

Critiquing the Cartel: Anti-Capitalism, Walter Rathenau and *Gravity's Rainbow*

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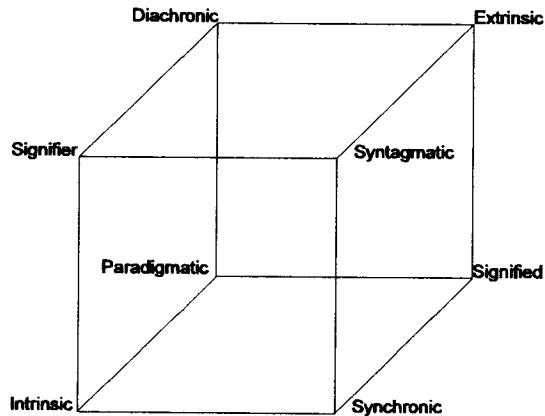
Near the end of the séance held at Peter Sachsa's, in Part 1 of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the voice of Walter Rathenau poses a set of problems to his listeners: "You must ask two questions. First, what is the real nature of synthesis? And then: what is the real nature of control?" (167). This is, of course, one of those typical Pynchon passages that invite members of the critical cartel, the Pyndustry, to seize on them as keystones for critical reading. Paradoxically, this one is also particularly good for exploring a narrative effect I have called the reader trap. Reader traps are stylistic and thematic techniques that unsettle the readerly desire to construct an ordered cosmos within the fictional space of the text. Specifically, a reader trap is narrative information that either produces a moment of interpretive doubt for which there is no certain solution, or produces a false sense of certainty about events in the narrative universe. I have written elsewhere about how reader traps function in our reading of Tyrone Slothrop's map and of Bianca's characterization and textual disappearance. In these earlier cases, I was drawn to the problem of the reader trap by a sense that readers had often been too hasty in assigning definitive meanings to Slothrop's map and to Bianca. My focus in this essay is Walter Rathenau, the putative father of the cartel, the "They-system" that is clearly among the villains of the text; but in that role Rathenau also signifies a reader trap.

The voice of Rathenau urges his listeners to consider "the real nature of synthesis" and "the real nature of control"; but how might we define anything's "real nature" in a postmodern text that routinely places our criteria for reality in question? Yet we might desire to accept these promptings from the voice of Rathenau as serious and straight questions that come also from an implied political voice of Pynchon we can construct during reading. As we read *Gravity's Rainbow*, we see develop an apparent privileging of nature over the culture of corporate cartels and capitalist ideologies that the text implies was a contributing cause to the carnage of the Second World War, and, by extension, to the carnage of the Vietnam era in which *Gravity's Rainbow* was composed. The voice of Rathenau could be one of Pynchon's voices in the text, speaking from the other side of the fictional boundary that

distances author from narrative world. But before we invest too much in an issue that conjures up problems of intentionality, I want to consider the other two keywords in the passage: "synthesis" and "control."

"Synthesis" can be made to signify in many ways in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The most immediate signification in the context of the séance is chemical synthesis as it relates to IG Farben's industrial cartel and the manufacture of dyes and other products from coal tar derivatives. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the most significant application of chemical processes of synthesis concerns plastics, the development of Imipolex G in particular. With this special plastic, however, the story connects the synthetic, the artificial product of technology, and the natural, as demonstrated by Greta Erdmann's erotic response to the feel of Imipolex (487-88) and by the possible, if anachronistic, use of the plastic as the stimulus in Laszlo Jamf's conditioning of Infant Tyrone's erection. But underlying both these cases, and ultimately the use of Imipolex for the insulating S-Gerät that contains Gottfried in Rocket 00000, is the question of "control." As *Gravity's Rainbow* explores the role of technology in controlling the individual, control is often a euphemism for domination and oppression. Service to a narrow conception of synthesis leads to the mechanization of human beings, a frightful merging with technology that leads to a loss of identity and freedom—assuming they were ever there to be lost in the first place.

Synthesis and control also define our activity of reading *Gravity's Rainbow*. Consider a cube that places in three-dimensional relation some of the major concerns of textual analysis and critical reading:



Semiotic cube °

I call this diagram a semiotic cube for reasons that should be obvious to anyone familiar with the basic components of structuralist/semiotic analysis and with the semiotic square deployed by many narrative theorists. With the semiotic cube, I want to move beyond the limiting binaries that attend most two-dimensional models while simultaneously acknowledging that oppositional structures have a role in representing the cognitive structuration of our reading and interpretive activities.

