**The dominance of technology in Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow:* the light bulb and the cybernetic apocalypse**

**Grace Halden**

**Birkbeck, University of London**

World War II featured numerous threats to the human through apocalyptic acts, one of which was the destructive acts of the V-2 weapon and the nuclear weapon. This paper examines the connected fear in Pynchon’s texts that the human would be put under pressure from other technological developments emerging during the war era. The apocalypse need not be, a Roslyn Weaver defines it, the 'widespread destruction of land or the urban environment' that is suggested by war.This paper argues that Pynchon examines a more insidious apocalyptic threat in which humanity loses control of technology and technological development. This, I term: Pynchon’s cybernetic apocalypse.

Cybernetics was heavily influenced by World War II. The War produced elevated numbers of mathematicians and physicists and heralded massive growth in computation and advanced machines. As a result of this movement, war became a mechanized system and the human became an operator in the war machine. The dominance of technology in war resulted in related notions of mechanization by large, overarching systems as well as concerns over human replacement in regards to labour and intellectual pursuits.

This paper uses the contextual framework of the cybernetic movement and World War II to analyze how *Gravity's Rainbow* features an apocalyptic scenario in which the human race is mechanised and dominated by artificial structures. In *Gravity’s Rainbow* this apocalypse is expressed through the dominance of the V-2 and the mechanization of human characters. I will focus on lesser analyzed technologies at work in Pynchon’s text – notably Byron the Blub. Here, the paper focuses on the links between light wave theory, the Electric Company and the use of artificial lighting at Camp Dora to explore specific Pynchon anxieties towards insidious technologies in everyday life.