Silences and Worlds: Wittgenstein and Pynchon

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1. Pynchon's philosophy, Wittgenstein's literature

Writing about Wittgenstein, that most eminent philosopher of language, means writing about problems of translation. In his *Miscellaneous Remarks*, one can find this: "Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten" (*Vermischte Bemerkungen* 483). One good attempt to translate that statement was made by Martin Puchner, who gives it as "Philosophy should only be done as poetry" (295), with an additional explanation that the word *dichten* means *to write poetry* but also *to condense*. David Schalkwyk amends Peter Winch's translation "philosophy ought really to be written as a form of poetic composition" (56) by the term *to poetize*. Yet *dichten* not only refers to the writing of poetry, but to fictional production in general, even if it is not in written form, and it also evokes the semantic field of being sealed off, tight, consolidated, and also that of proximity. Wittgenstein's comment on the literary nature of philosophy is already subject to the play of meaning which places it itself closer to literature than philosophy.

Wittgenstein himself furthers this understanding of his work in a literary context by stating that what he invents are new similes, "neue *Gleichnisse*" (*Culture and Value* 16), and Wolfgang Huemer, in a recent book called *The Literary Wittgenstein*, states that "the fascination of Wittgenstein's works lies to a considerable degree in their literary quality" (2). However, Puchner cautions readers against looking too much at the literary form of philosophy since this often keeps the two apart because "it envisions their conjunctions as that of a philosophical content that is then poured into some literary form" (296). The same holds true of the philosophical form of literature. In an attempt to do justice to the instability of this distinction, I would like to connect two works from each field, one that became famous as philosophy, and one as literature: *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon and the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by Ludwig Wittgenstein. I want to argue that they are related in their interest in the problematic relation between language and the world, in the uses of silence, in the construction of possible worlds, and in causality. Furthermore, certain passages in the *Tractatus* allow for a new angle on Slothrop's scattering towards the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

A new reading of the connection between the early Wittgenstein and

Pynchon is necessary because the text which deals with this relationship most thoroughly also deals with it only superficially. William M. Plater in *The Grim Phoenix* traces Pynchon's influences and states that the *Tractatus* is important because it also describes "the world as a closed system" and thus served as a model for Pynchon's textual systems. Plater is right in saying that Pynchon "does not have to use the *Tractatus* consistently" because fiction is not philosophy (5), but that does not mean that his fiction and Wittgenstein's philosophy do not consistently share similar traits. It is not enough to equate Wittgenstein's world of language with Pynchon's closed systems suffering entropy.

In Plater's opinion, readers of *Gravity's Rainbow* have no choice but to impose their own meaning on the noise of the text, just as Weissmann in *V.* got DIEWELTISTALLESWASDERFALLIST from the sferics by "finagling" (278). This scene may serve as an appropriate parable for Pynchon's technique, but the large part of the content of the *Tractatus* remains remarkably uninterpreted. Similarly, Petra Bianchi in her essay on Wittgenstein and *V.* addresses only a small part of the *Tractatus*, ignoring its ethical (non)content altogether. However, it is this ethical dimension of his early thought which "must be taken with complete seriousness and placed at the center of his philosophy" (Hodges 90). With this in mind, I aim to address that gap in Pynchon criticism, and to relate Wittgenstein's and Pynchon's intellectual projects more thoroughly to each other. For this reason, let me first summarize some of the main concerns of the *Tractatus*.

The basic aim of the *Tractatus* is "to draw a limit to thought—or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts" (TLP p. 3). Wittgenstein uses a critique of language to define clearly what can be said and what cannot be said meaningfully. One can think more than one can say. It is possible to think the unsayable, but not to think the unthinkable, let alone say it, especially say meaningfully. In Wittgenstein's opinion, the only meaningful statements are those that can be either true or false. Anything else must be shown, and "What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said" (TLP 4.1212). Realizing that the world is limited in such a way—"Feeling the world as a limited whole" (TLP 6.45), as Wittgenstein puts it, *this* is the mystical, that which Cyril Barrett paraphrases as "the marvellous, remarkable, inexplicable" (72).

As it is, the "*limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (TLP 5.6). Neither have anything to do with eloquence or education; my world is not smaller if I do not know what *différance* is. Instead, they are defined by the line between what can be said and what can only be thought or felt: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical" (TLP 6.522).

It is the task of philosophy to use logic as a tool to draw that line, and nothing else—especially not to pretend to say the unsayable by making ethical statements. However, the *Tractatus* is an ethical book, despite its

status as written philosophy, as Wittgenstein told his friend Ludwig von Ficker in a famous letter:

> *The book's point is an ethical one.* I once meant to include in the preface a sentence which is not in fact there now. . . . What I meant to write, then, was this: My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And *it is precisely this second part that is the important one.* (Janik & Toulmin 192)

In other words, he "meant what he did not say" (Gabriel 11, my translation). In a strict understanding of the last statement of the *Tractatus*, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (TLP 7), it is true that the *Tractatus* "cannot be written" (Hodges 87). This is why Wittgenstein claimed that "perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it—or at least similar thoughts" (TLP p. 3). Its words point towards something they cannot express directly. However, Wittgenstein also constantly does what he calls "running against the walls of our cage" (Kenny 296), that is, speak about that which is unsayable, revolting against his own "doctrine of silence" (McDonough 236), even though he knows it is "perfectly, absolutely hopeless" (Kenny 296). Derrida used quite a similar technique when trying to speak about *différance* and explain at the same time why it cannot really be spoken about (you may call it "approach and avoid"). Here, both their projects must acquire literary qualities, both must enter the realm of *Dichtung* to probe the limits of language beyond description. Literary forms can express a certain conception of philosophy and its method, and where literary form and philosophical method are closely connected, it would be a mistake to ignore the former and focus on the latter (Gabriel 3). It is sentences without truth value that point towards the unsayable, towards "non-propositional insight" (Gabriel 25, my translation). While the natural sciences can describe, the imagination can attempt to show—trying, failing, no matter, trying again, failing again, failing better.

