

Blog Post 2: Close Reading a Passage from *Bleeding Edge*

500 words minimum

Due Tuesday, February 10th

Over the past fifty years, Thomas Pynchon has distinguished himself as one of the United States' most accomplished novelists, not only through his prolific output of big, significant novels, but for his remarkable prose style. Though *Bleeding Edge* (2013) is perhaps less formally and syntactically experimental and ambitious than books like *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) or *Mason & Dixon* (1997), the prose is unmistakably Pynchonian (with all the allusiveness, playfulness, profundity, zaniness, paranoia, twisting plots, and weird songs that such a term implies). Further, Pynchon has well-established himself as a significant humanistic thinker on issues of science and technology. Whether his concerns were the shifts from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics in *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day* (2006), Norbert Wiener's early engagement with cybernetics, Henry Adams's thoughts on thermodynamics, and their convergence in the Cold War military industrial complex in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Gravity's Rainbow*, or his speculative projection of an automaton in *V.* (1961) or of ARPAnet in *Inherent Vice* (2009), Pynchon is a profound critic of US history and science's place in that history. And of course *Bleeding Edge*—set in the wake of the dotcom bubble's burst, during 11 September 2001, and anticipating the rapid changes of the twenty-first century—is no different. *Bleeding Edge* is Pynchon's most contemporary novel, in terms of both when it was published along with its setting and subject matter. So it is a fitting site for our investigation and exploration of narrative, literary form, science, technology, history, and how we represent and understand life in the twenty-first century. As such, I am quite eager to see where this novel takes us.

For your second blog assignment I would like you to select a passage that you find significant, confusing, or engaging from what we have read of Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* up until this point.¹ I would like you to *closely read*, to *interpret* the particular moment you have chosen, and to make an *argument* supporting that reading and interpretation. Passages can be as short as a sentence but no longer than a paragraph, *and should be quoted in full and cited appropriately at the beginning of your post* (work and pg. # are fine).

Begin by *briefly* describing the moment you have chosen to closely analyze and give some context for the passage. I would like, however, that the majority of the work you do here be interpretive rather than descriptive. Primarily, I would like you to pay attention to *form* in the passage, scene, or moment you have chosen to write about. How does the *structure* of the moment you have selected contribute to the construction of meaning? What exactly is that meaning? How does the form interact with the content of the work? How does the passage you have selected seem related to other issues we have discussed? How does one confront the difficulty of Pynchon's writing, to *do* something with it, to *say* something about it? How might you *work with* and *unpack* Pynchon's prose? How is this moment formally related to other points in the novel? Basically, these questions are to get you thinking, and you do not need to answer them all. I'm primarily interested in your *argument* here, how you are *interpreting* the passage and the novel, how you *specifically* and *concretely* investigate what kind of narrative, linguistic, poetic work the text is doing, and why it matters, why it is important to make the argument you are making about the text.

¹ If you are ahead in the reading, then by all means feel free to select a passage beyond the assigned reading.