Riding the Interface: An Anarchist Reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*

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Anarchists and allusions to anarchy appear in all of Pynchon's novels. In *V.*, Venezuelan agitator the Gaucho, of the bomb-throwing school of social upheaval, argues tactics with the violence-weary Signor Mantissa in Florence. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas and Jesús Arrabal ponder the "anarchist miracle": "another world's intrusion into this one" (120). In *Vineland*, Wobblies, student collectives and countercultural dropouts position themselves in opposition to the state. And in *Mason & Dixon*, the title characters often self-reflexively question their roles as mercenaries charged with subdividing America just as revolutionary fervor grips the colonies.[1] Besides these evident textual references, Pynchon often sympathetically represents varied forms of civil disobedience, resistances to corrupt and confining institutions, and other libertarian behavior which may be characterized as anarchistic. These representations are most visible, though, in *Gravity's Rainbow*. I will argue that the shape and scope of the novel, in all its complexity, are informed by anarchist thought.

I also want to preface my remarks, however, by acknowledging that this essay is very speculative. This is not an exhaustive analysis of Pynchon's anarchism, nor is it even a thorough exploration of the anarchist dimension of *Gravity's Rainbow*. I don't wish to claim (for obvious reasons) anarchism as a master narrative that would serve as an exegetical key to unlocking the mysteries of the text, nor is this project meant to be a wholesale celebration of anarchism, for even as Pynchon draws on anarchism, he also amplifies the flaws inherent in anarchist theory. Rather, I want to suggest that anarchism is a powerful force that moves through layers of discourse, and that we can approach the problem of anarchism and *Gravity's Rainbow* from a number of critical orientations. By paying attention to the text's thematic and formal properties, and by drawing connections between *Gravity's Rainbow* and the era during which it was written, we can begin to see how a concept of anarchism provides a unique and vital perspective from which to read the novel. Taking up the methodological challenge posed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, I wish to trace or map the filaments of anarchist ruptures—"to ride the interface" (GR 731), as one anarchist character puts it—and

nomadically pursue the anarchist ligaments as they surface in an analysis of the narrative.

To begin to think through anarchism as an object of inquiry—as a philosophy of history, as a critique of political institutions and as a program for social transformation—is to confront a protean cluster of attitudes and beliefs so diffuse and so internally contradictory that any attempt to elicit meaning, even meaning that recognizes contingency and allows for plurality, remains an elusive and frustrating enterprise. Contrary to many popular evocations of the term, anarchism cannot be simplistically reduced to "a state of society without government or law," because anarchism comprises a family of discourses that vary widely in the degree to which government, the state and forms of authority in various institutions are held in contempt. Anarchists have provided a fundamental critique of the modern concept of the state and have challenged the assumptions of many schools of political thought. The semantic difficulty one encounters when grappling with anarchism is also embedded in its very internal logic. This difficulty transcends the complexities usually associated with the study of anarchism—that it means different things to different people in different contexts, that it meant something different in the nineteenth century from what it means today, and that it is evoked and inflected differently in different discourses.[2]

Instead, the problem of tackling the question "what is anarchism?" cannot be answered without first acknowledging that any interpretation involves the rewriting of a complex reality in terms of a master code or master narrative, however transparent or innocent this interpretive act appears to be. Thus anarchism is *categorized* as a doctrine or movement that rejects the principle of political authority, anarchism is *situated* as a theory of history that envisions the eradication of hierarchical structures in social formations, or anarchism is *classified* as a philosophy born out of the confluence of European socialism and classical liberal ideals. Even these basic precepts, generally agreed upon, hinge on a way of identifying, organizing and processing anarchist theories by constructing and then operating from under a governing vision that is antithetical to anarchist thought. "No theory, no ready-made system, no book that has ever been written will save the world," the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin declared; "I cleave to no system, I am a true seeker" (qtd. in Carr 175).

