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"There is money everywhere": representation, authority, and the money form in Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*

Against the Day (2006) begins at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 and ends sometime in the early 1920's. In this novel Pynchon seems to provide the reader with a full account of what happened in world history within this time span, making it a vast enterprise—over 1000 pages—packed with people, events, and Byzantine plots bordering on the incomprehensible. Too much is happening too fast—the novel is excessive in every way, just like history itself. There are, however, certain threads that run through the narration, and show that Pynchon is, and always has been, a writer who is interested in going beyond the linear history of successive events to look for inner logic and repetitive patterns. In *Against the Day* one of these threads is economy. Economic questions have always been present in Pynchon's works but nowhere more explicitly than in this novel, which came out in 2006—two years before the global financial crisis we are still going through at the moment. Which is not to say that Pynchon could have somehow foreseen the global financial disaster of 2008; I only want to emphasize that as much as *Against the Day* is a historical novel, it is also a very contemporary novel in its analysis of the economization of life and the inherent vulnerability of economic value.[1]

[1] Apart from numerous reviews, there are still few critical studies available on this novel. The first one and most often referred to is Kathryn Hume's article "The Religious and Political Vision of Pynchon's *Against the Day*" (*Philological Quarterly* 2007, vol. 86: 163-187), where Hume focuses on Pynchon's presentation of religious and political stances, which in this novel are much more straight than in his earlier works. The view that *Against the Day* starts a new phase in Pynchon's work also comes out in the first anthology of criticism, *Against the Grain. Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives* (ed. Sascha Pöhlmann) that appeared in August 2010. The anthology, which has set

In *Against the Day* economy is not a field of human activity, but the field in which human life is defined, for it permeates social relations and thinking. A scene near the end of the novel is emblematic of this theme that recurs throughout. Three prominent characters—Yashmeen Halfcourt, Reef Traverse, and Cyprian Latewood—join up in the Balkans with a research group consisting of Professor Sleepcoat, his assistants, and a university accountant named Gruntling. The group wanders around the Balkan area gathering folksongs just before the outburst of the First World War. One evening, when the group is in the region of Trache where Orpheus is alleged to have been born, they discuss the myth of Orpheus and his failed attempt to bring Eurydice back from Hades:

> Later the Professor seemed to have Orpheus on the brain. "He couldn't quite bring himself to believe in her desire to come back with him to live in the upper world again. He had to turn around and look, just to make sure she was coming."
>
> "Typical male insecurity," Yashmeen sniffed.
>
> "Typical female lust for wealth wins out in the end, is the way I always read that one," commented Gruntling.
>
> "Oh he's the Lord of Death, for goodness' sake, there is no money there."
>
> "Young woman, there is money everywhere." (ATD 946)

In *Against the Day* money is indeed everywhere. The novel depicts the cultural, historical and political change that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the era in which technological innovations abounded and global markets flourished, and yet at the same time a sense of imminent catastrophe pervaded people's minds. The catastrophe, as we know now, was

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itself the aim to question the unity of Pynchon's *oeuvre* and to re-evaluate it, contains such research topics as Pynchon's politization of genre fiction and mathematics, the uses of visual culture in the novel, and the writer's "postnational imagination" (Pöhlmann 16) that marks a move beyond the postmodern framework.

not only the First World War but also its aftermath: the economic depression that affected much of the world, and the political fanaticism that grew from it.

Pynchon describes in the novel a historical situation in which political economy had reached a new level, which changed permanently people's everyday life. Everything expanded: finance markets, international trade, flows of capital, multinational corporations, migration, consumption, technologies of communication and transportation. As a result, economy became a more and more important cultural register. Pynchon thematizes and elaborates this change throughout the novel by using economic rhetoric in situations where it seems at first out of place—interpersonal relations and subjectivity—and shows how with money, larger political issues become intertwined with private life.

Often the issue is touched upon very lightly. When, for example, the mysterious professor Renfrew/Werfner some years after 1900 openly compares himself to a share—"My market value seems to fluctuate. At the moment it is up" (683)—this seems at first to be nothing more than an anachronistic joke. But if this statement is put in a broader context within the novel, one may ask what the twin professor is other than an abstraction comparable to stocks. His identity, the bond between name and person, is highly suspicious.[2] Professor Renfrew and his rival and colleague Joachim Werfner are the same man under different but palindromic names, or, as another character suspects in the novel, Renfrew/Werfner has a paranormal power to be in multiple places at the same time (685) —not an exceptional gift in the novel where several characters are involved in paranormal phenomena. Not much can be said about him, for his identity, the reference (value) behind the name(s), seems to be purely contingent, bound to time and place.

[2] Renfrew/Werfner's artificiality as a character is underlined in the novel in many ways. When, for example, detective Lew Basnight talks with him, he notices that "the Professor's face became distinct, exhibiting a brightness….no, a denial of ordinary vision… a smile that would never break forth from any interior cordiality" (240), as if Renfrew/Werfner were nothing but a bright surface, and nothing beneath.

