The Business of Living: *Gravity's Rainbow*, Evolution, and the Advancement of Capitalism

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Over the last few years, I have noticed among my students of American literature a marked decrease in enthusiasm for Pynchon's works. Between the late seventies, when I was an undergraduate encountering Pynchon for the first time, and now, when my undergraduates encounter Pynchon for the first time, attitudes have undergone a sea change. Among several reasons for this change, one broad shift in cultural attitudes is particularly noteworthy.

In the seventies, what was called at the time Pynchon's paranoid vision of a global conspiracy mounted by the military-industrial complex against the interests of the individual was very compelling. But in the nineties, this image of multinational cartels working toward global destruction is both so real as to be passé and, at the same time, inauthentic in the context of advanced postindustrial capitalism. *Gravity's Rainbow* presents an image of late corporate capitalism as dominated by multinational cartels engaged in a complex struggle with the forces of nature, over which they seek total control. Recent developments in management theory and public-sector initiatives like Al Gore's National Performance Review, however, indicate a trend toward decentralization, worker empowerment and diversification or "organized anarchy" in late capitalism. So is the identification of postmodernism with global capitalism really accurate? If postmodernism is more usefully identified with the rise of service-based information economies and the shift to postindustrialization, what is the consequence for Pynchon's representation of the postmodern marketplace?

1. Postmodernism and Global Capitalism

In "The Politics of Theory" and especially in "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Fredric Jameson argues that postmodernism is the cultural dominant of late capitalism. But he holds back from a full exploration of crucial terms and maintains a distance between culture and the economy, especially the postmodern corporation. As a consequence, his identification of global capitalism with other features of postmodernism is too easy.

Jameson describes postmodern culture as a consumer society or media society or information society, in contrast to the society of classical capitalism characterized by the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle. Contemporary multinational capitalism has integrated aesthetic production with commodity production, with the result that postmodernism (as distinct now from modernism) has a different set of social and cultural relations within capitalism. Jameson calls "obvious," and so does not elaborate, the global, totalized nature of multinational capitalism that has produced the culture called postmodern. "[T]his whole global, yet American, postmodern culture," he writes, "is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and horror" (PCL 57). He then dwells on a catalogue of postmodern cultural "symptoms," at the expense of an analysis of just what postmodern capitalism looks like, exploring in detail the characteristics of contemporary cultural expression that Terry Eagleton calls the "depthless, styleless, dehistoricized, decathected surfaces of postmodernist culture" (386).

Jameson's vision of the decentered subject, transformed from bourgeois ego to a network of free-floating and impersonal "intensities" (PCL 64), and an accompanying fragmentation of social life into private styles and codes is especially disturbing, not because I want to defend the idea of the unified subject but because Jameson fails to apply these powerful concepts to the global corporations that produce the capitalist motivations for postmodernism. That is, while he presents a compelling account of postmodern culture, he adheres to a conventional view of capitalism itself, which surely is not immune to the transformative power of the postmodernism it has brought into being. This contradiction underlies Jameson's comments on the operations of late capitalism, which are always weighted toward the cultural as opposed to the economic, like the following:

> If the ideas of a ruling class were once the dominant (or hegemonic) ideology of bourgeois society, the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm. Faceless masters continue to inflect the economic strategies that constrain our existences, but no longer need to impose their speech (or are henceforth unable to); and the postliteracy of the late capitalist world reflects, not only the absence of any great collective project, but also the unavailability of the older national [corporate] language itself. (65)

