

**“—AND THERE OUGHT TO BE A
PUNCH LINE,
BUT THERE'S NOT”:
GRAVITY'S RAINBOW AND FLIGHTS
OF DIGRESSION**

by

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Abstract

Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* isolates the paradox that its protagonist, Oedipa Maas, is both inside the novel's semiotic structure, as part of its process of production, and outside, as a product of that process. *Gravity's Rainbow* ups the ante and increases the dilemma exponentially when binary distinctions are effectively flattened out by a rhizomatic growth of narrative lines. My approach to *Gravity's Rainbow* attempts to explore a social reading that functions in its excess or along its flights of digression. The introduction, through a reading of *The Crying of Lot 49*, explains the paradox.

"Digression One" decenters the empty image of the rocket in order to unhinge the narrative structure of *Gravity's Rainbow*. "Digression Two" examines how the rhizome operates through a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of foundational images. "Digression Three" discusses politics along a number of intersecting interfaces that refuse absolute distinctions of inside and outside.

*For Heather and Brooklyn,
your patience, your love*

“Fiction itself proceeds by digression and cannot be predicted or defined. Each novel is a unique definition, a definition of itself. It follows that our criticism of fiction should make a progressive effort to defamiliarize the novel, to de-define fiction, as fiction simultaneously creates and decreates itself.”

---Ronald Sukenick,
In Form, Digressions on the Art of Fiction

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Abbreviations

AO – Anti-Oedipus

CL – The Crying of Lot 49

GR – Gravity's Rainbow

PP – Pynchon's Poetics

TP – A Thousand Plateaus

Preface

I first came across Pynchon in a survey American Literature course where “Entropy” was tacked on for the final week. Intrigued by the title, for no other reason than that it happened to co-relate with a song title of a band I'd been listening to with some frequency, I went to the library (because I'd got in the habit of not buying books) to get a copy when I came across a paperback edition of *The Crying of Lot 49*. And so began an obsession. I never actually discussed Pynchon in that class or in any other (until this thesis). Strange, yes, especially because Pynchon's iconic status within academia on par with Joyce, Melville, Cervantes, and other 'greats' with whom his work has been compared, makes him a common reference point.

My initial encounter with Pynchon is significant because it testifies to the drive behind my own critical endeavour. 'Pynchon,' for me, is produced within the academic institution, but the texts grouped under the name 'Pynchon' constantly exceed institutional frameworks and in the process force academia to transform in order to subsume these texts. While my introduction to Pynchon came through the institution, my initial enthusiastic response—that his texts seemed always on the point of articulating an obscurity that would revolutionize the world—was based on a *feeling* rather than an intellectual comprehension. Even though I could not (and still cannot which is precisely the point) piece together the puzzles, I nevertheless derived immense pleasure in reading them.

I mention this because it is with a certain trepidation that I write about Pynchon. In the back of my mind there is always the question that haunts many Pynchon fans/scholars—so I've read. Is my reading of Pynchon within the framework of an academic institution not an act of cooptation that his novels attempt to resist and parody? But once involved in a critical study of Pynchon what becomes quickly apparent is how deeply entrenched his texts are already in the academic institution. In fact, they spawn an entire institution that tends to lock them up in their own ivory tower. I like to think of this thesis (and I realize the possibilities for self-delusion are rampant) as an attempt to highlight the ways 'Pynchon' breaks through or runs away from the very borders that have grown up around his texts in the last thirty years, while simultaneously negotiating the writing as an intensity that produces, first and foremost, multiple emotional responses in myself.

Introduction

Before the Rocket Falls, Let's Take a Moment to Sing

"power centers are defined much more by what escapes them or by their impotence than by their zones of power"

---Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari,
A Thousand Plateaus

"It's not the gentlemanly reflex that made him edit, switch names, insert fantasies into the yarns he spun for Tantivy back in the ACHTUNG office, so much as the primitive fear of having a soul captured by a likeness of image or by a name"

---Thomas Pynchon,
Gravity's Rainbow

Since its publication in 1973, *Gravity's Rainbow* has continued to produce many unsettling effects. Prominent among these effects are the political and social implications of this provocative novel. From a critical standpoint the most troubling aspect of *Gravity's Rainbow* is the way that Thomas Pynchon weaves the drive towards freedom together with the drive towards apocalypse so that they become inseparable in the image of the rocket. In this sense, the rocket can be seen to function as the center of the novel, that is, as the image that holds the surrounding multiplicity of narratives together as a coherent unit. There is, as Tchitcherine speculates "*A Rocket-cartel. A structure cutting across every agency human and paper that ever touched it*" (GR 566). This structure of

the cartel culminates in the flight of the rocket and it is this image of the rocket, following a controlled path whose trajectory moves towards the singular point of Brennschluss where “The moving vehicle [the rocket] is frozen, in space, to become architecture, and timeless,” that limits, at the same time that it makes possible, the form of the novel itself (GR 301). My interest in the rocket's function is as an overarching structure that attempts to supersede the inherent value of the digressive narrative lines to which it is attached in order to direct them back towards its own image and thereby establish its centrality in the novel.

Certainly within the pages of *Gravity's Rainbow* there is no escape from the rocket. The narrator informs us at the beginning “There is no way out. Lie and wait, lie still and be quiet. Screaming holds across the sky. *When* it comes [...]” (GR 4, my italics). It is not a question of whether the rocket comes. Likewise, and in spite of the 760 pages of tragic, zany and downright confusing plots that ensue, we are still faced on the final page with this same inescapable certainty as “the pointed tip of the Rocket, falling nearly a mile per second, absolutely and forever without sound, reaches its last immeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre” (GR 760). The rocket, in this sense, is the embodiment of a totally contained system. This rocket-system enacts its own perpetuation in a methodical exploitation of anything that is of use to its purpose similar to Kekulé's dream of the serpent which

is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to *violate* the Cycle. Taking and not giving back, demanding that “productivity” and “earnings” keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these 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, vegetable and mineral, is laid waste in the process. (GR 412)

The troubling aspect of this novel is precisely that there appears to be an inevitability of doom that no amount of political or social action can alter. The rocket will fall. And in its service the marginalized will be exploited in the interests of an elite who attempt to shake the shackles of their mortality. Herein lies the crux of the problem: if every attempt to free ourselves from death leads to an expansion of technologies that work to increase the suffering and means of propagating death, then is the only viable alternative, in Pynchon's universe, a complete submission to a distant authority, made manifest in the rocket as an image towards which one submits in order to dominate others, and yet whose ontological status remains, in the novel, uncertain?

But if it is true, as I have suggested, that the image of the rocket structures and contains the movement of the text, it is also true that there exists a parallel movement that resists the rocket's dominance. "There is," according to Leni Pökler, "the moment, and its possibilities" (GR 159). While the rocket flies along a determined path from one point to another, we must also take into account that between the two points there is a time gap that delays the inevitable. This movement in *Gravity's Rainbow* is characterized by singularities: "the change from point to no-point carries luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw in fright" (GR 396). There is no method to predict the path of the singularity because it proceeds in the multiple opening up a host of new directions. "Do all these points imply," asks the narrator, "like the Rocket's, an annihilation?" (GR 396). Certainly some do. But there is also the movement away from the determined flight of the rocket. This resistance to the rocket takes form in the novel

as digression, digression whose flight at times returns to the rocket, but also, at other times, leads us down paths that never make it home to the rocket. The literary effect of this digression is to threaten the very structure, that of the rocket, that holds the multiple narratives together. The whole text threatens to break down, or out, into a seemingly random grouping of events whose connection to each other is always tenuous.

The tension of *Gravity's Rainbow*, between the rocket as the central image or master sign that structures the text and the narrative digressions that threaten this structure can be read as the novel's internal struggle, a struggle that remains unresolved or held in suspension. In order to understand this struggle between the structure and the sort of anti-structure that places the novel always on the verge of incoherency, I will examine it alongside Deleuze and Guattari's model of the rhizome. This model is an attempt to account for the movement of multiplicities without either reducing them to a primary unity from which they proceed or imposing a final totality as an end point towards which they proceed. The concept of the rhizome theorizes movement or growth from which there are only lines or flows that disrupt or escape the structure that codes them back towards the supposed unity imposed by a master sign. What makes this conception of the rhizome a particularly useful tool in terms of the form of *Gravity's Rainbow* is the way that the lines are made to move. The rhizome, while it certainly does attack the notion of a timeless unity or center, is not a binary opposition. In fact: "Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees" (TP 9). What Deleuze and Guattari call a line of flight or a deterritorialization is

the movement away from the unity of a structure, but this deterritorialization is perpetually caught up in a moment of reterritorialization by the structure. In the same fashion, we can say digression in *Gravity's Rainbow* eludes, or at least attempts to elude, the long arm of the rocket while at the same time the rocket ceaselessly tries to contain digression from turning the novel into an unyielding mess.

The rhizome is an attack on the rational coherency of a structure. But it is not a head on confrontation as in a dialectic. Rather, in fleeing the presumed unity or the concept at the heart of a signifying structure, the line of flight forces the structure to chase it outside its territory: "Lure your enemy to a desert. The Kalahari. Wait for the wind to die" (*GR* 729). The effect of deterritorialization is to stretch the structure to the point where it flattens out, where the image or concept at the center of the structure, the One, the rocket that holds it all together, unravels into nothing more than narrative lines moving in no specific direction. In so doing, the line of flight reveals the image at the heart of a structure as a power marker, as an imposition that attempts to order the multiplicity of flows in order to keep its own structure alive. It contains, channels and directs movement in order to feed its own system. Deterritorialization, in contrast, ruptures the hold of a signifying system's central image and releases the lines to carve out new directions. Where these freed lines go is not something that is determined either by the past or by the future. The digressions in *Gravity's Rainbow* are just as likely to return to the rocket-structure as they are to absolutely leave its parabola. As in the Poisson distribution pattern: "the odds remain the same as they always were. Each hit is independent of all the others. Bombs are not dogs. No link. No memory. No

conditioning.” (GR 56). Each digression from the rocket, and here I'm thinking specifically of the fragmented narrative lines that appear and disappear in the novel's final section with no clear trail that determines why or how they materialize at the particular moments they do, defers the cataclysmic end and acts out a type of guerrilla warfare against the systems of power that the rocket embodies.

This first chapter's purpose is twofold. First, it discusses Pynchon's project, as the search for resistance to totality, in terms of a challenge to authority that coincides, at least thematically and historically, with the rise of post-structural literary theory. My contention here is that Pynchon enacts, by means of fiction, the very problematics that post-structural theory reveals.¹ In so doing, Pynchon participates in a meta-fictional or meta-critical language where theory and fiction are not mutually exclusive categories. Second, this chapter looks at *The Crying of Lot 49*, as the immediate predecessor of *Gravity's Rainbow*, in order to demonstrate a thematic link in the attempt to escape the totality of structure. However, the formal structure of *Lot 49* reproduces the very system it attempts to subvert when the multiplicity that Oedipa encounters becomes re-organized under the sign 'Tristero.' In *Gravity's Rainbow*, on the contrary, the rocket fails to contain the narrative lines with the result that the novel is able to create a multiplicity without re-imposing an absolute limitation. This discussion of *Lot 49* helps to illustrate the adage 'form is content' when it comes, in the following “digressions,” to the operation of digression as a strategic tool that is used against the image of the rocket.

To begin with Pynchon's fiction is to confront the question of authority. How is

¹ While this may be true of most of his novels, my use of his fiction refers to only *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973).

authority conceptualized? I am here calling attention to the inherent problematics of the term 'Pynchon's fiction' as both my own meta-critical strategy and as a means to demonstrate the difficulties involved in writing about a fiction that contests the authority of its own modes of production. The possessive form indicates that the fiction can be traced back to an owner, Pynchon. And further, this owner refers back to the image of a sovereign subject who stands outside and directs the language of the novels in order to communicate a complete experience or idea that is the object of the fiction. From this position as the creator, Pynchon becomes the origin that commands the signifying systems at work in the fiction. In other words, we find ourselves rapidly in a scenario where the fiction represents the writing subject or the author's unified vision. The fiction, then, occupies a secondary position in relation to the author and becomes important only as a marker of a greater depth contained within the author who precedes the written texts. When the fiction is the means of communicating Pynchon's idea analysis turns increasingly towards uncovering Pynchon's authentic voice as a force that governs how the novels can or should be read. It is this notion of privileging the author as the ultimate authority on the text that Barthes attacks: "the modern sriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*" (145). For Barthes, the author's position is nullified because it is unlocatable except in the writing itself. The writer 'Pynchon' or rather the absence of Pynchon exposes a new dimension to any critical engagement with the novels.

Pynchon's well-documented aversion to public appearance and the scarcity of details about his life necessitates a reading that encounters the texts themselves as the primary source.² In fact, Thomas Pynchon, in his removal from the public eye becomes an element of the fiction that is ascribed to that name. The author assumes the position of a textual construct who can only be re-created through what is laid out in the fiction. This construct can, of course, be known only in fragments as the paper trail thins without unveiling any sort of unified character behind the novels. I will use the term Pynchon, then, not as a reference to a subject who stands outside of discourse, but as an empty sign that signifies an open border and does not legislate the movement of language within the texts endowed under that name. But the problem becomes more complex when confronted with a character like Pierce Inverarity in *Lot 49* or Laszlo Jamf in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Inverarity's death, which signals the beginning of the novel, doubles this absent author when he writes the will that sets Oedipa on her quest to uncover the meaning of "Pierce's attempt to leave an organized something behind after his own annihilation" (*CL* 81). Her quest, however, produces more questions than answers and she realizes that "she could never again call back any image of the dead man to dress up, pose, talk to and make answer" (*CL* 178). Jamf occupies a similar position as the 'author' of Slothrop as a 'text' who has been manipulated in his infancy. But like Oedipa and the reader of Pynchon's fiction, Slothrop has no access to this mysterious entity except through documents and other people's narratives. When Slothrop ponders returning to America and his old life even Jamf, as a potential alternative route, no longer acts as the authority

2 For a short, early account of the enigma of the writer Thomas Pynchon see Matthew Winston, "The Quest for Thomas Pynchon" in *Mindful Pleasures* p.251-263.

of his own text: “Then there's Jamf, the coupling of 'Jamf' and 'I' in the primal dream. Who can he go to with *it*? [...] If he gets too close, there will be revenge. They might warn him first, They might not” (*GR* 623). The realization is that some power stands between the person, Jamf and the person, Slothrop. So Pynchon's absence as an authority, like those of Inverarity and Jamf, leaves the fiction adrift in a sea of language. Thus it no longer matters whether *any* voice in the fiction can be isolated as the authentic Pynchon voice, but rather the question that needs to be addressed is, to repeat after Foucault, “What are the modes of existence of this discourse?” (“What Is an Author?” 120). That is to say, how does the language of Pynchon's fiction operate in relation to other discourses as well as how does it maintain its own discursive structure? This analytic shift moves us from the question 'who authorizes' towards an examination of *how* authority manifests itself in the novels.

We are left, in this circumstance, with a body of writing provisionally marked off by the term 'Pynchon's fiction.' This term, however, appears to close down the way in which it can be analyzed. That is, as fiction. That Pynchon's texts have and continue to be categorized and marketed as novels or fiction is certainly a claim I will not dispute. But what I do want to suggest is that this label tends to confine the manner in which the works grouped under the Pynchon name can be put into play. Part of the problem of regarding 'Pynchon's fiction' as fiction is that these texts ceaselessly call into question their own status as 'fiction.' In other words, characters explicitly read their worlds as texts, and therefore as fictional plots, but as plots that question the process of signification that the 'fiction' enacts. Oedipa's dilemma surrounding the four symmetrical

alternatives at the end of *Lot 49* has more to do with the effects of choosing one over another than the truth of any one of the alternatives: “For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia” (*CL* 182). It is this self-reflexive strategy that makes, in a certain sense, the 'fiction' on par with contemporary theory in its endless problematization of its own modes of discourse.

The last twenty years of IG Pynchon³ have witnessed a concerted, if embattled, effort to bring contemporary literary theory into dialogue with Pynchon's fiction.⁴ McHoul and Wills take this notion of fiction as theory to an extreme when they “read Derrida's 'fictions' from the vantage of Pynchon's 'literary theory'” (11). Likewise, Berressem plays three specific theoretical models against Pynchon's texts in order to read the complexity of subjectivity: “Rather than read Pynchon within one specific theoretical framework, therefore, I center my investigation on a notion relevant to all three approaches” (*PP* 2). However, this technique, rather than flattening the text out into a dimension where the center is always under fire, re-establishes the concept of subjectivity (however it might be constructed) as the center around which a multitude of texts converge. In fact, Berressem's method, which focuses around the Lacanian notion of belatedness, re-institutes a means of containing the excess of *Gravity's Rainbow* by relegating it to a space that is irrecoverably lost as a presence, but will surface as a

3 “IG Pynchon” is common currency in Pynchon criticism to describe the industry that Pynchon's writing spawns.

4 *Pynchon Notes* 14 (1984) is a special issue devoted to Pynchon and deconstruction, but it is only in the early 90s that book length studies of Pynchon in relation to, or in terms of, contemporary literary theory begin to appear.

displacement in the symbolic realm. My contention here, following McHoul and Wills, is that there seems to be no reason to separate theory from fiction in Pynchon's fiction. So when I refer to either *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Lot 49* there is an implied reference to the theoretical impetus that the fiction generates in itself. But to suggest that the answers to the various questions Pynchon's fiction poses are held within the patterns of that particular fiction is once again to give this empty sign 'Pynchon,' even as a provisional textual limit, an authoritative position that governs the text. This would again put us in a position where Pynchon's theory can read Pynchon's novels and impose a self-contained referentiality that presupposes a textual unity where every challenge to its own authority is resolved in the text. Furthermore, while Pynchon's fiction certainly theorizes itself and this self-theorization works to problematize the notion that any theory can envelope the generative quality of the fiction, this does not lead to a theoretical dead end. On the contrary, it is this problematic and Pynchon's attempt to push through it that increases the call for further theorization as a productive aspect of the fiction. My use of 'Pynchon's fiction' as theory, then, opens the text into a larger discursive universe where theory is not an apparatus that frames the fiction, but rather exists within the same space while neither mode of writing emerges as the ultimate primary text.

It must be apparent by now how rapidly the object of Pynchon's fiction dissolves its own boundaries. Without a unified narrative voice or closed sense of where the writing grouped under the name Pynchon begins and ends, there is only its language. And it is precisely the terms by which we understand the function of language that animate the critical debates in IG Pynchon. For example, if Pynchon's fiction no longer

refers back to an author, Pynchon, but is an effect without a cause, a body of writing that persists without an origin, then at what point, if at all, can we say it refers back to anything except itself as language? The fear among certain scholars is that this construction of the self-referentiality of Pynchon's fiction draws us dangerously close to a formulation of language as a pure game without real consequences or a narcissism that abstracts the novel from a direct engagement with the social field. Rather what I suggest is that Pynchon's fiction, while certainly self-referential, does not remove itself from the social, but instead, implicates itself as both a product and producer of language as a primary social structure which forces a response that is "outside the economies of representation, assured failure, moralising judgment, and signification" (Nealon 167). It is this division or rupture in the idea of how language is thought that produces the question, that I believe, has directed critical work with regards to Pynchon's fiction: how can Pynchon be only self-referential when he incorporates a wealth of signifiers that retain a relationship with a signified that exists outside and even prior to his texts? In other words, how does this language function? For example, one might argue that in *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon uses language to describe historically documented events in a way that reveals an idea about the world. In fact, several critics highlight the referential value of Pynchon's style. Leverenz, after denouncing what he perceives as "a sermon that was, quite simply, wrong," goes on to praise Pynchon's "aching tenderness for natural description" (242, 244). Similarly, Berressem's post-structuralist reading confronts "the sheer physicality of objects and the words that describe them" (PP 9). The function of language, here, is representational and the value of Pynchon's fiction is the manner in

which it conveys a portrait of the world or a necessarily pre-existing idea about the world.

But there is another, perhaps irreducibly different, strain of thinking about how language operates that emerges out of French critical theory. For Derrida, the moment we engage in language, that is to say, the moment we use a system of signs, we encounter a rupture between the linguistic sign and the object it signifies: “The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, ‘thing’ here standing equally for meaning or referent” (9). Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari write of the redundancy of signification where “every sign refers to another sign, and only to another sign, ad infinitum” (*TP* 112). And, following a particularly Derridean lead, McHoul and Wills connect Pynchon to a view of language where “the meaning, the actual presence to which we wish to attach the utterance, always slips back into being another utterance” (8). To put the matter succinctly, Pynchon's novels are first and foremost textual constructs. When Oedipa pieces together an account of the origins of Tristero she does so “From obscure philatelic journals furnished her by Genghis Cohen, an ambiguous footnote in Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, an 80-year old pamphlet on the roots of modern anarchism, a book of sermons by Blobb's brother Augustine also among Bortz's Wharfingeriana, along with Blobb's original clues” (*CL* 158). Similarly, *Gravity's Rainbow* is believed to be written almost exclusively from textual sources. Obviously the time frame makes it so that Pynchon could never have experienced the events narrated and the stories must be reconstructed from other texts. In fact, Pynchon makes no secret of his habit of raiding other texts as the source of his own writing: “Loot the Baedeker I did, all the details of a time and place I had never been to, right down to the names of the

diplomatic corps” (“Introduction” 17). In this conception of language each source breaks out into a multiplicity in which there is no ultimate authority that governs its movement within Pynchon's texts.

