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“DO YOU WANT TO LIVE?”: LAW, FREEDOM, AND PSYCHOSIS IN THE  
MODERNIST NOVEL

A Thesis Presented

By

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## Abstract

Towards the end of Kafka's *The Trial*, Joseph K. comes to the realization that laws are ultimately "Lies... made into a universal system." This point is frequently drawn upon to make a critique of legal systems and their attached bureaucracy as being inherently corrupt, figuring Kafka as an anarchic thinker and theorist. Kafka uses this theoretical framework as a starting point to discuss the psychic ramifications of such a system, and thus, paranoia, alienation, and guilt become the dominant themes of his work. But this theory of law is insufficient, especially considering Hegelian definitions of freedom and the state. For Kafka, laws imposed a psychosis on the subject, whereas according to Hegel, laws are precisely that which prevents our going into psychosis. In this piece, I reconcile Hegel's conception of law with Kafka's, and elucidate a Hegelian theory of paranoia that I use to re-conceptualize modernist literature. I unite Hegel and Kafka by situating *The Trial's* *mise en scène* as a world in which anarchy functions under the guise of order. I argue that modernist texts are inherently preoccupied with the psychic ramifications of a legal system that fails to account for the Hegelian necessity of law. This failure, which dominated the major political projects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in turn creates the Kafkaesque, rather than the laws or bureaucracies' in-themselves. Thus, subsequent 20<sup>th</sup> century late-modernist authors—such as Vladimir Nabokov and Thomas Pynchon—are left to grapple with this failure, and take up the same themes. Using this theoretical tactic, I posit that texts from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*—are working through the ghosts of the obstacles set out for them at the start the century.

*To Amelia, Anika, Jeffrey, Nick, and most importantly, Isa*

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## Introduction

“*Que no salga la luna*”  
—ROSALÍA

Lucrecia Martel’s 2017 film *Zama*, based on Antonio Di Benedetto’s 1956 novel of the same name, closes with an indigenous child asking Don Diego de Zama as he is carried in a canoe off into an unknown land, “Do you want to live?” (1:47:48). Until this point, Zama has been trapped in his administrative district of colonial Paraguay serving as a Corregidor, awaiting a transfer. But he never receives this transfer, and is instead stuck in a bureaucratic purgatory trying to prove himself worthy of the transfer. In his many attempts to prove himself, however, he fails at asserting his authority—his status as master—and does so in front of the officials who are supposed to be below him in the hierarchy, and more importantly, the indigenous peoples who he is supposed to govern. Additionally, he is exposed to indigenous cultures that are beyond the borders of the colonies that, for him, defy reality. As the film progresses, he begins to unravel psychologically, ultimately coming to the conclusion that “there are no such riches,” it is all “worthless;” the colonial identity and ideology he so desperately tried to fit, he resolves, is unsatisfactory in producing his freedom, and, in constituting him as a conscious subject (Martel 1:45:35).

The conflict in *Zama* is similar to that of the master-slave dialectic as theorized by G.W.F. Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. But it is a failure of this dialectic; there is no recognition, no freedom. Zama constitutes a position that desires mastery but can never receive the recognition one needs to hold the status of master within the dialectic. He is a Corregidor, not a governor, let alone a king. He is high enough in the bureaucratic

hierarchy to be a master to some, and yet low enough to be a slave to others. But those who he should be a master to are uninterested in his game. Indeed, some of the native members even seem to bully him at points, and eventually, he loses a grasp not only on his understanding of himself as a master, but of reality as it appears—his world becomes utterly incomprehensible. But why don't his colonial subjects engage in this dialectic? Is it possible to be outside, beyond, the dialectic? Or, is something altogether different happening?

First, what does it mean to occupy the space of the master? At the start of the dialectic narrative, the master is the “one being only *recognized*” while the slave is “only *recognizing*” (Hegel 113). Because of this, as Hegel points out, the master depends on the slave to recognize, only constituting a subject if his consciousness is being acknowledged. But the slave, because of their significance in *recognizing*, comes to realize their power in this dynamic, and understands their own self-consciousness, and their own freedom. The master depends on the slave for both their labor and their recognition. Both subjects, in a way, end up at odds with themselves; first, they see themselves at odds with the other in which they also see themselves, and secondly, they find that they were utterly wrong about their status within the dialectic. But this dialectical movement, which has an immense influence in our ability to see ourselves as free according to Hegel, isn't happening in *Zama*, which, in some ways, is the quintessential space for such a philosophical gesture. According to Susan Buck-Morss, the colonial struggle—particularly, the Haitian revolution—is the inspiration for the master/slave dialectic, and serves as the fundamental material illustration of the gesture. So why isn't this happening in *Zama*? Why don't the natives revolt, or even seem to

care? There is something beyond comprehension for *Zama* that the indigenous people are aware of; in other words, they are outside of the colonial ideology, and they seem to understand that recognition isn't enough. For the indigenous subjects, there is more power in their rejection of recognition, and this refusal—in both recognizing and also being recognized through colonial epistemologies—is what constitutes their subjectivity.

Then, what does it mean to be the master in a situation that is beyond that of the dialectic? It is important to note that *Zama* is novel written about the late colonial period (the end of the nineteenth-century), but is published in the mid-twentieth century.

Modernity, I argue, has changed our ability to confront the master/slave dialectic by providing us with a method by which we can avoid it, despite the fact that we are yet to shake it off of ourselves. *Zama* knows—somewhere, unconsciously—that he is not the master, and therefore, he is desperate—paranoid, even—for the recognition that will constitute him as a subject. The master—figured as a type of surveyor, either literally as the manager and overseer of a slavery plantation, or figuratively, as someone who is simply yearning for recognition—is a subject utterly aware of their own lack, yet a subject who believes they can—and will—resolve that lack through recognition, so as to become their own Big Other. Drawing on Slavoj Žižek's reversal of Michel Foucault's Panopticon, the master/surveyor occupies precisely the position of Stewart in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. Instead of positioning the tower of the panopticon as a regulating force for that of the surveyed, Žižek asserts that Stewart is, “the center of the panopticon, the all-pervasive eye, who is terrorized, constantly looking out the window, anxious not to miss some crucial detail” (Žižek 92). In this reversal, the surveyor is the one who is paranoid, not the surveyed, because they believe, due to their position, that

they *can* know all, and see all. They believe that they can successfully fulfill their lack, so long as they can maintain an awareness of those they lord over. *Zama* too has a moment like this. At the start of the film, Zama is hiding, looking down a small cliff at a group of indigenous women bathing at a beach. But he is caught watching them, and instead of reacting with fear or obedience—he could have been watching them at any moment—they yell at him and call him a voyeur. It's embarrassing for Zama; even an attempt at surveying his colonial subjects backfires, and again reduces his authority. Their recognition of his presence does little to constitute him as a conscious subject. He is chased away by one of the women but she catches up. Only after he has responded with violence against her does he regain some control and he is protected from persecution—both literally in her chase of him, and also legally—and this is what allows for his repression of the fact that he is not a master: bureaucracy.

Well, a *bad* bureaucracy, for lack of better phrasing. Zama must be a master of sorts; after all, he is a Corregidor. He has a title, this title provides him with a degree of power, or it at least suggests so. But again, it only has power in so far as it is acknowledged (which it isn't), due to its artificiality. The title of Corregidor was invented during the middle ages, inspired by Roman law. During the time in which *Zama* is set, however, it was largely being replaced with a more modern and learned population of *lawyers*. The job—which was essentially a hodgepodge of a lawyer, a local governor, and a police officer—stemmed from a bureaucratic system that was becoming outdated, especially as the modernist turn emerges. Zama is trapped by the bureaucratic system in which he is a part of; he is stuck in a Paraguayan purgatory awaiting a transfer just as Joseph K. from Franz Kafka's *The Trial* awaits his trial, and also, he is psychically

trapped by his belief in his bureaucratic title. Instead, his title only has power over himself, as he believes that he wields the power the title is suggesting, when in reality, he doesn't, and he must repress this knowledge. In other words, his title and its ideological underpinnings deny him of the possibility of acknowledging the truth, and therefore, his freedom and subjectivity. Once he renounces his title and the ideology at the end, only then can he be free.

The child at the end who asks, "Do you want to live?" is essentially asking, "do you want to leave the colonial ideology?" The slave, in Hegel's formulation, is the one who first chooses life over the risk of death, and in *Zama*, are the ones without paranoia or bureaucratic repression. But *Zama* isn't simply joining the "slave class;" something else is happening. *Zama* leaves ideology and the antagonism entirely, which "does not extend to the known real world of existence" for the indigenous people—they are literally outside the empire (Hegel 119). But must one truly leave like *Zama* did? Is there a better way—a better bureaucracy—we can uphold? We must resist arguments that suggest *Zama* floats away to some primitive anarchic society that is simply ideologically pure. The answer is without a doubt more complicated than that.

I am starting with *Zama* because it succinctly represents the ways in which a system of bureaucracy that does not correctly account for contradiction, yet contains within it ideologies of individuality or proto-libertarianism, leaves the insufficient antagonism of the master/slave dialectic intact in its attempt at resolving the dialectic. As a text about the end of the colonial era in South America but published in the mid-twentieth century, the text is itself straddling the enlightenment and modernism. Also, as a novel translated into English as recently as 2016, it adds to the global concern we can

see in modernist literature with bureaucracy and law as a source for one's psychological disturbances. It analyzes the modernist (and, I would argue, our contemporary) dilemma of believing that one is free and also a master in an antagonistic world. It works through the problem of having a bureaucratic system in place that attempts to even out the playing field of this antagonism simply through recognition, but it instead supports another hierarchy that disavows our ideological understanding of freedom. The text allows us to understand the pervasiveness of a politics of recognition, which insufficiently grasps at the universal through its attempt at asserting particularity. We have held onto a pseudo-feudal arrangement, but convinced ourselves that we have moved past it. We don't know how to organize ourselves without this antagonism, but know that it is insufficient. This, I argue, is one of the central concerns in modernist literature.

After Hegel expounds his master/slave dialectic he claims that the failure to confront this antagonism can result in "having a 'mind of one's own,'" which, "is self-will, a freedom which is still enmeshed in servitude" (119). I would argue that this is central to the modernist philosophical dilemma; one thinks that they are free simply because of their individuality—because they can doubt—and thus, they can think for themselves, which is for them a form of mastery. After Descartes, the subject knows to think, and accordingly should be able to think oneself into existence. But for Hegel, this isn't enough; this shortcoming is concretely explored in William Gaddis's 1955 novel *The Recognitions*, in which Wyatt, the protagonist, embarks on a Cartesian quest to prove his existence. Ultimately, he realizes he cannot prove his own existence, and the lines between true and false, authentic and counterfeit, even existence and non-existence, begin to blur and become indistinguishable. Ultimately, Wyatt finds that his existence relies on

recognition, not individuality or solipsism, but that even this recognition isn't enough. Wyatt's obsession with his desire to be recognized drives him mad, and by the end of the text he finds himself "restoring" paintings from the past, by which he means, scraping away the paint with a knife down to the original canvas. (It is suggested that he is similarly scraping his own identity away, something that will similarly occur to the character Slothrop in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*).

Descartes' individuality, which is complicated by colonial and capitalist forms of mastery, places all epistemological stress on the individual, so as to resolve the mysteries of one's existence and subjectivity entirely on one's own. Because of the stress on individuality as the basis for freedom, laws—in any form—are only viewed as limiting, and thus, become suspect. In the colonial mindset, laws and bureaucracies are impediments to the modernist "doubt,"—Zama cannot doubt his status as a master because of his bureaucratic title, despite his obvious failure at mastery—but to the modernist, all is suspect, and skepticism devolves into paranoia and alienation.

