

Hyper-Embedded Narration in *Gravity's Rainbow*

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Among the many possible approaches to *Gravity's Rainbow*, two are remarkable because they remain, twenty-plus years after the book's publication, untravelled roads. The first approach would entail using current narratology to open analyses of this novel's difficult joyride. It would take us well beyond studies of the novel's cinematic features or the tropics of its narrative discourse; in sum, this approach would open up Pynchon's narrative poetics in ways only promised by the titles of various essays and books.¹ The second approach would entail readings of the novel by way of Deleuze and Guattari. The general absence of work along this path is simply unaccountable because, as I suggest later, the correlations of Deleuzian theory with Pynchon's fiction are powerful and crucial. In what follows I explore how the two neglected approaches complement each other. This analysis isolates for study a specific feature of Pynchon's writing, yet one that always marks a zone where narrative poetics may be seen converting into a Deleuzian schizophrenia, and vice versa.

Consider a scene near the end of episode 14 in Part 1 of *Gravity's Rainbow*. There, even while they are, as our "apparently" omniscient narrator remarks, rapidly approaching the zero-point of extinction, Pynchon's surviving dodoes have "waddled in awkward pilgrimage" (111) to stand several thousand strong on a beach before Katje Borgesius's ancestor Frans van der Groov. Victims of seventeenth-century colonialist adventuring, the dodoes are dreaming of Baby Jesus. Indeed, there on the edenic isle of Mauritius, Frans has been "witnessing a miracle: a Gift of Speech . . . a Conversion of the Dodoes" (110). "Conversion": the term names a change in spiritual state, but also refers to acts of semiotic exchange in the most general sense, in monetary usage, for example, or in psychiatric discourse when ideas or impulses are symbolically manifested in bodily symptoms; yet the further meaning here involves the process, in logic, of swapping the subject and predicate in a proposition. This is precisely what occurs in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The dodoes, who had been the narrated objects of Frans van der Groov's story, are momentarily converted into narrating, or "dreaming," subjects. Yet Frans himself is already (in this scene) the object of Katje's genealogical recollections, even while, throughout this episode, Katje herself is being filmed (by

a “secret cameraman” [92]) for a brief movie whose images, in a further act of conversion by the extradiegetic narrative, will be projected on a screen during the conditioning of octopus Grigori, in whose consciousness the images will be converted one more time, into motor reflexes. Yet there is more. I used scare-quotes earlier in remarking that our narrator was only “apparently” omniscient; this uncertainty is fulfilled later in the novel when that voice is surmounted by (or embedded within) still another narrative authority.

This zone of densely embedded narration is extreme but by no means unique in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. One could begin the same analysis at many other subject positions in the novel: of Octopus Grigori in Part 2; of the suicidal lemming named Ursula who troops through Part 3; of the subject position identified in Part 4 as Byron the Bulb; or of the novel’s putative protagonist who appears to disappear from the narrative, for Tyrone Slothrop and his fantasies are accessed also as narrated predicates under the authority of various bureaucratic subjects; and so on, right up the command tree.

That recursive power, theorized as embedding, comes down to us as a traditional technique of artful narrating. But if, as in the remarkable instance of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, such conversions of embedded narrative begin multiplying, one hypodiegetic level manifesting still further hypodiegetic levels, all marvelously Chinese-boxed, then readers are dealing with the cognitively challenging conditions I call hyper-embedded narration. Hyper-embedding tests our cognitive powers because most people can keep consistently in mind the relations among just a few levels, usually three or four. It further challenges reading by overdetermining one of its truly foundational tropes, the holding in one’s hands of a book and perceiving its alterity in subordinate relation to the familiarity of one’s own experience. In hyper-embedded narrative that relation is understood to extend potentially-infinitely far down. Or up: for, in this possibly ceaseless conversion of subject positions, the reader paranoiacally understands any self—including one’s own—as always already the object of some other but undetected authority. So hyper-embedding tends to backlight the most basic artifices of storytelling and, in contemporary fictions, contribute to a wide range of modal effects, from John Barth’s comic parodies of traditional authorial positionings in “Menelaiad,” to Pynchon’s satiric subversions of the immensely political authority that *Gravity’s Rainbow* exposes across the whole domain of narrating.²

