

Oppositional Discourses, Unnatural Practices: *Gravity's History and "The '60s"*

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Will Postwar be nothing but "events," newly created one moment to the next? No links?
Is it the end of history?¹

Re-reading *Gravity's Rainbow* today, it is possible to see from a critical distance how much it is a product of its particular historical situation. Pynchon's text is a novel of "The '60s"--not only because it is *about* that now mythic period, but because it is demonstrably *of* it as well. Specifically, many of the text's obsessive concerns--with "the War," with propaganda and psychological manipulation, with genocide and the treatment of racial/ethnic subcultures, and with the paranoiac entity called "The Firm" or "The System"--are concerns that reproduce in displaced forms the anxieties of an America At War both at home and abroad, caught up in the traumatic cultural upheavals of what we now nostalgically call "The '60s." It might seem excessively culturally deterministic to insist that the structure of the text, with its strange, destabilizing shifts in modes of cultural/textual production so blatantly at odds with each other, recapitulates the historical conditions of the period. But to say that the chaotic clash and clatter of competing codes that intersect in "the Zone" of the text reproduces the similarly dispersed array of forms-in-conflict that traversed the cultural field during the period of its production is not only defensible but, once brought into focus, almost self-evident. The text, like the decade it reproduces, is a conflictual site in which disparate discourses struggle to be heard against the general cacophony of languages that is the social text; and *Gravity's Rainbow* can most productively be examined, not as a fixed, static, and iconic text, but as a linguistic arena of contestation in which is enacted in dramatic form the battle against hegemony that V. N. Volosinov calls "the struggle for the sign."²

The subject of this essay, then, is *Gravity's* history--or, more properly, its historicity as a cultural product. Examining how the text is produced by the conflicts and contradictions of the period discloses its historicity in its dominant concerns. The discourses of *Gravity's Rainbow* diverge from certain semiolinguistic points that indicate specific cultural anxieties and contradictions. For convenience, these

textual constellations can be organized around key words--words like "blackness," "the movie," "the war," "the system," and "the rocket"--that play a formative role in text production. In general, these textual modes reproduce corresponding modes of cultural production; but the text's ability to generate subversion and sustain negation depends on its capacity, not merely to mimetically reflect its historical situation, but to displace cultural production to lay bare the ideological contradictions of the dominant formation. *Gravity's Rainbow's* subversiveness is thus linked to its relentless undermining of linear-alphabetic logic, of narrative form, and of the collective representations that institute the "social construction of reality"³ that legitimates the hegemonic culture. Power as an institution always masquerades as something that is "in the nature of things" rather than instituted by cultural practices. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus destabilizes text-production to disrupt the discourse of power and to open micropolitical areas of subversion in marginalized practices, attacking the dominant paradigms by denaturalizing the construction of "reality effects" and foregrounding the socio-political nature of all cultural forms. In this sense, "paranoia," the dominant mode of text-production in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is a method of demystification in that, for the paranoid, nothing is simply "natural" and "given": "Everything is some kind of plot" (603)--that is, an appearance of "reality" masking the institution of power; and Slothrop's "Paranoid's Progress" through the text is a parable of delegitimation that cuts through ideological obfuscation to reveal the machinations of multinational capital and the mechanisms of technocratic control. Similarly, the text problematizes its assimilation of history by emphasizing its status as interpretive construct. The techniques of "re-reading" history developed by Enzian (520 ff.) and Tchitcherine (566 ff.) debunk conventional historiography, posit alternative and revisionist histories, and reveal that "history," like "reality," is constructed in the interests of power. Hence what I call "*Gravity's History*" is not a fixed entity or finalized interpretive mode, but a *practice* of apprehending cultural production and displacing ideological assumptions which is not totalized or fixed as a stable "meaning" or message.

Gravity's Rainbow is a definitive postmodern text because it commits itself to the gargantuan task of encyclopedically mapping the totality of postwar cultural production--a project that involves an implicit engagement with historicity. And for us, the readers and critics of Pynchon's megalomaniac project, it is only by engaging the historical specificity of that text that we can recognize the potential for subversion within what sometimes seems to be the seamless totality of the discourse of power that *Gravity's Rainbow* attempts, endlessly,

to deconstruct--operating as it does, as we must, always from within the paranoid history it attempts to render obsolete.

Schwarzphänomen:

The Schwarzkommando and the Discourse of Blackness

He had not meant to offend sensibilities, only to show the others, decent fellows all, that their feelings about blackness were tied to feelings about shit, and feelings about shit to feelings about putrefaction and death. (276)

Much of the impetus for the "New Left" and other radical movements of the '60s grew out of the involvement of young white radicals with black activists in the Civil Rights movement, perhaps the most significant political legacy of the decade. Pynchon's text shows the influence of this rising "black" discourse most directly in his article "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts" (1966), which explores racial tensions in the L.A. ghetto, and in his story "The Secret Integration" (1964), which anatomizes the reaction of white suburban Americans to a black household in their midst.⁴ "Blackness" is also a significant theme in the earlier novel *V.* (1963), in which German genocide against the Hereros in Southwest Africa is seen as representative of the historical vectors impelling the 20th century. In all these texts, then, "blackness" serves as a sign to motivate the investigation of contemporary political issues.

The politics of "blackness" play a major role, too, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which probes the cultural construction of race and color as a socio-linguistic nexus that is implicated in and even directly productive of racist ideology. Beginning with Slothrop's traumatic encounter with "Red Malcolm" (the text's intertextual version of Malcolm X) and his cronies in the Roseland Ballroom--of interest to PISCES because of the light it sheds on "race relations in their country" (75, 62-65)--and running through the complicated series of vendettas involving Major Marvy, Tchitcherine, and Enzian, *Gravity's Rainbow* dissects the discourse of "blackness" to reveal how language perpetuates racist ideology and interpellates individual subjects in line with embedded cultural forms.⁵ In situating its discourse within the arena of this cultural "struggle for the sign" of "blackness," then, *Gravity's Rainbow* both reproduces the dominant structure and displaces it, to produce that "internal distantiating from ideology" that Althusser infers as the role of art, thus aligning the text oppositionally within its historical situation.⁶