This reluctance to adhere to any master narrative as a viable representational means of theorizing the anarchist project demands an open-ended configuration of strategies of resistance. According to the syndicalist historian Rudolph Rocker, "anarchism recognizes only the *relative* significance of ideas, institutions, and social forms. It is,

therefore, not a fixed, self-enclosed social system but, rather, a definite trend in the historic development of mankind" (31). Anarchism conceived as a trend instead of a hermetic system always seeks to dissociate itself from any structure that presumes to speak for its actions and motivations.

Of course the idea of anarchism, like any idea, gains coherence only in relation to other ideas. We understand anarchism only when it is viewed as one school of political thought among many, or as a radical gesture of resistance on the extreme end of a spectrum of available possibilities. It is precisely this desire to organize knowledge, however, that anarchism teaches us to suspect. Once systems of order are established, they often become naturalized, then reified and used as instruments of domination and oppression. The most astute anarchist thinkers recognize that anarchism itself is not immune to this false transformation: "Beware of considering anarchy to be a dogma, a doctrine above question or debate, to be venerated by its adepts," Emile Henry proclaimed in a prison note shortly before being guillotined in 1894. "No!" he wrote, "[t]he absolute freedom which we demand constantly develops our thinking and raises it toward new horizons (according to the turn of mind of various individuals), [and] takes it out of the narrow framework of regulation and codification" (qtd. in Berman 34).

Such a characterization of anarchism as ephemeral and elastic—besides frustrating the scholar intent on unearthing the essence of anarchism—is instrumental in forging the utopian dimension so important in anarchist discourse. What we consider today to be the limits of freedom are merely provisional boundaries enforced by the current episteme, and these are likely to shift in the future. While anarchism may have directed its initial energies toward the radical reconstruction of political formations, like any movement that challenges fundamental organizing norms and structures, it has broader implications, from a critique of the state as the source of social and economic disparity and executor of limited, measured freedoms, to a critique of the apparatuses of domination and exploitation as they filter down and are made manifest as components of a lived reality. And although it is important to guard against subsuming all politicized struggle into an anarchist agenda, the degree to which this deregulatory impulse attaches itself to various causes cannot be underestimated. "[W]hat one might call the anarchist doctrine," argues Sebastian Faure, "is a cluster of general principles, fundamental conceptions and practical applications regarding which a consensus has been established among individuals whose thought is inimical to Authority and who struggle, collectively or in isolation, against all disciplines and

constraints, whether political, economic, intellectual or moral. . . . Thus, whoever denies Authority and fights against it is an Anarchist" (62). Similarly, the legal historians Gerald Gaus and John Chapman ask, "is anarchism merely a label we attach to doctrines, movements, and moods so inchoate that their only unifying theme is emotive opposition to authority and hierarchy?" (xxiv).

Anarchist thought is put into practice, then, both as a staunch position (no compromise in the rejection of power) and as a posture (a vigilant but fluid corrective to bureaucratic and repressive politics). The revolutionary force of anarchism thus inheres in its ability to be appropriated by diverse communities with diverse objectives. As people rub against authoritative structures in a variety of ways in their daily lives, anarchism can be evoked to combat tyranny across multiple fronts. Anarchism, conceived in this broadest sense, branches out from its roots in the mid-nineteenth century as a philosophy which competed with socialist doctrine for the allegiance of intellectuals and workers to develop, permeate, and attach itself to various political, social and cultural movements through history.

The proliferation of the anarchist impulse and its application to variegated contemporary realities are in accord with the fundamental anarchist ethos. That is, the logic which demands a rigorous interrogation of the limits of freedom across discursive fields requires a cognitive stance that envisions the possibility for new frontiers of freedom to open up in spaces not expressly coopted by the state apparatus, and this cognitive stance corresponds to an anarchic consciousness that understands that the struggle for a free and spontaneous human society must be waged not only on traditional political fronts but through a vigilant recognition of the significance of all actions and behavior. Anarchism, therefore, cannot be restricted to the confines of political discourse; it is also "a moral attitude, an emotional climate, or even a mood" (Gaus and Chapman xviii). With vitriolic zeal, Henry characterizes anarchism as representing "the egalitarian and libertarian aspirations which battle against present authority; it is everywhere, which makes it invisible" (qtd. in Berman 32).

