 A number of critics have paired Pynchon and Bakhtin together, although none have done so, as far as I am aware, in relation to *Inherent Vice*. See Mendelson, ‘Encyclopedic Narrative’, p. 1274, and Kharupertian, T., *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon*, Associated University Presses, Cranbury, 1990, pp. 15, 82-84.  
719 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 53.
formative networks that contributed to the development of the internet as it exists today.

Pynchon develops a complex representation of time through his construction of the ARPAnet motif. As discussed above, Pynchon’s ARPAnet refers to a real-life network that existed during the period in which Inherent Vice is set. And yet, Pynchon is not simply making reference to a historical fact. At the same time, the reader discovers that there is an element of prochronism in Pynchon’s reference to a proto-internet, with the network described in terms that present it as a system from the future, rather than from the present. Pynchon details Doc’s conversation with his Aunt, Reet, who prophesises the emergence of the internet in the future:

‘Someday,’ she prophesised, ‘there will be computers for all of this, all you’ll have to do’s type in what you’re looking for, or even better just talk it in—like that HAL in 2001: A Space Odyssey?—and it’ll be right back at you with more information than you’d ever want to know […]’

So despite the prochronistic ‘prophecy’ that Reet delivers, the reader does not simply interpret Pynchon’s ARPAnet as prochronistic. Because the novel is set in the 1960s, and the ARPANET is identifiable in this time period, there is also a parachronistic element to Pynchon’s use of the motif. The irony with which the motif can be interpreted as both prochronistic and parachronistic is exemplified by the parallel reference in Reet’s ‘prophecy’ to Kubrick’s 1968 film, itself an example of the power of technological prophecy in the period Pynchon represents within this novel.

Aside from the prochronistic and parachronistic elements that Pynchon incorporates within discussion of his proto-internet, there is also a consistent focus on the way that

720 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, pp. 6-7.
the ARPAnet manipulates time, and it is these comments that solidify and exemplify the function of the ‘proto-internet chronotope’ within *Inherent Vice*. Doc’s associate, Fritz, owns a computer that is connected into this primitive internet, and aside from the information that Fritz can glean for Doc from the various unsecured police computers connected to the network, the main attraction of the ARPAnet is its strange manipulations of time. Pynchon writes, detailing a conversation between Doc and Fritz:

‘[…] any excuse to feel like I’m surfin the wave of the future here, just got this new hire in, name of Sparky, has to call his mom if he’s gonna be late for supper, only guess what—we’re *his* trainees! he gets on this ARPAnet trip, and I swear it’s like acid, a whole ’nother strange world—time, space, all that shit.’

‘So when they gonna make it illegal, Fritz?’

‘What. Why would they do that?’

‘Remember how they outlawed acid soon as they found out it was a channel to somethin they didn’t want us to see? Why should information be any different?’

The emerging internet is characterised by two things: firstly, its similarity to hallucinogens, and secondly, the timeless (and spaceless) nature of the space that is created through this new mode of communication (and new mode of thought as well). Indeed the similarities to Doc’s trips discussed above are important; the proto-internet facilitates connections not only to the future, but to the past as well. Significantly, however, as opposed to Doc’s LSD trips, the internet holds no relationship to memory—the information available through this system is all new, and thus bears no relationship to the characters shared experiences of the past.

The effectiveness of the ARPAnet grows as the narrative develops, and finally reaches the point where it is the network itself that provides prophetic information, rather than

---

those familiar with the concept to be prophesising its emergence. Fritz, monitoring the
Los Angeles airport computer system, and in turn monitored by the FBI, discovers the
re-emergence of Shasta Fey before she has made contact with Doc. The prophetic
quality of the ARPAnet is not that it actually accesses the future, but rather that it
facilitates the quickening movement of information, which in turn, then drives the
speeding up of time itself (Doc of course is often left behind). The irony of this all
is, that the ARPAnet takes up time, as Fritz says: “This ARPAnet trip is eating up my
time”.

Pynchon envisages the emerging internet in the same way as he does hallucination.
That is, despite the proto-internet existing in the linear time of the novel (hence Fritz’s
comment that it is taking up his time) the most important temporality of the internet is
sited within the concept, in the boundless temporality of this new form of information
exchange. In this space normal conceptions of time are insufficient and both the past,
and the future, impinge upon the present. Thus, Pynchon’s chronotope of the emerging
internet presents time within the novel as multi-dimensional rather than linear—past,
present, and future exist all on one plane, rather than as different sections of a
controlling linear conception of time. It is in this sense that temporal distinctions
collapse, and with it the possibility of memory. It is the collapse of memory that
illustrates the similarity between the motif of the emerging internet and the major
chronotope of Inherent Vice, the chronotope of the Doper’s Memory.