2. Parallels

Pynchon imitated the structure of the *Tractatus* in a short passage of *Gravity's Rainbow*[1], but the link goes further than that. His novels, and especially *Gravity's Rainbow*, are the kind of texts which point to something outside themselves while refusing to comment on it directly. They convey the idea that words cannot represent things fully, but at best are "only Δt from the things they stand for" (510). The early Wittgenstein's picture theory is built on the descriptive powers of meaningful statements, but the ethical point of the *Tractatus* is that language is incapable as a system to represent the full range of human experience. Both Pynchon and Wittgenstein use words nevertheless, and they may even come close to delta T, but in the end fail

like characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* at that "number one Zonal pastime" of Holy-Center-Approaching (508). The desire to express is there nevertheless, and with it the realization that what cannot be represented must be shown, hinted at, outlined from the other side. Showing the limits of language and representation, both Wittgenstein and Pynchon force their readers to deduce that something lies beyond that limit.

2.1 Inadequacy of World-Description

The inadequacy of natural science to go beyond the sayable is painfully felt by the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* living under the threat of random V2 strikes. Natural science is the "totality of true propositions" (TLP 4.11), so what it does is describe the world, draw a map—yet it cannot offer interpretations of this map that go beyond the sayable. No description of the world in sentences with truth value allows for the deduction of anything metaphysical, which is Hume's "is-ought problem" (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 231-2), but also Moore's naturalistic fallacy (*Principia Ethica*, §10, 61-2). Or, in Wittgenstein's words:

> 6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value.
>   If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. (TLP)

One of the chroniclers of what is the case is Roger Mexico, a statistician "devoted to number and to method" to whom "belongs the domain *between* zero and one" (55). Yet he constantly has to deal with people who feel the desire to look beyond zero and one while he is marking rocket strikes in squares on a map of London: "The Poisson equation will tell, for a number of total hits arbitrarily chosen, how many squares will get none, how many one, two, three, and so on" (55). The Poisson distribution is misinterpreted by others as a technique for prediction. His descriptive capabilities and statistical interpretations are correct, yet in the extreme situation of random death from above, they show their inadequacy to even address that which troubles people most—strategies for survival and metaphysical explanations:

> "Why is your equation only for angels, Roger? Why can't we do something, down here? Couldn't there be an equation for us too, something to help us find a safer place?"
>   "Why am I surrounded [. . .] by statistical illiterates? There's no way, love, not as long as the mean density of strikes is constant.[. . .]"
>   The rockets are distributing about London just as Poisson's equation in the

textbooks predicts. As the data keep coming in, Roger looks more and more like a prophet. (54)

Jessica and Pointsman keep bothering Mexico about what lies beyond his map, and realize that, in the words of the *Tractatus*: "We feel that even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer" (TLP 6.52). All questions that cannot be answered by statements with truth value are—strictly speaking—nonsense. "When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words" (TLP 6.5). Yet it is these unsayable questions which are the most urgent:

> "Can't you . . . tell […] from your map here, which places would be safest to go into, safest from attack?"
> "No."
> "But surely—"
> "Every square is just as likely to get hit again. The hits aren't clustering. Mean density is constant."
> Nothing on the map to the contrary. Only a classical Poisson distribution, quietly neatly sifting among the squares exactly as it should . . . growing to its predicted shape. . . .
> "But squares that have already had several hits, I mean—"
> "I'm sorry. That's the Monte Carlo Fallacy. No matter how many have fallen inside a particular square, 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." (55-56)

Roger's attitude can either be called "Scientist-neutrality" (58) or "cheap nihilism" (57). If, as David Seed states, the "general tendency of the systems Pynchon examines is to obliterate humanity, to reduce bomb-blasts to a statistical 'event' or to reduce people to things, to passive functions" (181), Roger Mexico exemplifies that tendency. He has no problem at all with the limits of his scientific discourse, and does not appear to experience the will to resist death like others do. One night, however, he is confronted with the metaphysical in the form of the drunk Reverend Dr. Paul de la Nuit, who tells him:

> "[T]he ancient Roman priests laid a sieve in the road, and then waited to see which stalks of grass would come up through the holes."
> Roger saw the connection immediately. "I wonder [. . .] if it would follow a Poisson . . . let's see. . ."
> "Mexico." Leaning forward, definitely hostile. "They used the stalks that grew through the holes to cure the sick. The sieve was a very sacred item to them. What

will you do with the sieve you've laid over London? How will you use the things that grow in your network of death?"

"I don't follow you." It's just an equation. . . . (56)

Scientific discourse is unable to address those problems really bothering people, and Mexico does not even understand why this is a problem—as Wittgenstein puts it, "The facts all contribute only to setting the problem, not to its solution" (TLP 6.4321). The world is perceived as limited when language shows its limits and non-propositional insight demands to be voiced. The feeling of war, of living under constant threat of sudden death, where "you never hear the one that gets you" (23), must show the failure of descriptive language, and the best books about war have a tendency to highlight this failure in their own ways.

<p style="text-align:center">2.2 Forms of Silences in Gravity's Rainbow:
Em Dashes, Three Dots, and the Unspeakable</p>

The limits of descriptive language not only show themselves in those passages where questions of non-propositional insight are posed rather explicitly. *Gravity's Rainbow* is full of other forms of silences, where people wonder "not quite in words" (483), or where they get a glimpse at what is beyond language. While the scenes of Mexico's statistical discussions serve to *describe* the need to go beyond truth value, other parts of the text *show* that which cannot be said. If, as Wittgenstein asserts, "All propositions are of equal value" (TLP 6.4) and "Propositions can express nothing that is higher" (TLP 6.42), another mode of expression is necessary to indicate what lies beyond our world of language. The final statement of the Tractatus, leaving open the rest of the page and the "end" of the text for a heavy silence, is a normative sentence addressing philosophy as a critique of language. However, it allows for multiple readings, and one of them hints at the innate terror of this radical incapability to gain a full understanding of the world inside language. Yet it contains both resignation *and* hope, since it can be read as an acceptance of non-propositional insight as another means of achieving what maybe cannot be quite called knowledge.

