

Haunted History and *Gravity's Rainbow*

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For twenty-two years after *Gravity's Rainbow* was published, the source-text of Pynchon's epigraph from German rocket scientist Wernher von Braun remained a mystery. Now that we have it in full (see Appendix), criticism needs to reckon with this little homily on immortality. Recovered from History's dustbin and used as an epigraph to the most ghost-ridden novel in our time, Pynchon's epigraph poses incisive questions about the dead, about justice for and histories about them.

Gravity's Rainbow takes von Braun's scientific dictum, that "Nothing disappears without a trace," and turns it back against "Why I Believe in Immortality" by giving that preachy text a transformed afterlife, indeed. Note that in the quoting Pynchon radically trimmed it, excising von Braun's implicit claims that modern science would validate transcendentalist beliefs in an afterlife. More significantly, Pynchon cut the Space Expert's claims that belief in immortality creates human desires for "ethical action" and that such action makes a counterforce capable of preventing nuclear holocaust, itself the brainchild of applied scientists like von Braun, who created one of modernity's great weapons of terror. Still, in trimming this quotation, Pynchon declines to evoke that heavy historical irony haunting von Braun's own words, irony in the form of a leaden hypocrisy heavy enough to bring his spiraling, piously self-serving homily back down to Earth where it doubtless belongs. That Pynchon did not wish to evoke that irony at this crucial moment, when the reader walks through the doorway of his great novel, can be further seen in how he also excised von Braun's own epigraph from Ben Franklin—an earlier, kite-in-the-sky "Space Expert." As phantom epigraph spooking the von Braun epigraph, Franklin's words about divine justice might be taken as sign and symptom of the Space Expert's troubled consciousness, or the conscience of a whole class of modern technocrats, whom he clearly represents. By its end, *Gravity's Rainbow* will have taken fuller measure of that irony.

Lacking the entire source-text of the novel's epigraph, Pynchon's earlier critics hardly knew what to do with it. A few perceptive readers like Joel D. Black (23–24) sensed its heavy ironies despite Pynchon's cutting. Nonetheless, until Joseph Tabbi set the source before us in

Postmodern Sublime (5–6), critics like Robert Nadeau (137–38) and Susan Strehle (27–30) assumed that Pynchon quoted von Braun mainly to set up his novel's metaphors of indeterminacy and acausality, its sense of the unobservable but energetic phenomena defined in quantum dynamics. Only Tabbi, working from the full text, developed a wider sense of its ironies as he put the epigraph in context with technocratic psychology and its rhetorics of evasion and deniability.

This essay extends that conversation. I explore how, taking von Braun at his word, *Gravity's Rainbow* continues the "spiritual existence" of the 1962 homily, "Why I Believe in Immortality," ironies and all. I argue that von Braun's words haunt the novel just as pragmatist inventor Ben Franklin's epigraph about the promise of immortal justice evidently haunts von Braun's own text. But we should not see this as only a one-way process of haunting. Instead, as counterspell or reverse-magic, Pynchon's degenerative satire is meant to spook and thus to disrupt the historical sources of its own—of *our own*—terror, sources von Braun well represents.

Thus I begin by taking Wernher von Braun at his word, as literally referring to immortal ghosts and their hauntings. In practical terms this means projecting some of *Gravity's Rainbow's* most notably fantastic scenes through the lens of its epigraph, thus to see what they tell us about Pynchon's historiographical method. It means taking up its myriad of ghosts, wraiths, séance visitants, spooks, angels, qliphoth, specters, revenants and haints as scriptible phenomena consistent with the novel's counter-memory. Doing so can bring into tight focus some generally overlooked features of Pynchon's novel, especially in its first 250 or 300 pages. One of their most insistent themes is the final solution or assault of a bureaucratized, technologized fascism on human life, figured as the attempt to colonize and dominate Death, to rationalize the Other Side. Of course von Braun's mini-sermon implied that Science would eventually do just that. What is remarkable, however, is how his epigraph focuses a great deal of the novel's characterization, plotting, and revisionary historiography.

