

## Something to Compare It to Then: Rereading Terror in Coincidences Between Pynchon's Germany and America's 9/11

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"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?"

—Thomas Pynchon (GR 54)

On September 11, 2001, I was lecturing on "bomb culture" to a class of students who—I suggested—could have no idea of the climate of fear created during the Cold War by the possibility that a single rogue intercontinental ballistic missile might unleash nuclear holocaust. I had recently returned from a trip to Germany, where I had joined other dedicated Pynchon readers and scholars traveling to sites which appear in *Gravity's Rainbow*. We had been to Berlin, Slothrop's "City Sacramental" (372), visited the V-2 rocket research facilities at Peenemünde and seen what remains of the underground Mittelwerke, near Nordhausen, where slave laborers from Dora and other camps had died assembling the missiles used for Hitler's vengeance strikes in 1944–1945. Pynchon's 1973 novel and the terror weapons of the Second World War were fresh in my mind as I walked out of class to find myself watching the map of another City Sacramental, New York, inverted and transformed by debris, dust and shreds of office documents. The fragments of papers which drifted over lower Manhattan as a poignant testimony to lives lost in the World Trade Center towers were soon to be followed by other records of the missing. Personal profiles of victims appeared as fliers and posters in the streets of Manhattan and as "Portraits of Grief" in the *New York Times*. These echoed strangely another paper trail of loss: the "[a]dvertisements for shelter, clothing, the lost, the taken, [. . .] out in the wind, when the wind comes, stuck to trees, door-frames, planking, pieces of wall—white and fading scraps, writing spidery, trembling, smudged, thousands unseen, thousands unread or blown away" (373) that Slothrop finds in war-devastated Berlin in 1945; and the "scrap of newspaper headline" which elliptically informs him of the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima (693).

Given the coincidental circumstances, it is perhaps not so strange that I should see a lineage of terror and weaponry connecting the end of the Second World War, *Gravity's Rainbow*, my anxious childhood memories of the Cold War in the seventies and, finally, 9/11—“America’s new war,” as CNN news headlines quickly dubbed the terror attack. I started to find contemporary resonances in Pynchon’s descriptions of mangled metal, fluttering scraps of paper, missing persons and weapons intended to terrorize unsuspecting urban populations (Hewitt 275). Even the designation of the World Trade Center ruins “Ground Zero” confronted me with a location I had associated up to that point with the target of other vehicles of terror: the V-2s described in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the nuclear devices dropped on Japan and the strategic nuclear missiles of the Cold War. I may have been particularly prone to see an almost predictive quality to the novel, and had to ask myself why fiction and fact had lined up for me and whether the initial coincidence of images might hide a deeper message about the cause of terror events or about the nature of experiencing terror.

Looking (in the novel and outside) for evidence and answers to those last two questions, I was channelling both an Edward Pointsman and a Roger Mexico. One was looking for a “Book” (47) (or even Enzian’s “Real Text” [520]) of answers and predictions, hoping it might hold a ““cue we just aren’t paying attention to.” Something that’s been there all along, something we could be looking at but no one is” (49). The other accepted uncertainty, the terror of knowing only that there is no way of knowing whether one occupies the unlucky square that will be hit by the next unannounced strike, since each strike is statistically ““independent of all the others””: ““Can’t you . . . tell,”” Pointsman asks Mexico, ““from your map here, which places would be safest to go into, safest from attack?”” (56, 55), to which the simple, distressing answer is *no*. In other words, a Mexico reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* finds in it a definition of terror (also applicable to the latest suicide-bomber permutation) as a calculable but unpredictable probability. The essence of terror lies in accepting just this certain uncertainty that Mexico’s Poisson distribution models. A Pointsman reader of the text or of history assumes that cues to terror strikes can be found, that time-and-space coordinates can be ascertained and that terroristic events can be predicted in advance or explained after the fact. Even a retrospective explanation turns the open-ended “why?” into the causally closed “because.” This renders the event “safe” by implying that acts of terror are part of a causal chain and that therefore an improved handling of intelligence can pick up signs and piece together evidence of such acts in advance.<sup>1</sup>

