

Pynchon and Electro-Mysticism

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The novels of Pynchon are often discussed amongst literary experts as a prime example of so-called postmodernism. If Thomas Pynchon didn't already exist in secrecy, he would simply have to be invented, in order to verify postmodernism, just as Georg Cantor demonstrates Bacon's authorship of the works of Shakespeare. In any case, a vast cartel of quoters seem more than eager to ever increase a supposedly fresh complexity. Niklas Luhmann, when he was still smiling, occasionally joked that he knew not of any postmodernism, only of a modern post. Seeing themselves confronted with the facts and circumstances of Pynchon's novels, where the well-rehearsed tools of the humanities miserably fail, these prophets might find that the easiest way to escape their dilemma is simply to tag it as postmodern.

In the following I will assume that, rather than enlightening the darkness of classic modernism, subjects such as the disappearance of the hero or even the death of the author merely prolong and obscure the problematic, twisting it even into incomprehensibility. In contrast I will begin with a question which may merely sound trivial at first sight. How did music adjust (*sich schicken*) to the twentieth century? Instead of referring to Heidegger and the history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*), I would like to quote from two novels, which seem even to converge in that syrup known as muzak:

[. . .] little Lucienne assaulted from behind, raped by existence from behind, he begs for mercy, he is ashamed of begging for mercy, pity, help, help therefore I exist, he goes into the Bar de la Marine, the little mirrors in the little brothel, he is pale in the little mirrors in the little brothel the big soft red-head who drops on the bench, the gramophone plays, exists,

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everything turns, the gramophone exists, the heart beats: turn, turn liqueurs of life, turn jellies, syrups of my flesh, sweetness . . . the gramophone.

When that yellow moon begins to beam
Every night I dream my little dream

The voice, deep and husky, suddenly appears and the world vanishes, the world of existences. A woman of flesh had that voice, she sang in front of a record, in her best dress and they recorded her voice. A woman: bah, she existed like me [. . .] I don't want to know her. But there it is. You can't say that that exists. The spinning record exists, the air struck by the vibrating voice exists, the voice which made an impression on the record existed. I who am listening, I exist. Everything is full, existence everywhere, dense and heavy and sweet. But, beyond all this sweetness, inaccessible, quite close, so far away alas, young, merciless, and serene, there is this . . . this rigour. (Sartre 149)

The bus driver was of the normal or placid crosstown type; having fewer traffic lights and stops to cope with than the up-and-downtown drivers, he could afford to be genial. A portable radio hung by his steering wheel, tuned to WQXR. Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture* flowed syrupy around him and his passengers. . . . A report which could have been either a backfire or a gunshot sounded a few blocks downtown. Captured in the score's black symbols, given life by vibrating air columns and strings, having taken passage through transducers, coils, capacitors and tubes to a shuddering paper cone, the eternal drama of love and death continued to unfold entirely disconnected from this evening and place. (V 95-96)

The first example, dated 1938, is taken from an intentionally modern novel: Jean Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*. The postmodern counterexample is quite obviously from Pynchon's first novel, *V.*, dated 1963. Modern novels, as we all know, are deathly dull, and that is why they are also called *disgust*; it is a different matter with the postmodern. It is less well known, however, that modern writers think they can so easily switch from existence to technique and thus provide their readers with the true feeling of modern life. Thus, Sartre addresses the gramophone not with the french word *grammophone* but with the English le pick-up. After winning the First World War, electronics companies took over the formerly entirely mechanical record industry, and thus electro-magnetic amplifiers were installed between the sound source and the cutting mechanism, and between the record and the loudspeaker cone, to the