In a culture of heterogeneity, Jameson still insists on the unity and centralized power of the "faceless masters" who prescribe our fate. In this respect, his view would seem similar to the vision of late capitalism represented in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Enzian, Tchitcherine, Slothrop, Mexico—even the narrator—each arrives at the conviction that the political and economic structures within which they live are controlled by some modern equivalent of the Invisible Hand of Enlightenment economic theory. Gradually, the narrative uncovers the signs of a cartel-controlled power structure where everything appears to be connected, where the politics of rival nation states is only theater designed to obscure the machinations of the real politics, international Big Business. IG Farben V-Mann Wimpe tells Tchitcherine as much: "'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'" (349). The only alternative to control is chaos. The "architect of the cartelized state" (164), identified as Walter Rathenau, speaks from "the other side" about the kind of capitalist system he had worked to bring into being: "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" (165). Control or chaos: this is the oppositional structure within which characters (and readers) are constrained as the narrative progresses. Whether feared or desired, the vision of the cartelized state controlled absolutely by global corporate capitalism prescribes the responses of characters, narrator and reader.

But what if the postmodern corporation is no more unified than the postmodern subject? What would a schizophrenic corporation look like? Jameson describes the postmodern schizophrenic as the result of a breakdown in the signifying chain so that signs are reduced to pure disjunct materiality with no meaningful connection between past, present and future (PCL 72). But this diagnosis is confined to the human and cultural realm and, significantly, not to developments in the marketplace. Jameson discusses technology but not *information* technology; he does not ask how the schizophrenia of postmodern life may create the schizophrenic corporation, and he does not explore the consequences this schizophrenia might have for *global* corporate strategies. He uses the phrase "the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (80) without recognizing that it is literally true: such a totality is impossible. In the kind of postmodern world economy Jameson describes, total control is not possible; it remains a modernist dream. I want to pursue this connection between modernism and the kind of totalization Pynchon's cartels desire, and the postmodern alternative of a highly contingent, chaotic economy inhabited by schizophrenic corporations.

Responding in "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism" to Jameson's "Postmodernism," Eagleton does talk about real corporations and their relation to postmodern culture, but in terms of Lyotard's performativity principle, where the concept of truth is transformed under the weight of economic pressure so that being rich means being right:

> It is not difficult, then, to see relation between the philosophy of J. L. Austin and IBM, or between the various neo-Nietzscheanisms of a post-structuralist epoch and Standard Oil. It is not surprising that classical models of truth and cognition are increasingly out of favour in a society where what matters is whether you deliver the commercial or rhetorical goods. Whether among discourse theorists or the Institute of Directors, the goal is no longer truth but performativity, not reason but power. (387)

As Eagleton, following Jameson, recalls, high modernism, with its assumption of human imagination or volition as the primary access to truth, came into being with mass commodity culture (392). It is the beginning of the end of this kind of mass production and mass consumption, together with the emergence of a new understanding of truth, that Pynchon observes in *Gravity's Rainbow* and that Slothrop begins to recognize after meeting the anarchist Squalidozzi, who advises him:

> "In ordinary times . . . the center always wins. Its power grows with time, and that can't be reversed, not by ordinary means. Decentralizing, back toward anarchism, needs extraordinary times . . . this War—this incredible War—just for the moment has wiped out the proliferation of little states that's prevailed in Germany for a thousand years. Wiped it clean. *Opened it.*" (264–65)

The concept of war provides Pynchon the opportunity to explore the shift from modernism to postmodernism as a transformation of markets during a period when all economic relations come under extreme pressure and previous patterns of production and consumption change rapidly. To win at war is to achieve control over the enemy, but the economic players in Pynchon's war are engaged in a much grander conflict. The cartels that profit from the war invest their real energies in the struggle against Nature. The real interest of cartel-members like

IG Farben and Du Pont lies in "Plasticity's central canon: that chemists were no longer to be at the mercy of Nature" (GR 249). This ambition to assert control through the resources of human imagination is fundamentally a modernist ambition and lies at the heart of the entire modernist enterprise, in economics just as in science and art. Michael Prowse remarks that "Modernism, which dates from the late 19th century, is . . . associated with mass production, uniformity, and predictability; post-modernism with flexibility, choice, and personal responsibility" (50). The postmodern economy is not a clockwork mechanism available for rational analysis and human manipulation. Just as Enlightenment attempts at social engineering fail—a failure symptomatic of modernity's decline—so do similar attempts to understand and manipulate the economy. The causal logic to which "They" (the cartels) adhere in all areas of Their operations is as inadequate in economic terms as it is in every other attempt They make to achieve perfect knowledge.

