18. Eric Erikson quoted in Mary Jane Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 80.

19. Mary's melancholic love, emblematized in centuries of *pietà* (and resembling portraits of Venus weeping over the dead Adonis), combines *Eros* with *tristesse*, further expanding the feminine connotations or iconography of the Tristero.

20. I disagree with David Seed's point that the puns indicate the futility of Oedipa's quest. He states: "It is at Yoyodyne that Oedipa meets Stanley Koteks whose name and whose membership in WASTE [sic] comically hint at the possible futility of Oedipa's search." See David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1988), 126. Admittedly, Oedipa's search for the veracity of the Tristero may be futile, but the quest itself—and what it intimates about menstruation—is not.

21. Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis*, 84.

22. Several critics have made this connection. See for instance Judith Chambers, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Twayne Press, 1992), 100.

23. See the copyright information in the Harper & Row edition of *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

24. Helen Smith, *The Female Questor: An Analysis of the Gender Conflict in the Mythic Symbolization of Menstruation and the Quest for Knowledge* (University of Toronto: Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1991), 203. Subsequent references cited in text as *FQ*.

25. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 105.

26. Quoted in Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Discipline of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 81.

27. This remarkable sentence combines red, scent, snake and an invisible history, and (I contend) compresses the text's extensive menstrual imagery into one line (*CL*, 163). The modifier "unnatural" appears to take the roses to a metaphorical level and to indicate their role as symbols of menstruation in literary texts.

28. Neil Schmitz, "Describing the Demon: The Appeal of Thomas Pynchon," *Partisan Review* (1975), 116.

29. Ibid., 123.

30. Wail Hassan, "This is Not a Novel: *The Crying of Lot 49*," 96.

31. Ibid., 96.

32. J. Kerry Grant, *A Companion to The Crying of Lot 49* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 95.

33. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 109. Subsequent references cited in text as *AD*.

34. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 157. Subsequent references cited in text as *OP*.

35. See Ottavia Niccoli, "'Menstruum Quasi Monstruum:' Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century," in *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Mary Galluci (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

36. The male hero must be wounded or "cut" in a process of initiation into manhood; the rite simulates the "wound," according to Freud, that accompanies the girl's passage into womanhood (*OP*, 41).

37. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

The Clockwork Eye: Technology, Woman, and the Decay of the Modern in Thomas Pynchon's V.

KATHLEEN FITZPATRICK

> Woman, nature, machine had become a mesh of significations which all had one thing in common: otherness; by their very existence they raised fears and threatened male authority and control.[1]

Thomas Pynchon's *V.* explores, through the "degeneration" of its mysterious title character into a machinic approximation of life, a threatened inversion of the traditional cultural dominance of human over machine. Pynchon describes this shift as a "decadence," an intentional descent of the human toward technological inanimation, heavily figured throughout the novel by the replacement of parts of the human body with various prosthetics, such that the body itself comes to appear a machine. Mark Seltzer, writing in his landmark study *Bodies and Machines*, seems to see in such a "transposition of the character of the energy-converting machine and the character of the natural body[,] not the demotion of the living body to the machine but their intimate correlation."[2] Pynchon reads nothing so benign in such a connection; "intimate correlation" here euphemistically hides grave dangers. Seltzer's text explores these dangers in some depth, despite the initial impression it gives as a champion of the cyborg. Using Foucault's notion of "bio-politics," Seltzer describes the manner in which the metaphorization of the body as a machine was used to produce, in the late nineteenth century, "a single technology of regulation,"[3] a mechanism of control for both body and machine. This connection of body and machine, like many drawn from such Foucauldian genealogies, is built of a combination of social institutions and the patterns of thought those institutions have fostered. By the second half of the twentieth

century, in Pynchon's novelistic representation (which might usefully be subtitled "Bodies and Machines"), human culture has lost any possible means by which to think itself out of this connection with the machine, as the once metaphoric link has become somehow literalized. The machine's proliferation has only increased human identification with it, as has the rise of the field from which, interestingly enough, Seltzer takes his metphors of connection—"relays, transit points, paths of least resistance"[4]—electronics. Late twentieth-century culture need no longer metaphorize the body as machine; technology's dominance has irrevocably wired the two together.

