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TOTAL TIMESCAPING

The Modernist Moment in Pynchon's Against the Day

ABSTRACT: In his novel *Against the Day*, Pynchon's formulation of modernism anticipates and even subsumes postmodernism, yet also is predicated on an abolition of sequential time and cause and effect, which might reflect a modernist decentering of space, time, and gravity. Pynchon's modernism dramatizes the idea that linear time no longer exists – that our time and space are no longer the center of the universe, much as conscious individual thought no longer is the center of subjectivity. Periods, literary or grammatical, also fall by the wayside. This decentering of time also is associated with modernist science and ontology, which paradoxically put modernism back at the center of an aesthetic without a center. Modernism functions as the narrative equivalent of relativity, yet also of quantum theory, because all spaces and time emerge and exist at once, in a process that Pynchon refers to as bilocation. Modernist connection then veers into concurrence. At least heuristically, Pynchon also treats the modernist project as a form of doubling and repetition. As a result, Pynchon situates modernism and World War I as precursors to their successor, postmodernism and World War II, without directly addressing them, yet somehow also as co-existing with them; both are doubled though repetitions that rewrite the originals. Pynchon situates modernism as an ethos of echoes, but a repetition without an original. A kind of quilting point, modernism becomes a contradictory master term that still explains everything, a lens through which all else is seen.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Pynchon, Modernism, Postmodernism, Modernity, *Against the Day*, Time.

“Time itself was disrupted, a thoroughgoing and merciless forswearing of Time as we had known it.”

Thomas Pynchon 2006, 148

Introduction: the master signifier of modernism

In this article, I argue that Thomas Pynchon's 2006 novel *Against the Day* (*AtD*) represents a (post?) postmodern reprisal of modernist aesthetics and politics, and I reassess the novel as an interrogation of the modernist imperatives of 1922. Spanning the period from 1893 to just after World War I, the novel opens with a modernist low-culture exposition of the Chums of Chance, aeronauts who represent a pastiche and parody of boy's adventure novels, but quickly moves to incorporate, on the same plane, anarchism, Pinkertons, The White City, photography, and the cusp of World War I, just up to 1922, all situated in terms of high modernist end(s). Tiina Käkälä-Puumala documents

Pynchon's "historic interest" in "the era of modernization we have been living in since the 17th century [...] Puritanism, the Enlightenment, industrialism, scientific revolutions, global economy, information explosion, simulation – throughout his fiction Pynchon is very much a writer of modernization, of its historical preconditions, aims, and limits" (Käkelä-Puumala 2007, 12; Cowart 2012, 385). But Pynchon also hijacks the concept of modernism to develop a collage of periods, genres, affects, events and aesthetics that are often anachronistically conflated: his positing of modernism as one end of history, which also absorbs all eras, reaches its apotheosis in *AtD*, which could be subtitled *Everywhere, All the Time, All at Once*.

Yet the book, one of whose central *foci* is invisibility, also in some ways occludes the causes or referents for its own construction of modernism. David Cowart observes that "the author's refusal fully to depict World War I poses one of this text's most interesting questions: Why does a chronicle largely focused on the decades preceding 1914 not avail itself of a culmination as convenient to narrative as to history? Fought off-page, the Great War detains the reader only briefly as the novel reaches its conclusion" (2012, 394). In other words, much that propels the narrative, or that the narrative circles around without directly incorporating, remains invisible. Modernism too is a spectre haunting the novel, often off page. What's missing, or invisible, both represents the center and indicates the center has not held: that modernism anticipates and even contains postmodernism, yet also stands for the abolition of sequential time and cause and effect (which, among other things, might reflect the modernist decentering of space, time, and gravity). Simon de Bourcier proposes that "*Against the Day* presents a dialogue between the modernist aesthetic strategy of, in Žižek's terms, 'demonstrating that the game works without an object, that the play is set in motion by a central absence,' and postmodernism's counter-move of 'displaying the object directly'" (2019, 174). But I would argue that modernist absence (and ultimately invisibility) take primacy here, and that *AtD* also is structured around binaries, or what Pynchon terms "bilocated" opposites that ultimately overlap — the same things but from different times and spaces. The referent for all these duplications, or their Rosetta Stone, remains modernism. In Pynchon's novel, modernism also encapsulates and is used to dramatize the idea that linear time no longer exists (or, in other words, that our time and space are no longer the center of the universe, or even of us, much as conscious individual thought no longer remains the center of subjectivity): periods, literary or grammatical, therefore also no longer exist, but only from the reified vantage of modernism.