Khachig Tölöyan first isolated the divergent critical endeavours in 1983: “One approach is concerned with the ways in which Pynchon solicits our attention towards the world as represented by his text; the other insists that the specifically literary problems of his texts are being ignored” (“Seven on Pynchon” 172). I would add that the 'specific literary problems' are also problems of engagement with totalizing structures in the social realm. Berressem's *Pynchon's Poetics*, in fact, attempts to synthesize these conflicting approaches to language in Pynchon while at the same time explaining Pynchon's texts as the expression of a primary idea.⁵ With the emergence of the gap that opens at Pynchon's disappearance as a figure who governs the fiction comes a critical push to at least make the empty sign, Pynchon, represent some concept, some signified outside the writing.⁶ To turn Pynchon's fiction back towards a frame of reference that exists before its language is certainly an attempt to establish an organization within the text, but in so doing we return a sense of primacy to the signified in the construction of the sign. As Saussure demonstrates, however, in his conceptualization of linguistics as a science, “There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language” (112). While Saussure emphasizes the importance of the overarching structures of language, the

5 See Berressem page 12 note 10 for his indebtedness to Kölöyan's call for a means to stop the bifurcation of Pynchon studies. See also Kölöyan article “Seven on Pynchon: The Novelist as Deconstructionist”

6 See Bérubé's comments on “the *boundlessness* of the critical project” which “threatens not merely our narrative conception of 'representation' but a canonical or cultural one as well. That is, even if Pynchon is represented on a syllabus of American, twentieth-century, or postmodern literature, it is not clear what *he* represents—and we can make him represent practically anything we want” (303).

suggestion that language orders thought results in the primacy of the sign, a unification of the signified and the signifier, as an organizing principle. And it is precisely this supposed primacy of the sign that is undercut by what has come to be known as the post-structuralist movement that envisions the sign as an entity that is never in-and-of-itself a complete object.

The post-structuralist conception of the sign, as form that can never fully replace its object, challenges the sign's position of authority by attacking both the notion that the sign itself is a unified entity and the idea that there exists a transcendental signified that remains untouched by discourse. It is in this sense that, for Deleuze and Guattari, dominant language is the attempt to contain a flow that proceeds like a rhizome, as an “acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states” (*TP* 21). Bérubé asserts, in his assessment of IG Pynchon, that “playing games without established rules is alternately fun and appalling, and culture abhors the vacuum consequent upon the author's disappearance” (305). This testimony closely aligns itself to Baudrillard's suggestion that the loss of the real quickly results in a “Panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material production” (7). In fact, it is Baudrillard's theory of simulation, where the sign is endlessly referring back to a model that makes the model precede the reality to which it supposedly refers, is often taken as a clear marker of the postmodern.⁷ At times, indeed, such theoretical work becomes the end of critical practice in its refusal to acknowledge

⁷ See Baudrillard's essay “The Precession of Simulacra.” in *Simulacra and Simulation* p1-42

any difference between a reality and its simulation. It is this desire to prevent Pynchon's fiction from being read as purely self-referential or contained within language as abstraction and thus only of any importance to a select few engaged in the study of models of literary aesthetics that drives Berressem's attempt to interface the fiction, as a series of texts that represent a world of subjectivity, with literary theory.⁸ My question, with regards to this reading position, is to what extent is this not another means of restoring a form of consciousness, that of meta-writing, as the legislating force of the text? What makes reading Pynchon's fiction so difficult is not just that his novels deconstruct themselves, but rather that the process of constructing signifying systems without an ultimate truth that authorizes them and the effects of these systems of signification are a foregrounded element of the fiction itself.⁹ It is not simply that there is an absence of authority to Pynchon's fiction; instead, it is this absence that fuels the search for an authority, for “the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night” as the consuming drive of the narrative threads (*CL* 118). The object of this search, however, is constantly deferred. So even when Tchitcherine reaches the Kirghiz Light it fails to reveal any higher order of being:

Tchitcherine will reach the Kirghiz Light, but not his birth.
He is no aqyn, and his heart was never ready. He will see It
just before dawn. He will spend 12 hours then, face-up on
the desert, a prehistoric city greater than Babylon lying in

8 To a certain extent we can say the same of Mattessich's *Lines of Flight* in its “theoretically saturated close readings of Pynchon's major works seen as exemplars of a postwar schizophrenia” (10). Mattessich's reading seems to employ contemporary theory as a tool to explain the historical moment or I might say 'significance' of Pynchon's texts.

9 In this respect every text contains already the seeds of its own deconstruction. McHoul and Wills' make the observation that “After all, Barthes did not wait upon the invitation of something like *Gravity's Rainbow* to explore a more radical form of intervention into the text on the part of the reader. He wrote about a classic realist text. Further: Derrida finds his targets anywhere on the line from Plato to Sollers” (51).

stifled mineral sleep a kilometer below his back, as the shadow of the tall rock, rising to a point, dances west to east and Džaqyp Qulan tends him, anxious as a child and doll, and drying foam laces the necks of the two horses. But someday, like the mountains, like the young exiled women in their certain love, in their innocence of him, like the morning earthquakes and the cloud-driving wind, a purge, a war, and millions after millions of souls gone behind him, he will hardly be able to remember It.

But in the Zone, hidden inside the summer Zone, the Rocket is waiting. He will be drawn the same way again . . .
(GR 359)

The Kirghiz Light is the direct manifestation of some ultimate or final truth, “a place where words are unknown” and where “the face of God is a presence / Behind the mask of the sky,” that will reveal itself only to be forgotten and picked up again in the image of the rocket (GR 358). The text's own preoccupation with determining the cause of its signifying systems, in fact, produces effects that cannot be merely side-stepped as a distraction or barrier to a greater Truth that the text reveals: “No, ace, it is *not* a barrier. If it is anything it's a kind of leakage” (Pynchon, “Entropy” 90). It is this play or interaction between the quest for an authoritative force that would ensure closure as a unified text and the deferral of this moment that moves both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Lot 49*.

The quest for authority takes shape, in *Lot 49*, in Oedipa Maas' reading the will of her ex-boyfriend, “one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million dollars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough” (CL 9). Oedipa's emergence into San Narciso calls to her mind the printed circuit of a transistor radio and the narrator notes that “in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding” (CL 24). The revelation,

which is constructed as a possibility, will transcend the printed circuit, that is, the language or the code, in order to give the scene meaning. It is the potential of this revelation, what we might call the transcendental signified, that saves the patterns from falling into the state of meaninglessness for Oedipa. Somewhere, something exists that can establish order in the encryptions. The novel invokes the idea of a master sign that frees itself from the fabric of language in which it is woven, as though language veils a truth of unmediated experience. This sustained expectation of the unification of signifier and signified crystalizes around Oedipa's quest to 'uncover' the meaning of the linguistic sign 'Tristero.' All the signs point towards a Tristero that acts as the key-word to the mysterious order of Inverarity's will and potentially beyond that individual, an entire system of opposition that develops, unseen, but alongside the capitalist system from its origins in sixteenth century Europe to twentieth century United States. What must be recalled, however, is that Tristero never gets pared down to a singularity: "With coincidences blossoming these days wherever she looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word, Tristero, to hold them all together" (*CL* 109). The presumption that the text dangles in front of the reader, like Metzger's offer of a wager, is first that Tristero has significance and second that its significance will be definitively made clear.

Lot 49, however, never reveals its end, or rather never clarifies the sign 'Tristero' in a way that organizes the multiple signs that assemble in variable relations with it. This deferred presence at the heart of the novel's signifying system becomes the point around which early critics attempt to reconstruct Tristero from its signs. The trouble with these critical ventures to 'explain' the ambiguity of *Lot 49* is that they seek a meaning that

transcends the text. That is to say, they assume the novel's significance reflects a larger truth that inhabits a space in the 'real' world. Deborah Madsen notes this pattern of a critical presence that illuminates the textual world: "This sense of something 'other' than or alien to Oedipa's accustomed perceptions, and her belief that this excess must be meaningful, encourages Pynchon's critics to seek for themselves a metaphysical and pretextual explanation" (56). For Kolodny and Peters: "The Tristero is at once another dimension of consciousness and a truer means of communication. And as such it reflects a very real response to the betrayal so many of us now feel when once we had dared dream of the legacy of America" (86). This reading highlights how the novel's critical production needs 'Tristero' to signify something unified. It also exemplifies Baudrillard's claim that in a world where signifiers refer back to a plurality of signifieds, meaning takes shape as "the object of a social *demand*" and therefore is not attached to any real world of production, except as a simulation (26). Edward Mendelson, on the other hand, adds up the signs of Tristero to read it as the manifestation of a sacred order that can only exist in a relationship of faith that demands a conscious decision to join this community beyond the visible through the metaphor. To this, however, we must add Schaub's warning that those who accept the metaphor "are severely undercut by the narrator" (31). For Mendelson, the aspect of belief accounts for the unresolved ending: "with the 'true' nature of Tristero never established: a manifestation of the sacred can only be believed in; it can never be proved beyond doubt" (135). This leap of faith requires that one understand metaphor as an expression of truth rather than an arbitrary similarity. Oedipa raises this question to Nefastis: "But what,' she felt like some kind of a heretic, 'if the Demon exists

only because the two equations look alike? Because of the metaphor?" (CL 106). To believe in the power of metaphor as the expression of truth is to submit to an authority that is never completely present in the novel. In fact, it is precisely this presence, conceived in the sign 'Tristero,' that is consistently deferred through metaphor into other channels and knowable only as a multiplicity that never re-assembles as a totality.

Nevertheless, *Lot 49* pushes this unifying presence as the promise of escape from a terrifyingly random or arbitrary world. It whispers softly "among the dial's ten million possibilities" that the answer lies in front of us if only we had access to the magic Word that unlocks its mystery (CL 180). But as Tony Thwaites points out the novel itself "serves only to make indeterminate" the reality upon which it rests (86). While the text, in a sense, mimics random production, it does so only because there is a search for order. The more we try to clarify it as a complete entity, to make it signify, the more it breaks down. For example, *The Courier's Tragedy*, a theatrical production that acts, for Oedipa, as the origin of her (missed?) encounter with Tristero should produce a metonymic model that reinforces the role of Tristero in the larger structure of the novel. However, it is precisely this expectation that the play within the novel parodies. When the letter written by the evil duke Angelo miraculously transforms into "the revelation of what really happened to the Lost Guard of Faggio" it comes about as the direct action of Tristero which had up to this moment in the performance remained itself an enigmatic entity (CL 74). The three Tristero figures murder Niccòlo at the behest of Angelo which causes the mingling of blood where "innocence with innocence is joined" and produces the miracle (CL 74). It is, in other words, the revelation of Tristero that makes the miracle possible; a

proposition that repeats the promise of the novel. Find the significance that transcends the sign 'Tristero' and the signs of *Lot 49* will organize around that concept in a way that opens the door for a reading of a single signifying system within the novel itself. What makes *Lot 49* problematic is that the master sign is empty and, unless we are to read the novel around the concept of emptiness, which draws us back into a formulation of language as a game that plays exclusively with itself, there must be another way to read this text. Deleuze and Guattari's model of the rhizome, because it operates without a single root that grounds it in a particular location, opens the door to a reading that accounts for both the movement towards signification as closure and flight from this closure. Reterritorialization, or the attempt to re-establish a central authority, enacts a coding process that gives meaning to a hierarchical social field by stopping the lines of flight that escape its coding. A line of flight necessarily implies a block and a block implies an escape; they are not opposed: "the two systems of references [deterritorialization and reterritorialization] are in inverse relation to each other, in the sense that the first eludes the second, or the second arrests the first, prevents it from flowing further, but at the same time, they are strictly complementary and coexistent" (*TP* 220). So instead of saying that *Lot 49* centers around an absence, we could say that there is no center, or that the center is always deferred, which means that Oedipa "might have found The Tristero anywhere in her Republic, through any of a hundred lightly-concealed entranceways, a hundred alienations, if only she'd looked" (*CL* 179). By reading *Lot 49* as the perpetual struggle between lines that are caught up in a moment of signification and lines that flee the attempt to make them signify according to a unified idea, it

becomes possible to examine how this novel plays with its own structural organization as a means to question the authority of dominant social and political realities.

The loss of an ultimate presence that governs *Lot 49* is a blow to the signifying order that makes the organization of its reality teeter on the verge of meaninglessness. But it also stimulates a new strategy by preventing a recourse to a master sign. *Lot 49*, rather than representing a world, severs the link between the signifier and the signified as a mode of experimentation that calls into question the way language structures our experience of the world. Meaning threatens to escape through that gap between Tristero and its signified. At the same time, we can no longer conceive of this gap as a gap, but rather as the removal of a block that allows the signifier, Tristero, to move through contexts that appear to establish a connection between a revolutionary movement against monopoly in sixteenth century Europe to a contemporary underground resistance to capitalist America. Since Tristero can only be understood in relation to other signs that simultaneously take its place and construct it as something different from what it is, it becomes impossible to determine whether the connection is only linguistic or whether it transcends language. When Oedipa queries the showering Randolph Driblette about his use of the word 'Tristero', he replies: "if I were to dissolve in here [...] be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish too [...] The only residue in fact would be things Wharfinger didn't lie about [...] But they would be traces, fossils. Dead, mineral, without value or potential" (CL 80). The irony of a statement that condemns the writing that *Lot 49* produces can hardly go unnoticed; however, it is a sentiment that, in its serious implications is brought up during Oedipa's initial encounter

with Bortz. When she asks about “the historical Wharfinger” he responds:

“[...] they're dead. What's left?”

“Words.”

“Pick some words,” said Bortz. “Them, we can talk about.” (*CL* 151)

The only way to understand Tristero is through more signs, that are not in-and-of-themselves total entities. The muted post horn and WASTE both relate back to Tristero, but they both make the ground in which Tristero rests unstable.

The WASTE postal system operates, in effect, like a reterritorialized sign of Tristero, but it also is involved in a process of deterritorialization. That is to say, even though WASTE comes together as a tangible postal system, “With her own eyes [Oedipa] had verified a WASTE system,” it passes through all segments of society (*CL* 132). As a communication line it connects different realms of the social field, but as a line of flight it reveals the irreconcilable micropolitics of difference or of a source that exceeds the sign's ability to contain it. WASTE has no political vision, only heterogeneity that refuses to be completely controlled. It circulates through disgruntled Yoyodyne engineers and exiled anarchists. As Oedipa trails the WASTE carrier “across Market then over toward City Hall,” to Oakland where he moves “into slums and out,” where “one by one his sack of letters emptied” it becomes apparent that this distribution cuts across all social lines of distinction (*CL* 130). Participation in the WASTE distribution system is a line of flight that eludes U.S Mail's (as a branch of the institution or structure of America) ability to contain the movement of communication. Oedipa “remembered drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in” (*CL* 180).

The decision to opt out of the official channel “was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private” (*CL* 124). Tristero or WASTE moves into a micropolitical realm not as an alternative system, but as an anti-system that must face the continued threat of being re-inscribed within the very structure of signs that it seeks to escape.

In fact, Tristero, the muted post horn and WASTE are all connected: “an old American stamp, bearing the device of the muted post horn, belly up badger, and the motto: WE AWAIT SILENT TRISTERO'S EMPIRE” (*CL* 168-169). These signs, however, only open up to more signs. So while Tristero signifies in one sense an alternative to America, it is also apparent that “Every access route to the Tristero could be traced also back to the Inverarity estate” (*CL* 170). Similarly, the muted post horn stands in for Tristero, the Inamorati Anonymous and a kid's game where “you stepped alternately in the loop, the bell, and the mute, while your girlfriend sang: Tristoe, Tristoe, one, two, three, / Turning taxi from across the sea . . .” (*CL* 118-119). In which case the language attached to the post horn, that is Thurn and Taxis, also undergoes a mutation. In addition, WASTE is simultaneously an underground mail route and the refuse of capitalist America. While Koteks tells Oedipa: “It's W.A.S.T.E., lady [...] an acronym, not 'waste',” this does not prevent us from reading the people associated with the WASTE postal system as disinherited and without social value within a dominant capitalist structure (*CL* 87-88). In other words, those aligned with WASTE are an excess and need to be

removed from the system in order to perpetuate new production. They are, in one sense, what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the scapegoat who is

charged with everything that was “bad” in a given period, that is, everything that resisted signifying signs, everything that eluded the referral from sign to sign through the different circles; it also assumes everything that was unable to recharge the signifier at its center and carries off everything that spills beyond the outermost circle. (*TP* 116)

This element of social trash, as Oedipa notes, “could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate silent, unsuspected world” (*CL* 124-125).

Tristero, as a sign implicated in a chain of signifiers, also exists in this deterritorialized site that is simultaneously abstracted and connected to the idea of an alternative underground through its name, Tristero.

What becomes clear is not that one is true and one is false, but that the movement of the signifier constructs a social field that is inherently unstable. There is no essence, only more signs that attempt to impose an order on a deterritorialized force. The interaction of a deterritorialized and reterritorialized sign implicates each side of the binary in the other. Thus without the failure of the American Dream there is no Tristero alternative, but also the contrary: without Tristero, there is “just America” (*CL* 182). What emerges, then, is the impossibility of a total system, either official or Tristero, because they are both subject to the order of signification. A tendency to privilege one term over the other, in this view, is a form of power that constructs a system in a way that seeks to erase what it stands upon, but faces the impossibility of doing so because the structure needs the other as a foundation. Thus what in *Lot 49* comes across as ambiguity is an opening that exposes a power relation necessary for the maintenance of American

consumer capitalism. For example, if America, as an imposition of order, and Tristero, as an “anarchist miracle,” are two opposing poles, then Tristero must be framed in a way that makes sense to the system, that is, as an alternative that threatens the Republic (*CL* 120). However, it is the framing of Tristero as an alternative that ultimately makes its signification problematic when it encounters the WASTE postal system. As Oedipa notes, WASTE appears to connect a heterogeneous group via subterranean mail routes and fraudulent stamps: “Last night, she might have wondered what undergrounds apart from the couple she knew of communicated by WASTE system. By sunrise she could legitimately ask what undergrounds didn't” (*CL* 124). But it also does more. WASTE, as we have seen, exposes difference. This organization of signs implicates America as a power dependent upon its ability to marginalize elements of its own social body, in a concealment of its own fictional status as a totality. In other words, Inverarity's capitalist America needs to create and then maintain a degree of disinherited people to keep the vision of itself alive.

This operation of power, where America organizes itself according to a program of exclusion, remains intact at the end of *Lot 49*. By grouping the various threads that resist the structure of institutional America under the sign 'Tristero', the aspect of heterogeneity which is the very thing that threatens America is effectively caught up in the same structure it seeks to subvert. The way out of Oedipa's dilemma, that is, facing the world without an authorizing force, without some force that sanctions her decision, is blocked. Now presumably this is not what Pynchon had in mind when he debases his work by proclaiming that he seems “to have forgotten most of what I thought I'd learned

up till then,” but it does point to a difference in the narrative strategies employed between this novel and his next, *Gravity's Rainbow* (“Introduction” 22). Thematically, they are both linked in the search for and flight from a total structure that would authorize action. But formally, when the potential resistance in *Lot 49* points back to the sign 'Tristero', we witness a reterritorialization, which means that only those elements of the social field connected to Tristero can prove to be a 'counterforce' to that of the dominant American political landscape. Anything that eludes Tristero would be either made to conform or relegated to an even further distance from the centers of power. Whether Tristero or America maintains dominance makes little actual difference to the operation of power because the binary remains intact thus keeping the multiplicity in check. This becomes a fissure in the continuity of the two novels. *Lot 49* contains the force of multiplicity by channeling it back into Tristero and continues to operate within a dialectic where opposition to a dominant power is a direct confrontation. In contrast, *Gravity's Rainbow*, as we shall see in the following “digressions”, unleashes narrative digressions that prevent its reduction to a unified text by challenging the notion that the central image of the rocket can maintain control over the flight of the novel. In other words, *Gravity's Rainbow* problematizes the idea that a total system, like that of the rocket, can be resisted through a binary structure. Indeed, escape from a totally contained system becomes possible only when the binary structure that limits choice to either the rocket or its opposite, a complete absence, is abandoned. *Gravity's Rainbow* adopts a mode of opposition that counters totalizing systems through the rhizomatic growth of its digressions. These digressions, which are lines of flight that move both in and out of

structures, force the dominant sign or image like the rocket or even Slothrop to follow them outside the binary structure and as a result transform this structure from a mechanism of control into an uncontrollable growth of multiplicity.

Digression One

Keeping Hold of the Narratives: The Rocket as an Empty Image

"Novelists may wish to indulge the worst kinds of totalitarian whims directed against the freedom of their characters. But often as not, they scheme in vain, for characters always manage to evade one's all seeing eye long enough to think thoughts and utter dialogue one could never have come up with if plot were all there were"

**---Thomas Pynchon
"Foreword to 1984"**

"A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work"

**---Jean-François Lyotard
The Postmodern Condition**

On route through the Jamf Ölfabriken Werke AG refinery ruins with his comrades, Andreas and Christian, to track down Josef Ombindi, leader of the Empty Ones faction of the Zone-Hereros, in order to prevent him from ending Christian's sister, Maria's pregnancy, Enzian, aided by the stimulant Pervitin, speculates on the relationship between the Schwarzkommando and the rocket.