This dominance of technology and the willing subjugation of the human to it have been most strikingly (and neo-conservatively) documented by Neil Postman in his *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*:

> In other words, what we have here is a case of metaphor gone mad. From the proposition that humans are in some respects like machines, we move to the proposition that humans are little else but machines and, finally, that human beings *are* machines. And then, inevitably . . . to the proposition that machines are human beings."[5]

Given Postman's conviction that the responsibility for this conflation of human and machine lies squarely at the feet of our own deification of technology, it is interesting to note that he here points to metaphor as the element that has "gone mad." Technology here appears to interfere at some root level with our most humanistic, linguistic processes. In fact, Pynchon's exploration of the movement of the human into technological inanimation in *V.* serves to focus our attention on an epistemological rupture in the world since the turn of the century, a radical shift in our structures of thought, including metaphor. Pynchon's representation in *V.* of this ostensibly dramatic change should be taken in light of one of Fredric Jameson's numerous impressions of the distinction between modernism and postmodernism. Modernism, claims Jameson,

> thought compulsively about the New and tried to watch its coming into being (inventing for that purpose the registering and inscription devices akin to historical time-lapse photography), but the postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same; for the "When-it-all-changed" as Gibson puts it, or, better still, for shifts and irrevocable changes in the *representation* of things and of the way they change.[6]

The distinction between watching the new come into being and looking backward for the moment of its birth rests at the heart of *V.*'s narrative structure, which is an endless search into the past for that "telltale instant" of irrevocable change. *V.* is ultimately, then, about the end of modernism, not in the sense that the world really did change in 1898 (the novel's earliest past), but rather in that the ways in which the novel's present-day searchers read the world—the ways in which they *represent* the world to themselves—are profoundly different. This difference is inextricably bound up in the two most-repeated words in *V.*: *decadence* and *inanimation.*

In a bit of Belle Époque café chatter, we get the clearest possible definition of decadence: "A decadence . . . is a falling-away from what is human, and the further we fall the less human we become. Because we are less human, we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories."[7] This decadence is on its most basic level an object-lust, of which Pynchon presents numerous examples: Da Conho and his machine gun, Rachel and her MG, the proper nouns of the Whole Sick Crew. But beyond this, the decadence is also figured in terms of a libidinal transformation of self into object. These concerns about self-objectification surface repeatedly as an anxiety about the merging of the human and the mechanical, an anxiety that verges on the technophobic.

This anxiety, which one might refer to as the *anxiety of obsolescence,* manifests itself in the work of late–twentieth century writers as a fear of or disgust with the technological processes of the twentieth century, particularly those technological processes of communication (i.e., television) that seem to threaten the novel's position as the central artifact of our culture—and the novelist's position as primary cultural producer. The anxiety of obsolescence, a sort of inversion of Bloom's anxiety of influence (in which the fathers fear being murdered by the sons, rather than vice versa), provides a strategy of writing, enabling the postmodern author to carve out a protected space within an apparently hostile culture.[8] The anxiety of obsolescence is also, in many ways, an extension and transformation of Andreas Huyssen's "anxiety of contamination" from the modern into the postmodern era. As Huyssen has argued,

> Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of modernism as an adversary culture derive from that fact.[9]

What modernism sought to exclude, by protecting itself from mass culture, was in fact the encroaching mass itself. It is particularly to the point, then, that *V.* relentlessly examines the connection between the decadent movement into technological inanimation and the rise of the masses in public life.[10]

In fact, looking beyond this apparent fear of the novelist's technological obsolescence, of his displacement from the center of cultural life, we get another message which makes the correlation of the anxiety of obsolescence and the anxiety of contamination more clear: perhaps the displacement to be feared is in fact less the shift of the novel out of the center of our cultural life than the loss of some protected space on the part of the white male cultural producer. For the modernist, the masses are, after all, consistently identified with the other; "[t]he fear of the masses in this age of declining liberalism," Huyssen argues, "is always also a fear of woman, a fear of nature out of control, a fear of the unconscious, of sexuality, of the loss of identity and stable ego boundaries in the mass."[11] And here is the ultimate connection between the anxiety of obsolescence and its modernist origins in the anxiety of contamination; in falling away from the human, the high-cultural, we fall into the other realm that Huyssen projected in "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other":

> the nightmare of being devoured by mass culture through co-option, commodification, and the "wrong" kind of success is the constant fear of the modernist artist, who tries to stake out his territory by fortifying the boundaries between genuine art and inauthentic mass culture. Again, the problem is not the desire to differentiate between forms of high art and depraved forms of mass culture and its co-options. The problem is rather the persistent gendering as feminine of that which is devalued.[12]

In the postmodern, as the conventional wisdom and numerous theorists tell us, these boundaries between high and low, art and mass culture have dissolved. Huyssen himself seems at great pains to argue that, in bridging the "great divide" between high art and mass culture, the postmodern has done away with the anxiety of contamination, and particularly with the connected fears of contamination by the female. I largely disagree, and in fact see in the anxiety of obsolescence a "worsening" of the situation; there is everywhere represented in the postmodern novel the concern of the artist with "stak[ing] out his territory" by shoring up the crumbling barriers against an infiltrating, infecting mass culture, a mass culture that is still persistently gendered as feminine.