Pynchon pushes the poetics of embedding so far in *Gravity’s Rainbow* that its pages beg for a revision of current theories. Here a short survey will have to suffice. By the term “embedding” recent theorists understand the nesting or stacking of one narrative diegesis

within or upon another, establishing relations of subordination and, thus, hierarchy.³ The boundary-layer separating representations may be either ontological or illocutionary, depending on whether the relation of difference established is between various semantic domains (for instance, a television soap-opera embedded in a comic film) or between different speech acts (a letter inserted in a novel). This boundary is supposed to be always clearly marked in the text. One theorist terms the markers acts of “punctuation” (Furedy 751); another (in a nifty phrase) calls them “laminator verbs” (Goffman 156–57); still another understands them under the heading of “attributive discourse” (Bal 44–45), because they attribute the subsequent or antecedent discursive activity to a particular subject’s position in the text. Thus the paradigmatic structure of embedding has the form “John tells how A *said* that B *saw* X.” This model makes plain the function of laminator verbs, as well as their attributions of discursive activities that are clearly subordinated to each other, and all under the aegis of a type of authorial narrator (John). Moreover, that distinction between saying and seeing defines another obvious theoretical necessity, which Susan Lanser sees as involving the way an embedded diegesis is supplied under the authority of either a voice or a perception. In other words, its authority is defined by its status as narration or focalization, with a narration capable of embedding a focalization but not vice versa, a so-called “rule” that probably needs theoretical reexamination because Pynchon rather systematically violates it (see Lanser, esp. 143–45).

According to current theory, an embedded diegesis performs either one of two functions: retrospective interpretation of the past, or prospective predictions of the future (see Ryan, ENT 323–26). But reading Pynchon forces me to regard that, also, as a too-limited approach, restricted by the before-and-after conventions of narrative causality, which, as I have argued elsewhere in a study of its uses of hysteron proteron, *Gravity’s Rainbow* satirically puts under erasure. In violation of still another rule, this novel suggests—as do other postmodern texts—that embedded narratives might also be capable (like my computer) of processing information in “‘Parallel, not series’” (GR 159). And last among the general rules governing embedding in narrative texts is a requirement of symmetry: just as the text sequentially stacks up a number of hypodiegetic levels, so must it unstack them in the same order. Keep this in mind, because again it is a widely-stated convention *Gravity’s Rainbow* observes mostly in the breaching of it.

These elements in a theory of narrative embedding have also been argued into place as enabling conditions for narrative in general. Such different theorists as Tzvetan Todorov and Peter Brooks, for instance,

are emphatic about how embedding tropes the rather elusive concept of “narrativity” precisely because it foregrounds the conversion of a narrator into a narratee, or a narrating act into a narrated story. This is the “story in one’s hands” trope mentioned earlier. Also, recent work by cognitive scientists demonstrates a connection between the “memorability” of a story and the complexity of its embeddings. In brief, the hypotactic, sequential, chronological narrative chain is far less “memorable” than the story whose paratactic, embedded, anachronous structure supports hierarchized inferences—and therefore retellings—by readers.⁴ Other research shows that what is sometimes called “tellability,” defined as a quality that makes one narration more absorbing than another, also depends on “the complexity of the system of embedded narratives” deployed throughout a particular diegesis (Ryan, ENT 324).

There is more. Some years ago, Richard Ohmann argued that issues of “authority” in literary (as compared with testimonial or historical) narrative may also be theorized on the basis of embedding because a literary fiction reverses the order of authority. Suppose A tells us that B told him that C said X to D. In non-literary communications, the truth-value or “felicity” of this embedded message (“X”) rests at the innermost level (“C said X to D”), though we would grant that the illocutionary acts of B and A also matter in the transmission of X. In a literary communication, however, authority or reliability always rests at the outermost level of the nested series, in short, with the frame-narrator, A, whose discourse would have *the least* credibility in any tribunal (Ohmann 99–100). More recently, Lanser has further theorized the importance of these levels of authority in reading. She makes a useful distinction between public and private narrators, in addition to the various focalizers, embedded in narrative diegeses. Thus in the paradigmatic case offered earlier—“John tells how A said that B saw X”—B is the focalizer in A’s private narration within John’s public act of narrative structuring. As a rule, in literary texts a public narrative act always reifies authority at a higher level; non-literary textual practices work the other way around, attributing the greater truth-value to private communications like memos and diaries (Lanser 140–46). And finally, according to the concept of causality in narration, the reader’s inferences about the motives of agents, hence the causes of actions, are produced by interpreting “the set of embedded narratives” (Ryan, ENT 331). I suspect this is an almost ancient point to make about reading fictions; a crude version of it appears in Percy Lubbock’s *Craft of Fiction* (1921).