Much more touchingly, economic rhetoric is associated with characters like Estrella "Stray" Briggs, Reef Traverse's first wife. Stray sees that her poor chances in life are like bad money that cannot make a good fortune:

> She got sometimes to feeling too close to an edge, a due date, the fear of living on borrowed time […] she couldn't see her luck as other than purchased in the worn unlucky coin of all those girls who hadn't kept coming back, who'd gone down before their time. (651)

Another example is the self-consuming and disastrous passion between Lake Traverse—Reef's sister—and Deuce Kindred, the man who had murdered her father. Although the relationship between Lake and her lover Deuce never develops into affection, Lake is driven by Deuce's desire for her, which gives her power over him. The powerplay is even enforced once she comes to know his crime:

> But the really strange thing was, that with all there was to send them off down forever separate tracks, he continued to desire her […] and she finally started paying attention as she felt it turning to power for her, flowing out of the invisible unknowability of men like bank interest into some account in her name she hadn't known was there, growing with the days […]. (484)

However, money in *Against the Day* is more than a metaphor for certain human condition or certain kinds of relationships. The critical angle of this novel, I argue, is not so much that of money corrupting social relations, but the inherent bond between money, representation and social power. In *Against the Day,* this bond is revealed through a certain *representational crisis*. Speculation over economic value is recurrent in the novel, and it is more or less openly related to the crisis of the fading gold standard at the beginning of the 20th century, when the gold

convertibility was suspended in many countries, and gold in practice lost part of its adequacy as the ultimate referent for currencies. In the following, I'm going to analyze how Pynchon in *Against the Day* links this monetary crisis to two other contemporary ones: the turn-of-the-last-century questioning of realistic representation, i.e., the need for empirical reference for sign systems, and the crisis of political representation (representative democracy) that manifested itself in anarchism. "There is money everywhere" refers thus not simply to the supremacy of capitalism. As I tend to show in the following, money can be seen in the novel as a *form* that has structural parallels with other qualitative measures and modes of representation. From this perspective money can be seen extending from coins and bills to representational systems that are socially bound and dependent on authorization.[3] When Pynchon in *Against the Day* describes representational crises, he deliberately brings forth those moments when certain modes of thought could be challenged or modified. These moments have always a profoundly political dimension in Pynchon, for a breach in representation allows his characters (and us, his readers) to think differently about the world. As Pynchon himself says in the blurb text: "If it is not the world, it is what the world might be with a minor adjustment or two. According to some, this is one of the main purposes of fiction."

The Gold Standard and Its Discontents

Throughout the novel, Pynchon creates situations where economic value turns out to be vulnerable and subject to manipulation. Not accidentally, the time of the novel—the late 19th

[3] The idea of the money form is derived from Marc Shell, who shows in *Economy of Literature* that money is in many ways intertwined to ideas of representation and exchange in European thought since antiquity. **This includes, for example, the power of money to change things into one another and function as a universal measure, which according to Shell makes money more than anything else a mode of thought, comparable to such philosophical notions as symbol or Being.**

century and the early 20th century— was the time when the gold standard, which had until then formed the basis for a universal monetary system for several decades, fell into a crisis. The gold standard, which by definition means that the value of a currency is guaranteed by its convertibility into gold, was a historical attempt to create a universal value substitute. With the gold standard, international trade had a fixed standard for exchange rates between different currencies (Foreman-Peck 154–174). And monetary signs (that is, banknotes and coins) that had no intrinsic value had their referent in gold, which was considered value *per se* (Goux 20, 112).

Although the gold standard was established in England in the first half of the 19th century, its heyday lasted from 1870's to the First World War. The main reason for the crisis of the gold standard was that government expenditure in many European nations increased rapidly towards the end of the period—mostly because of increases in military expenditure (Foreman-Peck 165–165) The European governments needed more money for the coming war, and they increased the size of the money supply in circulation. As Jean-Joseph Goux notes, this disjunction between the supply of available gold and the total amount of money in circulation resulted in free-floating fiduciary currency that was no longer convertible (112). Which meant that the conversion of a currency into gold, although possible formally, could in practice be suspended by a central bank, and such temporary suspensions were made at an increasing rate towards the end of the period (Foreman-Peck 170–174). Goux notes that since the elimination of the gold standard in Europe in 1915 it has never been possible to reinstate it. "The conflictive tendency manifested since that time, with crises and readjustments, has been increasingly toward inconvertibility and fluctuation" (115).

Against the Day aptly depicts this pre-First World War era, characterized by people's growing skepticism towards economic institutions. However, the crisis of the gold standard is

never openly referred to, not even when the events take place in Europe (about half of the pages), or on the Eastern fringes of the early 20th century British Empire. When British gold sovereigns are counterfeited in the novel in Irkutsk, Siberia, the difference between a thinly gilded Chinese copper coin and the real article disappears: "It really is young Vic[toria] here on every one of these. And that's what matters, isn't it?" (ATD 775). Also, the Silver Act of 1890 and the subsequent end of bimetallism in North America by the end of the 19th century is mentioned only in passing (89, 306).[4] However, in *Against the Day*, Pynchon brings forth the crisis of monetary system through a tradition of esoteric knowledge that has always revolved around gold—alchemy. Besides being another example of the writer's known preoccupation with heretic science, alchemy in this novel represents a challenge to the basic axiom of the gold standard—the self-evident naturalness of gold and silver as sources of value.