Doper’s Memory

It’s just some local folks trippin,

---

723 We should also note the similarities contained in the concept of the quickening of time with George
Steiner’s work as discussed in ‘Mao II: Pre-figurations of Terrorist Temporality’, pp. 25-28, and with
Paul Virilio’s work as discussed in ‘The Futurity of the 10th of September’, pp. 74-78.
724 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 258.
Doc Sportello’s prodigious use of cannabis is the dominant image of *Inherent Vice*. From the very earliest pages of the novel and all the way to the conclusion, Doc’s marijuana vice influences not only the narrative of the novel, but the way in which time is conceptualised within the text as well. The genre of *Inherent Vice* is crucial to understanding the significance of the chronotope of the Doper’s Memory. The novel can be understood (at least partially) as an appropriation of the conventional “hard-boiled dick” genre. As such, the novel operates under a strict set of assumptions, one of the most important being that no matter how obvious elements of the solution to the mystery at the heart of the novel appear, the solution as a whole is not able to be conceived by the reader until the final pages of the novel. This assumption is altered, however, by the fact that Doc, the supposed ‘hard-boiled dick’, narrates parts of the novel, which means that the reader has access to the same mental processes as the character generically required to solve the mystery by the conclusion of the novel. Pynchon develops these ideas further, playing with the assurance of reality and the generic assumptions implicit in the crime fiction genre. Pynchon details a conversation between Fritz and Doc, after they have shared a joint together:

‘Yeah, PIs should really stay away from drugs, all ’em alternate universes just make the job that much more complicated.’
‘But what about Sherlock Holmes, he did coke all the time, man, it helped him solve cases.’
‘Yeah but he . . . was not real?’
‘What. Sherlock Holmes was—’
‘He’s a made-up character in a bunch of stories, Doc.’

---

726 Of course, at least anecdotally, cannabis is (or was) also Pynchon’s biggest vice. See Gordon, A., ‘Smoking Dope with Thomas Pynchon’, in Charters, A., (ed.), *The Portable Sixties Reader*, Penguin, New York, 2003, pp. 228-238.
727 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 33.
‘Wh— Naw. No, he’s real. He lives at this real address in London. Well, maybe not anymore, it was years ago, he has to be dead by now.’

Doc Sportello is, in opposition to the generic archetype, defined not by his assurance that he will solve the mystery, but is rather characterised by his confusion at the shadowy forces, and defined by his inability to come to a coherent explanation for the way the plot plays out. It is ultimately Doc’s drug use, and especially his habitual cannabis smoking, that places Pynchon’s detective character outside conventional archetypes of the private eye. Doc’s Doper’s Memory illustrates that once the linearity of time is disturbed within Pynchon’s appropriation of the crime fiction archetype, all other generic assumptions are modified as well.

Pynchon meddles further with the generic assumptions at play by placing Doc himself at the centre of the narrative, not solely in defence of his love interest, but as a suspect as well. From the opening pages of the text, it is Doc’s inability to explain his relationship to the events taking place that defines his participation in the narrative. From the beginning of the novel, and the first incident involving Doc that precipitates the narrative, gaps in time, and indeed the lack of an explanation for the plots taking place, are attributed to Doc’s perpetual state of being stoned. As a shootout occurs at the Chick Planet ‘massage parlour’, Doc is rendered unconscious, with the narrator stating: “Maybe it was all the exotic sensory input that caused Doc about then to swoon abruptly and lose an unknown amount of his day.”

The fact that Doc cannot account for his unconsciousness during the shootout that occurs momentarily afterwards colours the majority of the novel, and the motif of Doc losing contact with the world is repeated throughout. Sportello’s return to consciousness is precipitated by

---

728 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 96.
729 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 22.
Bigfoot Bjornsen, the LAPD detective with whom Doc has a long and colourful history. Bigfoot observes to Doc: “‘you have finally managed to stumble into something too real to hallucinate your worthless hippie ass out of.’” Doc’s lack of explanation for his sudden fall into unconsciousness, and his inability to describe what occurred during the period when he was unconscious is immediately linked to the failures of Doc’s memory. Pynchon writes, detailing Doc’s flailing attempts at explanation:

‘Bigfoot, I don’t know what happened. Last I recall I was in that massage parlor over there? Asian chick named Jade? and her Anglo friend Bambi?’

‘Wishful figments of a brain pickled in cannabis fumes, no doubt,’ theorized Detective Bjornsen.