The semiotic cube is aligned with spatial affinities that can best be read first from the front-to-back planes: the signifier-intrinsic-synchronic-syntagmatic plane and the paradigmatic-diachronic-extrinsic-signified plane. The advantage of this arrangement for seeing the relations on the cube is that it more closely resembles the common spatial metaphors of reading: foreground and background; however, I do not intend to privilege any particular plane as necessarily the foreground and thus somehow primary. These distinctions are not absolute. In any act of reading, features from one plane interact with those from other planes; therefore, we must also see the planes on the top and the bottom, the left and the right, and diagonal planes that would cut through the middle of the cube. Signification occurs only as a complex interplay of relations and oppositions involving all eight corners of the semiotic cube. All eight forces always operate in the everyday process of synthesizing signification that mediates the code/context axis of the message in the basic communications model. In critical practice, however, we must recognize the inevitability of privileging a particular corner to establish working principles of analysis for that feature. Where critical theory and practice often err is in the rhetoric of overvalue that accompanies such privileging. Moreover, since the optical play of the cube allows planes like foreground and background to appear to change position, we see the cube just one way only by a force of will and control. We need to recognize how each feature contributes to our processes of textual understanding, and that overt neglect of any feature can lead to a different reading, if not a misreading. The challenge is to pursue acts of reading that encompass as fully as possible a synthesis of all features, even if we may have to realize that every critical reading is incomplete in some way.

Gravity's Rainbow challenges our ability to achieve a full synthesis of signifying activities, and more often than not readers turn to a critical structure for control over the act of reading and the production of meaning. I would not want to be misconstrued as criticizing other readers for failing, somehow, to see the total text. *Gravity's Rainbow*, like other encyclopedic narratives, cannot be contained in one reading, nor would we want it to be. Therefore, without foregrounding what

follows with a grandiose claim of definitive reading, I want now to turn to the representation of Walter Rathenau in the novel, to offer a reading of "Rathenau" that, with an awareness of the activities of signification marked out on the semiotic cube, can lead to an understanding of how Pynchon deploys Rathenau as both the father of the cartel and the father of the anti-capitalist subtext running throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Rathenau was a German industrialist and, later, government official who was assassinated in 1922. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, he speaks from the "other side," never having a face-to-face encounter with any major character. The significant character closest to him during his appearance is Leni Pökler, who is present at Peter Sachsa's the night in the winter of 1929-30 Rathenau speaks to a collection of German military and business leaders seeking his advice. However, his advice is complicated by the historicity of both Rathenau and his views on key issues facing Germany and the world during the twentieth century.

To understand why Pynchon focuses on Rathenau as the spokesman for the other side, we have to understand who Rathenau was, what sources Pynchon used to construct his presence in the text, and how Pynchon, with a historical figure like Rathenau, uses a technique Charles Hollander calls "misdirection." Hollander suggests that Pynchon's reader needs to pursue information derived from actual people, corporations, and events beyond the immediate context of the fiction. He argues that Pynchon's references to extrafictional elements constitute only the veneer of a more complex historical narrative hidden behind the official versions prepared for public consumption. Once we understand how inside and outside function in the case of Rathenau, we can turn to the issue of anti-capitalism in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Pynchon introduces Rathenau by briefly suspending the narrative,¹ little more than a page after the first brief references to him, to provide an "official version":

Rathenau—according to the histories—was prophet and architect of the cartelized state. From what began as a tiny bureau at the War Office in Berlin, he had coordinated Germany's economy during the World War, controlling supplies, quotas and prices, cutting across and demolishing the barriers of secrecy and property that separated firm from firm—a corporate Bismarck, before whose power no account book was too privileged, no agreement too clandestine. His father Emil Rathenau had founded AEG, the German General Electric Company, but young Walter was more than another industrial heir—he was a philosopher with a vision of the postwar State. He saw the war in progress as a world revolution, out of which would rise neither Red communism nor an unhindered Right, but a rational

structure in which business would be the true, the rightful authority—a structure based, not surprisingly, on the one he'd engineered in Germany for fighting the World War.

Thus the official version. Grandiose enough. (164–65)

As far as this official version goes, it is accurate. It was most likely drawn directly (possibly even paraphrased) from Richard Sasuly's 1947 examination of IG Farben and its role in the Second World War (see esp. Sasuly 39–41).² But in Pynchon's version we can detect pieces of Rathenau's life history that may have intrigued Pynchon during the writing of *Gravity's Rainbow* and led him to consult at least one other source, to construct in *Gravity's Rainbow* the rich subtext associated with the signifier "Rathenau."

Attractive to any reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* is the idea of an "architect of the cartelized state." Pynchon has shown throughout his novels a marked distrust of corporations (Yoyodyne is the prime fictional example) and their dehumanizing service to the cultural forces of late capitalism. Rathenau's direct connection with AEG links him with one of Pynchon's targets in *Gravity's Rainbow*, an exemplar of American corporate eagerness to profit from the rocket: GE, the General Electric Company.³ Moreover, as the séance suggests and Sasuly confirms, Rathenau was at least indirectly connected with the rise of IG Farben.⁴