Also, some of its wackiest hijinks. An example: in 1939 Tyrone Slothrop loses his Hohner harmonica down a Roseland Ballroom toilet, perhaps even reaches or dives down after it. (Here, to the tune of "Red River Valley," all should sing the accompanying lyric: "Down this toilet they say you are flushin' — / Won'tchew light up and set fer a spell? / 'Cause the toilet it ain't going nowhar, / And the shit hereabouts shore is swell" [68].) But remember—while still humming—that intriguing claim in von Braun's phantom text: "nothing can disappear without a trace." So indeed, 554 pages and six years later, Slothrop recovers the Hohner in Northern Germany, not exactly the same blues harp, but one

transformed, ghosted now by the "spirits of lost harpmen." They are congenial spirits, for in Pynchon's mythography that's always the case with chthonic, Earthly souls, and their blues presence trains Slothrop to be an Orphic player or, in the narrator's phrase, "a spirit-medium" (622).

But back to those first 300 pages. Until V-E Day and part 2's end, Pynchon's action sequences consistently take up ghostly matters, but in a special sense. The narrative's main effort is to show psychic researchers attempting to rationalize and thus to *manage* paranormal phenomena. Generally the novel understands their work as historical denouement: in the narrator's phrasing, these researchers represent Europe "in the last weary stages of its perversion of magic" (277). Psi Section, "The White Visitation," Pirate Prentice's practical work as "fantasist-surrogate" for military brass too important to waste time being haunted, Carroll Eventyr's "freak talent" of surrendering his consciousness to ghostly spirits like Peter Sachsa's, even Brigadier Pudding's capacity to "live with this spiritualist gang well enough" to occupy the command-chain over them: all these characters put into motion the imaginary world of the novel's first 29 episodes.

In a powerfully straightforward synopsis at the end of part 2, our narrator remarks that this whole bureaucracy "began as a search for some measurable basis for the common experience of being haunted by the dead" (276). Hence Edwin Treacle's work on a sociology of specters. "'How,'" he asks, "'can you understand them without treating both sides of the wall of death with the same scientific approach?'" (153). Hence also statistician Roger Mexico's desire to be "graphing Standardized Kill Rates per Ton for the bomber groups" (40) rather than extracting séance transcripts for word frequencies indicating the possible presence of ghosts, work the bureaucracy enlists him in dully doing. Then there's the extraordinary plot centering on Tyrone Slothrop, haunted first by his Puritan ancestors, those "ghosts of fishermen, glassworkers, fur traders, renegade preachers, hilltop patriarchs and valley politicians [who] go avalanching back" in his genealogy (203), but haunted also and perhaps more decisively by German chemist/behaviorist Laszlo Jamf, who seems to exist, according to our narrator (focalizing through Pointsman), as a ghost "on the Slothropian cortex [. . .] a survival, if you will, of a piece of the late Dr. Jamf himself, past death" (168). Note the echo of von Braun's 1962 phrasing.

Of signal importance in these first 300 pages are Pynchon's remarkably detailed uses of Pavlovian psychology to represent his bureaucrats' attempts to colonize Death's Other Kingdom. Yet before turning to those examples we ought to pose questions of definition and

function. What is a ghost? What kind of figure? And made for what manner of cultural work? Happily there are useful new answers to such questions because ghosts, right now, are hot.

Ghosts are powerful yet paradoxical presences in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Pynchon's novels—for *Vineland* and especially *Mason & Dixon* are among the more haunted contemporary fictions. Among theorists, too, specters are equally hot. A work of political philosophy, Derrida's *Specters of Marx* calls on us to deal justly with Marx's many spirits after, and even in spite of, International Communism's 1989 death. In *Ghostly Matters*, social theorist Avery Gordon links analyses of historical trauma, Gothic fictions, and victims of state-sponsored terror in a powerful call for achieving social justice on behalf of a profound underclass: for example, the victims and survivors of genocide, who have generally been excluded from sociological analyses. (Edwin Treacle, meet Avery Gordon.)

