CHAPTER FIVE

ENTANGLEMENT AS TELOS: THE BODY AS CODE AND CODING PRACTICE IN *BLEEDING EDGE*

> Picking up memory's remote now, she hits PAUSE, then STOP, then POWER OFF, smiling without visible effort. (Pynchon, *BE* 16)

> "How could it be? How could predicting market behaviour be the same as predicting a terrible disaster?"
>
> "If the two were different forms of the same thing."
>
> (Pynchon, *BE* 320)

> Call it freedom, it's based on control. Everybody connected together, impossible anybody should get lost, ever again. Take the next step, connect it to these cell phones, you've got a Web of surveillance, inescapable… (Pynchon, *BE* 420)

With his recent novel *Bleeding Edge* (2013), Pynchon returns to the classic quest narrative framework that provided the fulcrum for many of his early novels. The cultural imaginaries of the detective genre are often associated with Southern California. As Pynchon's previous novels validate this link with the landscape, critics are quick to point out the spatial contiguity that communicate the narrative investments they share among themselves. The last of his "California novels"[1]—*Inherent Vice* (2009)—preceded the publication of *Bleeding Edge*. With this novel, however, Pynchon moves on to the New York city. Here, the novel shares spatial and contextual affinities with Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*. Both the novels take us back to the fallout of the dot com crash to consider the ways in which individuals navigate spaces intervened by information technologies and virtual simulacra. A consumerist cultural ethos informs the fictional architectonics in both texts. The temporal ambiguity of both the novels stems from the ambivalence around al-Qaeda's September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. Yet, Pynchon's aesthetic preoccupations have often minimized the possibility of investigating the political orders that determine the production of events and identities. What appears to be a rejection of essentialist underpinnings is seen by his critics as a "kind of displacement of Pynchon's politics onto the politics of literary form" (Bérubé 267). The current novel may be read as an antidote to such conjectures. That the novel articulates the immediacy of 9/11 as "The Day Everything Changed" (Pynchon, *BE* 378) registers the dialectical intertwining of textual and the political in Pynchon's oeuvre.

However, the novel does not engage with the catastrophic fallout of September 11 the way novels such as DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) have done previously[2]. In *Against the Day* (2006), as recent readings show, Pynchon dramatizes the emerging geopolitical landscape following the collapse of the Twin Towers (Benton 2011; Maguire 2017). This is perhaps most pertinently pronounced in *Bleeding Edge*. It follows the story of a decertified fraud investigator Maxine Tarnow. In one of the episodes in the novel, Maxine's friend Heidi speaks of 9/11 thus: "The day was a terrible tragedy. But it isn't the whole story. Can't you feel it, how everybody's regressing? 11 September infantilized this country. It had a chance to grow up, instead it chose to default back to childhood" (Pynchon, *BE* 336). Her statement is redolent of the cultural fantasies and the territorializing tendencies that define the political climate of the United States post-9/11. This is evidenced in the adoption of measures such as extended surveillance and censorship mechanisms among others.

For Maxine, the stakeholders of the state "took our own precious sorrow, processed it, sold it back to us like any other product" (Pynchon, *BE* 377-78) to make such parameters possible. This is a crucial point in the text for it foregrounds the ways in which the materiality of an event is rendered discursive[3]. In fact, Pynchon's novel chooses to look at the American landscape following the collapse of the Twin Towers as a site of convergence and permeability. Shortly after the event, the narrator talks of the Internet as an entity "[o]ut in the vast undefined anarchism of cyberspace, among the billions of self-resonant fantasies, dark possibilities" (Pynchon, *BE* 327). The point here is to see the electronic interfacing of the actual event that accommodate mediatized spectacles. Such a logic is consonant with DeLillo's *Falling Man* for it depicts the terrorist attack in postmodern terms. The endless entanglement of materiality and discursivity is what characterises its narrative imaginary. We take this as an entry point in our reading of *Bleeding Edge*.

The chapter interrogates the entangled ontology by looking at the representation of technology, financial capital and trash/waste in the novel. For Tony Tanner, "Pynchon is the real lyricist of rubbish" ("American" 214). He alerts us to Pynchon's preoccupation with "many of the categories (or noncategories) of people whom society regards as 'rubbish', socially useless junk: bums, hoboes, drifters, transients, itinerants, vagrants; the disaffected, the disinherited, the discarded; derelicts, losers, victims—collectively 'the preterite'" (Tanner, "American" 214). While this is true of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the

current chapter shifts focus to the 'inorganic'. In doing so, it argues that such settings unsettle the essentialist underpinnings of the body and espouse what is clearly a corporeal instability. For Arin Keeble, "the before and after of 9/11 is precipitated by the bursting of the dotcom bubble" (251). The text foregrounds the Deep Web as a locus of conspiracy theories and paranoia that characterises the contemporary American culture[4]. Maxine's initial encounter with DeepArcher, a computer program described as "a virtual sanctuary to escape to from the many varieties of real-world discomfort" (Pynchon, *BE* 74), registers this ambiguity thus: "She's lost. There is no map. It isn't like being lost in any of the romantic tourist destinations back in meatspace" (Pynchon, *BE* 77). The unmappability of the virtual frontier allows Pynchon to investigate epistemic instabilities. He does this by overlapping the dotcom bubble with the historical trajectory of 9/11, the virtuality of the Internet and the "meatspace" or the physicality of Manhattan. This is reflective of a typical Pynchonian project of inventing "a mystical counter-history to the rationalistic, monovocal Anglo-European history of technocratic capitalism" (Elias 133). As seen in Pynchon's early work, his fiction challenges the categorical binaries—say, of life and death, matter and metaphor, allegory and algorithm etc.—in favour of endless entanglements. *Bleeding Edge* participates in this by thematically conflating visceral and virtual registers, among others.

Inventing Counter-histories

Pynchon's use of the quest narrative is both parodic and metafictional. In this novel, the quest perpends an escape from the rule of either/or. Maxine investigates the assets of Gabriel Ice, a billionaire tech mogul who is in charge of the computer security firm called hashslingrz. She is approached by Reg Despard, an accidental documentary filmmaker, who expresses concerns regarding the shady firm Ice is running. Reg, who used to sell pirated semi-pornographic film cassettes on the streets of New York in the 1990s, makes a fortune by selling a movie cassette to a Film Studies professor at NYU who discovers in the former's filming technique a "neo-Brechtian subversion of the diegesis" (Pynchon, *BE* 9). Subsequently, Reg finds himself frequently invited to deliver demonstrations to students and researchers. The fortune that he earns for himself indicates how a life can be structured through the entanglement of randomness and regularity. In the portrayal of this character, the borderline between culture and kitsch has been deliberately problematised. His subsequent elevation from a bootlegged videotape seller to someone with money and fame points to the contemporary culture of vlogging and YouTube economy. Reg tells

Maxine that he has been hired by Ice for shooting a film. But as he begins his work, he finds that he has been denied access to certain information about the firm hashslingrz. For Eric Outfield, Reg's expert in computer tempering, Ice has "a purpose on earth written in code none of us can read. Except maybe for 666" (Pynchon, *BE* 11). Such a statement conveys a coming together of the existential and informational indicators. A person's sense of purpose is determined by corporeally embedded performance. Ice's location[5] has been redefined by the quantitative rhetoric of information technology, as he emerges as someone who bears an indexical correspondence to the cyberspace.

