Postmodern Ana-Apocalyptics: Pynchon's V-Effect and the End (of Our Century)

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> Gravity drains from me like colors at dusk.
> I fly so fast that I'm motionless
> and leave behind me
> the transparent wake of the past.
> > —Dan Pagis, "Point of Departure"

> Some say the world will end in fire,
> Some say in ice.
> > —Robert Frost, "Fire and Ice"

> I considered that we were now, as always, at the
> end of time.
> > —Jorge Luis Borges, "The God's Script"

> Our history is an aggregate of last moments.
> > —*Gravity's Rainbow*

1: Pynchon's Post (V-)Effect

> There will be a tremendous explosion, but no one will
> hear it.
> > —Italo Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*

The nature of Thomas Pynchon's fiction has encouraged a serial view of his texts as being sequentially organized by some concatenative V-effect, from the first novel, *V.* (or "V1"), then, momentarily omitting *The Crying of Lot 49*, to the centrality of V-2 rockets in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and, nearer us and nearer "home" (its final word), to *Vineland* as "V3" and a more nostalgic fresco of an allegorized proto-America (*Vinland* was the name given to the American continent sighted by the Vikings in the tenth century).[1] But each time, a different estrangement takes place, according to a variable V-effect, or Pynchon's version of the Brechtian *V[erfremdungs]-Effekt*.

As we may legitimately expect from its title and opening design—an inverted pyramid made up of forty-two smaller v's and followed by a

dot left out of the neat metafictional figure—Pynchon's first novel, *V.*, explores the many-facetedness of the V paradigm, the motif for the possible convergence of the two main parallel plot-lines at a vanishing point on the quester's (or critic's) horizon. A significant instance binds together at a V angle, in a symbolic mirror of narcissism and narrative reflection, time and reverse-time, the book's two opposite counterforces of real and virtual or mirror-time, which cancel each other out in a circular process of annulment:

> Rachel was looking into the mirror at an angle of 45°, and so had a view of the face turned toward the room and the face on the other side, reflected in the mirror: here were time and reverse-time, co-existing, cancelling one another exactly out. Were there many such reference points, scattered through the world . . .; did real time plus virtual or mirror-time equal zero and thus serve some half-understood moral purpose? (V 46; cf. 230)

But, however problematic and receding the convergence of either/or's may ultimately remain (for example, the alternative "v" vs / v. "v." [see 322 for "v." as "versus"], V as "a remarkably scattered concept" [389], etc.), *V.* (V dot) moves toward the possibility of an eschatological point of closure, against the background of the congruence of V (as "character" or literal metaphor for the pattern of its occurrences) with *V.*: the apocalyptic dissolution of history more explicitly defined in the earlier version of chapter 3 published as the short story "Under the Rose."[2] Unlike *The Crying of Lot 49*, for instance, where the programme is parodically deferred and "await[ed]," the whole of *V.* disseminates its title and programmatic design of v's within V until their gathering in a last signature, placed outside the final dot (492). Despite flashbacks and the framing of a never-ending or never-arriving "mission" (226), Pynchon's "V1" plot is essentially progressive and does not really poise on the threshold where the causational model of linear history, including the possibility of a non-recurrent apocalypse, might be successfully reversed.

Picking up thematically and chronologically where *V.* left off—the bombing of Malta, an island "alienated from any history in which cause precedes effect" (V 489), during the Second World War—and prepared for by issues of (pre)text and (pre-)apocalypse in the binary propaedeutics of *The Crying of Lot 49*, with its Manichean quandaries of either/or's versus excluded middles,[3] *Gravity's Rainbow* ushers in a yet more versatile, totalizing but untotalizable, unrepresentable figure: the Aggregat 4 or V-2, coupled with SS (a double parabola, the shape of gravity's rainbow itself) or sigma,[4] whose supersonic temporality—it

"travels faster than the speed of sound. The first news you get of it is the blast. Then, if you're still around, you hear the sound of it coming in" (GR 7; cf. 48, etc.)[5]—is capable of reversing cause and effect (or the aprioric linear pattern imposed on secular history by official rationalization [167]), and informs the book's final structural twist.[6] When *Gravity's Rainbow* "ends" with the fictional staging of the destruction of the world and book-as-theatre-or-film (760), we belatedly realize that we have been in a theatre all along, trying to decipher a multi-layered (screen)play and awaiting a "reel"[7] performance, possibly called *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which one last rocket erupts from the narrative-textual space into the present of referentiality—though, of course, all within the fictional space—to destroy the theatre and spectators of the deferred show and terminate the book. But that "final" missile about to explode on the Orpheus Theatre, either delayed V-2 of the Second World War or future nuclear ICBM of the 1970s, reenters Pirate Prentice's dream of an evacuation after bombing, which, after the final (rehearsal of an endlessly repeated) annihilation, we may cyclically go back to and reinterpret:

> A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now.
> It is too late. The Evacuation still proceeds, but it's all theatre. (3)

Thus Pynchon's defused ending turns into the "recurrent motif of an impending, apocalyptic message intruding into representational space from an 'impossible' outside" (Berressem 23), a figure for the failure to represent death-as-event, or Lacan's and Blanchot's impossible (missed encounter with the) Real (the Rocket itself), "symbolized" in that immeasurable Δt in the rupture of the book's circular structure.[8] Beyond numerous totalizing plottings—fictional and politico-economic plots, the plotting of Slothrop's sexual conquests and erections on a London map as an apotropaic measure against the V-2, etc.—lies the insuperable (self-)cancellation of the V2-effect built into the book's deferred circular structure.

Pynchon's fictional programme bears a striking analogy to Derrida's conception of the "fabulous" and "fictive" referent of nuclear war, the "fabulously textual" event of a nuclear apocalypse which has not yet happened, which one can only know through rhetorical projections— ballistic acts of conjecturing stretched parabola-wise toward the unpresentable unknowable "sublime" event—and which, if it did happen, would obliterate the very process of socio-cultural archiving that could still record such knowledge and experience.[9] Yet, while sketching the gloomy horizon of the "remainderless cataclysm" (Derrida

1984a, 21) of a nuclear disaster, *Gravity's Rainbow* is home to a whole range of strategic resistances that foreground the process of textual remaindering or *restance*—a double axis Derrida has used to characterize the work of deconstruction (for example, Derrida 1990). Not unlike Derrida—although through different structural, thematic and other means—Pynchon opposes this political necessity to the undialectizable destruction of the very symbolic work on/of the remainder which would result from an apocalypse annihilating the "movement of survival" (*survivance*) at the very heart of life itself (Derrida 1984a, 28), thus showing the necessary impossibility and (therefore) fictionality of envisaging a post-apocalyptic world, a "post-fiction."[10]

Because, unlike the V-1, the V-2 strikes before it warns, gives the response before the Pavlovian stimulus (GR 23, 25, 49, etc.), not until it has hit somewhere *else* does one know after the fact that one *will have been* saved, in a doubling-back gesture that withdraws life from life in "sur-vival" (*survivance*) by inscribing it precariously in a perpetual waiting, in between two deaths or salvations and delayed bangs, either too early or too late, in the *anakuklosis* or eternal return[11] of a "disaster" and impossibility to witness. Thus, when one has started (re)reading the opening sentences quoted before, one knows that one will have been momentarily spared, that one is still sur-viving (cf. quotations from Klein in note 10 above).