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, black activism is textualized most directly in the guise of the Schwarzkommando, who stand in for Black Power groups of the '60s like the Black Panthers. But it would be a mistake

to read literally the text's representations or to look positivistically for "real life" counterparts of the Schwarzkommando. *Gravity's Rainbow* both invites and defies such "naive" reading. Rather, the text is concerned with probing the social dynamics of the discourse of "blackness" as it conditions subjective responses to racial difference and otherness. Hence PISCES' examination of Slothrop's responses reveals not "real" events but culturally produced fantasies modelled on Norman O. Brown's psychohistorical text *Life Against Death*.⁷ Similarly, Tchitcherine's vendetta against his black half-brother, Enzian, is motivated not by "real" personal animosity but by a culturally-determined "*Schwarzphänomen*" (513; cf. 337-38) that drives Tchitcherine to seek to annihilate the racial/cultural "other." Such representations demonstrate that ideological formations enacted in language actually *produce* "real" historical effects. In fact, the text suggests, it is the discourse of "blackness" constructed by the dominant culture that actively generates the phenomenon embodied by the Schwarzkommando:

At PISCES it is widely believed that the Schwarzkommando have been summoned, in the way demons may be gathered in, called up to the light of day and earth by the now defunct Operation Black Wing. . . . Why wouldn't they admit that their repressions *had*, in a sense [. . .] *had* incarnated real and living men [. . .]. (275-77)

Gravity's Rainbow's representation of a black culture constructed in the inverse image of the dominant "white" society might be measured against Eldridge Cleaver's remarks on the role of mass media in "channell[ing] the aspirations and goals of the black masses" by constructing Negro heroes as images of white cultural values. Even blacks, Cleaver pointed out in 1968, find themselves operating within a cultural ideology that disparages "blackness," thus instilling in them a "racial death-wish" like that of Pynchon's Zone Hereros.⁸

The discourse of "blackness" emplotted in *Gravity's Rainbow* is intimately connected with the cultural conflicts of its time, as emergent Black Power groups attempted to redefine the terms of "black and white" ideology to assert that, in the now cliché phrase, black is indeed beautiful. But this "black and white" discourse is also paradigmatic of the dominant culture's construction of racial difference in more generalized representations of "otherness." Hence the text's concern with "blackness" serves to focus its mediations on the "colonial subject" in all guises--red, yellow, black and brown--and to explore the politics of racial exploitation as a cross-cultural dynamic in terms suggestive of Franz Fanon's preoccupations in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968).⁹ This concern with the politics of otherness further intersects with the text's critique of

neocolonialism and America's role in Vietnam as interpreted as a racial issue. As Cleaver wrote:

The American racial problem can no longer be spoken of or solved in isolation. The relationship between the genocide in Vietnam and the smiles of the white man toward black Americans is a direct relationship. (Cleaver 117)

Similarly, in *Gravity's Rainbow* the issue of blackness motivates a larger exploration of neo-colonial ideology and genocide against persons of color or other ethnic distinction, including Jews, American Indians, and Celtic peoples.

Gravity's Rainbow is eclectic and encyclopedic in its attempts to deconstruct the discourse of "blackness." Thus the text draws on intertextual material as diverse as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the jazz of Charlie Parker, and the literature of the Hereros to motivate its attack on the use of "blackness" as a sign in the structure of dominance. The effect of the text is thus to reveal how such constructions institute cultural effects with political consequences that reach into all aspects of life. And in order to reveal how such processes of cultural production function in contemporary culture, *Gravity's Rainbow* casts its construction of blackness in the form of that most "unnatural" of modes: the movie.

The Society of Simulation: The Novel as Movie, the Movie as Novel

. . . making the unreel real
By shooting at it, one way or another-- (689)

The cultural-materialist historian might see "the '60s" as the decade in which American culture became saturated by mass media. *Gravity's Rainbow* is correspondingly permeated by the forms and discourses of the omnivorous media. In *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan heralded the postwar explosion (or "implosion") of communications technology as a "totally new environment" in social life, and proclaimed this "New Age" in apocalyptic rhetoric as promising a "Pentecostal condition" of "cosmic consciousness."¹⁰ Pynchon incorporates this McLuhanite rhetoric into both *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Gravity's Rainbow*, but gives its apocalyptic tone a darker twist that betrays a deep ambivalence about the new modes of cultural production. And in "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts," for example, he writes:

From here, much of the white culture that surrounds Watts--and, in a curious way, besieges it--looks . . . a little unreal, a little less than substantial. For Los Angeles, more

than any other city, belongs to the mass media. What is known around the nation as the L.A. Scene exists chiefly as images on a screen or TV tube. . . . It is basically a white Scene, and illusion is everywhere in it, from the giant aerospace firms . . . to the "action" everybody mills along the Strip on weekends looking for. . . .

Watts lies impacted in the heart of this white fantasy. It is, by contrast, a pocket of bitter reality. (Journey 78)

The "Watts" text carries the oppositional tone of the Civil Rights movement and the contemporaneous "War on Poverty" along with an anti-technological rhetoric taken from the "Two Cultures" controversy.¹¹ In turn, these discourses are incorporated into *Gravity's Rainbow*, which presents itself as an "L.A. Scene" writ large, a "white" cinematic fantasy version of mass-media society, at the heart of which lies the "bitter reality" of war and death.

In this context, Pynchon's critique of mass media echoes critics of the "Postmodern condition" like Fredric Jameson, who observes that "the informational function of the media," instead of serving as a cultural memory-bank, "help[s] us to forget" our recent history, thus contributing to the way "our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past."¹² The contemporary subject exists in a perpetual state of media-induced informational overload and global culture/future shock; yet the disinformational content of mass media generally promotes the evaporation of any lived historical content, thus succeeding not only in commodifying and consuming the past but in distancing and derealizing the present as well. In this postmodern cultural situation, which theorists have labelled the "society of the spectacle" (Guy Debord) and "la société de consommation" (Jean Baudrillard),¹³ "reality" is converted into a mode of *simulation*, a diversionary display of alienated collective representations composed of a flux of free-floating signifiers and objectified image-simulacra that Pynchon casts in *Gravity's Rainbow* as "The Show" or "The Movie." Contemporary images of collectivity thus appear submerged in the schizophrenic flux of consumer commodity-fetishes that occupy the neon videoscape of First World postmodern culture, suffused in the atmosphere of primary narcissism and undirected violence captured in Pynchon's text. But behind this degraded collective display lurk the specters of mass death and starvation, insurrection and perennial subsidized warfare in the Third World, with above it all the Damoclean sword of nuclear annihilation--that vague yet unimaginably deadly threat lurking behind every page of *Gravity's Rainbow* that Pynchon elsewhere calls "Our collective nightmare The Bomb."¹⁴

Under the weight of this historical condition, then, the individual subject--like the neophyte reader of *Gravity's Rainbow*--is unable to cope with the sheer perceptual bombardment of (mis)information; but

the mass media render that information consumable and neutralize it, thus preserving the inviolable "space" of the disembodied viewing subject free from the incursion of unsettling realities. Reality recedes into simulation. History disappears into Foucauldian archive. And, as at the end of any war movie, the voice-over--voice of the abstract logocentric subject--goes on talking to itself, producing itself as discourse, reproducing itself as prerecorded message, and as a dream of pure presence in which the listener, the reader, might seek refuge from a history that is all too rapidly converted into the past and discarded on the junk-heap of postmodern culture.