point that Sartre's hero, sitting in his bar, is faced with a game of multiple inductor coils as pick-up. But surprisingly, this does not in the least bit deter him from hanging back in the time of the mechanical. The singer dresses up in her most beautiful dress, as if recording studios would be film sets, and sings onto the same record her future fan will listen to, ignorant of all the detours and exchanges between wax cutting and mastering, between mass production and loudspeaker sound. The main thing is that music transforms itself through the listener into the absolute, which infinitely transcends all existence, human or technical. The question remains of how a harmonic frequency spectrum triumphs over a noisy bar. To cut a long story short, Sartre could certainly have got away with studying less Heidegger, but he definitely should have examined more circuit diagrams before allowing his hero to confound the highly complex process of record pressing with this intoxicated record-induced bliss. All these games of rhythm and syntax, attempting to metamorphose the empty page into a beloved prewar blues, cannot hide such outstanding stupidity. When Sartre wrote *La Nausée*, it wasn't just liqueurs he was drinking; under the psychiatric treatment of Dr. Henry Ey, his medicine was called Mescaline. It really didn't help.

Pynchon's sonic bus ride, in contrast, is not simply postmodern, but both technically and historically up to date. First, it has, behind the whole story, everything that makes it a story: men and women, love and death. Second, there are the notes and staves of Guido di Arezzo, whose grids were the first to reveal music to us Europeans, in 1030 AD. Third, since Edison invented the first mechanical phonograph in 1877, there have been conductors and large orchestras who transfer such scores onto alphabetic wax plates or shellac records. And finally, since 1906, when Lee de Forest invented the valve amplifier, we have had the possibility to modulate the low frequencies of music, such as those from record grooves, as electromagnetic high frequencies, to thus transmit without substance, so that Tchaikovsky's overture can sound out on any simple transistor radio on any cross-country bus. There is no single existence, also known as "for itself" (*Fürsichsein*), which stands stunned in front of the "in itself" (*Ansichsein*) of the absolute, except as a periodical pure oscillation, music, rising out of the noise known as daily life, no matter whether it is as precise as a gunshot or as accidental as a car's false start. Two very different techniques of media, Europe's traditional notation and our electronic valve, mediate the "passage" between senses, circuits and diagrams—from notation to the novel.

Whereas in Sartre's modernism the old incompatibility of daily life and technique, of culture and technique increases the more attentively

you read, in contrast, the further you follow the thread of Pynchon's art of engineering (*Ingenieurskunst*), so each new complexity vanishes completely. All that is needed is a rather complex insight. Circuit diagrams stand in a different relation to their technical effects, as pictures and metaphors to their significant. Sartre, to address his phantasms, like that singer who once seemed to burn the moon onto shellac, chooses the metaphor of the impression, an image that stands as well for engraving and pressure as for impression and sensation. In this labyrinth of such ambiguity, technique itself becomes a metaphor, or, to quote Benjamin, a work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility. As if there wouldn't be anything else to say about records and radio, electronics and tyranny.

To write against the argument that technical drawings are the very opposite of images, Pynchon does the only thing possible: he inserts them in the text itself. Novels are no longer a composition of letters interrupted here and there by page numbers or chapters. They are therefore not some kind of patchworked and wondrous postmodern explosion of codes, but rather a calculated layout of letters, images and numbers. The reason is obvious. Pynchon's first publication in the December issue of a U.S. Air Force magazine called *Aerospace Safety*, signed "Thomas H. Pynchon," was titled "Togetherness," and it was concerned with the interface of technology and the military, Boeing Airplane Co. in Seattle and the U.S. Air Force. Already the first sentence explains that "Airlifting the IM-99A missile, like marriage, demands a certain amount of 'togetherness' between Air Force and contractor" (T 6). Pynchon never ceased in breaking up this marriage, taking apart this fusion and deconstructing this military-industrial complex into its devices and formulas.