Say that's our real Destiny, to be the scholar-magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it's all squeezed limp of its last drop . . . well we assumed—

natürlich!—that this holy Text had to be the Rocket [...] Its symmetries, its latencies, the *cuteness* of it enchanted and seduced us while the real Text persisted, somewhere else, in its darkness, our darkness . . . even this far from Südwest we are not to be spared the ancient tragedy of lost messages, a curse that will never leave us . . . (GR 520)

Enzian's meditation on the "Text" (which should be understood as an appearance of the message or meaning that underlies the structural production of its form or image) and its elaborate set-up demonstrates one instance of the deeply layered narrative style that characterizes *Gravity's Rainbow*. While Enzian's musings insinuate that this "Text" exists outside the image of the rocket, it must be noted that these drug induced thoughts surface through the mediated lens of an internal political conflict that threatens the existence of the Zone-Hereros and only at the expense of the more immediate struggle to save Maria's baby. But these contemplations rest on at least three assumptions that I believe my reading and the novel itself problematize: (i) there is a 'real,' objective text that exists outside the process of its own production, (ii) there is only one such text or true path that will unravel the many systems of signification in the world, and finally (iii) this real text subjects all the other texts (or heresies, to adopt a Pynchonian language) to its rule. In other words, in this passage the search for the underlying significance of the rocket (which includes Enzian's speculations to the contrary) occupies a central position that supersedes the cultural survival of the Zone-Hereros as well as the personal dynamics between individuals.

The problems generated by Enzian's questions about the "text" in *Gravity's Rainbow* operate as meta-fiction and, as such, cannot be thought of as separate from the "text" of *Gravity's Rainbow* or the rocket's status as an image that binds the multiple

narrative lines together.¹⁰ We could equally ask, what if the rocket, despite its appearance as the master sign or image that bestows meaning to the novel's plots, is a distraction from the real text of *Gravity's Rainbow*? But where would this "real text" be located? Leo Bersani points to this very problem when he suggests that the novel replicates a paranoid structure which would have the rocket as a distraction from the working of international cartels. Except that the paranoia doesn't stop there: "We can't resolve the issue simply by saying that Pynchon's 'real' subject is how his characters are victimized by that deception, and that in order to read *that* text the reader has to be set straight about the true center of historical power. For in fact the presumed real historical text is as obscure to us as it is to Enzian" (106). I think, however, that if the novel's 'true' center is inaccessible, it is at least plausible to suggest that the rocket, as an image that incorporates into itself a desire for dominance and control as well as a desire to submit to the rocket's authority as an escape from this control, constructs a particular signifying system with itself at the center. In fact, the rocket acts as the single image that connects the narrative lines that follow Enzian, Slothrop, Blicero, Franz Pökler, Katje and Tchitcherine, to name only a few. It functions as an overarching plot whose unfolding appears to order the sub(ordinate)-plots. Whether this image and the system it engenders is the "real text" seems to be itself a distraction, not from the "real text," but from a more productive line of inquiry. McHoul and Wills, in their critique of Brian McHale's "hang-up with readers having to reconstruct what 'really' happened from what a character

¹⁰ My reference to 'narrative lines' is similar to what Fran Mason calls "pure narrativity" (168) or "acausal narrative" (169) in that they are moments of narrative that are never complete. I retain 'line' as a gesture towards the affinity this word has with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome which becomes an important difference between Mason's essay and my own argument in the next "digression."

dreamed, hallucinated, etc." shift the focus of criticism from what is real to an emphasis on the specific "discursive operations" within the text (49).¹¹ It is my intention in this "digression" to follow the rocket as an image that, like 'Tristero' in my introduction, attempts to reterritorialize the heterogeneous narrative lines within itself in order to demonstrate that, unlike 'Tristero,' the rocket cannot hold the multiple lines together because they never come together as a single image or totality that would challenge it head-on. In its centrality, then, the image of the rocket operates as a master narrative that, in its attempt to explain, glosses over the inconsistencies and fragmented form of the novel in order to impose its structure as a deeper truth.¹² The rocket, as a putative master narrative, appears to weave the multiple narrative lines into one unified text or plot through a process of self-legitimation. That is to say, the system that makes the rocket possible (and here the question of what exactly constitutes this 'system' would be a primary focus of the novel) saves us from succumbing to an apocalyptic vision of the rocket's repeated fall without any hope of reprieve by positing itself as the means of transcendental escape. The novel's excess becomes part of the novel's coherence only when the rocket and its significance are revealed.

11 See McHale's article "Modernist Reading Post-Modern Text: The Case of *Gravity's Rainbow*" where he states "the reader, invited to reconstruct a 'real' scene or action in the novel's fictive world, is forced in retrospect – sometimes in long retrospect – to 'cancel' the reconstruction he has made, and to relocate it within a character's dream, hallucination, or fantasy" (86).

12 Many commentators use master narrative and metanarrative interchangeably. Lyotard and Niall Lucy employ the term 'meta'; Hutcheon and Fredric Jameson, both in reference to Lyotard use the 'master' prefix. I think, however, there is a subtle difference. While they both refer back to themselves as their own source of authority, 'master' evokes the tyranny, not only of one who owns, but one who has his way and is able to order (signifying both command and organization) the slaves. 'Meta,' on the other hand, does not necessarily refer back to itself in a relation of dominance. That is to say, it retains a suggestion of escaping the totality through satire or parody or pointing out its own weaknesses. While something of the sort can certainly be said to be going on in the relation between 'Pynchon' and *Gravity's Rainbow*, this is not at all how the rocket functions as an object within the novel. This is why I deliberately choose the term master narrative to describe the rocket.

The search for a master narrative, which is embodied in the image of the rocket, takes form in a pendulous movement. At one extreme the master narrative attempts to posit itself as the unifying factor that will provide salvation for an already fractured world. On the other extreme there is the fear that it is precisely the master narrative in its all-encompassing presence that sucks the life blood out of the text's multiplicities, leaving nothing but the structure behind. The simultaneity of this polarized vision characterizes the critical work that confronts the narrative structure of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Neil Schmitz identifies a juxtaposition of two narrative branches that are attached to Slothrop and Blicero respectively. Slothrop's line offers chaos while Blicero's brings about an icy determinism: "where Slothrop's plot-line is fouled with numerous plots, comically entangled with questions, false identities, doppelgangers, lost lovers, vindictive enemies, strewn with surreal episodes, Blicero moves steadily and surely toward his appointed goal" (Schmitz 122). Molly Hite also addresses this same issue of a dual imperative within the narratives. She locates one strain of narrative where "the V-2 acts as both a totalizing principle and the principle dooming the totality to destruction" (106). In her argument Hite claims that the world of *Gravity's Rainbow* has already fallen, that is to say, the primal unity, whether Eden or an undifferentiated unconsciousness, is irrecoverably lost. How this fall takes shape is the exploration of the novel. She writes: "If the increasing multiplicity of experience indicates how far this experience is from primal unity, it also suggests that this experience may not ultimately cohere in structures favoring death" (115). On one hand, there is a nostalgic sense of loss that dreams of a master narrative (death) that would provide closure, while on the other hand this same

nostalgia produces the need to embrace "a universe out of control" because it "is at least not committed to a determinate end" (115). Mason sums up these opposed strategies that envelop the novel: "one is predicated on symmetrical connections, typical of the unity created by a realist novel, while the other maps a picaresque story that constantly displaces itself through digression" (171). The search for a master narrative, in the text, oscillates between the desire for order and the desire for freedom from its own desire for order.

Despite this oscillation between a closed and open conception of narrative, the common consensus in IG Pynchon seems to be that *Gravity's Rainbow* invokes this search for a master narrative only as the object of its critique of systems or master narratives. The paradox that arises when the novel repeats the pattern of dominance it critiques, however, highlights a crucial problematic in terms of the operation of the social and political economy within the novel. If, as I have argued in the introduction, the text cannot appeal to a force that stands outside its own system of difference as a point of origin or reference, in what sense can *Gravity's Rainbow* engage in any sort of critique without reproducing the very structures and modulations of power that are its object? That is to say, the novel runs the risk of (re)producing a system of signification from which there is no escape. The question of how to read Pynchon's fiction without capitulating to a feeling of inevitability that fosters political and social apathy is nothing new in Pynchon studies. Since the publication of *V.*, the novels produced under the name Pynchon have been alternately derided and lauded with reference to a strain of apocalyptic determinacy. Robert Alter situates *V.* with other contemporary novels like

Invisible Man, *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Catch-22* where "One might characterize the mode of fiction [...] as a picaresque version of the apocalypse" (61). Paul Maltby, more recently, argues that *Gravity's Rainbow* represents a world where resistance is futile because every attempt to break free of the totality becomes co-opted as part of the totality. The contained system that Pynchon describes, "appears to be endowed with, precisely, a *systemic* logic; that is to say, it is believed to function as a self-regulating whole, *all* of whose parts are interrelated as compatible subsystems" (Maltby 150). This system is additionally contained because "Alternative and oppositional tendencies are not only effortlessly absorbed by the System, they are understood to sustain it" (161). In order to broach this problem of whether the image of the rocket (which it must be recalled subsumes both movement towards and movement away from its image) becomes a master narrative that structures the systems of signification within the novel to the extent that it binds the multiple narratives together into a single, unified whole, I will frame this discussion around the narrative lines that attach Slothrop to the rocket.

Rather than trying to find the true 'text' or sovereign ground that sanctions the multiple narratives, it is my contention that narrative in *Gravity's Rainbow* is always destabilized and continually flows towards an outside of what it seeks to contain or make signify, thereby calling into question any kind of authoritative figure. This problematization becomes an important aspect of the text because every time a center is located it produces a central authority, whether rocket-cartel, nation-state or individual, that legitimizes all forms of social action in a manner that reinforces that central authority. The purpose of examining the way narrative lines flow through Slothrop

towards the image of the rocket is to expose an emptiness at the heart of the signifying system that seeks to control the text. This absence of authority functions not only to dispel the notion that the rocket can hold the heterogeneous narratives together, but also to establish the idea that there is no center anywhere in the novel. Through this discussion of the narrative lines that attach Slothrop to the rocket, this chapter explores how the rocket, as an empty image, functions as a power marker that assembles the different narrative lines around itself as a form of self-legitimation.

At this point I must intervene in my own text to address a potential problem with the strategy of reading Slothrop's (or any character's) narrative line that I adopt in this "digression." An investigation of narrative lines as they follow characters risks the implication that these narratives are themselves complete plots which can be privileged over the master narrative of the rocket. This position, however, would fall back on a premise that there is a sovereign subject who can either resist or lead; that is to say, an autonomous self who continues to function, through a volition independent of the larger social structure in which he/she is embedded, either for or against that structure. While the 'problem' that Pynchon's fiction remains "incapable of creating real characters" is outdated, it nevertheless points to a mode of narrative significantly different from a modernist tradition (perhaps best characterized by Joyce, Proust or Woolf) that meditates on the depths of consciousness (Levine and Leverenz 5). As Mendelson articulates in the early days of IG Pynchon: "In [Pynchon's] books, character is less important than the network of relations existing either between characters, or between characters and social and historical patterns of meaning" (5). It would certainly be no stretch to suggest that

the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* are produced inside a structure of "multinational and transnational industries and financial corporations" that "tend to make nations-states merely instruments to record the flows of the commodities, monies, and populations that they set in motion" (Hardt and Negri 31). This does not mean, however, that they are merely nodal points that act as street signs to a larger idea. Despite claims to the contrary, Pynchon's narratives are not allegorical, for as McHoul and Wills point out: "the allegorical [...] is the mode of writing or reading in which one thing stands for another – where the literary figure, for example, stands for some (usually intangible) presence such as love, pity or hope"(15).¹³ To understand the narratives as such is to give them a territory or stable ground from which to act authoritatively by channeling the narrative flows in a particular direction: towards the image of the rocket or towards themselves as unified characters. In fact, as McHoul and Wills demonstrate, the indeterminacy that saturates the novel makes understanding it through the point of view of a contained character impossible: "if characters are not based on the idea of separate and unique biological, psychological, or social personages, then one could easily make a case for recounting the narrative from the point of view of, say, Impiplex G, as much a node in the grid, or a thread in the weave, of the story as 'someone' like its creator Jamf. Not to mention the rocket" (33). I should make it clear that my reference to the character, Slothrop, is more as an intersection of narrative lines, "a crossroad," than a sovereign

¹³ For examples of Pynchon's fiction as postmodern allegory see Deborah Madsen's *The Postmodern Allegories of Thomas Pynchon* and Maureen Quilligan's *The Language of Allegory*. In fact, Pynchon's texts are often referred to as utilizing allegorical figures. Bersani: "[*Gravity's Rainbow*] allegorizes a substratum in personal and historical narratives" (116); Hite: "Slothrop's decline becomes an allegory for the tendency of things to fall apart as civilization accelerates the universal entropic process" (118); Hutcheon: "Pynchon allegorizes otherness in *Gravity's Rainbow* through the single, if anarchic, 'we-system' that exists as the counterforce of the totalizing 'They-system'" (6).

being (*GR* 626).

While my choice of the 'Slothrop' line is somewhat arbitrary, in that an equal case (if space and time were not considerations) could be built around Enzian, Blicero or a host of other characters, there is certainly an interesting relationship between Slothrop's dissolution and the novel's refusal to come together as a unified object.¹⁴ The first picture of the American lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop comes veiled through an image of his ACHTUNG desk as it stands opposed to his British colleague Lt. Oliver Macker-Maffick's (aka Tantivy) cleanliness: "a godawful mess. It hasn't been cleaned down to the original wood surface since 1942. Things have fallen roughly into layers" (*GR* 18). Next, there is a strange map of London with a correspondence of coloured stars and women's names that Teddy Bloat photographs in black and white for someone who remains, at our initial encounter, hidden from both Bloat and the reader. Of course, the reader learns later that Roger Mexico and Ned Pointsman are the direct beneficiaries of the photos, through a transmission by Pirate Prentice, whose affinity "for getting inside the fantasies of others: being able, actually, to take over the burden of *managing* them" lands him a role as an agent for the Firm (*GR* 12).¹⁵ Coincidentally, or not, this map matches Mexico's map that charts the pattern of V-2 rockets exploding on London: "The two patterns also happen to be identical. They match up square for square. The slides that Teddy Bloat's been taking of Slothrop's map have been projected onto Roger's and the two images, girl-stars and rocket-strike circles, demonstrated to coincide" (*GR* 85-86). Our interest in

14 But if we need an additional reason then consider the chapter headings "Beyond the Zero," "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering," "In the Zone" and "The Counterforce" which make explicit reference to his 'privileged' status within the novel.

15 The Firm is an omnipresent agency whose authority, like the Court in Kafka's *The Trial* or Hardt and Negri's conception of empire, appears to be both total and absent.

Slothrop, in the larger context of the novel, becomes embroiled with the nature of his relation to the rocket. How do we explain the maps, chance or cause and effect? And later the attempt, shared with Slothrop's own quest, to understand the power that manifests itself in the rocket structure becomes a focus of the narrative line as it passes through Slothrop. The point is that the map begins to signify a relationship with the rocket; it suggests that somewhere in these markings there exists a link between the rocket and the stars that explains this apparent random occurrence, an occurrence in which even the pure statistician Mexico "feels the foundation of that discipline trembling a bit now" (*GR* 85). This process of making the map signify glosses over entire tracts of information that the novel likewise glosses. In response to Bloat's "casual questions" about the map, Tantivy relates that it is

"Some sort of harmless Yank hobby [...] Perhaps it's to keep track of them all. He does lead rather a complicated social life," thereupon going into the story of Lorraine and Judy, Charles the homosexual constable and the piano in the pantechnicon, or the bizarre masquerade involving Gloria and her nubile mother, a quid wager on the Blackpool-Preston North End game, a naughty version of "Silent Night," and a providential fog. But none of these yarns, for the purposes of those Bloat reports to, are really very illuminating. . . .
(*GR* 19)

The varied 'yarns' that are never complete stories and that have nothing to do with the rocket are placed under erasure or excluded from the novel's significance. The totality of this erasure, however, is contested by the mere mention of these narrative lines. Nevertheless, the master narrative of the rocket continues its attempts to shape and control the novel.

In fact, when the robot-bombs begin raining down on London in September '45,

Slothrop is drawn into this master narrative as he becomes aware of a personal connection between his emotional state and the falling rockets: "Them fucking rockets. You couldn't adjust to the bastards. No way. For the first time, he was surprised to find that he was really scared" (*GR* 21). Even if the nature of this relationship is unknown (that is, who exactly does what to whom?) Slothrop nevertheless experiences an emotional response that is produced by his interpretation of the rocket. At this early stage Slothrop's consciousness of the rocket is not, however, as a structure. He understands the rocket as an extension of a power that is inconceivable except as magic, mystery or God. Whether this entity embodies a power whose ultimate goal is to destroy him or whether he is destined to be saved for a higher purpose seems to be beside the point precisely because the novel never answers the question. Slothrop believes that because he does not know the origin of this power his existence remains at the mercy of whatever controls the rocket. And it is this belief in the rocket's assertion of power that initiates Slothrop's paranoid response: "He has become obsessed with the idea of a rocket with his name written on it—if they're really set on getting him ('They' embracing possibilities far far beyond Nazi Germany)" (*GR* 25). Slothrop's fear stems from the feasibility of an unaccountable plot being constructed against him that lies permanently beyond his control. It is this emotional link between affect and image that generates Slothrop's involvement with the rocket.

And yet, despite the epistemological crisis at the center of Slothrop's relation to the rocket, the rocket affirms its position within the novel as the dominant narrative when the "White Visitation" doctors attempt to construct an empirical framework that would

clarify the connection as a means to reach its deeper significance. Slothrop finds his way into "The White Visitation" where a whole barrage of psychological tests are planned. The first test finds him shot up with Sodium Amytol and he dreams a disjointed scene that begins in a Boston ghetto and ends up in the toilet partially to retrieve a lost harp and partially to escape being ass-fucked by Malcolm X whom Slothrop knows as "Red, the shoeshine boy who's slicked up Slothrop's black patents a dozen times down on his knees jes poppin' dat rag to beat the band" (*GR* 64). Later, we learn the purpose of this experiment is to serve an Allied propaganda machine in its bid to scare the German people into surrender by creating a story, Operation Black Wing, based on facts about blacks, the Hereros, who were once violently colonized by the Germans and who are now inside Germany grouping together with information and access to Hitler's special military weapons program. Slothrop's participation is willing, though perhaps unwitting: "Black Wing has even found an American, a Lieutenant Slothrop, willing to go under light narcosis to help illuminate racial problems in his own country. An invaluable extra dimension" (*GR* 75). Of course in the novel when the real Schwarzkommando emerges and Slothrop's status in relation to them is put into question we can't help but look back and wonder what power really authorized this test.

The tests don't stop there. After a review of Slothrop's previous psychological profiles which "indicate a diseased personality" the doctors debate how to proceed in their experimentation (*GR* 81). Reverend Dr. Paul de la Nuit wants to avoid the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) results because "It omits large areas of human personality" which he further suggests would be ideas about love, truth, honesty and even

religion (GR 81). Dr. Rózsavölgyi agrees and proposes a projective test where:

The *ba*-sic theory, is, that when given an *unstruc*-tured stimulus, some shape-less *blob* of *exper*-ience, the subject, will seek to impose, *struc*-ture on it. How, he goes *a-bout struc*-turing this blob, will reflect his *needs*, his hopes—will *provide*, us with *clues*, to his dreams, *fan*-tasies, the deepest *re*-gions of his mind. [...] A test, like the MMPI, is, in this respect, not adequate. It is, a *struc*-tured stimulus. The subject can *fal*-sify, consciously, or repress *un*-consciously. But with the *projec*-tive *technique*, nothing he can do, *con*-scious or otherwise, can *pre*-vent us, from *fin*-ding what we wish, to know. We, are in control. He, cannot *help*, himself.