‘But, like, I didn’t do it? Whatever it is?’

Doc’s confusion is unsurprising. As Bigfoot makes clear, and Doc affirms with his stoned response, the root cause is what Pynchon later identifies as “Doper’s Memory”, an affliction which causes descent into unconsciousness and sleep, and the consequent confusion at missing periods of time, indeed, of not participating in large swathes of time within the novel.

Pynchon’s construction of Doper’s Memory is intimately related to Doc’s perception of time throughout the novel. Despite the difficulties with memory that Doc experiences throughout Inherent Vice, Doper’s memory is not only a curse. Coy Harlingen, a character initially thought to have died, who the reader later discovers has merely escaped from his previous life—his death faked—suggests that Doper’s Memory has its benefits, whilst discussing his colleagues from surf band, The Boards:

730 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 22.
731 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 23.
732 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 281.
“‘they’re suffering, or do I mean blessed, with heavy Doper’s Memory.’” Indeed, despite the negative associations that we may assume, Pynchon’s approach to the Doper’s Memory chronotope identifies as much virtue as vice within the concept.

Later in the novel, in Doc’s pursuit of Coy, he comes to spend some time in the communal house of The Boards. At one stage he encounters a group of band members and various hangers-on, enraptured by the temporal oddities of a soap opera known as *Dark Shadows*. Pynchon writes:

> This was around the point in the Collins family saga when the storyline had begun to get heavily into something called ‘parallel time,’ which was confounding the viewing audience nationwide, even those who remained with their wits about them, although many dopers found no problems at all in following it. It seemed basically to mean that the same actors were playing two different roles, but if you’d gotten absorbed enough, you tended to forget that these people were actors.

Pynchon enunciates here a certainty in the manipulation of time that seems analogous to Bakhtin’s concept of the possibility of drunken creativity. Although the intoxicant is different, the same principles apply, in which the ability to understand, and to create meaning from complex ideas is made possible by the doper’s habit. There is, at the same time, another level of commentary that exists within the excerpt quoted above. Coy Harlingen seems to occupy this creative parallel time, the reformed heroin addict escaping from his debilitating addiction, and ‘acting’ as a number of different characters at the same time and throughout the novel. Coy’s creativity is facilitated by his recourse to cannabis and his association with The Boards, which allows him to escape from the clutches of the shadowy forces gathered around him.

---

733 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 86.
734 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 128.
Perhaps the most specific manipulation of time that occurs due to Doc’s cannabis use is a strange incident involving the then President, Richard Nixon. Doc has just observed the Golden Fang, one of the shadowy organisations that are central to the narrative, importing counterfeited twenty dollar notes, printed with Nixon’s face, rather than Andrew Jackson’s. Doc wakes up at Penny, his current girlfriend’s place, and his attention is immediately caught by the television, on which Nixon is addressing a meeting, the reader subsequently discovers, of Vigilant California, another of *Inherent Vice*’s shadowy organisations. Doc is confounded because the pictures of Nixon on the counterfeit twenty dollar bills are exactly the same as the image that he can see on the television screen at that exact moment. Pynchon writes: “The two Nixons looked *just like photos* of each other!” Doc’s confusion is obvious, as the counterfeit bills require the events he is watching on the television to be from the past (although they are definitely live), or some other temporally disjunctive alternative. As Pynchon switches the narration into free indirect discourse, the reader is instructed as to the implicit temporal oddities that are occurring. Pynchon writes:

> ‘Let’s see,’ Doc inhaled and considered. This same Nixonface here, live on the screen, had somehow *already* been put into circulation, months ago, on millions, maybe billions, in false currency. . . . How could this be? Unless . . . sure, time travel of course . . . some CIA engraver, in some top-security workshop far away, was busy *right now* copying this image off of his own screen and then would later somehow go slip his copy into a covert *special mailbox*, which would have to be located close to a power-company substation so they could bootleg the power they needed, raising everybody else’s rates, to send information time-traveling *back into the past* […]”

Doc’s reverie is interrupted by Penny re-entering the room, attracted by the smell of the joint he has been smoking throughout. The strangeness of this situation is never fully resolved, however, the ubiquitous joint in Doc’s hand is the final explanation.

---

736 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 120. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
737 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 121. (Pynchon’s emphases).
Although the reader is never discouraged from believing that the temporal disjunction in the two images of Nixon occurring at different times is anything less than absolutely real, Doc’s explanation emphasises the creativity inherent in the doper’s viewpoint, and in the Doper’s Memory chronotope. Doc’s cannabis use allows Pynchon to emphasise Doc’s alternate understanding of time, and to propose this temporality as an alternative within the novel.