Pynchon associates this decentering of time with modernist science and ontology, which paradoxically put modernism back at the center of an aesthetic without a center. Modernism here functions as the narrative equivalent of relativity, yet also of quantum theory, because all spaces, times and events emerge and exist at once, and through what Pynchon refers to as bilocation. At least narratologically, Pynchon treats the modernist project as a form of doubling and repetition. As a result, he situates modernism and World War I as precursors to their successors, postmodernism and World War II, without directly addressing them; both critically are doubled through repetitions that

rewrite the originals. Even their names tether the iteration to inescapable first enactments that are both hyper-present and recedingly invisible. Pynchon situates modernism as an ethos of echoes, but a form of repetition without an original; it serves as kind of empty set that decenters cause and effect and a kind of quilting point. In J. P. E. Harper-Scott's elaboration of Lacan, the quilting point is the concept "around which all concrete analysis of discourse must operate", the "point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively"; it becomes a master term that explains everything, a lens through which everything is seen (2012, 7-8). Modernity becomes the fulcrum and common reference point around which all other terms revolve; as Barry Smart observes in *Modern Conditions, Postmodern Controversies*, modernism can be conceived as encompassing

a late nineteenth-century stage of transition from romanticism to modernism, the subsequent 'triumph of modernism,' a postmodern reaction, and finally the emergence of ultramodernism. Underlying each of these respective stages is the common denominator of modernity, which by definition, and in contrast to the persisting forms and practices associated with tradition, is considered to be constantly in flux. (1992, 151-152)

Typically situated betwixt and between, modernism itself often is a term in the middle of the definition of modernism. In other words, it is what is, and therefore also what it is not. In other words, modernism is an unstable and self-contradictory term defined largely by what is on either side of it. I don't want to offer a formal description of the ways Pynchon incorporates modernist tropes and references, but an analysis of why he explores modernism "proactively" from the future and through temporal displacements, and what this approach achieves.

According to Simon Wortham, Žižek, after Lacan, "evokes the quilting point as that which operates as an exceptional element or 'master signifier' to unify a 'patchwork' of contingent elements into a single 'edifice' capable of 'totalizing the field and stabilizing its signification'" (2019, 99). I would not contend that modernism is a signifier without a signified, but it does serve as a master signifier that is also a semiotic McGuffin. Pynchon's version of modernism cannot be a transcendental, stable point of reference not only because it is in flux, but because – to use a series of appropriately mixed metaphors – it is a syncretic and self-erasing heuristic; a temporary scaffolding with which he develops narrative structure; and ultimately the equivalent of disappearing stitches. It is necessary to hold the corpus together until it dissolves.

(Bi)locating modernism

According to Cowart, Pynchon in *AtD* develops a

catalog, spread through the text, [that] eventually signals the imminence of a specific global catastrophe. At first, pure accident disguises the gathering malevolence, but presently the disasters begin to seem decidedly portentous: the Krakatoa eruptions of 1883 to recurrently, the 1902

toppling of the campanile in Venice [...] References to attempted assassinations in the nineteenth century – of Queen Victoria by Edward Oxford in 1840, of Henry Clay Frick by Alexander Berkman in 1892 – culminate, as it were, in the shots fired by Jean-Baptiste Victor Sipido at Edward, Prince of Wales, in the spring of 1900. (1992, 392-3)

Through to the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire and World War I. But the novel is full of references to a future that hasn't arrived, those that already have transpired, anticipatory echoes, near prophecies, prolepses, and intrusions from other times. Though the book indulges in an array of anachronisms, it situates its many later interpolations as "lateral", alternate or displaced atavisms. We repeatedly are asked to "imagine a lateral world, set only infinitesimally to the side of the one we know" (*AtD*, 230). These forms of displacement help codify Pynchon's credo of modernism as a layered, overlapping and staccato voicing of multiple places and times. In this quantum or infinitely dialogical modernism, all possibilities exist at once and can momentarily intrude into what we might have believed, in a pre-modern world, to be a stable medium of linear time and cause and effect. We are told that "Lateral world-sets, other parts of the Creation, lie all around us, each with its crossover points or gates of entry" (*AtD*, 221). Pynchon's novel is replete with "invisible gate[s]" and portals, most of which "biolocate" to modernism – that is, these other times and spaces are always tethered to and overlap with the modernist moment (*AtD*, 164). To bi-locate is to tap into and traverse these lateral coordinates. The mapping or periodization here again seems to operate under principles of quantum mechanics, because one appears able to determine time or space, but not both, and the identification of one seems to disrupt the other. These parallel spaces and times lead to the possibility of a "lateral resurrection," a sidewise escape from, or fatal return to, the "modern" here and now; that modern moment exists only because of/as the confluence of these other crossover points, which also serve as quilting points (*AtD*, 431). A ship's "Marconi room" was picking up messages or "traffic from somewhere else not quite "in" the world, more like from a continuum lateral to it" (*AtD*, 518): we frequently get hints of "a map to a hidden space," "a view into a Creation set just to the side of this one" (*AtD*, 566); we're told to "remember, everything on this map stands for something else," i.e., a displaced, lateral or doubled meaning that must return (*AtD*, 937). *AtD* is the final staging of this sidewise bilocation in Pynchon's works: "Maybe some of us are ready to step 'side-wise' [laterally] once more, into the next dimension – into Time" (*AtD*, 427).¹