V., Pynchon's first novel, presents verses from a Maltese "engineer-poet" (V 326), who is significantly called "the best of our poets" (V 316). The theme of the poem is tragic truth and the comic disguises of the mask, which is the poet himself. The poem ends by addressing the mask's mouth as the dependent variable of a transcendent function. The catenary of David Bernoulli, of Pynchon and of all washing lines is expressed by the following:

$$y = a/2 (e^{x/a} + e^{-x/a})$$

(V 326)

You just need to turn the element a , the so-called parameter, like you would turn a crank, and all the mathematically possible variations of a smile y emerge in selectable mouth-width x out from their linear or tragic base position. Computer animations do exactly the same thing;

Pynchon simply reveals the formula. I am going to follow this fusion of image, letters and numbers with some examples, before its main principle is revealed by Mondaugen's Law.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the hero, recently transfigured as Rocketman, stumbles across a "shithouse" decorated with a graffito bearing his own comic name: "ROCKETMAN WAS HERE." Slothrop then takes a stone and scratches two concentric circles and four straight axial lines right next to the graffito, and imagines afterwards that he has drawn the image of the rocket "seen from below," its flaming engine surrounded by the four fins (GR 623-24). But instead of the apparent drawing there are five naked letters which have already appeared a couple of times before to Slothrop, in the blue sky above Berlin Alexanderplatz (GR 446) and on the floor of a Wehrmacht *Feuerleitpanzer* or V-2 Launch-Control Vehicle (GR 560): the letters KEZVH. Only together do the two diagrams make sense. Logos as assemblage.

Although the double circle appears at first sight as in the "mandala[s]" (GR 446, 560) of Tibet or of C. G. Jung, it is rather an enforcedly free transcription of a technical drawing which appears to be from an operations manual for an electronic control unit. K stands for *Klar*, E for *Entlüftung*, Z for *Zündung*, V for *Vorstufe* and H for *Hauptstufe* (GR 361). Blicero's men turn the main switches of the rocket in exactly this sequence of letters when they launch the legendary Schwarzgerät at the end of the novel. In other words, characters in a novel follow a strict operations manual constructed from metal and letters, which predicts events just as the Greek oracles once did in every war and drama. The technicians Max and Moritz, simply because they were named after the two test rockets at Kummersdorf, accomplish the instructions given by Major Weissmann, alias Blicero, as soon as permitted by the feedback of a warning signal.

"Durchschalten." Blicero's voice is calm and steady.

"Luftlage klar," Max calls from the steering panel.

Moritz presses the button marked VORSTUFE. "ist durchgeschaltet."

A pause of 15 seconds while the oxygen tank comes up to pressure.

A light blazes up on Moritz's panel.

Entlüftung. "Beluftung klar."

The ignition lamp lights: Zündung. "Zündung klar."

Then, "Vorstufe klar." Vorstufe is the last position from which Moritz can still switch backward. The flame grows at the base of the Rocket. Colors develop. There is a period of four seconds here, four seconds of indeterminacy. The ritual even has a place for that. The difference between a top-grade launch officer and one doomed to mediocrity is in knowing

exactly when, inside this chiming and fable-crowded passage, to order Hauptstufe.

Blicero is a master. He learned quite early to fall into a trance, to wait for the illumination, which always comes. It is nothing he's ever spoken of aloud.

"Hauptstufe."

"Hauptstufe ist gegeben." (GR 758)

Just like a Tchaikovsky score, the ritual of the ignition exposes that which remains timelessly within the insignia or mandala of the Schwarzkommando (GR 563). Again it leads us to the "passage," to a transition in the ethnological sense of Arnold van Genneps. In contrast to the "American vice of modular repetition" (GR 348), the so-called production line, the implementation is some kind of trance or initiation under which technique and technician are woven together electro-mystically, silently, as if thinking and being (*Sein*) could be the same.

τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι (Parmenides)

The only difference between military test facility and Schwarzgerät, between Peenemünde and novel, is the technical drawing, which converts itself into *poiesis*, into the making (*das Machen*). Because on the fronts of the World War the five switch positions from *Klar* to *Hauptstufe* didn't simply form a basic rotary switch; they were spread over a whole switchboard which completely filled the cockpit of the *Feuerleitpanzer* (Fig. 1).