These thinkers agree: hauntings befuddle and, in their strongest forms, deconstruct easy dichotomies of real/unreal, actual/inactual, being/non-being, or living/not-living. Moreover, ghostly signifiers trouble the brand of deconstruction practiced in McHoul and Wills's provocative book, *Writing Pynchon*. Analyzing how *Gravity's Rainbow* deconstructs such dichotomies as those between preterite and elect, or a "We-system" versus a "They-system," McHoul and Wills hold that Pynchon's writing substitutes for the rhetorical dichotomy a material equivalence in the form of a "typonym." Part of their larger effort to resist so-called empirical strategies that privilege key quotations as "points of determinate verification" in a reading, such claims have tended in Pynchon studies particularly and postmodernist theory generally to license trivializing conclusions about erasure, free-play and indeterminacy. However, as Pynchon and Derrida both recognize and Michael Bérubé reminds us (224–39), a deconstructed dualism neither licenses wholesale free-play nor becomes inoperative and ahistorical. It does not lose its contexts; it can and I think must remain at least latently conscious of a text's haunted beginnings in the world of historically contingent events, including prior texts. In any case, I would have trouble with a McHoul-and-Willsian approach to ghostly phenomena as just "material typonyms," a view that should be seen as authorizing folks like Pointsman, for it capsulizes ghosts simply as printed ink on pages in a post-rhetorical, post-ethical world.

In Derrida, by contrast, the specter is "a certain phenomenal and carnal form of spirit" (6). More than just paradoxical, it is a present absence apprehended always only as the undead form of its dead substance. One way to apprehend them is to see how ghostly

phenomena impossibly light up all four corners of Greimas's semiotic rectangle and therefore are, anticipating the extraordinary ligature Pynchon makes to Pavlovian terminology, "ultraparadoxical." In fact, this ultraparadoxicality explains why Derrida insists there should be no metaphors of specters, because rather than standing as one type of figure among others, they have an alternative, indexical function in regard to processes of trauma and mourning. Indeed, Derrida situates "hauntology" amidst other practices in philosophy, hermeneutics and psychoanalysis that operate under the general rubric of "mourning." Across the disciplines, he who is visited by ghosts is "attempting to ontologize remains" (9). Such work, in Derrida's view, is vital to doing revisionary historical and cultural recovery in our post-Holocaust age.

This prospect of doing revisionary historiography opens out because ghostly visitations—like Hamlet's—typically pose the unreadability of a legacy. Ghosts demand investigations of genealogies or histories of error and wrong which, if they were legible in the first place, would threaten to overthrow existing authorities who got power precisely by those wrongs they dissimulated and left for survivors to decipher. Derrida comments that the spectral effect thus consists in undoing the opposition between the actual present and its other. It undoes causal temporality:

If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-absence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself. Before knowing whether one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future, of the past present and the future present, one must perhaps ask oneself whether the *spectrality effect* does not consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other. (39–40)

Elsewhere I have analyzed the disruptions of causal temporality in *Gravity's Rainbow* under the rhetorical aegis of *hysteron proteron* and argued that they contribute to the novel's postmodern satirical project. Here, I want to consider the novel's haunted scenes as participating in a historiographical project whose subjects are the almost-erased multitudes, the Others of white, technocratic society.

This project might trace its own rhizomatic threads back not only to *Hamlet* but to the Gothic novel: consider, for instance, how Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* (1799) is haunted by the almost

exterminated “Red Man.” Another thread runs back to the threshold of postwar culture. In 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote a brief note titled “On the Theory of Ghosts” as appendix to their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There they argue that a “disturbed relationship with the dead” constitutes “one of the symptoms of the sickness of experience today” (215). With the Second World War’s totalitarianism and genocide as backdrop, they remark how the so-called enlightened state reduces individuals “to a mere sequence of instantaneous experiences” in modern mass culture. Why? Because such people’s seemingly ephemeral presences make them into more willing, entranced instruments of the total state and furthermore enable its power elite to brand them as members of an ethnic or racial underclass and thus, when political expediency requires, to expunge them from memory. This happens all the more easily because modern states rise on the ephemerality of mass culture but also define subaltern cultures as “irrational, superfluous, and ‘overtaken’ in the literal sense” (216). It is as if Progressive History—writ large—has absolutely surpassed them, for subaltern people appear to have no role in the great drama of statecraft and progressive industry. What, therefore, can Official History have to do with them? Vanished apparently without traces, after the Final Solution, they have “no history outside the specific sphere of historical science” (216), erected as it is on the rational analysis of documents.