(GR 81-82)

Further, Pointsman's suggestion of an additional "structural stimulus" that would "expose Slothrop to the German rocket. . . ." is added in what seems to be an afterthought, except for the centrality of the rocket image to the rest of the novel (GR 82). The point here is that the proposed and actual testing that Slothrop undergoes (even if not fully conscious of the tests to which he is subjected) all have ulterior motives and address the image of the rocket, if at all, only tangentially. Operation Black Wing needs Slothrop to exploit and perpetuate a binary division of black and white; Rózsavölgyi wants to eliminate the influence of individual personalities so that in the wake of Hitler "nations [can] live rationally" (GR 81); and even Pointsman, whose project certainly is deeply intertwined with the rocket, finds his primary focus in consolidating "A physiological basis for what seems very odd behaviour" (GR 89) and which may "perhaps solve the mystery of why the rockets are falling as they do—though I admit that was more of a sop to get your support" (GR 90). What needs to be stressed is that despite the multiple narrative lines that cross through this section it is the rocket that emerges as *the* narrative to follow when Slothrop winds up in the casino Hermann Goering on the French seaside, under the

watchful eye of Pointsman who appears to have executed a *coup d'état* at "The White Visitation."¹⁶

Again we find ourselves in a position that seems to point directly to a significance in the conjunction of Slothrop and the rocket, but what this significance is remains out of reach. Taking a cue from Levi-Strauss, Deleuze and Guattari note a similar frame of reference as an essential part of what they term the signifying regime of the sign, where the signs of significance surface prior to the appearance of meaning: "the world begins to signify before anyone knows *what* it signifies; the signified is given without being known" (*TP* 112). What becomes meaningful does so only by attributing the signs to a supreme signifier whose substance is nonetheless a surface without depth (*TP* 117). So while, prior to his stay, Slothrop is known among the "White Visitation" doctors as the child subject of Laszlo Jamf's stimulus-response experiments, it is not clear what this signifies: "though many have always known him as the famous Infant Tyrone—like the New World, different people thought they'd discovered different things" (*GR* 85). The drive of the inquiry becomes the creation of a model that will explain the phenomenon. The problem is that narrative cannot, like any model, include all the available data without losing its thread or teleological purpose and so as the text attempts to focus on a particular line, in this case the rocket-Slothrop connection, we witness a sliding of the competing lines under the image of the rocket.

The "White Visitation" doctors construct models in order to extract information that establishes the significance of the connection between Slothrop and the rocket.

¹⁶ These narratives would also include Slothrop's own reason, that is his desire to be found certifiably insane or unfit for military service: "They've cut Slothrop loose again, he's back on the street, shit, last chance for a Section 8 'n' he blew it...." (*GR* 114).

Slothrop, then, gets written into an experiment whose primary focus, if we consider Pointsman as its author, is to read him exclusively in terms of his relation to the rocket.¹⁷ Every recorded detail gets measured against the image of the rocket which works to establish its centrality. The structure that centers around the rocket does not refer to an outside truth, but rather to the truth of its own claim to a position of authority. This redundancy likens the rocket structure to another axiomatic structure, the market, as described through the medium Carroll Eventyr: "A market needed no longer [be] run by the Invisible Hand, but now could *create itself*—its own logic, momentum, style, from *inside*. Putting the control inside was ratifying what de facto had happened—that you had dispensed with God. But you had taken on a greater, and more harmful, illusion. The illusion of control" (GR 30). Slothrop's importance is as a part that helps unlock the mystery of the rocket. In this approach he has a particular purpose. His character exists because of his use-value as a piece of the rocket puzzle. Stephen Dodson-Truck informs him: "*Your 'function'* . . . is, learn the rocket, inch by inch" (GR 216). While the text offers no bottom to the depths of the authority that commands the rocket, the insinuation is that by understanding the rocket we come one step closer to a knowledge of the power that controls it, and by extension, one step closer to control over that power.

Pointsman assumes that by placing Slothrop under surveillance the scientists can record the nature of the relationship between him and the rocket which would

¹⁷ In some sense it is problematic to read Pointsman as the author, in light of both his own contemplations: "They own everything: Ariadne, the Minotaur, even, Pointsman fears, himself" (GR 88) and Sir Marcus Scammony's remarks to Clive Mossmoon (both of whom are attached to a higher echelon of industry) "We sent [Slothrop] out to destroy the blacks" (GR 615). The implication is that Pointsman's authority is not absolute. This becomes yet another example of how the text attempts to subvert its own constructions by destabilizing its narrative lines.

metonymically reproduce the relationship between the rocket and the unknown power. Pointsman's gamble is that the relationship proceeds from the bifurcation of a single, unified event that gets displaced and takes form in multiple disguises.¹⁸ Slothrop quickly wises up to the fact that there is a plot around him, but again he has no idea who or what monitors his responses. The real and the simulated become indistinguishable. How can he tell what situations have been constructed as part of the experiment and what is random? Being written into this plot seems to preclude the possibility of escape. Even his escape from the Casino Hermann Goering, which he appears to have ingeniously orchestrated, becomes part of another plot. The narrator explains that this move happened in a controlled environment: "[Pointsman's] clever strategy appears to've failed. In first discussions with Clive Mossmoon and the others, it seemed foolproof: to let Slothrop escape from the Casino Hermann Goering, and then rely on Secret Service to keep him under surveillance instead of PISCES" (*GR* 270). The escape further takes on a life of its own as the OSS blunders in its responsibility and Slothrop disappears into the Zone. This movement from controlled environment to a new network of relations mirrors the flight of the rocket that reaches Brennschluss (the point at which fuel cuts out and it begins its downslope) as the limit to this controlled system. After Brennschulss there is the whole other half of the trajectory where the rocket falls into a Poisson distribution as an attestation to ultimate randomness. Again, a randomness that demands explanation, that demands significance which opens the door to the suggestion that perhaps, after human/technological systems reach their limit, another power commandeers this fall. In

¹⁸ This is, likewise the case with many critical attempts to understand Pynchon's first novel, *V*. The letter 'V' is often made to signify one woman who disguises herself in a number of different historical and cultural contexts, rather than the multiple trying to flee the imposition of the single signifier.

the same way that the rocket past Brennschluss poses an unpredictable threat to the citizens of London, Slothrop, alone and beyond the limits of surveillance, threatens the transnational powers that profit from the war machine on the ground: "Shell Max House, naturally, is frantic about Slothrop's disappearance. Here's a man running loose who knows everything it's possible to know—not only about the A4, but about what *Great Britain* knows about the A4. Zürich teems with Soviet agents" (GR 272-273). However, even though Slothrop slips the surveillance crews of the OSS, he is not 'free.' On the contrary, he is caught up in a new web of power relations which remain beyond his ability to comprehend at the same time as he is driven to understand them as a means to transcend their control.

In the Zone it appears as though a power exists that guides and shapes Slothrop's path. However, this plot also seems to incorporate an expanding number of narrative lines. Slothrop is only one among many in search of the rocket's significance or under the rocket's domain. His desire to escape from the various plots or structures that cycle through him can, it seems, only be achieved by determining the nature of his connection to the rocket. As a symptom of this search his identity becomes further intertwined with the rocket. At this point it bears remembering that Slothrop, unlike Enzian and Blicero, is not after the rocket as a literal object, but rather as a stand-in for another consciousness. He traces the rocket to one Lazslo Jamf, who is the creator or author of Imipolex G, an aromatic polyimide, found in a special component, known only as the S-Gerät, of rocket 00000 that simultaneously connects the narrative lines that follow Slothrop, Blicero, Enzian, Tchitcherine and Franz Pökler, to mention only a few. Again, the meaning of this

connection or reterritorialization around the image of the rocket remains unclear. The only person who might potentially explain its significance, Jamf, is dead—a fact which brings us back to the theoretical framework of the dead author whose creation nevertheless circulates as a living text. The problem, however, is that Jamf does not create the rocket. Rather, it is through his work that the structure of the specific rocket named 00000, takes shape. It is helpful, in this sense, to think in terms of what Foucault calls "founders of discursivity" who "are unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts" ("What Is an Author" 114). To read *Gravity's Rainbow* as meta-fiction that deterritorializes itself from its master narrative it is important to understand the way the image of the rocket attempts to control the multiplicity of narrative lines that are made possible by Jamf's work. The rocket channels the subject's desire to transcend the structure back towards itself as a means of solidifying its legitimacy. By the time Slothrop reaches Pökler at Zwölfkinder he is consumed by the rocket structure:

"Lemme at least tell you my story," blithering fast as he can the Zürich information with Pökler's name on it, the Russian-American-Herero search for the S-Gerät, wondering meantime, in parallel sort of, if that Oberst Enzian wasn't right about going native in the Zone—beginning to get ideas, fixed and slightly, ah, erotic notions about Destiny are you Slothrop? Eh? Tracing back the route Frieda the pig brought him along, trying to remember forks where they might have turned another way (GR 576)

Pökler explains nonchalantly that the S-Gerät is an aromatic polymer which doesn't help Slothrop in the least. After this point, which should, according to a traditional conception

of narrative, unveil a climactic revelation, there is a marked dissolution both of Slothrop and the coherence of the textual form. In fact, the novel's conclusion subverts any expectation of closure by leaving Slothrop "Scattered all over the Zone" and refusing to clarify the significance of the rocket (*GR* 712).

When narrative lines attach themselves to characters, like Slothrop, they are in one sense re-territorialized. However, they also participate in a deterritorialized flow. This flow moves, at times, towards the image of the rocket as a structure that will complete the text and establish an order that imparts itself with meaning; and it moves, at other times, centrifugal from the rocket in an attempt to undermine the stability of the idea that narrative advances only towards significance. While it is obvious that my reading shares a stake with Lyotard's postmodern "breaking up of the grand Narratives" (15) because of their role as organizing principles in totalizing systems, this 'incredulity' does not allow us to reverse the poles by placing what Arif Dirlik calls "local narratives" in a position of authority (25). Instead, as I will develop further in the next two "digressions," the concept of the rhizome or the *milieu*, rather than reproducing the binary opposition of global versus local, allows us to think in terms of a "*local absolute*, an absolute that is manifested locally, and engendered in a series of local operations of varying orientations" (*TP* 382). Dirlik, however, argues that the abandonment of master narratives, particularly modern notions of development, has opened up a social field where "formerly powerless groups [...] have acquired new power by virtue of the process of development itself, [...and] now seek to redefine it in accordance with their own interests and perceptions" (26). This situation is, in fact, a shifting of authority that

institutes, at another level, a central authority or re-territorialization without any real change to the modes of power. Hardt and Negri point to this same problem in their discussion of colonial struggles of liberation. They argue that a more defined, entrenched sovereignty subordinates part of itself in order to present an appearance of unity: "While this nationalism seeks to liberate the multitude from *foreign* domination, it erects *domestic* structures of domination that are equally severe" (133). While they frame the discussion around national sovereignty, for my purpose it is worthwhile to include individual sovereignty the likes of which is embedded, if only ideologically, in the American dream of freedom in this discussion.¹⁹ Shifting to this question of individual sovereignty, one significance of Slothrop's dissolution as a sovereign being is that he can, now, be attached to any number of narrative lines without referring back to any essential essence except the name 'Slothrop': "Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there's no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering" (*GR* 742). In addition, the name 'Slothrop' becomes attached to different names that have shared an identity with this name. 'Slothrop' refers at different points in the novel to Max Schlepzig, Rocketman, Ian Scuffling, the initials T.S. and even at a crucial moment Major Marvy. The effect of this floating signifier is to prevent the decentered image of the rocket from becoming re-

¹⁹ To take two prime examples of this individualist strain of American freedom there is (1) the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government" (Jefferson 325-326); and (2) Thoreau's conclusion to "Resistance to Civil Government": "There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived" (245).

territorialized in 'Slothrop.'

Unlike the name "Tristero" in *Lot 49*, which actually reterritorializes all the heterogeneous elements of an underground American into one alternative, the rocket performs the role of an empty image. It presents itself as the sign that will order the wealth of signifying systems that operate within *Gravity's Rainbow* into one unified system. And it is in this sense that the rocket can be conceived as an image that attempts to envelope all the narrative lines within the novel by referring them back to its own image. Clearly a structure surrounds the rocket and guarantees its central place in the novel, but when pressed to locate the power that authorizes this structure we can only return to the image of the rocket as a signifier detached from its signified. And yet, even in the absence at the heart of the rocket there remains the suggestion that it is possible for an authoritative power to be grasped. Bersani wonders if "International business interests may be providing just another front, behind which lie still 'other orders,' orders that might involve [...] a collaboration between the living and the dead" which carries, in its paranoia, the whisper that the search for an authority in the text could very well be an interminable process (106). One potential implication of this emptiness is that the text leaves open the possibility that with time, hard work, a new methodology or even out and out dumb luck, humanity can transcend this gap that exists between the image and its referent. The point I want to come back to, however, as in my introduction, is that *Gravity's Rainbow* never makes this leap. The rocket, as the object or holy grail of this quest, refuses to yield the answers that would organize the text as a unified whole. In this refusal, the novel includes itself inside the very systems of social production that are the

object of its critique. Ultimately, the image of the rocket is ambiguous because like the Herero name for god, Ndjambi Karunga, it "is creator and destroyer [...] all sets of opposites brought together" (*GR* 100). The novel makes it so that we cannot simply choose to be for or against the rocket system, but rather must conceptualize the binary itself as the system from which we must escape. It is precisely this attempt to contain every movement within the empty image that is the mark of the rocket's domain. Regardless of whether it is an image of transcendence or oppression the rocket appears to be at the center of a number of different narrative lines. What becomes problematic is that the narrative lines never arrive at a destination and are left to dangle in the face of the empty image.

Again though, we must return to confront the idea that *Gravity's Rainbow* repeats the very narrative structure it seeks to critique. Linda Hutcheon, in her study of postmodernism, argues that postmodern literature implicates itself in a "contradictory enterprise" by employing certain conventions only to demonstrate their inadequacies (23). In this way she locates "parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity" as the primary form of literary critique in a postmodern field (26). Many critics have commented on the parody at work in *Gravity's Rainbow* and certainly it would be logical to claim that by refusing to bring closure to the novel Pynchon parodies the assumptions of the master narrative. But this parody does not stop the fact that the emptiness at the heart of the signifying system also characterizes a determinist world that continues to function, even in its decay, without hope of finding a way out. And worse still, even if *Gravity's Rainbow* reproduces a

totalizing structure textually through the image of the rocket as a parody of a particular network of power relations that develops in the immediate aftermath of WWII and continues to function in a (one could argue) contemporary framework of empire building, in what sense does this parodic voice drown in its own excess? Assuming there is no unified voice, exactly which one is parody? I think, McHoul and Wills are quite right when they state: "neither parody, satire, nor analogy is sufficient to describe textual relations in *Gravity's Rainbow*, though the reader will certainly find examples of each" (57). If all the voices are parody and parody is the only means of resisting the type of totalizing structure that the novel produces (even as an object of critique), then we must ask ourselves to what extent does this object, that is to say, the narrative of the rocket, continue to function as an authority that makes the parodic element intelligible. Herein lies the danger that the image of the rocket legitimizes the parody which, in turn, re-establishes clear lines of communication and re-organizes the narrative multiplicity all the while maintaining its own central position. And it is this movement where, as Hardt and Negri argue, "All conflicts, all crises, and all dissensions effectively push forward the process of integration and by the same measure call for more central authority" that fuels the contemporary construction of empire that is everywhere and nowhere at the same time (14).

It is to a certain extent to read against this apocalyptic vision of inescapability that Stefan Mattessich claims *Gravity's Rainbow* "strains its own functions till they turn back on themselves, become self-parody or metaparody in patterns of cellular or algorithmic replication" (84). In other words, in Mattessich's argument, the text reproduces the

discursive structure of contemporary America as a metanarrative that includes a desire to annihilate its own structure even though the text's condition of possibility exists only within this discursive structure.²⁰ For Mattessich this strategy of metaparody lies at the heart of Pynchon's work: "if still there can be no stable ironies, nonetheless that self-implicating dynamic of Pynchon's prose is able to focus the incommensurabilities at work in language [...] and so point through them to a negative and critical textual desire" (94). The function of this metaparody, in its repetition of a self-legitimizing discourse, is to make the 'empty form' or holographic image that no longer distinguishes between the real and the simulacra the central focus as both subject and object. In so doing Mattessich contextualizes and contains Pynchon's novel in a particular historical moment of the 1960s counterculture whose form of resistance to totalizing systems, he claims, is a repetition that reveals an emptiness at the heart of public space. This repetitive strategy disrupts the teleology of narrative by refusing to acknowledge an end and "this system that is dying from being dispossessed of its death expects nothing but that from us: that we give the system back its death, that we revive it through the negative" (Baudrillard 24). And here it is significant that Mattessich notes the counterculture of the sixties produces no change to the structure of power. The effectiveness of a strategy that repeats, repeats, repeats, can begin to be seen as another formulation of the entropy theme so familiar to Pynchon studies and does little to address the 'real' effects of the subjugation of partial or fragmented narratives to a master narrative structure that are produced within

²⁰ I use 'metanarrative' here because I believe Mattessich is referring to something quite different from my use of the master narrative. His argument, that the novel parodies its own structure parodying the dominant narrative, would I think be an example of where metanarrative, as opposed to master narrative, allows the possibility of resisting totalization.

the novel.

The purpose of decentering this empty image of the rocket is not to refill it with another provisional or temporary image, nor is it to let absence stand as the central focus; rather, I want to place the narrative structure of the novel in question. In this way we can begin to read the narrative lines, not as directed towards a master sign, but as a rhizome in which "There are no points or positions," only flows which become caught up in structures as a result of "a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier" (TP 8). It becomes possible to examine what happens when the narrative lines flow past the authority of central images, what happens when these lines flee the structure of the rocket in which they are produced not as separate from that structure, but as its products that take on a life of their own or mutate in new networks of relations. Thus the digression in *Gravity's Rainbow* can be read as an excess that attempts to undermine the condition of its possibility as excess or digression by stretching the image of the rocket to the limit of its ability to control the signification of the narrative lines that fuel its power. Which is to say that the digression is not properly digression unless we concede that there is a center to the novel from which to digress. The novel has no original whole, only a fragmented or schizophrenic form that can never be recovered as either a nostalgic past or an idealized future unity without imposing a limitation that erases its discontinuities and its flight.

Digression Two

'After a While the Listener Starts Actually Hearing the Pauses Instead of the Notes': Riding the Rhizome

"Wait, a minute. You people didn't have jigsaw puzzles"
---Thomas Pynchon
Gravity's Rainbow

"A book has neither object nor subject."
---Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari
A Thousand Plateaus

"By its special magic a large number of lonely souls, however heterogeneous, share the common property of opposition to what is. And like an epidemic or earthquake the politics of the street can overtake even the most stable appearing of government; like death it cuts through and gathers in all ranks of society"
---Thomas Pynchon
V.

"What we need is to create a new social body, which is a project that goes well beyond refusal. Our lines of flight, our exodus must be constituent and create a real alternative."
---Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri
Empire

Gravity's Rainbow draws attention to the way the image, as a *milieu* in which various narrative lines converge to provide a form to thought, organizes structures (whether logical or social) that shape the ways the world can be thought. Besides the radical ethical uncertainty and the absence of a hieroglyphic key that would authorize a

foundation in which to ground the narratives, the difficulty of reading this novel resides in the way that it reads itself, through numerous narrative interjections, anticipations and digressions, as a problematic construct. The text presents an awareness that its own narratives are susceptible to the formation of a centralized structure on the basis of an image like the rocket. This self-reflexivity that at once gestures to something outside the images it creates and establishes the necessity of creating this outside *through* its images is what prevents *Gravity's Rainbow* from producing a master narrative that would contain the narrative lines that take shape between its covers. Whether it is the documentation of the rocket or one of the many masks donned by Katje, something slips outside the image. Katje's existence, with Blicero and Gottfried inside their Oven-state fantasy, can only be as the Gretel figure who must throw the witch in the fire. That is to say, Katje's actions are caught up in the image of Gretel and she can either confront or submit to the structure of the Hansel and Gretel story. Significantly, her flight from the Oven-state and her refusal to participate in this binary system forces us to think outside the image of Hans Christian Anderson's character. Even before her departure Blicero notes "Perhaps there's the only shadow of warning: her commitment is not emotional," she goes "no further than politic transvestism" and "plays at this only . . . plays at playing" (GR 97). What slips outside the image, however, is productive. Her escape from the Oven-state generates new narrative lines that flow into the lines of the "White Visitation" and later the Counterforce by connecting with them as a rhizome. The rhizomatic movements of the narrative lines in *Gravity's Rainbow* map their own network of relations in an attempt to produce a space outside the image that is not confined by absolute binary distinctions. This chapter will

examine how the rhizome operates through a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of foundational images. This process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, where narrative lines constantly slip outside the image, destabilizes the image to the extent that it becomes a pure form unattached to either its creative process or its own referent. Nevertheless, it is through this hollowed out form that the narrative lines create new images outside the constraints of the old forms.

In addition, if *Gravity's Rainbow* cannot operate without the reterritorialization of narrative lines in the image as an object that controls or determines the course of its narratives even as it subverts this process, then neither can my reading of that text. And, as such, the rhizome becomes a conceptual image for understanding the movement of narrative lines in *Gravity's Rainbow* because it works, paradoxically, when it falls apart. Deleuze and Guattari explain that "every machine functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time is also a flow itself, or the production of a flow, in relation to the machine connected to it" (AO 36). My foregrounding of the novel's fragmentation in no way implies that each of the narrative lines are in complete isolation. On the contrary, they cross, overlap or make monstrous leaps without ever coming together to form a unified whole. While, in one sense, these connections form the solid contour of an image, in another sense, there are narrative lines that slip outside the image formed in the connection. For example, Slothrop, travelling in the Zone with Ludwig (a boy in search of his pet lemming, Ursula), digresses into an explanation of the preterite vision of his ancestor, William, when he considers the lemming's run for the sea as an image that signifies implicit faith. This speculation

develops out of the lemming into a narrative line that suggests the Zone signifies a second chance at creating the antinomian promise of America in another space, a space where "inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up" can still be found (*GR* 556). However, almost at the moment of the enunciation of this connection Slothrop wonders: "Is he drifting, or being led? The only control in the picture right now is the damned lemming. If she exists" (*GR* 556). Here, this pronoun 'she' connects forward in the text and doubles as both lemming and America. Slothrop, hunted and alone in the Zone without any identification papers, has "been changing, sure, changing, plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-consciously as picking his nose—but the one ghost-feather his fingers always brush by is America. Poor asshole, he can't let her go. She's whispered *love me* too often to him in his sleep" (*GR* 623). All of a sudden America, this image of the antinomian promise that held together the connection to the lemming, begins to dissolve. In the former passage, America remains a possibility while in the latter it is an image that defines how Slothrop understands his identity. The type of submission that would be required in order to reach the singular point suggests that the image of America continues to possess an inherent knowledge that legitimizes action.

