

## **“Just a Bunch of Stuff That Happened”: Narratives of Resistance in *Gravity’s Rainbow***

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Since Lyotard, it has been a commonplace view that postmodernity is characterized by the death of grand narratives and the corresponding generation of a fragmented culture in which narratives and stories proliferate and in which meaning disappears in the face of Jean Baudrillard’s hyperreal postmodern condition. Since Ihab Hassan and Fredric Jameson, the fiction of this postmodernized culture has also been seen as fragmented, characterised by metafictional strategies and the self-reflexive aleatory play of language often associated with texts such as those by Gass, Sorrentino, Federman and Barth, amongst others.<sup>1</sup> This flattening out of culture and its products, however, causes problems for many theorists of postmodernity, particularly Jameson, because of the paradoxes that arise around the question of ideology and power. If “reality” is a depthless chain of signifiers and simulacra, then, as both Baudrillard and Arthur Kroker conclude, there is no ideology: how can the “real” human relations ideology conceals be hidden in a culture where everything is on show as a spectacle?<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, on the one hand, Lyotard’s philosophical or theoretical postmodernism suggests a liberating moment in contemporary culture in which the myths of the past are revealed as fictions—a view Jameson defers to when he suggests two positions regarding the “bourgeois individual subject”: either it existed and has now disappeared, or it never existed in the first place and the defamiliarization of grand narratives has revealed it for the fiction it always was (PCS 114–15). On the other hand, these positions do not mesh with the perception by Jameson and others of a culture of surveillance and control in which cultural movements, products and identities are re-aligned with power structures through the pervasion of culture by the commodity and the spectacle even while, according to Crook, Pakulski and Waters (32), the state is disappearing to be replaced by more decentralized corporate, political and economic structures. Mike Davis, in *City of Quartz*, for example, chronicles the creation of what he calls a “postmodern feudalism” in Los Angeles, describing a Raketen-Stadt-like city where system and state power are imposed on a city that projects itself as a postmodern utopia of decentralization and liberation through commodities, technology and

simulacra, but where technologies of control also “Beirutize” or “Ulsterize” the city’s Balkanized spaces.<sup>3</sup>

*Gravity’s Rainbow* is an important text in regard to these paradoxes of postmodernity because it maps a culture or reality in which grand narratives resurface to create system, ideology and control, but the novel also works in a fragmented world of proliferating stories, narratives and identities. In this respect, it can be argued that *Gravity’s Rainbow* performs, in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, both a reterritorialization of knowledges and subjectivities—through the re-establishment of metanarratives—and their deterritorialization—through the moulding of alternative knowledges, identities and narratives. *Gravity’s Rainbow* can also be seen to map the interface between modernity and postmodernity and, as Crook, Pakulski and Waters describe (58–74), the ways modernization and postmodernization exist side by side in postwar culture, through “hyper-rationalization” (system, grand narratives) and through “hyper-differentiation” and “hyper-commodification” (fragmentation and the sign-commodity). *Gravity’s Rainbow* deals with the paradox of contemporary culture in which everyday life becomes more controlled and yet more pluralistic. For example, it maps the ways the invisible Truman Security State becomes visible in Nixon’s proto-Security State (or its simulacrum) and its opposition by countercultural narratives, values and identities.<sup>4</sup> In terms of identity, the paradigm for postmodern uncertainty is the cyborg. Particularly in fictional representations (as in *The Terminator* [James Cameron, 1984] and *Destroying Angel* [Richard Paul Russo, 1992]), the cyborg is a controlled or programmed figure. And yet, in Donna Haraway’s theory, the cyborg is the model for a heterotopian collapse of gender binaries through the intersection of diffuse networks of knowledge and identity. For Haraway, the cyborg represents “the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic” (170).<sup>5</sup>