This is further reinforced in the text when we are told that Maxine embodies "a tendency to look for hidden patterns" (Pynchon, *BE* 22). Anticipating what is to unfold in the novel, the statement suggests the activity "pattern recognition", to draw on William Gibson[6], that characterises the posthuman condition. Maxine's search for Ice is predicted on codified information. For her, information transmitted through cyberspace is what defines and determines the investigation. At this point, Pynchon's textual logic is "to understand humans, one needs to understand how the patterns of information they embody are created, organized, stored, and retrieved" (Hayles 104). The privileging of immaterial information over the material human suggests a structural shift in mapping the corporeal conditions. In one of the episodes, Maxine's friend Vyrva McElmo tells her that hashslingrz is after the deep-web tech called DeepArcher. This technology has been developed by Vyrva's husband Justin, a California programmer, along with his friend Lucas. DeepArcher includes a security algorithm that piques the interest of Ice. The site facilitates deep-web excursions and ensures that there are no traceable digital footprints of the user on the Internet. DeepArcher's genesis has been described in the text thus:

> Originally the guys, you have to wonder how presciently, had it in mind to create a *virtual sanctuary* to escape to from the many varieties of real-world discomfort. A grand-scale motel for the afflicted, a destination reachable by virtual midnight express from anyplace with a keyboard… Justin wanted to go back in time, to a California that had never existed, safe, *sunny all the time*, where in fact *the sun never set unless somebody wanted to see a romantic sunset*. Lucas was searching for someplace, you could say, a little *darker*, where it rains a lot and great *silences* sweep like wind, holding inside them forces of destruction. What came out as synthesis was DeepArcher. (Pynchon, *BE* 74; emphasis added)

The passage is significant for it foregrounds a convergence between machinic manifestation of reality and human desire. With its reference to the "virtual sanctuary" *vis-a-vis* "real-world discomforts", the text stages a corporeal crisis. The fact that virtual simulacra emerge as an appropriation of bodily vulnerabilities, these images inscribe complexities about the ontology of existence. The novel illustrates the plasticity ("sunny all the time") and perfectibility ("the sun never set unless somebody wanted to see a romantic sunset") of the digital spaces. It is pertinent to note the machinic interplay with the feeling body. Such a relationality is saturated with affect as the text heightens the realm of the senses ("darker", "silences"). By superimposing the mind and its associated attributes, virtual technology problematises the organic orders of cognition and memory. In this, the text accentuates a complex correspondence between technology and the human body. In such cases, to draw on Deleuze and Guattari:

> […] a direct link is perceived between the machine and desire, the machine passes to the heart of desire, the machine is desiring and desire, machined. Desire is not in the subject, but the machine in desire-with the residual subject off to the side, alongside the machine, around the entire periphery, a parasite of machines, an accessory of vertebra-machinate desire. In a word, the real difference is not between the living and the machine, vitalism and mechanism, but between two states of the machine that are two states of the living as well. (*Anti-Oedipus* 285-86)

Pointing at the prospective demise of the interface between automatism and human desire, Deleuze and Guattari illustrate the schizophrenic capitalist technocracy[7]. This is premised on the dialogue "between the small machines scattered in every machine, and the small formations dispersed in every organism" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 286). By transforming the human body into the machinic order, Deleuze and Guattari project a codified understanding of the individual that characterises Pynchon's novel.

"And then they blew it to pixels"

This is further evidenced in the interchangeability between embodied intelligence and its simulated opposite. With the blurring of the borderlines, the mechanically manufactured affect and emotions permeate the novel. The vocabulary in which it is conveyed lends weight to the novel's more sombre and serious moments. At one point, Maxine's jeremiad against the U.S. government has been described to be an effect of her "Anxious Mom Mode" (Pynchon, *BE* 48). In the middle of the story, the functionality of the nerve

receptors in the body has been depicted in terms of "buttons on a game controller" (Pynchon, *BE* 258)[8]. The ontology of 9/11 is presented in the text either as a movement back to a "default state" (Pynchon, *BE* 321) or as "a reset button for the city" (Pynchon, *BE* 387). Maxine pushes this to the extreme as she gazes at the ruins of the World Trade Center: "it was pure geometry… And then they blew it to pixels" (Pynchon, *BE* 446). In such episodes, the materiality of the events is complexly aligned with the discursive digital cartography. Of equal importance is the way in which the narrative manages to unsettle the biological essentialism and offer a reconceptualization of the feeling human. Take, for instance, the moment where cellular materiality of the nervous nodes has been rendered as "buttons" that operate on the logic of inputs and outputs. Here, the body's neural mechanisms are reified into the technological imaginary. The ontological alterity heightened in the text points to the informational culture of postmodernity. In such cultures, the organic and the inorganic are endlessly entangled.

While the novel clearly participates in the cultural politics of cyberspace, it does so by dramatizing its simultaneous penetration into "meatspace". For Jason Siegel, the narrative underscores "dehumanizing descriptions that metaphorically compare human beings to machines" (10). By drawing on Gibson's graphical and spatial representation of cyberspace, Siegel reads the "chremamorphic" events in the text and shows how the subject turns into a "programmable object" in capitalist technocracy that converts "user inputs and outputs into capital" (12). Inside its control regime, the average user of the Internet can be constantly monitored and monetized. Siegel's essay sheds light on a crucial convergence between corporate and informational apparatus. Pynchon's incorporation of the gaming culture into the novel provides further scope to investigate this entanglement. Maxine's kids are accustomed to playing a videogame with Vyrva's daughter Fiona that has a "first-person shooter, with a generous range of weaponry in a cityscape that looks a lot like New York" (Pynchon, *BE* 33). It is a fictional module attributed to the programmer duo Justin and Lucas. However, Pynchon alludes to real-world gaming giants as well, most notably perhaps to Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* among others. First released in the PlayStation console, *Metal Gear Solid* is built on an interactive digital domain with cinematic storytelling.