Adherents of Adam Smith's Enlightenment notion of the Invisible Hand find it difficult to decipher the lessons of the new market, because the new market does not operate on the old terms of intelligibility and intentionality. The postmodern market (especially a global market) is just too extensive and complex to allow for total understanding. Its purpose cannot be predicted or planned for; its fluctuations cannot be specified in advance; its results do not become apparent immediately but are confused by a complex network of causes and effects and chance as well. The free market does not obey rational principles of control and planning, and, in fact, often behaves in irrational and entirely unpredictable ways.

This is the message Roland Feldspath tries to communicate from the "other side" (GR 31), that the old economic orthodoxies are now obsolete. The internalization of control and the Enlightenment emphasis on human agency—control through intention—have created, Roland insists, a dangerous illusion: "'The illusion of control. That A could do B. But that was false. Completely. No one can do. Things only happen, A and B are unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable'" (30). Roland describes a contingent, postmodern economic order in which corporate planning cannot succeed. He explicitly invokes Smith's image of the Invisible Hand, guiding the market according to a preordained logic, to describe the now outmoded modernist conception: "'As if . . . / 'A market needed no longer be run by the Invisible Hand, but now could *create itself*—its own logic, momentum, style, from inside'" (30). As if the business of economic analysts were no longer to discover and manipulate the rules governing economic systems, but instead to manipulate known relations in the market. But as Roland knows, markets—particularly global markets—are just not that simple, and complete control is impossible.

The ever-changing, unknowable, fashion-dominated economy of postmodernism resists cause-and-effect logic, especially on the scale of global economics. Pynchon anticipates in *Gravity's Rainbow* the shift to process-based information economies by situating his narrative during the period of transition from mass production to customized consumption. In contrast to the machinations of the cartels, a vast number of *contingent* markets very different in structure from the rationally organized cartel economy operate in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Characters buy and sell in the context of rapidly changing demand. Market windows open and close with breathtaking speed, and someone is always ready to take advantage of these fleeting economic opportunities. All the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* are involved in markets: just about everyone is a hustler, as Slothrop discovers to his surprise. Quite apart from the conventional businessmen (and they are all business*men*), Slothrop stumbles upon a whole sub-economy, which is only in part the Zone's black market. Examples abound: Prentice's deal for bananas, Schnorp's trade in custard pies, Rocketman's rescue of the Potsdam hashish, Frau Gnahb's acts of "'minor piracy'" (526), Springer's wheeler-dealing; these, in addition to more organized espionage and counter-espionage, complicate the narrative.

2. From Product to Process: Contemporary Management Theory

Recent advances in management theory illuminate the postmodern economy Pynchon sets up in opposition to the global economy of the cartels. The major economic trend that has motivated this new thinking about management strategy is the move from a product-based to a service economy. In the United States after 1920, service-sector employment, especially government employment and the provision of direct consumer services, increased continually, so that by 1980, some two thirds of non-agricultural employment was in the service sector, with only one third in goods-producing industries. Furthermore, more and more employees in highly mechanized manufacturing industries (approximately one third by 1980) were involved in service work: quality control, financial support, transport, promotion or advertising, and the like (Thompson 105–06). Because of trends like these, the contemporary United States has been called a postindustrial society. But in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the cartels (IG Farben, ICI, Shell, AEG and General Electric) are all based on manufacture as opposed to information; as Tchitcherine discovers, this applies equally to the brand of Marxism which is allied with the cartels. Information is the domain of individual hustlers like Mario Schweitar, since, as Semyavin recognizes, the market is shifting away from raw technology toward *information* technology (GR 258).