*Gravity’s Rainbow* maps these paradoxes of postmodernity by establishing two narrative or discursive axes. In one, the text searches for a master narrative, while in the other, divagating or bifurcating narratives fracture the quest for a final truth or system of meaning by looping away from the master narrative into digression and pure narrativity. This axis entails the production of narrative as dynamic movement, freed from causal and ideological structures. This sense of narrative is very similar to the view Homer Simpson takes in the “Blood Donor” episode when he and his family are considering the meaning of the events that have occurred following Bart’s donation of blood to save Mr. Burns’s life. While Marge offers several morals to frame the events (“The squeaky wheel gets the grease” and “A good deed is its

own reward”), none of which quite fits, Homer concurs with Lisa that there may be no moral and that the events were “just a bunch of stuff that happened.” While Homer Simpson is not someone who immediately springs to mind as an authority on narratology and postmodern fiction-making, his view of narrative is relevant to the view of *Gravity’s Rainbow* proposed here. The novel maps both the persistence of grand narratives and ideology (in a 1970s context, for example, Nixon’s simulacrum of a Security State), and the fragmentation of consciousness experienced by the subject. Thus it might be said that *Gravity’s Rainbow* replicates a culture of postmodern cooptation;<sup>6</sup> but I will argue that, in its fragmentations and digressions, *Gravity’s Rainbow* offers a micro-political model for resistance, through acausal narrativity in which just a bunch of stuff that happens functions as a way of resisting metanarratives and the power structures they legitimate.

*Gravity’s Rainbow’s* politics of resistance is important because of the way the novel maps subjectivity and identity, especially the avoidance of postmodern cooptation. The model of the complicity and disempowerment of the subject is suggested in several forms in the novel, but is foregrounded in dreams and fantasy. Desires and dreams seem to be constructed entirely by ideology. New desires and dreams are not just recuperated by culture but created by ideology as a means to preempt resistance to the power structures of existing society. For example, Slothrop dreams of entering the Spectacle by becoming a movie star and marrying Rita Hayworth; Prentice dreams dialectically of a Counterforce; Tchitcherine dreams of revenge and personal justice (at the expense of remaking society); Enzian dreams of a Rocket that will allow escape from death; and Blicero dreams of a new cultural order. These dreams, however, are framed in terms of existing social, cultural and ideological parameters, because they can be articulated only within ideological forms of discourse. Even Prentice’s dream of a Counterforce, as has often been said, is defined by the power-inflected systems it opposes.<sup>7</sup> The female characters in particular, because of their siting by masculine forms of language, seem unable to dream except ideologically. Women are so oppressed that they cannot find new desires and are always trapped within male ideology and power structures: Greta Erdmann is trapped in S and M desires; Jessica Swanlake is figured as a domain or text where Mexico and Beaver act out or write their versions of masculinity (Beaver’s establishment masculinity as opposed to Mexico’s bohemian and outlaw masculinity); Bianca is exploited by dreams of rape she cannot escape; Leni Pökler is literally confined in the Dora concentration camp. Women are oppressed by the “masculine technologies” (GR 324) figured in the

conjunction of Romantic idealism and modernist futurism in Blicero's fantasies of transcendence through science, which conjunction results in the death-driven fantasies of the "Oven-state," one of the models for the new dispensation of the "Rocket-state."

The difficulty Pynchon faces as he maps dreams for his characters is that discourse seems so imbued with ideology that there are no discourses available for new desires and dreams to be articulated. Language writes paradigms and parameters that determine identity and cultural practice, a process exemplified by the acronym "ID." In the "vaguely criminal face on your ID card, its soul snatched by the government camera" (134), the identity card not only represents the state's criminalization and distrust of its citizens, but also shows how identity exists only if it is officially recognized by, or constructed through, the state's ideological apparatuses. In addition, "ID" evokes the "id" and ideology's colonization of the unconscious, while also reflecting on the "1D" (one-dimensional) identities created through ideology. The discursive connections suggest a flattening and fixing process in ideology's creation of subjectivity, a flattening engendered by discourse and its creation of connections that reduce everything to homogeneity.

Pynchon's principal means of articulating official and ideological discourses is through the use of an intrusive narrative voice which seeks to connect, produce meaning and set out parameters for the novel. Despite its apparently panoramic perspectives, the narrative voice very often, though not exclusively, attempts to create frames for the text and to position it ideologically by imposing its own interpretations. When the novel says of Zwölfkinder, for example, that "In a corporate State, a place must be made for innocence, and its many uses. In developing an official version of innocence, the culture of childhood has proven invaluable" (419), it seems to be suggesting a rational critical perspective on the state's cooptation of innocence. The style of these sentences, however, is that of a business management handbook offering advice and guidance on corporate methods. The result is that the narrative voice seems to assume the normality of the corporate State's actions and naturalizes the exploitation of innocence. The narrative voice is not always as unobtrusive as this, frequently intruding into the narrative, in the manner of Balzac's didactic narrator, to direct the reader's attention to particular ideas or to close off possibilities the narrative promises, as, for example, in the use of *paralepsis*: "Later he will figure out where it was [Greta] went. By then they will be well on board the *Anubis*, and it will only make him feel more helpless" (459). Here the story is mapped out in advance, and the possibility of narrative developing its