What is left is the urge to indicate that which cannot be spoken of, and of course this indication must take place in language itself, and as such must remain incomplete and eventually unsuccessful. However, a literary form allows play in language, and two ubiquitous formal aspects of *Gravity's Rainbow* point towards the unsayable more than any others: the em dash and, especially, the three dots. These are so characteristic of Pynchon that Adrian Wisnicki could use them as identifying marks when he tried to attribute to him the articles in various magazines connected to Boeing (15). I read Pynchon's ellipses as invitations for extrapolation. Some of his sentences function like launch pads

which set the reader on a course, and after the Brennschluss of meaningful language she has to find the target herself (or miss it).

Most of Pynchon's dashes are used for insertion, pause, or disruption, and they generally just do what dashes do, but some of them carry traces of much more meaning. The most memorable instance of such a special dash is the one *Gravity's Rainbow* ends with: "Now evybody—" (760). It is an end which is not one, of course. That dash opens up the possibility to speculate endlessly about what happens at the end of the text. It allows us to wonder whether the approaching rocket bridges that "last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre, the last delta-t" (760) and destroys it and us, or whether this "moving vehicle is frozen, in space, to become architecture, and timeless. It was never launched. It will never fall" (301). Maybe William Slothrop's old hymn ends there in a mushroom cloud, maybe the whole audience joins in and sings as Their rocket fails to destroy them (and maybe it's the singing that stops it). The final silence of the last page prefers possibility over certainty, and it points towards something outside the text, an interpretation, reasons, explanations that cannot be quite put into words. Beyond textual proof that something is the case, this dash indicates silently what *could be* the case.

The second technique of outlining the unspeakable is Pynchon's use of the three dots, which even more than the dashes indicate a gap, a deliberate silence, a necessary exclusion. These absences of words are present on about every page of *Gravity's Rainbow*; I will pick two of those I consider most important.

The first example is also the most condensed one, compressed into a single word and three dots which point towards both this compression and also its insufficiency. It occurs during Slothrop's browsing through the London *Times*:

> Leafing through, dum, dum, de-doo, yeah, the War's still on, Allies closing in east and west on Berlin, powdered eggs still going one and three a dozen, "Fallen Officers," MacGregor, Mucker-Maffick, Whitestreet, Personal Tributes . . . *Meet Me in St. Louis* showing at the Empire Cinema (recalls doing the penis-in-the-popcorn-box routine there with one Madelyn, who was less than—)—
>
> Tantivy . . . Oh shit no, no wait— (252)

Slothrop reads that his friend "Tantivy" Mucker-Maffick has died. Even though he will suspect later on that this "death" may in fact have been but a linguistic event in a manipulated text—"maybe the whole story was a lie. They could've planted it easy enough in that London Times, couldn't they? Left the paper for Slothrop to find?" (252)—his immediate reaction to the report shows that he initially accepts it at face value, and he is therefore genuinely devastated by it. The passage includes what John Powers calls "the most poignant ellipsis

in all of fiction" (qtd. in Howard 31): the word "Tantivy" is not spoken, and it is not thought as a word—rather, the word and the three dots that follow it mark a whole set of insights, emotions and thoughts which are beyond the descriptive powers of language. The word is framed by two dashes, three dots and eventually another dash, it is surrounded by absences and silences, by that which cannot be spoken. Words fail Slothrop, and he is permeated by silence:

> Staring out the window, staring at nothing, gripping a table knife so hard maybe some bones of his hand will break. It happens sometimes to lepers. Failure of feedback to the brain no way to know how fiercely they may be making a fist. You know these lepers. Well—
> Ten minutes later, back up in his room, he's lying face-down on the bed, feeling empty. Can't cry. Can't do *anything*. (252)

We miss what happened in these ten minutes, Slothrop going to his room to lie down on the bed. More significantly, after a section that began with an interior monologue, we miss Slothrop's *thoughts* too. He ends up silent, and the words "Can't cry. Can't do *anything*" are not a coarse attempt to describe his state of mind, but precise pointers towards the unspeakable. He may be thinking many thoughts, but they are not represented by words in the text. The confrontation with death is also the confrontation with the limits of language. After these silences and markers of the unspeakable, everything that could be said seems trivial, and the first utterance made by a character is just that: "At noon Hilary Bounce comes in rubbing his eyes wearing a shit-eating grin. 'How was your evening? Mine was remarkable'" 253). The insufficiency of language becomes most apparent in situations where words fail and somebody speaks.

My second example addresses a silence that has struck readers who "have felt that an encyclopedic narrative that includes so much of the history of World War II must be shaped by a peculiar vision when it so steadfastly avoids Hitler and the Holocaust" (Tölölyan 56). It is evident that the Holocaust is not completely absent from the text, but some readers seem to observe an imbalance. Most recently, Luc Herman and Bruno Arich-Gerz have discussed this perceived lack of representation in their essay "Darstellungen von Dora." They take the criticism very seriously, but argue that Pynchon does not at all suppress the suffering of the inmates of the Dora camp (399), but puts it into the larger context of the system which not only produced rockets but also included the production of death (409). I want to add to this argument by considering the philosophy of the Tractatus, which can help understand a little better why absence not necessarily equals marginalization.