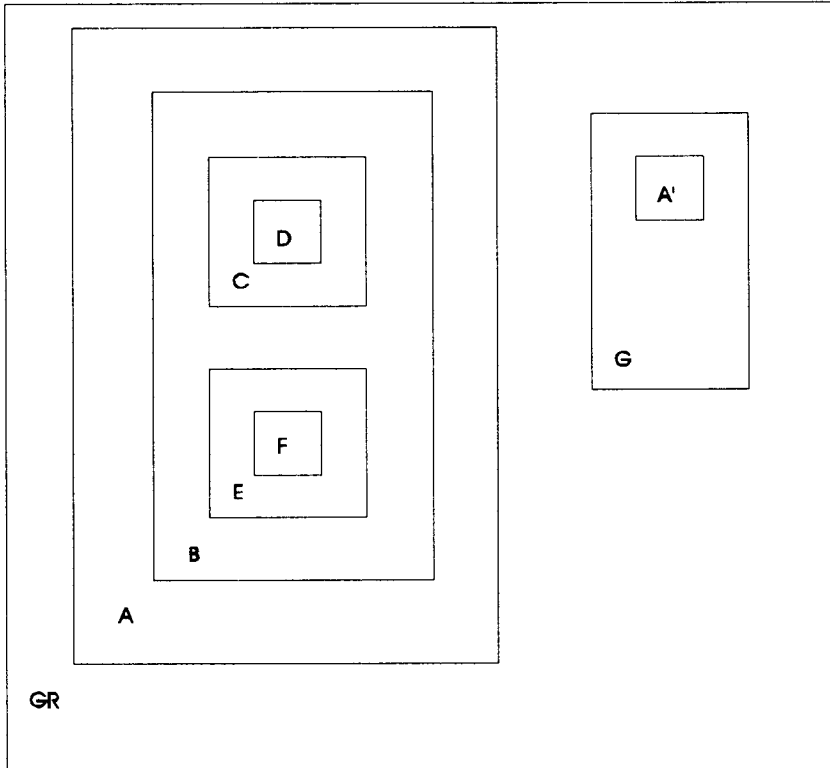
Long-standing as is the critical awareness of embedding, recent theoretical approaches that ground the causality, authority, tellability,

memorability and narrativity of diegetic acts in strategies of embedding are—taken altogether—rather remarkable: they comprise a powerful set of concepts to reckon with, far beyond New Critical ideas of how a story-within-a-story functions primarily as a reflection (even if a distorting mirror) of “themes” in the frame text. Yet far and away the *most* remarkable new theoretical description of embedding appears in a 1990 paper by Marie-Laure Ryan. In a radical remodeling of existing theory, she displaces metaphors of the *framing* of stories-within-stories and turns to figures drawn from computer science, providing us new metaphors involving the recursive *stacking* of embedded focalizations that are analogous to programs or applications, stored within embedded narrations that are analogous to sub-directories and directories, all driven by extradiegetic narrators or operating systems. Ryan’s approach produces useful results with a text like episode 14 of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, as I want to show.

Yet there are limits to even the best of recent approaches. One problem (recognized earlier by Ryan, in 1986) is that theories of narrative embedding tend to work either with childishly simple examples (in the case of cognitive-science approaches) or else (in the case of narratological approaches) with genres having canonically straightforward plots—like folk tales, soap operas, detective stories, and literary fictions of the modern age or earlier. The instances of embedded narrative in *The Arabian Nights* are invoked repeatedly, as are similar examples from *Wuthering Heights*. Among allegedly postmodern texts, the familiar cases are John Barth’s parodies of *Arabian Nights* in “Menelaiad,” and John Fowles’s use of embedded genres in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, which also seem to compose a pastiche of techniques grabbed from Victorian fiction. The problem with these examples is that their readers cross clearly punctuated boundaries, symmetrically arrayed, in a realistic and quite logical narrative situation.

Gravity’s Rainbow troubles that simple landscape of theory. Take episode 14, for example. Like three prior episodes in Part 1—episodes 5, 9 and 10—this one has an overall recursive design. That is, the narration in 14 begins with a sentence of the extradiegetic narrator’s (quoted in Fig. 1), a sentence to which the episode loops back at its end. The other episodes work similarly: episode 10, for example, loops back to another variation on “You never did the Kenosha kid.” Now, whether we represent this structure as a Chinese-boxing of successively interiorized framings or embeddings, or (as shown in Fig. 2), as Ryan’s new model would have us see it, in terms of successive stacks, episode 14 quickly leaves behind the extradiegetic narrator for the view of a “secret cameraman” filming Katje Borgesius on December

"In silence, hidden from her, the camera follows as she moves deliberately nowhere longlegged about the rooms, an adolescent wideness and hunching to the shoulders, her hair not bluntly Dutch at all, but secured in a modish upsweep with an old, tarnished silver crown . . ." (92).



"Grigori's attention is directed to the screen, where an image already walks. The camera follows as she moves deliberately nowhere longlegged about the rooms, an adolescent wideness and hunching to the shoulders, her hair not bluntly Dutch at all, but secured in a modish upsweep with an old, tarnished silver crown . . ." (113).