own course in the novel seems to be denied. Thus Pynchon enacts the construction of narratives in society, suggesting that ideology's construction of identity and behavior patterns means that it can determine (and even predict) future cultural practices as well as shape the subject's patterns of behavior. Slothrop's feeling of helplessness is generated not by his failure to understand but by the loss of control of his actions, his future behavior already predicted and described by the narrative voice. The narrative voice often sets out new fields of discourse but spatializes the text, like the discourses of information in *The Crying of Lot 49*, preventing the temporal movements of narrative. In the process, like Raymond Chandler's Marlowe, the narrative voice involves itself within the events it seeks to explain objectively and acts as a catalyst, shaping and determining events rather than simply presenting them.

The function of the narrative voice as a voice of ideology is linked to the creation of a master narrative for the novel to make sense of its fragmentation and to provide a controlling system of meaning, similar to the ideological narrative of connections which places Slothrop within the web of corporations and technologies the novel gradually reveals. Several critics have discussed the construction of a narrative of connections in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Tony Tanner, for example, describes how *Gravity's Rainbow* deploys two opposed narratives, one the story of the Rocket and its assembly, the other the story of the adventures of Rocketman (81). Neil Schmitz describes two binary narrative structures in the novel: one juxtaposes the construction of the Rocket—and the trajectory of its flight toward London—with the reverse trajectory Slothrop maps as he travels from London to Peenemünde, where the rocket was developed; the other narrative structure contrasts Slothrop, whose narrative is complicated and fragmented by proliferating plots and stories, with Blicero, who moves linearly to his appointed goal (121–22). Both critics implicitly present two configurations of narrative: one is predicated on symmetrical connections, typical of the unity created by a realist novel, while the other maps a picaresque story that constantly displaces itself through digression. Each narrative has a specific function in the text. The former referentially maps the ideological parameters that limit identity and cultural practice in contemporary society, enacting social processes through narratives (a narrative of connections depicting the matrix of corporations as they create the Rocket-state, the epic quest for the S-Gerät, and genre narratives) which attempt to limit the movement of the proliferating stories of the picaresque narratives. This latter narrative axis attempts to loop away from the former narrative, generating stories as alternative fields of action for identity and cultural practice.

In this sense the narratives of *Gravity's Rainbow* can be read in terms of the processes of reterritorialization and deterritorialization. Deleuze and Guattari detail in their universal history of social desiring-production in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deterritorialization is the axiom of capitalism, in which territory is no longer needed because all value is subject to the deterritorialized flows of capital. Capitalism, however, is schizophrenic, and is also subject to the reterritorializing axiom of the social machine. Thus capitalist societies "are defined by processes of decoding and deterritorialization. But *what they deterritorialize with one hand, they reterritorialize with the other*. These neoterritorialities are often artificial, residual, archaic; but they are archaisms having a perfectly current function" (AO 257). Capitalism is thus split between the desire to totalize and stratify and the desire to fragment and deterritorialize, while also being split between its very contemporaneity or immediacy and the historical forces that restratify the decoded flows it puts into operation. While deterritorialization is simply an axiom of capitalist desiring-production in *Anti-Oedipus* (and is neither positive nor negative), it has positive connotations in the construction of nomadic forms of desiring-production that are made more evident in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where deterritorialization becomes associated with a destratifying of meanings and with the creation of new "lines of flight" that can provide resistance to capitalist desiring-production:

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. . . . You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject. (TP 9)

Reterritorialization and deterritorialization are interdependent processes, and, as such, what is deterritorialized can also be reterritorialized (and vice versa), leading to the problem of discerning what is an act of resistance and what is an act of cooptation.