For Justine, it is one of the "forerunners" to DeepArcher and for Lucas, Kojima is known around as the "God" (Pynchon, *BE* 69). The production and proliferation of videogames problematise "the boundaries between work and play" (Yee 70). This is

indicative of a major marker of the contemporary cyberpolitics. In such regimes, simulated realities generate experience "*without even the faintest glimmer of a possible absence*, in a state of radical disillusion; the state of pure presence" (Baudrillard, *Ecstasy* 32). To put it in a differently, the interactive gaming experience reduces the cognitive engagement of the individual with the interface into capital that defines the management and manipulation of the mind. As such, "technologies that at once expanded the scope of gaming and integrated gamers ever more deeply into commercial kingdoms" (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 91). The fact that Xbox One subsequently releases an online multiplayer battle game titled *Bleeding Edge* reinforces the theoretical throughlines[9] running between Pynchon's narrative and the gaming industry.

Zigotisopolis: NYC Now and Nowhere

As hashslingrz takes control of DeepArcher and the interface goes open source, the site is no longer restricted to the strategies of its developer duo. Once it is off their hands, new users could create content and generate algorithms. This is evidenced in the way Maxine's kids create a virtual cityscape that resembles the old New York. The temporal extremity (old/new) is precipitated by the event of September 11 in the text. It is instructive to see how Maxine logs into DeepArcher and is struck by a sense of ontological ambivalence. The text verbalises her situation thus:

> […] Increasingly she's finding it harder to tell the real NYC from translations like Zigotisopolis . . . as if she keeps getting caught in a vortex taking her farther each time into the virtual world. Certainly unforeseen in the original business plan, there arises now a possibility that DeepArcher is about to overflow out into the perilous gulf between screen and face… Out of the ashes and oxidation of this postmagical winter, counterfactual elements have started popping up like li'l goombas. Early one windy morning Maxine's walking down Broadway when here comes a plastic top from a nine-inch aluminum take-out container, rolling down the block in the wind, *on its edge*, an edge thin as a predawn dream, keeps trying to fall over but the airflow or something—unless it's some nerd at a keyboard—keeps it upright for an implausible distance, half a block, a block, *waits for the light*, then half a block more till it finally rolls off the curb under the wheels of a truck that's pulling out and gets flattened. Real? Computer-animated? (Pynchon, *BE* 429; emphasis in original)

The passage deserves to be quoted in full in order to analyse the ontological ambiguities—human-machine entanglements—involved in the novel. The ambivalence is caused by the convergence between visceral ("meatspace") and the virtual ("cyberspace") landscapes. Maxine articulates this in her inability to seperate the "face" from the "screen". This is a crucial moment in the text that mixes up the organic ("dream") and the inorganic ("aluminum"). Maxine's sense of "the real NYC", for example, registers a sense of place that has been problematised by the orders of time. At this point, the remembering subject responds to an experiential mode of temporality rather than going by the sequential logic. Further, the text brings this conceit to critical and historical focus by blurring the edges of fact and fantasy ("postmagical", "counterfactual"). Henri Lefebvre describes the intersectional and interstitial qualities of space. For him, the architectonics of space embodies an engagement with time which "may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic" (Lefebvre 42). Pynchon's novel contends this understanding by looking at the interplay between memory and materiality. Maxine's location unsettles the encoding and retrieval of the remembering process "that contributes to our memory for personal experiences" (Eichenbaum 148). Her engagement with the virtual landscape problematises her associative remembrance of the cityscape. On such occasions, the "before" and "after" of an event is endlessly entwined, for the subject cannot temporally dissociate itself from the material markers of this convergence.

One example that particularly makes this convergence obvious in the novel is the neologism Ziggy and Otis come up with for the virtual city they fabricate: "Zigotisopolis". The name implies a branding strategy; but even more crucially, it suggests a site of overlapping ontologies (Ziggy+Otis). The text describes its inception in these words: "With a whole expanding universe to choose from, among the global torrents somehow the boys have located graphics files for a version of NYC as it was before 11 September 2001… reformatted now as the personal city of Zigotisopolis" (Pynchon, *BE* 428). The interactivity of the individual with a virtually generated past inscribes a moment where the dialogue between mind and matter is problematised. This dialogue registers a dislocation of the event (in this case, 9/11) from a fixed and referential frame. Such practices are saturated with affect that defines a virtual order of embodiment. As Massumi says, this is forged by a real but abstract "incorporeality of the body" (21): a merger of cognitive and computational signifiers. Pynchon's novel shows the

prevalence of this position that is "central to an understanding of our information and image-based late capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives are perceived to have foundered" (Massumi 27). The virtuality of Zigotisopolis presupposes a revaluation of the lived experience. It does so by connecting animated spectacles and the privately embodied feeling individuals through perpetual acts of consumption.

Consumption, Compensation, Control

In a way, DeepArcher itself is "a powerful allegory for the history of the Internet as Pynchon explicitly connects it to private sector and state collusion" (Keeble 260). The corporatization of the virtual generates structures of surveillance that exempt no one from the apparatuses of control. Eric Outfield expresses his dismay at this appropriation by drawing attention to systematic exploitation of users: "the Management wants everybody addicted to, shopping, gaming, jerking off, streaming endless garbage" (Pynchon, *BE* 432). Maxine's observations about the changing landscape of the portal illuminate the entanglement between the market frontier and digitised interface: "[a]dvertising everywhere. On walls, on the clothing and skins of crowd extras, as pop-ups out of the Invisible and into your face" (Pynchon, *BE* 354). This is endemic to the cultural logic of the contemporary. Crucial to this is the ambivalence of possibility and prohibition that informs the hyper-mediated means of consumerism. Pynchon's text illustrates the anxiety around the Internet through Maxine's father Ernie. Ernie traces the genealogy of the Internet to the U.S. Defense Department that initiated the DARPAnet as part of Cold War weapons innovation. He says:

> […] your Internet was their invention, this magical convenience that creeps now like a smell through the smallest details of our lives, the shopping, the housework, the homework, the taxes, absorbing our energy, eating up our precious time. And there's no innocence. Anywhere. Never was. It was conceived in sin, the worst possible. As it kept growing, it never stopped carrying in its heart a bitter-cold death wish for the planet, and don't think anything has changed, kid… The cold war ended, right? the Internet kept evolving, away from military, into civilian—nowadays it's chat rooms, the World Wide Web, shopping online… Call it freedom, it's based on control. Everybody connected together, impossible anybody should get lost, ever again. Take the next step, connect it to these cell phones, you've got a Web of surveillance, inescapable… (Pynchon, *BE* 420)

The “magical convenience” that Ernie speaks of represents both the fear and fantasies of electronic interconnectedness. It inhabits a complex cultural moment where the body becomes an ontological merger between the organic and the inorganic. Ernie conveys this situation by invoking the affective vocabulary of “smell”. The realm of the olfactory determines the embodied cognition of an individual. With machines that can manufacture affect, the text touches upon a cornerstone of the postmodern sublime that occurs “at the price of suspending the active powers of the mind” (Lyotard 124). The transformative potential of technology is further heightened in the ways in which the passage foregrounds the depletion of “our energy” and “time”. To portray the coming about of the Internet in terms of growth (“kept growing”) and subsequent decay (“bitter-cold death wish”) is to parody a biological frame of reference. This is a crucial point in the text that underscores an emergent condition of entanglements. The artificial ambience of the Internet replicates intimate domestic spaces for “shopping”, “housework”, “homework”, et cetera. This connects closely to the interplay between corporeal markers of the individual and the virtual vehicles of culture that gives rise to emotional experience.