Semyavin's perception is more than vindicated by contemporary management theory, which stresses the shift to a fashion-dominated "software" economy and recommends a new set of corporate strategies designed to cope with this new and highly contingent economic environment. Prominent among the management gurus who have brought postmodernism into the boardroom is Tom Peters, whose books include *Thriving on Chaos* and *Liberation Management*, the latter subtitled *Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties*. Peters stresses the importance of fashion, simulation and image in an economy where fashion changes almost continuously. Though he seems unaware of Baudrillard's descriptions of contemporary America, Peters shares Baudrillard's vision of America as the culture of the simulacrum, to which corporations must adapt. Though Peters never uses the phrase, the new corporate philosophy he preaches belongs to the postindustrial society.

Profits now are to be made in services, Peters argues, and he gives the following example, among others: the promotional group California Raisins earned more in 1989 from personal appearances, the sale of T-shirts and other forms of merchandising than farmers earned from raisins (6). Nintendo sells game consoles at a loss, offset by the huge profits from sales of game software. Recently a computer retailer advertised that anyone who bought a *Microsoft Office* software package would receive a PC free. The value lies in the software, the service, not in the hard manufactured goods. It is not the computer itself but what the computer can do and what it can do for the customer that generate wealth. The concept of the customer is a crucial element of Peters's management strategy.

Peters's exemplars include CNN, Union Pacific Railroad, Titeflex (a manufacturer of industrial hoses), and "multidomestic" corporations like ABB (Asea Brown Boveri). I would like to dwell a little on the latter, because the idea of a multidomestic corporation seems especially pertinent to Pynchon's representation of global corporate cartels.

The multidomestic corporation is organized not as a pyramid but as a matrix comprising many very small units. ABB consists of 1300 independent companies and 5000 autonomous profit centers each made up of 10-person teams. The domestic economic and sociopolitical conditions in which profit centers operate are of key significance. A 13-member executive committee based in Switzerland handles global coordination of the corporation's activities. Management is thus decentralized and organized horizontally rather than vertically;

bureaucracy is kept to a minimum; responsibility for profits (and losses) is kept close to the front line. "'We are not a global business,'" says an ABB manager; "'We are a collection of local businesses with intense global coordination.'" ABB encourages "'local companies to think small . . . meet customer needs more flexibly—and make money'" (51). The advantage to local companies of belonging to the corporation is information exchange or "continuous expertise transfer" (51)—no reinventing the wheel. The small scale of autonomous domestic companies allows several benefits: design and production become more flexible; local customer needs can be more fully identified and catered to (indeed, some of the companies Peters describes work together with their customers to design and produce exactly what the customer wants); workers are able to see the profits generated by their efforts (Peters describes companies that distribute incentive bonuses in the form of stock in the company); and workers are encouraged to develop an entrepreneurial spirit—to find new products, new customers, new market leads. Worker empowerment, the decentralization of authority, "customerization" (knowing and providing what the customer needs, not simply offering mass-produced commodities): these are the key concepts of postmodern corporate culture.

The dynamics of the postmodern market demand the customerization—which is not consumerization—of business and the creation of what Alvin Toffler calls "prosumers" (11). Prosumers are consumers who actively participate in the design of mass consumer products, like cars, by using CAD/CAM software to create a preferred combination of available components. (Volvo, for example, now makes cars exclusively to order—no mass production.) This flexible design methodology enables fast responses to the changing demands of fashion, whether in the automotive industry or housing design or personalized financial services or T-shirts. The effect is to incorporate service provision as part of the manufacturing process, breaking down the traditional barriers separating these sectors of the economy. The incentive for this kind of "disorganization," as Peters calls it, is speed of response to market trends and the empowerment of workers, who become service providers and not cogs in some intricate industrial machine. The assault on middle management involved in flattening the hierarchy transfers authority and responsibility to shop-floor workers, who succeed or fail along with their small company. Workers become entrepreneurs, often working face to face with the customers for whom they are providing services. A parallel trend toward worker empowerment in the public sector is represented by Al Gore's National Performance Review (fairly comprehensively documented on the World Wide Web at http://www.whitehouse.gov). Under this initiative, government departments have been asked to form front-line worker teams to devise simplified mechanisms for the delivery of government services. The aim is not only to reduce bureaucracy and red tape but to improve the quality of service by empowering workers to do rapidly whatever is necessary to serve the customer.