With its catastrophic temporality of future-before-past—also the book's "linear" unfolding from "It has happened before. [. . .] It is too late" (3) to "There is time" before "the last delta-t" (760)—Pynchon's V2-effect may be read as an allegorical exemplum of Lyotard's future-perfect temporality of the postmodern understood not as a contemporary historical "moment" but as an unaccountable, already re-presented, *ana*chronistic "event."[12] And the programmed advent of an onrushing "end" before a (re)beginning in Pynchon's cult postmodern masterpiece makes it a privileged test case for assessing the state of literature as well as criticism on the threshold of the countdown to the end of the century and of the millennium, at the ominous post of the year 2000. The relevance of the V2-effect is like that of the postmodern, in which *post-* anachronistically comes *pre-*. But it is also like Derrida's *post* or the "incoming mail" which the V-2 is compared to (6): its apocalyptic missive/missile does and does not reach us, according to the laws of Derridean (a)destination (*destinerrance*)[13] recalled by McHoul and Wills (54) in their study of *Gravity's Rainbow* and the "post-rhetorical."[14]

"At the beginning there will have been speed," says Derrida's opening shot or "projectile" in "No Apocalypse, Not Now" (1984a, 20).

As in the deferred temporal structure of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the future anterior "translates" the politico-discursive stakes and speed wars of the nuclear issue—that is, that one has to decide on a prior strategy by anticipating the enemy's next move or response, which has not yet happened (and may not happen)[15]—a future past retroactive tense which later I would like to align with larger concerns about literature in the "post-age." And indeed, after the "final" "Now everybody—" (GR 760) and the possibility of a return to yet another belated screaming across the sky, no apocalypse will have taken place in this fabulously textual event, not now, as if the V-2's speed itself had overshot the possibility of terminating the fiction and its critical interpretations.

I need now to analyze further the "war situation" in *Gravity's Rainbow* and in particular the role of its almost silent evacuation of the Jewish question, which I will read alongside various critical/ philosophical positions on the nuclear holocaust, apocalypse, survival, and how these concerns have been brought to bear on the diagnosis of a "postmodern condition." These will later appear to have been necessary steps toward evaluating the relevance of the novel's (ana)cyclical structure of deferral and recapitulation (*anakephalaiosis*) to the larger issues of literature, literary criticism and critical theory in our *pre*millennial *post*modern age.

2: No Apocalypse—Already (the Holocaust) Not Yet Again

> It will have happened to that other
> The survivor   The survivor
> To him it happened
> > —George Oppen, "The Occurrences"

> In the beginning there was the Holocaust.
> We must therefore start all over again.
> > —Elie Wiesel

Derived from the Greek *holokauston*, used in the Septuagint in the sense of "totally consumed by fire," and consonant with the Hebrew term for sacrificial offering, *olah* (Lev. 1.3ff.), the word "holocaust" is usually extended from the stricter meaning of a religious burnt offering to a more general metaphor for sacrifice, and thus shares a semantic deviation with "apocalypse," the unveiling or uncovering (*ana/ apokaluptein* in Greek) of a new dispensation in the Book of Revelation, beyond the cataclysmic sacrificial purgation by fire to which it has sometimes been reduced in popular belief.[16] The conflation became

more urgent after the end of the Second World War, with both the revelation of the Nazis' "Final Solution" (the planned extermination of the whole of the Jewish race through the Holocaust, and the subsequent attempt to exterminate extermination itself through the erasure of all remaining evidence) and the premonitory sign of apocalyptic mass destruction intimated by the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan.[17] The Apocalypse is thus a doubly felt urgency: eschatologically, since "concerned with final things, with the end of the present age and with the age to follow"—whether or not its accomplishment implies a circular return to an immemorial past[18]—and also teleologically, as it is "given a historical embodiment which is essentially linear," according to a view of history seen as moving toward a specified end, which "assigns to event after event a place in a pattern of historical relationships that will not repeat itself in the cyclical manner of oriental myth, but that presses steadily toward culmination" (Zamora 1989, 10, 13).[19] On a more "textual" level, Derrida—and what we have learnt to call "deconstruction"—has (not unlike Nuclear Criticism, which it has partly influenced) alerted us to the need to slow down the pace of our increasingly "apocalyptic criticism" with its apophantic desire, which, essentially nuclear in its inherent totalizing gesture, ignores the resisting remainder (*restance*) of textual activity and rushes headlong toward sought-after conclusions.

Over the last decade, under the pressure of (continental) philosophy's pessimistic outlook on the project of modernity, there have been several attempts at rehistoricizing the postmodern with reference to the urgent tones of survival acquired by the *post-* after the Second World War, away from the "canonical" founding views that would locate the postmodernity of literature in a range of distinctive formal practices and themes that could be traced back to a given point of departure according to an unproblematized linear conception of literary history. In his aptly titled essay "Postmodernism: It's Future Perfect," McKenna has summarized this emerging *Zeitgeist* in words which bring together issues of belatedness, survival to an apocalypse, and the retroactive glance of deconstruction, and are relevant for understanding how *Gravity's Rainbow* dramatizes the impossibility of representing the effect of belatedness "itself":

> The question of postmodernism in its most far-reaching implications . . . is the question of survival, of living on after the dead. A postmodern consciousness is indissociable, for demonstrable, concrete reasons bearing on the recent past as they affect the possibility of a future, from the consciousness of being a survivor, of living on. The consciousness of being as presence as being somehow or other belated, *nachträglich, après coup,*

may be the consequence of our deconstructive activity. It is also, I argue, a matter of decisive historical consequence. (229)[20]

Such reflections on living after Auschwitz came into acute focus with Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*,[21] and were later echoed by Blanchot in *Après coup*, a belated postface to *Le Ressassement éternel*, before being more fully articulated by Lyotard in his problematic of the differend (1988, especially 86–106, §152–60), then in *Heidegger and "the jews"* (1990).[22] Sombrely elected as the symptomatic proof of the failure or end of the modern ideal of humanity's emancipation, as "the crime opening postmodernity," in *The Postmodern Explained to Children* and various subsequent journalistic summaries,[23] "Auschwitz" is pitted against Hegelian dialectic in *The Differend* as the "proper" name for the destruction of experience and the extinction of the name "humanity,"[24] as the cessation of the proper "itself," and, coterminous with all the improper camps of the Nazis' Final Solution of mass liquidation, as the collective name of responsibility which fractures the communal "we" (1988, 101, §157):

> Nazism assails the occurrence, the *Ereignis* [that is, event—of the deportee's phrase; see 79, §131]. It thereby attacks the time of all modernity. . . .
> The Jewish phrase has not taken place. There is no *Is it happening?* It happened. (106, §160)[25]

From now on, the name "Auschwitz" will signify the impossibility of speculative discourse in the Hegelian sense (97, §155), as the unaccountable deaths "resist all attempts to sublate them into an economy" (Bennington 149),[26] as well as that of aesthetic representation—a malaise contributing to Blanchot's "disaster of writing" and also to Lyotard's own approach to the postmodern as "that which in the modern invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself," to which we must have the courage to attest (1992, 24–25).[27] "Auschwitz" signifies the "caesura" that reveals the essence of the West and interrupts historical continuity,[28] the suspension of the "critical" moment of absolute decision and the suspension of epochality itself,[29] that also characterizes the historicity of literature and the "nuclear epoch" in Derrida's "No Apocalypse, Not Now."[30] Thus, for Lyotard, Adorno, Blanchot, Lacoue-Labarthe (and also Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Vladimir Jankélévitch, Elie Wiesel and many others, survivors or not), though in different ways I cannot go into here, the question "Auschwitz?" is also and always already the question "after Auschwitz?" This question of the impossibility of a fictional narrative,

of knowledge or testimony of/after Auschwitz (Lyotard 1988, 101, §157),[31] traces a faultline between the belief in historical continuity and the rupture which has retrospectively been taken to inaugurate a necessarily postmodern consciousness, with perhaps the redemptive possibility of a "condition" in which grand narratives can no longer be trusted,[32] a situation of discursive fragmentation or "dissensus" following the radical dispersion of the collective "we."