Pynchon's novel then engages in a sustained, displaced doubling of modernism itself: through lateral spatial and temporal bilocation, the novel's events always occur

¹ I build on some arguments here from Hardack 2010 regarding the novel's use of repetition and bilocation, but extend them to focus on modernity. In that article, I address how Pynchon begins to deploy notions of the sidewise, e.g., in *The Crying of Lot 49*, in which Oedipa "slipped sidewise, screeching back across grooves of years" (Pynchon 1966, 95). In that novel and *Gravity's Rainbow*, the sidewise represents an incipient form of temporal dislocation, as well as the melding of voices and identities. For example, in what Pynchon periodically refers to as a "sidewise" motion, once distinct voices come to overlap: "[T]he voices are identical" (Pynchon 1966, 106; Pynchon 1995, 577).

simultaneously. We even find out that professors “Renfrew and Werfner were one and the same person”; as happens throughout the text, they “somehow had the paranormal power to be in *at least* two places at the same time [...] known in the Psychical field for about fifty years as ‘bilocation’” (*AtD*, 685-86). That bilocation more profoundly applies to modernism and postmodernism, which cohabit the text and exist simultaneously as, in effect, one and the same episteme, terms inverted going backward and forward. Pynchon’s modernism and postmodernism, like Renfrew and Werfner, are mirrors pointing at each other with nothing in between. Dr. Rao early on “suggest[s] the possibility of linear time becoming circular and so achieving eternal return as simply, or should I say as complexly, as that” (*AtD*, 132). And as Roswell much “later” adds, “And not only can we unfold the future history of these subjects, we can also reverse the process, to look into their pasts” (*AtD*, 1049). Connection itself in Pynchon often functions in relation to doubling and displacement (in part, as a related consideration, because comparison in Pynchon’s work tends to create near consonance—tropes become identitarian. In transcendental writing, which I argue provides a context for some of Pynchon’s work, metaphors often become synecdoches, and synecdoches literalized.). This echoing is closely connected to *AtD*’s radical reformulation and narrativization of time: “The doubles you report having produced are actually the original subjects themselves, slightly displaced in time” (*AtD*, 571). Simon de Bourcier suggests that Pynchon’s novel takes place in a Relativistic space-time that can offer no master chronology or stable order of events, but he is also critical of theorists who conflate modernism and postmodernism into a single post-Einsteinian moment (2012, 103, 26). I would contend that Pynchon “bilocates” his periods, in a way that obviates the meaning and possibility of periodization, leaving modernism in the center of a discourse that can have no center.

If, as David Harvey (1990, 99) contends, modernism was defined by an aesthetic response to the globalization of the world market, the subjection of nature’s forces to industry, and the revolutionizing of production, achieved through “violence, destruction of traditions, oppression” and the reduction of all valuation of activity to profit, Pynchon’s novel develops a heterodox fugue of temporal dislocations and anachronisms, mostly centered around those features of modernism. The momentum of the book is propelled by “a big parade of modern inventions” (*AtD*, 33); “the wonders of the modern age,” from photography to domed cities; all the “modern sciences” (*AtD*, 65, 306, 354) that fascinated the Chums of Chance; and even a “Modern Imperial Institute for Intensive Instruction in Idiotics, or M6.I, as it’s called” (*AtD*, 823). In another anachronism, the six I’s invert or reverse the initials of the British spy agency MI6, another entity that does not yet quite exist, yet irrupts into this world. Pynchon’s novel also could be subtitled *Jokes from the Future*.

