# Response to Steven Weisenburger's Response

Carol Schaechterle Loranger

To be taken to task for a turn of phrase by someone whose work I've long admired leaves me feeling a little bit like the kitten who's lost her mitten and so shall have no pie. I regret that the opening of my essay left Steven Weisenburger facing both barrels of a volley I meant to fire more broadly. As the most ambitious and visible of the industry's indices, annotations and cross-references, the *Companion* no doubt catches it oftener than it merits. In my defense, though, there are other types of terrorism than the Taliban variety—and these often more insidious—as anyone who for one reason or another lives outside one or more consumer loops in the United States might readily attest. I had thought that exposing the rich variety of pressures exerted on the average poor bastard to limit his/her behavior and options—and the APB's complicity in this maneuver (as I suggested in my essay)—was a thread that ran throughout Pynchon's novels and other writings.

Steven Weisenburger and I are not so far apart as it might seem. Literary scholarship is in a doldrums, which shows itself in exaggerated form in Pynchon studies. The novels demand so much attention to their surfaces, to tantalizing matters of architecture and information qua information—or, alternatively, are so much fun to play a little theoretical slap and tickle with—that it is possible to forget, or minimize, or not be concerned with the novels' being in the world or how the individual histories of their being in the world might affect the cultural work they do. *Gravity's Rainbow* is over a quarter of a century old and still in print, still presumably being read by people innocent of or unconcerned with the mountains of scholarship it has brought into being. Belonging as they do to an era of diminished expectations and increased terrorism —damn, there's that word again—directed at them by their own elected representatives, what do they make of it? Does it mean for them what it meant, for example, for Todd Gitlin's "hinterland generation"? Can it?

Which is why I attempted in the second half of "'His Kipling Period'" to pay for my own theoretical larking about with a little speculation about the novel's complicity in the structures of social authority it seems to have set out to critique. For every piece of informational backing and filling *Gravity's Rainbow*'s perversity demands, attention is drawn away from the discourse of the novel. Ditto for simply applying a new theoretical angle. The baseline

assumption of most approaches, that Pynchon's work is left-leaning and anti-authoritarian, has not, to my knowledge, been tested. The single strand I examined in "'His Kipling Period'" using Bakhtin's flexible and politically sensitive work on the novel—a strand which temporarily foregrounds issues of colonialism, terrorism, dominance, etc.—suggests that there are at least limits to Pynchon's left tendencies. The two novels following *Gravity's Rainbow* are increasingly valedictory in their treatments of freedom, opposition, revolution. Reading them, especially *Mason & Dixon*, I was reminded of Lionel Trilling's comment that the most seriously engaging modern writers "demand of us a great agility and ingenuity in coping with their antagonism [later, "indifference"] to our social and political ideals." I'm coming slowly to the conclusion, though hoping to be convinced otherwise, that seriously engaging postmodern writers—much like postmodern mamas arranging playdates—arrange safe outlets for exercise of agility and ingenuity to slip their social/political indifference by. Yes, these novels are beautiful as complex structures and lovely stuff to work with, but so are the polymers *Gravity's Rainbow* holds up as antithetical to life.

"What is the main-street interpretation the *Companion*'s annotations supposedly police?" The same one tendered us by *Gravity's Rainbow*, in a riff straight from Louis Jordan: "There ain't nobody here but us chickens"—with the chickens being the countless fascinating questions of structure and information decorating the shed of the novel. That said, I have no quarrel with the *Companion* or any of the other archaeologies which have been so painstakingly produced. I use it/them often enough to hope my own particular Fuzzy-Wuzzy will appear in the expanded, corrected Y2K edition. What I call for in my article—extensive inquiry into the novels' actual politics—can begin only now that the novels' mechanics have had their preliminary going-over. I can't quite envision what a painstaking dialogic analysis of the whole might look like—certainly it can't be a one-person job and avoid its own imposition of terror—but that, along with more concerted attention to the rhetorical strategies, reception and social-political arc of the oeuvre, and more dialogues like this about what it is we think we are or ought to be doing might be the place to start.