The reterritorialization and deterritorialization of narratives in *Gravity's Rainbow* occur primarily in the narrative voice's attempts to create a metanarrative for the novel and in the resistances, particularly Slothrop's, to the creation of a signifying paradigm in this form. *Gravity's Rainbow* proliferates genres, each one of which is tried out not only for the role of metanarrative but also as a model for the ideological construction of identity. The genres range across the war novel (or historical novel), the existentialist novel of self-discovery, the

picaresque, the spy thriller, romance, science fiction, jeremiad, detective fiction, and so on. The genre narrative that has most importance in the search for a metanarrative, however, is the epic quest, which is figured in terms of Slothrop's "Progress" through the novel. Initially, Slothrop's quest is a search for an escape from the V-2 bombardment of London, but gradually his search for escape takes on wider implications as he is caught up in the quest for the Schwarzgerät, which will seemingly provide a totalizing system of meaning, bring self-discovery and, narratively, provide a legitimating center for the novel around which all the other narratives and stories must revolve. This narrative can be understood in terms of Wagner's theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which, to produce a totality, synthesises all art forms within it. The narrative of connections' creation of an epic follows this pattern, providing a master narrative that will totalize the disparate stories and discourses of the text. In doing so, it apparently creates a system of meaning that provides a paradigm for identity, Pynchon seeing the same process at work in ideology's attempts to totalize experience in contemporary society. Pynchon, however, parodies this construction of identity and refuses to construct the novel as a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, denying synthesis by foregrounding disjuncture. The privileging of a particular genre as the grail of the novel's quest is always resisted, the configuring of the text as a war novel, for example, being undercut by the use of songs which, while appearing to contribute to the synthesis of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, actually displace the war-novel genre with the novel as Hollywood musical. Similarly, syntagmatic displacement prevents one genre from totalizing the multiple narratives. In Slothrop's trip down the toilet (62–71), for example, the narratives slip from paranoid fantasy to Western and then to Puritan allegory.

The key episode in the construction of the novel in terms of the epic metanarrative is the Mittelwerke episode, but this episode also gestures toward narrative resistance in the novel, first by Slothrop's refusal of the proffered status of epic hero, and also because Slothrop seems to enter the Mittelwerke twice, undermining the legitimacy of the narrative voice's framing of reality. When Slothrop is in or near Nordhausen, the narrative is coded with allusions to Wagnerian epic—implicit references to the Nibelungen and Nibelheim (the gnomes under the mountain) and overt references to *Tannhäuser* (299)—and to Greek myth—the Titans under the mountain (296, 330); but what Slothrop finds when he enters the Mittelwerke is a group of drunken soldiers singing vulgar limericks. Nevertheless, he does come across Major Marvy, whose role as Slothrop's Nemesis seems to insert Slothrop into an epic revenge narrative. Rather than confront Marvy and his Mothers

in battle, as an epic hero would do, Slothrop runs away, substituting the narrative of a chase for the expected heroic death-or-glory struggle that has been devised for him.

A similar attempt to insert Slothrop into the epic quest narrative, and thus to find a hero to validate both the quest for the Rocket and the quest's system of meaning, occurs when Slothrop meets Säure Bummer. Säure's companions just happen to have a Wagnerian costume of horned helmet, green velvet cape and buckskin trousers, which they give to Slothrop. Slothrop is placed in an encoded situation which will produce an already constructed identity and narrative for him if he accepts the role of epic hero. This role is encoded in terms of Blicero's Romantic death-driven ideology, in which the epic hero, like the heroes of old (and like Gottfried, who has dreamed of being a hero rather than a spear-carrier [103]), surrenders his selfhood to the system that gives him his powers, and becomes a functional and expendable product of the new corporate-state order and its cooptation of transcendence through the Rocket. Slothrop does not take on the role of the Wagnerian hero, thinking of himself instead in terms of popular heroes like the Lone Ranger: he removes the horns from the helmet and becomes Rocketman (or Raketemensch). He becomes a comic-book or cartoon hero rather than a Knight of the Holy Rocket, characterized by the same anarchic behavior as Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, as is also the case when he is asked to act as the Pig-hero Plechazunga. Instead of fulfilling the expected narrative, he turns it on its head and acts out the role as Porky Pig, refusing the identity created for him, and the narrative it entails—choosing an identity for himself.