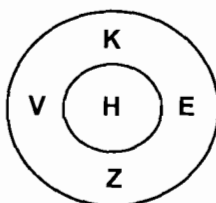


Fig. 1: Mandala (GR 361)

But as far as I know, not even Pynchon could tell in 1973 exactly how the central control switch in the *Feuerleitpanzer*, the interface between men and rocket, had been implemented. It was only ten years later that the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, released the technical drawings made by German engineers, who as war prisoners had documented, already with English captions, the remote control of their rocket motor from within the *Feuerleitpanzer*, as

part of Operation Backfire in the summer of 1945 (Kennedy 34). Hence the "*Triebwerkspult*" (Kennedy 33) changed into a "rocket motor panel" (Kennedy 34; GR 757), *Hauptstufe* into "main stage," and so on, until the writer Thomas Pynchon, in contrast to his peers buried beneath technical drawings, translated everything back into German again. Routing technologies are nearly impossible to translate, just as a character in a novel, under the name Eigenvalue, reveals only in the German word *Eigenwert* (Eigenvalue or, literally, own value) that he qualifies Hilbert spaces (cf. V 152).

The English graffiti "ROCKETMAN WAS HERE" leads us into even earlier prehistories. "Kilroy was here" is not only a hint; it literally stands written. One night on a pub crawl through Valletta, characters in *V.* pass an alley wall which announces the sheer ubiquity of Kilroy in colorful chalked drawings. The novel does no more than give to the mute graffiti a legend, in the double literal sense of the word (Fig. 2):

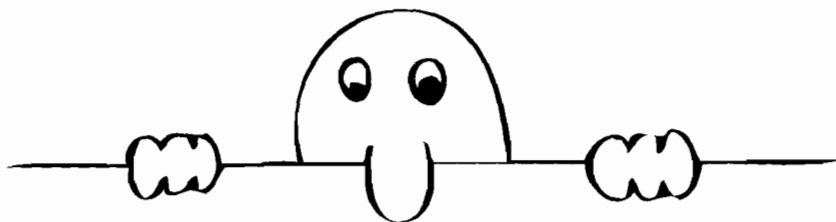


Fig. 2: Kilroy (V 435)

Common legend had it he'd been born in the U.S. right before the war, on a fence or latrine wall. Later he showed up everywhere the American armies moved: farmhouses in France, pillboxes in North Africa, bulkheads of troop ships in the Pacific. . . . The foolish nose hanging over the wall was vulnerable to all manner of indignities: fist, shrapnel, machete. Hinting perhaps at a precarious virility, a flirting with castration, though ideas like this are inevitable in a latrine-oriented (as well as Freudian) psychology. (V 436)

As every Pynchonite knows, psychology and history are nothing other than profane illusions; they equip techniques with sense and dates with legends.

But it was all deception. Kilroy by 1940 was already bald, middle-aged. His true origins forgotten, he was able to ingratiate himself with a human

world, keeping schlemihl-silence about what he'd been as a curly-haired youth. It was a masterful disguise: a metaphor. For Kilroy had sprung into life, in truth, as part of a band-pass filter, thus [Fig. 3]:

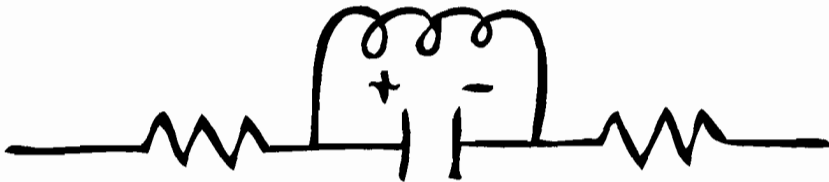


Fig. 3: Band-pass filter (V 436)

The bald head becomes an inductor or coil, the two nostrils the negative and positive plates of a capacitor, the two eyes the mathematical operators plus and minus, while out of two times five fingers emerge two galvanic resistors—for which, to Slothrop's surprise, the German DIN-Norm sign resembles the American coil sign. The resistors at the entrance and exit are connected in series, induction and capacitance in parallel. The inductor attenuates the high oscillations, the condenser the low ones. In reality this ensemble, viewed as part of a complete electronic circuit, forms the circuit diagram for a very primitive band-pass filter. "In the low-frequency range," for example, of music, "the inductors grow too bulky and possess bad electronic characteristics" (Tietze and Schenk 308). Today's engineers would love to optimize away this annoying fat coil. Nevertheless, it is impossible to demonstrate, with more economy and thus more elegance, the twist that Pynchon's novels enact on their readers than under Kilroy's principle diagram.