Precisely this dilemma between skepticism and law is revealed in *Zama* during a scene in which Zama acts as judge for a local court. The "defendants" tell an absurd story arguing that they deserve more native slaves from the state because they have killed all of their disobedient slaves and because of this have run out. Zama rules that they are entitled to more slaves primarily because of their family name. Afterwards, however, he is critiqued for his judgment by a lower officer who claims that it is an unfair ruling, where he says, "I am a human before I am a Spaniard," in defiance to the Spanish Crown and its hierarchical ruling. Again, Zama is forced to resort to violence so as to assert his dominance. This brief scene shows the power of the doubt of modernity in the face of an

outdated bureaucratic system; the lower officer thinks for himself, and he can see that law is ruling through prejudice, not for order. This scene shows how we have not rid ourselves of antagonism, nor do we even acknowledge it, and therefore use laws to confront our fear of the other. Our desire for mastery over ourselves manifests itself in a desire for mastery of others—of distinguishing oneself from all others. Therefore, laws are made to restrict the freedom of particular groups. In this way, there are individuals beyond or outside of law—who must be, because they are paranoid of it as being something that restricts their mastery—and those who are oppressed by the law, so as to maintain antagonism. Therefore, law serves a contradictory purpose; it serves as a protection from the anarchy of the other, but also, prevents one from realizing their desired anarchy. Either way there is no freedom, and the dialectic remains. Yet the ideological assumption that one is free, despite this system, generates a psychological contradiction.

This contradiction, according to Hegel, can result in Stoicism. He writes, “Stoicism [can] only appear on the scene in a time of universal fear and bondage, but also a time of universal culture which had raised itself to the level of thought” (121). Stoicism for Hegel is a rejection of the negative, where one “shrinks away” from their “utter-dismemberment” (21). They have come close to performing the phenomenological gesture, but have thwarted it half way. Stoicism is the ultimate “mind of one’s own,” where an individual accepts an internal freedom—solipsism, nearly—in the face of their bondage. Again, this reinforces one’s fear of the other—of subjectivity in substance—making one skeptical and paranoid. Since the subject believes they must escape bureaucracy but they cannot, they try to escape internally. But there is no escape; if we

cannot drift off into the unknown like *Zama*, how might we reconcile our freedom with our necessity for law?

It is tempting to suggest that the Hegel of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* is the older, more conservative—regressive even—evil twin to the young, radical, and progressive Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. After all, he defends the monarchy, talks of the importance of marriage and parenting, and upholds the state. At first glance, it might seem that Hegel himself is responsible for providing the theoretical ground on which we can inhabit this dilemma. How could Hegel possibly be used to confront modernist dilemmas when he is responsible for creating the most comprehensive understanding of the colonial power dynamic in the master/slave dialectic? But Hegel's system is tightly wound; to isolate a portion of it from the rest, and to dissect it into “good Hegel” and “bad Hegel” misses the mark entirely. This sort of parceling out of the “good” ideas in Hegel's philosophy particularizes him so as to render the whole irrelevant. Instead, it is important to grapple with those components of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* that which may offend the contemporary reader. Indeed, it is Hegel's most concrete attempt at politicizing his philosophical system from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Perhaps, the goal is not to rid ourselves of these feudal tendencies, but instead to take stock and recognition of them so as to find the most apt remedy.

In the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel clarifies the way in which he believes law functions in the state as a liberating force if it properly accounts for subjectivity and contradiction. First, he confronts the ways in which individuality thwarts one's freedom, saying, “the will which limits itself to *a this* is the will of a stubborn

person who considers himself *unfree* unless he has *this* will” (42). Freedom that is based in individual desire creates an inherent lack—similar to lack in the Lacanian sense—of freedom, in which one feels as if they must fulfill any will or desire in order to truly be free. Defining freedom in this way also creates an inherent need for mastery; if one must be able to fulfill their will to be free, they must lord over others if that is their desire. In this way, it is easy to rationalize forms of antagonism in the name of individual freedom, to which the subject is actually enslaved. This, according to Hegel, is similar to our “natural state,” in which we are “determined by [our] natural drives” (51). Thus, contrary to anarchist thought, man is not free “in nature,” but instead liberated through the successful negotiation of law, by which humanity is thrust from the throws of our natural drives. This, for Hegel, is the necessity of law in the universal, not in the particularized state, in which law only applies to some people. Particularized law keeps the chaos of the other outside the realm of freedom—which is precisely how law is understood by organizations like Blue Lives Matter—whereas law that considers the universal attempts to maximize the subjects freedom to generate a “community of minds” (Hegel 43). Thus, freedom is not attained through an escape into some primitive anarchy as it is suggested at the end of the Martel’s *Zama*, but instead a revolutionary understanding of our dependency on the other and their involvement in our freedom.

The major political projects of the twentieth century are rife with these complications. Marx’s somewhat unfortunate use of Hegel’s philosophy has had dire consequences on contemporary theories ability to use Hegel as a theorist that is centrally concerned with freedom in modernity. Indeed, Marx’s influence on the major communist projects of the era and their violent consequences offer a compelling reason as to why

one might be hesitant to embrace Hegelian thought. But it isn't just the leftist failures that didn't correctly account for Hegel's theory of law and freedom; Fascism, and indeed all of the major totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, suffers from a desire for mastery and individuality. Giovanni Gentile's "actual idealism"—which he developed as an extension of Hegelianism—sought to create a "community of minds" that were singular, in unity, via bureaucratic order; in other words, a particularized universal. These projects attempt to grasp the universal by making a particular the universal (more on this in chapter three).

The violence of these projects certainly brings to fore the failure to resolve the antagonism of the master/slave dialectic. The stress on surveillance most obviously shows the state's desire to master the other, as if in an attempt at making a non-lacking state. The state takes the form of the Big Other and holds an individual as it's representative (Hitler, Stalin, Mao, etc.), and maintains a feudal arrangement with modernist ideologies. But again, this attempt at mastery through the resolution of the states lack by surveillance makes the state—exemplified by the personified master—paranoid itself. Paranoia in Stalinism, for instance, rationalizes any means so as to realize the ultimate goal of resolving class antagonism—overcoming contradiction—but instead perpetuates this antagonism. Citizens are asked to risk their own lives—as if they are the masters risking one's life for subjectivity in the master/slave dialectic—but they must do so *for the state*, not for their subjectivity. Lives are pitted against each other, but lives are lost, and thus, the dialectic remains. Perhaps, thinking of the end of *Zama*, the better question for the state to ask is, "Do you want to live?"

The twentieth century novel confronts this philosophical conflict by presenting narratives that center on struggles between individuality and freedom, in which faulty systems of law generate a psychosis for the subject. States that do not account for the Hegelian necessity of law but maintain the antagonism of the master/slave dialectic systematically reject the phenomenological gesture that attempts to secure one's subjectivity and freedom. Although I have thus far started by discussing *Zama* and *The Recognitions*, I will primarily be illustrating this literary concern through Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. I will begin by illustrating the ways in which the problems with law in Kafka's *The Trial* can be analyzed and explained in a Hegelian manner so as to resist conventional interpretations that tend to—by choice or not— anarchize Kafka. Kafka is not simply critiquing law and bureaucracy, but instead, laws and bureaucracies that restrict one's ability to confront truth. Next I will read *Pale Fire* as a text that confronts the difficulty of reconciling oneself to contradiction once one has encountered that in the absence of law. And lastly, I will argue that *Gravity's Rainbow* is a text that aligns anarchy and fascism as political theories of non-contradiction. Additionally, *Gravity's Rainbow* considers the political outcomes of systems that attempt complete organization, how this relates to both scientific positivism and actual idealism, and how these are ultimately goals of overcoming contradiction via particularization.

*“And the Oracles, who pronounced on particular questions, are dumb.”*

—G.W.F. Hegel

Near the start of Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, during Joseph K’s arrest, the narrator says of the guards, “What sort of men were they? What were they talking about? What office did they represent? After all, K. lived in a state governed by law, there was universal peace, all statutes were in force; who dared assault him in his own lodgings?” (6). It’s difficult not to imagine this passage being laced with some sarcasm, especially once one knows the ending of the novel. K. never finds the answers to these questions; the court system and indeed his particular trial remains a mystery throughout the entirety of the narrative. But K., at least at the start of the text, does believe—naïvely—that he lives “in a state governed by law” with “universal peace,” and through this, we get a peak into Kafka’s legal critique, which hinges on a critique of ideology. What is most dangerous to K., what harms him the most, is his failure to notice and reconcile the patches in his expectations. When K. expects the law to act in a particular way, it does precisely the opposite, and slowly, his understanding of safety in his “state governed by law” begins to unravel. As K. navigates the legal system, he is constantly shocked at the way that it functions in contrast to what he imagined, but he doesn’t successfully account for this until the very end. He encounters the absurd, and then—usually in an arrogant manner—dismisses it as senseless and therefore unimportant. In this way, Kafka’s novel gets to the heart of ideological understandings of law as that which both keeps the other—the bad—out, and also, as a infallible force as if regulated by, or, is itself a type of Big Other. In other words, *The Trial* reveals the ways in which systems of bureaucracy

can devolve into anarchies themselves, which then enforce law through arbitrariness and prejudice rather than as a vessel for universal peace and freedom. *The Trial*, then, is not a text about law and totalitarianism as a functioning force of control (“functioning” in the sense that it in fact *works and knows how to work*) that we should fear, but instead, a text about the ways in which ideologies maintain for us an antagonistic anarchy that appears to us to be enforcing law in a totalitarian manner.

It goes without saying that Kafka’s *The Trial* is a text centrally concerned with the interaction between law and freedom, but precisely what Kafka is telling us about legal systems remains unclear. In his “Notes of Kafka” Theodore W. Adorno claims, “it is National Socialism far more than the hidden dominion of God that his work cites” (258). Adorno and many others (including Klaus Mann, who Adorno cites) have discussed the ways in which Kafka’s work seemingly predicts the impending wind of fascism. Such an analysis tends to hinge on pointing out the similarities between the world of the Kafkaesque and that of the Third Reich. Kafka, in these terms, is a kind of anachronistic figure, who provided us with a representation of what was to come, not what had already been, and directs the focus of analysis from that of the religious to the political. And indeed, such an analysis is likely fair; it is difficult to read *The Trial* coming out on the other end of the Second World War without drawing parallels. But these interpretations typically offer a limited theory of law that tends to claim that fascism and other forms of totalitarianism are simply a form of “law intensified.” Adorno writes that under fascism, as well as Kafka’s fictional state, “arrest is assault, judgment violence” (258). And while this is certainly true in many regards, exactly *why* is arrest made an assault, and judgment made violence? Is fascism just control exercised to a more intense degree? Or are there

greater, more specific answers that may explain the conditions through which totalitarianism is made possible?

Perhaps the easiest way of interpreting *The Trial* would be to say that law and bureaucracies are systems that deny the human of its humanity and rights, which alienates us all from each other through its authoritative presence. Similar to Marx's critique of factory work as that which integrates the human into the machine so as to dehumanize them, Kafka's bureaucracy functions in very much the same way. One might quickly presume that Kafka is suggesting to the reader that law—in whatever form it may take—has these psychic consequences, and we are instead better off in a state in which law and its enforcement is invisible, or, better yet, simply non-existent. Such a reading figures Kafka as anarchic, in that law enforcement flatly generates negative consequences as it restricts one's freedom. This reading, however, simplifies the legal system it claims is incredibly complex—too complicated to comprehend, in fact—and reflects an antagonistic legal perspective that upholds the “mind of one's own” philosophy of freedom.