Not that these subjects pass over without having had memories or pasts—these American blacks, Herero tribespeople, aboriginal Argentineans, or Dora Camp Jews and dissidents. Still, as Horkheimer and Adorno insist, their passing will always be “a wound in civilization” (216) and a haunting history because so without documents or physical traces, sometimes leaving historians to grapple with seemingly mute objects like teeth or instruments of torture. Healing that wound and composing the victims’ history therefore require summoning memories from such remains. How else are we to speak with and of those dead, except by such visitations? They are realized not through free-floating “material typonyms,” but by residues and resistant materials sodden with contingent but factual histories.

Among contemporary socio-cultural historians, Michel de Certeau most effectively models that kind of practice, and his work helps to theorize Pynchon’s ghosted fictions. De Certeau begins by understanding historiography as addressing a double absence. Not only is conventional history temporally alienated from the presence of its subjects; it is further alienated from oppressed people. Below even those middling figures Georg Lukács distinguished from “world-historical individuals” and considered the real subjects for historical

novels, below the *Verbindungsmann* or bureaucrat or technician, the truly oppressed are relegated to a double absence. Not only an elite class of leaders and great men but a greater host of apparatchiks and technocrats stands over them, uses them and, as a "final solution," exterminates them as abject and disposable Others. For De Certeau, this violence leaves marks on spirits as well as bodies, marks on victors as well as their victims, marks the historian is ethically obliged to interrogate. To neglect or set aside such marks would mean surrendering discourse to the melancholic's obsessive repetitions of past horror rather than attempting the still harder task of working through, of mourning. It would be unethical.

De Certeau's principal claim is that one must therefore attend to the murmurs from these undead victims, must develop a "heterology" or discourse of the Other. Once the historian realizes how he or she can no longer "construct an empire" of narratives legitimizing the state's explanations and dodges, the job requires one, in De Certeau's phrase, "to circulate *around* acquired forms of rationality" in search of murmurs from its outside (H 18). Getting beyond the zero of rationality and becoming, in De Certeau's words, "a prowler" or nomadic investigator moves inquiry into sorcery, madness, festival, popular literature and ghostly phenomena. Conventional history, De Certeau remarks, has always dismissed those discourses because they refuse to behave as "an inert corpus" for dissection. Instead, as wandering, ghostly, phantasmatic traces of an Other that menaces hegemonic rationality, these murmurings need to remain relatively disembodied in order to surprise. Just so, in Pynchon's source-work on the Herero, on Peenemünde or on Pavlov, such figures loom up from the margins or footnotes on neglected back pages, or haunt us from deep within a metaphor or mundane bureaucratic rite. Consider, for instance, how Pynchon conjured ordinary life at Peenemünde from offhand remarks in General Walter Dornberger's memoir. Similarly, as Bernard Duyfhuizen has shown, Pynchon's narration of the 1930 Berlin séance where the spirit of German Jewish industrialist Walter Rathenau makes a cameo appearance draws on minor elements recollected in Count Harry Kessler's *Walther Rathenau: His Life and Work*. De Certeau examines official records for similar traces, and all but names this a contra-rational, ghostly practice when he describes the historian's responsibility to use such archives to "summon a forgotten figure back to life" (WH 6). In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison aptly imagines it as the responsibility to attend to a "rememory."

Passages scattered throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* reveal Pynchon working in this revisionary historical mode. I have selected one extraordinary paragraph, from Slothrop's tour through the underground

Mittelwerke at Nordhausen during an early episode in part 3, because it illustrates all these features in addition to a remarkable (even if blackly humorous) self-consciousness about haunted history. I quote the passage in full (ellipses and all) because its every detail groans with traces of the dead, forgotten Dora concentration-camp workers whose only will and testament is this underworld scene, and because this scene forces the recognition, which resembles but is not quite a "nostalgia," that residues of those victims' passing make it difficult "to live in the present for very long":