Alchemy is referred to for the first time around 1900 in Colorado, in a scene where photographer Merle Rideout meets Webb Traverse, a miner and the great patriarchal figure of the novel. Webb also has a side only few people know: he wages his own war against the mining companies by dynamiting railroads in Colorado. Both men thus have a professional interest in chemistry: Merle for various chemicals used in 19th century photography, Webb for explosives. In order to figure out the intentions of each other, the men start a discussion on alchemy. Webb makes a seemingly neutral remark about a compound named fulminate, which is a lethal explosive made by dissolving metals like mercury and silver with various acids. Merle explains:

> "Basically you take gold and ammonia, or silver and nitric acid, or mercury ore and fulminic acid, which is just good old prussic acid, the suicide's friend,

[4] ("Free Silver Movement", *Encyclopedia Britannica*). One of the prominent female characters, Dahlia "Dally" Rideout, it is told, has been a model for an allegorical statue named "The Spirit of Bimetallism", that holds the images of sun and moon in its hands. The statue has been placed in a long hall (presumably of a bank) in New York along with such other allegorical statues as Supply, Demand, Surplus Value, and Diminishing Returns (ATD 895).

> patriarch of the cyanide family with an oxygen tacked on, and just as poisonous to breathe the fumes of."
>
> Webb shook his head as if in dismay at the world and its ironies […]. "You mean to say gold, silver, these shining and wonderful metals, basis of all the world's economies, you go in a laboratory, fool with them a little, acid and so on, and you get a high explosive that all you got to do's sneeze at the wrong time and it's adios, muchachos?"
>
> Merle […] nodded. "Sort of the *infernal* side to the story, you could say." (77–78)[5]

Alchemists, in their attempt to fabricate gold from metals of lesser value, paved the way for the invention of modern explosives. But the dialogue between Merle and Webb also indicates something else, namely the bond between wealth and violence that comes up everywhere in the novel. With a reference to the fulminate, Webb wonders further, "almost makes you think, if there is a Philosopher's Stone, there might not also be—"(ibid.). What? The possibility that silver and gold can be turned into a lethal explosive? In the politically tense atmosphere of the mining area, neither man discusses this aloud. But the discussion reveals that there is something within gold and silver, the core of economic value that ignites violence and destruction in more than one way.

The "infernal side" of the gold-based monetary system becomes very palpable, for example, when Fleetwood Vibe, an explorer from a wealthy family, reminisces about his trip to South Africa at the end of the 19th century. In Johannesburg, which the native Africans called "eGoli," "the city of gold," the newly found gold in the 1880's created a gold rush in which

[5] It has been noted in *Against The Day Wikipedia* that contrary to fulminating mercury or silver, fulminating gold, as described in this passage, is not a known chemical procedure, but more or less Pynchon's own invention ("ATD Page by Page 57–80").

European mining companies as well as individual gold-diggers from around the world robbed the land's natural resources while the native Africans were exploited to an unprecedented scale.[6] "Everyone white was in some way caught up in this, it was a no-limit game" (169), reminisces Fleetwood, who once forces a native mine worker to step into a deep mine shaft because he suspects the worker has stolen a raw diamond. Feeling no remorse for the deed, Fleetwood however realizes after South Africa that he has been shown "the secret backlands of wealth, and how sooner or later it depended on some act of murder, seldom limited to one" (170).

In the dialogue between Merle and Webb alchemy also appears as an attempt to create value that is no longer dependent on a certain fixed material referent, which puts alchemy in an ambiguous dual position with regard to economy:

> [Merle]: "But if you look at the history, modern chemistry only starts coming in to replace alchemy around the same time capitalism really gets going. Strange, eh? What do you make of that?"
>
> Webb nodded agreeably. "Maybe capitalism decided it didn't need the old magic anymore. […] Why bother? Had their own magic, doing just fine, thanks, instead of turning lead into gold, they could take poor people's sweat and turn it into greenbacks, and save that lead for enforcement purposes." (79)

In Webb's comment surplus value appears as a form of modern alchemy, the side effects of which are no less dangerous and lethal than those of the ancient one. Also, the historical shift

[6] The large gold discoveries in Transvaal, South Africa, actually prolonged the reign of the gold standard that otherwise would have been much shorter (Foreman-Peck 154–173).

from gold and silver coinage to paper money is referred to as a magic trick comparable to those of the alchemists.[7]

In its relation to economy, alchemy thus stands in a dual position of being both the excluded other of the gold-based monetary system, and something that is inscribed to the core of value formation. As an esoteric tradition that aimed at manufacturing gold alchemy is ancient, practically as old as minting,[8] and in *Against the Day* it appears as the necessary shadow against which positivist ideas of value such as the gold standard are established. From this perspective, the fact that the transmutation of lead or mercury into gold was never empirically proved, that it was a more or less imaginary leap only emphasizes the inherent factitiousness or *fictionality* of value formation. But as the history of alchemy has shown, making gold has always interested all kinds of rulers, who have the authority to issue money. All this makes alchemy an economically and politically dangerous enterprise, for it reveals, as in a mirror that the question of value always boils down to the question of authorization.