A number of questions are immediately raised by this extension of Huyssen's diagnoses, however. If, as I contend, *V.*'s project is to describe the search for what Jameson refers to as "the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same,"[13] the moment of epistemological rupture which brought the postmodern into being, how does that ostensible rupture affect the continuation of Huyssen's model? And if, as Jameson insists and the popular wisdom confirms, the postmodern is characterized precisely by a new bringing-into-

contact of "high" and "low" cultures, as seen in the oft commented-upon "cinematic" nature of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, how can there yet be a fear of "contamination" of the high by the low?

The answer resides in the concept of obsolescence. The fear of contamination remains, but only insofar as the postmodern cultural practitioner appears convinced not of the *potential* for contamination of his work by the mass-cultural, but rather of the *actuality* and *inescapability* of that contamination—and worse, the fear that mass culture will simply pass him by, rendering his work obsolete. Thus, while Pynchon acknowledges and represents the cultural importance of the cinematic in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the novel works repeatedly to neutralize film as a medium, and to cast the medium as intimately connected with the rise of fascism. Likewise, Mucho Maas's all-too "intimate correlation"[14] with the technologies of radio broadcasting in *The Crying of Lot 49* reveals a dangerous loss of individual selfhood as he turns into "a walking assembly of man."[15] The same impulse can be seen in *V.*; V.'s self-technologization is repeatedly linked to the rise of the masses in political life and the falling-away of the high-cultural. But the fascistic introduction of the technological into the human[16] serves as a mask for the true threat which the novel unconsciously reveals: the point of entry for the technological into human life is woman. The message about causality here is clear: *cherchez la femme*; the sense of the encroaching Other in this novel is figured throughout in terms of the threat of the female. It is thus far from incidental that *V.* is a quest novel, and that V. herself is the object of that quest, the *femme* for whom we *cherchons*; in fact, in following Herbert Stencil on his search, we do indeed find the woman everywhere at the center of twentieth-century history.[17]

V. is, of course, the novel's primary reference point for the twentieth-century transformation of self into object. Our awareness of V. first arises from Sidney Stencil's journal entry, the same entry that spurs his son Herbert on his mad pursuit of V. across history: "There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she" (*V.*, 53). This is not a question, but a statement: V. is from the very outset a what, a thing. And Stencil *fils* himself, in his pursuit of the "what" behind and inside V., practices a form of self-objectification designed to let himself slip in and out of personae (and, in fact, temporalities): the "forcible dislocation of personality" (*V.*, 62) which includes perpetually speaking about himself in the third person. Stencil has joined V., on some level, in the realm of what-ness; his is the ego whose stable boundaries have utterly dissolved.

Stencil's excursions into the past—his readings of the past via narrative—should be considered in connection to Jameson's conception of Pynchon's own project in *V.*, in which

> a semblance of historical verisimilitude is vibrated into multiple alternate patterns, as though the form or genre of historiography was retained (at least in its archaic versions) but now for some reason, far from projecting the constraints of the formulaic, seems to offer postmodern writers the most remarkable and untrammeled movement of invention. In this peculiar form and content—real sewer systems with imaginary crocodiles in them—the wildest Pynchonesque fantasies are somehow felt to be thought experiments of all the epistemological power and falsifiable authority of Einstein's fables, and in any case to convey the feel of the real past better than any of the "facts" themselves.[18]

This "fantastic historiography," which despite its fictiveness creates a better picture of "reality" than do the facts, is equally Herbert Stencil's project as it is Pynchon's; by projecting himself into the personae of various imaginary figures on the fringes of historical events, Stencil begins to draw his portrait of V. History thus becomes an object to be manipulated, a technology of reading. Stencil's portrait is built, he admits, of "a nacreous mass of inference, poetic license, forcible dislocation of personality into a past he didn't remember and had no right in, save the right of imaginative anxiety or historical care" (*V.*, 62). Through this fantastic/historical narrative, Stencil conducts a peculiarly postmodern investigation, looking backward for that "telltale instant" when it all changed—or rather for the telltale individual, V., who appears to be at the heart of the twentieth-century decadence.

One can read a similar project in *Gravity's Rainbow*; though the novel's setting appears to be the immediate post-war period in which most of its action takes place, the true "present" of this novel may in fact be "the future-shocked American landscape of the 1960s and 1970s."[19] The representation of events surrounding World War II is by this argument a speculative, causal reading of history, much like Stencil's forays into the past. This observation returns us to Fredric Jameson's distinction between the modern and the postmodern; like *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow* is less about the events of the past than about the ways in which we *read* those past events in the present, the ways in which all systems of historical facts tend toward conspiracy when read by postmodern sensibilities. These are Jameson's "shifts and irrevocable changes in the *representation* of things and the way they change";[20] it is less true, in this sense, that from the firing of the 00000 comes Richard Nixon than it is that from Richard Nixon comes the firing of the 00000.

