

INTERNATIONAL PYNCHON WEEK 2024 IN BELGRADE

June 17–21, 2024

University of Belgrade, Serbia

THE 2ND CALL FOR PAPERS

The literary and cultural phenomenon known as Thomas Pynchon is an enduring demonstration of multiple facets of the contemporary age – despite his notorious reclusiveness in a time when popularity is indiscriminately produced and also self-produced, he decided to withdraw from public view and construct his imaginary world without the ephemeral aid of media advertising and promotion. This consistent strategy has perhaps motivated the readers and critics over the past half-century to delve more deeply into the inexhaustible logical, structural and ideological possibilities which his works offer, with different research paradigms appearing as the decades went by. The first dedicated outlet for Pynchon scholarship was the journal *Pynchon Notes*, in publication from 1979 to 2009, succeeded in 2012 by *Orbit: Writing Around Pynchon*, which altered its title to *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* and became more inclusive towards other postmodern authors in Pynchon's frame of reference. The more immediate vehicle for the exchange of ideas, however, appeared with the first International Pynchon Week in Warwick in 1994, followed by conferences in Antwerp, London, Cologne, Valletta, Granada, Munich, Lublin, Durham, Athens, La Rochelle, Rome and Vancouver. One might say that it is a unique privilege to study a living author with such a lively academic network and long-running conference history.

The English Department at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade, Serbia, is pleased to announce that the 14th International Pynchon Week will take place on its premises from **June 17 to June 21, 2024**, in downtown Belgrade. Thus we again affirm the truly cosmopolitan character of the well-established conference, adding another city to this rhizomatic community of scholars who simultaneously discover the new layers of the object of knowledge and create new plausibilities through their research.

In line with IPW practice, we invite **paper and panel proposals on all topics that center on the Pynchon universe**, with 20-minute-long presentations allotted to every speaker. All talks are given in plenary form, without breakaway sessions, so as to maintain the common spirit which the conference has preserved since its foundation. Apart from the usual individual

format, presentations may be jointly given by two persons, and a group of three or more is not recommended for this conference. As far as the topic range is concerned, we suggest a tentative outline, and hope for other innovative ideas that derive from contemporary discussion in the humanities (and beyond).

How much longer will it take for a shift from the strictly postmodern to the concept of post-postmodern? How much does this division reflect on Pynchon's works chronologically and artistically? The visions of Pynchon may have ossified in certain practices of literary reception, but is he still the high priest of postmodernism, unaffected by the tectonic changes in the modern world, especially the havoc unleashed on and after 9/11?

If we follow Pynchon's opus chronologically, how much has it changed since the time he was only considered to be J.D. Salinger's pen name? Scholars may attempt to give various insights into the wealth of literary influences, both those identified by the author (T.S. Eliot, Hemingway), alluded to by Pynchon's narratorial persona, and those visible on closer inspection. The participants may feel free to extend their study of literary ties to such contemporary authors as Wallace, Danielewski, DeLillo, Gaddis and Jennifer Egan, to mention but a few.

Especially alluring is the study of the forms of liberal thought and practice which pervades all of Pynchon's texts, from the first short stories to *Bleeding Edge*: what do liberal ideas mean to the West and what do they mean to "the Rest"? Conversely, are there any points of convergence between socialism and liberalism, with all the opalescent senses of the words in the receptive contexts?

The concept of the political is a necessary prerequisite to any contextually based study of Thomas Pynchon, notably so in a historical discussion – apart from the frequent use of Calvinist doctrine of the Elect and the Preterite, how far is the writer's vision formed on non-American fundamentals, and how far is his fiction concerned with the structure of the Mumfordian megamachine? More conversation on Adorno and Horkheimer on the one hand and the social surroundings which produced any *Mittelwerke* and its analogies on the other would be cordially accepted.

Pynchon's novels inherently engage in a dialogue with history, be it 18th-century expeditions to territories still incompletely wrested from the control of the indigenous populations or almost contemporaneous bittersweet snapshots of proletarian families in 1980s

California, again oppressed by various legacies that go back several generations, all the way to the rooting of Pynchon's own Anglophone culture in the hitherto "virginal" expanse of the Spaniards/Mexicans/Natives/ancient giants. How romanticized is the view of "the loss of innocence" in diverse "Edens" of the planet when we contrast it with the scattered vestiges of the animist/shamanic/tribal world views based on metaphor, allegory and solely oral history?