When faced with a photo of Ursula, Slothrop concedes there is a lemming (just as we must concede there really is an America), but the scene simultaneously establishes a distinction between the image and the moment it attempts to reterritorialize: "Some part of her is always blurred, too quick for the shutter" (*GR* 556).²¹ Something

²¹ The photograph, here, acts as an image of the image, but also demonstrates how the image acts as a photograph that defines borders to thought. In this sense, we can extend the photographic image to the film image which becomes in *Gravity's Rainbow* a series of still shots sped up.

deterritorializes itself from the image. This something is by nature inarticulable because even if we focus the lens trying to isolate the blur we exclude certain parts and can only reproduce an image of an image. And yet when narrative lines slip outside an image they connect up with other lines that have slipped outside other images in order to create a new conceptual space from which to look at the image as pure form or structure. While Blicero believes this space can be accessed only through a transcendental escape he is nevertheless able to recognize that American-occupied Europe (and also America itself) is an image divested of its narrative lines, it is empty form:

In Africa, Asia, Amerindia, Oceania, Europe came and established its order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered. In time the death-colonies grew strong enough to break away. But the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on. Now we are in the last phase. American Death has come to occupy Europe. It has learned empire from its old metropolis. But now we have *only* the structure left us, none of the great rainbow plumes, no fittings of gold, no epic marches over alkali seas. (GR 722)

This sentiment that the image of America, as a promise of freedom, and its product, a structure of death, do not co-relate rings true when the search for Ursula leads Slothrop to Major Marvy and Bloody Chiclitz, two Americans in the Zone whose racist, fascist and fiercely capitalist tendencies are among the most overtly brutal in the novel.²² They see themselves only in the image of America and they legitimate all their actions through this image. From this position inside the framework of the institution, the image is the culmination of the best and the brightest the world can offer. It is only when Slothrop escapes to Zürich and is confronted by American troops that the image shows its cracks.

²² Of course these tendencies in no way impede their function as comic characters who are clearly derided by virtue of their ineptness.

He hears "America as it must sound to a non-American. Later he will recall that what surprised him most was the fanaticism, the reliance not just on flat force but on the *rightness* of what they planned to do . . . he'd been told long ago to expect this sort of thing from Nazis, and especially from Japs" (*GR* 256). Outside the framework of the institution, the image takes on a more ominous shape.

It is through this deterritorialization of narratives that we can begin to account for the digressions as themselves generating multiple narrative lines and not merely as distractions from or support of the 'main line' of the novel. In fact, as I have argued in the previous "digression", without a central narrative, there are only "break-flows" (*AO* 37). It is these interruptions or digressions from what appears, however temporarily, to act as the master narrative, that move the lines in an apparently aleatory fashion that cycles through and/or against a wealth of storylines and information without ever arriving at an end. The lines of flight that constitute the rhizome emerge from structures into an open space, that is a space temporarily outside our ability to give it an image, only to connect up with other *milieus*. Because the Zone and America are connected by Slothrop already, Squalidozzi's portrait of the Zone as a return to a world of "anarchic oneness of pampas and sky" brushes up against the image of America as an antinomian paradise (*GR* 264). In so doing the Zone becomes lodged in a narrative line where the image is separate from the "thing," whether moment or event, that it attempts to encapsulate. It becomes possible, here, to think of the image as both a crystallization of narrative lines and an object swept away in the flow of these lines. Michael Bérubé reads the desire to see an originary unity in the image as what the novel calls pornography. The obscenity of this

pornography is not so much the content as the fact that it "describes a regressive anamnesia that recreates illusory, prelapsarian (or prelinguistic) unities through a complex mechanism of dismemberment and reconfiguration" (248). There is no shortage of parody at play in the text's fetishization of the image, but its most serious and poignant critiques are leveled against the image as a unifying principle that synthesizes fragments into structures of dominance and control. The narrative lines that escape the image find themselves caught up in new networks of relations to whose rules they must submit (and reterritorialize) or flee (and deterritorialize) once more. Deleuze and Guattari explain that the rhizome has "not even the unity to abort in the object or 'return' in the subject" (*TP* 8). In order for the process of deterritorialization to be productive the narrative lines that flee an image must connect with something.

Fran Mason's essay "Just a Bunch of Stuff that Happened" explores the deterritorializing force of narrative digressions in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In his understanding, the deterritorializing force resists the ideology of the master narrative. He claims that Pynchon "generates a slapstick narrative of continual movement where the dynamic of the chase (in which events just seem to happen at random, one following another without necessary connection) seems to allow Slothrop and the narrative to escape the controlling forces at work in the text" (175). But my contention is that by looping back and forward, across and through different narratives, the digressions unleash a positive and creative dimension that cannot be grasped if we recognize the rhizome as simply a resistance to powers of control. The rhizome is, in fact, a growth whose resistance stems from its productive capacity. We must be careful to clarify that the types

of connections that occur in the novel are not homogenous. There are many moments when temporary connections push narrative lines in multiple directions. Mason concludes by calling attention to the problems inherent in his argument: "There are also questions about how far narrative deterritorialization is valid for an actual politics of resistance and how far it is simply a textualization of resistance so that, in a world where transformation or transcendence of society seems impossible, the only model for resistance is the equally impossible burlesque fantasy of acting like Bugs Bunny" (178). This conclusion undoubtedly rests on some shaky distinctions between actual/textual, but it also fails to take into account the productive capacity of the rhizome.

Deleuze and Guattari are, in fact, insistent about this active and creative aspect of the rhizome as a revolutionary movement that continually transforms the social and political fields: "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (*TP* 7). In other words, deterritorialization is never confined to being a tool of resistance, it is also a positive mutation that perpetually moves outside itself. The rhizome operates through "Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (*TP* 7). But these connections do not completely determine the path of the rhizome because something always slips through or subtracts itself from the connection. This process of deterritorialization means that the connections are temporary and are only productive when they cease to have a hold on each other, that is to say, when they refuse to consolidate around an image that would plant the narrative firmly in the soil that sustains this image: "A rhizome may be

broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (TP 9). This further suggests that we can engage with the narrative construction of *Gravity's Rainbow* only specifically and pragmatically, without a totalizing concept that makes the tangled lines clear. Since we are no longer concerned with unity or a totalizing narrative, except as a power that blocks the movement of the narrative lines, what the rhizome enables us to do is examine these lines of flight as inherently creative and affirmative rather than nihilistic fragments that burn up in a social entropy.

The fragmented narrative lines of *Gravity's Rainbow* present a mode of production that neither proceeds through cause and effect nor follows a progressive chronology. Because the numerous stories that take shape in the novel never establish a definitive end, the linkages between events, characters, space and time are not subject to hierarchization; instead, they brush up against, cut across or intersect one another in order to form new lines while in the process disintegrate or flee the very maps they create in their flight. It is never the place of arrival, that is to say, it is never the goal or the ideology that drives the narratives, but rather the desire to escape, to flee, to reach outside the frame of the image. Hardt and Negri, in their discussion of empire, mark out a similar transformative force in the desire to disobey authority:

Whereas being-against in modernity often meant a direct and/or dialectical position of forces, in postmodernity being-against might well be most effective in an oblique or diagonal stance. Battles against the Empire might be won through subtraction and defection. This desertion does not have a place; it is the evacuation of the places of power.

(212)

How can the flight of these narrative lines, in the absence of a "place" to which they can flee, provide any opposition to an image, like America, that constantly subjects what lies outside its borders to its rule?

We could ask, or should ask, with the rhizome, as with *Gravity's Rainbow*, where does it locate itself both temporally and spatially? What is the moment of this novel and where is (are) the site(s) in which its narratives unfold? Undoubtedly there is a line that follows Slothrop from London in 1944, underneath the descent of the V-2s, to the end of WWII in Europe during the re-configuration of Germany. But the narratives continually exceed both this time and this space by traveling forward and back, across continents and alternate dimensions where as Rathenau's voice, speaking through the medium Peter Sachsa's mouth, reminds his listeners: "You are constrained, over there, to follow it in time, one step after another" (*GR* 165). Not only in time, but we must consider the space in which Rathenau's voice speaks and is heard—through a medium—so the voice is neither Rathenau's proper nor Sachsa's, but an interface between the living and the dead, between the present and the distant, a link that may have no material existence except for the voice itself which eventually disappears into waves of ether. There is also no tidy conclusion that explains what happens to the various Zone narratives. Nor is the relationship between 1945 and the scattered Raketen Stadt episodes or the contemporary scenes near the close of the novel that place us in Los Angeles following the newly introduced Richard M. Zhubb, ever clarified. While there is no causal link that determines the shape of events, there are still connections between multiple narratives that produce new narratives that are themselves never complete. For example, when

Zhubb and 'you' face a sound that "wraps the concrete and the smog, it fills the basin and mountains further than any mortal could ever move . . . could move in time. . . .", rather than focusing on the plot, we can take the 'move in time' and map it back on a discourse where pop culture heroes arrive on the scene too late but refuse to believe this lateness is anything more than an anomaly (*GR 757*). Until they "watch their system falling apart, watch those singularities begin to come more and more often, proclaiming another dispensation out of the tissue of old-fashioned time, and they'll call it cancer, and just won't know what things are coming to, or what's the meaning of it all" (*GR 752*). This draws us back precisely to my point: there is no 'all' to understand, only a type of parataxis where temporary connections proceed without direction, of rules broken in their own construction.

Perhaps the clearest example of this type of movement occurs when Slothrop encounters different characters, especially women. The significance of his chance meetings, in terms of how the connection moves the master narrative of the rocket, is never entirely clear. This does not mean, however, that they are insignificant. On the contrary, they generate, in their deterritorialization, new lines with more temporary connections without ever drawing them all together in a complete story. In fact, Slothrop's mapping of sexual liaisons in London demonstrates a propensity to come together and then separate. On the other side of the English channel, stationed at the Casino Hermann Goering, Slothrop runs into Katje when he "saves" her from the octopus, Grigori. Of course, this scenario is an intricate lure, but beyond the theatrical arrangement that ensues this connection becomes a point where Slothrop witnesses a

stirring that Katje's image cannot contain. Katje, though certainly playing a role, is quite explicit in expressing the idea that beyond the visible world there are forces at play that flow undetected: "I don't think they know . . . about other selves [...] No more than you do. If you can't understand it now, at least remember. That's all I can do for you" (*GR* 224). While it is true that Katje's ability to transform herself into a living image, similar to Prentice's talent for getting inside other people's fantasies, is the basis for the Firm's use of her, it is also her existence as an image that allows Slothrop to suspect the existence of something outside the image. On their final night together she says

"You'll remember the Himmler-Spielsaal, and the skirt I was wearing . . . memory will dance for you, and you can even make it my voice saying what I couldn't say then. Or now." Oh what is it she smiles here to him, only for that second? already gone. Back to the mask of no luck, no future—her face's rest state, preferred, easiest. . . .

(*GR* 225)

The question of Katje's authenticity is irrelevant. Even though this plot, within which Katje is implicated due to her status as an agent of the Firm, is the impetus of their connection, there is something more, something that remains outside this plot.

Something of their relationship cannot be captured at the same time as it cannot be articulated except through this movement of flight. This flight creates a new narrative line, that of temporary alliances, which can be followed with different characters and at different times.

After Slothrop leaves the Casino he travels along underground routes in search of the S-Gerät on the theoretical premise that it is the key that will unlock the maze of his identity and reveal his place in the social structure. In Nice, under the protection and

guidance of Blodgett Waxwing's network of people, he is given further passage to Zürich in order to obtain information about the mysterious substance Imipolex G which is patented by both IG Farben and the Swiss corporation Psychochemie AG. Suddenly "It dawns on Slothrop, literally, through the yellowbrown window shade, that this is his first day Outside" (*GR* 256). However, his movements during this episode continue to be monitored by the OSS which means this 'outside' is not absolute. Rather, as becomes quickly clear, this outside is marked all over by new relations which Slothrop must learn to read as well as navigate. Moments after he receives the address of a contact in Zürich: "It's just occurred to him. 'Why are all you folks helping me like this? For free and all?'" To which the contact replies: "Who knows? We have to play the patterns. There must be a pattern you're in, right now" (*GR* 257). The nature of this meeting, as well as the notion of shifting patterns, is temporary and specific, as though they could only happen at this particular moment without reproduction, which propels the narrative in a position that enables it to take flight in multiple directions. Alone in his room he wonders "Is he off so quickly [...] off on a ratchet of rooms like this, to be in each one only long enough to gather wind or despair enough to move on to the next, but no way backward now, ever again?" (*GR* 257). The assertion that there is no possibility of return carries this hint of nostalgic loss for a unified and timeless entity into the novel's critique of the unified origin as ideology. Back to what, exactly?

The narrative lines are characterized by discontinuities and digressive jumps. And further, this unconfined or what Deleuze and Guattari call "nomadic," movement

problematizes the concept of directionality itself.²³ For Deleuze and Guattari "The nomads [...] add desert to desert, steppe to steppe, by a series of local operations whose orientation and direction endlessly vary" (*TP* 382). Brian McHale, in his attempt to grapple with the resistance *Gravity's Rainbow* poses for being read through a theoretical, conceptual or aesthetic model, notes a similar movement when one narrative transitions into a "different narrative by 'mapping'" one character on to another (104). This technique, for McHale, raises alarms "that almost any character in this novel can be analogically related to almost any other character – to raise for us the demoralizing prospect of free and all but unmanageable analogical patterning" (106).²⁴ While this scenario fills McHale with dread as well as ontological doubt, we can, by drawing narrative lines from what slips outside the image of characters, create a positive dimension of flight that navigates underground routes (similar to those that carry Slothrop) that will allow us to explore the text from outside the framework of the image.

Because the Zone is by nature a destabilized site this rhizomatic movement becomes almost the norm rather than the exception. The characters themselves are not blind to these new networks and as a result read their surrounding landscapes for signs of where to meet the next connection as a means to position themselves strategically in order

23 I should draw attention to Deleuze and Guattari's own differentiation between 'movement' and 'speed.' They claim "It is [...] false to define the nomad by movement" and further "Movement designates the relative character of a body considered as 'one,' and which goes from point to point; *speed, on the contrary, constitutes the absolute character of a body whose irreducible part (atoms) occupy or fill a smooth space in the manner of a vortex*, with the possibility of springing up at any point" (*TP* 381). For the purpose of my essay I will retain 'movement' with all the designation of 'speed.'

24 Indeed this blurring of distinct characters is played with by the text itself in Pointsman's confrontation with Rózsavölgyi: "'But that was after I asked you the question—you can't tell me the two 'I say's were part of the same statement,' unless, 'that's asking me to be unreasonably,' unless it's really true that, 'credulous, and around *you* that's a form of,' that we're the *same person*, and that the whole exchange was ONE SINGLE THOUGHT yaaagghhh and that means, 'insanity, Rózsavölgyi—'" (*GR* 634).

to survive the structures of control that are closing down the power vacuum that is Germany after Hitler's defeat. While there is a certain necessity and artifice involved in these temporary meetings, as moments of exchange, they make it increasingly difficult to understand the concepts of value or significance because the reference point or master narrative no longer functions as a legitimate authority:

"It's so unorganized out here. There have to be arrangements. You'll find out." Indeed he will—he'll find thousands of arrangements, for warmth, love, food, simple movement along roads, tracks and canals [...] Not paranoia. Just how it is. Temporary alliances, knit and undone. He and Geli reach their arrangement hidden from the occupied streets by remnants of walls, in an old fourposter bed facing a dark pier glass.
(GR 290-291)

This "arrangement" is actually a market exchange. That is to say, each party, Geli and Slothrop, enters the arrangement with a value to be traded, not in order to produce a surplus-value, but to produce a mutual satisfaction from which they can both grow. Thus an entire black market economy rises in the shadows of capitalism, an economy based, not on capital but on cooperation and immanence. These temporary arrangements emerge as an alternative market derived, in the disorganization of the Zone, alongside capital, as an alternative whose refusal to participate in the accumulation of capital and whose inherently productive inclination opposes capitalism: "Brains and bodies still need others to produce value, but the others they need are not necessarily provided by capital and its capacities to orchestrate production" (Hardt and Negri 294). This economy develops on the fringes of a Zone that is already positioned as a marginal site. From the perspective of empire, this market must remain or be relegated to a space outside the public sphere. Significantly then, the agreement between Slothrop and Geli is codified in a private

moment.²⁵

Critically, what happens is a blurring of the line between the inside and the outside, so that while conceptually and even rhetorically we are asked to understand the Zone as an outside, we see that this outside, that is, this subterranean network along which Slothrop flees, exists within a network of powers that attempt to block this flow in order to control the lines through which power passes. The torn down borders of the Zone open up a capitalist wet-dream of new markets as they simultaneously produce a need to control the fluidity that this opening creates. Hardt and Negri note that in the globalization of the market "The Third World does not really disappear in the process of unification of the world market but enters into the First, establishes itself at the heart as ghetto, shantytown, favela, always again produced and reproduced" (253-254). Again, by mapping this arrangement between Slothrop and Geli, as an image of a moment where the market's greatest possibility is also its greatest threat, onto a similar space another narrative grows. Graham Benton suggests that "Pynchon's characterization in *Gravity's Rainbow* of the Zone [is] as a site where a new and more free organization of social modes may flourish—not in spite of the war, but precisely because of the war" (156). What is at stake in war is not the territory, but the ability to determine the shape and image of the market. By locating this destabilizing presence inside the structures of control, *Gravity's Rainbow* negotiates at local moments the powers of ideological production.

25 Although we can't hide the fact that their sexual scene happens in a roofless room, which suggests an opening that someone (in fact her owl Wernher does descend out of the sky sending Slothrop scrambling for the covers) could gain access to this private interaction, making the whole division of inside/outside problematic.

At Cuxhaven, as he awaits his identification papers from von Göll, Slothrop comes to understand that, in order to survive in the Zone, he must embrace these temporary moments of connection as real moments that will lead him outside the maze. While rhizomatic growth characterizes the Zone there nevertheless remains a social field that continually attempts to solidify the narrative lines that intersect within his image in order to construct him as an object that can be understood and then used. Pointsman's elaborate experiment and the surveillance crews that have dogged him since he was sold to IG Farben as a baby are certainly examples of this type of power that continues to haunt Slothrop through the Zone, but even when this significance cannot be located he begins to signify something completely foreign and other: "a vampire whose sex life actually *fed* on the terror of the Rocket Blitz" (GR 629). In this way, he becomes a threat to social norms, a monster that must be extinguished or as Jessica Swanlake suggests: "They ought to lock him up" (GR 629). There is a long passage with Bodine, Slothrop and Solange that I will quote in its entirety because it wraps this issue of temporary alliances, networks and narratives together before falling apart into another plot.

"This is some kind of a plot, right?" Slothrop sucking saliva from velvet pile.

"*Everything* is some kind of a plot, man," Bodine laughing.

"And yes but, the arrows are pointing all different ways," Solange illustrating with a dance of hands, red-pointed fingerectors. Which is Slothrop's first news, out loud, that the Zone can sustain many other plots besides those polarized upon himself . . . that these are the els and busses of an enormous transit system here in the Raketenstadt, more tangled even than Boston's—and that by riding each branch the proper distance, knowing when to transfer, keeping some state of minimum grace though it might often look like he's headed the wrong way, this network of all plots may yet carry him to freedom. He understands that he

should not be so paranoid of either Bodine or Solange, but
ride instead their kind underground awhile, see where it
takes him. . . . (GR 603)

This passage seems to describe a rhizomatic growth as a means to flee the plots in which Slothrop is constituted. And it is here, with Slothrop's realization that there are multiple plots in which he participates without being the central focus, that we should leave him behind perhaps "not a thing in his head, just feeling natural. . . ." to explore the many digressions that feed the novel (GR 626). The danger, here, is that 'Slothrop' becomes an image that potentially functions, like the rocket, as a master narrative. By reading the way the multiple narrative lines escape this image we can both engage with the text's own rhizomatic patterns and ensure that my own reading does not reterritorialize the digressions of the text into an image of Slothrop.