This is the cultural situation that Pynchon's text reproduces, and in which it is situated as an oppositional practice. Pynchon's text enacts the contradictions of postmodern media culture in that, by presenting itself as a movie, it undermines the self-referential cinematic illusion, attacks the "society of the spectacle" from within, and attempts to break out of that illusion, to connect with "something real" (754): with lived historical experience. In its mixed celebration and distrust of mass media, *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests the attitudes of contemporaneous situationists and other practitioners of "guerilla ontology," like William S. Burroughs in *Nova Express*:

"Photo falling--Word falling--Break Through in Grey Room--
Use Partisans of all nations--*Towers, open fire--*"

The Reality Film giving and buckling like a bulkhead under pressure and the pressure gauge went up and up. The needle was edging up to NOVA.¹⁵

Gravity's Rainbow's conflictual employment of cinematic form is both an attack on the derealizing effects of media and an anatomy of the mechanisms of cultural production whereby "the unreal" is made a version of The Real through objectification and naturalization.¹⁶ The text denaturalizes cinematic "reality effects" by analyzing their production as a function of the technology of perception characteristic of Western European culture:

There has been this strange connection between the German mind and the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement, for at least two centuries--since Leibniz, in the process of inventing calculus, used the same approach to break up the trajectories of cannonballs through the air. (407)

A similar analytic technique is used by "the technicians at Peenemünde to peer at the Askania films of Rocket flights, frame by frame" (567). Hence "film and calculus" are intertextually linked as "pornographies of flight. [. . .] Reminders of impotence and abstraction" (567).

But if these scientific frames and the technologies they constitute are seen as derealizing abstractions, yet they acquire a "real" status,

so that, as Franz Pökler realizes, "these techniques [are] extended past images on film, to human lives" (407). In a reversal of empiricist conceptions, cinematic effects directly produce versions of The Real. So Pökler's child, Ilse, fathered on his wife while Franz is reenacting a scene from a movie, becomes "his movie-child," transformed into "a film" (398). And so the Schwarzkommando are "summoned, in the way demons may be gathered in," by a movie concocted by PISCES for use in psychological warfare. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus demonstrates that The Real is produced by illusions of perception and effects of technological simulation, and shows how culturally-induced "reality-effects" impose themselves on human subjects. "In the Zone, in these days, there is endless simulation" (489), the text declaims, anticipating Baudrillard's analysis of the "society of simulation" in which cultural production has moved into a mode of "The hyperreal . . . which is entirely in simulation" (Simulations 146-47).

The conflictual role of mass media in *Gravity's Rainbow* further reproduces the ambivalence of contemporary radical discourse toward the media that both opposed and enabled it. In the '60s, control of the omnipresent image-making media became a factor in the circulation of information and thus in limiting access to power; and manipulation of the media became a major tool of both mainstream politicians and counter-cultural groups, as even the Five O'Clock News was transformed into an arena of contestation. *Gravity's Rainbow* locates itself oppositionally within a society in which cultural production--Enzensberger's "consciousness industry"--is largely controlled by representatives of the sinisterly ubiquitous German-expressionist filmmaker (and black-marketeer) Gerhardt von Göll, whose "corporate octopus wrap[s] every last negotiable item in the Zone" (611). In a society captivated by its own mediated reflection and saturated by commodities, subversive activity appears impossible. But it is part of the text's ambivalence about its own status that von Göll remains a positive if unsavory character in *Gravity's Rainbow*, showing up in Hell with Pirate Prentice (540), planning a movie with the Argentine anarchists (385), and even becoming a marginal member of the Counterforce (745). The text masquerades parodically as a product of the current modes to subvert them from within and liberate their utopian potential; and the view of media embedded in the text is dialectical rather than monolithic, advocating that oppositional activity engage the new technologies on their own ground, as did Enzensberger's contemporaneous Marxist "Constituents of a theory of the media."¹⁷ In *Gravity's Rainbow* the mass media are a contestatory site in which conflicting messages and contradictory discourses intersect to open the cultural arena to oppositional practice.

Gravity's Rainbow is directed to (and perhaps *by*) an audience of "old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?)" (760), and so engages that society on its own terms. While dramatically enacting the critique mounted on the media by theorists of the postmodern, the text attempts to activate the popular and utopian potential in mass culture also remarked by Jameson.¹⁸ But in the historical situation of the '60s, the cinematic illusion could be perceived as dangerous because it concealed or derealized the truly "bitter reality" of "The War," Vietnam, a war that was played out before the mediatized eyes of a TV-conditioned American public so that even those who took part in it too often saw the War as simply a very bad movie indeed. As Michael Herr describes it, Vietnam became:

Life-as-movie, war-as-(war) movie, war-as-life; a complete process if you got to complete it, a distinct path to travel, but dark and hard, not any easier if you knew that you'd put your foot on it yourself, deliberately and--most roughly speaking--consciously. Some people took a few steps along it and turned back, wised up, with and without regrets. Many walked on and just got blown off it. A lot went farther than they probably should have and then lay down, falling into a bad sleep of pain and rage, waiting for release, for peace, any kind of peace that wasn't just the absence of war. And some kept going until they reached the place where an inversion of the expected order happened, a fabulous warp where you took the journey first and then made your departure.¹⁹

"Life-as-movie, war-as-(war) movie, war-as-life":
Vietnam, the Absent War

In the middle of *Dispatches*, Michael Herr's New-Journalistic account of Vietnam, is embedded a textual interlude that stands as *mise-en-scène* for the War and its intimate intertextual relationship with its time. On the bedroom wall of a GI named Davies' house in Saigon appears an unsettling artistic production that captures the phantasmagoria of postmodern warfare:

Most of one wall was covered with a collage that Davies had done with the help of some friends. It included glimpses of burning monks, stacked Viet Cong dead, wounded Marines screaming and weeping, Cardinal Spellman waving from a chopper, Ronald Reagan, his face halved and separated by a stalk of cannabis; pictures of John Lennon peering through wire-rimmed glasses, Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix, Dylan, Eldridge Cleaver, Rap Brown; coffins draped with American flags whose stars were replaced by swastikas and dollar signs; odd parts clipped from *Playboy* pictures, newspaper headlines (FARMERS BUTCHER HOGS TO PROTEST PORK PRICE DIP), photo captions (*President Jokes with Newsmen*), beautiful girls holding flowers, showers of peace symbols; Ky standing at attention and saluting, a small mushroom cloud forming where his genitalia should have been; a map of the western United States with the shape of Vietnam reversed and fitted over California and one large, long figure that began at the bottom with shiny leather boots and rouged knees and ascended in a microskirt, bare breasts, graceful shoulders and a long neck, topped by the burned, blackened face of a dead Vietnamese woman. (Herr 186-87)

Davies' collage is an attempt to represent the War, to make sense out of history in a time when history seems to have gone insane. But what is evident in Davies' effort is that, as an artwork in the stylized form of a constellation of socio-cultural signs laid out in spatial array, the pastiche doesn't "make sense," doesn't "add up," doesn't seem to signify anything outside itself. History as referent of these derealized signifiers detached from their signifieds by the destabilizing effects of juxtaposition is not really "represented" by the collage so much as (re)produced as a "reality effect" or mirage of signification, a hallucination induced by signs that are emptied of meaning. History remains as unrealizable and unreadable as ever. Representation has passed out of the realm of lived experience and become a nightmare, a bad dream or horrifying war-movie: Vietnam, the Absent War.

Similarly, *Gravity's Rainbow*--written in the California of Davies' collage--is full of pastiche and collage, crazy-quilt compendiums and encyclopedic lists of disconnected items that defy being summed up, strung together, or reduced to a recognizable meaning. The description of Slothrop's desk (18) is a classic case of the text collapsing under the weight of proliferating details. But one can isolate many similar passages, such as this one describing London under the Blitz:

In the stations of the city the prisoners are back from Indo-China, wandering their poor visible bones, light as dreamers or men on the moon, among chrome-sprung prams of black hide resonant as drumheads, blonde wood high-chairs pink and blue with scraped and mush-spattered floral decals, folding-cots and bears with red felt tongues, baby-blankets making bright pastel clouds in the coal and steam smells, the metal spaces, among the queued, the drifting, the warily asleep, come by their hundreds in for the holidays, despite the warnings, the gravity of Mr. Morrison, the tube under the river a German rocket may pierce *now, even now as the words are set down*, the absences that may be waiting them, the city addresses that surely no longer exist. The eyes from Burma, from Tonkin, watch these women at their hundred perseverances--stare out of blue orbits, through headaches no Alasils can ease. (132; emphasis added)

Despite tonal differences, the stylistic similarities between the two passages are rather striking, even without the subtly-coded double-focus that triggers the recognition that Pynchon's text refers to the same Absent War as Herr's.²⁰ In each text there is the same proliferation of decentered signs that displaces simple referentiality. And in each text there is a sense that behind the slide of signifiers there is a Real that eludes representation yet produces and informs the text. And that "absent cause" of the text is The War, which appeared in American culture in the late '60s in just such a form: as derealized signs and images on TV screens and in magazines, and as the absent cause behind the invisible forces of disintegration and death operating

beneath the surface of the chrome-plated postmodern American landscape.

In "Postmodernism," Jameson postulates a connection between "the cultural logic of late capitalism," in which due to the effect of advanced reification the signifying chain has disintegrated and the sign has been objectified and commodified as an image-simulacrum, and the aesthetic form of pastiche or collage characteristic of postmodern artistic production. This postmodern condition appears stylized in the texts of Pynchon and Herr. The stylistic register of these two passages reproduces the cultural dominant of a linguistic economy that has lost connection with the material conditions of lived historical experience. Subjective experience acquires the "phantom objectivity" Georg Lukács ascribes to reification,²¹ and the construction of subjectivity becomes schizophrenic. Individual experience becomes hallucinatorily decentered (as in the many passages in *Gravity's Rainbow* that portray dream states or hallucinogenic interludes), and history is eclipsed or reduced to a flux of image-simulacra that lack any referential content.

Both stylistically and thematically, *Gravity's Rainbow* reproduces this sense of history gone schizoid--a condition identified with the effects of the Absent War:

The War needs to divide this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together. [. . .] Yet who can presume to say *what* the War wants, so vast and aloof is it . . . so *absentee*. Perhaps the War isn't even an awareness--not a life at all, really. There may only be some cruel, accidental resemblance to life. At "The White Visitation" there's a long-time schiz, you know, who believes that *he* is World War II. (130-31)

Yet while the text of *Gravity's Rainbow* reproduces this schizophrenic effect--and comments psychologically upon it--it seems unable to rest in any consistent psychological discourse that might "explain" The War and its unsettling effects. Instead, it employs a variety of discourses drawn from contemporary psychology--Pavlovian/Skinnerian behaviorism (Pointsman), revisionist Freudian/Brownian atavism (Groast), Jungian/archetypal humanism (Treacle)--to produce a discontinuous form of what Robert Jay Lifton called "Psychohistory."²² This psychologizing impulse attempts to account for the dynamics of racism and neocolonialism, and is linked to the interest of '60s radicals in connecting racism in America with Vietnam and genocide practiced against Third World peoples globally. There is also a recoverable subtext involving the correlation of imperialism and capitalist economics with what Brown designated "Genital Organization";²³ and Slothrop's eventual dismantling as the "White Cocksman" (69) prefigures the attempt to decentralize and deterritorialize the Oedipal economy undertaken by Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.²⁴ But at

the same time the text contains a strong countercurrent of distrust of any "psychologizing" explanation of history that is related to the recognition that such discourses tend to place the origins of war as well as of civil discontent inside the "psyche" of the individual and hence to naturalize social problems as biological ones. Such subjectivist explanations are demystified in *Gravity's Rainbow* as forms of "PsyWar," and as types of psychological manipulation undergone by Slothrop, thus revealing the socio-political implications of normalizing psychology. The Slothropian parable discounts the belief that war originates in some Freudian Thanatos or collective death-wish, and insists that it is socially produced by the mechanisms of multinational capital and the machineries of an out-of-control technology.²⁵ Further, in problematizing psychological frames and dismantling the textual subject, the narrative impulse of *Gravity's Rainbow* reflects the tendency of the various structuralisms to dissolve "subject" into "structure" and to seek historical explanations not in the "psyche" but in the mechanics of power.²⁶ Ultimately, the text demonstrates, the sources of war are not to be located on the surfaces of Slothrop's brain, but in the machinations of that ubiquitous and insidious entity known variously as "The Firm" or "The System" or simply "Them."