The aesthetics of being two places at once

Pynchon's text also is virtually structured around references to modernist aesthetics, for example The Koloni, who constructed "on the principles of Invisibilism, a school of modern architecture which believed that the more 'rationally' a structure was designed, the less visible it would appear" (*AtD*, 625). From "God's unseen world" and the numerous "invisible gateways" to the invisibility associated with the mineral Iceland spar, invisibility in manifold forms is a central theme of the novel, and critical to its play with the notion of unseen but intersecting lateral worlds, as well as the notion of the unseen modernist prime mover (*AtD*, 250, 853). Pynchon continuously invokes a range of such modernist art movements, for example, the proto-fascist Italian Futurity, which also seems to update Dante's hell in modernist form, perhaps as "the Hell of-the-future" (*AtD*, 1070). Here an overdetermined modernist concept of time/the future again evokes the notion that the future can intrude into the past, and hell irrupt from below. We're also told in *AtD* that "The world came to an end in 1914. Like the mindless dead, who don't know they're dead, we are as little aware as they of having been in Hell ever since that terrible August" (*AtD*, 1077). George Steiner (1971, 56) proposed that the twentieth century was the first time a Western hell was located above ground, and one might add that modernism encapsulated such disorienting reorientings of our sense of spatial and temporal, as well as most other, orders.

In ways that play with modernist aesthetics, Pynchon's text also conjoins not just high and low culture, but past and future in scenarios that not only connect, but totalize culture. *AtD* situates modernism as a totalizing discourse of "bilocation" that connects all times, spaces, and consciousnesses. In a Joycean context, modernism totalizes knowledge in an encyclopedic gathering, doubling and distillation of epistemes and methodologies.² In a sense, Pynchon therefore situates modernism everywhere but where you would most expect, at its apparent origin. In other words, characters' sense of temporal confusion and disorder is a metaphor for the book's temporal disordering of modernism. As if dreaming of a quantum cat, Lew, for example, experiences "more than everyday déjà vu, the old two-places-at-once condition, kicking up again, he couldn't be sure if he was remembering this now or, worse, *foreseeing* her in some way, so that he had to worry about the possibility that not only might Jardine Maraca be dead but also that it *had not happened yet*" (*AtD*, 1059). That phrase recurs throughout the novel, itself in effect having always already been uttered: "[I]t's so far away the new hasn't reached here 'yet'? Or it hasn't *happened* 'yet'?" (*AtD*, 577).³ The narrator tells us that Renzo's *picchiata* was perhaps the first "expression in Northern Italy of a Certain Word that would not

² Odysseus becomes Ulysses; every event iterates but alters (alterates?) a prior event; all languages converge in "Oxen of the Sun"; Stephen is doubled; and the novel is intended to end the novel. See Hardack 1996 for an overview of how encyclopedic male writers attempt to replicate and totalize space and time as well as knowledge.

³ I'm reminded of the consonant lyric in Robyn Hitchcock's song "Raymond Chandler Evening," which invokes the quasi-modernist mystery writer: "I'm lurking in the shadows/'Cause it hasn't happened yet."

quite exist for another year or two. But somehow like a precognitive murmur, a dreamed voice, it had already provisionally entered Time” (*AtD*, 1071). Here, the capitalized “Certain” word also might represent a pun regarding the strident, psychopathic self-assurance of fascism.

AtD relentlessly dramatizes the prospect that all events occur simultaneously; that they all form part of the same grid or network; and finally that all people might be the same person, and thereby explores the effects of a totalizing modernist network.⁴ Through these “strange links,” everything in Pynchon’s novel begins “happening simultaneously” on opposite sides of the world (112). Modernist connection veers into concurrence. Every speech is made “‘here, but also simultaneously’ [...] [there through] the mysterious shamanic power known as bilocation” (143). We’re told through “the little-understood enigmata of the simultaneous [that] their gunners were abolishing time,” a conceit also adapted to the artificial temporalities of texts: the fact that “time” in a narrative is itself a heuristic, since a reader can skip to any part of the text and move backward and forward and reverse sequences, which already might be non-linear, at will (256). In this regard, *AtD* elevates the simple and formal fact that time in novels is artificial to become emblematic of a complex modernist episteme. (The “enigmata of the simultaneous” could also serve as Pynchon’s definition of modernism, the abolition of time and paradoxically of genres). Here, the war that has not yet begun is altering the space/time on either side of it. In this doubling and eradication of time, bilocation, or the ability to be in two places at once, conjoins any events or figures displaced in narrative sequence. As we began to inhabit a world where, as David Harvey remarks, “two events in quite different spaces occurring at the same time could so intersect as to change how the world worked,” Pynchon’s representation of bilocality or ubiquity rewrites Forster’s imperative to “only connect” as “only to bilocate” (*AtD*, 265).⁵ Pynchon, who initialed his protagonist in *Gravity’s Rainbow* “T.S.,” also might be implementing Eliot’s