The two positions set out in the novel—and, possibly, the two approaches to living with the current threat of terror strikes—mirror, on the one hand, the unconnected free-fall of “anti-paranoia” (“a condition not many of us can bear for long” [434]) and, on the other, the paradoxical comfort provided by the connections implied by paranoia. Pointsman is the paranoiac who seeks to connect cause and effect retroactively—or even in reverse—because of the coincidence between Slothrop’s map of his liaisons and Mexico’s coordinate map of V-2 strikes. Mexico, however, sees this connection between cause and effect as a “sterile set of assumptions” (89) and the parallel maps as a coincidence, a “statistical oddity” rather than a sign of Slothrop’s precognition (85).

If, in Pointsman fashion, I look for a cause of *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* apparent reference to current events, I must consider at least three possible reasons for the way events of 1945 and 2001 have aligned with a text of 1973: either I, or the book, or the world has changed.

The first possibility is the easiest one to accommodate philosophically. As a responsive reader anchored in my evolving historical context, I either see new possibilities in the text or reinterpret familiar ones. In this version the world changes as well, insofar as reinterpretation makes me see a new causal pattern in events. Any new focus on or conclusion from already available evidence, the retrospective accommodation of events as seemingly unexpected as 9/11, produces at least a different emphasis in the history which preceded it. If I find coincidences between past and present events, figures or icons in a book written thirty years ago, it is not that Pynchon has predicted specific events out of the blue but that the events he observed in the late sixties and early seventies and reflected on imaginatively have continued to generate predictable consequences. Looking back at the Second World War, he could reconstruct a pattern that had led to the early 1970s as he experienced them, and, looking back at his text, we can reconstruct the path from 1973 to our present as we see it. This idea confirms, with the benefit of hindsight, that history simply progresses through a process of cause and effect, where the past holds the seeds of all future developments. In relation to *Gravity’s Rainbow*, this understanding revives the possibility that an author like Pynchon can be precognizant, because, like Slothrop in Pointsman’s reading, he is responding to “something that’s in the air *right now*. Something we’re too coarsely put together to sense” (49).<sup>2</sup>

The second of the three possibilities above, that the printed text itself has quite literally changed, is a much more challenging one, but one which breathes new life into ideas of how we interact with a text—in more radical ways than in updating a historicized contextual reading.

That the actual printed text of *Gravity's Rainbow* has changed between 1973 and now—to accommodate historical references following its ostensibly original time of creation—is a possibility that could be entertained as a paranormal event influenced by an adept. It could reflect retroactive causality, the idea that anything from prayer to paradigm shifts in knowledge can erase and replace (our knowledge of) the past and create it anew.<sup>3</sup> Or, according to a metaphysical theory based on the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, the text I read could theoretically be new each time I open the book.

And here the last possibility presents itself: since I last opened the book, the world in which the given text exists could itself have changed. The act of observation (here, my rereading the text) not only interferes with the certainty of the measured result, as Heisenberg suggested, but has actualized an alternative yet equally real world from among the countless available ones which coexist in “superspace/time.” This is not science fiction but science theory, springing from Hugh Everett’s 1957 reading of quantum mechanics, which led to the theory of reverse temporal causality (Gribbin 172–74, 236–42, 252), and to the theory of many worlds parallel to ours, a theory popularized in 1973 by DeWitt and Graham (q.v.). In quantum physics and mathematics, “ghost worlds” (Gribbin 176) of probabilities coexist in the universe, and temporal reversal (or time travel) is perfectly possible at a subatomic level. But, even though John A. Wheeler’s controversial idea that as conscious observers human beings have reconstructed our universe back to the Big Bang may be true, human beings are also bound by their consciousness to live only in the world they presently observe, with the subjunctive always ahead of them.<sup>4</sup> If Pynchon’s text were in fact new every time I opened the book, or if the world in which I opened the book were a new one—one of many possible ones—I would not know this because my observation fixes one ghost world and retrospectively fits history and knowledge around the new paradigm. Our perception confirms that “reality is not reversible” (GR 139), except in fiction, where it is actually possible to experiment with parallel worlds, ghost worlds and causal as well as temporal reversals.