At this point, it is necessary to note the merger between embodied cognition and the consumption of simulacra. In this, the novel indicates a radical revaluation of body and space. It focalises episodes in which the human condition emerges as one that increasingly internalizes mediated emotions that traverse the private spaces and public performances. Such experiences of virtuality and corporeality link the novel to the politics of consumerism and control. This is crucial to understand the link between government policies and individual desires that ironically inform the open-source rhetoric of the Internet. While the interface represents the site of neo-liberal economy, it reduces the individuals into quantifiable identities. The narrative of innovation—“All for free. Hacker ethic” (Pynchon, *BE* 69)—may seem liberating and emancipatory. It is, however, quashed by state agendas. In portraying this, the novel colludes to a conflation of economic and the ideological. If Gabriel Ice represents an arch-capitalist—“[o]ne of the boy billionaires who walked away in one piece when the dotcom fever broke” (Pynchon, *BE* 10)—his subsequent depiction as “practically synonymous with U.S. security arrangements” (Pynchon, *BE* 371), sheds light on this conflation. The link is further forged by “a global network of conspiratorial activity in which the economic and the political are basically indistinguishable” (Pöhlmann 9). To this, Pynchon offers a corrective through the portrayal of March Kelleher, the middle-aged leftist activist who

is a friend to Maxine and the mother of Ice's wife Tallis. For her, capitalism is like "a pyramid racket on a global scale, the kind of pyramid you do human sacrifices up on top of, meantime getting the suckers to believe it's all gonna go on forever" (Pynchon, *BE* 163). The sense of crisis ("human sacrifice") suggested by Kelleher is further heightened in the text thus: "[t]here's always a way to monetize anything" (Pynchon, *BE* 349). Such passages articulate the anxiety around the cultural logic of "late fuckin capitalism (Pynchon, *BE* 308). At the interstices between the state and financial capital, the text situates the logic of the corporeal.

The Body Made Code

The virtuality of the Internet quantifies matter into observable patterns by reducing the corporeal into a numerical order. Such a position can simultaneously establish complex cognitive associations and disruptions. If "the brain, far from being a hard-wired modular organ, emerges as a dynamic co-evolutionary process of deep enculturation and material engagement" (Malafouris 45), then the interchange and interactivity of the individual with virtual technologies inform the agentic status of the subject in the novel. The text chooses to illuminate this by connecting technological materiality with the market forces that work as a specular equivalent of the ontology of 9/11. In one of the episodes, Horst Loeffler speaks of his ability to predict the behaviour of the market as something that saved him from the terror attack. His conversation with Maxine[10] goes thus:

> […] It wasn't me that ever 'knew' anything. But something did. Sudden couple extra lines of brain code, who knows. I just followed along."
>
> "But then… If it was that same weird talent that kept you safe…"
>
> "How could it be? How could predicting market behaviour be the same as predicting a terrible disaster?"
>
> "If the two were different forms of the same thing."
>
> "Way too anticapitalist for me, babe." (Pynchon, *BE* 320)

Horst's engagement with the market is mediated by the electronic interface that turns aspects of the material to digitised algorithm. His constant engagement with the interface foregrounds an event of "pattern recognition", to draw on Willian Gibson, that rescripts the agency of the individual. Firstly, the materiality of the market is transformed by virtual vehicles into numbers. Secondly, Horst interprets the numerical data that ultimately determines the next move in the entanglement of production and consumption: that

"which Horst by ESP has determined is the next hot commodity" (Pynchon, *BE* 417). This is amplified in the text where the human body is endlessly enmeshed in machinic mutability. In episodes such as this, the body emerges as a corporeal conduit for information processing.

In an interview with *La Sept*, Baudrillard presages this situation in stating that "not only are there screens and terminals in technical terms, but we ourselves, the listeners, the TV spectators, become the terminals of all this communications network" ("Electronic Age" 146). Horst's "weird talent" that possibly has saved him from "a terrible disaster" illustrates a moment where technological immersion is projected as an alternative to the fallibility of the human body. The living self emerges here as an extension of the intuitive machine. On such occasions, "the difference between man and machine is very difficult to determine" (Baudrillard, "Electronic Age" 146): as if "the two were different forms of the same thing" (Pynchon, *BE* 320). In demonstrating this scenario, the text conflates the ontology of financial capital with an event of corporeal crisis. It is necessary to note that Horst renders the chemical configurations of the nervous system into "couple extra lines of brain code" (Pynchon, *BE* 320). Such a statement describes the process where human beings are increasingly coded into the computational medium. The coming together of visceral and virtual vocabulary is pivoted on an emergent landscape of material reconfigurations where real and the hyperreal are increasingly intertwined. In his later writings, Baudrillard captures this condition pertinently by proposing that:

> […] images have entered things. Images are no longer the mirror of reality, they have invested the heart of reality and transformed it into hyperreality where, from screen to screen, the only aim of the image is the image. The image can no longer imagine the real because it is the real; it can no longer transcend reality, transfigure it or dream it, since images are virtual reality. In virtual reality, it is as if things had swallowed their mirror. (Baudrillard, *Art* 120)

The hyperreal condition of consumption runs parallel to the overarching market economy in the novel. Early on, Maxine "wonders if anybody's ever run a Beneish model on hashslingrz, just to see how ritually slaughtered the public numbers are" (Pynchon, *BE* 38). A few pages later, she considers adopting Benford's Law "as a fraud examiner's tool" to see whether "somebody wants to phony up a list of numbers but gets too cute about

randomizing it" (Pynchon, *BE* 41). These are moments when the text combines the digitised logic of the virtual ("numbers") with activities that animate political and economic experience. In both cases, the data projected in terms of numbers and images repurpose the ontological framework of the events. In this sense, the role of material and affective networks is mediated through the pixelated medium of the virtual world, which controls and overdetermines the corporeal and cognitive orders of the subject.