GR: extradiegetic narrator	D: Gottfried
A : view of "the secret cameraman"	E: Frans van der Groov
B : Katje Borgesius	F: the Dodoes' dream
C : Blicero (in Holland/Sudwest)	G: Octopus Grigori

Fig. 1: Framing of episode 14, Part I, *Gravity's Rainbow* (92-113)

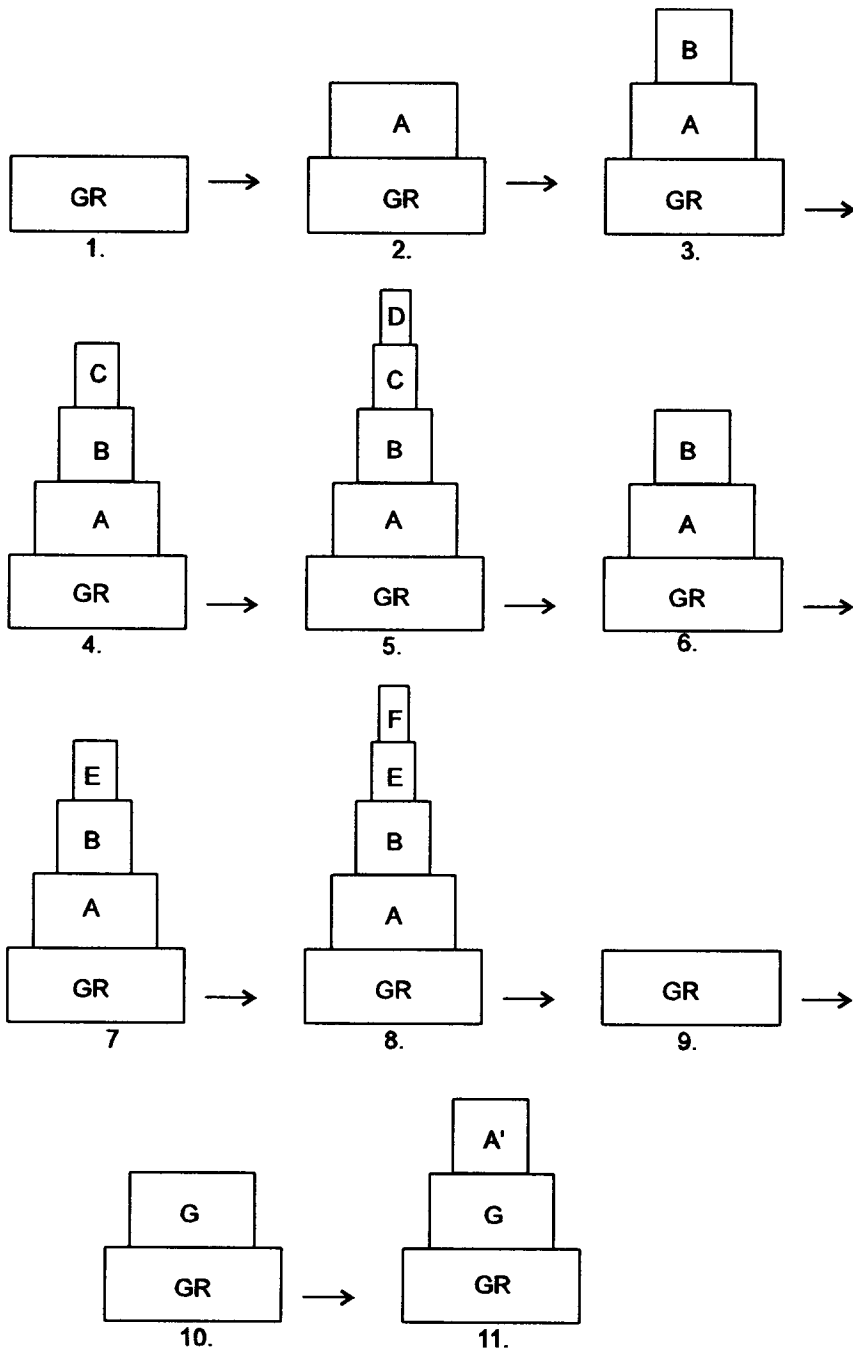
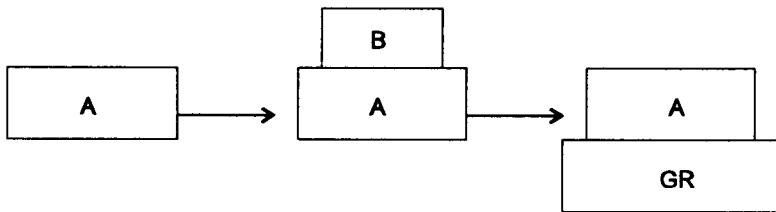


Fig. 2: Stacking of episode 14, Part I, *Gravity's Rainbow* (92-113)