This emphasis on reading the past aside, however, all of *V.*'s characters, past and present, succumb on some level to the often sexualized thrill of self-objectification; thus, to name but a few, Bongo-Shaftsbury and his arm-switch, Mondaugen and his sferics, Rachel and her MG, Esther and her

nosejob, Slab and his Catatonic Expressionism. And of course Benny Profane, the schlemihl. As Benny muses upon his reunion with Rachel,

> Any sovereign or broken yo-yo must feel like this after a short time of lying inert, rolling, falling: suddenly to have its own umbilical string reconnected, and know the other end is in hands it cannot escape. Hands it doesn't want to escape. Know that the simple clockwork of itself has no more need for symptoms of inutility, lonesomeness, directionlessness, because now it has a path marked out for it over which it has no control. That's what the feeling would be, if there were such things as animate yo-yos. Pending any such warp in the world Profane felt like the closest thing to one and above her eyes began to doubt his own animateness. (*V.*, 217)

The desired loss of control in the reduction of self to yo-yo is, in political terms, a giving up of responsibility, an easy opening for the rise of fascism. But the literal longing for a "simple clockwork" of self (and thus the implied clockmaker-run universe) reaches its crux in V. herself and her intimate, libidinal connection with objects. The first of these objects is an ivory comb, "whose shape was that of five crucified, all sharing at least one common arm. None of them was a religious figure: they were soldiers of the British Army" (*V.*, 167). This secularization and politicization of religious imagery has its origins in Victoria Wren's desire for a world ordered according to semi-religious principles. In "her private, outré brand of Roman Catholicism," we are told, Victoria has "crystallized into a nun-like temperament pushed to its most dangerous extreme" (*V.*, 167). Her variant on this nun-like temperament is of a decidedly physical, earthly character; feeling herself "married" to Christ, she feels that "the marriage's physical consummation must be achieved through imperfect, mortal versions of himself—of which there had been, to date, four" (*V.*, 167). For Victoria, as for Benny, there is more than simply comfort in the attribution of her own actions and desires to a force outside her control; there is profoundly sensual satisfaction.

In the episode entitled "V. in love," the relationship between V. and the young dancer Mélanie l'Heuremaudit ("cursed hour") is both depersonalized and sensualized to the extreme.[21] As V. defines the relationship: "Do you know what a fetish is? Something of a woman which gives pleasure but is not a woman. A shoe, a locket . . . une jarretière. You are the same, not real but an object of pleasure" (*V.*, 404). Mélanie is for V. no more than that object, and it is in her object-state that she gives pleasure. Moreover, Mélanie is, in her mirrors, the object of her own aggressive gaze. V. understands and feeds this self-objectification: "she recognized—perhaps aware of her own progression

toward inanimateness—the fetish of Mélanie and the fetish of herself to be one" (*V.*, 410). Mélanie is ultimately killed by this self-fetishization, however, victim of a cruel sexuality; "[a]dorned with so many combs, bracelets, sequins, she might have become confused in this fetish-world and neglected to add to herself the one inanimate object that would have saved her"(*V.*, 414).With this destruction of her fetish-object, V. turns wholly to an objectification of herself, transforming herself into the clockwork automaton Mélanie impersonated.

Her replacement of her human parts with artificial continues until, like *Gravity's Rainbow*'s Tchitcherine, V. is "more metal than anything else."[22] When Sidney Stencil meets V. (Veronica Manganese) on Malta during the June Disturbances of 1919—the crux moment for which Stencil *fils* appears to be searching—she expresses her desire for further self-objectification:

> "See my lovely shoes," as half an hour before he'd knelt to remove them. "I would so like to have an entire foot that way, a foot of amber and gold, with the veins, perhaps, in intaglio instead of bas-relief. How tiresome to have the same feet: one can only change one's shoes. But if a girl could have, oh, a lovely rainbow or wardrobe of different-hued, different-sized and -shaped feet. . . ." (*V.*, 488)

By the time of her last appearance, chronologically speaking, she has achieved just such an accessorization of self. The last persona she assumes in the novel is that of the Bad Priest, a persona in which she has cast away even the confining roles of sex and gender and returned to her own "outré" theology. As the Bad Priest, V.

> taught no consistent philosophy that anyone could piece together from the fragments borne back to us by the children. The girls he advised to become nuns, avoid the sensual extremes—pleasure of intercourse, pain of childbirth. The boys he told to find strength in—and be like—the rock of their island. He returned . . . often to the rock: preaching that the object of male existence was to be like a crystal: beautiful and soulless. (*V.*, 340)

The object of existence for V., then, in both her gendered and genderless manifestations, is to achieve the same sort of object-hood Esther finds in her nose job, to be deadened to all sensation, to be a rock. But Being and rockness do not correlate; as described by Heidegger, individual coming-to-Being (*Dasein*) requires self-awareness, and particularly an awareness of death. This acceptance of Being's vulnerability, which Heidegger calls *Sorge*, or "care," is at the root of individual freedom. And techniques—or technics—are "radically dishonest" when used to escape "care"; this dishonesty is evident in the "bad"-ness of V.'s priestdom.[23]