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, this may be translated into the reading of a radical opposition between the "We" of the Preterite, or even of the Elect who are still temporarily fortunate enough to hear the delayed blast of an earlier explosion, and the "They" of the "system." And if, as Steiner writes, "[t]he world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason. To speak of the *unspeakable* is to risk the survivance of language as creator and bearer of humane, rational truth,"[33] one may begin to understand both why, despite the posthumous nature of speculativeness, the all-burning of "Final Solutions" (the Holocaust of the dead Jews, whom the Nazis called *Figuren*; or the Apocalypse) has still been made to function as an iterative metaphor and rhetorical trope,[34] as the speculative space at once opened up and foreclosed by the serialization of destruction (the A-bomb, the quintuple annulling 00000 A4 missile, the Schwarzkommando's 00001 replica, all transfigured into the threat of nuclear disaster in the era of President Nixon—a five-letter nixin' or quintuply annulling apocalyptic name), and why the faint mention or silent evacuation of the Jewish tragedy in Pynchon's novel may be after all an apt manoeuvre to inform the larger claims of economics on humanity, the community of interests that brought the cynical West together after 1945. More globally, the allegedly typical postmodern foregrounding of parodic, self-reflexive techniques, such as figures of self-consuming (flame) writing or "pyro-graphy" in John Ashbery's "Skaters,"[35] and the thematization of the book's or library's holocaust in novelistic treatments of apocalypse (Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*, Maggie Gee's *Burning Book*, even Elias Canetti's precursor *Auto da Fé*, etc.), would point more darkly to the post-Auschwitz disaster of writing-as-ambivalent *gift* (also in the German sense of "poison"), as a ruined burnt-up offering (see note 47 below).

Pynchon's "deportation" of the Jewish question (to use a grimly functional metaphor) is carried out in at least two ways: first by focusing on the Germans' slaughter of the Hereros in South-West Africa in 1904,[36] seen by Pynchon as a "dress rehearsal" for the Jews' extermination during the Second World War[37] (notice the synecdochic relation in *V.* of the 60,000 dead Hereros of General von Trotha's *Vernichtungsbefehl* to the postulated 6,000,000 fallen Jews [245]);

then by evacuating Jewish bodies as capitalizable, disposable matter.[38] In ironic terms which now sadly evoke the belated revelation of Heidegger's silence about Auschwitz and his de-essentializing equation of humans (Jews) with the politico-economic mechanisms of consumables and waste,[39] *V., The Crying of Lot 49* (where the connection between Jews and the V-2 is casually announced) and *Gravity's Rainbow* take up the theme of the trashable, convertible Jewish schlemihl, and remind us implicitly that the massively technologized Jewish Holocaust bore witness to the "advance" as much as to the failure of modern civilization:[40]

"Look at you, masquerading like a human being. You ought to be junked. Not burned or cremated."

Of course. Like a human being. Now remember, right after the war, the Nuremberg war trials? Remember the photographs of Auschwitz? Thousands of Jewish corpses, stacked up like those poor car-bodies. (V 295)

"Buchenwald, according to Freud, once the light was let in, would become a soccer field. . . . At Auschwitz the ovens would be converted over to petit fours and wedding cakes, and the V-2 missiles to public housing for the elves." (CL 95)

So, Jews are negotiable. Every bit as negotiable as cigarettes, cunt, or Hershey bars. Jews also carry an element of guilt, of future blackmail, which operates, natch, in favor of the professionals. (GR 105)[41]

The first "deportation" opens up the absolute epochality we are ready to attribute to some key historical moments into gruesomely banal repetitions (the sequence of Herero and Jewish genocides; the bombing of Malta in 1940–1943 described by Fausto Maijstral in *V.*, which ushers in the chain of V-2s, the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima and the nuclear war to come in *Gravity's Rainbow*), while the silencing or "preterition" of the Preterite[42] Jews is also strategically part of the argumentative frame within which the repression of the deep necessity to mourn and repair has taken place in postwar Germany[43] and, Pynchon implicitly suggests, throughout the world, because of the economic superinterests (ex-Nazi scientists bought over for the NASA, transnational cartels re-formed after V-E Day) which invalidate neat divisions between war and postwar (see, for example, GR 326).[44]

The result of deconstructive activity, itself bound up with such decisive or "critical" historical consequences, finds its most "eloquent" expression in the philosophy of "what remains," that is (as we saw

earlier), of *restance* as much as resistance. Through its ironic twist, which, as it were, annihilates the final annihilation, *Gravity's Rainbow* brings about "sur-vival" ("life-upon-life") after death upon death (cf. death into "'death-transfigured'" [GR 166–67]), a remainder of textual/ interpretive activity that ceaselessly relaunches the rocket-as-divine scripture (or Torah [520, 727]). Beyond the two deaths of the Apocalypse (Rev. 20.6, 13–14)—the first (corporeal) death (cf. von Braun's epigraph to part 1 of Pynchon's novel) and the second (spiritual) or eternal death that will never overtake the victor (Derrida 1984c, 7)—and beyond even Lyotard's death of death (the annihilation of the individual and collective name "Jew" [1988, 101, §157]), there is always the (however oblique) promise of a "second coming" or "eternal return" with Pynchon's V2-effect, an *apokatastasis* or final catastrophe through a perfectly cleansing, renewing fire (an *ekpyrosis* or cosmic fire "that periodically puts an end to the universe in order to renew it") which "will put an end to history, hence will restore man to eternity and beatitude" (cf. Eliade 122, 124).[45] Like the imperative, anagogic "come" in the epilogue to Revelation (and of Blanchot's apocalyptic *récit, L'Arrêt de mort*), glossed by Derrida on several occasions (for example, 1984c, 25, 31, 33), which beckons toward the impending Parousia-as-return, Pynchon's final "Now everybody—" heralds a retroactive re-call rather than a mere nostalgic comeback; it is actually Blicero's nostalgia for a lost order that makes him disappear, or perhaps mutate westward into a U.S. technocratic magnate, in one possible set of interpretations of part 4; and the appropriately named Orpheus Theatre, run by a cover figure of Richard Nixon, appears in an analepsis to the mythical hero whose love was doomed by looking back (in the book, the following flashback to the launching of the 00000).