The Absent War informs the discourse of *Gravity's Rainbow* as a central focus of its oppositional impulses. Yet the text's inability to make The War "present," to represent it palpably as a historical reality--like the difficulty activists had in making Vietnam a reality to a mediatized American public--is an effect of the generalized derealization of cultural production in the postmodern period. Thus, much as anti-War activists adopted the slogan "Bring the War Home" in their efforts to convert the media into an arena of contestation, so *Gravity's Rainbow's* Counterforce enacts a similar dramatic impulse. As Counterforce recruit Roger Mexico sings:

Once you cuddled 'em and kissed 'em,
But we're bringing down Their system,
And it isn't a resistance, it's a war. . . . (640)

"Should we turn the expression around, then, and say that politics is war pursued by other means?" asks Michel Foucault,²⁷ virtually echoing *Gravity's Rainbow*: "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" (645). The War in *Gravity's Rainbow*, then, is not only the Second World War, or the War in southeast Asia it stands for, or even the War At Home with its own pitched battles (recorded in Mailer's *Armies of the Night* [1968]), but also that other less tangible but no less material battle that

is the struggle for the sign. This semiotic war appears in the text as the battle of the many marginalized voices and obscure agents of subversion--Byron the Bulb, the Adenoid, Osbie Feel, Pig Bodine and others--to represent themselves against the hegemonic discourse they oppose. These bizarrely various members of the counterforce work to carnivalize the language of the dominant culture in the struggle against a monolithic and monologic cultural hegemony. And it is this war, conducted in and as language, that is the ground and site of those others.

But in order to engage this struggle, one needs to know what one is up against: "Well, if the Counterforce knew better what those categories concealed, they might be in a better position to disarm, denis, and dismantle the Man. But they don't" (712). One needs to know something of the total shape of culture and of history before one can engage that War on the terms it demands. And in a world at War, structured by the stark dialectic of Us vs. Them, one needs to know the enemy to know which side one is on. One needs to know that elusive entity known as "The System" or "The Firm" or "the force." One needs to know: Who is Them?

"No one has ever left the Firm alive":
Paranoid Systems and Structures of Totality

Living inside the System is like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide . . . (412)

In *The Historical Novel*, Lukács postulates that the properly "historical" text embodies a total vision of the life-world of its subject and that that view of cultural totality locates the subject as an agent in the overarching drama of history.²⁸ *Gravity's Rainbow* clearly aspires to such monumental status. Yet the postmodern dilemma presupposes that a real sense of the total historical life-world of the collective is lacking, or at least elusive, not susceptible to embodiment in the conventional realist novel admired by Lukács. The inability of *Gravity's Rainbow* to render The War "present" is thus symptomatic of this postmodern condition. Even as the text aspires to a panoramic vision or "angel's-eye view" (54) of history, it tends to subvert its premises and undermine its overview, breaking down into a plethora of subplots and disjointed stories that transform History into "his-stories" that lack the finalized coherence of the 19th-century novel. *Gravity's Rainbow* attempts to attain the perfect "Paranoid System of History" (cf. 238); but because the demands of postmodern history exceed the grasp of even the arch-paranoid, the text breaks down into a dispersed array of sub-systems animated by competing paranoias that are

hopelessly at odds with themselves. In this sense, too, *Gravity's Rainbow* betrays its situation in "The '60s," perhaps the heyday of paranoia.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 left its mark on the entire decade and inscribed its traces in *Gravity's Rainbow* as well.²⁹ This public drama, in context with the multiple assassinations and celebrity deaths that followed, seemed to crack open the facade of politics to reveal covert forces at work behind the scenes, conspiracies and counter-conspiracies conducted by mysterious agents like those of the popular James Bond adventure novels and movies, and nefarious forces of evil master-minding "assassinations [. . . and] plots against good and decent men" (689). Not surprisingly, then, conspiracy theories flourished. From the Far Right's ultra-Manichean Cold War mentality, manifest in texts like Gary Allen's *None Dare Call It Conspiracy* (1971) with its cabalistic politics (echoed in Pointsman's paranoid soliloquies), to the Far Left's perpetual fear of infiltration and panicked perception of the incipient fascism of American life,³⁰ contradictory paranoias permeated the decade. With the public sphere thus saturated by the discourses of paranoia, it is inevitable that a similar impulse should dominate Pynchon's fiction.

The '60s were further characterized by a fear of systems and a distrust of political structures that made "The Paranoid Style in American Politics"³¹ the byword of a generation. What the Frankfurt School identified as The Culture Industry was variously anathematized as "The Establishment" or "The System"--terms whose vagueness reinforced their all-purpose applicability. Yet this pervasive paranoia was almost invariably arrested short of providing any real revelation of the Total Conspiracy it inferred. Thus the Warren Commission Report, in the view of many Americans, failed to discover the real conspiracy behind Kennedy's assassination;³² escalation of the arms race could not be clearly attributed to a single vested interest, despite its connection with Eisenhower's Military Industrial Complex; and the War in Vietnam could not easily be blamed on a single cause or responsible agent--all of which could only amplify the paranoia these contradictions provoked. And with the revelations of Chicago '68, Nixon's White House enemies list, the Watergate conspiracy on the one side and the "Chicago 7" on the other, the endless multiplication of factions and counter-factions came increasingly to resemble the plot of Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, a paranoid's nightmare of caries, cabals, and complexly involuted disclosures that finally refuse to congeal into a single coherent plot.