In "the disassembly of the Bad Priest," we at last see these inert, technological substances, with which Sidney Stencil noted her "obsession with bodily incorporating," (*V.*, 488) laid out before us: an ivory comb, a long white wig, a tattoo of the Crucifixion on her bare scalp; prosthetic feet with attached golden slippers; a star sapphire sewn into her navel; a set of false teeth; a glass eye. Phillip Brian Harper has explored the implications of the distinction between "dismemberment" and, in his case, "dismantling," and its connection to the fragmentation of the subject in the postmodern novel, pointing out that

> [i]f "dismemberment" connotes the destruction, through fragmentation, of an organically integrated physical whole, "dismantling" suggests the division of an *assembled* entity into its constituent parts. The very form of "dismantling" suggests its origin as a designation for the removal of a person's outer garment, or mantle. Insofar as a garment and its wearer's body are not organically united, "dismantling" suggests the demonstration of essential discontinuities rather than the disintegration of essentially integrated wholes.[24]

However, while "dismantling" connotes the removal of an outer garment from an essentially human body, "disassembly" connotes the taking-apart of a machine into components that are not only not organically united, but are in fact not human in the first place. One must note, however, that several of V.'s "parts," though not living elements of her body, are literally sutured in. Her connections of self to machine take place at so fundamental a level that, separated from her inorganic parts and literally crushed by a collapsing church, the two mechanical means by which her life has been kept running, V. dies, at last moving from the facsimile, technological inanimation to its original, death.

But the most central, most focal, if you can pardon the pun, of the objects that finally comprise V. is that glass eye. In the Südwest, in 1922, Kurt Mondaugen meets Vera Meroving as the sado-masochistic partner of one Lieutenant Weissman. As he approaches, he notices that her left eye is artificial. This replacement of V.'s own eye with the man-made, particularly after Mélanie's death by fetishization, calls to mind the Biblical dictum "if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out."[25] However, V., as always carrying religion forward into her own realm of the earthly, has replaced her eye not simply with an artificial, inanimate eye, but with a mechanical one. One should hear echoes of this mechanical eye in Huyssen's thoughts on the fundamental problem of the dominance of vision in contemporary culture: "Vision as pleasure and desire has to be subdued and manipulated so that vision as technical and social control can emerge triumphant."[26] V. has in fact replaced her

own cruel gaze with the mechanism of that technical control, the regularity of clockwork:

> A bubble blown translucent, its "white" would show up when in the socket as a half-lit sea green. A fine network of nearly microscopic fractures covered its surface. Inside were the delicately-wrought wheels, springs, ratchets of a watch, wound by a gold key which Fräulein Meroving wore on a slender chain around her neck. Darker green and flecks of gold had been fused into twelve vaguely zodiacal shapes, placed annunular on the surface of the bubble to represent the iris and also the face of the watch. (*V.*, 237)

This replacement of the "natural" processes and materials of vision—a vision already transformed into a cruel, objectifying gaze—with those of clockwork produces a complex relation among visuality, the mechanical, the passage of time, and the structure of the universe, all of which hones in on V. as its center: in this construction, Vera is, literally, "a Hand to Turn the Time" (*GR*, 760). But this determination to connect herself with clockwork is a strong indictment of V. and her effect on the century indeed, given that "alignment with the inanimate is the mark of a Bad Guy" (*V.*, 101). We can see this indictment even more clearly when read in connection with Norbert Weiner's *The Human Use of Human Beings*: "When human atoms are knit into an organization in which they are used, not in their full right as responsible human beings, but as cogs and levers and rods, it matters little that their raw material is flesh and blood. *What is used as an element in a machine is an element in the machine.*"[27] V.'s connection of herself to clockwork, and her technological relationships with those around her, transforms all of what remains of the human into mere elements in a machine.

And yet: we must consider V. in relation to her late–twentieth-century descendants, SHROUD and SHOCK, for, as humanity becomes more and more machine-like, the world of machines appears to be becoming more and more animate. These animate machines fundamentally represent a certain conception of what it is to be human, just as the partridge in the pear tree represents, for Slab, an update of the ontology once represented by the Cross. Some inkling of this purpose behind the humanoid machines comes through to Benny Profane in his dealings with SHROUD (synthetic human, radiation output determined) and SHOCK (synthetic human object, casualty kinematics), both of whom represent the Anthroresearch Associates (a subsidiary of Yoyodyne, of course) version of a mechanical model for man:

> In the eighteenth century it was often convenient to regard man as a clockwork automaton. In the nineteenth century, with Newtonian physics pretty well assimilated and a lot of work in thermodynamics going on, man was looked on more as a heat-engine, about 40 per cent efficient. Now in the twentieth century, with nuclear and subatomic physics a going thing, man had become something which absorbs X-rays, gamma rays, and neutrons. (*V.*, 284)

One can sense, then, given these models of human representation, in V.'s desires to return herself to the state of a clockwork automaton, a desire to return to an earlier, less chaotic model of the universe, with none of the uncertainties of Einsteinian physics, nor the potential for heat-death implied in Newtonian physics. Rather, the mechanical model of a clock is one that can be kept running eternally—provided there is a Hand to turn the Time.