The Real Article—Gold and Varieties of Realism

As Goux and Walter Benn Michaels have stated, the gold standard was not only a monetary system. It conveyed a certain idea of representation, characterized by credibility, convertibility, and naturalness. In his influential work, *The Gold Standard and the logic of Naturalism* (1987), Michaels argues that the logic of the gold standard was to efface representation as representation.

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[7] The comparison of paper money and alchemy is in fact quite old. In *Money, Language and Thought*, Marc Shell notes how Marco Polo, who described the use of paper money in China in his writings, already compared the ruler Kublai Khan to an alchemist (99n).

[8] The origins of alchemy are usually dated back to Hellenist Alexandria around 300 BCE, but just as often to early Greek natural philosophy around 600 BCE (Cobb and Goldwhite 16–25). The first texts of alchemy were written in Greek in the first century CE, and the tradition came to late Medieval Europe through Arab philosophers from the seventh through the tenth centuries (Nummedal 17–21, 188n)

But this fusion of materiality and identity leads, according to Michaels, to a paradox: to think of gold as if it were money was to deny the existence of money (157). By this he means that only the discrepancy between materiality and identity, between material and value, would enable the possibility of money and money economy (ibid.). This paradoxical attempt to efface representation also characterized the poetics of realism. In his study, Michaels analyzes representations of subjectivity in 19th century literary realism (or what Michaels names naturalism), and shows that realism has an intrinsic bond to the contemporary economic mode of representation —the gold standard. What was at stake in the recurrent question of subjectivity prevalent in realism was the split between body and identity. This doubling within personhood, argues Michaels, already reflects the nature of the commodity, and a character in realism becomes a nexus where two registers of representation—writing and money—fuse: "the desire to live up to the look on your face (to become what is written on your face) is the desire to be equal to oneself [...]. It is, in the logic of the gold standard, the desire to make yourself equal to your face value, to become gold" (22). A version of this logic can be seen, for example, in a novel that is actually situated on the threshold between realism and modernism—André Gide's *Les faux-monnayers* (1925). In the novel, one of the main characters, Bernard, declares to his beloved Laura: "Je voudrais, tout le long de ma vie, au moindre choc, render un son pur, probe, authentique. Presque tous les gens que j'ai connus sonnent faux. Valoir exactemant ce qu'on paraît; ne pas chercher à paraître plus qu'on ne vaut…" (Gide, *Les faux-monnayers* 197–198).[9] In Gidé's novel, however, such desire is already ironized, for in the course of the novel it turns out that the characters are in most cases "counterfeit money" in social relations—phoney and manipulative. To Michaels, to achieve that ideal, that equality between body and identity, would

[9] "I should like all my life long, at the very smallest shock, to ring true, with a pure, authentic sound. Nearly all the people I have known ring false. To be worth exactly what one seems to be worth—not try to seem to be worth more…" (Gide, *Counterfeiters* 185)

also mean to efface the discrepancy that makes a person, for "when the self becomes equal to its body […] it dies"(22). In Michael's analysis, such ideals were, in fact, something that derived not from the interests of individuals or groups, but from the money economy itself (178). From this perspective, the demand for personal authenticity in realism turns out to be not something inherent in literature (or arts in general), but a symptom of a particular historical moment.

Against the Day, no longer attached to the axioms of literary realism, does not pose the question of representation or authenticity through individuals. One imminent reason for this is that in Pynchon's prose the narrative emphasis is never on individuals as such. His characters are always subjected to something beyond their individuality—social context, historical situation, mythical imagery, thought experiments, or paranoiacally cohesive plot structures. What the narration only ironically suggests in novels like *Les faux-monnayers* —that people can be seen as money—is foregrounded in *Against the Day*. With regard to *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Joseph Tabbi has argued that in Pynchon's prose "meanings […] are not at all 'deep' in this sense, they exist right on the surface" (87). So they do also in this novel where we can find characters like the previously mentioned Professor Renfrew/Werfner, or where people, like the tourists and immigrants at the harbor of Trieste, are openly compared to money: "the daily streaming of souls […] Out and In—like debits and credits" (ATD 697).