Lakes of light, portages of darkness. The concrete facing of the tunnel has given way to whitewash over chunky fault-surfaces, phony-looking as the inside of an amusement-park cave. Entrances to cross-tunnels slip by like tuned pipes with an airflow at their mouths . . . once upon a time lathes did screech, playful machinists had shootouts with little brass squirt cans of cutting oil . . . knuckles were bloodied against grinding wheels, pores, creases and quicks were stabbed by the fine splinters of steel . . . tubeworks of alloy and glass contracted tinkling in air that felt like the dead of winter, and amber light raced in phalanx among the small neon bulbs. Once, all this did happen. It is hard down here in the Mittelwerke to live in the present for very long. The nostalgia you feel is not your own, but it's potent. All the objects have grown still, drowned, enfeebled with evening, terminal evening. Tough skins of oxides, some only a molecule thick, shroud the metal surfaces, fade out human reflection. Straw-colored drive belts of polyvinyl alcohol sag and release their last traces of industrial odor. Though found adrift and haunted, full of signs of recent human tenancy, this is not the legendary ship *Marie-Celeste*—it isn't bounded so neatly, these tracks underfoot run away fore and aft into all stilled Europe, and our flesh doesn't sweat and pimple here for the domestic mysteries, the attic horror of What Might Have Happened so much as for our knowledge of what likely *did happen* . . . it was always easy, in open and lonely places, to be visited by Panic wilderness fear, but these are the urban fantods here, that come to get you when you are lost or isolate inside the way time is passing, when there is no more History, no time-traveling capsule to find your way back to, only the lateness and the absence that fill a great railway shed after the capital has been evacuated, and the goat-god's city cousins wait for you at the edges of the light, playing the tunes they always played, but more audible now, because everything else has gone away or fallen silent . . . barn-swallow souls, fashioned of brown twilight, rise toward the white ceilings . . . they are unique to the Zone, they answer to the new Uncertainty. Ghosts used to be either likenesses of the dead or wraiths of the living. But here in the Zone categories have been blurred badly. The status of the name you miss, love, and search for now

has grown ambiguous and remote, but this is even more than the bureaucracy of mass absence—some still live, some have died, but many, many have forgotten which they are. Their likenesses will not serve. Down here are only wrappings left in the light, in the dark: images of the Uncertainty. . . . (303)

Details of Slothrop's Mittelwerke tour—the pipes, drive belts, lathes, cross-tunnels, even the shadows—all derive from photographs and descriptions in historical books by David Irving (*The Mare's Nest*, 1964) and James McGovern (*Crossbow and Overcast*, also 1964). Those objects, right down to the oil-cans, had historical reality.

Pynchon imagines these objects, however, as themselves verging on death—as shrouded, drowned, and releasing their last vapors into a “terminal evening.” All of it suggests more than the human dying that defines Dora and the Mittelwerke: perhaps a vast, technological dying-out. As for that, this whole *topos* feels “adrift and haunted, full of signs of recent human tenancy,” like the nineteenth-century ghost-ship *Marie-Celeste*. But precisely those abandoned, dying objects enable the narrator to summon back the Dora concentration-camp workers. Focalizing through Slothrop, he ontologizes from those remains the now incorporeal bodies of the dead machinists, right down to their once bloodied knuckles and fingernail quicks “stabbed by fine splinters of steel.” It is an extraordinarily detailed passage of historiographical speculation, in its expansive sentences as stylistically moving and powerful as anything else in the novel. As for Slothrop, in touring these caverns he senses (as do we) the spectral presences as “barn-swallow souls” flitting toward ceilings.

Beyond troubling the boundary separating dead from undead, these spirits pose a further uncertainty. They blur traditional categories of ghosts as *post hoc* “likenesses of the dead” in contrast to wraiths as *propter hoc* images of those fated to die. Also, in thus answering to and imaging “the new Uncertainty” left in the War's backwash, these souls are seen as identical with the Zone's displaced persons. An instance of the novel's broader problematic of temporality, and especially its obsession with reversible processes as another symptom of ontological displacements in the Rocket Age, the Mittelwerke haunting poses an undecidability that Pynchon revisits at the book's conclusion. There he represents the Schwarzkommando's September 1945 launching of their reassembled A4 as both a “ghost-firing” of Weissmann's quintuple-zero fired back in April, and a wraith-like foreshadowing of that rocket hanging above the Orpheus Theatre in the final frozen moment from the 1970s. And the point of it all is to force questions about *how* “the bureaucracy of mass absence” operates, and

just what the survivors' responsibilities are to those nameless, ambiguous and remote victims.