With this destabilization of Eurocentricism comes the notion of the extent of the colonial project and the suspicious application of Enlightenment ideas worldwide – how short-sighted and misguided was the bourgeois society which invented the production line and consequently the camps of mass extermination as its extremely perverted form? A fruitful discussion could arise on the modes of inequality and inequity addressed by Pynchon along the lines of race, ethnicity, religion, class, ability, gender and the like.

Another point related to colonial visions can be found in the few brief mentions of Balkan history and geopolitics in *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Mason&Dixon*, and much more so in several chapters of *Against the Day* where some of the main characters go through different life-changing experiences, making the region seem like a portal to another (historical) dimension. In a Balkan university center, it would be convenient to use the opportunity to discuss how much of Pynchon-related Balkan discourse has been in the domain of discovery, and how much in the domain of invention. How acceptable are the views turned stereotypes that the Balkans are a powder keg and the dark Other of Europe, populated by nations with "long memories and short fuses"?

The urban milieu in the present day has usually been identified as the "default" postmodern chronotope, but there is as much displacement of Pynchon's plots into the alternative contexts of small towns, contemporary wastelands, uncharted territories around the globe, even hippie communes like in *Vineland*. We also welcome talks that focus on the interrelation between various spatial narrative frameworks and their bearing on the stories' credibility, dynamic and overall effect. With the narrative aspect in mind, contributions to Pynchon studies from this vast field of inquiry are most welcome – whether it is classical narratology, Genettean research into narrative time, or recent cognitive studies of the phenomena of human experience ordered into narrative form. The brand-new study by Luc Herman and John Krafft entitled *Becoming Pynchon: Genetic Narratology and V.* (2023) certainly deserves special attention from all scholars in the field, as evidence that classical guidelines of focalization and consciousness

can still yield valuable results in Pynchon and broader scholarship. The recent acquisition of the writer's archive – 70 linear feet in length – by the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, is certainly going to prove invaluable in specialist academic research into the author's work from the synoptic point of view. The vast historical resources of this library make it an ideal place for the contextualist study of Pynchon once the materials have been made available.

Another inevitable topic in Thomas Pynchon's fiction comes from the sphere of science and technology, and it may even have been excessively accentuated by the less careful interpreters, since the author has been trying for decades to foreground the drawbacks of a society overly dependent on dehumanizing machinery. It is possible to track the writer's attitude towards the so-called hard sciences from "Entropy" to *Bleeding Edge*, and provide opinions on his implicit admonitions against the abuses of otherwise neutral technology – from the SHOCK and SHROUD test dummies to financial forensic leads which could direct to the possible perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks.

To sum up, this is by no means a complete range of topics suitable for presentation at the conference, and many other ideas from the area of Pynchon studies would also be gladly received. In retrospect, this list can serve as a reminder and a template for the addition of new subjects to the conference agenda:

- Pynchon and influences by him / on him (generic and thematic)
- Representations of liberalism in Pynchon
- Pynchon and (neo)colonialism
- Pynchon and the spatial imagination
- Pynchon and history
- Discourses of crisis
- Resistance and counternarratives
- Pynchon in intersectional perspectives of race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, etc.
- Ecology and environment in Pynchon
- Pynchon and the technological imagination / Science and technology
- Pynchon in comparative perspectives
- Pynchon and the Balkans

Prospective participants may submit abstracts of up to 300 words in .doc or .docx formats to the conference email: pynchonweek2024@gmail.com. Panel proposals of three papers should be 1000 words or fewer. Please include with either kind of proposal each author's contact information, affiliation, and a hundred-word biographic sketch listing any relevant publications, papers, and projects.

The abstract and panel proposal submission deadline has been extended to **December 1, 2023**. However, the scholars who submit their proposals earlier will receive an earlier answer and be able to organize the trip at ease, when the ticket price window is more promising. As is the case in all IPW meetings, the participants do not pay any conference fee.

Any questions about the conference can also be sent to the organizers' emails, and we will see to it that they are promptly answered:

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At present, it is impossible to say what the pandemic situation will look like in June 2024 in any country of the world, but we hope that it will pose a much less grave danger than it did at the time of the previous conference. In any case, should some participants find themselves in an unfavorable health situation, the Faculty of Philology can secure a remote video connection for them. If the participants give their permission, their presentations may be recorded and saved to a future audio/video database for the future conferences to draw on as an archive.

We look forward to a new exchange of ideas and opinions, incisive arguments and lively discussions at the International Pynchon Week in 2024.

Yours sincerely,

Sergej Macura

Aleksandra Vukotić