A tension between the sequentiality of deaths and the dialectic of Death's annihilation is at work in Pynchon's "reentrant" text; the linear (teleological) apocalypse is dis-covered into its critical (eschatological) serialization: no apocalypse—already not yet again. At the physical end of gravity's downward pull (the "Descent" section [GR 760]), the rocket's arc is transfigured from the single physical parabola of "no second chances, no return" (209)—shaped like history's linear teleological arc and to which an allegorical parable is added (the rainbow as a symbol of the promised restoration of the covenant between God and man via the sacrifice of Gottfried)—into a circular return as it fictitiously (through the required work of its readers' imaginations) burrows underground, back to the re-beginning of its textual course (cf. 726).[46] After "Now everybody—," which gives us to think the presence of present, also as the impending gift (*present*) that has not quite happened[47]—as the not now/not yet of a delayed, serial

ana-apocalyptics according to the Lyotardian conception of postmodern temporality as a procedure in *ana-* (1992, 93)—the V-2 silently strikes in the blank space of the book's anamnesic return, goes under the earth to complete the revolution around which deaths and survivals, pre and post, are randomly spaced out.[48]

3: What Remains After: Toward Generalized Ana-Apocalyptics

> We love apocalypses too much.
>
> —Saul Bellow, *Herzog*

In criticism, the apocalypse could signify, if it really took place, a termination of interpretation, thus of desire, fantasy, life, when the final revelation came, beyond which there would be nothing left to say. Such an *apparent* closure is fortunately always held at bay, as critics ceaselessly replay not dissimilar final solutions (albeit under new guises), and the sense of an apocalypse therefore fades over into mock-apocalyptic rehearsals for a first-last performance that will never take place.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the prospective apocalypse is always trembling on the threshold, at the Δt of (non-)closure,[49] yet is forever deferred in order to be serially replayed at all levels of the "reel" of Pynchon's "realfiction." Between politics and parody, and using the full political implications of (self-)parodying undecidability to the best of postmodern effects (Bennett), Pynchon's work challenges and reinscribes the very notion of apocalypse in a post-Second World War universe which has already "survived" the holocaust yet also lives under the threat of nuclear winter—the opening scene, set on 18 December (Weisenburger 15–16), can thus be re-read as fatally set in a post-atomic ice age. For what is the paradox of an epoch that is post-apocalyptic, that is, after the revelation of humanity's vacuity, though the apocalypse has not (yet already) taken place, if not a constant revisiting of the fathers' sins upon the children (like the generations of questing "stencils" in *V.*) in "ana-apocalyptic" fashion—two versions of Greek re-vealing, *anakaluptein* and *apokaluptein*, that here become, in my coinage, a returning, retroactive or retroprogressive apocalypse?

The very last section of the twelve-episode fourth part of *Gravity's Rainbow*, suggestive of the issue of apostolic succession (cf. Greek *apo-stellein*: to send [*apostolos*: Godsent, that is, here Gottfried]), is at once a narrative step forward, or prolepsis,[50] to the possible dawning of a nuclear war in the Nixon era and a step back, or *ana*lepsis, to the fork in post-Second World War time when both Blicero's quintuple-zero rocket bearing Gottfried and the Schwarzkommando's serially derived

00001 are about to be fired. Poised interstitially between zero and one (00000 and 00001), first and second (V-1 and V-2), or reading and re-reading, *Gravity's Rainbow* vindicates Blanchot's view of writing as "the opaque, empty opening into that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet" (1982, 33),[51] and empowers the reader to become re-ligious in a semblance of resurrection or *apotheosis*, in an eternal recurrent dis-aster.[52] Blanchot's diagnosis of writing's "trajectory" of a silent disaster can be applied to *Gravity's Rainbow* in a more literal way: "If the book could for a first time really begin, it would, for one last time, long since have ended" (1995a, 36).

Whether *The Crying of Lot 49*—through the gamesy repetition of the book's title as a final Beckettian waiting, in lieu of the event itself[53]—or *Gravity's Rainbow*—the book as annunciation, Slothrop as "pretext" (GR 738) and the Rocket as Text or Word (for example, 25), etc.—Pynchon's fictions are in a perpetual state of dis-closed, pre-apocalyptic rehearsal. Not now, pre *ana-apo-*; not yet | yet always already, from a naïve "doxic" conception of apocalypse as supposedly "terminal" or final revelation to the paradox of a trembling cataclysm "*inherent* in every sign" (Berressem 114).[54] No, Apocalypse has not (yet) taken place—Now—it will (not) have (yet) taken place as the book turns back to/on itself; no apocalypse, but rather a (pre/post) ana-apocalypse, a necessarily constant rehearsal, repetition and working through of revelation between "to die" and "to be reborn"—the couple *apothnèskein/anabioskesthai* in Plato's *Phaedo* (especially §71)—in the interstices between fiction and fact, poetics and politics, aesthetics and ethics.[55] Thus described, Pynchon's duplicitous fiction would be seen to "promote" a double process in ana- and apo-: a postmodern ana-mnesis where *post-* comes *pre-*, combined with the spectrum of evading tropes that Leavey calls "apotropocalyptics"[56] (including preterition or apophasis), an iterative apotheosis that perhaps best captures the state of our postcondition at the end of a century and millennium.

4: Apocalyptic Criticism: Past Postmodernism?

> Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow.
> —Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

So, what of "[t]he post [that] is always *en reste*, and always *restante*"—to adapt Derrida's *Post Card* (1987b, 191)—as we hurtle toward the second chiliastic landmark, after witnessing the emergence

of a quasi-discipline ("Apocalypse Theory") with an exponential proliferation of readers and studies (see, for example, Bull)?

The complex, if not *"pre-post*erous," figuration through which I have tried to address Pynchon's post(modern)-fiction has also been all along a pretext, my critical pretext for questioning the supposed step "past the last post" of postmodernism that one still periodically hears about—the original context for this essay was a 1995 conference at the University of Warwick on "Postfaction: The Step Beyond Postmodernism." For what can come after postmodernism, supposing for a moment that modernism—for instance, in its complex relation to "modernity"—is a completed, even exhausted, fully understood critical project? Of an apocalyptic tone adopted whenever we think we can proclaim the end of postmodernism,[57] itself already (self-)apocalyptic . . .[58] If *post*faction were to be endowed with a meaning, that meaning should perhaps be sought, for instance, in the redrawing of a boundary between fact and fiction, as in those recent novels which rewrite the lives of historical, literary characters and whose effect rests upon the reader's postulated recognition of a core of historical data transmogrified by the fictional process.[59] Among other contexts, my somewhat protracted exercise was also a way of showing that there cannot be such a simple step beyond postmodernism, another "post" in a line of successions and displacements, if only because postmodernism itself, as a practice and a mode and no longer as a mere "period," cannot be dismissed as a mere standing in line.