The passage which most directly deals with the Holocaust is located at the end of Franz Pökler's story, an episode which, as Weisenburger remarks,

is "the longest in the novel and is placed very much at its center" (234). This is not to argue that this makes the Holocaust central to *Gravity's Rainbow*; what is important is rather that the Holocaust is not central to Pökler's story, and so *Gravity's Rainbow* rather thematizes the conditions of speaking about the Holocaust than the Holocaust itself directly:

> The Obersturmbannführer was not at his post when Pökler went into Dora. He was not looking for Ilse, or not exactly. He may have felt that he ought to look, finally. He was not prepared. He did not know. Had the data, yes, but did not know, with senses or heart. . . .
>
> [...] While he lived, and drew marks on paper, this invisible kingdom had kept on, in the darkness outside . . . all this time. . . . Pökler vomited. He cried some. The walls did not dissolve—no prison wall ever did, not from tears, not at this finding, on every pallet, in every cell, that the faces are ones he knows after all, and holds dear as himself, and cannot, then, let them return to that silence. . . . (432-33)

Pökler must be asked the question that would haunt following generations: How much did people know about the Holocaust? Pökler definitely knew *something*, otherwise he would not have felt that "he ought to look, *finally*" (my emphasis). It is as if he had believed that as long as he refused to look, it would not be there. The data, the evidence presented in descriptive language to him, did not suffice to understand "with senses or heart" what was going on right where he was (and with his—indirect?—involvement). Three dots end this statement, an ellipsis refusing to describe just what it is he did not know: the complex terror to which has been assigned that simplifying signifier of *the Holocaust*, forever doomed to be inadequate.

The passage ends focusing on a single detail of that large concept, a single woman, still through the eyes of Pökler, still lacking any more general comments. In this instant, the text refuses to relegate death to statistics, as it is so often done—as Stalin said, and he was someone who knew—when millions die. The crisis of representation becomes evident. In this scene, what cannot be spoken about is passed over in silence—but in a silence of indication, not one of description. Pökler is struck by the terror which went on while he was working on the V2, and this terror is opposed to the rational descriptive work he did of drawing "marks on paper" while something went on "in the darkness outside," not only literally outside his workplace, but also radically outside the sphere of his descriptive endeavour, something which could not be grasped by mere data, but after all could only be fully understood as non-propositional insight. While Slothrop is confronted with the tragedy of one person's death and is left empty of signification, Pökler must face what at this stage only hints at mass death on an unknown scale, and his story acknowledges two kinds of silence: the silence which allowed him to keep the darkness outside and the data from turning into knowledge, and the silence which marks

the impossibility of describing the world in which the Holocaust is the case. Richard Crownshaw identifies Pynchon's use of allegory to describe "how a chronology of bureaucratic and scientific events, which up till now Pökler has found an acceptable version of reality, cannot explain and rationalize the fate of Jews" (209). A literary device of symbolical displacement is necessary to point towards that which cannot be stated more directly. When Pökler, at the end of a chapter so preoccupied with what he thought and said, sits for half an hour holding the "bone hand" of a "random woman" (433), we do not get any description of his thoughts, there is no reference to anything he might think *in words*, just like the text refused to represent Slothrop's thoughts in the missing ten minutes. This absence marks the text's acknowledgement of the limits of language and of itself.

Similarly, in the passage on Pökler in the Dora camp, the many ellipses remind the reader of the inadequacy of descriptive language as well as the desperate need to speak. Pökler realizes the danger of letting the "faces [. . .] he holds dear as himself [. . .] return to that silence" (433) in which they had been kept in the time when he had refused to look, but the text itself shows that such a silence of description is, strictly speaking, ultimately inevitable, even though it must be resisted in the strongest possible way. Pökler's final acts of compassion are not accompanied by any words he speaks, and they are described in words which do not find closure in a period followed by a silence of description, but remain the mere ephemeral beginning of what comes after words, and what is indicated by three dots which end the passage without completing it.

The unspeakable is not only addressed by the critique of descriptive language in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but also as capital-S Silence, almost an entity in itself, something to be experienced personally in epiphanic moments. This happens to Greta Erdmann and Byron the Bulb, but it is Tchitcherine's colleague Galina I want to focus on here.

While bringing the New Turkic Alphabet (NTA) to "the tribesmen" of "Seven Rivers country" (338), Galina learns about Silence:

> Here she has become a connoisseuse of silences. The great silences of Seven Rivers have not yet been alphabetized, and perhaps never will be. They are apt at any time to come into a room, into a heart, returning to chalk and paper the sensible Soviet alternatives brought out here by the Likbez agents. They are silences NTA cannot fill, cannot liquidate, immense and frightening as the elements in this bear's corner—scaled to a larger Earth, a planet wilder and more distant from the sun. . . . (340-41)

The NTA, a rational linguistic system covered by what Wittgenstein deals with in the *Tractatus*, is opposed to "great silences" which are forever outside language and cannot be contained. These silences point towards an order

of being that is different from what language allows to be said, and they are connected to non-propositional insight. Such an epiphany happens to Galina, who imagines herself both as a giant threatening a city as well as an inhabitant of that city—and thus in the encounter of Silence learns that "it is herself, her Central Asian giantess self, that is the Nameless thing she fears . . ." (341). Galina has learned about the limits of language and world only in the conditions away from the cities of a culture which has fully settled for what the NTA could express. We encounter Galina again only once more in the text, at the interrogation of Tchitcherine, who does not recognize her. She has "come back to the cities, out of the silences after all, in again to the chain-link fields of the Word, shining, running secure and always close enough, always tangible . . ." (705). The cities, symbols of rational modernity, are refuge from those silences, and they allow for security in *the Word*, the secure conditions of representation. The Silence far away from that domain of rational language taught Galina the inadequacy of that language by showing her its irreducible Other, which yet must be present in all attempts at representation. She has returned to the cities but does not speak in this passage, and we do not learn what effects these experiences had on her. Her explicitly marginal role in the text, in the end a passive bystander, possibly includes a lesson about Silence—her epiphany may have been of great importance, but maybe its very nature forbids description, since if it *could* be described, it would be worthless. Wittgenstein commented similarly on ethics, saying that he "would reject every significant description that anybody could possibly suggest, *ab initio*, on the ground of its significance" (*Lecture on Ethics* 295-96).