Because what else, in talking about talking as metaphor, in talking of images as figures, what else, if not Foucault's face, melts away in the sands of a sea shore, meaning explicitly this human world which is stubbornly presumed by any theory of literature and aesthetics. Yet because of these metaphors, and since Aristotle's *Poetik* based them on analogies or relations between words, the numerical ratios of Pythagoras no longer obtain, and by way of optical illusions, which Ehrenfels's Gestalt psychology bequeathed to aesthetics in 1890, there are no longer even geometrical or topological laws. The reason is obvious: In metaphors and figures, unlike in circuits, there is no electric current. Their characters and images simply lack numerals, which are

always thought of in diagrams, even if they are missing as in the original graffito. Thus the novelist decodes Kilroy's baby face, a call to mothering par excellence, as a picture puzzle or optical illusion, to abruptly dump any "faciality" (French *visag  t  * = German *Gesichthaftigkeit* = English *faciality* [Deleuze and Guattari 160]) mercilessly into the diagram. Thus his characters during the act of love think, however "[a]bsurdly," of "Hiroshima the electronics technician, reciting a mnemonic guide for resistor color-coding" (V 385). Because in the good old days before 1980, when resistors still caught our rough human eyes, according to the international IEC-norm, black stood for 0, brown for 1, red for 2, and so on up to nine (N  hrmann 292)—the V-2 Code KEZVH once more. No reason to tease a numerically normalized color spectrum out of Goethe's moral-sensual "theory of colors."

Whoever wrote in such codes knows more. No low moon scorches its rays so wonderfully and unexplained onto shellac; a countable composition of characters is what makes algorithms function. As soon as this is achieved, it appears with cold lucidity that lime and pencil, quill and computer keyboard enact nothing other than that which flows through the circuit. Beyond all speech-act theories, code addresses the real, which obeys in the circuit board or circuit exactly the same codes. Today in 2002, the production of digital processors, integrating up to 200 million transistors onto a thumb-sized piece of silicon, is such a kind of writing, but no longer with ink and lime, but rather a computer-controlled high-frequency electron-beam lithography. Thus computers resemble that sacred snake which, in ancient mythologies, eats its own tail: Technique which writes and rewrites its own hardware, until, according to Gordon Moore and Takeshi Fumimota, "[t]he amount of memory on a chip doubles [itself] every year and a half" (VI 174). Today, in the age of desktop computers and the World Wide Web, the proofs are evident and commonplace; but Pynchon's greatness is that he decoded the symptoms throughout Europe's long history.

One Sunday in the early sixties, Oedipa Maas drives to San Narciso and sees planned blocks of innumerable houses, which make her think of her transistor radio when she had beheld for the first time a printed circuit board while changing the battery (CL 24). It does not matter whether this information, which reflects itself in the city map like Narcissus in his fountain, finds its way to the heroine or remains as "only the earth," implemented as it is in our cities (CL 181). In 1864 Friedrich August Kekul   von Stradonitz dreamed one night that Benzol as a chemical formula, therefore also as a technical synthesis, could not be completed until the four valencies of the carbon atom joined the single valency of hydrogen in the perfect ring of a hexagon (cf. GR