I do not want to give too much credit to those statements (occasionally backed up by scientific statistics) that credit the "sense of an ending" (to use Kermode's famous epochal phrase) and impending apocalypse (with fantasies of destruction and renewal) which accelerates entropically as the end of each century, let alone millennium or era, draws nearer, and seems to send humanity into disarray and critics into wondering what will come after.[60] I will merely point out the propaedeutic precedent afforded by John Barth's misunderstood essay on "The Literature of Exhaustion" (especially 5, 11), which put into critical perspective how the sense of contemporary urgency and "usedupness" of novelistic forms, the apocalyptic feeling of being in "an age of ultimacies and 'final solutions,'" rather than the diagnosis of a factual reality, could still be turned on itself for new fictional departures. Let us beware, therefore, of sounding too apocalyptic (cf. Derrida 1984c, 8–9)—including in our well-intentioned attempts to ward off apocalypses—as if postmodernism were exhausted and dead, as if one needed yet another "obsequent" *post*, missive or missile, sent in apostolic succession.[61]

Perhaps Baudrillard, after all, has a point when he maintains on the contrary that, as we approach the end of the century and of the millennium, we are engaged in retracing our historical footsteps by cancelling out the signs of earlier twentieth-century history, rather than living out such an end or fantasy of a linear history; that a reversion in time, or *ana*strophe—rather than an eschatological denouement, or catastrophe—is happening rather than impending; and that the prevalent mood is one of melancholy rather than mourning:

> We are, then, unable to dream of a past or future state of things. Things are in a state which is literally definitive—neither finished, nor infinite, nor definite, but de-finitive that is, deprived of its end. Now, the feeling which goes with a definitive state . . . is melancholic. Whereas, with mourning, things come to an end and therefore enjoy a possibility of returning, with melancholia we are not even left with the presentiment of an end or of a return, but only with *ressentiment* at their disappearance. (Baudrillard 1994, 120)

> Everything has already become nuclear, faraway, vaporized. The explosion has already occurred; the bomb is only a metaphor now. . . . The temporal bomb. Where it explodes, everything is suddenly blown into the past; . . . this explosion has already occurred. . . . That is the real bomb, the bomb that immobilizes things in eerie retrogression. . . . The coarse projection into a film is only a diversion from the nuclearization of everyday life. Better yet, this film itself *is* our catastrophe. . . . It says that the catastrophe is already there, that it has already occurred *because the very idea of the catastrophe is impossible.* . . . the year 2000, in a certain way, will not take place. (Baudrillard 1989, 34–35, 37, 39)[62]

Compare with the twists of a serial, cyclical apocalypse in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which a denouement is denied us and which "is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive *knotting into*" (GR 3), in a "progression" which is first and foremost regressive.

Toward the beginning of "Point de folie—maintenant l'architecture," Derrida, the arch critic of apostolic transmission, warns against the historicist compulsiveness that, according to him, still lurks in the epoch-making, trend-setting manoeuvres of proliferating *post-*'s launched in the name of critical progress but which cannot avoid revealing the stencilizing, *déja lu* effects of criticism's crisis (1987a, 478). The supplementary modes of Pynchon's fiction, too, remind us, if need be, that literary hermeneutics, whenever it has a tone of closure that risks announcing the end(ing) (of the end[ing]), can vanish out of life and critical sight (*V.*), entropically become uniformly and

conformistically dualistic (*The Crying of Lot 49*) or fall prey to the laws of *gravitas* (*Gravity's Rainbow*). What can possibly be the "end" of a criticism that calls for the end of one *post* age to decree another "postism," that wants to put its stamp (postage) on current debates fraught with labelistic "seismisms"? About the necessarily apocalyptic tone of revelation, Derrida has noted its claims to reveal nothing less than the truth (of postmodernism?), and that such an *a-letheia* (uncovering) is already apocalyptically "in progress" (1984c, 24). What is the need for apocalyptic revelation when the apocalypse is inevitably on its way, is structurally already at work in the tone of a language and in language in general, has thus irremediably tainted the prospect of survival with the certainty of death and destruction (24ff.); when the apocalypse is the founding condition of all discourse, is *"inherent* in every sign" (Berressem), is/survives the perpetual "annunciation" and deferral of closure?[63] The obsessional theme of apostolic succession in literary history and criticism—including even the decision to make "post-Auschwitz" the *terminus a quo* postmodernism will have started according to *nachträglich* conceptions of periodization—that would take into account literature's need to register the sense of a historical trauma all the more traumatic since it is a sense of *déjà vu*: such is perhaps the still burning issue of (a postmodern) criticism at the "end" of this century . . .

But it is already too late, and in my turn I must end, and I will do so on the seventh and "last" missile/missive of Derrida's "No Apocalypse, Not Now"—in the "French" version (left untranslated in English)—sent before the revelation of his twice seven-lettered name, in apostolic succession to the messages to the seven churches of Asia in the Book of Revelation:

> *Now*: Fin et Révélation du Nom. *C'est* l'Apocalypse: Nom. *C'est*: étrange présent, maintenant. Nous y sommes. D'une certaine manière depuis toujours, et nous le pensons, même si nous ne le savons pas. Mais nous n'y sommes pas encore, pas maintenant, *not now*. (1987a, 385)[64]

Yet "the end is coming, something is happening, the end is beginning" (Blanchot 1973, 20; my translation). Texts must be speedily atomized and confla(gra)ted as all missiles—the V-2 falling on London at the beginning of the book, the 00000 launched from the Lüneburg Heath and its replica launched by the Hereros at the end, the proleptic nuclear warhead, etc.—converge and are about to be delivered to "us" in an eschatological (second) "coming" or a cyclical revolution of unprecedented revelations, as "we meet again the necessity and the

impossibility of thinking the event, the coming or venue of a first time which would also be a last time" (Derrida 1984a, 30):

> The end approaches, now there is no more time to tell the truth about the apocalypse. But . . . to what ends do you want to come when you come to tell us, here now, let's go, come, the apocalypse, it's finished, I tell you this, that's what's happening. (Derrida 1984c, 35)

A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now.
It is too late.

Now everybody —

—University of Wales, Cardiff

Notes

[1] See especially Tony Tanner and Pierre-Yves Pétillon. The best treatment of Pynchon's V motif so far is Susan Elizabeth Sweeney.

[2] For a discussion, see Lois Parkinson Zamora 1989, 55–56 (52–75 on apocalypse and entropy in Pynchon). The critical literature on the end of the world in American social imagery and fiction is, as it were, already "endless." Apart from studies referenced in Zamora 1989, 197–98n31, and throughout this essay, let us cite, more specifically on the tradition of the Apocalypse in American literature: first of all, key 1960s essays analyzing or predicting a "time of Endings"—Norman O. Brown, Ihab Hassan 1963 and 1975, Robert Alter, Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag and Earl Rovit; second, more balanced critical assessments of the apocalyptic theme—Zamora 1982 and Joseph Dewey.

[3] Cf. the account of *The Courier's Tragedy* in *Lot 49* (43ff.). For a view of Pynchon's pre-apocalyptic fiction, that is, before *Gravity's Rainbow*, see Catharine R. Stimpson. For discussions of Pynchon's problematization of dualities and middles, see especially Molly Hite 13–45 and Alan Wilde 75–103.

[4] For a sample catalogue of this polyvalent, supplementary design built into the V-2 rocket/effect and identifying the function of entropy in the equation $S = K \log W$, see George Levine. The disseminating power of the S — also noted by Derrida, after Mallarmé (1981, 96)—prefigures the scattering of Slothrop after the *Enola Gay* has dropped the bomb on Hiroshima (GR 693–94), a missile Slothrop's usual pattern of before-the-blast erections had not sussed out in advance, at which point the narrative entropically starts fragmenting. "Finally," the V-2 is also a reversible figure, as when the sign for victory turns ironically into its opposite, SS for "'ssörrender,'" pronounced in heavy Teutonic accents (230).