2.3 Critiques of Causality, Interpretation and Paranoia

Implied in both Wittgenstein's and Pynchon's critique of language is also a distrust in the concept of causality. The *Tractatus* employs a discussion of the law of causality to explain how only certain states of affairs can be described meaningfully. Just as we cannot infer from the world what we *should* do, what is good or evil, what is metaphysical, we cannot infer from it the knowledge about what is *going to happen*. It is an illusion that "the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena" (TLP 6.371). For Wittgenstein, only the laws of logic deserve the word *law*, while the "laws" of nature are "assumed as hypotheses" (TLP 5.154). Logic is seen as the form which is "the possibility of structure" (TLP 2.033) and as such "transcendental" (TLP 6.13). However, logic should not be regarded as a positive foundation of the world, a transcendental signified, since "the propositions of logic are tautologies" (TLP 6.1) and therefore "say nothing" (TLP 6.11). Wittgenstein's logic here is close to Derrida's *différance* as that which "makes signification possible" (395) but is only present as a trace. As Jorn K. Bramann writes in *Wittgenstein's "Tractatus" and the Modern Arts*,

That logic is transcendental means that one necessarily perceives the world as something which is subject to the laws of logic, that the basic structure of reality is identical with the order of logic. The order of facts as represented by the language of the propositional calculus, therefore, is not just one order among others that are possible, but it is *the* order of the world. The basic disconnectedness of all facts is, therefore, the true state of the world. Ordinary perception, and whatever is conveyed by ordinary language, can only give a distorted image of reality. The connections which they suggest are not real. A philosophical view of the world recognizes them as illusions. (84)

Logic does not care what *p* and *q* stand for. Its laws only produce empty propositions without truth value, and so "outside logic everything is accidental" (TLP 6.3).

Enter anti-paranoia, the insight that "nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long" (434). Pynchon's characters are finagling their way through a world which does not make sense, but requires them to *make sense* quite literally, to connect facts and make inferences with ambivalent truth-value. Order becomes an obsession, and it is always an order which has the paranoiac at its center. Of course, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean you're wrong. However, this paranoia is based on the assumption that things happen for a reason, that one event necessitates another—that there is cause and effect. Wittgenstein would disagree: "There is no compulsion making one thing happen because another has happened. The only necessity that exists is *logical* necessity" (TLP 6.37). The insight into this logical necessity does not lead to any gain of knowledge *about* the world, since logic is only the space in which that which is the case exists—the "facts in logical space are the world" (TLP 1.13). This is why logicians cannot and "do not draw any ontological conclusions from their calculi" (Bramann 83), which leaves their results as empty as Roger Mexico's statistics. Since mathematics "is a logical method" (TLP 6.2) and a "proposition of mathematics does not express a thought" (TLP 6.21), mathematics cannot be used to make statements about the world itself, especially not about issues which its inhabitants perceive as vital.

Wittgenstein attacks causality on a large scale, his "attitude toward the world is anti-ideological to an extreme. But Wittgenstein's conception of facts does not only undermine 'holistic' theories like that of Marx, Hegel, Toynbee, or Jaspers, but common sense perceptions of reality as well" (Bramann 87). It is important to note that Wittgenstein does not question causality on an ontological but on an epistemological level. What follows from his assumptions about logic is this:

5.135   There is no possible way of making an inference from the existence of one situation to the existence of another, entirely different situation.

5.136   There is no causal nexus to justify such an inference.

5.1361   We *cannot* infer the events of the future from those of the present. Superstition is nothing but belief in the causal nexus. (TLP)

One could call this the belief in "the aprioristic *certainty* of causal connections" (Stenius 60). Or, from a different angle: "Paranoids are not paranoids [. . .] because they're paranoid, but because they keep putting themselves, fucking idiots, deliberately into paranoid situations" (292). The desire for an understanding of the world by connecting states of affairs (or believing that they are connected *a priori*) can never be fulfilled because such a connection must be provisional and limited, one could say *personal*, and Wittgenstein recognizes this desire on this level of meaningful statements as a human urge rather than an innate order of the world:

6.36   If there were a law of causality, it might be put in the following way: There are laws of nature. But of course that cannot be said: it makes itself manifest. . . .

6.362   What can be described can happen too: and what the law of causality is meant to exclude cannot even be described.

6.363   The procedure of induction consists in accepting as true the *simplest* law that can be reconciled with our experiences.

6.3631   This procedure, however, has no logical justification but only a psychological one. It is clear that there are no grounds for believing that the simplest eventuality will in fact be realized.

6.36311   It is an hypothesis that the sun will rise tomorrow: and this means that we do not *know* whether it will rise. (TLP)

This psychological justification is what Pynchon is interested in, knowing that beyond that, no meaningful statements can be made. This is why he calls the meeting of two paranoids a "crossing of solipsisms" where "two patterns create a third: a moiré, a new world of flowing shadows, interferences . . ." (395). The solipsist shares with the paranoiac the assumption that she is the center of the world, and that all meaning converges towards that center. Both centers give order and stability to a chaotic world, and so it is "every paranoid's wish [. . .] to perfect methods of immobility" (572).

Yet is there not a basic contradiction between Pynchon and the early Wittgenstein—does not the one view the world as chaotic while the other views it as ordered? Their world views can be reconciled. Wittgenstein may seem to assume that there is a logic operating in the world and thus order in the world, but this logic is a *condition* of the world, not its Manichaean driving force, and as such it is an order too remote to be of any use for making any kind of inference about the *content* of logical operations. Logic is an *absent*

order that is useless for satisfying our paranoid drives, and everything *inside* that absent order, paradoxically, is absolutely chaotic.