Technological Sublime/Technological Subjugation

Elsewhere in the text, the historical materiality of September 11 is conveyed through the irregularities in the stock market. The "sudden abnormal surge of put options on United Airlines" and the repeated stock behaviour for "American Airlines" (Pynchon, *BE* 315) are suggestive of a decisive ontological framing of the subsequent crisis. To promote such a fictional fabulation is to locate 9/11 not simply as an event of politically motivated violence, but as an economic manoeuvre predicated on the monetary rhetoric. The novel conveys this episode in terms of the virtual: "The screen is full of numbers" (Pynchon, *BE* 315). In so doing, the text undertakes a posthuman convergence where machines connect emotionally with the humans by evoking in the latter a painful awareness of the realm of the flesh. This connects closely with a crisis of the conventionally grounded unitary notion of the human. In his critique of this mutually exclusive category, Cary Wolfe calls attention to the "embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world" (xv). For him, it is necessary to acknowledge "the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools" (Wolfe xv) which forms the fulcrum of posthuman philosophy. This is reflective of a "disaggregation of humanistic subject-positions and values" (Braidotti, *Metamorphosis* 200-201) that is coterminous with advanced post-industrial cultures.

While Derrida sees here the painful prospect of a new order of hegemony and subjugation, the text articulates this as a culmination of the technological sublime. Pynchon's novel is replete with moments where, to draw on Derrida, one "must learn the language of the masters, of capital and machines… in order to survive or live better" (*Monolingualism* 30). The textual incorporation of human situatedness in material and affective conditions determined by the market underlines a complex correspondence between the body and its immediate environment. This is described in the novel through depictions of simulated and hyperreal means of production and consumption. In fact, the

passive absorption of data mediated by machines highlights the interplay between presence and absence, permanence and impermanence. Derrida's mapping of technological subjugation and technological sublime is important to understand this position. In this case, the world of simulacra that shows how the human self and agency can be constantly re-formed and de-formed undercuts, in the process, an ambivalent ontology of totalitarian control and coercion[11]. It constitutes a "disembodied gaze" (Braidotti, *Metamorphosis* 181) where the referent of the control regime inhabits a location of inherent mutability. Such practices eschew the fundamental claims of the bodily. These forms of control are conjured in a reversible relationship between the knower and the known. At a representational level, March Kelleher captures this sense of uncertainty in the text: "Back in the days of hippie simplicity, people liked to blame 'the CIA' or 'a secret rogue operation'. But this is a new enemy, unnamable, locatable on no organization chart or budget line—who knows, maybe even the CIA's scared of them" (Pynchon, *BE* 399). Kelleher's concern foregrounds the spectral quality of virtual surveillance that underscores an effacement of corporeality. The text verbalises this lack with an ontological claim for the tangible: "there should be real cash on a real table" (Pynchon, *BE* 470). The strategies of surveillance enacted through portals of the hyperreal dislocate human agency from the body.

At one point in the text, the interplay between spectrality/absence and corporeality/presence is conveyed through the perspectival paring of remembering and forgetting. When Kelleher goes for a lecture on the occasion of Maxine's kids' eight grade graduation, she shares the parable of a woman who "cannot and must not forget" (Pynchon, *BE* 113). This is an act of invoking radical nostalgia, for March herself represents "a largely forgotten, out-of-date form of political activism" (Sandberg 482). This is the tale of a ruler who likes to "creep around town in disguise, doing his work in secret" (Pynchon, *BE* 112). In the story, if someone spots him, the ruler tries to buy them with bribery. One night, he crossed path with a woman and tries the same trick asking her to forget whatever she had seen. But to his surprise, the woman looked askance at his proposal: "'Forget?' she screeched. 'I cannot and must not forget. Remembering is the essence of what I am. The price of my forgetting, great sir, is more than you can imagine, let alone pay.'" (Pynchon, *BE* 113). The episode allegorises the entanglement of the psychological and political processes of remembering and forgetting. In depicting the ruler's investment in managing a particular instance of remembrance, the text

foregrounds forgetting as an institutional or collective activity. If remembering entails a preservation ("essence") of the self, the inhibition of autobiographical memory informs a crisis of the emotionally situated individual. To this, the text creates a subversive counternarrative by espousing individuated remembrance as something that elides capitalist frames of reference.

The novel is replete with acts of individual resistance to capitalist apparatuses. Maxine's emotherapist Shawn is introduced to us as someone "who happens to share with Horst an appreciation of silence as one of the world's unpriceable commodities" (Pynchon, *BE* 30). In the middle of the narrative, we get to know that Maxine admires March Kelleher for she "doesn't have a price" (Pynchon, *BE* 137). The novel offers correctives through these events to the capitalist frames of forgetting. March articulates this position when she states: "'Culture, I'm sorry, Hermann Göring was right, every time you hear the word, check your sidearm. Culture attracts the worse impulses of the moneyed, it has no honor, it begs to be suburbanized and corrupted'" (Pynchon, *BE* 56). While venture capitalists like Gabriel Ice and Rocky Slagiatt (the one who has a stake in Maxine's case) consolidate the corporate framework, people like Lester Traipse (one of Ice's corporate flunkies, who subsequently succumbs to a heavy dept and dies), represent the irreducible instability of this culture. This is conveyed as part of a larger discourse which is inscribed simultaneously with symbolic codes and material markers in the novel.

A Hermeneutic of Indexing

As Maxine goes through the dossier of Nicholas Windust, she finds:

> There are a dozen pages on attempts to follow the money through the *hawala* setup Eric discovered, beginning with Bilhana Wa-ashifa Import-Export in Bay Ridge, thence via the re-involving of shipments into the U.S. of halvah, pistachios, geranium essence, chickpeas, several kinds of ras el hanout, and shipments outbound of mobile telephones, MP3 players, and other light electronics, DVDs, old *Baywatch* episodes in particular—these data, assembled by some committee of the clue-challenged, alarmingly unacquainted even with GAAP, all thrown together so haphazardly that after half an hour Maxine's eyeballs are rotating in opposite directions and she has no idea if the document is meant as self-congratulation or some thickly disguised confession of failure. (Pynchon, *BE* 261; italics in original)

The passage interposes the vectors of neoliberal culture into the affective domain of the body. On one level, it stages how materials acquire culturally qualified meanings by conveying the perpetuation of monetary economy in terms of "shipments". On another level, it invokes the privately perceived cognitive schema of the individual. This is exemplified in the ways in which the material vectors extend to the sensory states of the body: gustatory ("halvah", "pistachios", "ras el hanout"), auditory ("mobile telephones", "MP3 players"), epidermic ("geranium essence") et cetera. The textual attention to "Maxine's eyeball" reinforces the link to the pathological condition further. Conversely, the passage also highlights a sense of crisis in its reference to "some thickly disguised confession of failure". This is heightened towards the end of the novel when Gabriel Ice is depicted as the embodiment of corporeal vulnerably: "his face all red and swollen, some trembling he can't control" (Pynchon, *BE* 473).