Slothrop's entry into the Mittelwerke is also presented ideologically by the narrative voice, specifically his apparent first entrance, which is dominated by the narrative voice's description of the supposedly bright and clean future on offer as a tourist attraction in the city of tomorrow, the Raketten-Stadt, for which the Mittelwerke is the model. However, the futuristic couture of Heini of Berlin, the space-operetta fantasy and "The Promise of Space Travel" dioramas increasingly hint at darker elements until the scene develops into an official paranoid fantasy of sinister forces in the Mittelwerke, finally admitting to the nexus of controls there: "Wait—which one of them was thinking that? Monitors, get a fix on it, *hurry up*" (298). The episode then breaks off, and Slothrop appears to arrive for a second time. The impression created by the second arrival is that the narrative had taken a wrong turn, veering toward a narrative of control which was then repressed. The second arrival is a diversion from ideology, control and the master narrative; the episode is reconfigured as a chase narrative with constant changes of focus and direction as Slothrop is pursued through the tunnels of the



Mittelwerke by Marvy and his gang. In the first arrival scene, the narrative moves toward a representation of the creation of control and surveillance, its goal the representation of the invincible power of ideology and the futility of resistance. Pynchon, however, shifts the narrative focus and disrupts the ideological narrative that the narrative voice has constructed. He generates a slapstick narrative of continual movement where the dynamic of the chase (in which events just seem to happen at random, one following another without necessary connection) seems to allow Slothrop and the narrative to escape the controlling forces at work in the text.

What the Mittelwerke episode represents, then, is the conjunction of a textual metanarrative, which entraps subjectivity, with the novel's strategies of narrative resistance. Narrative resistance is represented by divergence from the systematizing narratives of the novel—the ideological narrative voice, the narrative of connections and the epic metanarrative of the search for the Rocket-grail—by refusal or modification of identities and by the pure narrativity of the chase scene or cartoon dynamics with their fracturing of linear cause and effect. The modification of identities is linked to the proliferation of genres in the novel. Genres are not just narrative structures but are invested with political codes of representation which work through the coding of identity. One example is the use of the gangster genre, by reference to Jimmy Cagney (whose mannerisms Slothrop adopts in his final dealings with Katje on the Riviera) or to John Dillinger. Dillinger, as a historical figure, signals the conjunction of ideological fictions of masculinity and social identity. As long-time Public Enemy Number One, Dillinger seems to be the main symbol of resistance in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but he is also a symbol of an ideological masculinity which, if adopted, may lead to death, as it very nearly does in the case of Klaus Närrisch, who imagines himself as Dillinger as he waits for Tchitcherine and his Russian troops to attack at Peenemünde. The use of Dillinger introduces the narrative of his life as a bank robber and his eventual death at the hands of the FBI. Like the film gangster, he is a masculine tragic hero, doomed in his attempt to resist the state. Indeed, masculinity is presented in *Gravity's Rainbow* as a conditioned identity, principally through Slothrop's penis and its conditioning by Jamf but also because, like Dillinger's, hyper-masculine identities of the hero (Wagnerian, gangster or comic-book superhero) either work to support the system, in the case of Gottfried, or promise death at the system's hands.

This reterritorializing impulse in genre narratives and the search for a metanarrative (and meta-identity) also, however, entails deterritorialization. The mapping of identity in terms of genres provides oppositional identities as well. The gangster genre, for example, is not

only ideological; it provides an anti-establishment identity, and is supplemented by musical biopics (Charlie Parker, Orpheus), narratives of existentialist self-discovery and slapstick narratives (in which both Slothrop and Mexico adopt the role of the Chaplinesque little man fighting authority). While it can be argued that the use of genres is a postmodern ironic quotation, that use has a more positive aspect. Pynchon recognizes the necessity to reconceptualize identity in a postmodern culture that reduces subjects to “mouthpieces of a discursive ventriloquism” (Soper 126). He configures identity in terms of a subjectivity that is aware of ideology’s investment in the forms used to construct experience and patterns of behavior. The novel, therefore, begins to foreground the death-drive associated with Dillinger, the negativity and alienation that surround the existential hero, and suggests that the little man of Chaplin’s films is defined by the system he resists. The adoption of identities is provisionally transformative. Slothrop does not permanently adopt any one, an act that would create a one-dimensional identity and reinsert him into a narrative oriented to the fixed goals of a metanarrative. Identity becomes very similar to Bugs Bunny’s quick-change role-play as he attempts to confuse Elmer Fudd—most notably in *What’s Opera, Doc?* when he adopts the guise of Brünnhilde. Identity is transformed into a process of identification through the cross-cutting among genres and narratives, an enactment of identity transformation in which the death-driven, ideologically defined and alienated forms of identity in the genres Slothrop mimics are diminished and the different forms of resistance each genre figures are privileged: the aggressive resistance of Dillinger, the new possibilities and creativity of Charlie Parker and Orpheus, the resilience of Chaplin’s little man. In each case, the identity associated with the genre is multivalent: it is both ideological and expressive of resistance.