The recognition that the anarchist impulse is everywhere—that it weaves invisibly through social and cultural networks—provides the nexus from which my analysis of Pynchon emanates. It is a wide and generous conceptualization of anarchism I bring to bear on a study of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and it is a formulation that is not without certain hazards. As a point of departure for such an investigation, it becomes apparent that the difficulties one struggles with in a study of anarchism are analogous to the difficulties encountered in a study of Pynchon. For

Gravity's Rainbow, too, resists any easy interpretation, and likewise, the organizing structures we use to infer and bestow literary meaning are themselves treated by Pynchon and his critics with suspicion.

Viewing anarchism as a textualized object within *Gravity's Rainbow*, we can see that Pynchon uses this concept as a way of discussing cycles of history and the return of a motivation in history that survives even as nations undergo cataclysmic transformations. According to Bakunin, history "appears to us as the revolutionary negation, now slow, apathetic, sluggish, now passionate and powerful, of the past" (MBSW 122). This crude and heavy-handed distortion of Hegel's negative dialectic is also expressed as Bakunin's notorious and celebrated maxim "Let us . . . trust the eternal Spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unfathomable and eternally creative source of all life" (58). Furthermore, "[r]evolution requires extensive and widespread destruction, a fecund and renovating destruction, since in this way and only this way are new worlds born" (Bakunin, SA 334). The idea of new worlds born through destruction resonates not only with Arrabal's desire for a cataclysmic anarchist miracle in *Lot 49*, but also with Pynchon's characterization in *Gravity's Rainbow* of the Zone as a site where a new and more free organization of social modes may flourish—not in spite of the war, but precisely because of the war.

Toward the end of the Second World War, then, a diverse group of Argentine anarchists hijacks a German submarine and sails it back to Germany "to seek political asylum" (GR 263). Francisco Squalidozzi (one of whose comrades, Felipe—a poet and "the leading theoretician" of "gaucho anarchism"—calls himself "'the Gaucho Bakunin'" [386]) voices his dreams of a postwar utopia to the American officer Tyrone Slothrop in this oft-cited passage:

> "In the days of the gauchos, my country was a blank piece of paper. The pampas stretched as far as men could imagine, inexhaustible, fenceless. Wherever the gaucho could ride, that place belonged to him. But Buenos Aires sought hegemony over the provinces. All the neuroses about property gathered strength, and began to infect the countryside. Fences went up, and the gaucho became less free. It is our national tragedy. We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that *openness*: it is terror to us. Look at Borges. Look at the suburbs of Buenos Aires. The tyrant Rosas has been dead a century, but his cult flourishes. Beneath the city streets, the warrens of rooms and corridors, the fences and the networks of steel track, the Argentine heart,

> in its perversity and guilt, longs for a return to that first unscribbled serenity . . . that anarchic oneness of pampas and sky. . . ." (264)

Squalidozzi goes on to explain:

> "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 implication here is that history marches "forward" according to narratives of progress only when progress is defined as the consolidation and expansion of political power and control. Decentralizing *back* toward anarchism requires an extraordinary event, such as global combat, to erase centuries of bloody territorial positioning. And yet, anarchism in this case is evoked, not exclusively as a nostalgic longing for some idealized and romantic past, but as a repressed yearning awakened only through the devastation engendered by warfare. "Anarchism here," as John McClure notes, "is not the original sponsor of potentially positive unmappings. . . . Rather, anarchism seeks to exploit the deadly *unmappings* of empire, to cultivate, in the rubble of its wars, ways of life that will not simply rehearse its history" (170). In an analogous commentary, Khachig Tölölyan identifies a "complex and multi-faceted paradox": even as the war is used by people who control structures of power, "by its very nature war . . . inevitably opens up, for a brief historical moment . . . vistas of a world where there really are no secret networks of power and class, no barriers, no political boundaries and artificial discontinuities" (60).