SHROUD and SHOCK, however, represent the post-Hiroshima human subject, an agencyless, purposeless object continually bombarded by radiation and car crashes. These are frightening models, for, as Thomas Moore notes in reference to the V-2 of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "when Things, most seriously death-dealing things, are honestly imagined as having will and intent, the projection signifies a tidal attraction between the partly dehumanized humans of a Thingified culture and that culture's purely mechanical reifications."[28] This attribution of will to Things should remind us of Benny's schlemihldom, from which he projects that mechanical objects are "out to get him." Benny carries an innate recognition of the dangerous roles played by SHROUD and SHOCK as models of the agencyless human subject, feeling

> a certain kinship with SHOCK, which was the first inanimate schlemihl he'd ever encountered. But in there too was a certain wariness because the manikin was still only a "human object;" plus a feeling of disdain as if SHOCK had decided to sell out to the humans; so that now what had been its inanimate own were taking revenge. (*V.*, 285)

In other words, for SHOCK to have earned the animosity of the inanimate, to be the enemy of technology, it must, somehow, be alive, an uncomfortable thought given its all-too-apparent object status.

Norbert Wiener, in *The Human Use of Human Beings*, addresses this paradox in a creepily scientific fashion: "the problem as to whether the machine is alive or not is, for our purposes, semantic and we are at liberty to answer it one way or the other as best suits our convenience."[29] Hector ponders just such a distinction in *Vineland*, upon charging his estranged wife with "Tubal homicide," a charge which raises "deep philosophical issues. Is the Tube human? Semi-human? Well, uh, how human's that, so forth. Are TV sets brought alive by broadcast signals, like the clay bodies of men and women animated by the spirit of God's love?"[30] These are of course the issues toward which we've been

working all along: the merging, or at least the confusing on some philosophical level, of the human and the mechanical in television, the end result of which, of course, is the obsolescence of the thinking subject so necessary to the novel's survival. One should of course see in this what is perhaps the quintessential moment of the anxiety of obsolescence: the example of Fergus Mixolydian, Irish Armenian Jew and the self-proclaimed laziest person in New York. Fergus's project is clearly to remain as close to inanimation as possible, and he has designed for that purpose "an ingenious sleep-switch, receiving its signal from two electrodes placed on the inner skin of his forearm. When Fergus dropped below a certain level of awareness, the skin resistance increased over a preset value to operate the switch. Fergus thus became an extension of the TV set" (*V.*, 56). Fergus has, in other words, gone here a step beyond Bongo-Shaftsbury's implanted arm-switch, even a step beyond the self-objectification of V.; rather than incorporating bits of inert matter into himself, creating mechanical extensions of himself, he manages instead to recreate himself as the extension of a machine. That the machine in question is a television set is, of course, not innocent; the TV is, from this perspective, singularly responsible for transforming legions of readers into couch potatoes, the final form of the synthetic human object.

Benny, in any event, in considering these very "deep philosophical issues," makes a fundamental category mistake, one that Wiener might consider "semantic" but which strikes at the foundation of what it is to be human. He finds himself, on his rounds as night watchman, talking to SHROUD:

> "What's it like," he said.
> Better than you have it.
> "Wha."
> Wha yourself. Me and SHOCK are what you and everybody will be someday . . .
> . . . "What do you mean, we'll be like you and SHOCK someday? You mean dead?"
> Am I dead? If I am then that's what I mean.
> "If you aren't then what are you?"
> Nearly what you are. None of you have very far to go. (*V.*, 286)

Benny here misinterprets technological inanimation as death. But it's admittedly a fine line, especially in terms of SHROUD and SHOCK; see, for instance, the narrator's description of SHOCK, the human-like machine:

> its flesh was molded of foam vinyl, its skin vinyl plastisol, its hair a wig, its eyes cosmetic-plastic, its teeth (for which, in fact, Eigenvalue had acted as subcontractor) the same kind of dentures worn today by 19 per cent of the American population, most of them respectable. Inside were a blood reservoir in the thorax, a blood pump in the midsection and a nickel-cadmium battery power supply in the abdomen. The control panel, at the side of the chest, had toggles and rheostat controls for venous and arterial bleeding, pulse rate, and even respiration rate, when a sucking chest wound was involved. In the latter case plastic lungs provided the necessary suction and bubbling. They were controlled by an air pump in the abdomen, with the motor's cooling vent located in the crotch. An injury of the sexual organs could still be simulated by an attachable moulage, but then this blocked the cooling vent. SHOCK could not therefore have a sucking chest wound and mutilated sexual organs simultaneously. A new retrofit, however, eliminated this difficulty, which was felt to be a basic design deficiency. (*V.*, 285–86)