Gravity's Rainbow reproduces this cultural condition by displacing paranoia into a system of text production that utilizes the impulse of

"connection-making" in the service of its labyrinthine literary constructs, to the point that in the novel (as in the decade) it becomes impossible to distinguish the *real* plot from paranoid fabrication. Thus while the thrust of the paranoid impulse is toward the disclosure of a final "Plot Which Has No Name"³³ or polarized structure of Us vs. Them, in *Gravity's Rainbow* that revelation is continuously deferred into a "poststructuralist paranoia" which blocks finalization of the systems-building urge and prevents the structure it infers from reaching totality. The textual arena thus suggests the "detotalized totality" of Sartre: a structure composed of a multiplicity of microsystems, each of which reproduces the absent whole, yet which refuses to be totalized into a final form. Or even more, one might invoke the now notorious formulation of Foucault:

Power's condition of possibility . . . must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point . . . ; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always localized and unstable. . . . [P]ower is not an institution, not a structure . . . it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault 93)

To which one can only compare Slothrop's paranoid revelation:

"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 finger vectors. 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 Raketentstadt, more tangled even than Boston's-- (603)

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, as in Foucault's world, "power is everywhere" but remains untotaled and untotalizable, an effect of a hegemonic system that cannot be attributed to a single central control, except sporadically, as the system of multinational cartels (IG Farben and ICI) discovered by Slothrop, the conference of oil magnates invaded by Roger Mexico, or some more tangible "They" like Pointsman or Mossmoon. In the end, what remains the *most* paranoid thought in *Gravity's Rainbow* is that "The System" it implies may not even exist, and that history might be in "a control that is out of control" (277), outside even the multifold logic of capital and the octopus-like grasp of the postwar corporate State.

Yet looking at these discourses from some critical distance, one is struck by the persistent impulse to connect cultural production to its historical circumstances--an impulse that is thwarted by the inability of the monadic subject to break out of the closed circle of subjectivity and infer the total form of culture. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus records a preoccupation with what Jameson calls "Cognitive Mapping," an urge

to locate the textual subject in the larger context of history manifest in Rathenau's séance, in Slothrop's, Mexico's, and Gwenhidwy's Maps of London under the Blitz, and indeed throughout the novel. In various ways the text inscribes the need to perceive totality, "to endow the individual subject with some heightened sense of its place in the global system" (Cultural Logic 83). Yet this mapping impulse is persistently blocked by the recognition that the topography of postmodern "space" eludes the conventional modes of locating the subject in history. Thus *Gravity's Rainbow* again remains caught in the conflicting terms of postmodern cultural production.

To meet the imperatives of cognitive mapping, *Gravity's Rainbow* constructs an archetypal city (similar to Doris Lessing's "Four-Gated City" or any number of other literary chronotopes) with a mandala-like four-fold form. This construction assimilates cultural space to a quasi-mythic form that conforms to the Platonic/Cartesian structures of Western culture. Yet even in inscribing this "City Paranoiac" (172), *Gravity's Rainbow* records the recognition that the emergent postmodern space of the hypertechnological "City of the Future" (674) will no longer be centered or structured as were the four-fold Herero villages (563) or the ordered metropolitan centers of industrial capitalism.³⁴ In fact, *Gravity's Rainbow* is opposed to the hierarchical metropolitan organization of cultural space, which is equated with the imperialist colonial mentality and with the genital, authoritarian personality. Like Clifford Geertz in "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power,"³⁵ Pynchon links cultural "centering" with power and authority, and advocates, with Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, the decentering of the structured spaces of a hierarchical culture organized around a "Holy Center" (508) whose seat is the locus of power and whose form is the Rocket.

Rather, the chronotope of *Gravity's Rainbow* records the disquieting shapes of a culture in transition from the older, centered spaces of the "modern" (industrial capitalist) world to the decentered, detotalized and unstable spaces of a "postmodern" (postindustrial?) era. In attempting to "map" these transitional spaces, the text repeatedly offers the reader "tours" of unsettling topographies like those of the Mittelwerke (structured around the sign of the double-integral to signify a post-Cartesian form [298]) and of the strange multidimensionally mobile City-In-Transit through which we are guided by Mindy Bloth (735). These narrative tours constitute an initiation into a "postmodern hyperspace" that "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (Jameson,

Cultural Logic 83). Postmodern space appears in *Gravity's Rainbow* as those strange space-age topographies that disorient and overwhelm the subject, threatening it with perceptual vertigo. But *Gravity's Rainbow* attempts to evolve a new set of perceptual categories that might allow the subject to chart this baffling new cultural space and reconceive its relation to the social totality.

The postmodern "City of the Future" in which Pynchon's text locates itself is subject to an alarming double focus, reproducing as it does the situation of a culture in transition from one form to another. *Gravity's Rainbow*, like much postmodern literary production, thus remains a form in transit; and the textual inscription of the many-faced mythic City it inhabits appears as both an achieved form in the process of deconstruction (London under the Blitz) and a new form under (re)construction (the postwar world): as both a city and a ruin, a construction and a deconstruction inscribed in the text, in Derridean terms, only "under erasure." Hence the text remains again conflictual and contradictory, suspended between a potent nostalgia like that of the Zone Hereros for the "Lost Center" (319) of the stable mythic spaces of a pre-colonial tribal past, and the anxious expectation of a space-age utopian city it is yet unable to imagine. But in its many guises, as mythic space or decentered postmodern production, as a manifestation of the structured order of metropolitan colonialism or the strange, mutated shapes of multinational capitalism, the name of the city remains the same. All these textual cities are guises of *Der Raketentadt*.

Der Raketentadt:

Rocket State-Cosmology and the Technology of Apocalypse

Oh, a State begins to take form in the stateless German night, a State that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul. (566)

In the attempt to grasp the totality of cultural production in a given era, the historical novel produces a textual locus or concretized cultural representation that centers the text around a figurative site which reproduces in microcosm the society the text represents. Thus, for example, the later novels of Dickens center themselves around a dual locus defined by the Law Court or Government Office (Chancery, the Circumlocution Office) and the Prison (Newgate, Marshallsea) that focuses and motivates the discourses of Law and the Carceral which define Dickens' world. In the postmodern novel, however, the more mobile, schizoid and decentered conditions of cultural production under multinational capital produce a more formless literary production; and

Gravity's Rainbow typically manifests a deep anxiety about the conditions and even the existence of any cultural center. In the figure of the Zone Hereros, the text records a potent nostalgia for this "Lost Center" that is at the same time undermined by the recognition that "terms referring to [. . . a] 'Center of Internal Energy' [may] possess, outside the theoretical, no more reality" (700). Yet if there *is* a textual center that defines the conditions of cultural production in the epoch of Late Capitalism, that locus is occupied by Test Stand VII--and the Rocket is its soul. The Rocket thus serves as a central focus of *Gravity's Rainbow's* oppositional impulses as enacted in the struggle of the Zone Hereros to decode the textuality of the Rocket-as-sign, to transform the locus of power into a site of contestation, and to turn the weapons of the dominant culture against itself in the struggle to reclaim "our Earth and [. . .] our freedom" (525).