Squalidozzi's last comments on the fragile promise offered by this deterritorialized space metaleptically stand in for the anarchist problematic in general: "'We want it to grow, to change,'" he says. "'In the openness of the German Zone, our hope is limitless.' Then, as if struck on the forehead [. . . he adds] 'So is our danger'" (265). The tensions between these hopes and dangers in Pynchon's assessment of anarchism are never resolved: the hope that anarchism may deliver us from a world feeding itself on its own destruction is tethered to a persistent feeling that the very vigilance anarchist practice requires may at any moment capitulate to institutionalized patterns of control and domination.

If Squalidozzi is the most conspicuous advocate of an anarchist program in *Gravity's Rainbow*, he is not the only character to advance such an agenda. The libertine and part-time impresario Miklos Thanatz presents a case to Ludwig about the vexed connections between violence, anarchy, pathology and sexuality that parallels the critique of psychoanalysis in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. For Deleuze and Guattari, the entire project of psychoanalysis is problematic in that Freudian theory is predicated on a transfer of materialist anxieties onto the category of the subject. In their reading of D. H. Lawrence, Deleuze and Guattari claim:

> [P]sychoanalysis was shutting up sexuality in a bizarre sort of box painted with bourgeois motifs, in a kind of rather repugnant artificial triangle, thereby stifling the whole of sexuality as production of desire so as to recast it along entirely different lines, making of it a "dirty little secret," the dirty little family secret, a private theater rather than the fantastic factory of Nature and Production. (AO 49)

"Instead of participating in an undertaking that will bring about genuine liberation," they write, "psychoanalysis is taking part in the work of bourgeois repression at its most far-reaching level" (50). If the project of psychoanalysis is to maintain and legitimize structures of domination on the level of the family by participating in the work of repression rather than instigating any form of genuine liberation, then an attack on the governing precepts of such theories must be seen as yet another strategic position from which to free the subject from an oppressive institution.

Like Deleuze and Guattari, Pynchon exerts theoretical pressure on psychoanalytic concepts from an anarchist perspective. Thanatz voices these concerns by mapping a political framework onto expressions of so-called deviant behavior:

> "[W]hy are we taught to feel reflexive shame whenever the subject [of S and M] comes up? Why will the Structure allow every other kind of sexual behavior but *that* one? Because submission and dominance are resources it needs for its very survival. They cannot be wasted in private sex. In *any* kind of sex. It needs our submission so that it may remain in power. It needs our lusts after dominance so that it can co-opt us into its own power game. There is no joy in it, only power. I tell you, if S and M could be established universally, at the family level, the State would wither away."
>
> This is Sado-anarchism and Thanatz is its leading theoretician in the Zone these days. (GR 737)

In Thanatz's formulation, the state condemns sadomasochism because it provides a form of role playing which too closely resembles the required positions of individual and Structure needed to enforce hegemony. That is, S and M is marked as deviant by the state apparatus because it may reveal the underlying power relations the state depends on to maintain order. Consequently, by way of a politico-sexual practice Lenin never could have imagined, sado-anarchism, if established at the family level, would cause the disempowered state to wither away.

Apart from Squalidozzi and Thanatz, even Slothrop's much discussed disintegration can be read through anarchist discourse, specifically that branch of anarchism advanced by radical ecologists. Slothrop's movement through the Zone—the metamorphoses he undergoes—seems to correspond to Murray Bookchin's ecologically-derived anarchism, which is marked by spontaneity, differentiation and fragmentation. Wandering through mountains and meadows, Slothrop sheds his various disguises and strips all the insignia off his borrowed uniform. He becomes "intensely alert to trees" (552), and lets his hair and beard grow. "[H]e likes to spend whole days naked, ants crawling up his legs, butterflies lighting on his shoulders, watching the life on the mountain" (623). Later, he cries aloud with joy, "not a thing in his head, just feeling natural" (626).