To Derrida those questions are exactly what any analysis of spectral phenomena must take up. Hauntings always call for the redressing of wrongs and must involve matters of justice: "What is ours? In what way is it historical? And what does it have to do with so many specters?" Derrida asks (40, 51). In postmodernity especially, answers cannot avoid taking into account spectral effects: simulacra, synthetic or prosthetic happenings in cyberspace, new televisual and cybernetic media for surveillance and control—cybernetic features *Gravity's Rainbow* represents in their nascent stages, during the Space Expert's researches of the thirties and forties. Still we have to take up the issue posed by von Braun's Ben Franklin epigraph, that snippet haunting Pynchon's own: Whence comes justice, in such a techno-social condition? Baudrillard comments that our "moral and social conscience is now a phenomenon entirely governed by the media" (91), and if he is right, then justice itself has become a spectral process. How then shall we ever deal with this century's ghastly horde of victims clamoring for redress at the jurisprudential bar? More to the point, what possible interventions can writing attempt?

Pushing Derrida's analysis along these lines, we arrive at two general claims. The spectral scene is always, Derrida argues, an appeal for justice, for redress of historical wrongs. But it is also a demand for alternative, heterological approaches to writing up historical evidence, in De Certeau's sense. For western literary history, as *Specters of Marx* so powerfully argues, *Hamlet* well represents the conventional drama of haunted justice. What forms, then, would a heterological literature assume?

Turning to Pynchon, wouldn't a full-dress treatment find that hauntings in both these unconventional senses play a crucial role in his fictions? In *V.*, Stencil quests for a shape-shifting spirit who seems to have haunted the back rooms and alleys of all modern history. *The Crying of Lot 49* opens with Pierce Inverarity's demand—practically from his grave—that Oedipa execute his testamentary will, in other words, that she take responsibility for administering an inheritance that may, or may not, reveal itself as an unsuspected, haunted history of disinherited souls, including (just for example) a drunken sailor whose only textual legacy will be his bodily secretions palimpsested on a soiled mattress, a legacy Oedipa despairs of ever decoding before the mattress blazes up in an irreversible holocaust, disappearing him from history.

Vineland traces Reagan-era reactionary politics back to sixties-era counter-revolutionary conspiracies, finding there (as our narrator puts

it) a "geist that could've been polter as well as zeit" (208). And where did those sixties poltergeists come from? *Vineland* explores fifties, thirties and 1890s leftism as a genealogy spooking the present. With its Thanatoids, revenants who "feel little else beyond their needs for revenge" (171), and with its sacrificial victim, the aptly named Weed Atman, *Vineland* insists on the maxim Frenesi Gates gets from her father, in a dream: "'Take care of your dead, or they'll take care of you'" (370).

Mason & Dixon not only includes more haunted episodes than any other Pynchon novel; it also does a great deal of explicit thinking *about* ghosts: their sociality, their relations to temporality and history, to corporeality and Earthliness, including how boundary crossings occur, and what it is, finally, *ghosts want*. Early in the novel, Wicks Cherrycoke remarks that "Men of reason will define a ghost as nothing more otherworldly than a wrong unrighted"—as, in short, little more than a trope, without agency. But Mason and Dixon are shown regarding ghosts as much more than that: as "invisible yet possessing Mass, and velocity, able not only to rattle Chains but to break them as well" (68)—once again, poltergeists with a powerfully disruptive agency. Maskelyne tells the initially incredulous Mason that St. Helena is "'haunted [by] an Obstinate Specter'" (132) outraged over the devastation of the island's ebony forests. Later, in America, Mason and Dixon's Visto slashed through the Alleghenies becomes an expressway for angry revenants "'Howling like a great Boulevard of souls condemn'd to wander'" (547). Some are specters of Shawanese and English killed during the westward advance of empire; other angry spirits might be understood as representing the chthonic forces of Earth's tortured body, signs of Pynchon's increasingly insistent eco-critical agenda from *Gravity's Rainbow* onward.

Even so, *Mason & Dixon's* innovation on the spectral drama amounts to little more than widening the call for justice to include non-human subjects. Otherwise, from *V.* onward, Pynchon's haunted fictions make the conventional demand for equity before history's bar, at the same time representing and calling for heterological practices as means of achieving that end.