Although this pattern of movement along the Zone's "underground" presents freedom as a goal or a destination at which point the rider can simply step outside or off the "el tracks" of narrative and continue to exist in some knowable fashion, there is, at the end of this same episode, another way to understand freedom. Of course, Solange is really Leni Pökler whose daughter Ilse has been conceptually linked to Slothrop's one time relation with Bianca by virtue of the fact that they are both conceived through the same film.²⁶ Slothrop, sleeping beside Solange, dreams of Bianca playing at the kid's amusement park Zwolfkinder,

And 'Solange,' oddly enough, is dreaming of Bianca too,
though under a different aspect: it's her own child Ilse, riding
lost through the Zone on a long freight train that never seems

²⁶ Bianca in a gang rape on set: Ilse after her father, Franz, watches the viewable version of this scene in the film *Alpdrücken*, returns home and fucks his wife all the while pretending she is the actor, Margherita Erdmann.

to come to rest. She isn't unhappy, nor is she searching, exactly, for her father. But Leni's early dream for her is coming true. She will not be used. There is change and departure; but there is also help when least looked for from the strangers of the day, and hiding, out among the accidents of this drifting Humility, never quite to be extinguished, a few small chances for mercy. . . . (GR 610)

Freedom, here, is never a goal or a place at which one arrives, but perhaps more closely akin to a state of becoming, a perpetual process of reterritorialization and deterritorialization. The essence of freedom here is escape or the ability to flee, to elude capture by the image as an object used in order to frame and thus limit movement. Taken this way, the reality of Ilse's freedom becomes a bit problematic. While the novel gives us no direct reference to anything that might properly be considered her essence, she does have an image that takes shape under her name and becomes a tool that persuades her father, Franz, to continue his participation in the Nazi rocket program: "The only continuity has been her name, and Zwölfkinder, and Pökler's love—love something like the persistence of vision, for They have used it to create for him the moving image of a daughter, flashing him only these summertime frames of her, leaving to him to build the illusion of a single child" (GR 422).²⁷ Here, we are stuck with this paradox where this subject named Ilse exists outside her image and yet her image is co-opted by a system as an instrument of control.

It is in this sense that *Gravity's Rainbow* forces its readers to conceptualize the image as an object that fixes the diverse narrative lines and acts as a potential center around which logical and social structures form. At the same time the novel, by overtly

²⁷ My reference, here, to Ilse's 'essence' means that the novel gives us no hint of her thoughts, her dreams, her emotions, nor her physical appearance. She is, for all intents and purposes, only a name.

and necessarily positioning itself as constitutive language, suggests that if anything exists outside this space that the image occupies, it becomes visible only by mapping the narrative lines that detach themselves from the image. In so doing, *Gravity's Rainbow* constructs the concept of the image, as a framing device, but one within a *milieu* through which multiple narrative lines pass. This means that the image, whether video or photo or linguistic, is not a constant form, but subject to variation as a result of its own structure. *Gravity's Rainbow* links together the image as a solid form and analysis of this form as factors that determine how the world can be thought:

So Slothrop is borne, afloat on the water-leas. Like signals set out for lost travelers, shapes keep repeating for him, Zonal shapes he will allow to enter but won't interpret, not any more. [...] The most persistent of these, which seem to show up at the least real times of day, are the stairstep gables that front so many of these ancient north-German buildings, rising, backlit, a strangely *wet* gray as if risen out of the sea, over these straight and very low horizons. They hold shape, they endure, like monuments to Analysis. Three hundred years ago mathematicians were learning to break the cannonball's rise and fall into stairsteps of range and height, Δx by Δy , allowing them to grow smaller and smaller, approaching zero as armies of eternally shrinking midgets galloped upstairs and down again, the patter of their diminishing feet growing finer, smoothing out into continuous sound. This analytic legacy has been handed down intact—it brought the technicians at Peenemünde to peer at the Askania films of Rocket flights, frame by frame, Δx by Δy , flightless themselves . . . film and calculus, both pornographies of flight. (GR 567)

Film and in particular the film image is used as a tool of control. A film of Katje's image is an object used to train Grigori, the octopus that ensnares Slothrop in Pointsman's experiment. This same film image, however, loses the constancy of its form when Katje views it and sees "a face so strange that she has recognized the mediaeval rooms before

she does herself" (GR 533). But when Katje watches the film, as a *milieu* of intersecting lines as opposed to a single image, there appears "Spliced on at the end of all this" a screen test called "Doper's Greed" whose dialogue between two cowboys questions the reality of a midget sheriff who stands in their midst. It turns out that from this spliced bit of film, Katje interprets a message that signifies a counterforce is forming in order to combat the type of master plotting exemplified by Pointsman and the higher echelons of power. The point is that the film, as a *milieu*, contains and produces different lines that create and subvert the very images it produces in order to provide a framework of reality. Katje's film image might have been used as a tool of control, but through this same film, which extends beyond her image, "She returns to her open cell, gathers a few belongings in a bag, and walks out of 'The White Visitation'" (GR 535).

The objective of control behind Grigori's behavioural training through the use of Katje's image is put in play by eliminating the variables and producing a sort of hermetically sealed version of reality. The film image, however, is inherently unstable and thus produces a sort of spontaneous and unpredictable variation that challenges a model of total control. Who could predict "Doper's Greed" being spliced onto that particular film, much less Katje's interpretation or the fact that it is accurate? Of course this is artifice and plotting as well, but as such it is "Art as escape from language and abstraction—and verbal art is the most conclusive escape into our birthright in the world beyond language from which language above all separates us, and which, therefore, it has the power to restore" (Sukenick 38). The film, then, is a *milieu* in which images become reterritorialized in narrative, but also where deterritorialized narrative lines flee the

structure of their production. The increased analytical effort to define an image, that is to say, the more precise the attempt to make the relationship between image and object match by accounting for all the potential variables, the higher the chances of producing the exception to the rule. Similarly, for Slothrop's ancestor, William, the preterite are the foundation of the elect: "The successful loner was only the other part of it: the last piece to the jigsaw puzzle, whose shape had already been created by the Preterite" (*GR* 554).²⁸ This "shape" only comes into being, however, through the production of the singularity. This singularity, to take this idea a step further, is not an end because it enters a new *milieu* from which emerges systems of meaning or knowledge that seek to define its exact nature. And this process, you might very well guess, cannot be but interminable.

The problem becomes to account for this interminable process through means of a finite model. This finite model or structure creates and maintains borders that make an image visible. However, in order to make the visible image, say the Herero mandala as a symbol of eternal return, perceptible we must simultaneously produce an outside against which the image can be differentiated. In the example of the Herero mandala what exists outside this image is "the white-occupied world [where] Captivity, sudden death, one-way departures were the ordinary things of every day" (*GR* 323). In 1931, when Kurt Gödel claims *Principia Mathematica* describes "a proposition that that says about itself that it is not provable" he attacks the notion that foundational mathematical axioms are legitimate authorities in-and-of-themselves (149-150).²⁹ While the technical equations of Gödel's theorem are admittedly, without a background in mathematics (which I do not

²⁸ The preterite are "the many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation" (*GR* 555).

²⁹ *Principia Mathematica* is a "three-volume treatise by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell on mathematical logic and the foundations of mathematics" (Nagel and Newman 1).

possess) difficult to penetrate, this difficulty is by no means an impediment to understanding how the theorem functions in the context of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Early twentieth century attempts to formalize mathematical systems stem from a desire to define the internal logic or controls of systems as contained and isolated units. But as Nagel and Newman explain, Gödel "proved that it is impossible to establish the internal logical consistency of a very large class of deductive systems—number theory, for example—unless one adopts principles or reasoning so complex that their internal consistency is as open to doubt as that of the systems themselves" (5). Similarly, we can read structuralist or even new critical attempts to code the internal logic of language systems as a parallel project. Lyotard points out: "Since it is possible to generalize this situation [Gödel's proof of the incompleteness of arithmetic systems], it must be accepted that all formal systems have internal limitations" (43). Which is another way of saying that structures that depend on foundational axioms say more about the structures themselves than any thing they profess to explain. Invariably the creation of models or structures that give shape to images produce a border that guarantees nothing passes through which would contradict the system. The irony, of course, is that anything that does establish a paradoxical problem is relegated to an outside where it no longer threatens the structure, leaving the structure with nothing but its own formal design about which to speak. In effect, such totalizing systems rely on the production of an outside to legitimate themselves. In her analysis, Molly Hite equates "They-systems" in the novel with "totalizing conceptual systems" which are "contingent on an outside power that guarantees their coherence. But if They actually exist, They belong inside the system that

purports to account for everything that exists" (124). She takes this assertion further when she states "In *Gravity's Rainbow* [...] They are Us, a fact that is not necessarily consoling but that does present some room for unanticipated developments" (127). Hite's argument, while discounting the idea that an "outside" exists, suggests that we can only know the story from the "inside." But how are we to conceive an inside without an outside? She seems to point towards the idea of a flat text, but never makes this leap. In fact, in *Gravity's Rainbow* the binary inside/outside dissolves and yet it would be mistaken to believe there remains no difference. On the contrary, "inside" and "outside" are productions that are made to interact and are only visible in a network of difference.

Pynchon re-writes Gödel's theorem as Murphy's Law, "that brash proletarian restatement of Gödel's Theorem—*when everything has been taken care of, when nothing can go wrong, or even surprise us . . . something will*" (GR 275). What makes this theorem important in the context of the novel is that it self-reflexively examines the construction of the text's own systems of signification while at the same time producing narratives whose relation to the main story of the rocket is tenuous at best. Imbedded in this formal design is the notion that foundations cannot be attributed to a single unified source, but rather to flux or a fluid activity. Since there is always an outside towards which the narratives move, and this outside operates in a rhizomatic network making it inconceivable as a totality, Gödel's theorem functions to disrupt our ability to systematize the narrative lines through a cause and effect structure. In other words, it produces the unpredictable: "Even as determinist a piece of hardware as the A4 rocket will begin spontaneously generating items like the S-Gerät" (GR 275). It is the formation of order,

of rules or laws that attempt to explain or give significance to flows, that becomes the border upon which transformations take shape.

As often as not the most direct examples of this process occur in the narrative digressions which lead us away from centralized images like 'Slothrop' and into the network of the rhizome. Ernest Pudding's attempt to write the book *Things That Can Happen in European Politics* lays out the problems associated with models of representation. His reliance on a mode of thought that begins with a unified or solid origin and proceeds to account for all the possible effects of this origin simply cannot keep pace with the speed of change. Pudding quickly finds out there are a seemingly inexhaustible combination of things that can happen in European politics: "Begin, of course, with England. 'First,' he wrote, 'Bereshith, as it were: Ramsay MacDonald can die.' By the time he went through resulting party alignments and possible permutations of cabinet posts, Ramsay MacDonald had died. 'Never make it,' he found himself muttering at the beginning of each day's work—"it's changing out from under me" (GR 77). In his book, Pudding doesn't "give Hitler an outside chance" which is tantamount to implying that Hitler's rise was unpredictable and therefore could not be prevented no matter how much information circulates about the inner workings of power (GR 275).³⁰ This gestures to a very different form of resistance from the Chomskyeque notion that if only enough information reached the wider masses, then all fascist behaviour would cease to threaten the emerging Enlightenment goal of a rationalized society. What I want to make clear is that this implication that Hitler is unpredicable need not resign us to inevitability. The

³⁰ I should be clear that my use of "Hitler" signifies not the man particularly but the range of forces that permitted the existence and authority of a fascist government, that produces "Hitler" as its image.

suggestion is not that forces like those which Hitler summons and commands are unstoppable because unpredictable, but rather that there is no system that can stop the madness of Hitler because it is madness and, as such, doesn't operate according to the accepted rules or laws or norms that govern social structures. Madness, and its corelative fascism, must be engaged with a type of madness, with a force that refuses to play by the rules that this new power attempts to construct.

Likewise there is another scene, at the beginning of the same episode that introduces Brigadier Pudding, that is an apparent digression of a digression, where Gödel's theorem functions to break apart the narrative. This scene presents one Reg Le Froyd who, in 1925, "rushed through the upper town to stand teetering at the edge of the cliff, hair and hospital garment flickering in the wind" (*GR 73*). When accosted by a Constable Stuggles who cries "Don't jump!", Le Froyd replies "I never thought of that" (*GR 73*). Sure enough he throws himself off the cliff and "into the void" (*GR 73*). In this case we get a clear sense of how the order or the rule calls into being an action that, prior to its enunciation, was unthought. Similarly, we can map this forward to the formation of the New Turkish Alphabet in the Seven Rivers country of Central Asia. The implementation of this alphabet as the dominant mode of language is designed to act as a means of control over unstable indigenous populations at the far edge of Russian territory. However, the new printed language becomes politically charged the minute the indigenous populations touch it:

On sidewalks and walls the very first printed slogans start to show up, the first Central Asian fuck you signs, the first kill-the-police-commissioner signs (and somebody does! this alphabet is really something!) and so the magic that the

shamans, out in the wind, have always known, begins to operate now in a political way, and Džaqyp Qulan hears the ghost of his own lynched father with a scratchy pen in the night, practicing As and Bs. . . . (GR 355-356)

The rule or the model actually makes the invisible visible which changes the direction of action.

Another example of this process comes about during Ombindi's attempt to seduce Enzian into an acceptance of the idea of cultural suicide as a means of escape, as a means of returning to a lost homeland.³¹ This seduction produces the song "Sold on Suicide" where

In its complete version it represents a pretty fair renunciation of the things of the world. The trouble with it is that by Gödel's Theorum there is bound to be some item around that one has omitted from the list, and such an item is not easy to think of off the top of one's head, so that what one does most likely is go back over the whole thing, meantime correcting mistakes and inevitable repetitions, and putting in new items that will surely have occurred to one, and—well, it's easy to see that the 'suicide' of the title might have to be postponed indefinitely! (GR 320)

The idea of suicide, here, transforms into a creative act that actually works against the desired end. This process whereby the attempt to construct an ultimate or definitive rule that can be used as a point of measure, paradoxically produces a difference or inconsistency that threatens the structure that is based on a unified origin and is precisely what drives the narrative line in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The more we try to read the novel's ultimate meaning or give it one unified signifying system the more singularities that

31 For either Ombindi "who self-conned as any Christian, praises and prophesies that era of innocence he just missed living in" (GR 321) or Enzian who believes "The people will find the Center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place. . . ." (GR 319), this vision of a homeland would of course be linked to an ideological production.

contradict the system or thesis we produce.

The danger of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and of this analysis, is not so much that the narratives are destabilized, but that the deterritorialized lines, that is the digressions, become reterritorialized and in the process re-organize the text around some singular image, like Slothrop or the rocket, that acts as a center or origin from which to proceed and return. It is not enough to expose the rocket as an empty image because at every moment the text produces new lines that could supplement this lost center. In distinguishing between a royal and nomadic science, Deleuze and Guattari state: "it is not exactly a question of extracting constants from variables but of placing the variables themselves in a state of continuous variation" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 369). There is always a flux that keeps the structure of *Gravity's Rainbow* from closing down entirely upon itself. What needs to remain clear from this "digression" is that the narrative lines in *Gravity's Rainbow* ride a border land or interface that touches up against a totally closed universe, on one hand, and on the other a creative aleatory flight. This discussion puts us in a position to examine, in the final chapter, the social and political implications of this interactive movement as they play out in the Zone, particularly through the creation and operation of the Counterforce.

Digression Three

Politics at the Interface: A Grand Betrayal

*"And there's shit you won't be eating any more—
They've been paying you to love it,
But the time has come to shove it,
And it isn't a resistance, it's a war"*
---Thomas Pynchon
Gravity's Rainbow

"Liberty is a practice"
---Michel Foucault
Space, Knowledge, Power

*"the very conditions that make the State or World war machine
possible [...] continually recreate unexpected possibilities for
counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary,
popular, minority, mutant machines"*
---Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari
A Thousand Plateaus

*"That something is irrational is no argument against its existence,
but rather a condition for it"*
---Friedrich Nietzsche
Human, All-Too-Human

In the Fall of 1945, as Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake's wartime romance begins its disintegration, she pleads, in reaction to his continued interest in the war: "Roger [...] it's *spring*. We're at peace." Her statement is summarily contradicted by a narrative that digresses momentarily from the relation between the lovers:

No, we're not. It's another bit of propaganda [...] [Mexico] sees only the same flows of power, the same

impoverishments he's been thrashing around in since '39
 [...] There's *something* still on, don't call it a "war" if it
 makes you nervous, maybe the death rate's gone down a
 point or two, beer in cans is back at last and there *were* a
 lot of people in Trafalgar Square one night not so long ago
 . . . but Their enterprise goes on. (GR 628)

The picture that emerges from this digression is of a social field constituted by war at varying degrees of intensity. It presents a world where nothing exists outside of war, where every attempt to escape the war structure or the war state gets subsumed back inside a system whose aim is to use war as a means to control and dominate the shape of its social field in order to maintain its architects in positions of power. However, what *Gravity's Rainbow* makes impossible to ignore is that, in addition to its all-encompassing nature, war exhibits the revolutionary conditions of mobility, disorder and fallen borders. By constructing this paradox, the novel locates a destabilizing presence within an oppressive social structure. This presence suggests that transformative forces are at work, within the borders of social structures, to create outsides that undermine the structure in which they are produced. So in this sense, *Gravity's Rainbow*, as a creative text, has neither outside presence to which it refers nor inside legislation that governs its narrative lines; instead, it has only an interface where the twin tyrannical axes of absolute determination and absolute freedom flatten out into an unknown and unpredictable *milieu* whose rules are constantly in the process of transformation. Along this interface the rules change from relation to relation and at any point of its lines any player can refuse to accept the rules. What is important in terms of the politics of *Gravity's Rainbow* is that while revolutionary activity can sprout anywhere along the novel's lines of flight, it is impossible to tell, from a preterite vantage point, that is to say, with no access to a

transcendental authority, what action produces metamorphosis and what gets coopted back inside the very system this action seeks to escape. Where this becomes difficult to conceptualize politically is that, as the novel suggests, social transformation requires a fundamental betrayal on a level where one is not even conscious that it is happening in order to free itself from the structures that take shape in its wake. The production of social change, then, can never be described, only created by putting fragments in motion in order to exceed the bounds of rational thought.

Gravity's Rainbow is constructed along a dichotomy of absolutes: one way determinism and predestination and another freedom and meaninglessness. If, however, neither pole is tenable as an escape route and there is nothing but the paradox of a dual limitation that collapses into itself along the same plane, then is it possible to move past/beyond/through this paradox? Must we remain caught in a situation where it is impossible to distinguish between the revolutionary and the coopted? Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodern texts perform this exact role, eternally spinning around their own axes: "all a poetics of postmodernism would do would be self-consciously to enact the metalinguistic contradiction of being inside and outside, complicitous and distanced, inscribing and contesting its own provisional formulations" (21). Must a reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* be self-defeatist from the beginning? After all, von Göll informs Squalidozzi "even the freest of Gauchos end up selling out, you know. That's how things are" (*GR* 387). The sort of de-politicized aesthetic that Hutcheon proposes, however, does little to address the real effects of exploitation. Hardt and Negri argue, however, that it is not enough to merely point out the logical contradictions in postmodern society.

One must engage with them in order to break them wide open: "Empire can be effectively contested only on its own level of generality and by pushing the processes that it offers past their present limitations. We have to accept that challenge and learn to think globally and act globally. Globalization must be met with a counter-globalization, Empire with a counter-Empire" (206-207).

Given this paradox, Deleuze and Guattari, among other late twentieth century philosophers, attempt to re-conceptualize notions of space so that the paradox itself becomes neither a type of deadlock from which to begin or end, nor a foundational puzzle that sets the course running and which unfolds to some conclusion in time. Rather, Deleuze proposes that, (as Berressem explains): "It is [...] possible to think a space in which inside and outside are no longer fundamentally separated, a space in which one can cross from one to the other without crossing a threshold" ("Of Metal ducks, Embodied Iduros, and Autopoetic Bridges" 89). What Deleuze and Guattari call a "*milieu*" operates in a manner that does not fix distinctions between things, but which does produce difference or multiplicities. Brian Massumi explains that a *milieu* is, "a technical term combining [surrounding, medium and middle] all three meanings" (xvii). At first glance this concept appears to locate itself inside a dualist structure. However, a *milieu*, as a term, is opposed to the binary structure of beginning and end without reproducing this binary relationship because "It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency" (TP 21). By its very nature this *milieu* exceeds its limits which allows for movement that is not confined within the two poles, but in fact, drags the two poles with it in its folds. Deleuze

and Guattari further explain: "*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (*TP* 25). The *milieu* has no fixed boundaries. It is, in fact, one plane from within which difference is produced in order to exceed the very limits that it creates.

It is clear that war permeates the social field of *Gravity's Rainbow*, but it must be understood that it does so as a *milieu*. That is to say, the novel suggests that war is present at a low level of operation even in the most intimate moments of social relations or what we may call peace. War takes on this all-encompassing aspect as an event from which there is no place outside its scope. As Mister Information communicates: "The German-and-Japs story was only one, rather surrealistic version of the real War. The real War is always there. The dying tapers off now and then, but the War is still killing lots and lots of people. Only right now it is killing them in more subtle ways" (*GR* 645). Because it is not possible to establish the narrative time of this statement, it can only be understood as a perpetual present through the use of "right now." War, as a process, is continuous, but its effects produce disjunctures and gaps in both space and time that make distinctions between war and peace seem possible outside of discursive operations. Tölöyan isolates how "Pynchon's war exposes how deceptive the distinction between civilian and military life is, how entangling the norms of peace have been, and what kinds of violence are done to people in their enforcement" (60). The result is not so much the Orwellian contradiction "War is Peace," where the difference between them gets

cancelled, or what Baudrillard calls the "implosion of meaning," as a placing of both rhetorical figures along a single plane so that they are not necessarily separate (31). As such they occupy different ranges of a common spectrum. This strategy resonates with Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* where there is the suggestion that "there's peace even in war, war has its islands of peace. For war satisfies *all* needs" (50). Pynchon does not stop at saying there is some process of war that persists past the battles and theatrical displays of force. He locates the heart of war in the operation of the market: "Don't forget the real business of the War is buying and selling [...] Best of all, mass death's a stimulus to just ordinary folks, little fellows, to try 'n' grab a piece of that Pie while they're still here to gobble it up. The true war is a celebration of markets" (*GR* 105). By constructing a social field that functions within war and from which there is no recourse to an outside, *Gravity's Rainbow* posits that any transformative social drive must stem from within the conditions of its own oppression.