412). From 1763 on, Mason and Dixon were occupied for years with laying down the Platonic ideal of pure latitude, the oblivious vision of their royal society, on the virgin earth and thus implying already the civil war. Finally, Leibniz, according to Pynchon's dream, is said to have developed his infinitesimal calculus of 1677 solely "to break up the trajectories of cannonballs through the air" (GR 407), which leads us back to that mathematical-physical parabola of initial acceleration (*Anfangsbeschleunigung*) and the influence of gravity (*Schwerkrafteinwirkung*) which gives *Gravity's Rainbow* its title. Unfortunately, Leibniz was not quite as versed in the technical details of war as the "connection between the German mind and the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement" (GR 407) would suggest, but Pynchon's passion for "equation[s]" that "elegant[ly] blend [. . .] philosophy and hardware, abstract change and hinged pivots of real metals" (GR 239), overwrites even the history of science. In fact it was Leonhard Euler who, through cannon tests for the Imperial Russian army, developed the base of natural logarithms and therefore the exponential function (see Euler). Toward the end I will return to its graph, which steepens infinitely but which remains impossible in a world of mortal and finite resources.

Enough of the examples. They only served to clarify—across four centuries of science and technology, and of course Europe is implicated—some understanding of Pynchon's equation. "'Personal density,' Kurt Mondaugen in his Peenemünde office not too many steps away from here, enunciating the Law which will one day bear his name, 'is directly proportional to temporal bandwidth'" (GR 509).

Kilroy, the real one with the curly locks, once again raises his head. This time not as a simple band-pass filter or LCR filter with an inductor, capacitor and two resistors, which only lets through oscillations within one more or less narrow frequency band, and thus, for example, equally dampens higher and lower sounds than were foreseen in its so-called bandwidth. Mondaugen (and in his shadow Pynchon) takes from this classical circuit only the idea of a variable filter performance, to present two extremities, one very explicitly, the other implicitly. Heroes like Slothrop are steep band-pass filters who "have trouble remembering what [they] were doing five minutes ago" (GR 509). Writers like Pynchon, in contrast, cover easily, as just demonstrated, three centuries from Leibniz to Oedipa. Thus:

"Temporal bandwidth" is the width of your present, your *now*. It is the familiar " Δt " considered as a dependent variable. The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. (GR 509)

So far, so good. But Mondaugen actually becomes a legislator due to a last, and, as far as I know, outrageous step. It took Europe more than two millennia, from Pythagoras to Euler, to stop thinking of the phenomenon of music in terms of string lengths and sound durations, but rather as frequencies. It is the oscillation rate per second of the violin strings which allows Tchaikovsky's score to be transmitted to the transistor radio. All kinds of filters—low-pass, high-pass, band-pass—have been developed to sharply divide the desired signal from disturbance, music from noise. Before Mondaugen's Law was enunciated, the time sector, that which we mortals must live in, remained independent as a variable: frequency on the left-hand side of the equation, time on the right-hand. Sometimes, but only sometimes, we managed to filter out the irreversible time-arrow, and just hear music. This is exactly what Pynchon reverses. His outrageous band-pass, which filters *in* the time sector, turns delta-t into a variable and thus into an adjustable parameter. Since I don't know if it has ever been calculated, I would like to call this law of personal density or compactness, as it is termed in mathematical analysis (Bronstein and Semendjajew), Pynchon's Law.

Pynchon's Law, because it includes us mortals in the technology of the circuit. We could imagine search engines whose delta-t was so variable that it would cover the years either between Shakespeare and Marlowe or between Hamlet and Odysseus. Mondaugen, the legislator and radio technician,

thought of himself [. . .] as a radio transmitter of some kind. [. . .] In his electro-mysticism, the triode was as basic as the cross in Christianity. Think of the ego, the self that suffers a personal history bound to time, as the grid. The deeper and true Self is the flow between cathode and plate. The constant, pure flow. Signals—sense-data, feelings, memories relocating—are put onto the grid, and modulate the flow. We live lives that are waveforms constantly changing with time, now positive, now negative. Only at moments of great serenity is it possible to find the pure, the informationless state of signal zero.