This reading of Kafka draws consciously or unconsciously from a Hobbesian perspective of law, in which law is seen as inherently binding. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes, “Liberty, or freedom, signifieth properly the absence of opposition (by opposition, I mean external impediments...)” (129). For Hobbes, man is innately free—although, he believes, in nature life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”—and law is therefore always an external impediment to man's innate will (78). Hobbes's social contract functions on the premise that man must restrain himself in some way from his ultimate freedom in the state to maintain a level of peace. But Hobbes can only conceptualize law

functioning as a source of fear. He writes, “generally all actions which men do in Commonwealths, for fear of the law, are actions which the doers had liberty to omit” (130). In other words, the only thing maintaining society and the subject’s respect of their duty to the state is the fear of imprisonment, and this fear is what compels the subject to sacrifice their own freedom. Perhaps it is clear why this is a tempting model for interpreting Kafka, but it requires that you also accept that Kafka believes Hobbes’s definition of freedom, as if Kafka is suggesting we escape the fear by removing law to bring us back to a state of nature that is different than Hobbes’s. Such a reading, however, might turn Kafka into a Lockean rather than an anarchist (although, perhaps there are more closely related than they initially seem), but I find it hard to believe that Kafka is advocating for a style of law that has been most aggressively implemented in the United States and is a source of libertarian philosophy.

It would also be easy, and subsequently tempting, to suggest that Kafka, in all of his texts, is working through an explanation and exploration of a “rhizomatic” structure, to take a term from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In their second volume of their series *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* titled *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write, “the rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers” (7). The rhizome as a structure is a sort of non-structure or abstraction that connects all in an efficient but apparently meaningless manner. They continue, saying, “a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections [of] semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (7). It works in a random manner, resisting traditional hierarchies or categories, seeking to connect the seemingly disparate in one’s attempt at grappling with

“multiplicities.” It is an ultimate form of anarchic organization, in which the organization is instead an anti-organization that follows only the principle of connection. Following this, it isn’t difficult to find representations of rhizomatic systems in the work of Kafka: the unknowable and impossible to navigate legal system in *The Trial*; *The Castle*’s labyrinthine architecture; the caverns and underworld of the boat in *Amerika*; it appears as if Kafka’s world is littered with physical rhizomes, in which his character’s get lost. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari begin their extended analysis of Kafka by claiming, “this work is a rhizome, a burrow... we will enter, then, by any point whatsoever” (3). They go on to claim that Kafka has generated a new form of literature in which he accounts for the machine of the rhizome, and instead, celebrates the mechanization of the subject into rhizomatic bureaucracy, etc. They write, “A writer isn’t a writer-man; he is a machine-man, and an experimental man... A Kafka-machine is thus constituted by contents and expressions...to enter or leave the machine, to be in the machine, to walk around it, to approach it—these are all still components of the machine itself: these are states of desire” (7). These states of desire are in no way negative aspects of the machine, and truly, they claim, there is no escape, just as there is no escape for K. I can’t help but point out, however, the eerie similarity in language to Marinetti’s “dreamt-of metallization of the human body” (Benjamin 241).

The anarchy of the rhizomes encountered in Kafka’s work, however, is precisely the problem his characters face. When faced with a legal system that is rhizomatic (if one insists on using that term), K. has no option but to get lost. There is no navigating a system that is system-less, and to be persecuted by such a system suggests that it is not as anti-hierarchical as Deleuze and Guattari would like to claim it is. The human absorption

into the machinery of bureaucracy is certainly a concern of Kafka's, but is it celebrated? It is one thing to challenge conventional interpretations of a text, but there is something eloquent in the simplicity in the "traditional" claim that Kafka is centrally concerned with "the modern citizen who knows that he is at the mercy of a vast machinery of officialdom whose functioning is directed by authorities that remain nebulous to the executive organs, let alone to the people they deal with" (Benjamin 141). Exactly where in *The Trial* is K. successfully initiated into the flat rhizomatic structure of law without oppression from some "officialdom?" In no way is K. brought in or connected to the rhizome of law; he is instead—as Benjamin points out—at its will. Certainly, Kafka's system is difficult to make sense of, as is the rhizome, but so is totalitarianism. This is more a "connecting of the dots"—a Slothropian conspiratorial noticing—than an analysis, which is consistent with rhizomatic epistemologies. It still hasn't sufficiently explained itself; it has simply flipped the interpretation of Kafka that claims law is oppressive in total, and claimed that it is joyful and full of desire instead. Deleuze and Guattari claim that there is joy and humor in Kafka's work—and I most definitely agree—but these moments come to the reader amidst a vast landscape of despair and concern. We must first consider precisely *what it is* that makes Kafka's legal system difficult to make sense of, and why it so closely resembles totalitarianism.

*The Trial* is a text that is enmeshed in a discourse of modernity, or, a shift in the way the state operates and its effect on the subject. The law being represented in *The Trial* is a *new law*, one in which antagonism can remain under an ideological understanding of freedom, which claims we must be free of restrictions—legal or otherwise—to truly be individual subjects with freedom. In some ways, the hierarchy has

been ideologically leveled in a rhizomatic fashion, but this has no material ground. Adorno's analysis—despite his anti-Hegelian tendencies—accurately confronts the change in law and ideology that is present in Kafka's work, saying, “there is no real distinction, Kafka writes, between town and castle. Kafka's method was verified when the obsolete liberal traits he surveyed, stemming from the anarchy of commodity production, changed into the forms of fascist organization” (258). Adorno claims that Kafka is representing and analyzing a shift in authority in which the individual has been raised to the level of equality, but then out of this, developed a new form of antagonism. Tied to capitalism and the breakdown of feudal arrangements of commodity production—as well as enlightenment ideals of natural rights and modernity—the subject is more individual than ever, but subsequently alienated and determined by their will entirely. To refer to Hegel, the subject has a mind of its own, but also feels alone because of this. This isolation makes encountering the other and the process of recognition all the more difficult, and our legal arrangements begin to reflect this challenge.

With this in mind, Hegel's definitions of law and freedom are imperative here. For Hegel, law is essential to the existence of freedom. Similar to Hobbes, Hegel claims that it is law that strips us of our “natural state,” but for Hegel, our freedom is generated in our creation of laws, and is not present in the absence of them. In other words, Hegel takes an approach opposite to Rousseau and claims that we are not at all “born free,” or free in nature first, but instead, we create and illustrate our freedom when we make laws. In this way, we are not giving freedom up like in the social contract, but instead generating our freedom through our laws. Hegel writes, “As spirit, man is a free being

who is in a position not to let himself be determined by natural drives. When he exists in an immediate... condition, he is therefore in a situation in which he ought not to be, and from which he must liberate himself” (51). Following Kant, Hegel argues that the very existence of laws is in fact a form of proof of our freedom; laws constitute the ability to chose *not* to follow our natural drives and are a type of self-restraint that is in itself freeing. Therefore, the state is not formed through the relinquishment of one’s freedom so as to live in peace as it is in the social contract, but instead the relinquishment of one’s slavery for freedom. In fact, Hegel believes that social contracts are alienating in that they function by trying to maintain two individual “*arbitrary will[s]*” rather than grappling with the universal and the mutual reliance each contracting party has on the other (104).

But what is and isn’t “right” law for Hegel is particular. What is central to Hegel’s conception of an effective set of laws is that they are *made clear* to their subjects. He writes,

For the law to have binding force, it is necessary, in view of the right of self-consciousness that the laws should be made *universally known*. To hang the laws at such a height that no citizen could read them... is an injustice of exactly the same kind as to bury them in an extensive apparatus of learned books and collections of verdicts... so that knowledge of the laws currently in force is accessible only to those who have made them an object of scholarly study. (Hegel 246-247).

It is a simple sentiment, but this argument ensures that law resists being arbitrary to the subject, so as to maintain an equality of governance, not a particularism. Additionally, the publicity of the laws resists particularism in the way that it allows all—oneself or the

other—to have a comprehensive knowledge of the law, and therefore, all subjects regard the law as *their law*, and no one is beyond it. To reiterate this point, Hegel writes, “Right is concerned with freedom, the worthiest and most sacred possession of man, and man must know about it if it is to have a binding force for him” (247). Law, figured in this way, allows for and facilitates the phenomenological gesture of recognition, in which subjects of the state are able to comprehend their dependence on one another rather than their otherness and individuality that is restrained through contractual and arbitrary law.

In *The Trial*, law is made entirely arbitrary and mysterious, not only to those subject to the law, but also to those who enforce the law. The most blatant representation of this is the fact that K. and the audience are never told what his actual crime is. In the Kafkaesque state, violations of the law are not the focus of enforcement, but rather force itself is. For Kafka, law can strike at any moment because—like in fascism and other forms of the state that are engaged in the antagonism of the master/slave dialectic—there must always be someone persecuted as the other. In other words, because there is no recognition, but recognition is still valued as what constitutes one as the master, one is always seeking mastery over the other so as to assert one’s own subjectivity. When this is taken to the level of the state, it takes form in large-scale arbitrary persecution, where force is believed to be necessary for the stability of the state. Therefore, the actual crimes are never important, but instead the fact that someone is being persecuted and excluded. Hegel confronts this by saying, “representational thought often imagines that the state is held together by force; but what holds it together is simply the basic sense of order which everyone possesses” (289). In the Kafkaesque state, law is bound to this representational thought, fearing that it would fall apart without force.

But for Kafka, law isn't simply arbitrary so as to maintain enforcement of the other; *actual law is non-existent*. After K's initial court hearing, he comes back to the building in which the court is and notices a pile of books. After being told he cannot look through them, he remarks, "they're probably law books, and it's in the nature of this judicial system that one is condemned not only in innocence but also in ignorance" (55). K's observation here is true, but it is in fact much worse than that. Once K. finally is able to look through these "law books," he finds that they are full of pornographic images. There are no laws, it is completely anarchic, and the system that K. once felt was protecting him is revealed to be perverse and out of control. Law in K's state is illusionary, an ideological façade, serving to protect those who are beyond it from the other that is subject to it. K's first court hearing, as well as this moment in the text, are the beginnings of K's exposure to law's failure at regulating and restricting the other, and this is a traumatic vision he cannot comprehend fully.

Slavoj Žižek addresses precisely this aspect of *The Trial* in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* where he writes,

The so-called 'Kafka's universe' is not a 'fantasy-image of social reality' but, on the contrary, the *mise-en-scene of the fantasy which is at work in the midst of social reality itself*: we all know very well that bureaucracy is not all-powerful, but our 'effective' conduct in the presence of bureaucratic machinery is already regulated by a belief in its almightiness. (34)

Throughout the text, K. oscillates between the two contradictory positions here in which he believes that law is both infallible but also faulty and imperfect. When he is arrested, he is still in a position to believe this contradiction—there must have been a mistake

because he does not think he has committed a crime, but he has faith enough in the legal system that he will be acquitted if he follows the rules. Initially, it seems that the trial will be only a minor inconvenience, and mostly, he is concerned about being late to work. But as he advances in trying to prove himself innocent, he is often confused by moments in which it is revealed that the legal system is faulty. He reconciles this by believing he is being tried by an unusual court of law as if there is a more another official, infallible court of law that his particular trial is not under. But with continued exposure to the failures of the legal system, he is forced to confront the fact that the court of law in his state is predicated on its obscurity so as to maintain its infallible status. On this Žižek writes, “‘External’ obedience to Law is thus not submission to external pressure, to so-called non-ideological ‘brute force’, but obedience to the Command in so far as it is ‘incomprehensible’, not understood; in so far as it retains a ‘traumatic’, ‘irrational’ character” (35). Thus, for Kafka, law functions through the idea or “representational thought” of force, but truly operates under obscurity, which is in fact more forceful.