Compare this rendering with Herbert Stencil's projection of V. at present-day, the machine-like human:

> skin radiant with the bloom of some new plastic; both eyes glass but now containing photoelectric cells, connected by silver electrodes to optic nerves of purest copper wire and leading to a brain exquisitely wrought as a diode matrix could ever be. Solenoid relays would be her ganglia, servo-actuators move her flawless nylon limbs, hydraulic fluid be sent by a platinum heart-pump through butyrate veins and arteries. Perhaps—Stencil on occasion could have as vile a mind as any of the Crew—even a complex system of pressure transducers located in a marvelous vagina of polyethylene; the variable arms of their Wheatstone bridges all leading to a single silver cable which fed pleasure-voltages direct to the correct register of the digital machine in her skull. And whenever she smiled or grinned in ecstasy there would gleam her crowning feature: Eigenvalue's precious dentures. (*V.*, 411–12)

The differences are few: SHOCK is primarily mechanical while V. is electronic; V. is controlled by a "digital machine" in her head rather than SHOCK's control panel. The difference, however, seems to boil down to wiring; otherwise, machines and humans, thanks to plastics, hydraulics, and the dentures of the inestimable Eigenvalue, seem to be moving toward the same, altogether alarming state of synthetic human object.

But one cannot help but comment on the abject misogyny contained in Herbert's imaginings of V. at seventy-six. Huyssen, in writing about Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, could just as well have been writing about *V.*, when he claims that the machine-vamp appeals to

> the male fantasy of the machine-woman who, in the film, embodies two age-old patriarchal images of women which, again, are hooked up with two homol-

> ogous views of technology. In the machine-woman, technology and woman appear as creations and/or cult objects of the male imagination. The myth of the dualistic nature of woman as either asexual virgin-mother or prostitute-vamp is projected onto technology which appears as either neutral and obedient or as inherently threatening and out-of-control.[31]

V. has all along been both virgin and vamp; by the novel's end, she has, in Stencil's rendering, become the ideal combination of computer, Barbie doll, and inflatable sex toy. She has been created, via Stencil's forcible dislocations, as the ideally non-human sexual object, an object whose entire being is centered on pleasure, but who requires the insertion of that ever-missing phallus for the circuit to be complete. This is of course the future wished for by Benny Profane, who is chronically perplexed by the difficulties of dealing with real women: "Someday, please God, there would be an all-electronic woman. Maybe her name would be Violet" (*V.*, 385). Benny's hope, for a woman with no resistance—or at least none that can't be "measured in ohms" (*V.*, 385)—is carried out in Stencil's imagination.

Thus what is made to appear a self-objectification in V. is a projection, the determined transformation of the threatening woman—threatening because of her connections to the inanimate, as well as her connections to the powerful forces of twentieth-century politics—into a sexual object, an objectification for which, conveniently, she herself is blamed. In fact, this objectification is seemingly justified when V.'s threat takes on a specifically sexual nature in the "V. in love" episode. V.'s visual objectification of Mélanie is implicated in the younger girl's death; V. then destroys the power of her own gaze—and further object-ifies herself—by having her own eye replaced with one made of clockwork. Or so we think; the "facts" all begin to seem awfully slippery, and we are forced to begin acknowledging Stencil's role in constructing them. As Donald Larsson most trenchantly points out,

> Whatever the historical facts of this love affair, they attain their significance only through the meaning assigned to them by Stencil, and it becomes clear that V. and Mélanie together are both objects of Stencil's own quest for visual pleasure which he has displaced onto the two women in order to avoid his own responsibility in the process.[32]

Stencil coldly dismisses V. as a "beast of venery," (*V.*, 412) despite the fact that it is through *his* venery that she is "chased like the hart, hind or hare, chased like an obsolete, or bizarre, or forbidden form of sexual delight" (*V.*, 61). This displacement of his desire onto his object is repeated throughout the novel; the same, clearly, can be said of V.'s process of self-objectification.

Not only is it Stencil who has linked the "few dead objects" together in one female body, but he is the one who ultimately achieves the novel's greatest feats of self-dehumanization—he moves wholly and completely into the third person, projects himself into others, and practices a continual and "forcible dislocation of personality" (*V.*, 62).

The wholesale objectification of V. in Stencil's projection of her fully electronic present—an objectification that has been made that much easier by the removal of her name and its replacement with a mere initial—serves to highlight two key facets of her treatment throughout the novel. On the one hand, this completion of her mechanization, her "progression toward inanimateness," (*V.*, 410) takes to its logical extreme the project of self-objectification she began in her various guises throughout the novel, and its ramifications for the decadence in which the novel's characters are drowning: "the Kingdom of Death is served by fetish-constructions like V.'s, which represent a kind of infiltration" (*V.*, 411). V. is precisely the point of entry, in Stencil's reading, for the "death-dealing things"[33] created by technology that have infected contemporary life and threaten human existence.