⁴ Some understandably would argue that simultaneity, or the compression of space and time, is a feature of the economic and technological globalization affiliated with postmodernism. But many of the technologies – from the telegraph to trains – and behaviors – from colonization to resource extraction – of globalization also marked the nineteenth century. As one brief but emblematic example, Melville situates *Moby Dick* as a kind of proleptic avatar of what we now might consider postmodernism. Seen in many places at once, and transcending space and time and connecting everything, the white whale is defined by “the unearthly conceit that [he] was ubiquitous; that he had been encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant [...] [and was] not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time)” (1988, 182-83). This configuration of geographic and temporal simultaneity, or the old-two-places-at-once condition, is evident throughout *AtD*, in which Pynchon combines “pre-modern” and postmodern stagings of simultaneity to generate his all-encompassing version of modernity. For discussions of nineteenth-century U.S. representations of simultaneity, see Hardack 1999; 2020.

⁵ In an overdetermined way, especially since the landscaping company in Pynchon’s *Vineland* is named Marquis de Sod, Rudy Giuliani’s fiasco of a press conference at Four Seasons Total Landscaping represents the postmodern letter reaching its destination. Four seasons, or time, totalize the landscape, or geography, so time eradicates space, but through an act of comically inept displacement, doubling or bilocation.

modernist proviso, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” throughout *AtD*: that each great new work of art modifies the past, or in effect creates the kind of fantastic temporal displacements that structure this novel. In other words, all new artistic creation bilocates its sources.

This continuously iterated notion of bilocality is cathected to things that haven't happened yet and to thoughts to which we could have no access, not because they're private, but because they're inaccessible even to the characters. Pynchon's narrator in *AtD* often knows not just the thoughts of inanimate objects, but ones that haven't yet occurred, but are known will come into being. Pynchon links his conflation of high and low culture with a modernist conflation of time and space, producing an encyclopedic totalization of knowledge collated into a kind of omniscient modernist universal narrative consciousness. For Pynchon, modernism seems to be the center of a temporal and cultural fugue that posits there is no center; everything radiates from it, yet is also simultaneous, with modernism somehow remaining both foregrounded and invisible. Unlike many encyclopedists, however, Pynchon does not seek a totalized knowledge in hierarchic form, but as part of a radically egalitarian ethos – all cultures, times, places, and narrative aesthetics are gathered at once, simultaneously overlapping, but ultimately under the stance of a modernism that now also biolocates popular and elite cultures. But Pynchon's modernism represents less its own stable ethos than what the text frequently refers to as a convergence – a convergence of times and spaces, aesthetics and sciences, which, outside the context of modernism, would be incommensurate. But modernist bilocation allows for convergences that transcend the limitations and restrictions of other aesthetics and ontologies.

As Cyprian puts it in *AtD*, unreliably but evocatively, “It may be that God doesn't always require us to wander about. It may be that sometimes there is a – would you say a ‘convergence’ [...] not merely in space but in time as well?” (*AtD*, 958) But within this egalitarian or non-hierarchical doubled singularity, modernist photography remains privileged because of “its convergence of silver, time and light” (*AtD*, 454). According to Arkadiusz Misztal, Pynchon

employs more subtle traces to articulate his ideas of time: light traces in photography. [...] [H]e creates complex temporal ‘scapes’ by the convergence of light and time. Pynchon [...] returns in this novel to the ‘natural magic’ of early photography to explore the marginalized and overlooked timescapes of modernity. The restoration and celebration of these temporalities constitute an integral part of his strategies of resistance to systematized clock-time and machine-time. (2016, 40-41)

In addition to opposing machine time, Pynchon constructs his novel *as* a modernist time-machine; but like his version of modernism, the machine itself remains outside space and time, even as it brings all times and spaces together.