Again we see that *Gravity's Rainbow* draws the terms of its discourse from the forms of its historical situation. In 1962, on the giddy brink of the '60s, two historic events set the tone of the decade. In that year, John Glenn became the first American to orbit earth in a spacecraft, an achievement that promised to realize sci-fi dreams of transcendence. Yet that millennial event was set against the Cuban Missile Crisis of the same year, which demonstrated that the same technology that promised transcendence could also be deployed in the Armageddonite project of self-annihilation.

Given the gravity of this world-historical situation, it is not surprising that *Gravity's Rainbow* should construct an entire discourse system around the Rocket--a "Rocket state-cosmology" (726) structured around the bleak dialectic of creation and destruction, transcendence and annihilation, a stark binary logic of 1 and 0:

But the Rocket has to be many things, it must answer to a number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it--[. . .] Gnostics who have been taken in a rush of wind and fire to chambers of the Rocket-throne . . . Kabbalists who study the Rocket as Torah, letter by letter [. . .] Manichaeans who see two Rockets, good and evil, who speak together in the sacred idiolalia of the Primal Twins (some say their names are Enzian and Blicero) of a good Rocket to take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the World's suicide, the two perpetually in struggle. (727)

The Rocket-as-sign is *Gravity's Rainbow's* central figure for postmodern history and central site of contestation, and the informing structure of contradiction generated by the ambivalent historical situation of the Rocket State produces a polarizing or destabilizing effect throughout Pynchon's text. Yet while the text is produced by a signifying system centered in the Rocket, it attempts simultaneously to distantiate that structure, to dismantle that technology and disengage the reader from the fascination of the Rocket, which derives

its charismatic quality from its duality as an image of power, its promise of transcendence tinged with the threat of annihilation, reminiscent of the aura of a primitive deity or the idolatrous halo of the unnamed Calvinist god. Part phallus, part technological product, part deity, part destroyer, the Rocket is Pynchon's ultimate commodity-fetish, which invests all the accumulated religious tradition of the West and all the stockpiled capital of business and science into a cultural project of self-destruction.

It is difficult to contemplate the world-shattering technologies focused in the Rocket without reverting to primitivistic awe at the altar of annihilation, an atavistic belief that rites of human sacrifice yet operate behind the veneer of civilization.³⁶ If *Gravity's Rainbow* seems to produce such mystification, it is attributable to the power the Rocket yet holds over contemporary culture. Although postmodern culture has largely performed the massive reconfiguration of ideological space necessary to rationalize, routinize, and naturalize the technology of annihilation, responsible critics still adopt such rhetoric when attempting to account for the existence of the Rocket. The Marxist critic E. P. Thompson, for example, contemplating the MX missile in "Notes on Exterminism, the Last Stage of Civilization," was moved to write:

Undoubtedly, the MX missile-system will be the greatest single artifact of any civilization. It will be the ultimate serpentine temple of exterminism. The rockets in their shelters, like giant menhirs pointing to the sky, will perform for "The Free West" not a military but a religious function. They will keep evil spirits at bay, and summon worshippers to the phallic rites of money. Within the aura of those giant nuclear circles, the high priests of ideology will perform ritual sacrifices of taxes . . .

. . . The temple will be erected to celebrate the ultimate dysfunction of humanity: self-destruct.³⁷

Yet if Pynchon's text is produced from a similar rhetorical nexus, *Gravity's Rainbow* is more self-reflexive in refusing to allow the power of the Rocket to permeate the text or to mirror the discourse it seeks to dismantle. Instead, *Gravity's Rainbow* relentlessly undermines and subverts the "Rocket state" mentality, thus converting the Rocket into a sign in the cultural contestation. The Rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* stands at the center of an Oedipal/capitalist linguistic economy that fulfills the terms of the equation:

Rocket = phallus = Father = City = Western European colonial civilization, etc.

But it is this economy that *Gravity's Rainbow* attempts to deconstruct as it contests the terms of its own production. This dismantling effort--textualized in the deconstruction of Rocketman Slothrop that parallels

the construction of Rocket 00001--is the central motive of the text, which is simultaneously an anti-text that subverts the discourse in which it is parasitically produced.

Yet inscribed as a further subtext to this deconstructive effort is the recognition that "the Oedipal situation in the Zone these days" is already "40 years out of date" (747), and that the Oedipal economy of the Raketentstadt is already being supplanted by the new postmodern multinational consumer-state economy instituted by the postwar mutation of capital the text records. If primitivistic motives once fueled the construction of the Rocket state, now "sacrifice has become a political act, an act of Caesar" (749); and whatever charisma the Rocket may once have possessed has been bureaucratized into "A *Rocket-cartel*" (566) whose interests are less atavistic or authoritarian than economic. The postwar formation of Late Capitalism entails the partial delegitimation of the Oedipal economy, whether in the guise of the individual construction of subjectivity, the structure of the family, or the hierarchy of the centralized authoritarian state, and the concurrent movement toward a more decentered, schizophrenic formation of shifting flows of information, desires, capital, commodities, etc. Within the mutation of capital recorded by *Gravity's Rainbow*, then, the function of the Rocket-as-sign shifts to fit changing historical conditions. Yet despite the shift toward an increasing liquidation of culture in the postmodern period, the Oedipal formation remains the dominant mode, particularly in matters of government authority and defense (with their patriarchal discourses) and the continuing hegemony of modified versions of the nuclear family in mainstream culture. Thus despite the massive reconfiguration of cultural space recorded in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Rocket and all it represents retains its deadly sway.

If there is hope, then, that the annihilation augured by the Rocket may be averted, it lies partly in the possibility that the very logic of cultural capital that produced the Rocket may render it obsolete. This does not mean that opposition to the technology of exterminism is any less necessary or urgent; the Rocket continues to serve as a sign of all those forces that oppose the realization of a genuinely utopian condition and as a focus for cultural contestation. But it does mean that oppositional practice in the postmodern era must be willing to shift its ground to meet the changing conditions of "The Force" it opposes. As the configurations of culture change, so must the terms of its contestation--which is the recognition Enzian reaches in a key passage:

--all right, say we *are* supposed to be the Kabbalists out here, 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, orururumo orunene the high, rising, dead, the blazing, the great one [. . .] while the real Text persisted, somewhere else, in its darkness, our darkness. [. . .]