Wittgenstein even seems to address the paranoiac directly when he states that "The world is independent of my will" (TLP 6.373), and dismisses any relation between the two beyond mere coincidence: "Even if all that we wish for were to happen, still this would only be a favor granted by fate, so to speak: for there is no *logical* connexion between the will and the world, which would guarantee it, and the supposed physical connexion itself is surely not something that we could will" (TLP 6.374). A paranoid subject believes in solipsistically being at the center of a world which has to be interpreted, and where order can be created by establishing *meaning*. Wittgenstein claims instead that there "is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas" (TLP 5.631), and that the "subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world" (TLP 5.632). Since "the self is not a possible object of experience" (Glock 349), just like the eye is not part of the visual field (TLP 5.633), it cannot be part of the world, nor can it be outside the world either. This is why it is referred to as a limit of the world, and this is why meaning *in* the world must ultimately escape that subject. What remains is the insight that there "is no a priori order of things" (TLP 5.634), and thus that any order of things is provisional, just like any attempts at making sense of the world from within it.

2.4 The Political and Philosophical Possibility of (An)Other World(s)

If there is no a priori order of things, it is possible to imagine *any* order in the world. This makes paranoia possible but also poses a problem for paranoiacs, since their system of interpreting the world must necessarily remain open. Plater states that "Pynchon has created a fiction that shows as well as speaks about the closed system, and he has created a philosophically complete world, one that is all that is the case" (61). This judgment fails to consider two important aspects. First, speaking about what Plater assumes is the "closed system" of language—and one may reasonably doubt it is one—means *thinking* beyond its boundaries. Second, the first statement of the *Tractatus*— "The world is all that is the case" (TLP 1)—should not *only* be taken fatalistically in a deterministic way, since it is more than a "brutal truth" (Cowart 91). Another appropriate reading, closely connected to ideas of entropy, is that "Die Welt ist alles was der Fall ist" states that the world is everything that is *the fall*, that everything constantly goes downhill. David Wills and Alec McHoul have collected a large number of meanings for the word *Fall* in their essay on *V.*, and all these show how complex a reading of the *Tractatus* as literature can get: "Fall, accident, plunge, downfall, decline, ruin, decay, collapse, overthrow, drop, lapse, slump, depression, surrender, death, cadence, case, instance, example, matter, situation, event, circumstance, eventuality, occurrence,

outcome, occasion, case (jur.), case (med.), case (ling.)" (279). My reading of the first statement, though, will consider what it does *not* say, but what is explained shortly after: that the world is not only what is the case, but that it is also what is *not* the case, and what *could be* the case. The *Tractatus* is about the conditions of possibility, not about actual states of affairs: "Each thing is, as it were, in a space of possible states of affairs" (TLP 2.013), and the "existence and non-existence of states of affairs is reality" (TLP 2.06). It is that space that is important, not what is in it. Pynchon creates such a space but does *not* present its content as pre-determined and unchangeable. The world of *Gravity's Rainbow* is more than what is the case, it is also what is not the case, and most importantly what could be the case. Pynchon here is in line with this idea of the *Tractatus*, but not with Plater's interpretation of it.

Both Wittgenstein and Pynchon subscribe to possibilism, which Bradley defines as "the belief in things which are merely possible, that is, nonactual possibles" that can be "worlds, states of affairs, objects, or whatnot" (29). Pynchon's possibilism evidently differs from Wittgenstein's, and I would simplify and argue that one is political where the other is philosophical.

Wittgenstein argues that "[j]ust as the only necessity that exists is *logical* necessity, so too the only impossibility that exists is *logical* impossibility" (TLP 6.375). He is concerned with the framework of logic that allows us to conceive of states of affairs in the first place. "Logic deals with every possibility and all possibilities are its facts" (TLP 2.0121). Since logic does not care for the content of its statements, it is not concerned with things as they are, but always already involves things as they *could be*. Logic provides not content but a form, and "quite generally, Wittgenstein regards the notion of form as equivalent to a set of *possibilities*" (Bradley 45). His critique of causality leads to the radical insight that "Whatever we see could be other than it is. Whatever we can describe at all could be other than it is. There is no a priori order of things" (TLP 5.634). Plater reads this as a comment on points of view and relativism (11), but it is based on a misunderstanding of statement 1.1, "The world is the totality of facts, not of things." Plater takes this to mean that what matters is the *observation* of the world, not the world *as it is and is not*, and sets it without further comment in the context of Maxwell, Boltzmann and Henry Adams, as if the meaning of the statement were self-evident (11-12). However, reading on from statement 1.1 just a bit, one recognizes that it is *not* about observing the world: "The world is determined by the facts, and by their being *all* the facts" (TLP 1.11), for "the totality of facts determines what is the case, and also whatever is not the case" (TLP 1.12). If we understand the world to be the totality of facts in terms of our description of what is, and if we exclude what is not and the possibility implied in that distinction, we limit the world more than necessary, and misunderstand the *Tractatus*. It is not a tract on perception. Since the "totality of existing states of affairs also determines which states of affairs do not exist" (TLP 2.05), with every presence we must think an absence, and the play between the two is

the condition of possibility. With this in mind, the statements "Whatever we see could be other than it is. Whatever we can describe at all could be other than it is. There is no a priori order of things" (TLP 5.634) read differently, not with Plater's emphasis on *description*, but on *being*. Since statements with truth-value are only embodiments of what is possible in that "space of possible states of affairs" (TLP 2.013), the acceptance of necessity must give way to a radical recognition of possibility. Without causality *in* the world, nothing is necessary, but all is possible.