It is this inextricable nature of war as a devastation and war as escape from this devastation that makes the social implications of *Gravity's Rainbow* problematic. On the one hand, war is a tool of empire, of what is referred to in the novel as the "Firm" or a "They-system" whose purpose is social control for economic profit. Wimpe, as an agent of the chemical cartel, claims: "We know how to produce real pain. Wars, obviously [...] these are quantities tied directly to the economy. We know them, and we can control them" (*GR* 348-349). On the other hand, war is never strictly destructive or even negative. In the process of decimating populations, environments and economies, war makes possible the conditions from which to begin building new social formations. What

injects this destruction with hope is that war, in-and-of-itself, does not determine the arrangement of this new formation. War, then, is a transformation that forces the emergence of a new order without determining or plotting the dimensions of the new shape. Heraclitus' famous dictum "War is the father of us all" is mirrored by Mexico's claim that "My mother is the war" (*GR* 39). War tears down structures and lays open the necessity of creating a new state of being: "The War has been reconfiguring time and space into its own image. The track runs in different networks now. What appears to be destruction is really the shaping of railroad spaces to other purposes" (*GR* 257).³² While this narrative comment suggests that war actually has a final shape, the novel keeps this total image out of sight and consequently it can only be experienced as a becoming or as an incomplete process. There is no way to predict the full extent of the variables that factor into the equations that would provide a complete picture of war as an end state. The chances for complete determinacy, on one hand, and total randomness, on the other, remain equally possible. In fact, war is a deterritorialization with no particular direction; instead, it continually cuts away at structural foundations even as powers attempt to reterritorialize new foundations. And it is in the interest of defending some type of structure against this deterritorializing force, if not for meaning, then for safety, that Blicero, Gottfried and Katje enact the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale as "their preserving routine, their shelter, against what outside none of them can bear—the War, the absolute rule of chance" (*GR* 96).

Gravity's Rainbow, following a pattern already established in *V.* and *The Crying*

³² My use of structures includes *all* structures: narrative, social, political, linguistic, economic, material, etc.

of *Lot 49*, attempts to reterritorialize its narrative digressions and dislocations in a binary system. It imposes a dual limitation that orders the way the text and the social relations within the text can be conceptualized. Either everything in the universe is connected in which case it produces itself as a rational entity whose structure can be positively identified and thus made to submit to its own rules, or the universe is completely random and devoid of any system except pure, unexplainable, unforeseeable coincidence without inherent meaning. Obviously neither choice is particularly inviting. Although several critics, indeed the vast majority of IG Pynchon, attempt to resolve this profound duality, this rhetorical divide offers no way to think outside the duality itself. McHoul and Wills, who claim that the post-rhetorical strategy of *Gravity's Rainbow* puts the notion of duality on a single side which nonetheless comes to be opposed to a new term, what they refer to as a "material typonomy," make it possible to conceive of the duality itself as a fundamental aspect of critique in *Gravity's Rainbow* (53). The counter-strategy, however, does not merely substitute one duality, such as order/chaos, for another: "what distinguishes what we now call the post-rhetorical from that model is the fact that the order of the third term in no way transcends or embraces the order of the first two terms" (57).³³ From this assertion it becomes possible to see that strategically, after working through these dualities in both *V.* and *Lot 49* without finding a way out, *Gravity's Rainbow*, like "the black girl [...] a genius of meta-solutions—knocking over the chessboard, shooting the referee" in a grand gesture of renunciation exclaims 'fuck it, let's scrap the whole damn system!' (*GR* 102). Of course, the novel leaves a dizzying formal

33 The material typonomy marks "A material equivalence between signifiers [that] replaces a rhetorical difference between them." (53) Some examples they provide include: rocket/penis//Jamf, reality/fantasy//cinema, us/Them//Slothrop. See page 61.

structure intact, but it is a binary structure that, in its inadequacies, cannot contain the force of its own narratives. This is not to say that *Gravity's Rainbow* branches off into a borderless region or "a prelinguistic consciousness [which] seems to guarantee [...] release from the System" (Maltby 173). Instead, the novel functions, as we've seen in the previous "digressions," like a rhizome where borders are encountered and exceeded as part of a process that moves the narrative lines. This new space operates as an interface or a *milieu* that generates multiplicities. Before we venture into any new rhetorical or conceptual space I think it is worthwhile to see exactly how *Gravity's Rainbow* creates a binary system as a means to display the impotence of this system and in the process construct itself as a *milieu* that overrides the binary structure.

In the contingent binary structure of determinism and chance there is, at one end of the spectrum, a paranoid world where everything unfolds as a plot, while on the opposite end the world is random and meaningless. The horror of this chaotic world takes its sharpest focus in war as an object that dismantles social structures and refuses to come together around any new form. It is a destructive path that stands diametrically opposed to the pre-determined world. This absolute destruction of social structures of control is, on one hand, a liberating force in that it allows for a chaotic, but free, flow of movement. The walls, so to speak, have come down. Khachig Tölöyan identifies how war simultaneously acts as an instrument of domination and "opens up, for a brief historical moment, vistas of a world where there really are no secret networks of power and class, no barriers, no political boundaries and artificial discontinuities" (60). On the other hand, as Slothrop comes to recognize when left to his own devices in the Zone

"anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything [is] a condition not many of us can bear for long" (*GR* 434). In fact, Deleuze and Guattari claim that this wing of the war machine characterizes the flight of fascism: "fascism is constructed on an intense line of flight, which it transforms into a line of pure destruction and abolition" (*TP* 230).

According to Molly Hite, however, the increased fragmentation of pieces scattering in acceleration stems from the breaking apart of a primal unity which can never be recovered: "The Fall results in a universe diversifying endlessly, out of control, abandoned by the gods" (115). But these exponentially dividing parts are equated by Hite as a positive manifestation of hope. She writes: "And though the manic proliferation of events produces a terrifying vision of history, prediction and control are even more terrifying. A universe out of control is at least not committed to a determinate end. For this reason the Fall takes on the aspect of an extremely qualified *felix culpa*" (115). What seems to be overlooked in her argument, which remains susceptible to the old duality of order/chaos, is that completely random happenings have a propensity to enact oppressive structures similar to those perpetrated by a god. Enzian refuses to distinguish between God's law and the rule of absolute luck: "There is no difference between the behavior of a god and the operations of pure chance" (*GR* 323). It is important to recognize that this absolute alienation or disconnect, this vision of a world being progressively cut up into finer and finer particles by "Modern Analysis" is not a way out of a totally determined world to which it is seemingly contrasted, nor is it precisely its opposite (*GR* 722). Instead, it presents itself as a limit, one that folds back on itself to become its opposite, just as Enzian suggests. Both sides of this duality imply that nothing can change what is

or will be. The world of *Gravity's Rainbow* smooths out into a flat text. Because neither a completely determined world where some authority has an absolute command nor the rule of absolute chance offer any hope that social action can effect change it becomes necessary to think of them as occupying the same plane. Taken together as theoretical options their deadlock produces an apathy or ambiguity that permits the structures that are enacted in their names, either as freedom or as defence, to persist.

This sense of utter randomness, where the world is so completely haphazard and accidental that it is devoid of meaning, cannot sustain any structures, which as I've suggested is certainly liberating. But another consequence is that this world cannot produce anything except its own nihilistic drive to the end. It is this nihilism that Ihab Hassan locates in his review of *V.*: "If the novel makes a serious claim on our imagination, it is not because its originality is staggering or its design is labyrinthine. It is rather because its knowledge of the particular nihilism that ravages our time is compelling" (44). However, we should remark that in *Gravity's Rainbow* because both this nihilistic drive and this liberatory desire are products of the reign of absolute chance, it becomes impossible to locate a position from which to declare a difference between the two states of being. This is certainly a point Fran Mason picks up in a discussion about the interdependent processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, when he declares that they lead "to the problem of discerning what is an act of resistance and what is an act of cooptation" (172). This dilemma leaves us on a plane of immanence where the outside is always denied. Is the rocket an agent to take us to the moon and transcend our specific social relations as Franz Pökler and Blicero want to believe? Or is it the

ultimate death tool that Slothrop imagines hanging above him in space ready to descend and hit him with the tip in the forehead at the right moment? When one path is as good as another is it possible to find the "singular point [America] jumped the wrong way from"? (*GR* 556). Žižek articulates this problematic in his discussion of Deleuzian politics when he claims Deleuze himself can be coopted as the radical ideologue of global capitalism: "Is not the latest trend in corporate management itself 'diversify, devolve power, try to mobilize local creativity and self-organization'? Is not anticentralization *the* topic of the 'new' digitalized capitalism?" (185). This end of the spectrum, that of complete fragmentation, poses a limit that folds or collapses, in terms of its effects, into its opposite.

But if these two poles, that of determinism and chance, are part of the same field, we can also say that the attempt to encapsulate the world in a logically determined model, that uses war as a means to purge the world of its mystery, its silence, its accidents, its differences and institute a regime of total control, is a reaction against the emptiness of the first pole. Beyond this second limit of *Gravity's Rainbow* there is only replication. The social structures of empire that are erected around this pole are efficient. They extract the necessary information from an object in order to produce knowledge in the service of a foundation from which to re-create the mirror conditions of the object as a means to foster endless commodity production. While science serves this goal it is the capitalist impetus of mass marketing and mass production, "which survives by creating unfulfillable needs for new commodities," that fuels this system that fashions itself as a contained unit (Mazurek 79). Its movement is like the tentacles of empire that reach out

to subsume its Others in an attempt (but we must be clear, this attempt never succeeds in *Gravity's Rainbow*) to transcend cultural, racialized, class, national or any form of difference while uniting consumers in their desire for products owned by no less than multinational cartels. Under this model of a market controlled by scientific, military and economic elites, there is no room for instability, everything must be accounted for, all ledgers balanced. The inability to account for the affective or irrational aspects of life is precisely why this model fails in its quest for dominance. The emergence of organic chemistry or the production of synthetic materials is intimately tied, in the novel, to the creation and maintenance of an axiomatic market. As Wimpe may or may not have explained to Tchitcherine, "we salesmen believe in real pain, real deliverance—we are knights in the service of that Ideal. It must all be real, for the purposes of our market. Otherwise my employer—and our little chemical cartel is the model for the very structure of nations—becomes lost in illusion and dream, and one day vanishes into chaos" (*GR* 349). While the cartel structure is artificial (as opposed to natural—an opposition that is problematized by both post-structuralist theories and *Gravity's Rainbow*), its effects must be real, that is to say, measurable, in order for the system to maintain its control.

Drug addicts present a type of Other who are produced by the system, but who nevertheless oppose it. Addiction, then, surfaces as a phenomenon that destabilizes the scientific endeavour because "The more pain it takes away, the more we desire [the object of addiction]. It appears we can't have one property without the other, any more than a particle physicist can specify position without suffering an uncertainty as to the particle's velocity" (*GR* 348). Without a calculable knowledge of how addiction operates it

becomes an outside produced from within the structure. The way addiction gets framed in *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests that it is a direct product of the attempt to destroy pain. It presents, for a coherent structure, "A *surplus* cost" that throws the balance or equilibrium of the market out of whack (*GR* 348). And again, Wimpe, in his discussion with Tchitcherine, continues: "A demand like 'addiction,' having nothing to do with real pain, real economic needs, unrelated to production or labor . . . we need fewer of these unknowns, not more" (*GR* 348). This is why addiction, and here we could add dreams, love, trust, care, different forms of mutual contact, fear, anger or any other intangible product of what Hardt and Negri term "affective labor," presents a potentially disruptive force within the fabric of the market (293).³⁴ The effects of these intangibles are entirely unpredictable precisely because they are affects and cannot be thought through rational binary structures.

Addiction, then, as a threat, requires some response from the proponents of empire because its existence jeopardizes both the unity of social structures and its ability to control or limit its subjects' desires. This response takes two forms, both of which rely on war as a means to propagate "They-systems." The first is that of the transnational chemical cartel (whose composition includes, among other corporations, the National Research Council): increase the production of pain in order to find ways of alleviating pain without addiction. The offshoot, of course, is that this production simultaneously produces addiction as an uncontrolled variable in the equation. The second is to employ a

³⁴ Hardt and Negri argue that immaterial labour, of which affective labour is but one face, provides a space where cooperation outflanks capital so that "the cooperative powers of labor power (particularly immaterial labor power) afford the possibility of valorizing itself" (294). For a broader discussion of the role of immaterial labour in the postmodern economy see pages 290-294.

police or military force to prevent the spread of addictive drugs. Because addictive drugs, particularly synthetics, are highly regulated, their circulation moves underground in the black markets. The black market becomes a locus like "little vortices appearing in a crowd" for all the surplus cost or waste of the legislated market (*GR* 569). These markets are acceptable to a degree, in fact, they "carry an element of guilt, of future blackmail, which operates, natch, in favor of the professionals" (*GR* 105). However, if they grow too large or too fast, because they trade in everything the official market has deemed obscene or excessive, the elite interests must be protected: "The cops go at busting these proceedings the way they must've handled anti-Nazi street actions before the War" (*GR* 570). The role of the official market, intertwined as it is with science and the military, is the production of life within determinate and knowable rules that govern what constitutes life.

Thus, the "Firm" or "They-system" in *Gravity's Rainbow* functions, like empire, through the inter-connectedness between the economy, science and military power. Taken together they tend to capture any lines of flight and make them their own constituency: "the imperial State is only one part of [ecumencial organization], and it constitutes a part of it in its own mode, according to its own order, which consists in capturing everything it can. It does not proceed by progressive homogenization, or by totalization, but by the taking on of consistency or the consolidation of the diverse as such" (*TP* 436). In fact, the "Firm" is similar to what Deleuze and Guattari call a "State apparatus" that operates by means of "a dualist organization of segments, a concentricity of circles in resonance, and generalized overcoding" (*TP* 222). But each distinct area or

segment, taken out of its integration, tends to move towards a connection with what lies beyond its boundaries. The behaviourist Pointsman, one of the primary adherents of cause and effect methodologies, follows Pavlov who

believed that the ideal, the end we all struggle toward in science, is the true mechanical explanation. He was realistic enough not to expect it in his lifetime. Or in several lifetimes more. But his hope was for a long chain of better and better approximations. His faith ultimately lay in a pure physiological basis for the life of the psyche. No effect without cause, and a clear train of linkages.
(GR 89)

The explicit use of "faith" aligns even this most material of sciences with the operation of a divine order and suggests a blurred boundary. Gordon Slethaug notes that "The White Visitation Center that Pointsman heads is part of a nineteenth-century ecclesiastical edifice and signifies a way of perceiving causality and divine ordering that differs from behaviorism in its spirituality but not in its deterministic implications" (154-155). Oddly enough, in contrast to a character like Franz Pökler who never faces his role as an invaluable technician of the V-2's destructive capacity until it is too late, Pointsman seems to be acutely aware that the successful completion of his work has dire consequences. In a discussion about the link between Slothrop's map and the falling rockets he claims: "When we find it, we'll have shown again the stone determinacy of everything, of every soul. There will be precious little room for any hope at all. You can see how important a discovery like that would be" (GR 86). It would mean from Pointsman's perspective total control over the production and maintenance of a unified system. This desire to uncover the ultimate pattern or decipher the hieroglyphic code that will unlock the secret order of the universe is not limited to Pointsman. In fact, even

Enzian, whose destabilizing presence in the Zone is certainly among the most radical, hunts down the ultimate shape of the world. Blazing through the wastes of the Zone, high on speed, he speculates to a hypothetical future generation:

We have to look for power sources here, and distribution networks we were never taught, routes of power our teachers never imagined, or were encouraged to avoid . . . we have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world, draw our own schematics, getting feedback, making connections, reducing the error, trying to learn the real function . . . zeroing in on what incalculable plot?

(GR 521)

It is this paradoxical attempt to contain the multiplicities or, in terms of the narrative structure of the novel, the digressions, within a manageable form as a means to control their shape and, as a result, free oneself from the structure, that constitutes one limit of the text.

One of the great ironies of this model of control in *Gravity's Rainbow* is that the very system that dominates is the one that promises the way out of its clutches. The suggestion is not so much that the system itself can fall, but rather that the individual, by getting outside its grasp, can pull the strings that make it work and thus attain a form of freedom from domination. In the novel, science occupies the position of both liberator and jailor. Scientific discourse, like its literary counterpart, constructs patterns in an effort to understand the nature of the world. The world is transformed into knowledge only to the extent that it can be tamed and brought under control as the servant of some other purpose. However, science is not isolated in the laboratory from the diversity of social relations. This drive for control manifests itself as a specific scientific methodology that begins from a theory and ends with the attempt to prove the theory's

validity. This drive spills over into all areas of the social field. Laszlo Jamf's lectures during the Nazi war mobilization speak volumes about the interactions between politics and science or education: "That something so mutable, so *soft*, as a sharing of electrons by atoms of carbon should lie at the core of life, *his* life, struck Jamf as a cosmic humiliation. *Sharing?* How much stronger, how everlasting was the *ionic* bond—where electrons are not shared, but *captured. Seized!* and held!" (GR 577). This opposition of cooperation and dominance animates a deep seated opposition in science, religion and even ethics of a fundamental difference between the human and the Other that the text deconstructs. Deleuze and Guattari, however, refuse to make a "distinction between man and nature." On the contrary, they view "Not man as the king of creation, but rather as the being who is in intimate contact with the profound life of all forms or all types of beings, who is responsible for even the stars and animal life, and who ceaselessly plugs an organ-machine into an energy-machine, a tree into his body, a breast into his mouth, the sun into his asshole" (AO 4). *Gravity's Rainbow* dramatizes this cooperative venture in numerous instances along its interfaces, which include Slothrop's conversations with trees who offer advice on tactics of guerrilla warfare and the story of the conscious lightbulb, Byron the Bulb. This binary between the human and the Other is classically thought to be at the center of an essential or objective reality; indeed, it is the central tenant of humanism. What *Gravity's Rainbow* does is to push this idea against its limit which in turn makes visible the fact that meaning is not the expression of an external truth, but rather the object of a social production. A narrator further connects Jamf's conviction about the ionic bond to a feeling that permeates the social field: "If this is

National Socialist chemistry, blame that something-in-the-air, the *Zeitgeist*. Sure, blame it" (*GR* 578). While the narrative tone of this statement carries a degree of sarcasm that allows us to question what actually infects what, we can at least say that both the intellectual and political climate feed off each other or are the product of a similar desire. If Jamf's desire to re-create life from life does produce something then it is only death. As Berressem points out "The synthetic dream and illusion of a deathless world thus create a completely lifeless world" (*PP* 136). By narrowing the focus of a search to what would fit inside the hypothetical model, science or any totalizing system of thought necessarily excludes data that is essential to life at some level. Thus even if it succeeds in re-creating life it can do so only as a form.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, neither end of the spectrum offers a way out. Ultimately, in terms of their effects, both absolute determinism and absolute chance, fold back into each other and become part of the same plane. The critical tendency of this effect is to think of the text itself, and consequently art, as hermetically sealed within a form that attempts to reproduce some existing social relation outside its rhetorical limits. But if we want to think of this novel as a text, that doesn't so much reproduce a pre-existing outside world, as create its outsides from within its own form, then we must engage with the concept of space as something that is not bound up in a binary system of thought. With this in mind, it becomes possible and even necessary to think of space in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the *milieu*.³⁵ In *Gravity's Rainbow*, this space is likened to an interface. The interface breaks down barriers on different levels. For instance, the

³⁵ Here I mean textual space, but also the spaces that are created through text because the *milieu*, and in fact, the rhizome, rather than making these firm distinctions, sees them as parts involved in the same process.

geographical border of the Zone, the internal/external division or mental/physical or even, and here most explicitly in terms of my argument, the border that distinguishes plots from digressions. Pointsman explains how Kevin Spectro "did not differentiate as much as he between Outside and Inside. He saw the cortex as an interface organ, mediating between the two, but *part of them both*" (GR 141-142, Pynchon's italics). Several critics make the analogy between this space in *Gravity's Rainbow* and a Möbius strip with its singular side and edge. For example, Berressem notes that Pynchon conceptualizes Europe as a "'state of mind' in which psychic and geographic space are conflated" and where "classical space and the distinction between inside and outside are replaced by a new kind of space, one that is represented by the Möbius strip" (PP 121). Mattessich builds on this to say that "this space constitutes an implicate order that holds the registers of language and being together in a single complicity" (81). From this single plane, then, language and being "work within its massive orchestration of language to breach its form and violate the 'self-enclosedness' of the object" (82). The point of my argument is precisely that this space, this *milieu* or interface, is productive or creative. It constantly exceeds its own boundaries by connecting up with other *milieus*, not as a means to destroy itself, but in order to generate new shapes. This does not mean, however, that these new shapes are end-points or complete objects, but rather that it is this effort to work from within the old form or structure in order to transgress its limits that prevents a stasis that can only be death. As Berressem again notes, "the space itself is now *in toto* defined by a cut that is *internal* to the structure" (PP 121). Difference or multiplicity is produced from multiplicity; there can be no reduction to a single origin, but it is produced internally and

projected externally so that while both seem to be separated they are in fact aligned along a single plane.