The modernist singularity

Throughout the novel, Pynchon's form of repetitive narration makes time not only relative and nonlinear, but non-singular and possibly impossible as a category: for example, "questions arose as to the timing, the 'simultaneousness' of [the event in Siberia] [...] something which had not quite happened yet [...] [and] only seemed to occur in the present, though really originating in the future. Was it [...] the general war [...] collapsed into a single event?" (*AtD*, 797) Just as the continents mass and converge, so do temporal nodes. The simultaneity of events is also a function of bifurcated narrative consciousness, a bi-product of narrators who can be two places at once: "Communication had commenced, while, almost exactly on the other side of the Earth, Chums of Chance monitoring personnel waited [...] was the signal going around the planet, or through it, or was the linear progression not at all the point, with everything instead happening simultaneously at every part of the circuit?" (*AtD*, 112) Another term for that circuit is modernism. Throughout *AtD*, the narrator acts and events transpire "as if time had been removed from all equations," and everything "already existed in the moment, complete, perfected" (*AtD*, 327). Everything happens all at once and also already has happened, and that is the modernist moment. In other words, the event always is only a reverberation between past and future, or between one (part of a) text and another: it exists *only* in the repetition, and therefore necessarily creates parallels/doubles/echoes, or spooky narrative action at a distance. In *AtD*, there is no time like the present. As Werfner begins to say, there might be inescapable symmetries, some "predisposition to the echoic," as Renfrew then appropriately finishes, "perhaps built into the nature of Time" (*AtD*, 227). Not surprisingly, these are conceits Pynchon repeatedly dramatizes intra- and intertextually. In *AtD*, for example, "a curious thing had happened to time" (*AtD*, 876); or as Superman proleptically opines in *Gravity's Rainbow*, "you know, Jimmy, time – time is a funny thing" (*AtD*, 752). Time itself is repeated in these texts in the way of a remix. In tandem, modernism repeats what comes before, because it still incorporates the past into its very break with it, and from our vantage is linked, and becomes a way station, to its own successor. Pynchon is here deploying a kind of Situationist detournement, a (post)modernist commandeering or rerouting (detour) of time itself, that mines and combines milieus, periods, consciousnesses, and texts.

In Pynchon, time-travel, itself situated as a modernist 'invention', functions as a Borgesian form of intersubjectivity and intertextuality: passages and characters from one work show up in 'earlier' and 'later' works, but then all texts intertwine as one undifferentiated and non-linear or simultaneous text (which is the encyclopedic universe). Ultimately, Pynchon's treatment of time is not only part of his aesthetic and narratology, but political, and at the center of his radicalism: "What are any of these 'utopian dreams' of ours but defective forms of time-travel?" (*AtD*, 942) Time becomes a locus of an eschatological modernism. Those experiencing the future at "the end of the capitalistic experiment," "were forced to migrate [...] upon that dark fourth-dimensional Atlantic known as Time" (*AtD*, 415).

Pynchon's novel is deeply invested in cultural and temporal pastiche, but also anachronism as a manifestation of anarchism. Utku Mogultay (2018, 4) contends that *AtD* "abounds with such narrative miniatures in which historicity and contemporary aesthetic sensibilities bleed into each other [...] Spanning about three decades, Pynchon's narrative starts in Chicago in the year 1893 and from there takes us to the American Midwest and West, Mexico, the Arctic, South Africa, Germany" and so on. What happens in each location bleeds over into other sections, with phrases impossibly echoing from one place and time to another. Sometimes Pynchon's narrative use of *style indirect libre* is obvious, and directed to temporal/historical and epistemological disjunction: for example, the narrator of *AtD* tells us of a "maze of islands that so confounded the Argonauts even before history began"; on the next page, Vlado tells Yashmeen of narratives "sometimes even older than the Argonauts' expedition – before history" (*AtD*, 818-819).

Here the character either is picking up the narrator's voice directly or the narrator is adumbrating or manipulating the character's speech: as often happens in Pynchon, cause and effect, before and after, launch and echo, are unstable, and even some alterations seem to confirm not difference, but underlying identity and connection. The narrator here again destabilizes linear sequence, because the text has no objective or immutable past and future, and many things transpire simultaneously or out of 'order'. In that broader sense, the novel's schema of periodization and modernism is inherently destabilized. Sometimes the echoes are not just intratextual or intertextual, but more traditionally literary, but even in that context, they arrive explicitly doubled. As Mark Quinn notes, we are cited the same passage from Dante twice in *AtD*: Chick reads "I am the way into the doleful city – Dante," above a memorial arch, which is an iteration of the phrase set above a great Portal of the City. Such repetitions or adumbrations of memories and gateways transpire because, as noted, "Time itself was disrupted, a thoroughgoing and merciless forswearing of Time as we had known it" (*AtD*, 148).

Sometimes the narrator simply seems to want to tell us what they know, as when s/he, they or it informs us – using photo bilocation to close the text's penultimate section, "Against the Day" – that Dally was "riding out to a stop in some banlieue"; begins the next section, "RuDu Depart," by describing Dally as humming "C'est pas Paris, c'est sa banlieue"; and then on the next page tells us that Dally had drifted "into its, well, banlieue" (*AtD*, 1061, 1064-65). Even here we encounter a slippage: the second time you say something, it means something slightly different from the first, especially if you directly repeat it. The double is transformed in being bilocated, and the same effect applies to the text's iteration of modernism. No banlieue here is an original – they are all doubles and echoes.