However, because Pynchon's narrator frames this digression on Rathenau with the phrases "according to the histories" and "Thus the official version. Grandiose enough," we should examine more closely Rathenau's presence in the text. "History" is a signifier the narrator has overdetermined just seven lines before the quoted passage as "at best a conspiracy, not always among gentlemen, to defraud," a view the voice of Rathenau confirms near the end of the séance: "All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic" (167).⁵ Nevertheless, there should be a difference between what the reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* and the guests at the séance look for in Rathenau's message: "Generaldirektor Smaragd and colleagues are not here to be told what even the masses believe. It might almost—if one were paranoid enough—seem to be a collaboration here, between both sides of the Wall, matter and spirit. What *is* it they know that the powerless do not? What terrible structure behind the appearances of diversity and enterprise?" These questions are never definitively answered, probably because "Whatever comes through the medium tonight they will warp, they will edit, into a blessing. It is contempt of a rare order" (165). Although, on the one hand, the textual signals might lead us to wonder whether even the

version we read has been warped and edited for consumption, on the other hand, those signals suggest that we look beyond the surface to discover more of Rathenau's history and what he might actually have said from the other side.

Sasuly's *IG Farben* is a key source for Pynchon's understanding of the IG's cartel structure and its role in the German buildup to the Second World War, but Sasuly does not account for all the details about Rathenau that Pynchon includes in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The likely second source is Count Harry Kessler's *Walther Rathenau: His Life and Work*, a probable reference for Pynchon's extended signification for Rathenau. Kessler's biography was published in 1928 (English translation, with authorial revisions, 1930; republished in the United States, 1969—while Pynchon was working on *Gravity's Rainbow*), and therefore the picture of Rathenau it presents is contemporaneous with the séance scene, before the Nazi party had stamped its brand of violent nationalism on Germany.⁶ In addition to noting the coincidences in publication dates and the historical ironies in Kessler's work, we may imagine that Pynchon was drawn to the rainbow metaphor Kessler uses to describe Rathenau. Kessler writes of "a peculiar iridescence of Rathenau's intellect which seemed to clothe every idea it evolved in a brilliant multi-coloured halo":

He had a vast, indeed a unique store of knowledge, economic, scientific, literary, historical, political, and a no less unique store of business experience. Now all this was kept perpetually moving to and fro between two systems, introspective asceticism and shrewd worldliness, each complete in itself, each hardening rather than compromising with its rival as life proceeded, and each illuminating every idea, as it rose over the horizon of Rathenau's mind and passed on its way, with brilliant and ever-changing hues. His intellect thus came to resemble an astonishing coat of many colours, which he displayed for the delight or the discomfiture of those who approached him, and behind which he concealed, from himself and others, the painful hesitations of a nature torn between two mutually destructive passions. (20-21)

From what little we know about Thomas Pynchon, this description of Rathenau might also describe him.

The most direct textual evidence for Kessler's work as a source is the "anti-Semitic street refrain" Leni Pökler recalls singing during the days before Rathenau's assassination (GR 163). Kessler quotes the two lines, attributing them not to school children but to an *ad hoc*, semi-military nationalist organization (one of the many nationalist precursors of the Nazis in Weimar Germany): "God damn Walther Rathenau. /

Shoot him down, the dirty jew" (365).⁷ Kessler also writes about séances held in 1914: "spirits are raised from the dead in the very study of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Moltke" (168); and "the wife of Moltke . . . asked [Rathenau] to attend a lecture of the mystic and prophet Rudolf Steiner" (171). Although Kessler never says Rathenau attended such events, he writes immediately after the reference to Steiner, "Rathenau's letters this spring [1914] show a new and tender preoccupation with nature; the realm of the soul hovers only just below the surface."

Kessler also presents an exhaustive history of Rathenau's negotiations with the Russian minister Chicherin (Tchitcherine in Pynchon's transliteration⁸) and the diplomatic theatre surrounding the Rapallo treaty. The Rapallo treaty is mentioned three times in *Gravity's Rainbow*, once during the séance—"Why do you think von Maltzan and I saw the Rapallo treaty through?" (166)—and twice in the first major chapter devoted to Pynchon's fictional Vaslav Tchitcherine: "He is no relation at all to the Tchitcherine who dealt the Rapallo Treaty with Walter Rathenau" (338); and "in his moments of sickest personal grandeur it is quite clear to him how his own namesake and the murdered Jew put together an elaborate piece of theatre at Rapallo, and that the real and only purpose was to reveal to Vaslav Tchitcherine the existence of Enzian" (352). But I want to return now from flagging sources to discussing the narrative deployment in *Gravity's Rainbow* of Rathenau and his ideas.