The Zone is characteristic, if not exemplary, of this type of space. John Johnston notes that it is "only within such a zone or multiplicity in which no signifying or semiotic system attains dominance, and no expressive or discursive unity can take hold, that Pynchon can depict the historical assemblage that forms the new subjects and objects of our contemporary existence" (118). I want to point out here that Johnston's reading figures Pynchon's text as representative of a shared "contemporary existence." This means that the text loses much of its revolutionary force because it attempts "to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the dark recesses of memory and language" (*TP* 12). As a site, the Zone provides some clarity as to how multiple interests permeate the social field without canceling one another out, but we should note along with McHoul and Wills that the text of *Gravity's Rainbow* itself is composed of multiple localized "*sites* for the playing out of discursive operations" (49). Slothrop's personal quest to find the S-Gerät, as a means of gaining some knowledge about himself in order to fight against those unseen powers which have assailed him since before he can remember, is in no way the only narrative line in the Zone. Additionally, the United States and Russia compete for control of land and/or technology through which they could control populations; multinational corporations like ICI Chemical, IG Farben and Shell attempt to control the flows of information and migration; cultural groups like the Hereros try to carve out a space within the ruins where they can re-create their own hybrid society by combining traditional and western myths; and revolutionary groups like

Squalidozzi and his submarine of Argentinean anarchists, seek a return to "the days of the gauchos" where "The pampas stretched as far as men could imagine, inexhaustible, fenceless" (*GR* 264). In this vacuum, each of these interests attempts to channel or direct the flows that war unleashes back towards its own vision of the world as a means of control that will cease the deterritorializing process and recreate the terms of peace.

The interface or *milieu* of *Gravity's Rainbow* stretches beyond the Zone; it does not exist at a particular space or time within the novel, but it permeates the novel in its entirety. The novel itself is an interface. This becomes important in terms of the inevitable questions about resistance versus cooptation. Because this struggle within the *milieu* happens in no-place, it is everywhere. Because the novel refuses the transcendence it seeks, because it betrays its characters, its own hopes and dreams, it forces an engagement with the question of how to re-arrange all these broken pieces without reproducing a system of dominance that seeks to establish an image as the unifying factor. It forces its readers, as well as its characters, to engage with the fact that, regardless of whether or not a They-system is a theoretical possibility, there are powers that pervade all space and attempt to impose limitations at every level of being. This means that resistance must match this effort and occur at all levels of existence: "If there is no place that can be recognized as outside, we must be against in every place" (Hardt and Negri 211). Through this suggestion the novel lays open the possibility of actualizing non-hierarchical social relations by eliminating the determination of privilege. Every site occupies a public sphere where social relations are formulated. Effectively, what this does is position the site for struggle at a local level. This is a local, however, which is in

no way opposed to the global: "the absolute, then, does not appear at a particular place but becomes a nonlimited locality; the coupling of the place and the absolute is achieved not in a centered, oriented globalization or universalization but in an infinite succession of local operations" (*TP* 383). If we think of the novel as an interface—in one sense, between the aesthetic and the political—then we can, to a certain extent, engage with the question of how politics function along the interface.

Aesthetically *Gravity's Rainbow* does not cohere as an object whose parts mesh together to produce a unified text. Instead it produces itself as a series of local operations whose connections often depend less on a rational structure than word play or variations that draw disparate narrative lines together momentarily in order to create the unthinkable. In a digression from a digression about a boy, Gavin Trefoil, whose skin pigmentation can be willed to transform into any colour along a spectrum from albino to "very deep, purplish black," there is a narrative line that follows a nerve cell through its migration and mutation into skin tissue (*GR* 147). An "older operative" explains to a "younger one" that inevitably they all migrate towards the interface. The younger cell cries out with shock and clings to the belief that one day they will return to the central nervous system ("CNS"), to a memory that can still be felt. However, the older female responds:

It's been a prevalent notion. Fallen sparks. Fragments of vessels broken at the Creation. And someday, somehow, before the end, a gathering back to home. A messenger from the Kingdom, arriving at the last moment. But I tell you there is no such message, no such home—only the millions of last moments . . . no more. Our history is an aggregate of last moments. (*GR* 148-149)

These “last moments” are a variation of the “delta-t” or “last unmeasurable gap” at the end of the novel and thus link the two scenes without coming together in terms of plot (GR 760). Language, and by extension art, functions through variation to connect even as it produces difference. The implication, then, is that our knowledge and our existence depends upon an outside that must be completely and perpetually Other. Carroll Eventyr, a medium who functions at the interface of the living and the dead, produces this kind of perpetual Other, that is to say, a variation of himself that he can only know through texts that are inherently unstable:

There's no memory on his side: no personal record. He has to read about it in the notes of others, listen to discs. Which means he has to trust the others. *That's* a complicated social setup. He must base the major part of his life on the probity of men charged with acting as interface between what he is supposed to be and himself. Eventyr knows how close he is to Sachsa on the other side, but he doesn't *remember*, and he's been brought up a Christian, a Western European, believing in the primacy of the 'conscious' self and its memories, regarding all the rest as abnormal or trivial, and so he is troubled, deeply. . . . (GR 153)

Despite Eventyr's fear, this site of contact with Peter Sachsa, to which he has no access through his own memory, this irrational territory nevertheless creates a text of himself that he can only recognize as Other. If we think of text as the formalization of a nomadic movement outside text, then the political charge of the aesthetic of *Gravity's Rainbow* is that its narrative lines refuse to stabilize. The result is a de-formalization of its structure which frees its narrative lines to connect with what lies beyond its borders at any point in order to enact a perpetual creation of itself and the others with which it comes in contact. It is along this interface where the textual and the existential can no longer be extricated

the one from the other, that the struggle, the war continues.

There persists in IG Pynchon, despite the level of theoretical sophistication and complexity, a refusal to read aesthetic form as directly political. Rather there is a tendency to interpret the aesthetic as a politics of a second order. This refusal only reinscribes the very dualities that *Gravity's Rainbow* deconstructs. For example, Mattessich, after suggesting that the prose of *Gravity's Rainbow* turns back against itself as an object of parody, claims "If this amounts to little more than a politics of reading, and hence no real politics at all, it does so with a renewed ethical focus on reading the texts of our lives well" (132). The point I think Mattessich skirts around is that we are not simply reading our lives but actively producing or creating them in the same way that we are not simply reading, but reading to write. What seems to be missing from this sort of criticism is an awareness that *Gravity's Rainbow*, for all its pre-occupation with death and annihilation, is a text that continually produces new outsides that open its own structures. The ethical force of the novel takes shape in its creative capacity, in the spaces where it takes flight, in its digressions, in its dizzying moments of incoherence and experimentation. In an interview about ethics, in which he discusses Sartre, Foucault derives a counter-conclusion to the notion of authenticity as the basis of moral action: "From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (351). Because the 'real' and the textual exist along this interface, they necessarily intertwine. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest "The multiple *must be made*, not always adding higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has

available—always $n - 1$ dimensions" (*TP* 6). The aesthetic of *Gravity's Rainbow* is not sealed in upon itself, but reaches outside its own fractured form into a political realm that is always present both inside and outside the novel.

To illustrate how the novel creates its multiple narratives through a process of fleeing what already exists, let us return to the Hansel and Gretel game where it would appear as though Blicero, from a certain angle, is quite right to question "How seriously is [Katje] playing?" (*GR* 96). Although as "a shape making unavoidable the shape of one last jigsaw piece" becomes clearer we can't help but wonder, how much is he setting himself up? (*GR* 102). When Katje does walk away from the "Oven-game" she threatens the German war effort because she can expose the rocket launch site as a target for British aerial bombardment (*GR* 102). Even though she provides him with time before giving up the coordinates of the site, her action, that simple desertion from the game, makes Blicero evacuate the location. In other words, she has not confronted the entire war structure, but rather she has temporarily opened a space, created a fissure through which something can flee before the space closes down again, and pushed herself outside of the structure of that particular game. Her role as a sort of eternal agent, that is, her ability to play the part does not end with this desertion. In fact, the suggestion is that it can never end and this is the essence of freedom. There is no eternal home, no authentic self to which she can turn. And it is in this light that Enzian tells her "*You've only been set free [...]* I told Slothrop he was free, too. I tell anybody who might listen. I will tell them as I tell you: you are free. You are free. You are free." (*GR* 661). We must think of this freedom as a freedom to change, to mutate, to become Other than you are. This flight always re-constitutes itself

in another *milieu* as something Other. This is why an alternative to the power of a They-system or empire cannot center itself in a definitive location. On the contrary, it must produce "ontologically new determinations of the human, of living—a powerful artificiality of being" (Hardt and Negri 217-218). The outside that Katje withdraws into expands the *milieu* through connection with another *milieu*: "The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" (*TP* 21). While she exceeds one border, she produces a new one that, too, must be exceeded. In this sense, we can think, almost paradoxically, of freedom as a struggle on par with Trotsky's "permanent revolution [...] which makes no compromise with any single form of class rule, which does not stop at the democratic stage, which goes over to socialist measures and to war against reaction from without, that is, a revolution whose every successive stage is rooted in the preceding one and which can end only in complete liquidation" (qtd in Ryan). The consolidation of the Counterforce, even while it claims to "piss on Their rational arrangement," cannot escape Mexico's critique that even a well-maintained and operational We-system is an instance of "playing Their game" (GR 639, 638). But the reason the Counterforce ceases to function as a revolutionary entity is neither its fragmentary nature nor celebration of the irrational, but precisely the opposite. Its attempt to reproduce the very same system even as a form of mimicry or as a temporary engagement cannot disengage from the same pressure of constantly keeping the multitude in check that bears down upon empire. And while the action of the Counterforce centers around Slothrop, the effect is to polarize the multiple interests around the concept of Slothrop. Many commentators suggest that the failure of the Counterforce, heralded by a

spokesman in an interview for *The Wall Street Journal*, stems from its inability to consolidate, to unify even temporarily around an issue or an event or, in this case, Slothrop. The spokesman says "Opinion even at the start was divided. It was one of our fatal weaknesses" (*GR* 738). But we must also note that it is precisely the attempt to define Slothrop and thus give themselves a purpose, a reason for being, that begins a process of in-fighting and stifles the revolutionary project. Since this war happens along an interface that has no borders except those it creates, Slothrop becomes a border through which the Counterforce cannot pass.

It is from within the interface or *milieu* that social relations are produced. Deleuze and Guattari make the argument that desire is inherently productive, that "the real is the end product, the result of the passive syntheses of desire as autoproduction of the unconscious" (*AO* 26). They place psychoanalysis, in its propagation of the ego as the police force that keeps the dangerous, but also creative or productive elements of desire in chains, alongside the State apparatus as a tool of dominance. Likewise, *Gravity's Rainbow* locates the ego as a center of control that prohibits access to regions of the unconscious because they threaten the control of rational structures that produce unity and stability: "The Man has a branch office in each of our brains, his corporate emblem is a white albatross, each local rep has a cover known as the Ego, and their mission in this world is Bad Shit" (*GR* 712-713). But unless the unconscious is going to reproduce or get trapped in a pre-existing structure or form, like either Freud's Oedipus complex or the archetypes of Jung's collective unconscious, unless it is going to adhere to the 'old' rules and codes, it must find a way to form egoless transactions. Because the ego is the

military presence inside the individual and the source of “actual violence, the violence of repression,” it must be betrayed (*GR* 735). The Other must betray the Self in order to avoid being coopted back inside the system. This is why betrayal becomes the political action of the novel. Judas betrays Jesus and Slothrop wonders had Judas become the figure of salvation for his action "Might there have been fewer crimes in the name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot?" (*GR* 556). If these poles are reversed, if Judas becomes his Other, then this betrayal becomes an act of mercy, Blicero betrays Gottfried, Slothrop betrays himself, gravity betrays the rocket, Pointsman betrays Mexico, Mossmoon betrays Pointsman, Jessica betrays Mexico, Greta betrays Bianca, Pernicious Pop betrays the Floundering Four, Eddie Pensiero betrays his colonel, Džaqyp Qulan betrays Tchitcherine, *Gravity's Rainbow* betrays its reader . . . the list goes on and on. Betrayal should be read as an act of innocence because it is not the action of someone who steadfastly distinguishes good from evil, but rather the person who professes to know nothing beyond the pragmatic relations of momentary existence that are constantly in flux. Deleuze and Guattari mark out the prophet as the figure who differentiates between "the great realm of deceptions and the great realm of betrayals" (*TP* 125). They claim: "Unlike the seer, the prophet interprets nothing: *his delusion is active rather than ideational or imaginative*, his relation to God is passionate and authoritative rather than despotic and signifying: he anticipates and detects the powers (*puissances*) of the future rather than applying past and present powers (*pouvoirs*)" (*TP* 124). What I'm suggesting is that along this interface, in order to reach an outside, the conscious self must exceed its rational boundaries, at which point it connects with its Other and through this connection

fundamentally betrays the concept of Self as a means to elude the cooptative powers of the Firm. When Pirate Prentice finds himself inside a "disquieting structure [...] a place of many levels, and new wings that generate like living tissue—though if it all does grow toward some end shape, those who are inside can't see it," Merciful Evans explains "I can't even trust myself? can I. How much freer than that can a man be? If he's to be sold out by anyone? even by *himself* you see?" (GR 537, 543). The implication is that because we never know the particular context into which we enter and have no control over how our words/actions are being put into play, we are free to become anything we desire, even at the cost of destroying the terms of our existence as humans. Ironically, the novel's hope comes from the mouth of the rocket-creator, Wernher von Braun, in the form of an epigraph to Part One: "Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation." This mutation, however, must be conceived, not as a transcendence, but as a change from within the bowels of that which it destroys.

While Squalidozzi believes "In the openness of the German Zone, our hope is limitless," *Gravity's Rainbow*, in constructing its entire social field as war, extends this hope infinitely (GR 265). The narrative strategy that the novel adopts—to recognize and then work through the paradox of war as a force of massive destruction that simultaneously opens and closes a social space for non-hierarchical relations—operates from within this paradox to create a *milieu*. This in no way implies that *Gravity's Rainbow* resolves or transcends the contradiction. Instead the novel shifts discursive boundaries, conceptualizes both sides of the binary that solidifies the paradox as part of the same operation and then sweeps them away in its narrative lines that continually grow

out of each other. In this way the narratives within *Gravity's Rainbow* stretch towards what lies outside their own borders, that is to say, to other *milieus* by creating and becoming its own Other. Along these interfaces between central narrative and digression, social and individual, self and other, where there is neither one nor the other, only multiplicity, *Gravity's Rainbow* invites us to ride towards the impossible, towards an inconceivable present.

InConclusion:

The Fall Back into History

"What's so shameful is that we've no sure way of maintaining becomings, or still more of arousing them, even within ourselves. How any group will turn out, how it will fall back into history, presents a constant 'concern'"

---Gilles Deleuze
Negotiations

"This ascent will be betrayed to Gravity. But the Rocket engine, the deep cry of combustion that jars the soul, promises escape. The victim, in bondage to falling, rises on a promise, a prophecy, of Escape. . . ."

---Thomas Pynchon
Gravity's Rainbow

If there now passes along this interface between *Gravity's Rainbow* and my own readings, a sense of resolution or of closure, it is illusory. While it would be disingenuous and hypocritical to state, after arguing the impossibility of permanent closure, a definitive word that wraps my digressions together in a main idea, I am not above betrayal. This thesis will present itself as a single text, each point serving its master, but it will have gaps, discontinuities, productive spaces suitable for digression. This conclusion will not say one thing, it will say many. It will speak collected fragments, digressions from the point that there is no point which is the point: the form and the content are inseparable.

The type of reading I have attempted to construct always faces the danger that it will reterritorialize. All you need to know about *Gravity's Rainbow* is contained in

Slothrop or the rocket. Or conversely, let us read the digressions as the central narrative, as the 'main line' to which the rest of the novel must submit. Reversing the poles, making the margins central, these are symptoms of the same process. They function to limit and contain, to reduce a multiplicity to a manageable size. They are ways of preventing the text from reaching outside itself, to keep it suspended in literature as literature, as though spinning eternally unconnected to anything. It is precisely because *Gravity's Rainbow* thrashes up against its own borders, because it rattles its own cage and slips through the keyhole, that we must adopt a reading strategy that aids this process without itself becoming lodged in its own impasse.

The possibility that a transcendental authority lurks in the shadows, in the silences of *Gravity's Rainbow* produces a paranoid response that ceaselessly searches for this authority, if only to avoid its pervasive reach. The novel's refusal to locate, in either time or space, any transcendental authority conjures up a form of nostalgia for the old modes of knowledge that are now denied, that is, of making narratives complete by connecting objects and characters and events in order to form a story that proceeds logically from point to point. Slothrop, wandering around in the Zone without any identification papers, recalls a memory back in Berkshire: "picking up rusted beer cans, rubbers yellow with preterite seed, Kleenex waded to brain shapes hiding preterite snot, preterite tears, newspapers, broken glass, pieces of automobile, days when in superstition and fright he could *make it all fit*, seeing clearly in each an entry in a record, a history; his own, his winter's, his country's . . ." (*GR* 626). But the old story he was able to construct is all gone. Or it never was. The parts no longer fit. Or they never did. There is no narrative

form large enough to encapsulate the speed of flight. When this memory did exist, it was already illusion, lived fantasy, delusion concocted by Them. There was always only the pieces, the remainders, the digressions, the "seeds" left by the wayside, forgotten in the rush of progress, awaiting the connection, the next fix that'll keep the ball bouncing.

What does it all mean? "Proverb for Paranoids, 3: If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers" (*GR* 251). And yet, in spite of this nostalgia, *Gravity's Rainbow* is celebratory. In its refusal to provide the transcendental authority, the novel does not concede that social change is hopeless because we are a society consumed by our own death. Instead the text suggests that in the absence of the authority of a master, we can only change from within structures or forms in which we are simultaneously producer and product. While on a content level, *Gravity's Rainbow* engages with nation-states, multinational corporations, scientific models, empire, colonialism and even the ego as structures from which there is no escape, these elements of content cannot be separated from the form of the novel itself. That is to say, if there is no escape except by means of a nomadic movement through these structures then what better place to engage than in the form inseparable from content. And because the novel itself, as a form consisting of a central narrative, essentially explodes into narrative lines or digressions that cannot be brought together as a unified text, *Gravity's Rainbow* wages a guerrilla war against its own form in order to create a new form, that is itself inherently unstable and unpredictable.

The digressions in the novel do not reverse poles and position themselves as center, but flatten the text into a non-hierarchical realm where there are only narrative

lines or "surplus yarns" (McHoul and Wills 62). These lines, however, do not oppose the structure of a main narrative from a pre-existing world outside the text. That is to say, there is no privileged world, no 'reality', no history, no truth beyond the existence of the novel against which it can be measured in order to see how it matches up against its object. Instead, the narrative lines move through this structure and simultaneously destroy the old forms and create, in their flight, new forms. This aesthetic technique is invested at every level with a political and social desire to free individuals from structures of control like religion, nation-states, institutions, corporations as well as individuals own repressive psycho-social apparatuses. The recognition that *Gravity's Rainbow* brings to this discussion is that no outside force will arrive to 'save' us. There is only "the path you must create by yourself, alone in the dark" (GR 136). If we reach an outside or outsides, they must be products of our own creation. In other words, we must continually create and become Other as a means to elude powers that rely on strict, but fine distinctions between friend and foe, enemy and ally.

Thus if my readings do not hold, if they fall apart out along the interface, that is to say, if they are filled with gaps and discontinuities, then they are productive. If my digressions are written on a promise to point the way out, to give a definitive or conclusive reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* then they too, like Gottfried in the rocket, are betrayed in their ascent. That the digressions in *Gravity's Rainbow* cannot be reclaimed without sacrificing some aspect of the narratives in order to produce a unified text is the novel's vision of hope. It is this space, this delta-t before the apocalypse, a nomadic movement through form that prevents the form from closing down on the narratives, that

keeps the lines in flight. How these lines fall back into history, that is to say, how they are used/abused, subjected to time and space, to social formations is certainly a concern in the text. At the same time, these lines, once created, break apart from the process of their creation. Their flight is uncontrolled and the attempt to shape its future path seems a losing battle. The means to prevent these lines from becoming reterritorialized is to follow them, to produce more lines of flight, to produce a rainbow of excess, it is, like Katje permanently creating herself anew, to proceed by digressions that no longer return to any originary object. Is it any wonder *Gravity's Rainbow* ends with an invitation, "Now everybody—" to sing?

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