K. comes to understand this at the very end of the text after discussing a parable with a priest. The priest says of law that, “‘you don’t have to consider everything true, you just have to consider it necessary’” to which K. replies, “‘A depressing opinion... Lies are made into a universal system’” (223). Žižek claims that this scene reveals that “‘what is ‘repressed’ then, is not some obscure origin of the Law but the very fact that the Law is not to be accepted as true, only as necessary—the fact that *its authority is without truth*” (36). It is worth noting that it is a religious figure who provides K. this sacred information, as if the priest is someone who has access to knowledge others do not have. It is also important to note that the legal system itself does not seem fully aware of this

fact, and most likely believes entirely in its own legitimacy and that it does function through force, as if in a social contract. But now that K. knows this, law no longer has the mystical allure of safety or truth any more, and, according to the state, force must truly be employed, and he is soon killed. In his final moments, he does not fight against the men that bring him to the quarry to kill him; instead, he grants them their responsibility entirely, finding that ultimately it is better for the guards to remain within their ideological understanding of law than it is to be thrust from it into nihilism. Just before they kill him, he mimics a figure he sees atop the building in the distance which looks to him to be “a friend... a good person,” and he “raise[s] his hands and spread[s] out all his fingers” as if in religious elation, perhaps regaining some shred of faith in something before his death (Kafka 230). Figured like this, *The Trial* is a narrative about one’s symbolic death from ideology, and the tortuous incomprehensibility of this loss. In contrast to *Zama*, in the Kafkaesque state there is no option of escape into the primitive non-ideological other than death; one must find truth somewhere because once you understand the anarchy and meaninglessness of it all, you are as good as dead.

K.’s trajectory of navigating a anarchic system of law shows the difficulty of the process of reconciling oneself to the contradictory nature of things, and in many ways echoes Hegel’s reading of Christianity as “revealed religion” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. K. resembles what Hegel calls “the Unhappy Consciousness,” in which the subject mirrors the death of their God—like the death of Christ—and is knowledgeable of this loss and their dividedness. The thing that the subject once held as sacred has been tarnished, and the mystic allure has vanished. Hegel claims that Christianity functions like this in that it literally kills its own God, but ultimately most forms of Christianity

find this death merely a symbolic one, not a literal one, which again points to the difficulty of this position. This truth is revealed to K. from a priest—which seems initially contrary to Hegel’s thought, since, for Hegel, the priest is the mediator that grants the unhappy consciousness reason—but the priest is also a member of the conspiratorial court, effectively equating religion and law in the Kafkaesque state. This is perhaps why K. seems to spare the bodyguards at the end the trouble of resistance, since he is in the process of reconciling himself to the contradiction that law is both all knowing and perverse and anarchic, which, at this point, is too blatantly obvious to disavow. Yet at the very last moment, he appears to find a religious comfort in this loss. There is a change, however—and this will be discussed further in chapter 2—that the figure he sees off in the distance is the externalized version of himself self-dirempted, and his mimicking of the figure is a way of reconciling himself to contradiction.

Contrary to Hobbes’s conception, in the Kafkaesque it is not a fear of the law that compels one to renounce their freedom, it is instead fear itself that creates law and its incomprehensibility. As I mentioned in the introduction, law that functions within the master/slave dialectic but also within the ideology of individuality and freedom generates a fear of the other that the state must constantly persecute. The breakdown of this ideological understanding of law—inhabiting the position of the Unhappy Consciousness—can result in psychosis (as I will argue further in chapters two and three). But the fear of this breakdown is precisely what maintains the ideology. As stated earlier, it is not that law *works and knows how to work*; on the contrary, those within the legal system are themselves participating in the predominant “representational thought” surrounding law and force, and this adds to its incomprehensibility. To refer back to

Hegel's critique of faulty laws, law is made "scholarly" and therefore difficult to access in *The Trial* because it is believed to have a truth when it does not. When another defendant describes a legal petition he read—which he was not supposed to read—he claims,

'It was scholarly all right, but in fact contained nothing of substance. A lot of Latin for the most part, which I don't understand, then several pages of general appeals to the court, then flattery of certain individual officials, who weren't in fact named but could have been deduced by anyone familiar with the court, then self-praise on the lawyer's part, combined with an almost canine servility before the court, and finally analyses of legal cases from ancient times that were supposedly similar to mine.' (Kafka 177)

This is the very antithesis of Hegel's insistence that law should be common and accessible to all. Not only does this make it accessible to some and not to others and therefore persecutory to those who cannot access it, as discussed earlier, it also shows a desperation on the side of the lawyer for complexity so as to muddy the traumatic truth of its lack. The use of Latin and "analysis of legal cases from ancient times" shows an attempt at connecting law to some obscure origin—to use Žižek's language—where there is none—there is "nothing of substance." The self-praise and flattery reveals a conspiratorial aspect to law that really stresses an in and out group of mastery versus subordinates.

The defendant's critique of the system here is a dangerous act, and shows why the petition was originally supposed to be kept secret from him. If the legal system wants you to believe it is the Big Other, you are safer if you accept that as truth, not simply necessary.

Most of the characters K. encounters throughout the text, most notably the Painter, and even the narrator, most definitely *do believe* in law as the Big Other. While talking to K. the Painter claims, “No file is ever lost, and the court never forgets. Someday—quite unexpectedly—some judge or other takes a closer look at the file, realizes that the case is still active, and orders an immediate arrest” (158-159). The Painter, in his attempt to offer advice to K. confirms the Big Otherness of law, but simultaneously, throughout the scene, convinces K of the vanity of officials in the court system. Even the narrator believes in the almightiness of the courts, saying, directly to the reader,

Try to realize that this vast judicial organism remains, so to speak, in a state of eternal equilibrium, and that if you change something on your own where you are, you can cut the ground out from under your own feet and fall, while the vast organism easily compensates for the minor disturbance at some other spot—after all, everything is interconnected—and remains unchanged, if not, which is likely, even more resolute, more vigilant, more severe, more malicious. (Kafka 120)

For both the Painter and the narrator, the legal system is infallible, and most certainly does operate by means of fear and force. The law is taken seriously by these figures, which for them, maintains both their physical safety from persecution, but also their psychic safety from contradiction in the Unhappy Consciousness. The law—as master—seeks recognition, and when a subject denies them of recognition—just like in *Zama*—the master seeks further recognition through violence.

What is most interesting about K., however, is that he never truly loses himself to psychosis, and in some ways resembles a type of Hegelian hero (although, it is necessary to point out that, according to Hegel, “within the state, heroes are no longer

possible: they occur only in the absence of civilization,” which further proves the failure of law in the Kafkaesque) (120). K., unless he does gain some brief faith at the very end—although, perhaps it is of the revealed religion (it is incredibly ambiguous)—eventually reconciles himself to contradiction and successfully renounces his former ideological understanding of law. And this is what makes him dangerous. At the start of his text during his arrest he claims, “when you’ve been in this world for thirty years and had to make your way on your own, as has been my lot, you get hardened to surprises and don’t take them too seriously” (13). Again, this is incredibly vague, but the fact that he denies his charges of severity—and does so usually with an air of arrogance—is what allows him to dismantle the ideology for himself. According to Lacan, the most important distinction between the paranoid and the non-paranoid, is that the paranoiac takes everything seriously (74). Everything for the paranoiac has *some meaning*, but this is something that K. denies from the beginning. He is adept to noticing that things are instead anarchic rather than perfectly planned. The text is instead more paranoid than K. himself, which perhaps explains the surrealist tone and aesthetic in which it is conveyed. But what would have happened if K. had more time?

## II

*“There’s a little bit of West Texas in all of us”*

—Kurtis Souza

In the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel writes, “the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter-dismemberment, it finds itself” (19). In my introduction and first chapter I have discussed the ways that bureaucracy can prevent this process of “devastation” by providing an ideology of wholeness in one’s title, or, in the security of the machinery of the bureaucracy. Because of a legal system that does not account for or allow contradiction, the subject is restricted in their ability to perform the phenomenological gesture of self-diremption and reflection. Don Diego de Zama and Joseph K. are characters who nevertheless undergo a rupture in their conception of law and how their identities relate to the state, and ultimately, they find a quick resolution to this rupture, one escape, the other, death. But what would happen if Zama were not able to float off into the primitive unknown? Of, if K. were not killed after finding faith in the image of an “angel... a friend”? What if one were to undergo self-diremption, but was unable to find oneself in the utter-dismemberment of this position?

There has been a great deal of scholarship dedicated to deciding precisely who the narrator of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* is. There are three predominant schools of thought on this topic: Shadeans, those who think John Shade is both the writer and annotator of the poem; Kimboteans, those who think Charles Kimbote is; and Botkins, those who believe that it is another character, V. Botkin, a professor at Wordsmith

College who has gone insane and has a split personality, the other side of which is a nonexistent Charles Kimbote. Determining which of these schools is correct, however, is not necessary; all that is truly important about the variety of possibilities when it comes to identifying the narrator is the very fact that there are multiple choices. We know that there is at least one character in all of these scenarios who is split, who remains split for the majority of the text, and claims at the end, “I shall continue to exist. I may assume other disguises, other forms, but I shall try to exist” (Nabokov 300). The narrator here—whoever they may be—is explicit in telling you it does not matter who they are; they will cease to be the same as they are right now in the near future. As a disclaimer, I will tend to use Kimbote as the name of narrator—knowing fully well that it may not be Kimbote—out of simplification and clarity, since that is what the narrator refers to themselves as.

This shouldn't discourage us from trying to understand the text at all. It would be easy to suggest that the entirety of *Pale Fire* is a critique on forms of interpretation—that Kimbote's argument comes more directly from the mouth of Nabokov's, who's distaste for psychoanalysis and Marxist criticism is well-documented, even within the novel. Kimbote—as a self-professed literature professor at Wordsmith College—could represent a caricature of the literary critic, who reads into art a reality that is their own, having very little to do with the reality within the text. In this interpretation, Kimbote's logical jumps in his annotations are akin to the type of literary analysis Nabokov found offensive in his own life. This suggests to us, however, that the internal reality of the work of art has essentially nothing to tell us as readers, since we inevitably insert our own delusions and come away from the text with those delusions still intact. But is this reading—offered by

the text to us, the reader—not a reading in itself? Or, perhaps an even better question, is this not one of the central points of psychoanalytic interpretation, that we bring our own subjectivity into the object, and that this actually allows us to know it better? If Nabokov had such a revulsion for interpretation—psychoanalysis, especially—than why write a text that invites the reader to interpret it at nearly every turn of the page? Such a reading seems to me to not only be wrong, but more importantly, useless.

I write this not simply to defend my own interpretation of the text, but because I find that these debates—which have surrounded the text since its publication in 1962—have done very little to scratch the surface in explaining *why* we are interested in these potentially divided characters, and what they have to tell us. Most critics call the narrator a “madman” and leave it at that, having done little to no analysis as to the nature of his psychosis. Additionally, very little has yet been said on the text’s political concerns, namely, Kimbote’s obsession with monarchs and their fall, which I find inextricably related to his psychosis and division. Ultimately, I find that both of these textual concerns—psychosis and the rule of law—are related to Kimbote’s understanding of religion. I argue that the narrator—Kimbote or otherwise—is a representation of a figure who has undergone the rapturous cataclysm of utter-dismemberment, but who is perpetually reconciling himself to a divine Big Other, or, an externalized undivided subject, and thus, cannot reach “absolute knowing,” let alone “Reason.” This position is what generates his political concerns and psychosis, and helps us understand Hegel’s defense of the monarch in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, as well as Hegel’s other understandings for the necessity of law in the state.