This turn to the natural figures in a great deal of anarchist writing: the idea that a model for social engineering can be found in nature was promoted by the geographer-biologist-anarchist Peter Kropotkin in the nineteenth century and later revised by Bookchin. Writing in 1971, Bookchin claims: "the ecological principles that shaped organic societies re-emerge in the form of social principles to shape utopia. . . . Natural ecology becomes social ecology" (21). For Bookchin, human society as we know it is "unnatural" because gigantic, impersonal structures of the state and of the great corporations are founded on principles of authority and coercion. With the suspension or paralysis of these institutions (such as we see happening in the Zone), human society will be transformed into an organization of voluntary, natural relations. These relations would not be "built" in hierarchical formations of power and oppression, but would "grow" by organic means according to individual needs and desires. If this schematic seems to reproduce a simplistic dichotomy always already exploded by Pynchon—that of Nature providing a redemptive and/or recuperative path which will save the world from the ravages of a hostile and harmful technocracy—it is nonetheless at least partially valued by the text. As Slothrop is integrated into the natural environment, he eventually becomes part of it, perhaps even becoming "a genuine, point-for-point microcosm" (GR

738). With Slothrop "[s]cattered all over the Zone," it is "doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again, in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained'" (712). Casting Slothrop's corporeal dissemination in the police lexicon of surveillance, apprehension and interrogation emphasizes his liberation. If (to quote Henry again) "anarchism is everywhere, which makes it invisible," then Slothrop's transformation literally (dis)embodies and performs such a predication.

Moreover, "[o]nly feathers" remain from Rocketman's last flight. Free as a bird, he leaves mere vestiges behind to be scrutinized, but even these resist identification and classification. They are studied by an ornithologist whose findings are published (apparently anachronistically) in "*Proceedings of the International Society of Confessors to an Enthusiasm for Albatross Nosology*," but the exact affliction of this creature is never ascertained. In two last telling details, we learn that this journal also devotes entire issues to "analyses of world economics," and even "sent a correspondent to Spain" in the winter of 1936 (712). The correspondent's report, we can surmise, included some observations on the anarcho-syndicalist struggles against Franco's regime.

Much as Bakunin "sustained the scattered impulse of rebellion across nineteenth-century Europe," according to one biographer (Kedward xvi), so too do "[s]ome believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there's no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering" (742). This scattering, in turn, resonates as well with Deleuze and Guattari's call for a rhizomatic system of thought to replace binary logic. Slothrop as nomad, as bird aflight, as germinating material—all these identities are metaphorically parlayed by Deleuze and Guattari into affirmation and opposition. "Thought lags behind Nature" (TP 5), they write. "Always follow the rhizome by rupture; lengthen, prolong, and relay the line of flight" (11). "[M]ake rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots!" (24).

Besides recognizing the anarchist thematics woven into the text, attending to the historical moment that produced *Gravity's Rainbow* invites us to construct correlations between the action within the novel and the social, cultural and political landscape from which the novel emerged. The 1960s and early '70s saw the rise of what social observers have termed "neo-anarchism," which had links to the New Left and emerged out of the experiences of those involved in the Civil Rights movements, anti-war demonstrations, nuclear disarmament protests and ecological conservation programs.[3] The trend toward "tuning in, turning on, dropping out," the development of small communal societies, and the rejection of previously held values and

beliefs point to pacifist desires to construct utopian alternatives influenced in part by anarchist ideas. Anarchism, however, was also manifested in acts of terrorism and violence against the state apparatus: William Powell published *The Anarchist Cookbook* (1971), which includes instructions on how to make homemade bombs and where to throw them; the Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver printed up one-hundred-year-old political pamphlets by Bakunin calling for popular uprisings against police oppression and distributed them through the streets of Oakland, California. From the other side, the feeling that anarchism gravely threatened established moral and social orders was responsible for a great many public condemnations of countercultural activity. Whether that activity was truly anarchist mattered little to those who felt that a valued way of life was being violently wrested away, and "anarchy" was often evoked as responsible for all forms of terror and mayhem and as a virtual synonym for chaos. So, while anarchism was especially conspicuous in the era that saw the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow*, it was yet as variously inflected as anarchism historically has always been: for some a noble pursuit of freedom, for others a nihilistic move toward total social disintegration.