When the Rathenau spirit voice mentions the Rapallo Treaty, he claims "'It was necessary to move to the east. Wimpe can tell you. Wimpe, the V-Mann, was always there'" (166). Like Rathenau and Laszlo Jamf, Wimpe is a character largely in a semiotic sense only. He exists only in the narrative discourses of other characters. (Rathenau is only his voice through a medium; Jamf exists almost exclusively in documents and in other characters' references, although the narrator appears to be the authority for some references.) Nevertheless, these characters come to signify vital information within our construction of what *Gravity's Rainbow* is about. Wimpe, as a V-Mann (*Verbindungsmann*, an IG Farben overseas representative who doubled as an intelligence agent [DuBois 58–59; see also 266–70, and Sasuly 105]⁹), is in many ways the emissary for the cartelized state Rathenau had prophesied. In that narrative role Wimpe helps connect a number of narrative strands. For instance, he figures prominently in the rumor section ("The rumors are as extravagant as this country is listless. [. . .] But these are rumors" [343–49]) of the Tchitcherine chapter, supplying Tchitcherine with various drugs and citing, without attribution and probably with a different meaning, Rathenau's vision:

“we salesmen believe in real pain, real deliverance—we are knights in the service of that Ideal. It must all be real, for the purposes of our market. Otherwise my employer—and our little chemical cartel is the model for the very structure of nations—becomes lost in illusion and dream, and one day vanishes into chaos. Your own employer as well” (349; emphasis added). By making Wimpe one of the spokespersons in the text for Rathenau’s vision,¹⁰ Pynchon marks the appropriation of Rathenau’s ideas by IG Farben for purposes other than those Rathenau intended. More significantly, because Pynchon has cut them off from their original authority, *Gravity’s Rainbow* can recontextualize those ideas to serve different narrative and thematic ends.

Many textual threads suddenly start to disentangle here. The reference to knights maps Wimpe onto Gerhardt von Göll, der Springer. The themes of pain and deliverance recur throughout the novel and for many characters: Wimpe, for instance, supplied von Göll’s onetime actress Greta Erdmann with drugs (464). Tchitcherine’s education in drugs semiotically foreshadows his first encounter with Slothrop and the Potsdam hashish, after which Slothrop meets Greta Erdmann and recreates a sadomasochistic scene from one of her and von Göll’s movies, *Alpdrücken*, and together they journey to find Greta’s daughter, Bianca, whose disappearance leads Slothrop ultimately to von Göll. The contours of a syntagmatic/paradigmatic reader trap begin to take shape, the type of trap Pynchon’s narrator articulates within Tchitcherine’s psyche after a “memory of Wimpe, longago IG Farben V-Mann, finds him” (701):

About the paranoia often noted under [Oneirine], there is nothing remarkable. Like other sorts of paranoia, it is nothing less than the onset, the leading edge, of the discovery that *everything is connected*, everything in the Creation, a secondary illumination—not yet blindingly One, but at least connected, and perhaps a route In for those like Tchitcherine who are held at the edge. (703)

Although recognizing misdirection, for Hollander, is a reading practice for using extratextual information to discover the hidden stories embedded in references, *Gravity’s Rainbow* often traps readers with an intratextual version of misdirection. It deploys many repetitions that fall under a same-but-different logic yet suggest, especially to the reader prone to catalogue repetitions, that the text is structured in elaborate patterns. Of course detecting patterns is standard operating procedure for reading narrative, but *Gravity’s Rainbow* cautions us, either directly with a narratorial intrusion or indirectly through a textual deflation, to handle with care each moment of high textual seriousness.


The Heinz Rippenstoss quip at the close of the séance (167) is one such deflation. Similarly, Wimpe's restatement of Rathenau's ideas is a deflationary misdirection. Tchitcherine's memory of Wimpe and his version of Rathenau's ideas, however, does connect the Rocket significantly to the cartel image in the novel.

Late in Part 3, Tchitcherine—having just missed the Schwarzkommando (Slothrop, dressed in Tchitcherine's uniform, had warned them)—finds himself in a "political debate" (565) with Major Marvy and Clayton "Bloody" Chiclitz (the founder of Yoyodyne). Suddenly Wimpe's version of Rathenau's vision comes back to him and leads to a revelation:

Oh, Wimpe. Old V-Mann, were you right? Is your IG to be *the very model of nations?*

So it comes to Tchitcherine here in the clearing with these two fools on either side of him. [. . .]

"Say, there." It appears to be a very large white Finger, addressing him. Its Fingernail is beautifully manicured: as it rotates for him, it slowly reveals a Fingerprint that might well be an aerial view of the City Dactylic, that city of the future where every soul is known, and there is noplac to hide. Right now [. . .] the Finger is calling Tchitcherine's attention to—

 *A Rocket-cartel.* A structure cutting across every agency human and paper that ever touched it. Even to Russia . . . Russia bought from Krupp, didn't she, from Siemens, the IG. . . .

Are there arrangements Stalin won't admit . . . doesn't even *know about?* Oh, a State begins to take form in the stateless German night, a State that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul. IG Raketen. [. . . Tchitcherine] will never get further than the edge of this meta-cartel which has made itself known tonight, this Rocket-state whose borders he cannot cross. . . .

[. . .] Everyone else seems to be in on it. Every scavenger out here is in IG Raketen's employ. All except for himself, and Enzian. (566)

The Rocket-cartel is a manifestation of Rathenau's vision of a new world order based on industrial co-interests rather than on the ideological politics of nation states. Moreover, in realizing that "Russia bought from Krupp . . . from Siemens, the IG," Tchitcherine outlines precisely what the Rapallo Treaty was all about (as the spirit voice of Rathenau himself emphasizes in saying about the treaty, "'Why do you think we wanted Krupp to sell them agricultural machinery so badly?'" [166]): establishing trading channels that would allow German industry to rebuild with the aid of raw materials from Russia, and opening a

Russian market (not to mention the collateral effect of undercutting Allied efforts to form a united front on the issue of war reparations).