The Doper’s Memory chronotope links time and Doc’s memory, rendering them both untrustworthy. The dope chronotope is a product of its time, Pynchon’s reconsideration of an era in which the hippie community was both threatening (hence the repeated references to the Charles Manson murders and the forthcoming trial throughout738), and alluring, the romance of “brains all discombobulated with dope sex rock ’n’ roll” combined with the memory of the period that comes after it.739

Despite the romance of the doper movement, Doc’s Doper’s Memory is always an impediment to certainty within the narrative. As he becomes a target for both the LAPD, and then the FBI as well, his inability to verify, or even to account for the periods in which his memory fails, drives the occlusion of meaning within the text. Pynchon details a conversation between Doc and his girl, the Deputy DA Penny Kimball:

‘Besides, maybe you did do it, has that crossed your mind yet? Maybe you just conveniently forgot about it, the way you do so often forget things, and this peculiar reaction of yours now is a typically twisted way of confessing the act?’

‘Well, but . . . How would I forget something like that?’

‘Grass and who knows what else, Doc.’

738 See, for example, Pynchon, Inherent Vice, pp. 38, 128, 208-209.
739 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 69.
‘Hey, come on, I’m only a light smoker.’
‘Oh? How many joints a day, on average?’
‘Um . . . have to look in the log. . . .’

Pynchon approaches Doper’s Memory by emphasising the humour of an individual being able to remove himself from time, whilst emphasising the irony of the private eye, generically required to maintain control of his mind at all times, instead manifesting the completely opposite ability. Despite the irony and humour that Pynchon employs throughout the novel, there is a paranoia at the base of the Doper’s Memory chronotope. The interruption of time is an inherently concerning phenomenon, impeding, as it does, the normal flow of time not only in the narrative in question and the novel, but in the real world as well. In this sense, the chronotope of the Doper’s Memory is always referring back to the uncertainties of the 1960s and 70s which, aside from the Manson murders and the general concern as to the state of American society, is explicitly reacting to the fear of what will come to pass in the coming decades. The dope-coloured memories of the 1960s then comment explicitly on that which comes after. Indeed, the narrator observes that the passage of time from the 1960s to the 1970s engenders a change in the way concepts are understood, as Pynchon writes: “Circa 1970, ‘adult’ was no longer quite being defined as in times previous.” These changes are related to the same idea that the Doper’s Memory chronotope develops—at the end of the 1960s “a strenuous denial of the passage of time was under way.” Indeed, Inherent Vice, written in 2009, seems to argue for the 1960s as a seminal period within American culture, the moment in which a significant change in the conception and perception of time occurred.

Conclusion

740 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, pp. 69-70. (Pynchon’s emphasis).
741 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 172.
742 Pynchon, Inherent Vice, p. 128.
As the narrative threads of *Inherent Vice* are slowly resolved, and some form of conclusion is reached, Pynchon brings the focus of the novel back to time, and how time is perceived. The one character who rarely features throughout the novel, and yet can be figured as the absent central character, is Adrian Prussia, a loan shark and heroin dealer also known as ‘El Drano’, who took a part in the disappearance of Coy Harlingen. The reader is finally given some insight into his role from Puck Beaverton, a sometime associate of Prussia. Doc has been bailed up by Beaverton who, after forcing a PCP loaded joint onto Doc, proceeds to explain some of the intricacies of the plot, and how time is *always* central. Pynchon writes:

> Adrian understood from the jump, Puck explained, that what people were buying, when they paid interest, was time. So anybody that failed to come up with the vigorish, the only fair way to deal with that was to take their own personal time away from them again, a currency much more precious, up to and including the time they had left to live.⁷⁴³

At the concluding stages of the novel, Pynchon still maintains a general adherence to the conventions of the ‘hard-boiled dick’ genre. Doc is still determinedly, if unsuccessfully, attempting to solve the series of questions that have been posed throughout the novel. When it becomes obvious that no clear resolution is possible, this is all the reader is left with—that all crime, indeed, we can assume, all human activity, is intimately related to time, whether it be on the simple level of life, or the more complex ideas of Doc’s strange relationship to time. Finally, the purpose of Doc’s Doper’s Memory and its chronotope is clarified. *Inherent Vice* is a novel both of the 1960s and the 21st century, two periods in which time changed radically. The temporality of *Inherent Vice* is the complete antithesis of Bakhtin’s observations on the novel’s Greek predecessors. Bakhtin wrote, describing the chronotope of the

conventional ‘adventure novel’: “[t]his empty time leaves no traces anywhere, no indications of its passing.” For Pynchon, writing simultaneously about the 60s and the present day, time is characterised precisely by its traces, hence his use of cannabis and acid within the text, plus his reference to influential cinema and music of the period. At the same time, however, there is another trace present; the transformative moment of the 9/11 attacks which forces temporality to the forefront of the novelist’s focus.