[5]Compare with the big bang at the origin of the universe, whose noise still has not reached us, according to Derrida 1988, 7. Issues of the supersonic V-2's silent gift of death, in this paradoxically long, slow book defying "soundness," should be sounded in the light of Royle, especially 45, 51–54.

[6]Already in *V.*, Stencil had wished to know whether V. merely turned up at every earth-shattering, history-making event or was the cause of it—between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, sign and symptom.

[7]Of the many treatments of the filmic in *Gravity's Rainbow*, see especially Hanjo Berressem 151–90, for whom the "written filmic" is the protective virtual space language inserts between itself and (the desire to stage) its self-destruction (185–86).

[8]Cf. Lacan 53–54. For Blanchot, "the real is real inasmuch as it excludes possibility—because, in other words, it is impossible. The same can be said of death and, still more accurately, of the writing of the disaster" (1995a, 64). "If death is the real, and if the real is impossible, then we are approaching the thought of the impossibility of death" (121).

[9]See Derrida 1984a. On the "nuclear sublime," see Frances Ferguson; Richard Klein, especially 77; and Peter Schwenger 1986, especially 37–38. For a view of the Rocket (and of the novel's skewed temporality) as an allegory of the unpresentable sublime, see Marc W. Redfield, especially 160.

[10]Cf. Klein:

> The nuclear sublime is that all too familiar aesthetic position from which one anticipatorily contemplates the end, utter nuclear devastation, from a standpoint beyond the end, from a posthumous, apocalyptic perspective of future mourning, which, however appalling, adorably presupposes some ghostly survival, and some retrospective illumination (*apo-calypto*: the emergence of what is hidden [in the secret cave of Calypso] out of the darkness into the light—the end as revelation of some essential truth). (77; cf. also 78)

Thus, "[t]he time or tense of the nuclear sublime is the already of a not yet, the mimetic reassurance of a future anterior" (77), and nuclear criticism, if it wants to think the unthinkable, needs to imagine a futureless future "in which there will not have been a posthumous perspective" (78). The dilemma and epochal crisis is "anticipating in the tense of the future anterior a decisive historical possibility which, if it occurs, our culture might never view historically" (78).

[11]See Mircea Eliade 89n, quoting from Henri-Charles Puech's *Man and Time*: "Cosmic time is repetition and *anakuklosis*, eternal return."

[12]Lyotard 1992, especially 24 ("Answer to the Question: What Is the Postmodern?") and 95 ("Note on the Meaning of 'post-'"). For an excellent account, see Bill Readings, especially 55–58.

[13]See especially Derrida 1984b and 1987b—the latter of which is informed by this general strategy.

[14]Another excellent study of the apocalyptic strain in Pynchon's works is David Robson. For another view of Pynchon's novel as both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic—tensed between the sense of hurtling toward an inevitable catastrophe and the feeling of having survived a past cataclysm—see Laurence Daw, especially 92.

[15]Cf. Derrida 1987a, 365: "structure d'emportement absolu, un 'gagner de vitesse' quasi infini qui rendrait possible le 'toujours déjà' *en général*," which does not appear in the English version. The strategic conjunction of speed and war has been systematically explored by Paul Virilio, from *Vitesse et politique* (1977) onwards.

[16]See also Michael André Bernstein, especially 132n2, for meanings of *holocaust*. His study develops a persuasive argument against prophetic "foreshadowing" and retrospective "backshadowing," or "prophecy-after-the-fact" (21). As Fritz Senn reminds us, Joyce had already combined both senses of *apokaluptein* in the retrospective ascription of "burnt offering" (of kidneys, as in Exod. 29.13) to "Calypso" (the first chapter of *Ulysses* featuring Jewish Leopold Bloom), in "Ithaca"'s recapitulation of Bloom's day in terms of Jewish rituals. Senn's exemplary reading shows how the text's subtle, imperceptible "calyptic" hidings (the nymph Calypso hid Ulysses seven years on Ogygia) must be transmuted by the (re)reader into anacalyptics or uncovering and revealing (see especially 85, 87–88).

[17]For a possible distinction following Derrida's argument in "No Apocalypse, Not Now," however, see Klein: "The difference [between the Jewish and nuclear holocausts] is one between destruction on a vast scale that is collectively survived, archivally remembered, and politically mourned, and a total burning—a true *holos-kaustos*—in which no public survival, no collective recollection, no institutional mourning, remains" (78); and "It is this altered relation to mourning in a future without future, this negative future anterior, that differentiates what the nuclear fable allows us to imagine from the Nazi holocaust in Europe, whatever its hideous magnitude, which will still have permitted the consolation, the interiorization, the working through of memory, in order to preserve the future from repetition" (81).

[18]As in Lyotard 1993b, 245.

[19]Zamora 1989, 10–19 provides a short summary of theories and meanings of the apocalypse. Derrida has also commented on several occasions on the root meanings of *apocalypse* as capital unveiling (cf. 1986, 198b), as a Heideggerian apophansis or letting something be seen (at work in the *Logos* and *aletheia* or "truth" [see in particular *Being and Time* §32–34, 154, 218ff.]) always redolent of an Enlightenment, such as the Biblical dis-closure of the small community of the Elect beyond the landscape of destruction and catastrophe in an ambivalent mixture of concealment and revelation, an uncovering or unveiling which makes visible the truth of truth, the light that shows itself (cf. 1993, 121–22; 1984c, especially 22).

[20]For a sustained treatment of belatedness, or *Nachträglichkeit*, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the V2-effect as "the retroactive staging of an impossible 'event'" (48), see Berressem, passim. Usually translated as "deferred action," the German term is used in psychoanalysis to denote the reversal of cause and effect in the logic of traumatic inscription, whose temporal grammar can thus be easily mapped on to the condition of postmodern culture, in which "causality is lost" (cf. Hal Foster xiv). In the words of Ned Lukacher: "Deferred action demands that one recognize that while the earlier event is still to some extent the cause of the later event, the earlier event is nevertheless also the effect of the later event. One is forced to admit a double or 'metaleptic' [referring to *Figures III*, by Gérard Genette] logic in which causes are both causes of effects and the effect of effects" (35). For a sound analysis of the narrative implementation of such temporal skewings, which also features a chapter on *Gravity's Rainbow* (179–218) within a larger section on "Posthistories," see Ursula K. Heise.

[21]Adorno 1973, 361ff. In a 1959 essay, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?" which also antedates the Mitscherlichs' important study (see note 43 below), Adorno had already underscored the need to revise the Kantian "enlightenment" (*Aufklärung*)—echoing, as would the title of one of Lyotard's two famous essays on postmodernism, Kant's "Response to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?"—through a collective psychoanalytic working through (*Aufarbeitung*) of the memory of catastrophe and its narcissistic wound.

[22]See also Lyotard's similarly titled 1989 address, subtitled "A Conference in Vienna and Freiburg" (1993a), where the themes of the Holocaust's un(re)presentability and of the need for anamnesic working through (*Durcharbeitung*), as opposed to "mere" historical memorization, are more clearly foregrounded.