However, Pynchon does not restrict this sense of crisis solely to the corporeal. In its incorporation of a certain "flash-drive dossier" (Pynchon, *BE* 378), containing Windust's portfolio, the text engages ironically with "deforestation, storms, famines, and other late-capitalist planetary insults" (Pynchon, *BE* 378-89). This is a crucial episode in the novel that foregrounds an order of degeneration by juxtaposing the practices of corporate economy with the atmospheric. In so doing, the text appears to inscribe Pynchon's nod to the emerging environmentalism of the current decades. In her essay on the entanglement between electronic capital and planetary phenomena, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak captures a shift from the erstwhile understanding of the earth in terms of "latitudes and longitudes" towards "virtual lines… now drawn by the requirements of Geographical Information Systems" (72). The contrast that she draws between these two orders is pivoted on the increasing forces of global economy that comprise intercontinental and transoceanic exchanges of commodities and lifeforms alike. As a corrective to this, Spivak persuades us to imagine ourselves as "planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities" (73). The industrial reorganisation of the environment (in the form of crops, humans, animals) has precipitated a demographic collapse where human beings operate both as "actors" and "actants"[12]. In this formation, humans control the environment through corporate networks, putting themselves simultaneously at risk from depleting geophysical habitat. Pynchon portrays this risk scenario in an expanded spatial and temporal frame of threat while pointing to species disappearance in *Gravity's Rainbow*. *Bleeding Edge*, however,

draws out the direct and immediate associations between the climatic ("deforestation, storms, famines") and the corporate ("late-capitalist") conditions.

Self-Interpreting Things

Žižek speaks of the ways in which "the universality of humankind falls back into the particularity of an animal species" (*Living* 332). This insistence on universality and particularity is a key concern of the Anthropocene. The geological parameters of life on earth (temperature, the composition of soil/air/water etc.) and the socio-economic dimension of culture constitute a dialectical relationship. This is further problematised with the arrival of electronic capital that projects information into the objects of exchange. It creates "an almost magical and mystifying effect: things appear to continuously reveal—or, rather, emanate—their own interpretation" (Žižek, *Living* 338). In fact, the virtuality of the capitalist modes of production entangles economic and geo-political life-worlds through technology. In so doing, it risks the planetary logic of the corporeal. If matter reveals its "own interpretation" as defined by the global capital, then the ecosystem that holds it acquires a quantifiable rhetoric. This is what engenders "the world as a single space and pictures it as an extended grid in which all areas are mapped and measured" (Vermeulen 72). Pynchon's novel resonates with this by unsettling the organicity of the corporeal. When Gabriel Ice claims "'I don't die. There's no scenario where I die'" (Pynchon, *BE* 473), he draws out a cartographic framework of the visceral body. If death can be considered as an ontological opposite of life, the quantification/measurability of the event of dying registers an undoing of this logic. With an incorporation of waste/dead matter, the text pushes into the extreme the coming together of technology and capital to overdetermine the planetary.

The interrelation between economy and ecology is evident in the way in which the novel sheds light on the process of production and circulation of matter that leaves behind in its wake artifacts which degenerate into waste. If the ontology of waste exemplifies the inherent porosity of the commodity culture, its accumulation in the form of discarded material residues and chemical biproducts engender a landscape of anthropogenic extremities. In presenting a decadent consumerist culture and its capitalist ontology, the novel shows how the production and prohibition of waste get entangled. For example, when Maxine visits her emotherapist Shawn, their conversation gravitates towards a reflection on the mediated spectacle of the Trade Centre towers coming down:

> "Do you remember the piece of footage on the local news, just as the first tower comes down, woman runs in off the street into a store, just gets the door closed behind her, and here comes this terrible black bellowing, *ash*, *debris*, sweeping through the streets, gale force past the window… that was the moment, Maxi. Not when 'everything changed.' When everything was revealed. No grand Zen illumination, but a rush of *blackness and death*. Showing us exactly what we've become, what we've been all the time."
>
> "And what we've always been is…?"
>
> "Is living on borrowed time. Getting away cheap. Never caring about *who's paying for it*, who's starving somewhere else all jammed together so we can have *cheap food*, *a house*, a yard in the burbs… *planetwide*, more every day, the *payback keeps gathering*. And meantime the only help we get from the media is boo hoo the innocent dead. Boo fuckin hoo. You know what? All the dead are innocent. There's no uninnocent dead." (Pynchon, *BE* 339-40; emphasis added)

The conversation simultaneously highlights the production of trash ("ash", "debris") and the constitutive human acts ("cheap food", "a house") that materially inscribe their ontology. It is necessary to note that such acts are suggestive of embodied phenomenological experience of the living. The novel cannily links this to an expression of nonlife ("blackness and death"). To this end, the ontology of waste participates less in the composition of decadence and deniability than in encoding this fundamentally entangled orders of life and nonlife. The textual adoption of a commercially inflected vocabulary ("who's paying for it", "payback keeps gathering") reinforces the cultural condition in which the moment is inscribed. Such episodes illustrate the immersion of the corporeal in capitalist modes of production. There is an attempt here to situate the human in the Anthropocene. By portraying the interplay between life and nonlife as a "planetwide" phenomenon, the text foregrounds the logic of planetarity that cuts across cultures and climates alike.

For such a dialectic of relationality to take form, the text stresses the need, as Heise puts it, "for an increased emphasis on a sense of planet, a cognitive understanding and affective attachment to the global" (*Sense* 59). The terrestrial claim for space and the subsequent destruction of habitats substantiate the schism between a world we claim for ourselves and the planet which remains essentially *unheimlich*[13]. Pynchon's novel stands testimony to the manner in which technological appliances turn to waste products due to

their inability to re-integrate themselves. If the biological organicity defines the environment through prospects of regeneration, then the non-biological architectonics of the technoscape implicates a dislocation. This has further problematised the epistemic divide between wilderness and civilization. It reinforces the dialectical play between organic/life and inorganic/nonlife. When we follow Maxine through the uninhabited office loft of hwgaahwgh.com at one point in the novel, the space is found full of artifacts that approximate a shift from the abstractions of capitalist technocracy to a mode of corporeal and earthly engagements:

> […] a row of snack machines, *artificial bamboo trees* framing a reception desk of wood *blonder than the blonde* stationed behind it… She finds the door wide open and the place empty, another failed dotcom joining the officescape of the time—tarnished metallic surfaces, shaggy gray *soundproofing*, Steelcase *screens* and Herman Miller *workpods*—already *beginning to decompose*, littered, dust gathering… Well, almost empty. From some distant cubicle comes a tinny *electronic melody* Maxine recognizes as "Korobushka," the anthem of nineties workplace fecklessness, playing faster and faster and *accompanied by screams of anxiety*… (Pynchon, *BE* 43; emphasis added)