Many eternal returns

For Pynchon, repetition seems to confirm identity, but identity doubled and slightly altered, and that process also would apply to the relationship between postmodernism and modernism. Pynchon's modernist project, as one example, deploys some of Joyce's aesthetic and narratological strategies, and especially that of *Ulysses*, which is set in Dublin – a city of doubling that of course hosts the bilocation not just of Stephen and Leopold, but *The Odyssey*. In other words, meaning emerges through the repetition of and response to the past: repetition with, but also as, difference. Pynchon's technique is reminiscent of what Hugh Kenner (1979, 15-18) calls the Uncle Charles principle in Joyce, a form of the aforementioned *style indirect libre* in which characters' worldviews and limitations frame the narrator's depiction of them, and that too is a critical form of repetition with difference. What we hear from Pynchon's narrator is a translated version of the past. In *AtD*, we are told such repetitions reflect “the genuine article, and the sub-structure of reality. The doubling of the Creation, each image clear and believable [...] its curious advent into the world occurred within only a few years of the discovery of Imaginary Numbers, which also provided a doubling of the mathematical Creation” (*AtD*, 133). The iterated phrase “doubling of the Creation” is itself a reformulation of several passages in *Gravity Rainbow*, in which “*everything is connected, everything in creation*” (Pynchon 1995, 703). When *AtD* invokes convergences and “outward and visible metaphors” (811), it channels not just St. Augustine, but *Gravity's Rainbow*, which repeatedly invokes the “outward and visible signs” of predestination (e.g. Pynchon 1995, 448, 665, 811). *AtD* here continues to establish itself as a double for *Gravity Rainbow*, itself a text constructed of doubles. Some of these doubles in *AtD*, perhaps including the narrators, are barely visible, as if they were “somehow, only fractionally present” (*AtD*, 135). Pynchon's modernist doubling always is accompanied by such fractioning, and present space and time through intrusions, advents, and convergences of their counterparts, and, spatial and temporal Renfrews and Werfners, their “equal[s] and opposite[s]” (*AtD*, 33-34).⁶ Renfrew and Werfner are modernism and postmodernism, or rather the reverse. Postmodernism in some ways repeats, doubles and alters modernism, or partly ventriloquizes it through repetition, and for Pynchon partly creates it retroactively.

⁶ The novel is full of passages that evoke invisible or undetectable disruptions of space and time, or link the decentering of time to the doubling of space: “Time could not, somehow, be taken for granted. It sped up and slowed down, like a variable that was dependent on something else, something so far, at least, undetectable. I have since learned of other cities, out here, secret cities, secular counterparts to the Buddhist hidden lands, more indelibly contaminated by Time, deep in the taiga, only guessed at from indirect evidence [...]” (*AtD*, 752, 790).

Invisible time

To end at the beginning, which is a kind of modernists trope, but a beginning altered through return, I would note that one can interpret *AtD* as itself a double for modernism displaced in time. Mogultay (2018, 11) observes that the small town we encounter in the middle of Pynchon's novel, "Wall o' Death[,]" is not built on any old ruins; it is built on the ruins of the city of tomorrow," an early emblem of modernity from the 1983 Chicago World's Fair. As Mogultay (2018, 3-4) further elaborates, the city also serves as the site of considerable anachronism, and is described in terms that would apply to America only fifty years later. Encapsulating the novel's ethos, the ruins of the present are built on modernist images of the future, and the wasteland ruination associated with modernism bookends all the novel's doubles. David Cowart asserts that

The historical range of *Against the Day*, 1893 to 1923, covers the thirty years that saw, as it were, modernity's coming of age. The author chronicles the struggle between capital and labor, the competition for colonies, the deep pull of anarchy both philosophical and political, the wars, and the fluidity of international borders that could never accommodate all the nationalisms splintering and proliferating [...]. As Shawn Smith observes, "Pynchon's fiction reunites the present with the genealogy of destruction that spawned it."⁷ (2012, 405)

But *AtD* closes with a separate coda set in 1922 in Los Angeles, a spatial displacement perhaps meant to follow through on the novel's temporal ones (though one also should note that *The Crying of Lot 49* transpires in a version of Los Angeles and *Gravity's Rainbow* ends in a Los Angeles theater about 28 years after its main events in Europe). Cowart convincingly evaluates the context for that dislocation as follows:

Why, indeed, [use] the American West Coast, rather than some likelier European locale, for a conclusion on the eve of the very annus mirabilis of modernism – the 1922 that saw the completion of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and the publication of *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*? If in fact the author has deliberately elided the year 1922 from his chronicle, it may be that he means to suggest a postmodern worm in the modernist apple, one episteme born at the very moment of another's perfect ripeness. Certain of the more outré features of his 1920s Los Angeles provide an effective frame for characters who modulate from their nineteenth-century identities into figures more familiar to twentieth-century storytelling. (2012, 406)

If, as Brian McHale (2000, 49) claims, space dominates *Mason and Dixon*, where time is spatialized, time dominates *AtD*, where space is both temporalized and temporized – that is, itself both "early" and "late". Again, in sometimes inchoate ways, the narrative focus of *AtD* is early and late for modernism, its before and after, yet not actually coterminous with it. As the novel suggests, when someone is involved in a "time discrepancy," "he is not here, not completely. He is slightly somewhere else. Enough so, to present some inconvenience" (*AtD*, 599). Perhaps the *Inconvenience*, the dirigible the

⁷ Quotation taken from Shawn Smith. 2013. *Pynchon and History: Metahistorical Rhetoric and Postmodern Narrative Form in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*. New York: Routledge, 181.

Chums of Chance fly around the world throughout the novel, takes over the text's narrator in "being everywhere, but invisible" (*AtD*, 928), and its function is to be slightly elsewhere, slightly sidewise, slightly utopian.

In the end, Pynchon's displacements and doublings bring us back to his revisionist politics of modernist radicalism, which are closely connected to invisibility.⁸ Stray, for example, remembers her earlier "notions of the Anarchist life and its promise of a *greater invisibility*" (*AtD*, 976). If we ask who goes off the grid, who becomes invisible, who declines to be further oblivionated by daguerreotype? – Slothrop, and of course his creator, though Slothrop might turn up on an album cover and Pynchon under a brown paper bag when "appearing" on *The Simpsons*. In Pynchon's texts, invisibility is a strategy of resistance, and perhaps a way to elide the wrong kind of doubling – of instead being only fractionally present. The Chums also might have disappeared to their counter-earth, perhaps across if not against the day. And perhaps the point of the text, as in *Vineland*, is to document all the events that "history would [otherwise] be blind to," to record those voices no one else "will be left to remember" (*AtD*, 1016, 1001). Against expectation, it is not the anarchists, the futurists, or any political group that travels against the day; it is the boyhood Chums who cross into the political narrative, developing their "supranational idea" that the third (or fourth) dimension was the "avenue of transcendence," and not a means for delivering explosives (*AtD*, 1083). It is the Chums, whose age in time remains ever indeterminate, who become invisible in space all around us. The narrator asks if we could imagine for them a vector where the birds are heard everywhere but are invisible, where the night is no longer violated by light displaced, or perhaps doubled, from Hell. Pynchon's novel takes place in between days, advancing a version of modernism that is both center- and off-stage, and that gravitates toward invisibility. As Simon de Bourcier (2019, 178) attests, Pynchon is concerned not only with absence, but the presence of invisible things, especially those illuminated by

⁸ Being invisible for Pynchon is a defensive gesture of the preterite and disenfranchised, a way to resist power; but the invisibility of those in power generates paranoia. Pynchon likely recognized notions of political invisibility in, and further developed them from, Jim Dodge's slightly mawkish 1990 novel *Stone Junction*, whose protagonist Pynchon describes as pursuing a kind of alchemical "final secret of Invisibility" (1990, xiv). As Pynchon writes in his introduction to that novel, which he situates as an epic "for our own late era of corrupted romance," one way to achieve a protective anonymity, disguise and autonomy is to resist technology, surveillance and data collection by perfecting "invisibility" (1990, xi). Here, invisibility is a distinct trope, separate from the invisibility African American authors from Harriet Jacobs to Ralph Ellison invoke in relation to slavery and social death, and from the status of African Americans – rather than say the transcendentalists who sought to be invisible or transparent eyeballs – as the true unobserved observers of American society.

It's an obvious but necessary observation that Pynchon's ambivalent depictions of modernity reflect his ambivalence about technology, voiced throughout his fiction and his essay "Is it Ok to be a Luddite?" (Pynchon 1984) Though he values science and the marvels of invention, Pynchon consistently is suspicious of the uses to which technology is put, and like Dodge often manifests a nostalgia for a romanticized pantheistic nature – a vitalistic world in which everything has consciousness – and what he sometimes terms organic communities.

modernism. Pynchon's gambit is to reclaim modernism and its futurism for a more egalitarian day, and to reach a light unconstrained by the past.

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