The displacement across genres is mirrored in the narrative forms of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, specifically the pure narrativity of cartoon forms in which just a bunch of stuff happens. Although cartoons seem to be marginal to the main business of the novel (the search for a master narrative and for the S-Gerät), they actually form one of the deterritorializing models of narrative Pynchon uses to refuse the systematizing tendency of the metanarrative. Cartoons produce a negentropic effect, creating life out of death. They make inanimate and turn static frames into dynamic narratives. Pynchon acknowledges his taste for chase scenes and his liking for Road Runner cartoons in *Slow Learner* (19). Road Runner cartoons represent Wylie Coyote’s attempts to halt the motion of the Road Runner, something he invariably fails to do. Perhaps Pynchon sees, in the constant move from

one chase scene to another, movement itself as a means to escape control.<sup>8</sup> Cartoons are episodic, predicated on rapid displacements, the narrative cutting quickly between routines and scenes. Nor do any of the episodes have relevance to succeeding episodes, each scene being a little story in itself. Cartoons flout the causality of conventional narratives, in which the events of one scene determine those of the next. In their episodic form, cartoons generate narratives of continual renewal and re-beginning.

The rapid cuts and acausal configuration of episodes that characterize cartoons occur at several points in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, in the section that describes Thanatz's experiences after his fall from the *Anubis*. The episode begins with the statement "You will want cause and effect. All right" (663), and then goes on to string together events without any supporting structure to connect or totalize them. The episode begins with Thanatz's rescue from the sea by an undertaker, followed by a digression on the effects of lightning—a fantasy narrative which includes a description of how those struck by lightning are carried off by dwarves in plastic masks and Carmen Miranda hats—and a digression on Ben Franklin. Thanatz's rescue seems to "cause" a series of reflections on the effects of lightning, but the narrative soon reveals that these stories are pointless digressions. The undertaker's interest in lightning (which has motivated these stories) is economic and does not extend to the scientific, fantastic and historical frames configured in each of the digressions. Thanatz's rescue is followed by a further displacement as the story moves to his experiences in a community of homosexual former prison-camp inmates, followed by his departure in a police car which is attacked by Polish guerrillas who mistake Thanatz for an anti-Lublin journalist.

At this point the episode's lack of causal structure is emphasized when Thanatz tells the guerrillas of their mistake: "'Not me,' Thanatz sez. 'Shit. He's right.' They roll him out the car door into a DP encampment a few miles farther on" (669). The minimal vocabulary here suggests that narrative momentum and the rapid cuts from one event to another outweigh the placing of events in frames of connectivity and meaning. The events occur haphazardly with only temporal succession to connect them, the narrative moving purposelessly from one scene to another in the same way Thanatz then wanders randomly with the DPs. The episode is a picaresque in miniature, parodying the epic narrative by mimicking Slothrop's picaresque adventures. Although it concludes with Thanatz relating his stories to the Schwarzkommando, which suggests a recuperation of information (and cause and effect), Thanatz actually relates all his adventures whether they are relevant to the information the

Schwarzkommando seek about the Schwarzgerät or not. While the narrative promises cause and effect—as does the epic narrative—there are no necessary links between events and digressions, and the explicatory discourses intended to explain the events actually become digressions and stories themselves. The narrative shifts bear more resemblance, ultimately, to a cartoon or a series of vaudeville routines than to the causal sequence the master narrative demands to legitimate its power-inflected systems of meaning.