Individual interaction with the environment is articulated here through a series of conceptual contradictions. The "artificial bamboo tree" that forms part of an interior architecture signifies an ontological opposite to the immobility of wildwood. By portraying a predominance of the inorganic over the organic individual ("blonder than the blonde"), the moment inscribes the human longing to overcome the limitations of their biological form. The artificiality of the artifacts defies the temporality and space invalidating, in the process, the concerns of biological vulnerability. To achieve this, however, is to compromise the organically founded fixities. At this juncture, technology is projected as an intervention in the conflicting historicity of a species. The "electronic melody" that Maxine hears is said to be "accompanied by screams of anxiety" that affect the individual at a metacognitive level. It is a moment where the biological substrate merges with the technological in such a way that sensory inputs and extra-sensory electronic information can no longer be separated.

This entanglement is clearly visible when Maxine's best friend, Heidi, a professor of popular culture, confesses, "Guess I'm just a Yahoo! type of gal. Click, in, click back

out, nothing too far afield, nothing too… deep" (Pynchon, *BE* 434). The experience of life merges here with the disembodied experience of a search engine. Such a situation recontextualises issues of individuality and the schism between public and intimate private spaces. As the search engine represents a global circulation of electronic information, it operates as a merger between the embodied individual and the social collectives across different locations. For this to happen, computers and servers work in tandem imitating 'imagined communities' that play an expected set of roles at particular historical points. Arguably, Pynchon's narrative proposes this search engine aesthetic as a dominant form of cultural sensibility in the novel[14]. The electronic interconnectedness associated with the search engine phenomenon has parallelism with the idea of planetary interdependencies. The attention to waste in the novel orients us to recognise this condition.

Capitalocene: Inventories and Interventions

In the passage quoted above, the catalogue of technologized objects produces a counter-narrative of phenomenological experience against the fallibility of the corporeal. It is necessary to note that such objects—mass-produced artifacts that suggest the subsequent formation of a postindustrial wasteland—are simultaneously subsumed under a topography of trash despite the flawless frame. The office space of hwgaahwgh.com is described in terms of its high-tech infrastructures: "soundproofing", "screens" "workpods", etc. These are appliances of electronic augmentation that produce 'affect' for corporeal consumption. The fact that these are "beginning to decompose" signifies the transfiguration of man-made matter into useless junk. Such formations articulate the ways in which the technological artifacts integrate into the geological processes of the immediate vicinity. One might see here a radical fusion of natural and technological in the junkyard ecosystem.

On the face of it, this coming together reinforces the theoretical throughlines with DeLillo's *White Noise*. Pynchon's text partakes in this by depicting a world of simulation and simulacra where the human is always already a floating image which can be endlessly replicated for the purposes of consumption. For Mira J. Hird, landfills register an "attunement to the limitations of human exceptionalism, as well as the broader recognition of an inhuman epistemology" ("Waste" 461). If bodily waste implies "human failure and imperfection" and "bears close associations with our animal matter" (Kennedy

23), then artificial trash inscribes a negation of this physicality of being. As Maxine and March drive past the Island of Meadows, a landfill "at the intersection of Fresh and Arthur Kills", toxicity central, the dark focus of Big Apple waste disposal, everything the city has rejected" (Pynchon, *BE* 166), the text provides a description of the forces that project the landscape paradoxically as a space of liminality and centrality in relation to the city's industrial economy. Such situations foreground the novel's reflection on the anxieties around the material processes of the physical world. The interchangeability of the bodily and the artificial is couched in the fears of degeneration and deniability. In Maxine's thoughts, the landfill has been further described as the "perfect negative of the city in its seething foul incoherence" (Pynchon, *BE* 167). The city here emerges as a cultural signifier that transforms trash by not only denying it ("negative", "foul"), but also 'repurposing' it through differently visualised structures. Such practices inform "a wilful human determination concerning the being of the object" (Kennedy 23). This is given further weight in the passage that describes the nature of the disposed trash in the landfill:

> Every Fairway bag full of potato peels, coffee grounds, uneaten Chinese food, used *tissues* and *tampons* and paper *napkins* and disposable *diapers*, fruit gone bad, yogurt past its sell-by date that Maxine has ever thrown away is up in there someplace, multiplied by everybody in the city she knows, multiplied by everybody she doesn't know, since 1948, *before she was even born*, and what she thought was lost and out of her life has only entered a collective history, which is like being Jewish and finding out that death is not the end of everything—suddenly denied the comfort of absolute zero. (Pynchon, *BE* 166-67; emphasis added)

The references to "tissues", "tampons", "napkins" and "diapers" signify human excretory waste. Once in the ground these material remnants enter "an inhuman domain" (Hird, "Waste" 457) where "multitudes of bacteria collaborate with human debris and geological forces" (Hird, "Waste" 458). The perpetuity of the process is conveyed through a temporal frame ("before she was even born") that complicates human technocratic attempts to measure, know, and control the ontology of waste.

This is further amplified when the landfill is depicted as "the ancient estuary exempt from what happened, what has gone on happening" (Pynchon, *BE* 167). To propose that "death is not the end of everything" (Pynchon, *BE* 167) is to acknowledge the material afterlife of processes on earth which combine "human and nonhuman actants

in shifting assemblages" (Hird, "Waste" 458). While the human actants are evident in the passage quoted above, the nonhuman forces appear in formless spectrality: "Maxine has been smelling garbage for a while, and now it intensifies as they approach a lofty mountain range of waste… smells of methane, death and decay, chemicals unpronounceable as the names of God" (Pynchon, *BE* 166). The spectrality of the elements is made clear in the way the chemical residues are said to have names that resonate with the otherworldly ("as the names of God"). With this reference to the obscure realm of the "chemicals" which produce and propagate "death and decay", the text gestures at the hazardous underside of industrial capitalism. Methane, which is a greenhouse gas, is often associated with mass manufacture of livestock and intensive factory farms. The fact that "smells of methane" permeate the body and affect the individual, the ambiguous presence of the chemical in the environment problematises the borderline between insides and outsides. Once the bodily interiority is invaded by chemically induced phenomena, it leads to the contamination of the biogenetic self at a cellular level. In such a state, chemically induced affect comprises our natural health and renders the body vulnerable.