Boundary Crossing	Attributive Discourse
GR → A	"In silence, hidden from her, the camera follows as she moves deliberately nowhere. . . . her very blonde hair frozen on top in a hundred vortices, <i>shining through the dark filigree. Widest lens-opening this afternoon, extra tungsten light laid on, this rainiest day in recent memory</i> " (92).
A → B	"At the images <i>she sees</i> in the mirror Katje also feels a cameraman's pleasure, <i>but knows what he cannot</i> " (94).
B → C	"It is she who, at some indefinite future moment, must push the Witch into the Oven intended for Gottfried. So <i>the Captain must allow</i> for the real chance she's a British spy . . ." (96).
C → D	<i>Gottfried</i> , in the cage, watches her [Katje] slip her bonds and go" (102).
D → B	"Sorry, no, we need the bullet,' <i>Wim's face in shadows her eye can't compensate</i> for, bitterly whispering underneath the Scheveningen pier, ragged crowd-footfalls on the wood overhead . . ." (104).
B → E	"But by the middle of the 17th century there were no more pigs of gold, only of flesh mortal as that of Frans Van der Groov, another ancestor, who went off to Mauritius with a boatload of these live hogs and lost thirteen years toting his haakbus . . . <i>Frans carefully drew beads on the parents at 10 or 20 meters, the piece propped on its hook . . . its heat on his cheek like my own small luminary . . .</i> " (108).
E → F	"They [the dodoes] are all brothers now, they and the humans who used to hunt them, brothers in Christ, <i>the little baby they dream now of sitting near</i> , roosting in his stable, feathers at peace, watching over him and his dear face all night long . . ." (111).
F → GR	"Pirate and Osbie Feel are leaning on their roof-ledge" (111).
GR → G	"The reel is threaded, the lights are switched off, <i>Grigon's attention is directed to the screen, where an image already walks</i> . The camera follows as she moves deliberately nowhere longlegged . . ." (113).

Fig. 3: Hypodiegetic Shifts in episode 14, Part I, *Gravity's Rainbow* (92-113)

Episode 1, Part I: The Opening of GR

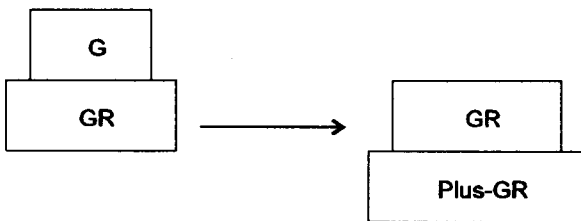


"A screaming comes across the sky." (3)

"Above him lift girders old as an iron queen, and glass. . . . He's afraid of the way the glass will fall—soon—it will be a spectacle." (3)

"His name is Capt. Geoffrey ('Pirate') Prentice. He is wrapped in a thick blanket. . . . His skull feels made of metal." (5)

Episode 12, Part IV: The Closing Sequence of GR



"The first star hangs between his feet. Now—" (760)

"The rhythmic clapping resonates inside these walls, which are hard and glossy as coal: Come-on! Start-the-show! Come-on! Start-the-show! The screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent." (760)

A: Evacuation Sequence

B: "His" fears

GR: Extradiegetic Narration (A: now redefined as Dream Sequence)

G: Gottfried

Plus-GR: Film Sequence (GR: now redefined as film "we" have watched)

Fig. 4: Stacking of *Gravity's Rainbow*, First Episode to the Last

22, 1944. Again, this is the film that will be used in the operant conditioning of Octopus Grigori. From the cameraman's focalization, we execute another pass, this time into Katje's consciousness, and thus into her memories of Captain Blicero's rocket battery in Holland during the Autumn of 1944. The next hypodiegetic pass is through the boundary signalled, again, by focalization, into Blicero's consciousness. (In Fig. 3, this shift is indexed by means of the attributive discourse Pynchon uses, represented by the move from B→C.) This level involves still further analepses, figured by Blicero's memories of his 1922 tour of duty in South-West Africa; then back to 1944, only to pass—again by means of focalization—into Gottfried (for two pages). And here the narration momentarily experiences a kind of system crash, represented in Fig. 2 by step 6, when, after pushing to successively more dependent levels, we suddenly pop back to Katje's consciousness, level B. It is this return to a focalization through Katje, though, which makes available the next hypodiegetic pass, this time to Katje's distant ancestor Frans van der Groov (the pass, in Figs. 1–3, from B→E), thus to set up, as I noted earlier, the conversion of the dodos. At that point, note what happens at step 9 of Fig. 2: another, rather massive system crash takes us, as it were, back to the operating system of this narrative—the extradiegetic narrator. Yet that is not all: the episode concludes by popping from the extradiegetic narrator briefly into Octopus Grigori, thus to replay at episode's end sequence A, the earlier view of our secret cameraman. Except that it is not really his view any longer, but, instead, the simulacrum or projection of it on a movie screen: A-prime, in other words.