But if I'm riding through it, the Real Text, right now, if this is it. [. . .]

It means this War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted. [. . .]

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 . . . (520-21)

Thus *Gravity's Rainbow* remains committed to the historical project of grasping the total form of culture in the postmodern period without allowing its discourse to be reified as a finalized system. It remains committed, too, to the conditions of opposition and contestation, despite what it recognizes as the almost omnipresent forces of cooptation that have converted subversion into yet another cultural commodity. But by stubbornly situating its discourses in the shifting sites and micropolitical areas of contestation, and by actively engaging the reader in his or her own "struggle for the sign," *Gravity's Rainbow* answers the need for a paradigmatic text of opposition in this elusive epoch of the postmodern. And in the end, what is transmitted by the text is less a "message" or a "meaning" than a praxis, an oppositional impulse that sets itself implacably against the discourse of power, and the quiet yet urgent insistence that such opposition must go on, whatever the terms of the ever-shifting history it confronts, whatever the wiles of The System which seems to circumvent and seal off whatever subversion it might generate, whatever the twists and turns of the vast and sinister Plot called History in which we are all--Elect and Preterite, victimizer and victimized, member of the monied elite or two-bit loser down on your luck--always already involved.³⁸

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Notes

¹ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973) 56.

² *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York: Seminar, 1973). "By an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community . . . Sign becomes an arena of class struggle" (23).

³ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

⁴ "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts," *New York Times Magazine* (12 June 1966): 34-35, 78, 80-82, 84; "The Secret Integration," rpt. *Slow Learner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984) 139-93.

⁵ For "Red Malcolm," see *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove, 1965) 49-69, and *Gravity's Rainbow* 63-64. On ideologic subject-formation, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971) 127-86.

⁶ See Althusser, "Letter on Art," *Lenin and Philosophy* 221-27.

⁷ *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1959). The intertextual presence of Brown in Pynchon's novel is discussed by Lawrence Wolfley in "Repression's Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon's Big Novel," *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Richard Pearce (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1981) 99-123.

⁸ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968) 89, 99-101.

⁹ See also Cleaver 108 ff. on America's "domestic colonialism."

¹⁰ *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) 80. See also Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1981) 21 ff.

¹¹ For Pynchon's thoughts on the Two Cultures issue, see "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?" *New York Times Book Review* (28 Oct. 1984): 1, 40-41. See also William Braden, *The Age of Aquarius: Technology and the Cultural Revolution* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), esp. Chapter 1.

¹² "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay, 1983) 125. See also the expanded version of this essay, "Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53-92.

¹³ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983); Baudrillard, *La société de consommation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). See also Baudrillard's *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss et al. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).

¹⁴ See *Slow Learner* 18, and *Gravity's Rainbow* 693.

¹⁵ *Nova Express* (New York: Grove, 1965) 67. Pynchon discusses the influence of Beat writing on his practice in *Slow Learner* 7 ff.

¹⁶ On "naturalization" and "the 'real,'" see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975) 140-41, and Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987) 26-40. On cinematic effects and Pynchon's text, see David Cowart, "'Making the Unreal Reel': Film in *Gravity's Rainbow*," *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1980) 31-62.

¹⁷ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a theory of the media," *New Left Review* 64 (1970): 13-36. See also Enzensberger's "The Industrialization of the Mind," *Partisan Review* 36.1 (1969): 100 ff., and the more recent review by Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, "(Re)Watching Television: Notes Toward a Political Criticism," *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 97-113.

¹⁸ "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 130-48.

¹⁹ *Dispatches* (1977; New York: Avon, 1978) 67-68.

²⁰ The references to "Indo-China" and "Tonkin" here would also serve for the contemporary reader as allusions to Vietnam.

²¹ "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT, 1971) 83.

²² See, for example, "Protean Man," *Partisan Review* 35.1 (1968): 13-27.

²³ *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966) 125 ff. See also "The Allegory of the Black Eunuchs," *Cleaver* 145 ff.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: Viking, 1977).

²⁵ My argument here runs contrary to that of Wolfley, who contends that the Freudian/Brownian discourse is an interpretive horizon in the novel. This argument ignores the fact that the thrust of narrative in Slothrop's Progress is finally away from the biologicistic explanations of his behavior concocted by PISCES, and toward an examination of cultural conditioning as exerted through a manipulative structure. Thus the investigative team of Speed and Perdoo finds no data to corroborate Pointsman's psychologizing hypothesis (270), and, similarly, the Counterforce parable staged in Osbie Feel's movie discounts Pointsman's theory (535).

²⁶ See the debate between Bruno Bettelheim and Richard Flacks in *The Age of Aquarius* 69 ff. See also Jameson's argument in "Periodizing the '60s" (*Social Text* 9/10 [1984]: 178-209) that cultural conditions in the '60s produced a "structuralist moment."

²⁷ *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980) 93.

²⁸ *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983).

²⁹ For references to the Kennedy assassination, see *Gravity's Rainbow* 65, 682, 688.

³⁰ On the New Left's perception of fascism in America from a skeptical perspective, see Jeffrey Herf, "The New Left and its Fading Aura," *Partisan Review* 53.2 (1986): 243.

³¹ See Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1965). See also Scott Sanders, "Pynchon's Paranoid History," *Twentieth Century Literature* 21.2 (1975): 177-92.

³² See Jack Ludwig, "New York," *Partisan Review* 32.1 (1965): 63-69, describing an appearance by conspiracy-theorist Mark Lane.

³³ Cf. *V.* (1963; New York: Perennial, 1986) 226.

³⁴ See also Schaub 52-53, 74.

³⁵ *Culture and its Creators*, ed. Joseph Ben-David and Terry Nichols Clark (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1977) 150 ff.

³⁶ On sacrifice as atavism, see also Daniel Odier, *The Job: Interviews with William S. Burroughs* (New York: Grove, 1970) 106-07.

³⁷ *Zero Option* (London: Merlin, 1982) 56.

³⁸ I would like to thank Professor Thomas H. Schaub for consultation during the writing of this essay.