Causality and chronology are tested on all narrative levels in *Gravity's Rainbow*, itself a system of signification in which “time is an artificial resource to begin with” (412). One central conundrum in the novel, the possible relation between Slothrop and the V-2 rocket, results from the fact that in places “the entire film runs backward” (139), thwarting Pointsman’s (and others’) straightforward chronological cause-and-effect reading. *Gravity's Rainbow* also allows for parallel worlds created from divergent interpretations of “texts”

(Slothrop, the Rocket, the Real Text, the Zone): “When Slothrop was discovered, [. . .] Like the New World, different people thought they’d discovered different things” (85); “[e]ach alternative Zone speeds away from all the others[. . .] Each bird has his branch now, and each one is the Zone” (519); “the Rocket has to be many things[. . .] Each [heretic] will have his personal Rocket” (727). Such a proliferation of readings is the textual equivalent of the Many-Worlds theory; and, as long as no one has observed it and actualized a single Rocket reality, the 00000 could be said to occupy a ghost world of probabilities. Even without paranormal or quantum-physical changes, *Gravity’s Rainbow* contains enough subjunctive time and space<sup>5</sup> to support alternative understandings (either causal progression [Pointsman] or coincidental parallels [Mexico]) of the relations of place (Germany and the United States), time (1945, 1973 and 2001), terror weaponry (V-2 and Boeing 767) and target cities (London, Lübeck, Berlin and New York). As other essays in this collection show, *Gravity’s Rainbow* contains many German references and comparisons to the United States, explicit and implicit, that can be examined against historical evidence. One might assume that German referents would always antedate their American equivalents, but some relations in time and space can be more complex than that.

One coincidental example, which spans space- and time-references and connects vehicles and targets of terror not just associatively but directly, starts with an interrogation of the relation between a comical folk hero, Plechazunga, and a comicbook superhero, Plasticman. Coordinated functionally through their association with Slothrop, they are, at first sight, parallel but unconnected indexes to his character. However, once having linked them through Slothrop, one may wonder whether Old World folk heroes like Plechazunga in any way incubate or progress to become New World superheroes like Plasticman. Such a connection, as we will see, would signify a cultural-historical progression. But in this specific case, the connection is almost certainly just an idiosyncratic, ahistorical coincidence. If causality does not connect these characters, other reading parameters may. For example, the hero category that connects Plechazunga and Plasticman also accommodates Slothrop’s incarnation as Raketemensch/Rocketman. This double denomination is a translation which brings together folk- and high-cultural as well as German and American characteristics. A joint creation of Säure and Slothrop—“You had the same idea?” (366)—this character combines pared-down Wagnerian paraphernalia with elements of American cartoon figures like “[f]our-color Plasticman” (206). Yet although Slothrop fantasizes that as Rocketman he will

receive “food, wine and maidens in a four-color dispensation” (366), it is as Plechazunga, the German pig-hero, that he finally gains these in abundance—and in German Expressionist colors too (568–69).

Admittedly, this kind of cultural-linguistic connection is worthy of a paranoid conspiracy theorist looking for an alternative plot based on something we could be looking at but no one (except the theorist) is. Though thematically connected in the text, the pig-hero and Plasticman are not causally or historically connected outside the text: one is a fictional creation contained within the text; the other is historically anchored, although the life he leads in comics outside Pynchon’s text is also fictional. But Pynchon provides us with another pair who do bridge the gap between fiction and history: the German and germinal cartoon characters Max and Moritz, who make a not uncharacteristic appearance as rocket-firing crew launching the 00000 (757–58) at a time (1945) when they had already been transplanted to American media in a cultural translation. As the mischievous *Katzenjammer Kids*, or Fritz and Hans in the almost identical rival strip *Captain and the Kids*, on the funny pages of American newspapers, these two ingenious German children continued to wreak (often firework-related) havoc in a stereotyped African-colonial setting. By the mid-forties or early seventies, readers may not have recognized them as Max and Moritz, but Pynchon does: Plechazunga’s firework-igniting eight-year-old assistant, the “Wilhelm Busch original” Fritz (568; cf. 501), is a chronologically looped reference to the German creator of the original Max and Moritz and to their American brethren Fritz and Hans (the latter recognizable perhaps in Hansel Geschwindig, the snappy bulb-snatcher [651]).