End of episode. At this point we can make several key observations about the technique here. First, note how Pynchon's narration simply disobeys the rules of symmetry mentioned earlier. Each moment of what I call system crash puts the reader through a dizzying confusion: Where am I? Or, more precisely, who am I *seeing with*? Moreover, how does one negotiate these leaps over the "boundary layers" separating different levels? From where I stand, anyway, this seems one of *the* most challenging discursive features of *Gravity's Rainbow*; it is what—in my experience of teaching the novel—gives novice readers fits during the first hundred or so pages. Second, related to this first problem, the attributive phrases Pynchon uses to mark each hypodiegetic shift are often the most fleeting verbal traces. None of the "he was thinking" or "it occurred to her" out of conventional fiction; instead, perhaps the merest trace of what Erving Goffman calls a laminator verb, like "she sees" (GR 94) or "Gottfried . . . watches" (102). At times the boundary crossing will be signalled by a sensory trace, as with the B→E shift in Fig. 3, where Frans's haakbus leaves

“its heat on his cheek” (108). I know of nothing else in literary history like this, nothing like the attentiveness, perhaps even a kind of stoned, schizoid intensity that such a technique demands of readers. In fact, there is nothing else like it in Pynchon’s other work to date, except a brief reprise of the technique in *Vineland*, when the Ninjette computer’s now “quiescent ones and zeros” (115) Prairie has been combing through for her mother’s history go on unfolding that history after Prairie has gone to bed—though even there the boundaries are clearly marked and naturalized in terms of computerized recall.

The third thing to note about the shifts of focus in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is that, from the “secret cameraman” onward, the hypodiegetic boundaries are ontological rather than illocutionary. The passes are from one psychic domain into another; and focalization is therefore, in Gérard Genette’s terminology, the diegetic mood authorizing each shift (see esp. 161–211). But this is highly problematic. For it is a general rule of narrative that a narrator can give access to a focalizer, but a focalizer cannot do so, because perception (for instance, the vision of a focalizing subject) logically stops at the threshold of another’s consciousness. Another way of putting this rule is to say that only a narrator, whether public or private, has the authority to cross that territorial boundary; the diminished authority of a focalizer does not allow such a diegetic move. Canonically embedded narratives, even hyper-embedded texts like *Arabian Nights* and *Wuthering Heights*, rigorously obey this rule; *Gravity’s Rainbow* does not, and we are compelled to ask what are the effects of its disobedience. Beyond claiming that these features are profound innovations on a literary genre widely regarded as a means for imagining the flux of consciousness, an achievement for which *Gravity’s Rainbow* has yet to be given its due, I now want to ask how these transformations of canonical technique accomplish a critical social work.

While initially seeming to violate both common sense and narrative convention, Pynchon’s hyper-embedded fiction *does* make sense. Indeed, while it may be true that a focalizer should not be able to cross the boundary into another focalizer, yet in *Gravity’s Rainbow* this happens regularly and, after a while, seemingly “naturally.” Why? Such moments trope the imagination of an Other, or even perhaps a condition of radical immanence, and many readers will be tempted to read out of them an ethics of compassion, perhaps in reference to the oft-quoted motto from *V.*, “Keep cool, but care” (366). This is useful, but analysis cannot stop there. What also matters is the figure, again, of narrativity, the ceaseless conversion of narrated objects into narrating subjects, with the profoundly political implication that this is

a process one must learn to manage, lest one be managed by it. In short, many readers will want to trace the potentials for an emancipatory praxis in Pynchon's figures of embedding, though this too is simply not enough, for reasons I take up in a moment.

Before considering those reasons, we also need to observe that Pynchon's embeddings entail a characteristically postmodern subversion of hierarchical authority. The novel's framing episodes disrupt any semblance of a stabilized perspective. Brian McHale observed some years ago (MRPT) that the initial diegetic sequence in *Gravity's Rainbow* turns on an embedded figuration, when the evacuation sequence of the first two pages (GR 3–4) is attributed to Pirate Prentice. It is his dream. Fig. 4 models that sequence, and models as well the concluding sequence, when—as a number of critics have remarked—the very diegesis we have been reading for 757 pages is refigured as the hypodiegesis screened for viewers, circa 1970, in the Orpheus Theater.

We should also bear in mind that postmodern techniques of embedding have become conventional enough that they can be appropriated wholesale. Take, for example, the way Paul Verhoeven's film *Total Recall* (1990) turns on instances of embedding that read like popularizations of Pynchon's more complex narrative figures. The film opens, like *Gravity's Rainbow*, with a character coming up out of a nightmare. In his dream-sequence, Douglas Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger) imagines a horrific asphyxiation in the deadly atmosphere of Mars, represented as the mining colony of a metastasized cartel. His wife, Lori (Sharon Stone), consoles him with reminders that it's only a nightmare, but Doug persists in reading the dream as evidence of a destiny greater than his blue-collar drudgery. He pays a sizable chunk of his wages to Recall Incorporated for a fantasy-vacation, and selects the Mars Package: a computer-simulated visit to the planet, with him in the starring role as "a top operative, back under deep cover," on a mission involving contact with "this beautiful, exotic woman" (as the salesman pitches it to him). Jacked-in to Recall's computer system, however, Doug experiences a "schizoid embolism," because someone has already tampered with his mind, erasing prior memories of Mars.