The text choses to reflect on this by alluding to "toxicity central" (Pynchon, *BE* 166). Elsewhere in the novel, we find references to "toxic-smelling traffic" (Pynchon, *BE* 122) and "toxic pollutants" (Pynchon, *BE* 254). Taken to the extreme, such settings lead us to the ways in which augmented technology stands "against the human and threatens human being to the extent that we forget our dependence on what presents itself historically" (Kennedy 49). The technology-induced trash that comprises "toxic pollutants" and "toxic-smelling traffic" operates as a potent reminder of this condition. The dangers of getting exposed to such landscapes are evident in the merger of cognitive and materialist residues:

> She is supposed to be meeting Heidi here but abruptly finds herself at nightfall on a path through some woods. Light flickers ahead. She smells smoke with a strong toxic element, *plastic*, *drug-lab fixins*, who knows? comes around a bend in the path and there is the house from the Vip Epperdew videotape, on fire—black smoke in knots and whorls, battered among acid-orange flames, pouring upward to merge with a starless overcast… The burning is violent, all-consuming, the heat too fierce to approach. Even at this distance, she feels *her oxygen supply being taken*… (Pynchon, *BE* 196; emphasis added)

In this episode, Maxine navigates through the metropolis of Manhattan in her dream. Such episodes bespeak the twin anxiety of technological humanity: the machinic emancipation from the bodily vulnerabilities—by way of advanced industrial infrastructures and laboratory aesthetic—that entails a simultaneous undoing of the planetary ontology in which the species taxonomies are enmeshed. The undecided ontology of the toxic smell is attributed to elements that are nonbiodegradable in nature. While the effect of "plastic" and "drug-lab fixins" is predicted on corporeal alterity, the timeless persistence of such forms of waste as technofossils[15] bring forth a latent anthropogenic vulnerability. This is indicative of a merger between aesthetic priorities of a culture that endorses material reconfigurations and the ecological forms of the planet. The fact that the ontology of plastic waste defies the temporal logic of culture by incorporating itself into geological timescales, it participates in the evolutionary framework of earth. To what extent the consequence of this might travel is indexed by the portents of a failing human future: "her oxygen supply being taken".

Spectres of the Posthuman

The generic scene of a corporeal crisis triggered by plastic waste is given a specific context in the novel when Maxine rummages through the Cold War sites of the Deep Web while tracking the money laundering activities of the hashslingrz farm. Drawing attention to the redundant military infrastructures, the text depicts:

> Broken remnants of old military installations, commands long deactivated, as if *transmission towers* for ghost traffic are still poised out on promontories far away in the secular dark, corroded, untended trusswork *threaded in and out with vines and leaves* of faded poison green, using abandoned tactical frequencies for operations long *defunded* into silence… *Missiles meant for shooting down Russian prop-driven bombers, never deployed, lying around in pieces*, as if picked over by *some desperately poor population* that comes out only in the deepest watches of the night. Gigantic vacuum-tube computers with half-acre footprints, gutted, all empty sockets and strewn wiring. Littered situation rooms, high-sixties plastic detailing gone brittle and yellow, *radar consoles* with hooded *circular screens*, desks still occupied by avatars of senior officers in front of *flickering sector maps*, upright and weaving like hypnotized snakes, images corrupted, paralyzed, passing to dust. (Pynchon, *BE* 241-42; emphasis added)

At this point, the text centres on the ontological afterlife of a range of wastes generated by the military-industrial complex in the course of activities that are "routinely cast as public goods qua national defence" (Alexander and O'Hare 432). This is redolent of a permanent war economy premised on the relationship between politicians, the military and the industrial front. The mass manufacturer of high-tech military weaponry serves to communicate the circulation of financial capital. As such, the prohibition of artificial matter is immanent to the production process of the military industry. Pynchon's novel foregrounds the wastefulness of such an arrangement thus. By depicting the accumulation of inorganic waste in the interstices of the planetary ecosystem ("threaded in and out with vines and leaves"), the text registers a sense contamination. More than anything else, such situations contextualise the emergent historical and cultural perspectives that the novel appears to endorse. To draw on Cary Wolfe, the passage illustrates a coming together of "ecologies of the organic, the living, the biomass; and gray ecologies, of the machinic and technological, the electronic" (203). This is indicative of an emergent posthuman ontology in which life and nonlife are endlessly entangled.

The passage incorporates the human element as a compromised subhuman category ("some desperately poor population") in the face of the technological sublime. In its placement within an augmented environment of "circular screens" and "flickering sector maps", the human morphs into a programmable entity whose fate depends on military technology and machines of mass destruction. By portraying the "poor population" as a scavenging species, the text further minimizes the human ontology. The fact that they hunt for the "[m]issiles meant for shooting down Russian prop-driven bombers, never deployed, lying around in pieces" informs the "unprecedented degrees of intimacy… between structural differences, or ontological categories… the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 89). Put otherwise, the text here stages an event to displace the entrenched construction of the human by allowing us to see how the body is defined by its relationship with machines. Such scenes illustrate the point that "technology is a potentially deterritorializing force which disrupts the body as the locus of the human" (Leonard 79). In this case, the relationship between the body and technology is coded through apparatuses of communication ("transmission towers", "radar consoles") and commercial exchange ("defunded"). While computer-generated spaces redefine the territorial claims of corporeality, the informational speed and global contact it fosters displace the embodied and embedded conceptual formations. To this

end, the industrial and informational economy transfigure the phenomenological indices of the body.

It is necessary to understand that Pynchon does not endorse an apocalyptic worldview in the novel. In fact, he extends a cosmic irony in terms of technoscientific evolution and human intentionality ("paralyzed, passing to dust"). At a time when the difference between the organism and the machine is increasingly unclear, Pynchon's novel investigates the ways in which the capitalist culture destabilises the singular and unitary epistemologies. In positioning the narrative at the complex crossroads of financial capital and information technology, the text creates a landscape of entanglements. It repurposes the American landscape following the collapse of the Twin Towers to symbolise perpetual permeability of 'matter'. The Deep Web rhetoric of the plot articulates this pertinently. With the introduction of the Internet, the text appears to privilege immaterial information over the material human suggesting a structural shift in the ways in which the corporeal condition has been diagrammed. Crucially, such settings enact a dissolution of human agency into the digital domain of simulacra and anticipate an emergent posthuman condition. The novel contains episodes where the materiality of technocratic capitalism reconfigures the existential and phenomenological frame of the body. In this, *Bleeding Edge* challenges the neural determinism of human emotions by juxtaposing sentient selves and affective objects. The text sheds light on this by accommodating the practices of machine-induced production and corporeal consumption. It inscribes into this framework the coproduction of trash/waste to dramatize planetary interdependencies. Such a reading involves the poetics of the Anthropocene that critiques as well as formalises the transoceanic exchange of commodities and lifeforms. In this, the novel re-examines the logic of the corporeal produced and problematised by postmodernist fiction.