Enzian also expresses a Rathenau-inspired concept of the Rocket-cartel, one even more attuned to the emerging postwar Zone. The following passage can be most obviously fixed in the narrative as coming from Enzian's consciousness. But since the narrator's signaling is so subtle, and the passage's language—"theatre," "history," "conditions"—belongs to other matrices of signification in the novel, we may be excused for the slippage that identifies these ideas with the narrator and the first "us" as including readers:

Perhaps it's theater, but they *seem* no longer to be Allies . . . though the history they have invented for themselves conditions us to *expect* "postwar rivalries," when in fact it may all be a giant cartel including winners and losers both, in an amiable agreement to share what is there to be shared. . . . Still, Enzian has played them off, the quarreling scavengers, one against the other . . . it *looks* genuine enough. . . . Marvy must be together with the Russians by now, and with General Electric too. (326)

Enzian's realization of this giant cartel is stressed later when he comes upon a bombed refinery and realizes that, although the bombing too *looks* genuine enough:

there floods on Enzian what seems to him an extraordinary understanding. This serpentine slag-heap he is just about to ride into now, this ex-refinery, Jamf Ölfabriken Werke AG, is *not a ruin at all. It is in perfect working order*. Only waiting for the right connections to be set up, to be switched on . . . modified, precisely, *deliberately* by bombing that was never hostile, but part of a plan both sides—"sides?"—had always agreed on. (520)

This revelation is triggered by Enzian's observation of "insulators reconfigured by all the bombing [. . .] and wait, wait, say what, say '*reconfigured*,' now?" (520). The S-Gerät is also a reconfigured insulator, and Slothrop, that faithful quester after the S-Gerät, has a similar recognition: "The War has been reconfiguring time and space into its own image. The track runs in different networks now. What appears to be destruction is really the shaping of railroad spaces to other purposes, intentions he can only, riding through it for the first time, begin to feel the leading edges of. . . ." (257). In a later passage already quoted, Tchitcherine completes the phrase "the leading edge of" with "the discovery that *everything is connected*" (703).

Once again, a reader trap begins to take shape as connections accumulate. A passage from Enzian's extraordinary understanding resonates as a warning to readers as well against possibly carrying connections too far, until we become the "scholar-magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it's all squeezed limp of its last drop" (520). The phallic text whose meaning we seek, like the phallic rocket sought by the text's questers, is ultimately indecipherable in any definitive form that crosses the line from paranoid structures to historical fact.

Nevertheless, we can hardly help pursuing leads, and at this extraordinary moment of understanding for Enzian, we see all the marks of Rathenau's vision. For if this "bombing was the exact industrial process of conversion" (520), then:

It means this War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted . . . secretly, it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology . . . by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques, by something that needed the energy-burst of war. [. . .] The real crises were crises of allocation and priority, not among firms—it was only staged to look that way—but among the different Technologies, Plastics, Electronics, Aircraft, and their needs which are understood only by the ruling elite. (521)

Responding to the needs of industries rather than political states, Rathenau formulated his ideas for international cartels during the First World War when he was in charge of organizing the allocation and priority of war materials (Franz Pökler's job as plastics-procurement officer for the Rocket parodies Rathenau's wartime activity). As Kessler makes clear largely through extended quotations from Rathenau's publications and letters, Rathenau idealistically believed that, beyond the war, through their inter-industry needs for materials and products, industries were better suited for the organization of human society than were political states. But he also saw the need to revolutionize industry away from the model of the firm (to use Pynchon's term) that conceived of its primary goal as profit at the expense of all else. In language that echoes Enzian's recognition, Kessler describes Rathenau's 1919 conception of a "New Economy" as Kessler saw it evolving in 1928:

But the main way in which the New Economy is taking shape is in the concentration of whole branches of industry into national and international combines, cartels, and trusts. At present, in Germany . . . coal and potash

have made the greatest strides in this direction, but other great industries are following their lead. Iron and steel, electricity and chemistry, are already far on the way to fusion into national associations. These certainly only represent the private interests of business enterprise at present, but they will inevitably bring along with them communal control and a communal industrial organization, and are helping forward the functional, as against the regional, principle of administration, in that they find themselves compelled to amalgamate with similar functional organisms in other countries. (225)

Although in hindsight we recognize the naiveté of this optimistic projection, we also see how Rathenau was more concerned with the functional organism of business and industry, an organism Pynchon renames Technology. *Gravity's Rainbow's* deployment of Rathenau's vision foregrounds that vision's most obvious flaw—its idealism that corporations would give up their private interests for the collective good. Moreover, as the case of IG Farben makes clear, Rathenau's vision was appropriated and perverted to enhance even further the power of existing industries and cartels.