Another thing is the complex relationship with realism that characterizes Pynchon's fiction, and which has gained him the reputation of a paradigmatic postmodernist writer. As has been often noted, his prose combines meticulous and historically accurate descriptions with radical questioning of representation—a feature that has been aptly named with Linda Hutcheon's term "historiographic metafiction" characterizing the inherent paradox of postmodernist historical representation. Another salient feature is the way the fictional world in

Pynchon undergoes a "radical though plausible violation of reality" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 704). As Brian McHale has shown, recurrently the supposed frame of reality within the narration is modified by internal contradictions or gross violations of extra-textual norms of verisimilitude (68–69). [10] These narrative discrepancies fracture in a radical way the consistency of realistic representation. However, Pynchon's way of modifying realism goes beyond the mere literary, for a characteristic that recurs throughout his fiction is the writer's preoccupation with *impossible perception*—that is, a situation where empirical perception, the foundation of the objective gaze of science and our common sense notion of reality, is taken to its limits. Impossible perception, like the "roar" of the sun in *Gravity's Rainbow* that cannot be heard because the sound cannot travel through space, is Pynchon's attempt to challenge the coordinates of what is considered reality by broadening the scope of ordinary perception. Impossible perception is involved, for example, in the novel's emphasis on mathematics, especially imaginary numbers that were theorized since mid-nineteenth century. Sascha Pöhlmann has argued that Pynchon's notion of reality is complex in the way numbers can be complex (25), and noted that Pynchon's use of mathematics shows that imaginary is not necessarily synonymous with fictional:

> *Against the Day* [draws] on mathematics in order to show how foolish it is to dismiss the imaginary as something "unreal" or fictional that is either opposed or irrelevant to a consideration of reality. … no mathematician would consider imaginary numbers silly or a waste of time even though, strictly speaking, they do not exist. (26–28)

[10] A typical situation is when an otherwise perfectly realistic scene has contrafactual elements (such as talking animals), or when deliberate fantasies turn out to be actual. Or, the reader is given prospective warnings about the mental capacity of the characters, so that the reality of the text has to be reconstructed, and often also deconstructed several times by the reader.

In *Against the Day* the question of representation, reality, and thus the possibility of understanding the world emerge through light. One of the big questions that the novel poses for us is how much of our concept of reality is dependent on vision, hence light? Not surprisingly, the novel is saturated by things and beings that are just past visibility— ghosts, visitations, electromagnetic phenomena—revealing "worlds which are set to the side of the one we have taken […] to be the only world given us" (249). Impossible perception also has an ideological impact in Pynchon, for it designates things that cannot be perceived because they are considered non-existing. The notion on possible or multiple worlds have often been used in relation to Pynchon's fiction, but what is often ignored is its political implications, which are very clear in this novel (more about this in the next chapter). As Pöhlmann argues: "The play of worlds of *Against the Day*…matter most where they show how petty the limits of reality actually are, and how they are curbed and determined by forces that are eventually always political" (28).

Impossible perception also converges with the monetary crisis quite concretely, in a scene between Merle and Frank Traverse, where the theme of manufacturing gold and manipulating nature comes up again. A couple of years after Merle's encounter with Webb Traverse he meets engineer Frank Traverse, the now late Webb's son, and shows him in his studio a nugget of *argentaurum.* This substance, literally "silvergold," has been produced by certain Dr. Stephen Emmens, a historical figure who, at the end of the 19th century, claimed to have created a process that transmutes silver into gold. Dr. Emmens is a controversial figure in the history of chemistry: a member of academic associations, and an inventor of the explosive named *emmensite,* who however never seemed to gain much scientific credit for his work. Emmens describes the principles of transmutation in his essay "Argentaurana, or Some Contributions to the History of Science" (1899). Emmens, a true alchemist it seems, is however very careful not to

disclose all the details of his method that includes, for example, a mechanical pounding of a piece of a silver dollar, which according to him eventually leads into the transmutation of silver into a substance that is neither silver nor gold but has the properties of both—hence the name *argentaurum*. In the same year, 1899, it was claimed in the *New York Herald* that Emmens had sold a considerable amount of that fabricated gold to the U.S. Mint (Emmens, *Argentaurana*, 65–70). Although Emmens denied these claims in his essay, and stressed that he had only sold some ingots of argentaurum to the United States Assay Office in New York (73), it is evident from the frequent contacts that the U.S. Mint was interested in his work. What Emmens lacked, however, was scientific authority (a fact he complains about several times in his writings), and since he didn't want to disclose his method, he eventually became an object of controversy. [11]

In *Against the Day*, Merle, who has immediately realized the economic potential of argentaurum, announces enthusiastically to Frank: "This Emmens process, even with what it costs […] this stuff could *knock the Gold Standard right onto its glorified ass*. And what'll happen to metal prices then?" (ATD 306) And the incredible possibility arises that some of the gold at the U.S. Treasury is in fact fabricated: "Big chunk of our damn U.S. Economy resting squarely onto it, how about that? (307)."