The ontological status of subsequent represented events remains uncertain, briefly. Breaking free of Recall's machinery, and opposed by police he guns down one after another, Doug makes his way to Mars, meets the exotic woman, and even discovers another (embedded) plot—his predestined identity, not as a revolutionist, but as a cartel operative named Hauser, who *invented* Quaid and even conspired to erase the memories of Hauser. *Total Recall* keeps all this simple,

however, by hesitating (for a while) between two interpretive options: *either* Quaid/Hauser's disrupted simulation of the Mars trip has somehow restored, by a kind of back-formation, the recall of his prior experiences on the planet, thus inspiring his actual return there, in which case his real identity is Hauser; *or* Quaid/Hauser never fought free of the Recall machinery in the first place and has all along been experiencing the fictional return he purchased, in which case he is Quaid. Yet the film plays up this second option only to reject it. Lori shows up on Mars claiming to have been inserted into the simulation to pull Doug back out, the subject position it has created having become too seductive for "a lowly construction worker." But Hauser, now fully accepting his (embedded) identity, guns down Lori and the cohort of operatives. Unlocking the secret of the cartel's totalitarian dominance of the colony, Hauser—now a fully redeemed capitalist as a consequence of his experiences among the colony's degraded workers—kills the cartel's chief executive officer, Collhagen, liberates the planet and transforms its deadly atmosphere into breathable, earthlike air. But this occurs only after a near-reification of his nightmare asphyxiation at the film's beginning, and thus leaves him at its end with "a terrible thought" he expresses to the exotic Melina: "What if this is a dream?"

Total Recall simplifies the structure of embeddings used in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Both texts begin and end with the narrative diegesis popping to a higher level, while, in between, the reader/viewer makes ontologically complicating passes to various intermediary levels. There, however, the similarities end. *Total Recall* entertains only a playful doubt towards traditional categories of heroic agency and heroic plotting. Indeed, Hauser's heroism is purchased by way of a cynical rejection: to play out fantasies of working-class emancipation (liberating those mutant drudges), Hauser must reject his Earth-identity as a construction worker (Quaid) and assume the identity of a corporate man-of-privilege (Hauser), which is itself rejected, in his killing of Collhagen, for the purpose of merely putting a happier face (his own?) on a capitalist empire.

By contrast with Verhoeven's three-level embeddings in *Total Recall*, Pynchon's great novel pushes the strategy to a kind of limit, and (I think) rejects any naive belief in its emancipatory energies. On page after page, *Gravity's Rainbow* carries to a limit this power that, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari identify with free indirect discourse when they comment on its erasure of "clear, distinctive contours" and thus its great deterritorializing charge in twentieth-century fiction (TP 80–81). This extraordinary immanence, felt initially as something very like the nomadic, rhizomatic and acentered flows of

schizoid consciousness, focuses a powerful, liberatory desire, but is at last only half the story.

Throughout the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, it is understood that capitalism releases schizophrenic flows of energy at the same time it restrains them. The deterritorializing of desire is therefore only the flip-side of a massive reterritorializing repression (AO 34–35). That is the central contradiction of capitalism to Deleuze and Guattari. It must produce the superabundance named by schizophrenia at the same time its social machine must absorb or integrate that charge. How capitalism accomplishes this contradictory end, and the role of the military-industrial “war machine” in that process, constitutes —Deleuze and Guattari say in the “Treatise on Nomadology”—one of “the biggest questions from the point of view of universal history” (TP 418).

If so, then *Gravity’s Rainbow* is the great historical fiction of our age. Seen via Deleuzian theory, its plot is focused on a fascist state apparatus verging on collapse, encircled by global capitalist forces that are deterritorializing it but are also its future. At this historical rupture the encircling forces scramble to appropriate the fascists’ war machine, their V-2 rocket, just as during the thirties fascist Germany had appropriated the early nomadic assemblage of it. Both moments of appropriation involve rejecting or dissimulating much that is charismatic in the rocket; otherwise, the process involves a wholesale suturing of this war machine onto the socius. The social body inscribes onto itself each of the Rocket’s technological, industrial, commercial and spiritual circuits, those “flows and currents that only secondarily allow themselves to be appropriated by the State” (TP 360). In short, the state incorporates the Rocket as a semiotic regime. There follows a general reassertion of control, a paranoid hegemony figured in Part 4 as an Oedipal narrative of “Pernicious Pop” (GR 676). Yet even global capitalism cannot bring under its aegis the enormous surplus value generated by the Rocket, a value nothing more or less than sheer destructive fury or “screaming” that “comes across the sky.” *Gravity’s Rainbow* concludes with this fury spending itself in two ways. First, Rocket 00001 serves its appropriators as a machine for their suicidal mania. Clearly, however, this mania must be troped away. Second, then, Rocket 00000 targets an Other—figured as its human cargo—in a ritual sacrifice whose purpose can only be to dissimulate and rationalize that fury yet another time, and even though that fury is bound to erupt again on the social body. Hence the novel’s last hypodiegetic pass, to the figure of a nose cone poised above the Western imaginary at the Orpheus Theatre, circa 1970.