The exception, though, is *Gravity's Rainbow*, and its specialness consists in Pynchon's critique of a lunatic modern science for pursuing exactly the goals von Braun preaches: the goals of rationalizing and utilizing ghostly phenomena. The novel picks up that project *in medias res*. Before his own death in a V-2 blast, Kevin Spectro asks Pointsman, "'suppose we considered the war itself as a *laboratory?*'" (49). But of course it already is one, and the aptly named "White Visitation" points its research effort specifically at colonizing and controlling spirits

"beyond the zero," thus to command an otherwise unpredictable and ultraparadoxical drama of justice and make it precisely the media-induced spectacle Baudrillard laments. Evidence of this fantastic conspiracy is everywhere in the novel's first two parts, and even implies tentative successes. Roland Feldspath, for instance: a ghost operating "from eight kilometers, the savage height," he functions as "one of the invisible Interdictors of the stratosphere now, bureaucratized hopelessly on that side as ever on this," and his job is to instruct Allied technicians in matters of ballistic control. "That's one of his death's secret missions" (238). For him the War's bureaucratic assignments truly do extend beyond Death's threshold.

Milton Gloaming's séance studies, Carroll Eventyr's "freak talent" as a spirit-medium and Prentice's surrogate hauntings all coordinate with the greater death-side conspiracy. Among them, however, Pointsman's Pavlovian researches are obviously the master technology. Attempting to push conditioned reflexes into a "transmarginal" phase, to trace their life-span "beyond the zero" of their extinction at the hands of lab technicians and to theorize such transformations as ultraparadoxical phenomena that blur "ideas of the opposite," including Life versus Death, Pointsman pursues Wernher von Braun's *Words to Live By* fantasy of immortal souls socializing in an afterlife. He wonders: for a Slothrop presumably taken transmarginal during Jamf's researches, is the V-2 a stimulus operating like "some precursor wraith" (86)? In other words, is it a substanceless yet perceivable form exerting a gravitational pull into its future? To find out, he and his colleagues skid Slothrop "out onto the Zone like a planchette on a Ouija board" to see whether "what shows up inside the empty circle in his brain might string together into a message" from the Other Side (283). By the end, I'd say nothing much shows up, except for Slothrop's long-lost Hohner and his Orphic powers as a spirit-medium for dead harpists. A net loss for Pointsman's crew, but a net gain for socially downcast souls like those bluesmen.

During its first 300 pages, *Gravity's Rainbow* may be read as a satire on the degenerate hubris of Western Science, pilloried for its attempted colonization of Death's Other Kingdom. After the first two parts, in fact right about when Slothrop tours the Mittelwerke just after V-E Day, the novel slips back into conventional representations of ghostly phenomena. Now the Hereros discourse with dead ancestors clamoring for redress of General von Trotha's genocidal terror in South-West Africa, Greta Erdmann feels a haunting apprehension that she may be Jewish, and Tchitcherine's wraith-like haunting seems to predict his own eventual summons to the bar of justice, as in a Moslem-style examination of the recently dead. A flashback to Lyle

Bland's Rosicrucian-inspired out-of-body travel and eventual death, around 1935, reminds readers that "The White Visitation"'s wartime project for technologizing the afterlife has a certain genealogy. The project also involves a radical break from the past: "It wasn't always so," remarks our narrator, recalling that "[i]n the trenches of the First World War," soldiers were able to "find in the faces of other young men evidence of otherworldly visits, some poor hope that may have helped redeem even mud, shit, the decaying pieces of human meat" (616). So it will do to say that during the novel's last two parts readers are safely returned to a conventionally natural-supernatural mode of ghostly matters. No colonialist conspiracy here, just ghosts—an altogether familiar ground for readers of Pynchon's fictions.