What gives this scene an additional twist is that Frank looks at the nugget through a thin slice of calcite, also known as Iceland Spar. This mineral has one peculiar characteristic: under suitable conditions, it refracts light so that the light is polarized. Every image seen through the spar becomes a double image, and thus Frank sees two overlapping images of the nugget, one of

[11] It seems that with Emmens, Pynchon has found, again, a piece of apocryphal history. In writing this article, I had difficulties in finding any information on Emmens. Major **reference databases, such** as *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, do not have entries on him or on argentaurum, and he is not mentioned in the regular histories of chemistry. Only a few copies of his books, all first and only editions, are available in academic libraries. In his essay, "Some remarks concerning gravitation"(1897), Emmens also claims to have manufactured diamonds in 1863 by electrolysis of carbon bisulfide. But, disappointed at the small size of the diamonds, he never renewed the experiment. Emmens's experiments and writing include a wide range of topics from gravity and metallurgy to ballistics. He also wrote fiction, and was devoted to the question of abolishing poverty.

gold and one of silver. Which one does he believe in? Which one is more real? There is no solution to the question, since the lost ground for value is at the same time the lost ground for reality as something commonly shared, solid, and tangible. Merle wonders, "how could something so weak and weightless as light make solid metals transmute? Does seem crazy, don't it—down here anyway, down at our own humble ground level and below, where it's all weight and opacity" (306). In the novel, the Iceland Spar keeps reappearing time after time as an emblem of rupture within reality. Characters who are aware of this special effect of light caused by the spar consider this double image metaphysical: in addition to what is understood as the ordinary world, one sees invisible lines, surfaces, and beings. The Iceland Spar is thus a ghostly mineral, for it shows things that remain invisible to ordinary vision, therefore challenging "the world that thinks of itself as real" (143).

"If it doesn't work with gold, next step will be lead**"–**Anarchism and Money

When gold in *Against the Day* melts almost literally into air, it does not mean that value as such disappears (this would have been precisely the fear of those who advocated the gold standard), but that the mechanisms of value formation, and the contractual nature of value is laid bare. Goux has argued that the notion of value is always dependent on idealization that gradually tends to make matter indifferent (50). It starts with comparison—essential to all exchange—and the recognition of an abstract value despite the perceptible differences between the things compared (3). This abstract value that Goux names, after Marx, the *general equivalent* becomes the standard measure, which makes all other things commensurable (ibid.). In economic exchange, the general equivalent takes the form of money, which historically finds its expression in gold

(16–21). [12] But, argues Goux, in order to function as a general equivalent gold has to belong to three different orders simultaneously. These three orders Goux has named—by applying Lacan's psychoanalytical concepts—the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. The imaginary order means that gold is the ideal abstracted measure of values. In the symbolic order, gold is something that can be represented by worthless symbols (i.e., paper money), and made a medium of exchange. And the order of the real is evoked whenever gold emerges as a concrete means of payment or a reserve. (47–53) [13] The paradox with gold is that it is both a commodity and a universal measure for all other commodities. To Goux, this paradox only shows that the general equivalent is essentially a hierarchical form, a form of centralization and subordination:

> The term *capitalism* might be applied with all its etymological weight to this centralization of value and values. The general equivalent functions as head and capital of a divided territory from which it is barred as empty, omnipotent center. (44)

Political implications are apparent here: the general equivalent—in all its manifestations—is the form of centralized and abstracted power. Goux sees that the historical evolution of the monetary form shows a constant progression toward abstraction where the materiality of gold is eventually replaced by the imaginary: "No longer a material value, money becomes a sign of gold, and then a simple sign of value, the sign or representative of a hypostatized abstraction" (49). Against the power of the general equivalent and its "hegemonic logic" (6), Goux sets what he names

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[12] One of the basic arguments in Goux's theory on the general equivalent is that it is a form that can be seen structuring other cultural domains as well—those of semiotics, psychoanalysis, and politics— thus making them isomorphic with economy. Goux's insight is that all these domains can be analyzed in terms of exchange, where value is created by replacement, and the domain is centered on a general equivalent that functions as a standard for exchange. Just like gold in economy, in the domain of semiotics language (speech) becomes the general equivalent for all other kinds of expression. In psychoanalysis, the phallus becomes the standard, the sexual norm, against which all other objects of drive are measured. And in political life, monarchy is a situation in which subjects are subsumed under one sovereign ruler, and territories are subsumed under one capital. (9–63)

[13] The relevance of Lacanian concepts is debatable here, but Goux's division of gold into three orders is otherwise well-grounded.

symbolization, which concept fuses semiology with economy. Goux's theory on symbolization in *Symbolic Economies* is somewhat schematic and lacking in coherence, but I see that his attempt is to restore those elements of exchange that were repressed by the formation of the general equivalent: intersubjectivity and materiality, i.e., the profoundly *social* nature of all exchange. Accordingly, he follows Georg Simmel, to whom most relationships between people can be interpreted as forms of exchange (Simmel 82). These social elements, which never actually vanished from economy, but persist concealed, function in Goux's theory as a counterforce to the abstract and centralized universality of monetary economy. To Goux, value formation is essentially dependent on intersubjective relations and the signifying productivity of human agents. As Goux argues with regard to semantic value: "value springs from a certain relationship between the activity of subjects and the material that *will become* significant. It is not a passive access to a signifying order but a vital intention, an investment, a projection" (170). Value formation is thus a profoundly political matter, where, if we follow Goux, the signifying practices of individuals always confront the homogenizing order of the general equivalent. This confrontation can be seen also in *Against the Day* when Pynchon depicts a particular historical moment where the crisis in economy corresponds to a political crisis, namely, that of centralized power.