That this exercise in plot summary leaves aside conventional figures of character precisely defines, I think, its interpretive potential. It is a way of understanding the Rocket not only as narrative protagonist but as (in Herr Rathenau's words) "Death the impersonator." Within its regime of anti-production, not only talk of cause-and-effect but talk of integral human subjects is "secular history" and "a diversionary tactic." Characters are understood as subject positions the War Machine defines, and whose voices it can ventriloquize. "If you want the truth—I know I presume," Rathenau continues, "you must look into the technology of these matters. Even into the hearts of certain molecules—it is they after all which dictate temperatures, pressures, rates of flow, costs, profits, the shapes of towers." These comments (which, incidentally, come at the most embedded moment of yet another complexly Chinese-boxed episode) conclude with Rathenau enjoining skeptics to "ask two questions. First, what is the real nature of synthesis? And then: what is the real nature of control?" (167).

I want to conclude this sketch of a Deleuzian approach by taking Rathenau's injunction to heart. For Pynchon's hyper-embeddings constitute more than the basic, unique, and radical rhythm of this novel. Not only a poetics, they also figure an obsessive politics of conversion: of narrated objects into narrating subjects, whose stories, though, are always about their objectification in the cartelized state. For the inward movements inscribed by such sequences typically conclude—the system typically crashes—upon the diegetic treatment of an abjectly dominated, victimized subjectivity. Whether the conclusion of such a proairetic sequence is figured by a conversion of the dodoes, the murdered statesman Rathenau, a light bulb named Byron, Brigadier Pudding, or Slothrop himself, one effect of Pynchon's embeddings is to trace the flows of a regime hell-bent on control.

In his extraordinary analysis of aerospace society, *The Final Frontier*, Dale Carter argues that even while the cartelized "Rocket State" needed to integrate horizontally, extending monopoly capitalism into more and more far-flung markets, nonetheless its basic mode of organizing power was by hierarchical integration. The ideal "organization man" of this regime was the member of a sub-sub-unit. Describing the zone of American capitalism during the sixties, Carter writes: "Between 1958 and 1963 Project Mercury provided work for 12 prime contractors, 75 first order subcontractors, over 1,500 second tier and around 7,200 third tier suppliers; between 1961 and 1973 the Apollo program drew on the resources of at least 20,000 and possibly as many as 80,000 firms *at all levels*" (202; emphasis added). This is the functionally modelled society of the Rocket State, its carefully demarcated boundaries figured in Pynchon's novel by the surreal

“Toiletship,” and by Rocket City’s marvelously elaborate elevator, cozy but thrilling, that zooms workers from level to level.

Pynchon’s trippy embeddings command attention, then, as much more than a clever or playfully aesthetic technique crucial to good yarn-spinning or canonical modernist narration, from *Heart of Darkness* to *All the King’s Men*. They involve more than the ontological uncertainty McHale describes as a key feature of many postmodern fictions. We should recognize in them a mode of schizoanalysis, a writing that is homologous with but subversive of basic discursive features in our contemporary systems society. Pynchon’s degenerative satire traces these features throughout the bureaucratic hierarchies of late capitalism. Its war machine and people’s fabulously choreographed dance around that device are figured in *Gravity’s Rainbow* by a narration so intricately embedded as to both demolish and reconfigure understanding. This is what it means to “integrate” with the Rocket.

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Notes

¹Among recent books whose titles would have led one to expect detailed analyses of Pynchon’s narrative technique, see, for example, Alec McHoul and David Wills, *Writing Pynchon: Strategies in Fictional Analysis*, and Hanjo Berressem, *Pynchon’s Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text*. Kathryn Hume traces a perspectival pattern or trope running through the novel in “Views from Above, Views from Below: The Perspectival Subtext in *Gravity’s Rainbow*”; and my own “Hysteron Proteron in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” takes a similar approach to the tropics of the novel’s discourse.

²For a discussion of “Menelaiad” as a representative instance of the “Chinese-box worlds” of postmodernist fiction, see Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 114–15.

³See, for example, Mieke Bal, Viveca Furedy, and Marie-Laure Ryan. Ryan’s “Stacks, Frames, and Boundaries,” a provocative rethinking of narrative embedding, borrows concepts of computerized stacking from Douglas Hofstadter. My own approach draws heavily from Ryan’s work.

⁴The principal contributions to this field from scholars in the cognitive sciences include essays by Goldman and Varnhagen, Mandler and Johnson, and Trabasso and Van Den Broek.

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