Towards the end of the séance, the voice of Rathenau returns to the question of illusion and reality in phrases that echo both Kessler's account of Rathenau's ideas and Enzian's later understanding:

"You think you'd rather hear about what you call 'life': the growing, organic Kartell. But it's only another illusion. A very clever robot. The more dynamic it seems to you, the more deep and dead, in reality, it grows. [. . .]

"These signs [of Death] are real. They are also symptoms of a process. The process follows the same form, the same structure. To apprehend it you will follow the signs. All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic. Useful to you, gentlemen, but no longer so to us here. If you want the truth—I know I presume—you must look into the technology of these matters." (167)

Enzian's vision at the bombed out refinery underscores that directive to IG Farben's ruling elite to "look into the technology of these matters." And while Pynchon's representation of the role cartels play in wartime specifically features the Second World War, it has manifest relevance to the Vietnam War. The anti-war movements of the 1960s and '70s focused on revealing the culpability of multinational corporations in the prosecution of the war. As the voice of Rathenau suggests and Enzian's vision makes clear, "this War was never political at all."

If this position is to organize our reading, we have to see how it intersects with other key themes. We might include the familiar Pynchon theme of the Elect/Preterite dichotomy, since the representatives of the cartel, shadowy as They are, believe they are justified by their Election, and Pynchon has marked his seekers—Enzian, Tchitcherine, and Slothrop—with the stamp of Preterition. Ironically for the Elect at the séance, Rathenau the Jew is given voice although under Nazi ideology he would be always already Preterite. What the ruling elite at the séance cannot accept is that their beliefs are ideologically constructed.

Thus, during Enzian's revelation at the refinery, an interior dialogue occurs, containing a seemingly privileged voice coming to his consciousness from a source unspecified, but perhaps the other side:

Yes but Technology only responds (how often this argument has been iterated, dogged and humorless as a Gaussian reduction, among the younger Schwarzkommando especially), "All very well to talk about having a monster by the tail, but do you think we'd've had the Rocket if someone, some specific somebody with a name and a penis hadn't *wanted* to chuck a ton of Amatol 300 miles and blow up a block full of civilians? Go ahead, capitalize the T on technology, deify it if it'll make you feel less responsible—but it puts you in with the neutered, brother, in with the eunuchs keeping the harem of our stolen Earth for the numb and joyless hardons of human sultans, human elite with no right at all to be where they are—"

We have to look for power sources here, and distribution networks we were never taught, routes of power our teachers never imagined, or were encouraged to avoid . . . we have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world, draw our own schematics, getting feedback, making connections, reducing the error, trying to learn the real function . . . zeroing in on what incalculable plot? Up here, on the surface, coal-tars, hydrogenation, synthesis were always phony, dummy functions to hide the real, *the planetary mission* yes perhaps centuries in the unrolling . . . this ruinous plant, waiting for its Kabbalists and new alchemists to discover the Key, teach the mysteries to others. (521)

Some readers might be tempted to see this passage as a Key to the mysteries of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and if we naturalize the voice here as coming from the other side, then it would be but a short step to construct this voice as either the voice of Rathenau or the voice of Pynchon.

Such speculation, however, raises the problematic question of whether we must then assign a greater hermeneutic truth to all passages we can naturalize as coming from the other side. We can

make this move only by suspending disbelief—granting at least textual existence to the other side—and by repressing readings based more directly on the semiotic forces of textuality. Pynchon's Rathenau's second question—"what is the real nature of control?"—comes back to haunt us. Do we demand in our reading the key to the mysteries of *Gravity's Rainbow*, or should we step back and question why that demand is so important to us as readers? As often happens elsewhere, the scene of Enzian's vision closes by undercutting the vision: "Well, this is stimulant talk here, yes Enzian's been stuffing down Nazi surplus Pervitins these days like popcorn at the movies, and by now the bulk of the refinery—named, incidentally, for the famous discoverer of Oneirine—is behind them" (521–22). Yet even if Enzian's vision is no more than a drug-induced hallucination, the narrator's *incidental* reference to Oneirine reconnects the chain of signifiers to Jamf, to Wimpe and Tchitcherine, and to the first character in the narrative to mention Oneirine (166)—the voice of Rathenau. The real-life Rathenau was "'trained [in chemistry] by Hofmann'" (GR 166; see Kessler 21), who, in turn, was a member of "the true succession, Liebig to August Wilhelm von Hofmann, to Herbert Ganister to Laszlo Jamf, a direct chain, cause-and-effect" (GR 161). *Gravity's Rainbow* has plenty to say about cause-and-effect, and, as has been amply demonstrated, any suggestion of direct chains should be questioned. But rather than plunge off on a tangent—connecting Franz Pökler, the S-Gerät, Imipolex G, the Rocket and Slothrop—I want to return to the real Rathenau and his ideas of anti-capitalism.