[23]See, for example, Lyotard 1985 (which mentions 1943 as a possible date, because of the conjunction of the Final Solution and new war technologies) and 1987.

[24]Cf. also George Steiner 1988: "On a collective, historical scale, Auschwitz would signify the *death of man* as a rational 'forward-dreaming' speech-organism (the *zoon phonanta* of Greek philosophy). The languages we are now speaking on this polluted, and suicidal planet are 'post-human'" (156).

[25]Cf. also Blanchot 1995a: "How is it possible to say: Auschwitz has happened [*a eu lieu*]?" (143). The structure of this *Ereignis* as un(re)presentable happening must be sharply distinguished, as I will indicate later, from Baudrillard's generalized "de-eventification" in his reiterated apophthegms about the (Vietnam, Gulf) wars/the year 2000 not having taken/not taking place "in themselves."

[26]Bennington 144–54 offers an excellent discussion of the limit test-case of Auschwitz in Lyotard's approach to the differend.

[27]Richard Beardsworth (especially 55) sees the "post" in Lyotard as a de/retemporalized experimental attempt precisely to "witness reflectively the difficulty of 'presenting' *events*," an analogical presentation which must be connected to the post-Auschwitz situation.

[28]Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe 1987, especially 56–81 (cf. also 1986). Lyotard 1989 speaks of a cleavage or breach (*fêlure*) in Occidental thinking (366).

[29]Cf. testimonies about the post-Holocaust feeling of "death-in-survival" that has been analyzed in terms of a forking in time, of a radical break between "Auschwitz and after" (to use the title of Charlotte Delbo's trilogy of Auschwitz memoirs). See, for example, Lawrence L. Langer 1995, especially 13–14, 18; and also 1994, especially its closing statement: "Remembering survival only ratifies the difficulty, not to say the impossibility, of effacing it" (80). Compare with Blanchot's somewhat rhetorical statement "He who has been the contemporary of the camps is forever a survivor: death will not make him die" (1995a, 143).

[30]We may . . . assert that the historicity of literature is contemporaneous through and through, or rather structurally indissociable, from something like a nuclear epoch (by nuclear "epoch," I also mean the *épochè* suspending judgment before the absolute decision). The nuclear age is not an epoch, it is the absolute *épochè*; it is not absolute knowledge and the end of history, it is the *épochè* of absolute knowledge. Literature belongs to this nuclear epoch, that of the crisis and of nuclear criticism, at least if we mean by this the historical and ahistorical horizon of an absolute self-destructibility without apocalypse, without revelation of its own truth, without absolute knowledge. (Derrida 1984a, 27)

[31]Also: "A quelque date qu'il puisse être écrit, tout récit désormais sera d'avant Auschwitz" (Blanchot 1983, 99); and "what [Auschwitz] says refers us to that which there can be no memory of, to the unrepresentable, to unspeakable horror, which . . . is what is immemorial" (Blanchot 1995b, 248). For a ground-breaking study of this "event-without-a-witness"—to which, in the words of Primo Levi, "we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses" (63)—see Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub.

[32]To the ironic "founding" exception of a quasi-grand narrative proclaiming the demise of grand narratives perhaps?—cf. "Missive on Universal History" (Lyotard 1992, 40).

[33]Steiner 1967, 146. *Écrire-sur-vivre* ("Write-on-living") is the only "affordable" makeshift in this condition of *survivance* (what spectrally remains even when life has been subtracted from itself) which, we may add, marks the critical condition of a posthumous, testamentary postmodernity. See Derrida 1979, especially 77.

[34]On the burning issue of the necessary or scandalous metaphorization of the Jews' suffering, cf. the discussion of Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" by Jacqueline Rose.

[35]See Laurent Milesi and, for a larger context, Herman Rapaport.

[36]See also, of course, the omnipresence of the Oven from Grimm's Teutonic fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel," displacing through mythification the fire and brimstone of the Apocalypse and, more important, the sinister trappings of Hitler's death camps. The argument for the unrepresentability of the Nazi genocide and for its displacement onto the Hereros has also been advanced by Brian McHale 292n22; see also 159–63, 262–63, 292–93 on apocalypse and contemporary literature.

[37]Thomas Pynchon to Thomas F. Hirsch, 8 Jan 1968, rpt. in David Seed 240. Within Pynchon's fiction, "Mondaugen's Story" in *V.* (chapter 9) is an antecedent of the Herero material in *Gravity's Rainbow*—including the compulsive drive of the "Empty Ones" toward self-genocide (GR 317–18), which Enzian's project of duplicating the original quintuple-zero rocket as the serially derived 00001 attempts to counterbalance. The name "Schwarzkommando" is itself a sombre reminder of the infamous *Sonderkommando* or even *Scheißkommando* of the death camps.

[38]One could also envisage the trekking across the desolate Zone of postwar Europe as a metaphorical errancy displacing the "long voyage" (to use the title of Jorge Semprun's book) of Jews/deportees to concentration camps, ending in the loss of identity, de-animation and quartering (Slothrop's "crucifixion" near the beginning of part 4).

[39]See the passage quoted in Blanchot 1989, 478.

[40]See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, especially 8–9, 89 (quoting similar indictments).

[41]A narrator's sarcastic reproach to Katje Borgesius, in the context of her having turned three Jewish families over to the Nazis; her ancestor had kept himself busy by exterminating dodoes in seventeenth-century Mauritius (GR 108–11). One could also understand the processes of transforming human bodies (usually involving writing), already thematized in *The Crying of Lot 49*, in the light of Piotr Rawicz's "word became flesh, and flesh—smoke" (22).

[42]A crucial religious and rhetorical trope in Pynchon's fiction, preterition or (Greek) *apophasis* helps to evoke the set of meanings of the apocalypse. William Slothrop, Tyrone's ancestor based on Pynchon's own ascendant William, wrote a tract, soon burnt, titled *On Preterition* (GR 555–56)—modeled on *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption* (1650), which suffered a similar fate; William Pynchon also wrote *The Jewes Synagogue* (1652)—in which, as Tyrone Slothrop muses, he expressed the millennial hope of turning the time (cf. GR 760) *back* to the fork where (according to the doctrine of predestination) Elect and Preterite were separated (cf. also the *hysteron proteron* presenting former generations of Slothrops in GR 27). For the crucial theme of the passed over or Preterite and its accompanying rhetorical trope of preterition (a figure of omission of a topic while mentioning it) in *Gravity's Rainbow*, see, for example, Louis Mackey, especially 20–21.

[43]Taking his cue from Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's epoch-making Freudian study, *The Inability to Mourn*, which documents the blockage in postwar Germany of psychic processes of mourning, repeating and working through by a collective sense of repressed/repressing guilt, Eric Santner reaches such a verdict and connects the postmodern destabilization of cultural norms of (self-)identity and community in particular to the ethical and intellectual imperatives of life after Auschwitz. Among the texts he quotes from is another Lyotard passage asking us to think the "postwar" under the double sign of the postmodern (the failure of the "modern project") and the post-Holocaust, and stressing the interdiction against anamnesis of such a pathological blockage, especially: "Anamnesis constitutes a painful process of working through, a work of mourning for the attachments and conflicting emotions, loves and terrors. . . . We have only gotten as far as a vague, apparently inexplicable, end-of-the-century melancholy" (qtd. in Santner 8). Santner adds: "Postmodernism . . . may thus be understood as a collection of theoretical and aesthetic strategies dedicated . . . to undoing a certain repetition compulsion of modern European history. This compulsion may be seen to have found its ultimate staging in Auschwitz, which can be seen as a sort of modern apparatus for the elimination of difference" (9). A similar Freudian therapeutic of anamnesic working through versus *Wiederholungszwang* is advocated in Saul Friedlander and in Dominick LaCapra, especially 205–23.