Wittgenstein's possibilism stems from these properties of language. It is possible to envisage "nonactual state[s] of affairs" or "different ways the world might be," even though of "the various ways the world might be, only one of them was, is, or will be, actual. All the others were, are, or will be, nonactual" (Bradley 30). Nonactual does not mean impossible, and language is the space in which these possibilities can be played out. Wittgenstein wrote in his *Notebooks 1914-1916* that in "the proposition a world is as it were put together experimentally" (7e). The distinction between nonactual and impossible is a useful one to keep in mind when considering a fictional text. Strictly speaking, fictional texts can never deal with the impossible, since logical impossibility could not be expressed in language which has logic as its condition: "It is as impossible to represent in language anything that 'contradicts logic' as it is in geometry to represent by its co-ordinates a figure that contradicts the laws of space, or to give the coordinates of a point that does not exist" (TLP 3.032). Fictional texts instead can deal with what is nonactual in "our" world. If one follows Wittgenstein in recognizing "two domains of quantification: an unrestricted domain of objects that exist as possibilia and a restricted domain of actualia" (Bradley 61), one must recognize that this allows for an infinite number of "games of make-believe" (Pavel 54), and so for conceptions of possible worlds.

Lubomír Doležel in *Heterocosmica* comments on the postmodernist rewriting of canonical literary texts that "displacement constructs an essentially different version of the protoworld, redesigning its structure and reinventing its story. These most radical postmodernist rewrites create *polemical* antiworlds, which undermine or negate the legitimacy of the canonical protoworld" (207). This can be applied not only to the protoworld of a literary text, but also to the protoworld we believe to be reality. It is possible to create a polemical antiworld to "the real world" for political purposes, rewriting things as they are, are not, could be, should be, reinventing its narrative. Brian McHale reminds us that "fictional possible worlds and the real world inevitably overlap to some extent" (34), and it is the transworld exchange which can make the postmodern "fictional heterocosm" (28) political.

The belief in nonactual but not impossible worlds implies a politics of changeability as it questions the status quo by abstractly showing that things as they are are not the only way things can be. For example, "Newspeak" in *Nineteen*

Eighty-Four is an attempt "not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible" (312). Manipulating and *limiting* language is a political act, and the power of language to refer to nonactuals is *political*. There is power in speculations starting with "If someone killed the President. . . ." Pynchon comments in a related manner on this power of language when he presents the consequences of the introduction of the New Turkic Alphabet: "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!)" (355-56). Immediately this system of language is appropriated for subversion. There is, in a way, only a small difference between describing a different state of affairs and demanding it. The creation of a fictional world like the Zone, which has "no locational as well as no epistemological stability" (Tanner 80), posits a challenge to all unified narratives in and about the so-called "real world."

It also involves a critique of political necessity, an abstract one to be sure, but one that can found an anti-conservative politics of possibility which refuses to accept that which can be changed for the better. Slothrop learns that lesson from a pine tree:

> Slothrop's family actually made its money killing trees, amputating them from their roots, chopping them up, grinding them to pulp, bleaching that to paper and getting paid for this with more paper. "That's really insane." He shakes his head. "There's insanity in my family." He looks up. The trees are still. They know he's there. They probably also know what he's thinking. "I'm sorry," he tells them. "I can't do anything about those people, they're all out of my reach. What can I do?" A medium-size pine nearby nods its top and suggests, "Next time you come across a logging operation out here, find one of their tractors that isn't being guarded, and take its oil filter with you. That's what you can do." (552-53)

Slothrop is moved out of his fatalistic acceptance of necessity ("I can't do anything") by being shown an *alternative* to doing nothing. The tree does the thinking for Slothrop, thinking beyond what is to what could be.

Byron's fellow bulbs react in a similar way to Slothrop's trees when "word goes out along the Grid" (650) of Byron's imminent getting unscrewed by a Phoebus agent:

> They are silent with impotence, with surrender in the face of struggles they thought were all myth. *We can't help*, this common thought humming through pastures of sleeping sheep, down Autobahns and to the bitter ends of coaling piers in the North, *there's never been anything we could do.* . . . Anyone shows us the meanest hope of transcending and the Committee on Incandescent Anomalies comes in and takes him away. Some do protest, maybe, here and there, but it's

only information, glow-modulated, harmless, nothing close to the explosions in the faces of the powerful that Byron once envisioned, back there in his Baby ward, in his innocence. (650-51)

The bulbs' fatalism is not presented as rooted in true necessity—the hope of transcending this incapacity to act and change is there, only it is destroyed by the Committee on Incandescent Anomalies (CIA), whose job it is to keep things as they are, to serve and protect the *status quo*. Power aims at perpetuating itself and so constructs necessity. Orwell's Party sought to manipulate language in such a way that it would make it impossible to realize that there is no necessity; Pynchon in his fiction of paranoia manipulates language to show us that *everything* is possible.

3. Slothrop

Yet where do these politics of possibility lead Slothrop eventually? He does not seem to be a good advocate of any cause, since he meets a highly ambiguous fate towards the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*. However, certain passages from the *Tractatus* can shed new light on his scattering. They will not resolve the ambiguity, and nothing should, but they add a positive note to this dissemination.

Mondaugen's Law states: "Personal density is directly proportional to temporal bandwidth. 'Temporal bandwidth' is the width of your present, your *now*. It is the familiar 'Δt' considered as a dependent variable. The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona" (509). Slothrop's bandwidth moves from a fuzzy line to a singular dot as he is stripped of his identity in the course of the novel, until he is reduced to only his self, and then beyond it. Mondaugen's Law explains that "the narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are. It may get to where you're having trouble remembering what you were doing five minutes ago, or even—as Slothrop now—what you're doing *here*" (509). He is gradually dropping out of time, and consequences of this have shown even earlier:

> But nowadays, some kind of space he cannot go against has opened behind Slothrop, bridges that might have led back are down now for good. He is growing less anxious about betraying those who trust him. He feels obligations less immediately. There is, in fact, a general loss of emotion, a numbness he ought to be alarmed at, but can't quite . . .
>   *Can't* . . . (490-91)

The silences expressed by those repeated three dots already point towards Slothrop's moving towards an experience beyond language. This journey will terminate in his removal from the text altogether, even though his absence is clearly marked. His final disappearance, when he loses even the singularity

that is his self without identity, can be seen as "the change from point to no-point" which "carries a luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw in fright" (396). The *Tractatus* gives reason to celebrate his vanishing: "Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present" (TLP 6.4311). Slothrop's temporal bandwidth is so limited that he only knows the present; Plater rightly states that he achieves "timelessness outside of time" (51), but fails to link this to the *Tractatus*.