A similar narrative dynamic occurs in the episode that maps Slothrop's escape to Berlin by balloon. In his role as Nemesis (his and his soldiers' singing of limericks is described as "the singing of Furies" [334]), Marvy intrudes into the story to force Slothrop back to earth. An aerial pie-fight follows, and Marvy is vanquished when a sand bag hits the engine of his plane. Cartoon-like events generate a comic episode (similar to Dastardly and Muttley cartoons) whose story has little relevance to either the narrative of the S-Gerät or the narrative of connections, narratives into which Marvy hopes to coopt Slothrop. The episode's importance lies in the fact that it foregrounds the fictionality of narrative production and deflects *Gravity's Rainbow* from an affirmation of the power-inflected narratives that threaten to create the novel as a replication of the movements of power and ideology in contemporary culture.

Episodes like this continually intrude into the master narrative, episodes like the Floundering Four, interrupting Slothrop's progress toward the master narrative's end, intruding and displacing it by introducing gaps of pure narrative that threaten its totalizing imperative. The effect of these intrusions is that *Gravity's Rainbow* reconstitutes narrative in terms of transformation and deterritorialization (rather than through metanarrative connectivity) and prevents the irruption of ideology into the text as a determining principle, an eruption that would, in Charles Russell's view, define *Gravity's Rainbow* ideologically as a text "totally encapsulated in, and a direct expression of, the reigning cultural codes of meaning" (PL 253). These interruptions or digressions, however, do not fully displace the narrative voice or the metanarrative and their reterritorializing imperative. There are also questions about how far narrative deterritorialization is valid for an actual politics of resistance and how far it is simply a textualization of resistance so that, in a world where transformation or transcendence of society seems impossible, the only model for resistance is the equally impossible burlesque fantasy of acting like Bugs Bunny.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Hassan and Jameson initially proposed the view that postmodern fiction was principally determined by the play of signifiers and self-reflexiveness. See Hassan, and Jameson PCL (especially the discussion of Bob Perelman's "China," 73–75). See also Allen Thiher and Charles Caramello for more detailed discussions of postmodern fiction as metafiction and language-play.

<sup>2</sup>According to Baudrillard, with simulation "it is no longer a question of the ideology of power, but of the *scenario* of power. Ideology only corresponds to a betrayal of reality by signs; simulation corresponds to a short-circuit of reality and its reduplication by signs" (48). Similarly, Kroker sees in postmodernity "not an ideologically constituted self . . . but a rhetorical subject, that is, possessed individualism as the exhausted sign of the disappearance of ideology into the language of rhetoric as the war machine" (6).

<sup>3</sup>See especially chapter 4 of *City of Quartz*, "Fortress L.A." (221–63), in which Davis details the various forms of control and spatial organization that create Los Angeles as a postmodern dystopian city. These include the creation of Downtown as a fortress and the suburban imitations it has generated in the walling off of tract developments into enclaves; surveillance cameras; the "Dirty Harry" architectural styles associated with Frank Gehry (which Davis also calls "riot" or "defensive" architecture); and the LAPD's reliance on helicopters for its policing (thereby flattening the city into a set of grid references or map coordinates, thus making L.A. a topographical city rather than a real lived space or environment).

<sup>4</sup>See Eric Meyer for a discussion of the relation between the state and the counterculture as mapped by *Gravity's Rainbow*.

<sup>5</sup>For other filmic examples of the negative cyborg, see *Hardware* (Richard Stanley, 1990) and *Star Trek: First Contact* (Jonathan Frakes, 1996). Not all fictional representations of cyborgs are negative, however. Bruce Sterling, in his Shaper/Mechanist series (*Schismatrix* [1985] and the Shaper/Mechanist stories in *Crystal Express* [1989]), represents cyborgs (the Mechanists) whose prosthetic additions create valuable new forms of perception, knowledge and consciousness.

<sup>6</sup>Leo Bersani argues that the Zone, rather than a domain of possibility, becomes a metaphor for a fragmented postmodern culture and, in the process, also replicates postmodern forms of control.

<sup>7</sup>For example, Charles Russell comments that, "as Roger Mexico realizes, to define themselves as a system against the They-system, the Counterforce must play 'their' game: it must remain a subsidiary system within the larger one" (PPR 261).

<sup>8</sup>For example, in the Floundering Four episode, Slothrop gets trapped (in the refrigerator) only when he stops moving and takes time for "that Pause that Refreshes" (677).

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