Charles Kimbote, the self-professed annotator and publisher of John Shade's poem "Pale Fire" claims that he meets Shade while serving a temporary teaching position at the fictional Wordsmith College in the also fictional Appalachian town of New Wye. While there, he rents a house from "Hugh Warren Goldsmith, authority on Roman Law and distinguished judge" (Nabokov 82). The importance of this setting is two fold: first, it generates for Kimbote a drastic overhaul in his understanding of law; and secondly, it becomes his panoptic tower from which he can survey John Shade.

During Kimbote's first extended discussion of the house, he focuses on the assortment of notes that Judge Goldsmith left him concerning the maintenance of the house, including precise directions on moving furniture and house plants around in particular rooms so as to avoid damage from sunlight, and the variety of meals that he must provide for their cat. Through these small details, Kimbote finds that Judge Goldsmith—someone he felt was a "learned professional"—is immensely concerned with trivial things that he finds not only unimportant but also idiotic. When he showed Shade these notes—if he truly did—Kimbote reports that he "roared with laughter," and interestingly, "his robust hilarity dissipated the atmosphere of *damnum infectum* in which I was supposed to dwell" (Nabokov 85). By referencing the legal term of *damnum infectum*, he figures the Judge and his home—and on a metaphorical level, his status as a legal authority—as a crumbling tower that is soon to collapse into fragments. In addition to these notes, he finds a scrapbook,

In which the judge had lovingly pasted the life histories and pictures of people he had sent to prison or condemned to death: unforgettable faces of imbecile hoodlums... a stranglers quiet ordinary looking hands, a self-made widow, the

close-set merciless eyes of a homicidal maniac... a bright little parricide aged seven... and a sad pudgy old pederast who had blown up his blackmailer.

(Nabokov 84)

This scrapbook has two major consequences for Kimbote. First, it again changes his understanding of Judge Goldsmith as an authority figure of law. Goldsmith is made perverse in that he found to find enjoyment in condemning criminals to death. For Goldsmith, it is not necessarily so arbitrary notion of justice or “right” that compels to him to be a judge, nor is it the social status of his occupation, it is instead the enjoyment he finds in the mastery he holds over others, particularly, in those who engage in especially perverse crimes. The Judge’s scrapbook is analogous to the legal books that K. finds and looks through, in which he finds pornographic images. Kimbote, like K, learns of the perversity and meaningless of law in this form. The second consequence is in the “ordinary-ness” of these criminals; Kimbote finds their pictures extraordinarily underwhelming, which frightens him and humanizes them—*he recognizes them*. This becomes even more apparent throughout the novel, in which he spends a great deal of his annotations explaining the impending murder of John Shade by an assassin sent for himself named “Gradus” who he repeatedly resists “granting... the status of man” to (Nabokov 279). He wants criminals to be monstrous, but instead finds that they are instead banal, similar to that of Hannah Arendt’s conception of Adolf Eichmann. He denies this to the very end, in which Gradus is revealed to be an escaped man named who was convicted by Goldsmith who was trying to kill Goldsmith himself, and there is nothing all that mystical about him. In this way, Kimbote engages with this recognition an anti-Hegelian manner. Whereas Hegel claims, “it is not the murderer, the their, who is

to be recognized, but the *capacity to be one*,” Kimbote forces himself only to recognize them and “shrinks away” from the negativity within himself and turns towards positivity and wholeness in divinity (192). Nevertheless, there are unconscious consequences for Kimbote that he is unaware of.

But in addition to Judge Goldsmith’s house causing Kimbote’s ideological fall from grace of the law, it also becomes the place in which he experiences his psychic fall. After he discusses the Judge’s scrapbook, he turns to a discussion of “our poet’s windows” (Nabokov 86). He begins to describe the various ways in which he can look out the windows and spy on John Shade—again, like Žižek’s reversal of Foucault’s panopticon—with whom he begins to identify with. Again, whether they are the same person or not is not necessarily important, he has either created another version of himself—John Shade—to whom he ascribes divinity, or, he has simply ascribed this to someone he loves (and love is something I will get to later in this chapter). Kimbote’s religiosity comes back to him and he recalls a time where he saw “a man in the act of making contact with God,” after which he claims, “I had never seen such a blaze of bliss before but was to perceive something of that splendor, of that spiritual energy and divine vision, now, in another land, reflected upon the rugged and homely face of old John Shade” (Nabokov 88). In this moment, Kimbote claims, that Shade is composing “Pale Fire,” which Kimbote hopes will verify his identity by telling the story of his mythic home country “Zembla,” and his escape from there as an exiled king—tales the reader can without reservation take as delusions.

But Kimbote’s spying on John Shade comes out of an initial paranoia that he begins to develop out of being in Goldsmith’s house. He claims, “Often, almost nightly,

throughout the spring of 1959, I had feared for my life. Solitude is the playfield of Satan” (Nabokov 95). He looks out the windows partially to find recognition—for he finds himself utterly alone now—but also more simply out of fear. He begins to inspect everything in the house, and writes, “I never failed to discover next morning something unlocked, unlatched, a little loose, a little ajar, something sly and suspicious-looking” (Nabokov 97). This is also when he begins to talk in greater depth about his homeland Zembla and their long history of regicide. He also begins to discuss for the first time how he is accused of experiencing hallucinations, and even suggests that he was considering suicide as a way to relieve himself from an impending assassination.

Hegel claims in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* that the subject must “recognize itself in the law and thereby recognize its own freedom in it” (17). After looking through Goldsmith’s scrapbook, however, Kimbote recognizes himself not in the law but in criminality, struck by the faces of the criminals and the perversity of the law. Because he does not want to allow the criminals subjectivity—exaggerated in his creation of “Gradus”—he generates a larger dialectic between the monstrous other and the divine self—that latter of which he aligns Shade and himself with. He is concerned with whole figures who are either entirely monstrous or entirely perfect, and finds only a divide between these two groups, neither of which can have an internal divide. Ultimately, however, he divides himself further, whether he is Shade, Kimbote, or Botkin. In all three of these possible scenarios there is a character divided into two completely separate entities, one that occupies subjectivity, the other, is personified in the social substance. The problem in Hegelian terms is precisely this: Kimbote, after facing the perversity of law and finding recognition in the other, he finds himself in “utter-dismemberment,” and

we see him move to Unhappy Consciousness in the following passages. But Kimbote's Unhappy Consciousness is perpetual because of his understanding of Christianity not as Hegel's "revealed religion," but instead, as a religion that provides an undivided God that operates for him as a Big Other. Additionally, his "priest"—which according to Hegel externalizes and grants the subject with Reason—is John Shade, a character he either invents, or, does not truly interact with, or, is himself, depending on who the narrator is. Either way, Shade is insufficient at being an external source of Reason.

In demonstrating the becoming of the Unhappy Consciousness Hegel writes, The duplication which formerly was divided between two individuals, the lord and the bondsman, is now lodged in one. The duplication of self-consciousness within itself, which is essential in the Notion of Spirit, is thus here before us, but not yet in its unity: the *Unhappy Consciousness* is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being. (126)

The Unhappy Consciousness comes out of stoicism and skepticism, and prior to that the master/slave dialectic, in which the subject understands that they are meaningful in that they are free as prescribed by stoicism, and also, that they are meaningless, in that they negate their subjectivity by claiming reality is incomprehensible in skepticism. Out of this contradiction, they feel themselves divided internally. The Unhappy Consciousness, then, seeks some beyond in which they place a form of unity or universal—the *unchangeable essential*—that they find to be utterly separate from themselves, who, in contrast to the unchangeable essential, they see as simply a particular individual separate from the beyond (Hegel 131). They seek unity with the unchangeable beyond, without yet knowing that they *are themselves* this unchangeable beyond (Hegel 131).

The extent to which Kimbote wants to get to this beyond further demonstrates the potential psychotic position of the Unhappy Consciousness, especially in relation to religion. Kimbote identifies the essential unchangeable beyond in God and the afterlife, and therefore desires a merging into unity with the afterlife. For Kimbote, this creates a suicidal urge, and he writes, “the more lucid and overwhelming one’s belief in Providence, the greater the temptation to get it over with, this business of life, but the greater too one’s fear of the terrible sin implicit in self-destruction” (Nabokov 219). He goes on to describe—in perhaps the most beautiful passage in the entirety of the text—the joy he would feel to jump to his death, culminating in his “loved body’s obliteration in the Lap of the Lord,” saying, “ecstatically one forefeels the vastness of the Divine Embrace enfolding one’s liberated spirit, the warm bath of physical dissolution, the universal unknown engulfing the minuscule unknown that had been the only real part of one’s temporary personality” (221). In this description we get almost a perfect replication of the Unhappy Consciousness, in which he sees his life and “temporary personality” as the “minuscule unknown”—effectively equating it to the unessential—and the divine beyond that is attained only through death as the “universal unknown”—making it the essential unchangeable.

For Kimbote, this unchangeable beyond is God, but it is precisely the Christian understanding of God that Hegel critiques as being antithetical to absolute knowing and our freedom. For Hegel, Christianity is the “revealed religion,” in which God is revealed as divided—dead, even—and made universal in this division, through God’s being remembered (462). But for Kimbote, God is entirely whole, and therefore plays the divider, *dividing between good and evil*. Kimbote claims, “For a Christian, no Beyond is

acceptable or imaginable without the participation of God in our eternal destiny, and this in turn implies a condign punishment for every sin, great and small” (Nabokov 223). Kimbote is engaged in a type of “picture-thinking”—according to Hegel—that personifies Notions of the revealed religion, and distorts his understanding of good and evil. Whereas for Hegel, “Evil is the same as Goodness... Evil is just not Evil, nor Goodness Good”—even claiming that we can see Lucifer as the first “son” of God in that he divides God, and that evil grants us our ability to love—for Kimbote, Good and Evil are entirely separate, self-contained entities (472; 468). He rejects the notion of a divided, humiliated God in the revealed religion of Christianity, and therefore, he denies Reason, despite his attempts to overcome his position as the Unhappy Consciousness.

According to Hegel, the subject attains Reason out of the Unhappy Consciousness via a “mediator.” Hegel writes, “[the subject] rejects the essence of its will, and casts upon the mediator or minister its own freedom of decision, and herewith the responsibility for its own action. This mediator, having a direct relationship with the unchangeable Being, ministers by giving advice on what is right” (136-137). Kimbote tries to have this relationship with John Shade, who, when he first sees him from the window of Goldsmith’s house, he claims, “I knew that whatever my agnostic friend might say in denial, at *that* moment Our Lord was with him” (Nabokov 89). He immediately identifies Shade as a minister—someone with a “direct relationship” with the beyond—and thus, he tries to make Shade the mediator of Reason for himself. But Kimbote doesn’t necessarily desire Reason, he instead wants a unity with the beyond, and his project fails. Kimbote views Shade’s “Pale Fire” as an opportunity to witness the beyond that is being channeled through the priest figure, but also, as an opportunity for the recognition he

needs to reconstitute himself as a undivided subject. As his delusions develop—delusions that are particular for reasons that I will soon discuss—he seeks a divine verification for these falsehoods. He even tells Shade at one point that his stories, “once transmuted by you into poetry, the stuff *will* be true, and people *will* come alive” (Nabokov 214). But despite Kimbote’s insistence that, “John Shade valued by society above that of all other people,” it becomes clear to the reader that Shade finds Kimbote to be a rather invasive presence in his life, often interrupting his writing process and insisting that he write about Zembla when he has no desire to (Nabokov 24). Once the poem is nearer to completion, it becomes apparent that Kimbote doesn’t necessarily need Shade anymore, and Shade is discarded, either through a literal death or an imagined death of that side of his personality. Once Shade is done with the third canto, Kimbote begins to feel a closer connection to the beyond, saying, “there is a chance yet of my not being excluded from Heaven, and that salvation may be granted to me despite the frozen mud and horror in my heart” (Nabokov 258). But he never allows Shade to complete the poem, and it ends one line short. Kimbote discards of Shade as the mediator at the last moment, as if he knows the completion of the poem will not fully verify the delusions he has developed, and thus there is a margin for him to interpret into the poem his identity.