Examining how Pynchon organized this historical material available to him when he was writing *Gravity's Rainbow*, I believe we can identify an anarchist impulse at work on the level of form. It has almost become *de rigueur* in Pynchon studies to claim that *Gravity's Rainbow* resists simple generic classification: the heterogeneous composition contextualizes disparate formal and stylistic elements, leading Tölölyan to note that critics are uncomfortable over "the inability of their narrow generic and modal categories to deal with Pynchon's work" (qtd. in Celmer 6). Steven Weisenburger claims that Pynchon's narrative techniques "beg for a revision of current theories" (71). Alec McHoul and David Wills press this point (and shift the blame) by expressing a "very real dissatisfaction with the Pynchon industry," which shies away from the kind of innovative theoretical activity the novels demand. Instead, McHoul and Wills argue, Pynchon criticism for the most part capitulates to banal exegetical practices and relies on "some of the most conservatively academic critical apparatuses. . . . Into the play, the marked disunity of the perfectly fictional and imaginary Pynchon," they write, "comes, time after time, the critical policeman, rule-maker, and above all explainer of the 'actual' 'underlying' rationale for Pynchon's writing" (1).

Language like this turns the tables on the critic-text relation. Far from opening up the text, the critic (in Squalidozzi's words) is "obsessed with building labyrinths," with drawing "ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet." The critic in this scenario finds himself or

herself in the unhappy position of critical policeman, trying to contain the anarchy of the text. I don't wish to pursue or rehearse the complexity of such self-critical, self-reflexive meditations here; I simply want to concur that Pynchon indeed frustrates our desire to situate his text in preexisting critical catalogues, and this frustration imparts significance to my central argument. *Gravity's Rainbow*'s refusal to be identified by (and thus limited to) the conventions governing genre demarcations reflects a broader political concern with the way critics organize texts according to literary principles. This strategy, in turn, can be folded into a study of anarchism and aesthetics.

Herbert Read articulates the relation between anarchism and art as follows:

> Form, pattern and order are essential aspects of existence; but in themselves they are the attributes of death. To make life, to ensure progress, to create interest and vividness, it is necessary to break form, to distort pattern, to change the nature of our civilization. In order to create it is necessary to destroy; and the agent of destruction is the poet. I believe that the poet is necessarily an anarchist. (58)

Read's provocative formulation reveals an obvious debt to Bakunin's thought and demonstrates how anarchist political philosophy might be mapped onto artistic considerations. And yet, as critics trained to identify and interpret order in art, we are placed in an awkward position: the critical turn inherent in any interpretive act hinges on a decoding process, and it is old news to assert that Pynchon's texts, at many junctures, seek to interrogate, occlude or undermine established meaning-making systems. According to Richard Poirier, an apparent danger in Pynchon criticism is to try to "translate" the novels into a more manageable and familiar form:

> The damage consists of treating each of the formal or stylistic or allusive elements in a work as a clue to meaning, a point of possible stabilization. This is an especially inappropriate way to treat Pynchon because each of these elements is in itself highly mobile and dramatic. Each is a clue not to meaning so much as to *chaos* of meaning, as evidence of the impossibility of stabilization. (19)

If these clues, these semic threads, cannot be woven into a tapestry of signification but lead rather to chaos, any desire to assign neat patterns to the narrative is necessarily frustrated. However, a way around this critical impasse—a way of rebutting the claims that Pynchon merely celebrates ambiguity, indeterminacy or even unintelligibility—is made

possible by situating these observations within anarchist discourse. By viewing *Gravity's Rainbow* from an anarchist posture steadfastly wary of totalizing moves, we gain a deepened sense of Pynchon's vision, see it as having a sort of coherence, as a sustained meditation that calls into question the validity of all representations and ordering systems. Furthermore, the novel's form enacts what may be called an anarchist aesthetic. That is, the experience of reading Pynchon—tracing the heady narrative strands through literary, pop cultural, philosophical and scientific discourses, through shifting inflections of genre and through radical disjunctions of tone and style—corresponds to an anarchist sensibility that emphasizes heterogeneity over uniformity, spontaneity over conformity, and fragmentation over consolidation. In George Levine's words on Pynchon's prose:

> The discontinuities, the surprises, the refusals of categories, the fake mythologizing—these all confront us with the possibility that art is most valuable, in a culture where power resides among the organizers, when it rejects the tradition of organic coherence we take as a universal standard. Might not that art be best—at this moment, in this place—that constantly pushes toward the possibility of fragmentation? Might it be that not order but anarchy is the most difficult thing to achieve in this culture? The pressure toward anarchy, in a world structured to resist anarchy at any cost, might release us, ironically, into a more humane order. (117)

An ironic possibility to be sure, for the repeated operative qualifier here is "might": anarchism *might* be a release into a more humane order, and an aesthetics of fragmentation *might* point us in this direction. To imagine the possibilities of other, non-authoritative, non-hierarchical configurations, though, is also to confront the possibility of pure chaos. Anarchism not only exhilarates in its unspecified promise of new ways to "imagine love out of the wastes of a world full of people helpless to love" (Levine 117); it also terrifies because it invites the dreams of annihilation and self-negation that plague many Pynchon characters. But for Levine, and for Pynchon, this is a risk worth taking.

From Thanatz's Sado-anarchism to Roger Mexico's punk gesture of urinating on Their conference table, from Felipe's Gaucho Bakunin to Slothrop's fragmentation, and from opposing Them to deterritorializing all kinds of boundaries and precepts, anarchism is a serious and important presence in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon gives his text an anarchist dimension that materializes both diachronically in the representations of epochal moments in history and synchronically as anarchist networks suggestively weave across the spectrum of a subject's daily life. By rewriting the past which has shaped our present,

Pynchon promulgates and extends an anarchic vision in his exploration of historical and psychic territories, filtering, assessing and evaluating represented social and cultural forms through an anarchist consciousness.

In the closing pages of "In the Zone," Pynchon describes many strange villages that have sprung up on the Lüneburg Heath. "Squalidozzi has come in out of his wanderings with tales of Palestinian units strayed all the way from Italy, who've settled down farther east and started up Hasidic communes" (GR 613–14). Some villages are "dedicated now to a single industry, mail delivery" (614)—intimations of the Tristero, perhaps, since we know from *Lot 49* that that organization resorted in lean times to handling anarchist correspondence. And one village "has been taken over by army dogs, Dobermans and Shepherds," whose "trainers are dead men now, or lost." No one can get near the town, and "[i]f there are lines of power among themselves, loves, loyalties, jealousies, no one knows" (614). In one particular village, though, "[a] dozen nationalities, dressed as Argentine estancieros, crowd around the soup-kitchen commissary. El Ñato is standing on the saddle of his horse, Gaucho style, looking off into the German pampas" (612). In this makeshift, multi-ethnic commune, the dispossessed have set up huts and gardens and corrals and kitchens in the middle of the garrison state as they, like Enzian and Andreas, "ride the interface [. . .] between armies East and West" (731). Here Graciela Imago Portales ponders the inner strength of her lover Beláustegui: "The man knows his odds," she thinks. "Each moment has its value, its probable success against other moments in other hands. [. . .] He will stake everything on this anarchist experiment" (613). It is this experiment that Pynchon holds dear, and it is this vision, I believe, that is worth pursuing.

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Notes

[1]This essay is born out of a larger project on Pynchon and anarchism. For a more comprehensive analysis of the anarchist dimension in *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, see my "'This Network of All Plots.'"

[2]These differences are, of course, extremely important, as this essay should demonstrate. Instead of eliding difference to create a more manageable object of inquiry, however, a more appropriate and astute analysis would recognize the existence of multiple anarchisms, which intersect and diverge across any number of discursive platforms. Similarly, Pynchon understands that anarchism is not a monolithic movement and ideology, but a complex of ideas and allegiances that are continually renegotiated and rearticulated.

[3]This rich vein for Pynchon criticism has been mined but not yet depleted: see, for example, Raymond M. Olderman, Eric Meyer and Frederick Ashe.

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