As in *Lot 49* and *Vineland*, Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* imagines a thoroughly haunted modern world. For communist apparatchiks in Central Asia, words, even letters, are spooked by unsuspected etymological and even phonetic traces (354–56). Spam tins turn up again, "reincarnated" as toy trucks for the kiddies on Boxing Day (133). Even toothpaste tubes, recycled and thus "returned to the War," bear in their metal forever after not only the "phantoms of peppermint" but also the imprints of Londoners' fingers, immortalized even when the tubes are melted for solder or pounded into gaskets (130). This list could go on at some length. Indeed, there are moments like this in the other novels, but with nothing like the same frequency and intensity of effect as in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The satire on western technologies haunted by specters of the world they have desolated, but still driven to colonize and dominate the Other Side—the domain of the Dead—is, however, unique to the 1973 novel.

"Science . . . tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace." For Wernher von Braun, this dictum called enlightened researchers to the project of conquering immortality, even the world of soul, and indenturing its subjects. For a doubting Thomas Pynchon, whose earliest writings test a Luddite romanticism that his mature books have shaped into full-blown satirical subversions, that kind of official summons to a von Braun-style project, articulated in Germany and the United States as a vast government-sponsored bureaucracy and cartelized industry, demands a resisting, anarchic counterforce. I have argued that *Gravity's Rainbow* does that work by composing a countermemory, a haunted history whose main effort is not the rationalizing and policing of useable souls but a bodying forth of souls cast off from a voracious, late-capitalist war machine, a listening to their murmurings as testimonies in an act of judgment. Not von Braun's cheesy, depoliticized judgment but a fully vested anarchic

critique of the techno-fascism that has left and still leaves this century strewn with tortured souls.

Some discussion of the novel's anarchic politics has cropped up on the Pynchon List, particularly after the Unabomber's arrest. Some of it has touched on Kirkpatrick Sale's writings on Ludditism. To date, however, there is no extended analysis of Pynchon's politics in the published criticism. Still, what is the genealogy of Pynchon's haunted, and haunting, critique, and what are its rhizomatic ties to related movements in eco-criticism? Here, after all, is a writer who apparently fancies "A Soul in ev'ry stone" and has crafted a haunted, revisionary historiography as well as a Luddite anarchism to go with that fancy, but we have treated his books as if they were freaks of nature, without pasts or parallels. In *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers* (293–94), Bérubé wonders if the failure to ask such questions is owing to our own (conservative) institutional commitments, as university scholars working the tenure track.

Two years after *Gravity's Rainbow* was published, Richard Poirier warned that Pynchon's canonization would be "a cause not for celebration but for misgiving" (19). After a quarter-century I partly agree. The best we have managed to do with Pynchon's hauntings is a discussion of Gothic conventions in Douglas Fowler's *Reader's Guide to Gravity's Rainbow*, while the overriding political questions, especially those touching on cybernetics and the spectral world of televisual phenomena, have been literarily contextualized in Tabbi's superb chapter and well theorized in John Johnston's recent work—but they have not been historically contextualized.

Time, then, to be up and doing. We ought to sing a verse of "Snap to, Slothrop" (61) or maybe "Time to gather your arse up off the floor" (8). Where's the kazoo orchestra to back us up?

—University of Kentucky

Appendix:
Why I Believe in Immortality
by Wernher von Braun
Inventor and Space Expert

"I believe . . . that the soul of Man is immortal
and will be treated with justice in another life
respecting its conduct in this."

—Benjamin Franklin

Today, more than ever before, our survival—yours and mine and our children's—depends on our adherence to ethical principles. Ethics alone will decide whether atomic energy will be an earthly blessing or the source of mankind's utter destruction.

Where does the desire for ethical action come from? What makes us want to be ethical? I believe there are two forces which move us. One is belief in a Last Judgment, when every one of us has to account for what we did with God's great gift of life on the earth. The other is belief in an immortal soul, a soul which will cherish the award or suffer the penalty decreed in a final Judgment.

Belief in God and in immortality thus gives us the moral strength and the ethical guidance we need for virtually every action in our daily lives.

In our modern world many people seem to feel that science has somehow made such "religious ideas" untimely or old-fashioned.

But I think science has a real surprise for the skeptics. Science, for instance, tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace.

Think about that for a moment. Once you do, your thoughts about life will never be the same.

Science has found that nothing can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation!

Now, if God applies this fundamental principle to the most minute and insignificant parts of His universe, doesn't it make sense to assume that He applies it also to the masterpiece of His creation—the human soul? I think it does. And everything science has taught me—and continues to teach me—strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace.

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