Kimbote’s delusions surrounding his past are inextricably related to his religious perspective. For Kimbote, an undivided God is more *necessary* than it is *true*, thinking back to Joseph K’s revelatory understanding of law at the end of *The Trial*. Kimbote claims that, “once we deny a Higher Intelligence that plans and administrates our individual hereafters we are bound to accept the unspeakably dreadful notion of Chance reaching into eternity... There is no appeal, no advice, no support, no protection,

nothing” (Nabokov 225-226). Once you accept a divided God, Kimbote claims, you have accepted a type of cosmological anarchy, and the essential unchangeable becomes one with oneself, but he—as the Unhappy Consciousness—believes that he is the inessential, or, meaningless. But he puts his cosmological framework into bureaucratic terms, saying, “with no Providence the soul must rely on the dust of its husk, on the experience gathered in the course of corporeal confinement, and cling childishly to small-town principles, local by-laws and a personality consisting mainly of the shadows of its own prison bars” (Nabokov 226-227). Here, he figures this spiritual loss as generating a localized, relative system that resembles a type of American Libertarianism. His belief in a perfectly whole bureaucratic God provides some greater reasoning as to why he is so obsessed with maintaining this wholeness after the death of his belief in a bureaucratic legal system after witnessing Judge Goldsmith’s scrapbook. Now that one source of protection against the anarchy of existence has withered away from him, he must fight to maintain the wholeness of the cosmological protection. According to Hegel, this conception of religion—which holds the unity of divine as external to the self, where the subject cannot identify with the divided God—creates a “reconciliation [that] enters its consciousness as something *distant*, as something in the distant *future*, just as the reconciliation which the other *Self* achieved appears as something in the distant *past*” (478). In this way, Christianity as conceptualized by Kimbote can only reconcile itself to a unity with God that either already was—before his death—or is in the future—in the afterlife. This is where Kimbote develops his nostalgia, in which his whole legal system still exists, and his desperation for the future, in which he dies and is made one with the unity of God.

Throughout his annotations, Kimbote eventually comes to suggest that he is actually “*Charles II*, Charles Xavier Vseslav, the last King of Zembla, surnamed The Beloved” (Nabokov 306). In this narrative, Kimbote is an escaped king from the “distant northern land” of Zembla, a nation which has a long history of regicide (“two Queens, three Kings, and fourteen Pretenders died violent deaths, strangled, stabbed, poisoned, and drowned, in the course of only one century (1700-1800)”), and has now—at the time of Kimbote’s writing—been totally overrun by revolutionaries (Nabokov 315; 95). Kimbote is nostalgic for this fictional place, and claims it operated similarly to his cosmological, bureaucratic perfection. On his own reign as king he writes,

The King’s reign (1936-1958) will be remembered... as a peaceful and elegant one. Owing to a fluid system of judicious alliances, Mars in his time never marred the record. Internally, until corruption, betrayal, and Extremism penetrated it, the People’s Place (parliament) worked in perfect harmony with the Royal Council... The polite arts and pure sciences flourished. Technicology, applied physics, industrial chemistry and so forth were suffered to thrive... The climate seemed to be improving. Taxation had become a thing of beauty. The poor were getting a little richer, the rich a little poorer... Everybody, in a word, was content.

(Nabokov 75).

Zembla, for Kimbote, is the assigned place for a past in which he felt whole, and if only he could get back to it, he could resolve his lacking position. But the contradiction is clear; everybody was *not*, in a word, content; there must have been some reason for this “Extremism” to bubble to the surface. For Kimbote, it is simply an unaccountably monstrous evil—like Gradus—that he can never fully explain. But in generating this

nostalgic delusion, he further self-dirempts himself by providing a narrative that analogously confronts his split reality.

In some ways, Kimbote's reign in Zembla resembles that of the ideal Hegelian State as described in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. It appears to function as a nicely oiled bureaucratic system, in which the members of the state seem to know their role but also find freedom in this role. It has a monarch—which Hegel notoriously defended—and much of the descriptions of this state seem to portray many of the “ethical” aspects of the Hegelian state. But the Ethical, monarchic State of Zembla is constantly being overthrown, which represents the anarchic legality in which Kimbote finds himself in in New Wye, Appalachia. The lack of legality generates for Kimbote a desire for the Ethical State, that which seems in complete opposition to American understandings of freedom and the individual's role in the State. Hegel claims that in the absence of effective law, “A longing may therefore arise for an objective condition, a condition in which the human being gladly debases himself to servitude and total subjection simply in order to escape the torment of vacuity and negativity” (186). This is what is happening to Kimbote.

On first read, then, it may seem as if *Pale Fire* is almost a critique of the Hegelian state, but there is a problem to elucidate here. Of the monarch, Hegel writes, “In the fully organized state... all that is required in a monarch is someone to say ‘yes’ and to dot the ‘i’: for the supreme office should be such that the particular character of its occupant is of no significance... There may indeed be circumstances in which this particularity plays an exclusive part, but in that case the state is... poorly constructed” (323). For Hegel, the monarch is purely a symbolic figure, who is beholden to represent the subjectivity of the

state in their act of saying “I will it” for the whole of the State, but in determining what it is that they “will,” they have no subjectivity. In many ways, the monarch of the Ethical State, is the most enslaved figure of the state, in which they are symbolically beyond the law by their exercise of “will” and “decision,” but they in fact must relinquish themselves of their particularity to do so. For Hegel, the more irrational the election of this monarch is, generally the better, since the monarch is more representative of the State’s concentrated, excessive irrationality that allows it to contradictorily function in rationality. Kimbote, however, sees himself in this role—as the monarch—but does not comprehend the monarchy in these terms. He views Zembla and his position as monarch within this state as an opportunity to resolve his self-diremption, and thus, he understands the monarchic position as a wholeness. This is apparent in the ways in which he describes the various kings and queens that have come before him, and the ways in which their particularity determined their rule and the entirety of Zembla. He destroys his own fantasy for himself, and this destiny is written into his name (“‘Didn’t you tell me, Charles, that *Kimbote* means regicide in your language?’”) (Nabokov 267).

At one point Kimbote says, “the name Zembla is not a corruption of the Russian *zemlya*, but of Semblerland, a land of reflections, of ‘resemblers’” (Nabokov 265). This, in addition to the consistent references to Narcissus, mirrors and other reflective surfaces, suggests that his own delusion is asking of him the process of reflection and recognition. He is bombarded with opportunities for greater reflection, to see unity in himself with substance—in the beyond, the essential—but he denies this, a remains self-dirempted, which complicates his delusion. Additionally, his moment of rupture—in which he loses his faith in the law and subsequently, his God—is made metaphorically universal, by

staging it as a revolutionary overthrowing, rather than a particularized psychic shift. It can easily be made analogous to the Russian Revolution, given the biographical connections with Nabokov. But what is interesting about this universalizing metaphor—which is less of a metaphor because of this—is that the rupture finds itself in the truth procedure of love, as explained by Alain Badiou. Badiou writes, “love, art, science and politics generate—indefinitely—truths... truths subtracted by knowledge” (340). For Badiou, love is one of four ways that the subject may encounter truth, and truth, is a subtraction—a negative encounter—from one’s previous “knowledge” or understanding. It is an “event,” after which one cannot return to their previous knowledge; no nostalgic prescription is sufficient. For Kimbote, his shift in understanding law coincides with a love for Shade, whether or not Shade is a real person.

*Pale Fire* has frequently been read as a queer text—most notably in Steven Burhm’s *Reflecting Narcissus*—and it isn’t difficult to understand why. While recalling a memory of Shade, Kimbote writes, “My admiration for him was for me a sort of alpine cure. I experienced a great sense of wonder whenever I looked at him... the romance of his presence” (Nabokov 27). But the first time Kimbote sees him—when he sees “Our Lord” with Shade—is from the Goldsmith’s home, in which he feels utterly alone and solitary. On love, Hegel writes, “the first moment in love is that I do not wish to be an independent person in my own right and that, if I were, I would feel deficient and incomplete. The second moment is that I find myself in another person, that I gain recognition in this person” (199). Out of the loneliness of Goldsmith’s home—Kimbote’s panoptic tower—he witnesses Shade, and this prompts his constant surveillance of Shade’s household. Perhaps out of homophobia, or Shade’s lack of reciprocated

recognition in Kimbote, he cannot fully confront this truth procedure, and he remains self-dirempted perpetually, never gaining recognition. *Pale Fire*, in this light, is a text that reveals the rupturous power in love, but also, the consequences of a lack of acknowledgement of the subtractive power of truth.

### III

*You oughta know not to stand by the window,  
Somebody might see you up there...*  
—David Byrne, “Life During Wartime”

Jorge Luis Borges’s story “The Garden of the Forking Paths” is about a spy named Doctor Yu Tsun who is working for Germany during World War I. He has a strange perspective on time, however, and he says that, “all things happen, happen to one, precisely now. Century follows century, and things happen only in the present. There are countless men in the air, on land and at sea, and all that really happens happens to me” (Borges 90). Forced to carry out a mission he is not comfortable with, he draws on this conception of time but changes it slightly, saying, “I foresee that man will resign himself each day to new abominations... To them I offer this advice: *Whosoever would undertake some atrocious enterprise should act as if it were already accomplished, should impose upon himself a future as irrevocable as the past*” (92-93). He has contradicted himself here; he claims that there is only truly a present, but that man should project that the future will be much like the past, and therefore, one’s ability and responsibility to change their present is rendered null. Yu Tsun claims that he is both within in time—in the present—but can also see all of time at once, the past and the future are already determined, and therefore, one has no freedom in the present, although that is all one truly knows. The contradiction functions in that it stresses immediacy as all knowing, denying the universality implicit in its conjuring of “now,” and then by assigning universality to “this now” in futurity. Borges is contemplating precisely how it is that people were to commit the atrocious acts that they would during and immediately after the publication of this story in 1941 during World War II. It is different and similar to

that of Hannah Arendt's conception of the banality of evil in which one sees themselves beholden to a bureaucratic system in which they have no control, but it is more cosmological than that; the Nazi soldier at Auschwitz, leading Jews into the gas chambers, could see themselves not only beholden to bureaucracy, but also a history and a future they have no power in.