The concept of worker empowerment through corporate management sounds as though it should be diametrically opposed to the cartelized state described in *Gravity's Rainbow*. However, as Bernard Duyfhuizen has shown in his work on Walter Rathenau, one of Rathenau's ideals was precisely that of worker empowerment through cartels (101). Global organization does not necessarily mean global control. Quite the opposite, for the more complex a system becomes, the more difficult it is to control in all its parts, and the greater is its tendency to entropic decay. By coopting Rathenau's anticapitalist vision of a cartel structure that works to promote the spiritual and moral welfare of workers, They struggle endlessly against those forces of chaos the Counterforce seeks to foster—for example, in episodes like the swashbuckling Mexico and Bodine fencing with giant foam rubber penises (708), or the same "Disgusting Duo" (GR 717) disrupting Frau Utgarthaloki's dinner party. Ironically, the Counterforce and its reliance on contingency, not They, belong to the future. This irony is apparent only from a postindustrial perspective: that even if the military-industrial complex managed to overcome the forces of entropy and managed to control the whole creation, they would suffer financial, if not political, ruin. And yet it is ultimately the desire for control that is Pynchon's real subject. The cartels present an unequivocal image of the desire for complete control, which is always already doomed, but which is shared, in a diluted way, by all who pursue strategies of control, and this includes the characters, the narrator, and us, the readers, who seek to rationalize and control the meaning of the fictional world. Contingency will defeat us every time. The power of contingency is emphasized not only in contemporary management theory but in scientific discourse as well, particularly in thinking about the evolution of biological structures and systems.

3. Evolution and Capitalism

The shift from centralized authority to decentralized organizational strategies described in management theory is reinforced by contemporary thinking about evolution which suggests that diversification has always taken priority over totalization. Some management theorists, like Michael Hannan and John Freeman in their *Organizational Ecology*, have had recourse to evolutionary theory to formulate a model of corporate survival in the postindustrial economy. They describe a new social Darwinism in which selection no longer connotes value but is absolutely tied to contingency; so what succeeds in today's market will not necessarily succeed tomorrow. Social Darwinists of the late nineteenth century, like Herbert Spencer, argued that the survival of the fittest meant only the fittest and best survived and that this rigorous process of selection served the long-term interests of the economy. The likes of Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller saw the destruction of the poor as a necessary sacrifice to ensure the eventual perfection of the U.S. economy. This vision of economic evolution owes a significant debt to Invisible-Hand logic and is allied with traditional interpretations of Darwinian theory, from which it derives. It assumes that evolution follows a deep logical structure intended to produce the eventual perfection of the system (economic or biological) through a slow and steady process of increasing complexity and diversity.