The last words attributed to the voice of Rathenau at the séance are, "'You think you know, you cling to your beliefs. But sooner or later you will have to let them go'" (167). Rathenau's actual beliefs certainly challenged those of the ruling elite. He believed, for instance, in high taxation to redistribute wealth so workers as well as owners could live in dignity. He believed excessive profits morally corrupted business leaders; therefore, by a redistribution of profit—first through taxation and then organically within the structure of industry itself—leaders would regain their moral focus and would delight in working side by side with those they had previously oppressed. Although Rathenau was intrigued by Bolshevism, he did not see a fulfillment of his vision in the rise of the communist state, since he recognized that imposing centralized control through a political process would also lead to the oppression of workers. This interest in workers and owners alike stemmed from his concern over the effect the industrial revolution had had on the worker's soul.

In *The Mechanism of the Mind* (1913), Rathenau describes the birth of the soul in lyrical, Rilke-like terms:

A nature not touched by age surrounds him; not stones, plants, air and water, but a mysterious Cosmos teeming with life, mind, blood, light and love. Things no longer speak the language of everyday life; they whisper of the Unspoken and Unspeakable. A second Nature lies veiled behind the visible, ready to burst forth; speak but a word and all reality will disappear. The spirit of the world breathes majesty and love, and the soul when it is still young demands nothing but to give itself up to the forces of the world and be absorbed in their workings. (qtd. in Kessler 76)

But Rathenau's own "unquenchable desire for the pure life of the spirit" was always in conflict with an "irresistible urge towards commercial and technical activity and outward material success" (Kessler 18). Hence, the ideal architecture of the cartel can be seen as Rathenau's attempt to reconcile these opposing forces through an extraordinary attempt at synthesis and control. To reach the realm of the soul, he had to transform the world and reverse the accelerating trend toward the mechanization of human beings.

Rathenau saw in the First World War the cataclysmic event that could set the stage for a transformation of the capitalist model of industry and its enabling force of the nation-state. Although staunchly patriotic, he saw his role in the war as an opportunity to prove what could be accomplished through a complete understanding of cartel structures, and he expected to play a significant part in rebuilding postwar Germany and Europe along new economic lines that would bypass the older capitalist models. He never got the chance, as the old models reasserted themselves, but with one difference: Rathenau had shown, through his work in the War Procurement Office, what could be accomplished through the cartel structure. Moreover, as IG Farben proved, the work of foreign policy, especially espionage, could not be left to the whims of political and bureaucratic ideologies: the cartel needed to be constructed to survive, even if somewhat reconfigured, the next war. Rathenau's anti-capitalist vision of communal gatherings of markets and industries, owners and workers, working together to nurture the soul and not for the profit of a few, was coopted by IG Farben, Siemens, and Hugo Stinnes, and turned into the power machine Fritz Lang represented so effectively in his film *Metropolis* (1927). *Metropolis* is mentioned in *Gravity's Rainbow* when Pökler tries to tell Slothrop something about Laszlo Jamf but cannot keep from talking about movies (577–80).

Pökler recounts for Slothrop his memory of Jamf's "last lecture":

"You have the two choices [. . .] stay behind with carbon and hydrogen, take your lunch-bucket in to the works every morning with the

faceless droves who can't wait to get in out of the sunlight—or move *beyond*. [. . . M]ove beyond life, toward the inorganic. Here is no frailty, no mortality—here is Strength, and the Timeless.” (580)

Whether Jamf himself ever moves beyond remains in doubt: if he does, it is “in the least obvious way.” He “took his lunchbucket to America,” where he came “under the sinister influence of Lyle Bland” (580). Bland is involved in

an American synthesis which had never occurred before, and which opened the way to certain grand possibilities—all grouped under the term “control,” which seemed to be a private code-word—more in line with the aspirations of Bland and others. A year later [in 1933] Bland joined the Business Advisory Council set up under Swope of General Electric, whose ideas on matters of “control” ran close to those of Walter Rathenau, of German GE. (581)

I doubt it would surprise many readers if we examined Swope's ideas on matters of control and found yet another appropriation of Rathenau's anti-capitalism to serve the grand possibilities of American capitalism and its emerging international and multinational cartels.

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Notes

¹Tzvetan Todorov has theorized: “The appearance of a new character invariably involves the interruption of the preceding story, so that a new story, the one which explains the ‘now I am here’ of the new character, may be told to us” (70).

²For additional information on IG Farben, see Joseph Borkin, and Josiah E. DuBois, Jr. A number of Pynchon critics have pointed to Sasuly as a source: see Javaid Qazi, Khachig Tölölyan, and Steven Weisenburger.

³For a reading of Pynchon's interest in GE, see Hollander, PP 34.

⁴While Rathenau was in charge of the German wartime economy, he “was able to draw some of his leading assistants from the IG. One of his chief aides in charge of organisational matters was Hermann Schmitz, one of the coming men of the IG. Ultimately Schmitz succeeded Carl Duisberg as president of IG Farben and was still the number one man in IG at the end of World War II” (Sasuly 40).