Borges built a body of work focused on the conundrums of an idealist reality, one in which reality is a projection of the mind. His works are noted for creating labyrinths—both physical and mental—in which his characters are forced to struggle against their own perception, and how these seemingly impossible mazes have consequences in some sort of communal reality. The Borgesian labyrinth, I would argue, is analogous to the dialectical method, in which one finds themselves lost—“torn-asunder”—in a space or situation that is utterly disruptive to their conception of reality, out of which they may again find themselves. For Borges, the labyrinth of reality and our minds is ultimately inescapable, however, and so one must either reconcile themselves to the labyrinth, or, falsely resolve the labyrinth by changing their reality, relying entirely on adjusting their perception through, what I say, resembles “actual idealist” thought. And considering “The Garden of Forking Paths,” Borges isn't far off; drawing parallels between the inescapability of the present in a temporal form that has an immovable past and future and Giovanni Gentile's—the philosopher of absolute idealism, and more famously, “the philosopher of fascism”—inescapable world of thought would not be difficult. One can discern Mussolini's (and Gentile's) assertion “regard[ing] the future development of mankind,” that, “Fascism does not, generally speaking, believe in the possibility or utility in perpetual peace,” in Yu Tsun's argument for violence in the present (4). The stress

here on immediacy—not only in action, but in one’s capacity for knowledge—is important, as it suggests that truth is only that which is apparent to you *now*, though it already fails at this by implying a past and future. In an attempt at magnifying the particularity of the immediate moment, the actual idealist nevertheless implies the universal, which thrusts them deeper into contradiction. Where for Borges these labyrinths are an opportunity for the confrontation of contradiction, Gentile and Mussolini want to find a spiritual “unity”—a synthesis—by organizing the walls of the labyrinth through immediacy and “order.”

In Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, a minor character named Squalidozzi—an exiled anarchist from Peronist Argentina—talks about his home country, saying,

Fences went up, and the gaucho became less free. It is our national tragedy. We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky... We cannot abide that *openness*: it is terror to us. Look at Borges. Look at the suburbs of Buenos Aires... Decentralizing, back toward anarchism, needs extraordinary times... this War—this incredible War—just for the moment has wiped out the proliferation of little states that’s prevailed in Germany for a thousand years. Wiped it clean. *Opened it.*” (268).

Figured like this, the anarchist seeks to leave—destroy, even—the labyrinth, whereas the fascist seeks to organize it, control it. But both perspectives find value in war in that it in some way changes the structure. Squalidozzi sees the anarchic potential in the wasteland of Europe after the war, citing the mass destruction as a break in the walls of the “little states” he seeks to erase. But through this passage, *Gravity’s Rainbow* aligns anarchism and fascism—what are typically seen as being on opposite poles of the same political

line—by their relation to contradiction. Both political projects are engaged in a philosophical belief in synthesis—in the overcoming of contradiction—that seeks unity by making the particular the universal through interacting with bureaucracy either positively or negatively. Whereas the fascist state operates through the attempt at perfecting bureaucracy, anarchy purports that we rid ourselves of bureaucracy entirely. Pynchon, however, makes the claim that these two projects have precisely the same results, making it impossible to distinguish between these two philosophies. So how does the Hegelian model of the state match up with these competing perspectives on bureaucracy? Is a contradictory bureaucracy possible?

While I don't think that *Gravity's Rainbow* answers these particular questions, it does offer us a critique of the bureaucratic theories of both fascism and anarchism that allows us to understand precisely how they fail from a Hegelian perspective and what the psychic cost of this failure is. *Gravity's Rainbow* shows the ways in which political projects that are built on a theory of overcoming contradiction, which reject Hegel's absolute knowing and reduce the subject and the state to that of absolute paranoia and even mysticism, are projects in which Hegel's "sense-certainty" becomes the predominant epistemological approach. Ultimately, the text suggests that it is not bureaucracy that is a labyrinth as it is frequently portrayed as being (especially considering analyses of Kafka), but rather that contradictions are labyrinths we can encounter if—in an anti-fascistic manner—the bureaucracy accounts for contradiction as something that cannot be overcome. Equally, without bureaucracy—without a proper system of the state in which subjects may find themselves—the text suggests that we cease to exist, no longer a member of a "community of minds" in the Hegelian sense

(43). These critiques allow for the potential for speculation as to what a bureaucracy looks like when it accounts for contradiction, instead of shrinking from it. What *Gravity's Rainbow* allows us to see is that “positivism” and “actual idealism” (i.e. fascism)—two seemingly disparate philosophical modes—are necessarily the same thing in that both operate by stressing immediacy as the epistemological pinnacle (which denies universality), and then by dragging this particularity out into futurity in an attempt at making the particular the universal.

Perhaps the most famous line in *Gravity's Rainbow* reads, “a million bureaucrats are diligently plotting death, and some of them even know it” (Pynchon 17). This line lends itself nicely to a quick analysis; bureaucracy dehumanizes the process of war, and therefore, facilitates it through confusion and mass participation. It suggests that it is not the ones who *do* know it, but the ones who *don't* that we should be concerned with. The average bureaucrat is unaware of precisely what they are doing, which allows them all the more to do it, especially if they do not know that the consequence of their work is mass death. And I wouldn't argue against this analysis, but there is a greater context as well as a greater critique at play here. Pynchon is interested not just in bureaucracy as a general mode of organization, but instead, in the ways in which bureaucracy surrounding two particular “fields”—namely, scientific progress, and economic progress—converge, and at this intersection, we generate mass wartime death. Ultimately, these two forms of bureaucracy—which are indeed the same systems, according to Pynchon—are “positivist” forms, in that they do not believe in “tarrying with negative,” but instead, in their perpetual progression, which in turn allows them to generate death without acknowledgement of their participation in war.

According to the text, the sustained belief in progress via science and positivism, allows one to disavow the negative, even if the progress of technology and science is based in weaponry. On the scientists developing the bombs being used in the war, Pynchon writes, “as long as the Rocket was in research and development, there was no need for them to believe in it... they were athletic, brainless men without vision, without imagination” (408). Here, the belief in scientific progress—despite its focus on “progress” or futurity—is brought down to an immediacy, in which one may disavow the future simply for the task at hand in the present. Science is figured as an epistemology of immediacy—like Yu Tsun’s belief in the immediacy for violence—and it cannot account for the results of its actions. The Rocket—the thing in “development”—ceases to even exist in this immediacy, and therefore, its consequences aren’t imaginable. Scientific positivism is a way of *deferring the future*; in other words, one puts off the results of one’s immediacy by grounding themselves deeper in immediacy and by imagining this as a form of generalized progress.

Pynchon sees this theory of scientific positivism as being inextricably related to economic progress and capitalist ideologies, not only in that it requires money to sustain itself, but that it needs an ideology to generate an understanding of its utility. Pynchon claims, “this War was never political at all... it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology... by something that needed the energy burst of war, crying, ‘Money be damned, the very life of [insert name of Nation] is a stake,’ but meaning, most likely, *dawn is nearly here, I need my night’s blood, my funding, funding*” (529-530). As Mussolini and Gentile claim in “The Fascist Doctrine,” war serves a utility that peace does not in that it generates the ideological necessity for immediacy that capitalism and

positivism operate on. People can forget the long-term consequences of their actions, as long as they can successfully drown themselves in the positivity of the present. He aligns this with capitalism, which operates similarly in that it asks you to enjoy your present through the consumption of goods. Out of the war, we get not only new weaponry, but also “Plastics, Electronics, Aircraft[s]” that become products of consumption, not just destruction (Pynchon 530). Nowhere does this become more apparent in Pynchon’s use of an epigraph from Warner Von Braun—a former Nazi scientist who was later hired by NASA—which begins by saying “Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation” (1). The man who is responsible for the continued development of the weaponry that facilitated the greatest number of deaths in Europe during the war cannot see—or better yet, refuses to see—negativity; in this way, one can turn death into positivity. The rest of the epigraph reads, “Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death” (Pynchon 1). For Von Braun, there simply isn’t negativity to be tarried with—not even death; science provides him—as well as the American’s who hired him after the War—with a doctrine of positivism.

Pynchon claims that this degree of positivism has dialectical consequences, however, in that positivism generates greater negativity. But this is never acknowledged, and thus, gets beyond our control, and for Pynchon, nowhere is this more obvious than in the environmental devastation caused by science and capitalism. He writes that these systems are,

Taking and not giving back, demanding that ‘productivity’ and ‘earnings’ keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World vast

quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity—most of the World, animal, plant, vegetable and mineral, is laid waste in the process. (Pynchon 419)

Positivism, in this sense, is exaggerated to the point of what is essentially “voluntary extinction” without the acknowledgment that this is indeed that ultimate logical end of this system. Man would soon condemn himself to death, along with the rest of the world, without even being able to see it first.

So how did positivism—primarily theorized by Auguste Comte—operate and flourish in a fascist state, which, in origin, derives itself from Giovanni Gentile, the philosopher of “actual idealism,” or, “Actualism?” At first glance, these two philosophical movements appear to be diametrically opposed to one another. Positivism theorizes on the perpetual progress of humanity through the use of empiricism, suggesting an objective reality based entirely in materialism. Comte posits that society has generally been getting better, and that we are slowly moving towards a more rational future, in which empiricism and science—the only ways by which we can understand reality, according to positivism—will determine most aspects of our lives. Comte claims, “In the final, the positive state, the mind has given over the vain search after absolute notions... Reasoning and observation duly combined, are the means of this knowledge” (28). Actualism, on the other hand, argues that reality is ultimately unknowable because thought is all encompassing, inescapable. The only way we can truly know anything is through a “unity” in the act of thinking. Gentile writes, “The unity of the mind is *infinite*. For the reality of the mind cannot be limited by other realities and still keep its own reality” (28). For Gentile reality is only in the mind, and the idea of a material reality that

is in any way separate from the mind—like it is in positivism—is simply unthinkable. Through proper state organization, however, we may find this unity of thought, and hence Fascist unity. The symbol for fascism—and even its etymological origins in the Latin *fascēs*—literalizes this unity through a bundle of sticks held together, with an axe in the middle, representing the wholeness that may be found through violence.

Although these two philosophical movements seem opposed, there are important ways in which they converge. Most notably, they converge in their approach to particularity and immediacy, and their relationship to futurity in their mutual belief in the overcoming of contradiction. Both Positivism and Actual Idealism operate in a contradictory manner in that they deny one's subjectivity while simultaneously stressing one's immediate sensorial knowledge as the ultimate form of knowing. Positivism could be considered analogous to what Hegel refers to as "sense-certainty." For Hegel, sense-certainty is belief that, "we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In *apprehending* it, we must refrain from *comprehending* it" (58). It is the simple act of deducing truth through the use of one's senses. Because of the lack of "alteration," sense-certainty seems as if it is the most concrete and verifiable form of knowledge, but, according to Hegel, it is in fact the most mediated. Actual Idealism is not yet implicated in this form of epistemology, but Hegel goes on to argue that sense-certainty relies on particularity in precisely the same way that Actualism does. He argues that sense-certainty is mediated by discussing its reliance on immediacy and the individual, saying "the force of its truth now lies in the 'I', in the immediacy of my *seeing, hearing,* and so on; the vanishing of the single Now and Here that we mean is prevented by the fact that *I* hold them fast" (Hegel 61). In this way, sense-certainty requires an "I", a particular

“viewer,” through which the sensuous can be grasped. Because of this, sense-certainty has no ability to grasp at the universal, and it instead must either come to suggest absolute relativity in truth, or, grasp the particular as the universal. Hegel writes, “what consciousness will learn from experience in all sense-certainty is, in truth, only what we have seen viz. the This is a *universal*” (65).