This assumption has been thoroughly dismantled by the two best-known recent popularizers of evolutionary thinking, Richard Dawkins and Stephen Jay Gould. Both emphasize the importance of chance in the workings of natural selection. Gould uses the principle of contingency extensively in his various discussions of the Burgess Shale. The fossil record represented by the Burgess Shale is evidence of an enormous diversity of biological experiment in the Paleozoic era. As Gould describes it, this is "[e]volution [probing] all the limits of possibility" (FS 258). Charles Walcott, who discovered the Burgess Shale in 1909, found in it evidence of the gradual emergence of human consciousness, guaranteed by divine promise, out of a history of progress from primitive to complex forms. But the interpretation of the fossil record Gould argues for asserts the importance of contingency in determining which life forms survived and which became extinct. Nothing in the primitive vertebrate organism found among the Burgess fossils indicates that it would become the forerunner of modern mammals; nothing in the twenty arthropod designs indicates which would be the four surviving forms. Survival is a matter of fast response to chance environmental events. And that response must be made from biological materials already at hand. Evolution does not introduce innovation; evolution selects the best available adaptation. A contingent event is "the chancy result of a long string of unpredictable antecedents, rather than . . . a necessary outcome of nature's laws" (Gould, BB 69). The strong element of chance emphasizes the importance of diversification and flexibility as parts of a successful corporate strategy. If you cannot plan for success, because you cannot predict the conditions for success, then the most effective strategy is to try as many innovations as possible and to adopt a flexible corporate structure that enables fast responses to chance movements in the market.

Economists Hannan and Freeman take up this interpretation of the relation between chance and evolution: "In no sense does the use of [natural] selection logic imply that this is the best of all possible worlds or that organizations that have thrived in some periods are somehow deserving of success. Selection models insist on the importance of randomness in success" (36). So diversity and innovation, qualities found more readily in small, flexibly organized companies, are necessary conditions for the operation of selection. "Part of the genius of Darwinian theory concerns the way in which it links diversity and adaptation," Hannan and Freeman argue. "Selection processes can only work on available diversity" (70). But, as they make clear, large and powerful organizations rarely move fast enough to adapt their corporate strategy and structure in response to the changing economic environment—and the larger and more powerful the organization, the more unable to adapt it is. Large organizations—global cartels, say—become entrenched by their own past successes and are proportionately unable to change opportunistically to exploit the uncertainty of the postmodern marketplace. The successful corporation, then, is most likely to be the schizophrenic corporation, where past, present and future successes are disjoint, where past corporate activities have no relation to what the company does in the present and present activities will not affect future activities. The corporation that focuses exclusively on the present, with no sense of the wider significance of the current project, and will move freely to the next project, no matter how diverse that might be—this is the company most likely to succeed in a postmodern economy dominated by the culture of fashion.

Gravity's Rainbow is situated in a period of transition from the modern to the postmodern, from a manufacturing or product economy to a service or information economy, and the narrator articulates a sense of rapid change: "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 [Slothrop] can only, riding through it for the first time, begin to feel the leading edges of" (257). This narrator's perception is echoed later by Enzian when he realizes that a ruined refinery seems to have been bombed according to a deeper strategy: "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). Similarly, Tchitcherine comes to believe that the cartels have "everything . . . connected" (703). The reader is led to sympathize with the view that a global organizational conspiracy is reaching its apotheosis, aided by the chaos of war, and that life in the postwar world will be prescribed in all its details by Them. This is what They also believe. But the validity of this belief is open to serious doubt.

Another concept developed by Gould encapsulates this belief and places it in the wider context of systems analysis. "Punctuated equilibrium" is his term for the series of brief periods of rapid change embedded in a history of non-change: "Stasis is the norm for complex systems; change, when provoked at all, is usually rapid and episodic" (BB 69). Thus, the corporate strategy of totalization and centralization pursued by the multinational companies that make up the cartels of *Gravity's Rainbow* was an effective response to market conditions in the stable period of the pre- and immediately postwar years (see Weisenburger for historical sources relating to the corporations Pynchon mentions). But the shift to a postmodern economy has been evidenced by a period of intense change and profound uncertainty in the market, a period of economic gloom for the global multinationals that have persisted with outmoded (broadly modernist) strategies of totalization. There is an ironic discrepancy between what the narrator and the characters (in both the Firm and the Counterforce) believe and what recent theories about the process of structural change tell us is the ruin awaiting any structure that seeks absolute control. One of the controlling ironies of *Gravity's Rainbow*, then, is the inevitability of failure attached to those efforts at control that everyone, including the reader, desires and fears.