The allusion to the Katzenjammer kids not only imbeds in *Gravity’s Rainbow* references to the legacy of the Südwest but also points to another rocketeer with a recognizable German accent, Wernher von Braun, whose role in developing the V-2 was central. At the end of the war, “von Braun, the Prussian aristocrat” (402), and selected engineers from Peenemünde were conveniently picked up by American T-forces (the “technical spies” who missed Horst Achtfaden and Klaus Närrisch [451, 456, 527]) and “interned [. . .] at Garmisch[-Partenkirchen]” (273), from where they were transported to the United States, along with as much rocket hardware and documentation as “[Major] Marvy’s mothers” (287)—or the U.S. Army Ordnance Technical Intelligence Special Mission V2, directed by Colonel Holger Toftoy—could retrieve from the war zone (Neufeld 267; Piszkievicz 41).

Like Plasticman and the double dyad Max und Moritz/Fritz and Hans, von Braun lives in different guises inside and outside *Gravity’s Rainbow* and thus creates for the reader a particularly tricky relation

between time and space, one to which his statement about transformation and life after death that serves as the epigraph to *Gravity's Rainbow's* part 1 contributes. His presence in the novel is indirect or at a temporal and spatial distance. He is almost always somewhere else—the Harz, Garmisch or America—where things happen to him “lately” or “soon” rather than in the present. Being hard to pin down could, of course, be a sign that, like so many other characters, he is just not central. However, rather than being merely a historical, statistical coincidence on the textual map, von Braun might, like the textual Rocket, be a metaphor that lives in and outside the text and refuses to be fixed as an object because he, again like the Rocket, is symptomatic of a transformative, viral relation with the future—not central as much as pervasive. In the relation between his life in the text and his life in history, von Braun’s temporal status mimics that of the V-2 (the effect being experienced by the victims before the cause can be detected), and the gap allows von Braun himself to escape time and place, just as the epigraph suggests he wanted to.<sup>6</sup>

Because of von Braun’s flair for self-(re)presentation and his increasing presence in the popular media after mid-century, by 1973 most readers knew him primarily as an idealistic aerospace pioneer and as the creator of the Saturn rocket (technically speaking, itself an effect of the V-2); but they might not have been aware of the cause (his role in the Third Reich’s rocket program and his 1945 transfer to the U.S. equivalent) until reading *Gravity's Rainbow*. Von Braun’s presence in Pynchon’s novel, in the guise of his 1945 German self, published when von Braun had just, famously, helped land Americans on the moon, allows the reader to work out the cause (German V-2 von Braun) after having already established the effect (American Saturn von Braun). Once this kind of knowledge is established, the text is different the next time one reads it. The Real Text of world history may not have changed (the path von Braun took existed all along), but for the reader a change in knowledge has created a paradigm shift, a new truth, which retroactively changes previous assumptions. The world has changed, at least perceptually.

Tendentious as superimposing Plechazunga and Plasticman may seem as a reading strategy, the presence of von Braun directly coordinates German V-2s with American rockets (be they Saturn-Apollo space vehicles or Cold War ICBMs) in both a technological and a historical progression. The causal progression goes beyond what Pynchon provides in *Gravity's Rainbow* and what is commonly known about the connection between or the effects of the transfer of commercial and military technology from Germany to the United States expedited by paralegal Army operations at the end of the war.

Indicative history tells us that, to the German rocket engineers of the Third Reich, the V-2 (or A4) missile that terrorized London, Paris and Antwerp was "viewed only as an interim weapon" in the progression toward a stratospheric, supersonic rocket-aircraft "able to cross from Europe to America in 40 minutes," and that A9 and A10 two-stage rockets were already on the drawing board (Neufeld 113; Dornberger 140). From the original plans for these rockets von Braun's team of German rocketeers, once transplanted to the United States, would develop the Redstone and eventually the Jupiter and Saturn rocket systems, the military and civilian applications of which promised both deadly dominion and celestial conquest.<sup>7</sup> Subjunctive history, with different coordinators, was realized on 9/11. The objective of the A9/A10 plans hatched in Germany during the war was allegedly to launch terror strikes on New York, possibly with nuclear payloads. A different version of that projection came true when terror did strike New York.