⁵*Gravity's Rainbow* contains many meditations on History. Consider the alignment of Rathenau's comments with the following articulation of a narratorial response to Katje Borgesius's concern over the “conversion factor between information and lives”:

Don't forget the real business of the War is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals. The mass nature of wartime death is useful in many ways. It serves as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War. It provides raw material to be recorded into History, so that children may be taught History as sequences of violence, battle after battle, and be more prepared for the adult world. [. . .] The true war is a celebration of markets. Organic markets, carefully styled "black" by the professionals [. . .] which [operate], natch, in favor of the professionals. (105)

⁶Pynchon signals the moment the Nazis became a decisive power in German politics by staging Peter Sachsa's murder in a street action that, by textual chronology, most likely represents those following the 14 September 1930 Reichstag elections, in which the National Socialists emerged as a major party (see 152, 219–20). Indeed, Kessler's biography displays some of the ironies inherent in a pre-Nazi history of Rathenau. Kessler characterizes Rathenau's early writings as recognizing

the clear image of a world whose problems are no longer national, but international; the new world of the twentieth century which has already superseded that of the nineteenth. His systematic exploration of reality made Rathenau—who in tastes and ideals remained throughout his life a thorough Prussian, insofar as he was not a Jew of the Old Testament type—much against his inclinations into a representative of European, indeed cosmopolitan thought. And from this point he progressed inevitably to those views which are embodied in his great theoretical works, and from which proceeded his two historic achievements: the organization of the supply of German raw materials at the beginning of the war; and after the collapse, the foundation of a new German foreign policy, the so-called "policy of fulfillment," to which Germany owes the beginning of its recovery, and Europe the beginning of its rehabilitation and pacification. (42)

An analogous postwar summary is quite different. Sasuly interpretively explains a passage (the one Pynchon may have paraphrased for his "official version") from Rathenau's writings: "What Rathenau is talking about, under a light mist of verbiage, is a completely cartelized state. Given further development with a strong dose of police brutality and creation of a phony 'race science,' it is a Nazi State" (Sasuly 41).

⁷To get the original German, Pynchon probably consulted a German edition of Kessler's work. Kessler quotes the refrain in the last chapter of his book as he discusses the context of and the events leading to Rathenau's assassination. (Pynchon may also have been inspired by the chapter's title: "There Is No Death.") The only other source I have found where Pynchon may have discovered the street refrain is James Joll, who quotes the German

version Pynchon slightly alters: “Knallt ab den Walther [“Juden” in *GR*] Rathenau / Die gottverdammte Judensau” (125; GR 163).

⁸Qazi notes that one of Pynchon’s sources for rocket information (Theodore Von Karman, *The Wind and Beyond* [1967] 276) “also mentions one Frank Tchitcherine, an American intelligence agent who was assigned to [von Karman] in order to help him screen refugee German Scientists (most of them from Peenemünde and the factory at Nordhausen) at the end of hostilities in 1945. This Tchitcherine is related to the Tchitcherine in the Kerensky government” (17). Another possible source for the transliteration Tchitcherine is Viscount D’Abernon’s memoir of the Rapallo treaty negotiations.

⁹It should not surprise us that the man in charge of the *Verbindungsmänner*, Max Ilgner, was a nephew of Hermann Schmitz, the Chairman of the managing board of directors of IG Farben—the same Hermann Schmitz who worked for Rathenau in the materials procurement office during the First World War. As Borkin reports:

Over the years [Ilgner] had developed a good relationship with a young officer on the economic staff; Georg Thomas, keeping him informed of developments in the manufacture of synthetic oil at Leuna. By no means incidental to the friendship was Thomas’s active role as an army officer pushing raw material self-sufficiency [Rathenau’s goal in the First World War], especially in oil and rubber. In fact, back in 1928 [not long before *GR*’s Rathenau séance], he had written a secret memorandum on behalf of the Army Ordnance economic staff recommending the development of synthetics “through new discoveries and inventions” to replace strategic raw materials that Germany had to import from abroad. He specifically referred to I.G.’s synthetic oil development at Leuna, noting that when “substitutes for foreign raw materials can be developed only through very expensive processes, these must be supported by Army Ordnance.” Technologically and financially, Thomas’s thinking was the unconventional kind that I.G. appreciated. (58–59)

It is likely that the “Jamf Ölfabriken [Synthetic Oil] Werke,” near Hamburg, at which Enzian has his Rathenauian vision is modeled after IG’s Leuna synthetic oil refinery: Enzian finds Pavel sniffing “Leunagasolin” and having “Leunahalluziationen” (520–23). These coincidences take on greater resonance given Hollander’s research on the cooperation of IG Farben and Standard Oil, and the relation both have to Pynchon family history (PI 29–30).

¹⁰This is not the only place Pynchon uses a fictional character—especially an unlikely-seeming one—to represent concepts or convey information from the extrafictional world. Examples include Blodgett Waxwing’s analogy based on the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle (385), and both Josef Ombindi’s and Beláustegui’s references to continental drift (321, 388).

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