Historically, the amazing consequence of the pre-First World War crisis was that the gold standard, which was considered an absolute system (because of its supposed naturalness), could function without a fixed referent. After the war years, and during the rest of the 20th century, the world gradually entered a state where the monetary system was practically run by conventional signs. As Goux has pointed out, the legitimation crisis of the gold standard had a strong cultural impact, and it corresponded to other crises of representation that emerged during same period,

when the need for empirical reference for sign systems was questioned. Goux mentions as an example the Saussurean declaration of the arbitrariness of linguistic values, and the birth of the modernist, pure painting by Kandinsky and Mondrian (113). In *Against the Day* the emerging modernism and its way of challenging conventional modes of representation can be seen in the character of Andrea Tancredi, a young Italian painter, who wishes to "get around the inertia of paint" (586) by using a technique that seems to fuse pointillism and abstract expressionism. Andrea would like to add the fourth dimension—time—to painting because he sees that motion is the essence of things: "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 we can" (ibid.)

However, when it comes to the transformation of social reality, in *Against the Day* art remains in the background. Instead, visions of other worlds and the transformation of this one are most often linked to anarchism, the new political movement of the time. There are several anarchists in the novel—both practicing ones like bombers and political assassins, and those who only support anarchist ideas. Besides the aforementioned Webb Traverse, all his sons—Reef, Frank, and Kit Traverse—are somehow inclined toward anarchism, Kit only in theory but his brothers also in practice. Other anarchists include European nihilists, American trade unionists, and an international crowd of emigrants and outlaws in the Pyrenees, Spain.

Historically, one of the main features within the anarchist movement (itself an assembly of several heterogeneous traditions and schools of thought) was the disavowal of authority, in particular that of the state. One logical and practical consequence of this disavowal was an attempt to abolish money, and some attempts were made either to abolish money altogether (in the libertarian communes in Spain during the Civil War 1936–38), or to create currencies of use-

value (i.e. labor time exchanged for labor time).[14] With anarchists, the idea of community life without state administration and the abolition of money come together. As has been argued by many theoreticians of money, most notably Simmel, "sociological conditions," i.e. the social structure, determines the principles of monetary policy and ways of interpreting money (172–174). Thus, as Marc Shell has shown in *The Economy of Literature* (1978), tyranny and coinage develop historically at the same time, thus manifesting the interdependency of political and semiological power that Goux theorized above. Be it a king or a state, money always implies the presence of an authority, of power—both the power of money itself as abstract potentiality, and the power of the regime that has authorized it.

The anarchists' attempt at abolishing money is not openly dealt with in *Against the Day*. However, I argue that the questioning of money and value that recurs throughout the novel represents an anarchist writerly strategy that attacks the fetishistic quality of gold and the presence of centralized power within the monetary system. Pynchon's sympathies in the novel lie on the side of the anarchists, despite the fact that innocent people become casualties of the war between anarchists and the regime. This is the least elaborated part of the entire phenomenon in the novel, where owners and proprietors resemble nihilist stereotypes in a manner that has usually been associated with their political adversaries. Although Pynchon ironizes his anarchists, often quite heavily (in the fantastic episode at the Anarchist Spa in the Pyrenees in particular), they clearly represent the possibility of an alternative economy based on the ethics of mutuality. When Reef Traverse watches the anarchist youth in Spain, their devotion impresses him: "these solemn young folks carried with them an austerity, a penultimacy before some unstated future, a Single Idea, whose power everything else ran off of. Here it was not silver or

[14] See Jesse S. Cohn, *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Politics* (216–229), and Richard D. Sonn, *Anarchism*, 90–94.

gold but something else. Reef could not quite see what it was" (931). Stray Briggs, Reef's ex-wife who has struggled with economic problems all her life, also gets more and more involved with leftist activism towards the end of the novel. In winter 1913–14, when she works as a volunteer on the violent Ludlow strikes in Colorado, something has profoundly changed with her. She seems to have abandoned the idea of personal gain altogether: "There is a sort of informal plexus of people working as best they can to help the strikers out. Food, medicine, ammunition, doctoring. Everything's voluntary. Nobody makes a profit or gets paid, nor even credit or thankyous" (997). But, this said, it also becomes clear that anarchism is not brought into the novel as a solution to social and economic problems. On the contrary: as one of the anarchists declares, anarchism will lose its historical moment, the battle against the state, because the ongoing preparation for the war will enforce nationalism and the idea of national state (938).