Instead of a Third Reich ballistic missile launched from Germany at the Empire State Building (as envisioned at Peenemünde), in 2001 it was two American-made Boeings flown by Al-Qaeda terrorists (educated in Germany and trained in the United States) into the tallest structures in Manhattan. The Nazi rocketeers behind the A9/A10 scheme were incorporated into American society at the invitation of Army Technical Intelligence, and the same T-forces also brought over the rocketeers' equivalents in German aviation engineering, whose know-how provided the key to Boeing's success with commercial and military aircraft, ancestors of the 767s that hit New York's twin towers.<sup>8</sup> In terms of Many-Worlds theory, it seems as though a parallel, but not dissimilar, reality had been actualized among the ghosts of those possible. Put another way, it had not happened before, but there was something to compare it to then. A Pointsman conspiracy theorist might trace (through the chain reaction of events springing from Technical Intelligence operations in 1945) a direct causal connection between subjunctive and indicative events and disregard the innumerable quantum jumps in history that actualized one and not the other. An alternative, which also rejects arbitrary coincidence as an explanation, is to see the resonance between subjective and indicative versions of history as evidence of a deterministic, cyclical pattern in which history is repetition with variation.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, causal determinism can be rejected if we believe coincidences and parallels between two versions are arbitrary (if not wholly outside our scope of perception) while their associative connection nevertheless allows for them to function as commentaries on each other. It is this alternative to direct causality that Leni Pöckler seems to express when she ponders the possibility that "[i]t all goes along together. Parallel, not series.



Metaphor. Signs and symptoms. Mapping on to different coordinate systems, I don't know . . ." (GR 159).

For some characters—Mexico confronting Pointsman's sterile causal take on science or Leni confronting Franz's excitement-destroying causality—not knowing for certain may be "eminently fair" (57) or may imply liberation and new possibilities. For others it is a cause of fear. As suggested earlier, terror in *Gravity's Rainbow* is not merely a fear of the unknown but rather a fear of the repetition of the unknown. Once death is recognized as a measurable yet arbitrary and (individually) unpredictable probability, there is no comfort or control in cause-and-effect thinking. However, the same lack of certain knowledge and connection taken for granted by Mexico and espoused by Leni may be what terrorizes others into using scientific measurements, calculation and models to approach "pure, primitive terror" (452), at least gradually and in the safe subjunctive mood of theory. Horst Achtfaden implies that, when terror cannot be dissipated by the already known, such as memorized textbooks, one way to cope is to experiment on paper, "us[ing] dimensionless coefficients[. . .] This allows you to use models [. . .] and scale the wind-tunnel results all the way up to reality, without running into too many unknowns" (453).

Approaching the world, including terror, by imag(in)ing it through scientific measurements is reminiscent of the way reality, according to the Copenhagen interpretation and its metaphysical spinoffs, is tied to measurement and observation. "No elementary quantum phenomenon is a phenomenon until it is a registered ('observed,' 'indelibly recorded') phenomenon" (Miller and Wheeler qtd. in Blanchard and Jadczyk). This claim resonates with the need people who had been told of the attacks on 9/11 felt to turn on a TV to verify the news "first hand" through recorded images.<sup>10</sup> Because recorded images have a unique power to make something real to observers, the objective of international terrorists has been to use the media as a vehicle of terror as much as any missile or plane or other technological delivery system.<sup>11</sup> Recording, however, does not only make us perceive an event as more real or probable (and therefore existentially more terrifying); by mediating experience, it also serves as a coping mechanism. Poisson distributions and cine-theodolites distance an audience from the reality of terror while simultaneously bringing that audience into relation with a measurable and scientifically reproducible reality. Comparable examples from 9/11 include the architectural distance kept by CNN's camera crews and Aaron Brown, the computer simulations of the crashes produced by Sky News, and the remote imaging and satellite photos used to show a view of the destruction, which added distance as well

as context. Placing the act of observation between the event and our experience of it, even where terror is concerned, can place us with Pynchon's detached Angel hovering over the "terror raid against civilian Lübeck," fire-bombed by the RAF in 1944 (GR 214–15; cf. 151), or with the "pale Virgin" deity "gazing down at the city [Hiroshima] about to be sacrificed" (694).<sup>12</sup>