4. Capitalism and Control

So what does all this mean for Pynchon's representation of capitalism? Is his vision of a cartel-driven global conspiracy outdated in view of the new management theory and the decentralized postmodernist corporation? Or have we yet to see the emergence of an entire economy operated by schizophrenic corporations? *Gravity's Rainbow* is profoundly ambivalent on this point. Or does "worker empowerment" really mean the further cooptation of those like Slothrop who discover, finally, that "the Man has a branch office in each of our brains" (712)?

The capacity of the cartels to control the market by controlling the consumer is a motif emphasized throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. It is articulated most clearly by Wimpe, the drug salesman, in discussing with Tchitcherine the connection between analgesia and addiction. The cartel knows how to create pain, but the fundamental search for a drug to remove pain without creating addiction goes on. In response to Tchitcherine's surprise—he had assumed such a search must be hopeless—Wimpe explains that addiction is chaotic, "'having nothing to do with real pain, real economic needs, unrelated to production or labor . . . we need fewer of these unknowns, not more'" (348). The cartel works toward the creation of a planned, rational economy, where real needs are supplied with real commodities; "'psychological quirks'" like addiction have no place in such an economy (349). Yet the postmodern economy is nothing if not quirky. The whole economy—literal and symbolic—of drugs in *Gravity's Rainbow* is contradictory. In the narrator's view, drugs offer a potential access to states of consciousness and conditions of knowledge ("drug-epistemologies" [582]) that are inaccessible to rational consciousness, and yet drugs are among the foremost products of the cartels that seek to control individual subjectivity. If the cartels' control is total, then the states of consciousness produced by their drugs must be highly suspect.

The parable of Byron the Bulb is also irresolvably contradictory. Byron attempts to create a network of subversives throughout the Grid to spread the word about the global economic conspiracies he has uncovered. But his dream of centralization is doomed to failure: "His youthful dreams of organizing all the bulbs in the world seem impossible now—the Grid is wide open, all messages can be overheard, and there are more than enough traitors out on the line" (654–55). But if Byron's centralizing ambitions are doomed, then why not also Theirs? Why are They exempt from the same conditions of openness where secrets are learned and conspiracies betrayed? The moral of Byron's story seems to be that They are not exempt. If Their power were complete, Byron would not be able to elude Them as he does; his very survival depends on the inaccuracy of his vision of Their global power.

The weakness of Them is that Their power is necessarily incomplete, and the more strenuously They aspire toward totalization, the more remote that complete control becomes. Think of the episode where Springer promises Slothrop that control of the individual will be absolute "'when the film is fast enough, the equipment pocket-size and burdenless and selling at people's prices, the lights and booms no longer necessary'" (527). Then, Springer suggests, reality will be determined by cinematic images, and even subjectivity will be scripted. But who will write the scripts? They assume there will be a single scriptwriter, serving Their interests. In the postindustrial society, however, these scripts are determined by fashion, and the images promoted by fashion change with alarming and unpredictable speed, a rapidity the cartels cannot match. The moral of the disgusting dinner-party episode is that They are so entrenched in orthodox manners and behaviors that They cannot change in response to contingent events. So the well-bred diners at Frau Utgarthaloki's table are completely at the mercy of the irruption of obscenity let loose by Mexico and Bodine. Similarly, the corporation that operates as a global giant (and the story of the formation of this immensely complex global cartel is told intermittently throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*) cannot respond with sufficient speed and flexibility to the frenetic pace of the postmodern economy.

Only the schizophrenic corporation, which has no history, where past, present and future activities are disjointed events with no significance available to be generalized into fixed rules—only this kind of schizophrenic corporation can succeed in the context of postmodern image-making. *Gravity's Rainbow* plays off modernist against postmodernist visions of the market and finally leaves open the question of capitalism's ultimate fate. The relation between capitalism and control in the postindustrial economy remains, then, to be explored further in *Vineland*. But that is another story.

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