In this sense, despite the similarities that exist between *Inherent Vice* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, this novel exhibits a far more modern approach. After the catastrophe of the September 11 attacks in 2001, the focus of America literature switches from the complexities of narrative to the method through which narrative is expressed. Pynchon’s continued focus on time, from *Against the Day* and manifested again in *Inherent Vice*, illustrates the ongoing concern with temporality in the novel, and time in the world, that exists for the author, and, in *Inherent Vice*, the continuation of a project that reorients Pynchon’s work and provides a new impetus in the twenty-first century.

**Postscript**

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that the September 11 attacks of 2001 engendered a new focus on time. Both a reconceptualisation of time and a reconsideration of temporality within the novel can be identified in the post-9/11 works of both Pynchon and DeLillo. It is important to point out, however, that an awareness of temporality exists in the both authors work before the events of 9/11.

---


290
also. One example of Pynchon’s pre-9/11 work that exhibits a similar focus on time is his 1993 article published in *The New York Times Book Review*, ‘Nearer, My Couch, To Thee’.

Pynchon, riffing on Benjamin’s Franklin’s aphorisms, and illustrating the shift from sloth as religious transgression to a secular one, argues that sloth is ultimately a crime against “uniform, one-way” time.\(^{746}\) Sloth is now, for Pynchon, the domain of the couch potato, an outwardly produced dream beamed from the television, standing in for the dream-in-sleep, the more traditional manifestation of reverie. For Pynchon, the invention of the remote control and the VCR changes both the conventional definition of sloth, *and*, of time. Time in the world of the technological reproducibility of information “can be reshaped at will […] controlling, reversing, slowing, speeding and repeating time.”\(^{747}\)

The significance of this transformation is twofold. Firstly, Pynchon’s 1993 observations illustrate an awareness of the constantly changing nature of time prior to the September 11 attacks of 2001. This is not to argue that time did not change between 1993 and 2001, but rather to reinforce Pynchon’s awareness of temporality (as we have seen, Pynchon’s analysis of time and temporality can be identified 20 years before ‘Nearer, My Couch, To Thee’; see ‘∆t: Pre-Cursors to Pynchon’s Reconsideration of Temporality in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’). But secondly, the reconsideration of temporality that Pynchon proposes in ‘Nearer, My Couch, To Thee’ is very similar to the image of time proposed in *Inherent Vice*. The Doper’s Memory chronotope that is developed within the novel is explicitly reliant on the dream-like

\(^{747}\) Pynchon, ‘Nearer, My Couch, To Thee’, p. 57.
reveries Doc’s cannabis use produces, as well as the ‘controlling, reversing, slowing, speeding and repeating’ of time that occurs within Doc’s creative perception of time whilst stoned. Pynchon refers to the development of the remote control within *Inherent Vice*, describing an object “large and crude, as if sharing design origins with Soviet sound equipment.” Despite the crudity of the early remote control, its power over time, and over humanity is already burgeoning—Doc, whilst watching TV with a group in thrall to the temporal power of both screen and remote control comes to a realisation. Pynchon writes:

> He realized the scope of the mental damage one push on the ‘off’ button of a TV zapper could inflict on this roomful of obsessives.

749

The obsession with television and its remote control emphasises society’s desire for linear time, controlled and normalised, a time that Doc, and Pynchon as well, have little interest in. The September 11 attacks may have reoriented the conceptualisation of time, but finally, Pynchon proposes a much more creative view of time, both through the narrative of *Inherent Vice*, but also through the temporal concepts he considers and creates.

---

748 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 127.
749 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p. 128.
Works Cited


_____ Proust, Grove Press, New York, 1931


Carmichael, T., ‘Lee Harvey Oswald and the Postmodern Subject: History and Intertextuality in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*, *The Names* and *Mao II*’, in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Summer 1993, pp. 204-218.


Horvath, B., ‘Review of *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* and *I Sing the Body Politic: History as Prophecy in Contemporary American Literature*’, in *ANQ: A


*Oxford English Dictionary*


Wolf, P., Modernization and the Crisis of Memory: John Donne to Don DeLillo, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2002.


Archival Material

DeLillo Archives, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin. Full archive catalogue available at:
http://research.hrc.utexas.edu:8080/hrcxtf/view?docId=ead/00313.xml&q=DeLillo&query-join=and