In the case of *Gravity's Rainbow*, statistical and electronic measurement, and the imaging performed by German and English specialists alike are ways to *understand* the V-2. Observation through documentation—whether painstakingly made films of rocket flight-tests (406–07), chance video of a plane crashing into the World Trade Center, or a novel serving as the lens through which to view the Second World War—creates a distance that may also afford space for interpretation. A novel that investigates terror could itself be a paper-based model like the ones Achtfaden describes, allowing one to approach gradually the terror of full-scale reality. The reader who associates the text with an event like 9/11 may do so because both the form of the text and its descriptions of terror evoke how terror is experienced and negotiated. In addition to the coincidences of times (1945, 1973, 2001) and spaces (Germany, Britain, America) and the vehicles that symbolically link them, three coincidences between text and terror all dramatize a tension between connection and dissociation (or causality and arbitrariness) in the text, in the way the text can be read and in how we experience terror.

First is the way facts are recorded and causality is reversed or challenged. The novel meticulously traces the V-2, in reverse, first as it lands on its terrorized targets in London and later as it is produced and tested by terror-struck engineers like Pökler and Achtfaden. The recording of strikes turns out to challenge the notion that science makes the unknown safe. Mexico's statistics show rocket strikes to be bounded and explicable only in the sense of being predictably unpredictable. Readers may balance these two tendencies in the text—determinism and indeterminism, paranoia and anti-paranoia—or may see them as defining the two foci of the ellipse of uncertainty which living with the constant possibility of terrorism has introduced into everyday life: "Chances are astronomically against a perfect hit" (425), yet "[e]veryone's equal. Same chances of getting hit" (57).

Second, the barrier between fact and fiction is disconcertingly permeable. One example is Operation Black Wing's intentionally demoralizing propaganda film about a fictitious Schwarzkommando, the making of which seems to give the Schwarzkommando real life—or to incarnate them from the ghost world of probabilities. Other examples are the Busch-cartoonish rascals, von Braun and the Rocket itself, all

moving between fictional text and historical context and having the ability to mutate or pop up where we do not expect them. The way terrorism has evolved from state-sanctioned high-tech military campaigns to subversively individualized acts of cultural, religious or political violence has made us live in the subjunctive because of the uncertainty not just of if, when and where a strike might hit us but also of how. The ontological status even of household objects has been destabilized by terror. A mobile phone might be an innocent means of communication or a detonator. Airport security has taught us that bottles of baby formula are dangerous because one day one bottle will contain nitroglycerine. The real terror is the fact that the war has gone underground, that any object can be transformed into a weapon or vehicle of terror, just as any place is potentially vulnerable to a terrorist attack at any time. When we are forced to live in the subjunctive, the “nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes” us is “fear itself” (Roosevelt 40). Psychologically, we need to objectify our fear so we have a known reality to deal with. An actual attack can even concretize fear almost to the point of relief (Edgerton). After such a moment of actualization, when subjunctive uncertainty becomes indicative certainty, we can go back and reread the evidence which will then clearly lead out of Mexico’s terrifying ghost world of probabilities to the specific time, place and method of the actual(ized) attack.

Third, events are mediated and feelings either engaged or protected by distance. Science affords safe distance through modelling and interpretation, and literature registers acts of terror, such as Allied air raids on German cities, from an angel’s-eye view of the carbonized corpses. Pynchon never describes Ground Zero carnage in the visceral, graphic detail of someone like Kurt Vonnegut describing fire-bombed Dresden. Most of the corpses in *Gravity’s Rainbow* are hidden—under snow or in body bags—or, like Bianca, present as ghostly traces of possibility. New York’s Ground Zero initially presented a similar, strange absence of corpses, offering instead the paper contents of thousands of office drawers fluttering torn and burnt over the city as random samples of anonymous lives. What message can such fragments, either arbitrarily juxtaposed or significantly connected, carry? *Gravity’s Rainbow* refers to the “ancient tragedy of lost messages” (GR 520; cf. 322), and though narrator and characters utter, hope for and speculate about warnings to the New World from the Old (and to the present from the past), these go unheard or uncomprehended—“whistled not voiced”—are identified or interpreted only retrospectively, or exist only in the subjunctive—“Did [Columbus] hear them too, that last night? Did they have a message for him? A warning? Could he understand the prescient goatherds in the dark, [. . .] in the last sunset of Europe?”