The possibility to defy capitalism, however, remains, and it emerges in the novel in places where it is least expected. This becomes evident, for example, when the magnate and financier Scarsdale Vibe comments on the inventor Nikola Tesla's ideas of free electrical power. Nikola Tesla, a historical figure who had an important role in the development of electrical engineering in the late 19th and early 20th century, had demonstrated that power and energy could be transmitted wirelessly. In order to put his experiments to use he devised a plan for a transformer that could produce huge amounts of electrical power that anyone could use. Scarsdale Vibe, the potential sponsor and the real baddie of the novel, considers the whole idea harmful and dangerous:

> "He [Tesla] is already talking in private about something he calls a 'World-System,' for producing huge amounts of electrical power that anyone can tap for free, anywhere in the world, because it uses the planet as an element in a gigantic

> resonant circuit. He is naïve enough to think he can get financing for this, from Pierpont [Morgan] or me, or one or two others. It has escaped his mighty intellect that no one can make any money off an invention like that. To put up money for research into a system of free power would be to throw it away, and violate — hell, betray—the essence of everything modern history is supposed to be." (33)

Nowadays one can only speculate what such a transformer could have done to world history and world economy, let alone climate change. Later in the novel it turns out that Tesla's attempts at constructing wireless electricity are secretly sabotaged by Scarsdale Vibe, who announces that if the transformer turns out to be "too much of a threat to the existing power arrangements" (323) it will be dynamited. For Vibe the idea of free power available for everyone is dangerous[15] —not only because it undermines his cost/profit calculation, but because it undermines his notion of capitalism as the driving force of history. When Scarsdale Vibe speaks up for "the essence of everything modern history is supposed to be" he refers to capitalism that lives on and creates scarcity, in this case the scarcity of electrical power. But one can also detect here the view that history and economic history are basically the same thing, and anything that would threaten the accumulation of capital would also be a threat to the promises of history.

This idea of capitalizing history, or more precisely, of capitalizing time, appears recurrently in the novel. In capitalized history time has the money form—the clock time of endlessly accumulating rationally segmented units that guarantee the linear growth of interest and profit. Organization of time is also a mode of ruling, and in *Against the Day* this comes up several times. Early in the novel, explorers near the North Pole speculate whether colonizing in the future might extend beyond geographical space: "And what of colonizing additional

[15] Tesla's transformer can also be seen as another form of alchemy, since it produces value (electric current) seemingly out of nothing. I am indebted to professor Mark Osteen for pointing this out.

dimensions beyond the third? Colonize Time? Why not?" (131). Also, the imperial political administration of North Europe is described as "stock-jobbing" of history, where "lives are the units of exchange" (828), indicating a society in which life has already been reduced to life-time, devoid of any other significance beyond the mere quantity.

But time, as Pynchon says in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is an artificial resource to begin with, and in *Against the Day* this insight becomes another important locus for his critique of capitalism. Into a world where workers like Webb make a living by selling their time —"he never saw a minute that didn't belong to somebody else" (91)—Pynchon introduces en masse the theoretical speculation of space-time and the theory of relativity that was born in the late 19th and early 20th century. Pynchon makes the most of the fact that empirical notions of time and space were shaken in science at the same time when political, economical and cultural instability prevailed. People's imaginations were aroused by the idea of time-traveling, a theme that is also elaborated throughout the novel, where many characters have experiences of time-travels and travelers. In the novel Pynchon mixes the technological enthusiasm of early science fiction with the late 19th century theorization on time as the fourth dimension that would connect past, present, and future into a single spatial continuum. Time-traveling in *Against the Day* not only undermines the linearity, and hence the possibility of capitalizing and controlling time. It is openly compared to the social utopianism of the anarchists. When **Yashmeen** Halfcourt, one of the time-travelers, feels that she had sought "routes of escape from a world whose terms she could not accept" (942), it can be taken either as an account of her time-traveling experiences, or as a political statement, or both.

Challenging the money form of time— the accumulating time of interest and future profits—is another of Pynchon's subversive writerly strategies. Time in Pynchon's fiction can

often change from linear succession of events into an immanent mythical time, where every action sooner or later has its equal and opposite reaction. When British intelligence officer Derrick Theign meets his fate in the hands of Serbian nationalists he has persecuted, there is no money that can save him from their vengeance:

> "To save everyone trouble," Vastroslav said, "there is nothing you can tell us. Nothing you can pay us. You have stepped into a long history of blood and penance, and the coin of these transactions is struck not from metal but from Time" (874).

Theign's fate is revenge from a death he has himself brought about. Vengeance, which Goux (43) sees as a form of exchange comparable to the elementary form of economical exchange (barter), is a recurrent theme in the novel. Throughout the novel Pynchon creates situations where time suddenly changes into payback time that does not involve belief in representation, as in monetary systems, but obligation that is personal and inescapable. Irreconcilable evils, injustice—the novel is saturated with people who did not get their share when history moved on, and who now haunt the present like vengeful ghosts. Similarly, the economy of reciprocal obligations haunts the novel, evoking an ethical demand that may be vague but strangely persistent in Pynchon's fiction.

In *Against the Day*, the historical legitimation crisis of a monetary system appears as a breach from which all kinds of concrete intersubjective forms of exchange emerge. In the novel one can thus detect two kinds of economy: one that functions under the rule of an autonomous and universal code, seemingly independent of human agents, and another, in which the universality and anonymity of money gives way to an economy of reciprocal obligations. Pynchon is not, however, providing us a fiction of a life without or outside monetary economy.

On the contrary, what he elaborates throughout the novel is economy as something that is inseparable from our modes of thinking and being. And as the historical examples of alchemy and anarchism show, the desire to transform these modes never leaves us.

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