But the other angle highlighted by this transformation of V. into sex toy is raised precisely by the notion that V.'s position in the novel is entirely "in Stencil's reading." Herbert Stencil is, after all, "He Who Looks for V." (*V.*, 226), he is the novel's prime reader. When he finally recounts, near the end of the novel, the history of his tortuous search, he at last acknowledges "a long suspicion. That it did add up only to the recurrence of an initial and a few dead objects" (*V.*, 445). In fact, the entire "past" of the novel is Stencil's projection, his narrative. Rather than V. being culpable for the attempt to reconstruct herself with machine parts, it is finally Stencil himself, through his readings of history, who is responsible for attempting to construct a woman out of a pile of fetishes. He quickly dismisses this suspicion, however, stubbornly claiming that the story he tells is "'[n]ot Stencil's,' Stencil insisted. 'Hers'" (*V.*, 445).

Having convinced himself of this, at the novel's chronological end, Stencil follows the trail of the clockwork eye to continue his quest. This quick dismissal, however, does not alleviate the quester's—or the novel's—responsibility in V.'s all-too-literal "objectification." In his search for the moment "when-it-all-changed," for the very moment of the end of the modern, a search which effectively writes the history it uncovers, Stencil has in fact created V. as a text, and then blamed her for her object-ness. Both Stencil and, arguably, Pynchon have committed precisely the same crime with which they indict the century; they have foisted off their humanity on the inanimate by blaming the textual object for her own objectification.

NOTES

1. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Illinois University Press, 1986), 70.
2. Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 13.
3. Ibid., 44.
4. Ibid., 4.
5. Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 112.
6. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), ix.
7. Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (London: Vintage, 1995), 405. Subsequent references cited in text as *V.*
8. As this essay will reveal, this protected space should be read as intimately connected with the useful pose of the alienated male explored by Rob Holton throughout Pynchon's early fiction. In the sense that a continuum can be discerned between the often embarrassingly racist and sexist politics of the early fiction and the more sensitive representations of the other that Dana Medoro convincingly argues begin with *The Crying of Lot 49*, *V.* clearly aligns itself with the earlier work in both its hip alienation and its casual misogyny, though it also shows signs of beginning to question these structures.
9. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, vii.
10. For an exploration of Pynchon's treatment of the rise of the masses in *V.*, see Robert E. Golden's "Mass Man and Modernism: Violence in Pynchon's *V.*," *Critique* 14, no. 2 (1972): 5–17.
11. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 52.
12. Ibid., 53.
13. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, ix.
14. Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, 13.
15. Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1986), 140.
16. One should hear echoes in this of Marinetti's Futurist manifesto, as cited by Walter Benjamin: "War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metalization of the human body." Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 241.
17. Again, in thinking the shift that seems to exist between the misogyny of the early texts and the more pro-female later novels, it is key to note that *The Crying of Lot 49* is likewise a quest novel, though with a significant difference: Oedipa has of course ceased waiting for the "knight of deliverance" and has undertaken her own search (*CL*, 22).
18. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 368.
19. Joseph Slade, "Thomas Pynchon, Postindustrial Humanist," *Technology and Culture* 23, no. 1 (1982), 72.
20. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, ix.
21. For a full reading of this episode in terms of the fetish and the desire for the object, see Hanjo Berressem: "In *V.* this 'Law-of-the-Machine' [Berressem's transfiguration of the 'Name-of-the-Father'] takes over both the individual and the cultural field, annexing the body in both dimensions. The fetish, all workforce or all sign, is the signifier by which the culturally determined, sexual economy is inscribed onto the body via the semiotic code. It is the relay by which Baudrillard's 'symbolic ambivalence' is replaced by a digital, phallic economy. The fetish as a signifier finally comes to designate the desire of the semiotic code itself." Hanjo Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 71–72.

22. Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 337. Subsequent references cited in text as *GR.*
23. Lance Schachterle, "Pynchon and the Civil Wars of Technology," in *Literature and Technology*, ed. Mark Greenberg and Lance Schachterle (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1992), 253-74.
24. Phillip Brian Harper, *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 48.
25. Mark 9:47.
26. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 76.
27. Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (New York: Anchor Books, 1954), 185.
28. Thomas Moore, "A Decade of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Incredible Moving Film," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 22, no. 1 (1983), 86.
29. Weiner, *Human Use*, 32.
30. Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland* (New York: Little, Brown, 1990), 348.
31. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 3.
32. Donald Larsson, *The Film Breaks: Thomas Pynchon and the Cinema* (Ph.D. diss, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1980), 120.
33. Moore, "A Decade of *Gravity's Rainbow*," 86.