The same is true of his treatment of solipsism, which does not go beyond linking Wittgenstein's concept of the self to the writer's role in fiction (9). Much more can be gained from the following passage in the *Tractatus*:

5.62   . . . The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of *language* (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of *my* world.

5.621   The world and life are one.

5.63   I am my world. (The microcosm.)

5.631   There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas. . . .

5.632   The subject does not belong to the world; rather, it is a limit of the world. . . .

5.64   Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it. (TLP)

The "solipsist's ego is an entity without an identity" (Pears 19) in that passage of the *Tractatus*, which is what Slothrop experienced in the course of the text. Slothrop constitutes the limit of a world just like anyone else, but he manages to transcend his. Something grows from his loss of identity and self: he "becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection where the judges have come to set up a gibbet for a common criminal who is to be hanged at noon" (625). He vanishes from the world system by becoming a coordinate system of his own. The "reality co-ordinated" with "the self of solipsism" (TLP 5.64) originates from him as an absent center without extension. If everything metaphysical must lie outside of the world whose limit is language, Slothrop must leave language (the text) to have access to the metaphysical. If the "solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem" (TLP 6.521), Slothrop's scattering may indicate such a solution. Wittgenstein claims that this is "the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense" (TLP 6.521).

"Those Who Know, know" (665), indeed. Another example: the Polish undertaker, who is a "digital companion" whose response to everything is either yes or no (663), tries to transcend his life of zeros and ones by getting hit by lightning; by experiencing "a singular point" he wants to reach another "world laid down on the previous one and to all appearances no different. Ha-*ha*! But the lightning-struck know, all right! Even if they may not *know* they know" (664). His goal is to gain knowledge about "how people behave before and after lightning bolts, so he'll know better how to handle bereaved families" (665). He is preparing for confrontations with death, and for speaking about death. In his "digital" state, his language seems insufficient, so he looks for transcendence. Thanatz witnesses "an enormous blast of light and sound [hit] the water back where the undertaker, peeved at what he takes to be no gratitude, is hauling away. 'Oh,' comes his faint voice. '*Oh*, ho. Oh-ho-ho-*ho!*'" (665). This is all the commentary there is, and either the undertaker has learned the hard way that his plan might not have been such a good idea after all, or he has indeed found what he was looking for—only that his language fails at representing it.

Slothrop's experience of transcendence is not as painful as the undertaker's, but he too is leaving language and world behind. Earlier, he mused about finding in the waste of the "cleared, depolarized" Zone "a single set of coordinates from which to proceed" (556), and this set could be Slothrop himself, indicating new conditions of existence. He may be that new "Center without time, the journey without hysteresis" (319), which at the same time is not. He has become like Derrida's *différance*, "the structured and differing origin of differences" (393), producing a new way of structurality in his axes, making structures in his coordinates possible, but also disappearing from the system itself, leaving only traces. This gives a new angle to Weisenburger's idea that Slothrop, as a cross, is "Christ-like" (321)—he may have a famous predecessor in creating a new system and then leaving it so that it might work. He leaves the plot with all its links, and "the difficulty of knowing from the inside whether or not a set of events constitutes a designed plot or is merely coincidental" (Schaub 105) does not affect him any longer. He is only present "in spirit" (712) and has left traces all over the text, but "Slothrop *qua* Slothrop" (738) is gone.

Slothrop is in good company. He is not the only literary character leaving the text behind, and his fellow escapees into the silence beyond words are numerous and well known. Wyatt Gywon in Gaddis's *The Recognitions* simply walks off out of our view, having lost his name hundreds of pages earlier, going somewhere the text refuses to follow (900). Leopold Bloom, resting after having traveled, falls asleep, and the final question of Ithaca, "Where?", is answered either by a large dot or by a blank space, depending on what edition you prefer (689/871). The voice in Beckett's *Unnameable* realizes that perhaps words "have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me,

if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (418). All those words have only carried the voice (and the reader) to the threshold of the story, and what is behind the door that opens on it remains in the realm of silence. Hamlet's last words draw our attention to the fact that there is always a rest, a surplus of meaning in the play that is beyond words, and that also there is rest, peace to be found in silence. Pynchon himself writes about Daniel Pearse, the protagonist of Jim Dodge's *Stone Junction*, that "it is for him to slip along the last borderline, into what Wittgenstein once supposed cannot be spoken of, and upon which, as Eliphaz Levi advised us—after "To know, to will, to dare" as the last and greatest of the rules of Magic—we must keep silent" ("Introduction" xiv). The protagonist of the *Tractatus*, who it could turn out possibly was us all along, finds a ladder waiting at the end, and Wittgenstein's words: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)" (TLP 6.54). What unites all these texts, and what shall serve as a final short summary of a long connected reading of Wittgenstein and Pynchon, is that they share a deep awe at silence, and at the same time an equally deep desire to express, and with it the realization that these are not separate. Their shared impossible project is an inquiry into the nature of Silence, and even if there may be no propositional knowledge to be gained from it, at least it contains a lesson similar to the one Byron the Bulb learned, a lesson of love, and of respect for Silence.

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Notes

[1] "1. It is a combination. 1.1 It is a scalar quantity. 1.2. Its negative aspects are distributed isotropically. 2. It is not a conspiracy. 2.1 It is not a vector. 2.11 It is not aimed at anybody. 2.12 It is not aimed at me . . . u.s.w." (415)

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