"In the name of the cathode, the anode, and the holy grid?" said Pöckler. (GR 404)

At first this whole electro-mysticism assumes, according to Pynchon's judgment, that it is the (electronic) valve, and only the valve, which creates a world where control is possible without any consumption of energy. At the time of *Gravity's Rainbow*, valves were even considered superior to bipolar transistors. Thus the tiniest current on the grid can guide any amount of flow through the triode and

modulate feedback or oscillation far beyond the “unity gain” (GR 238). Microscopic currents on the grid can also be ignored until only zero signals flow and the electro-mysticism starts. When the link to time, and thus the ego, ceases, because Δt turns into the dependent variable, plus and minus cancel each other out. That is why Mondaugen is the polar opposite of Pökler, who remains condemned, as in the analogue medium of film, to relive over and over again, the repetition, the incest with his make-believe daughter. Thus McClintic Sphere, in order to reach a wider audience with Charlie Parker’s bebop, asks a sound engineer to explain to him how the flip-flop, as a new digital alternative to such oscillation, balances infinitely between yes and no, one and zero, and therefore arises as the base circuit of computers (V 293). Eventually, with his last appearance in the novel, the jazz musician slowly grasps Mondaugen’s electro-mystical insight: “that the only way clear of the cool/crazy flipflop was obviously slow, frustrating and hard work. Love with your mouth shut” (V 365).

As simply and easily as that, circuits in Pynchon can be transformed into ethics. The only condition is to define people as plus and minus, as man and woman. Within a model of current, oscillations and signals—thus on this side of metaphor—we can think only of beings made of flesh and blood. Drugs belong equally to life and death, just as resistors belong both to love and to circuitry. Electro-mysticism is a materialism and only “gathers that which is” (“*nimmt*” nur “*auf*,” “*was ist*”). Circuit diagrams and bodies relate to each other as the front and reverse sides of the same piece of paper, recto and verso, then “[n]ot even in your worst times of night, with pencil words on your page only Δt from the things they stand for” (GR 510). Pynchon for once makes this coincidence explicit in the “Confessions of Fausto Maijstral,” another Maltese poet:

Poetry had to be as hasty and rough as eating, sleep or sex. Jury-rigged and not as graceful as it might have been. But it did the job; put the truth on record.

“Truth” I mean, in the sense of attainable accuracy. No metaphysics. Poetry is not communication with angels or with the “subconscious.” It is communication with the guts, genitals and five portals of sense. Nothing more. (V 318)

It is up to us, who speak or write of poems, to amplify this message instead of filtering it, however eruditely. There is no doubt what Pynchon and Heidegger are against, an ethics of the compensation of oscillation and the poetics of pure recording. Metaphysics (to plagiarize Pynchon) comes (to plagiarize Heidegger) to an end and is perfected as

a framing (*Gestell*). In “The Question Concerning Technology” (1954) Heidegger writes,

The revealing that rules throughout modern technology has the character of a setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging-forth. Such challenging happens in that the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is in turn distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew. Unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching about are ways of revealing. (Heidegger 321–22)

In *Gravity’s Rainbow* Pynchon is once again explicit, explaining with his crazy exponential function the “only aim” of the “System,” implied already in that very word itself, the totality of the enframed (*Gestellten*):

Kekulé dreams the Great Serpent holding its own tail in its mouth, the dreaming Serpent which surrounds the World. But the meanness, the cynicism with which this dream is to be used. The Serpent that announces, “The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning,” is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to *violate* the Cycle. Taking and not giving back, demanding that “productivity” and “earnings” keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity—most of the World, animal, vegetable and mineral, is laid waste in the process. The System may or may not understand that it’s only buying time. And that time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone or anything but the System, which sooner or later must crash to its death, when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the World can supply, dragging with it innocent souls all along the chain of life. (GR 412)

Whereby we have ended up in this land which belongs to all that is American. Ever since the Bretton Woods conference of 1972, dollars have no longer been covered by Goldfinger’s gold; they are dependent on the artificial resources of oil and time, which evade us all.

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