Both Positivism and Actualism contain within them the outcome of sense-certainty, namely, that they accept the particular as the universal. For Positivism, it is the empirical, sensuous reality of “now,” as verified through the multitude of “Nows” in repetition, that is the universal; for Actualism, it is the very fact that there is an “I” and the wholeness of this “I” from which we can generate reality, that is the universal. When this epistemological approach becomes a political philosophy, “it would become fanaticism; it would wish to find the whole in every particular, and could accomplish this only by destroying the particular, for fanaticism is simply the refusal to admit particular differences” (Hegel 304). Politically, for Positivism, this means accepting technological progress as the universal; for Fascism, “a synthesis and unity” in identity through organization (Mussolini 2). Either way, both systems rely on the individuality and the immediacy of sense-certainty, which Hegel claims, at his harshest, can dissolve into mysticism. He writes, “We can tell those who assert the truth of certainty of the reality of sense-objects that they should go back to the most elementary school of wisdom viz. the ancient Eleusinian Mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus... For he who is initiated into these Mysteries not only comes to doubt the being of sensuous things, but to despair in it” (65). By referring to Ceres and Bacchus, Hegel is suggesting that the subject who operates via sense-certainty comes to learn that they cannot even believe in the existence of sensuous

objects because of their perpetual decomposition, which can make the subject begin to lose its reason all together. Truth devolves into a series of transient particulars, arbitrariness, and all that the subject is left to do is infer connections between particulars.

Herein lies the contradiction of conspiracy theories, according to *Gravity's Rainbow*. A bureaucracy built on an epistemology of sense-certainty suggests that the individual rely on their mediated relativity to deduce all truth for themselves, while simultaneously, it provides an ideological structure that offers an external validator for the individual. *Gravity's Rainbow* is invested particularly in this dilemma; how can a bureaucratic system of Positivism and/or Actualism result in complete paranoia? And, if we were to rid ourselves of bureaucracies, would we resolve this paranoia? Positivist and Actualist systems of bureaucracy, according to Pynchon, offer an opportunity for belief in a Big Other, in that they create such efficiently organized systems—both ideological and concrete—that appear to resolve contradictions and provide convenience in ignorance. As the subject encounters more and more contradiction, however, there is a necessity in a validating authority, in a spiritual Big Other. We see this even in Warner Von Braun, who found spirituality in his scientific “progress.” In a devastating vignette, we follow an engineer named Franz Pökler who is coerced into working on the Rocket by the government when they claim that they will provide his family with free housing. Slowly, he begins to realize what he has agreed to—they have been placed in a camp—but he tells himself, “*I've made such a mess of everything... they have qualified people there... trained professionals... they know what a child needs*” (Pynchon 417). He drowns himself deeper and deeper into his work—his immediate tasks—and this allows him to disavow what he truly knows and believe in the supremacy of the larger bureaucracy,

which he then believes is absolute and all knowing. Other scientists who are part of large bureaucratic organizations—such as Roger Mexico and Edward W. Pointsman, who work for “The White Visitation,” a psychological warfare center—eventually resort to supernatural explanations, sometimes asserting that Tyrone Slothrop—the protagonist, a low-ranking bureaucratic agent—is orchestrating the war by controlling the rockets. Mexico and Pointsman, however, are invested in surveillance as part of their research, and so—like Zama or Kimbote—are desperate not to miss any information, and in this desperation, become paranoid. Eventually, their scientific research devolves from empiricism and begins to resemble Actualism, until at the very end they resort to Tarot to explain nearly everything. The irony of their belief in the Big Otherness of Slothrop is exaggerated by the reader’s access to Slothrop’s interiority, which shows that he is paranoid as well. Their mutual paranoia is incompatible—like “a crossing of solipsisms”—which creates, “a new world of flowing shadows, interferences” (Pynchon 402). This is the “unity” of Actualism.

Slothrop’s paranoia leads him to believe he must leave bureaucracy entirely. When the novel begins, he is a low ranking bureaucrat in an agency that is itself under an umbrella of a larger bureaucratic agency. His paranoia develops once he notices that bombs are dropping close-by and quickly after he has sex, and he starts to keep a map in his office of where this takes place, tracking the multitude of “nows” and connecting them. His belief in the potential for a Big Other is what allows him to become more paranoid, however, since it distorts his perception of those who are surveying him. As the reader, we know that Pointman and Mexico are surveying him because they think he is the Big Other, but Slothrop believes that because he is being surveyed, he is also being

controlled. It is because he doesn't see surveillance as a form of paranoia that he becomes more paranoid; if he were to understand that the surveyor is actually afraid of him, that they are as lacking as he is, he might be able to use this to his advantage. His belief in a non-lacking other is what convinces him he needs to escape bureaucracy entirely, into the "open air" of anarchy.

Pynchon makes Slothrop a descendant of a longtime American Puritan tradition to stress his belief in the Big Other. For Pynchon, Puritanism's belief in an all-knowing God that operates by predestination can generate paranoia, since one is always being watched but can never know if they are the "elect" or the "preterit." For Pynchon, this is an explanation for the Salem Witch Trials, which he believes is analogous to the paranoia experienced under Actualist/Fascist governments. Puritanism, despite its Protestant origins, is in many ways the antithesis of Hegel's "Revealed Religion." Pynchon offers a representation of how revealed religion might have operated in contrast to Puritanism in the narrative of Slothrop's ancestor William Slothrop, who, "sick and tired of the Winthrop machine," left Boston and wrote several books that argued that Judas Iscariot was the most important figure in the New Testament because he was responsible for the death of God (565). Pynchon writes, "Could this have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from? [...] Might there have been fewer crimes in the name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Isacriot?" (565-566). William Slothrop's books were burned and condemned, but Pynchon suggests that if they weren't—if we able to see God as divided, as Hegel suggests we should—the potential for the belief in the Big Other, which is essential to one's belief in surveillance as effective and worthy of paranoia, would have been greatly reduced. Without the Big

Other, perhaps, we could make bureaucracies that engage with contradiction, rather than avoid it.

But this didn't happen, and Slothrop is afraid of bureaucratic surveillance. He tries to escape it, first through disguises, then ultimately, by disappearing into some anarchic existence. As he leaves the state, however, he begins to slip into non-existence, since there is no other in which he can find recognition, and vice versa. Eventually, people can't even see him, and his identity begins to fragment. At the end, only one minor character, Seaman Bodine, can still see him, whereas, "most of the others gave up long ago trying to hold him together, even as a concept" (Pynchon 755). Eventually, however, even Bodine gives up, and Slothrop slips into nonexistence. He is no longer among the Hegelian "community of minds" that constitutes one's subjectivity. He has escaped law, but in doing so, has lost his freedom entirely. Without recognition, the subject who pulls themselves deeper and deeper into the solipsism of sense-certainty finds even their own particularity as being transient, and eventually, they fragment and dissolve.

*Gravity's Rainbow* comes to a pessimistic conclusion, in which the bomb at the start of the novel drops again—this time on you, the reader—and the entire narrative begins again. In this way, the text posits, "*a future as irrevocable as the past,*" but now you have been invited into the narrative (Borges 93). But this circle also presents us with another chance at the phenomenological gesture, which is, "the circle that returns into itself, the circle that presupposes its beginning and reaches it only at the end" (Hegel 488). By restarting the narrative, Slothrop is reconstituted as a subject, and there is at least the slightest hope that, now that you are within the narrative, things might turn out

differently. The novel ends with a song written by William Slothrop, who tried to bring about a divided God, that points towards an absolute knowing, in which we recognize ourselves in substance, right before the narrator asks us to join in, saying, “Now Everybody—“ (Pynchon 776).

## Conclusion

*“I wanted nothing but for this to be the end,  
For this to never be a tight and empty hand”  
—Angel Olson, “Unfucktheworld”*

The famous Argentinian epic poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* tells the story of a gaucho—Fierro—who is drafted into the Argentinian army and taken from his romantic, albeit impoverished life out on the frontier. Eventually, having had enough of his miserable life in the army, he deserts, only to find, however, that his home and family are gone. After being pursued by the army a number of times, he befriends a soldier who decides to join him in living with the indigenous populations that are beyond the borders of the Argentinian state, much like Zama floating away beyond the borders of Paraguay. Fierro has become, for some, an anarchic symbol who escaped the boundaries of civilization and asserted his freedom by doing so. But there is a second, less popular poem—*La Vuelta de Martín Fierro*—in which he returns. He finds life among the indigenous incredibly difficult, and, in an attempt at helping a woman who is being accused of witchcraft, he begins his journey back to the State. *Gravity’s Rainbow* summarizes the second part by saying, “the Gaucho sells out: assimilates back onto Christian society, gives up his freedom for the kind of constitutional Gesellschaft being pushed in those days by Buenos Aires. A very moral ending, but completely opposite to the first” (Pynchon 393). And while this isn’t a perfect account (at the end of the second poem, it is suggested that Fierro may get into a gunfight, but he claims that he will change his name and try to live out his days in peace), it nevertheless provides us with a picture of a subject trying to navigate varying degrees of bureaucracy—ways of avoiding contradiction. The two contradictory narratives of Fierro point to the necessity of law in

constituting one's freedom, while also presenting a critique of the State when it creates laws through a social contract—*Gesellschaft*. Fierro can't simply leave the State like Zama, but he also can't find freedom in the State because it operates through a Hobbesian contract that uses law to subtract freedom and to organize and expand empire through military bureaucracy. But the real problem is the opposition through which Fierro operates. In the first poem, he sees the state as an external force that is opposed to him as a subject. In the second poem, the stateless becomes the external force, and he shrinks back towards the borders of the state for safety. Is there the potential, however, for a third poem? A poem in which Fierro finds freedom in the State, where the bureaucracy confronts contradiction instead of constructing an order to avoid it, where progress includes the confrontation of the negative?

Jorge Luis Borges wrote a conclusion to the Fierro narrative in which he gets in a drunken gunfight with a musician at a bar and dies. What Borges shows us is the failure to work through contradiction by way of opposition. For Fierro, the state is utterly opposed to anarchy, the latter of which he believes he can find a wholeness in. Once he is there, however, he finds that anarchy is just as unsatisfactory as the state was. He doesn't, however, think through or confront his own subjectivity in either of these places; he instead just oscillates between what he sees as two external oppositions until his death. At the end of the story, Borges writes, "There is an hour in the afternoon when the plain is on the verge of saying something. It never says it, or perhaps it says it indefinitely, or perhaps we do not understand it" (162). In this moment, Borges assigns subjectivity to the plain—to nature—suggesting a breakdown of the dialectic between substance and subject, and this happens only after death is encountered via the narrative for the reader.

Borges is asking the reader to see themselves in that which seems to be utterly substantial; to be home in otherness, the opposition.

Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* portrayed Fascist Spain as a beehive, in which all was perfectly ordered and busy, but devoid of imagination, and, as "a place that tolerates neither sickness nor tombs"—a place without negativity (27:30). But even in an isolated, quiet town in Franco's Spain, negativity and death was encountered—carried with—by a young child after watching a film, and Spirit comes to her in her reflection on the edge of a pond. Even the "perfectly ordered State"—designed so as to avoid contradiction entirely—contradiction is grappled with through the work of art. Art—as a subtractive truth procedure—offered Ana (the child) an opportunity for reflection, at which she leapt. This film suggests that despite fascistic attempts at the complete avoidance of contradiction, it nevertheless provides opportunities for reconciliation. It suggests that fascism—or, at least its proponents—has an unconscious through which it undermines this attempt at avoidance. Ana is not a bee, and the state not a beehive; our thinking and our speaking grants us an opportunity at the seeping-in of contradiction for our reconciliation with it—to find the Spirit within us—despite our many attempts at complete synthesis.

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