(453). In fact, lost messages are not messages at all. Only received messages reveal themselves, retrospectively, to have been sent. Reading meaning into scattered fragments creates a deterministic, causal path, which will then seem always to have been there to be found. How subjunctive yet deterministic readings are is revealed when a reader sees patterns cast forward to a future beyond the reasonable scope of the contents and production of the book.

Readers who see connections or coincidences between the Second World War, the Cold War and the War on Terror, between Germany and the United States, and between different points in history may recognize the contours of terror these share even if the exact situation and details are not reproduced. Though resonant in places, *Gravity's Rainbow* does not describe 9/11 prophetically—if we can believe Blicero, such “symmetries were all prewar luxury. Nothing’s left him to prophesy” (102)—but it does provide the space for coincidental events to seem suddenly to have become recognizable, as if they had always been ghostly present in the novel and were now realized by our reading as a message. By observing the connection, we have retroactively actualized a reality. This readerly ability to connect within and outside *Gravity's Rainbow* can be applied to any number of themes, events, details, metaphors, references. One thing that makes terror stand out is the fact that it might by nature be unmappable as an event until it has been observed, measured and interpreted.<sup>13</sup> It is this mediated connection with reality that terror shares with the text.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Compare with this the popular frustration at the FBI’s failure to have detected evidence of an impending attack in the intelligence amassed before 9/11.

<sup>2</sup>The notion that authors can function as sensitives and pick up cues and cautions before ordinary people do ignores postmodernist criticism’s postulate about the death of the author and may be part of a new (old) approach to literature which some have identified in post-9/11 culture.

<sup>3</sup>See Terry Reilly and Stephen Tomaske’s essay in this collection, and see Christopher Norris and Michael Dummett on the relativity of science, knowledge and truth, and on the power of, for example, prayer in delayed-choice action.

<sup>4</sup>Wheeler’s idea of a participatory universe compares interestingly with Merleau-Ponty’s idea of a participatory worldview (Wheeler, BBH).

<sup>5</sup>My use of the term subjunctive here in relation to *Gravity's Rainbow* is more oblique, locatable less in the specific written text and more in the process

of reading, than is the subjunctive thematized explicitly by Pynchon himself in *Mason & Dixon*.

<sup>6</sup>The figure of von Braun as a construct queries the relation between fact and fiction, not just in novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* but also in autobiographies and histories. See Dalsgaard, GRHN; cf. McLaughlin.

<sup>7</sup>As does Blicero in his final soliloquy. On this and *Gravity's Rainbow's* relation to the U.S. space program, see Carter.

<sup>8</sup>Technical Intelligence teams raided Luftwaffe resources as well as those of the rocket program. Boeing aerodynamicist George Schairer's visit to the LFA Hermann Göring aviation research facilities at Völknerode was the start of a genealogy leading to the latest Boeing military and commercial aircraft (Samuel 153).

<sup>9</sup>In this case it is not so much "American Death [that] has come to occupy Europe" (GR 722) as vice versa. On *Gravity's Rainbow* and the eternal return, see Dalsgaard, GRRG.

<sup>10</sup>Conversely, a conspiracy theory which posits that the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon was a hoax is based on the visual absence of the Boeing 757 in photos of the crash site. See "Hunt the Boeing!" and Meyssan.

<sup>11</sup>Even the V-2 designers had to sell the idea of terror to Hitler with the aid of the latest recording technology (Dornberger 101–03; Speer 495–96).

<sup>12</sup>Even when the threat of terrorism seems real, few of us will suspect, as does Pökler at Blizna (GR 425–26), that we are personally targeted.

<sup>13</sup>A related argument about the special nature of death in Pynchon's work has been developed by Tiina Käkälä-Puumala.

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