[44]See, for example, Khachig Tölölyan, especially 60. Such a state of permanent war, due to the military-industrial vitiation of politics—Orwell's indefinite "peace that is no peace" (qtd. in David Dowling 88)—is cogently described in Virilio 1983.

[45]Farther on, Eliade notes, quite relevantly: "And in our day, when historical pressure no longer allows any escape, how can man tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history—from collective deportations and massacres to atomic bombings—if beyond them he can glimpse no sign, no transhistorical meaning" (151). This would give a more positive reading of the "end" of *Gravity's Rainbow*, where the planet is envisaged as "burning, toward a terminal orgasm" (GR 223).

[46]This is perhaps the imaginary movement *The Crying of Lot 49* refers to as being "unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia" (CL 126). "Unfurrowed" recalls the fullblown gloss on the etymology of "DT's" or *delirium tremens* as "a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's ploughshare" (89), the psychical version of the ∆t of fractionally delayed time that informs belatedness, ruptures historical-narrative continuity and opens the circular structure in *Gravity's Rainbow* (cf. CL 89 for parallels, and McHoul and Wills 78ff.).

[47]This "final" "Now" on which Pynchon's recursive text is poised may be read in the light of the third reason for the second Derridean missile/missive: The fact that nuclear war has not (yet) occurred gives us to think the presence

of our present, with the usual Derridean undertones of the (impossible) gift, that in *Gravity's Rainbow* Blicero's sacrificial binding of his minion Gottfried "(God's peace" in German) into the design of the quintuple-zero rocket promises to deliver: redemptive divine peace as, ironically, fatal destruction and post-apocalyptic silence, or "rest in peace." For Blanchot's disaster of an eternal return as the gift of what comes without arriving, posthumously, see, for example, 1995a, 5; on the temporality of the eternal return and of deferred death, see especially 21, 65–66, 69, 117, and the last words in the book: *"a deferred death: disaster"* (146). See also:

> The holocaust, the absolute *event of history—which is a date in history— that utter-burn where all history took fire . . . where the gift, which knows nothing of forgiving or of consent, shattered without* giving *place to anything that can be affirmed, that can be denied . . . gift of what cannot be given. How can it be preserved, even by thought? How can thought be made the keeper of the holocaust where all was lost, including guardian thought?* (1995a, 47)

[48]Such a "going under" or *Untergang* (that is, setting, occidentalization) followed by (another) sunrise in the orient or origin (both from Latin *oriri*) marks the temporal and theological turn toward the (re)beginning of *Gravity's Rainbow* (GR 3–7), which, in Derrida's reading of the (self-)apocalyptic all-burning which partakes of the lowering or "setting" of philosophy (1986, 237a–44a), may be counterpointed with Hegel's presentation of the mediation between the first and second moments of natural religion in *Phenomenology of Spirit*—for us, the movement between the end(ing) of the first reading (*legere*) and the advent of the second coming to the book-as-"gathering," the *religious* recall through an act of thinking back and again (*re-legere*). Launched in 1974, into the not-too-serene "poststructuralist" sky, one year after the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and comparably informed by an "annulling" and annular structure— from the question put to the remains of Hegel's absolute knowledge to the here and now of a ruined, interrupted "end" (1986, 262b: "Today, here, now, the debris of")—Derrida's "death knell" offers a speculation on the wrecked state of writing once philosophy, especially Hegel's absolute knowledge, has been consumed to ashen remains, uncovering the ruins of the once glorious monument of our occidental (setting) philosophical tradition. Six years later, or seven after *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Post Card*—"[a] postnuclear war narrative . . . addressed to, posted to, those who live in a prewar condition" (Schwenger 1992, 7), in which spiritual (grand)sons dictate to their (grand)fathers what these will have said in miraculous scenes of retrograde philosophical transmission—likewise sends its burnt remainders (3), the product of a "great holocaustic fire, the burn-everything" (40).

[49]Pynchon's endings (cf. Richard Pearce), especially in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, dramatize this ∆t or split in time where good fiction explores finality while knowing it has to ward off interpretive apocalyptic

closure (cf. Zamora 1989, 176). Or in Berressem's words: "Pynchon's text . . . has a twofold momentum. It is caught in the double bind of the will to terminate and the will to express—paradoxically, to express this very termination" (145).

[50]See numerous examples of one of Pynchon's favourite techniques in *The Crying of Lot 49*, such as: "she was to have all manner of revelations" (12); or "Things then did not delay in turning curious," and "Much of the revelation was to come" (29). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the use of narrative anticipation, the sense of rushing inexorably to a pre-calculated end, must be read in conjunction with the tricksy, paranoia-enhancing use of cataphora (putting a pronoun before its delayed referent) to inform the novel's catastrophic reversal of temporal causality. Likewise, Redfield reads the beginning of the novel as tensed between the "propulsive drift" of the narrative of evacuation and "the rhetorical difficulties that retard or check comprehension" (160).

[51]Similarly: "Du 'ne pas encore' au 'ne plus,' tel serait le parcours de ce qu'on nomme l'écrivain" (Blanchot 1983, 86).

[52]Cf. "Let us remember. Repetition: nonreligious repetition, neither mournful nor nostalgic, the undesired return. Repetition: the ultimate over and over, general collapse, destruction of the present" (Blanchot 1995a, 42). The sense of gathering, or "re-collection," in the etymology of *re-ligare* brings up, via Heidegger's (and Gianni Vattimo's) *Andenken* and Lyotard, the issue of postmodernism as the post-Auschwitz era of the impossible gathering of the departed/deported.

[53]Already in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the novel's explicit deferral of a "final solution" would therefore not be synonymous with a merely gadgety device to usher in an apparently endless circularity and self-reflexiveness, but would also signal the paradoxical saving grace of suspensiveness against terminal, government-induced paranoia.

[54]Cf. also Derrida 1984c, 27–28, and 1988, 4: "The apocalypse takes place at the moment when I write this."

[55]As is well known, it was in order to achieve such ideological effects of socio-political criticism that Pynchon got interested in the scientific concept of entropy, as is only too crudely clear in the early story bearing that name, where entropy predicts, in cosmic terms and awkward didactic manoeuvres, the apocalyptic undifferentiation toward which American and Western civilization as a whole are tending.

[56]See John P. Leavey, Jr., especially 39–41, where he connects/collects under that vocable (in which one should also hear the diversionary skill of "apostrophe," as in Derrida 1987b, 4) Derrida's apocalypse without apocalypse to his addressees without message and without destination.

[57]One egregious example is De Villo Sloan. Opening on the claim that "[p]ostmodernism as a literary movement in the United States is now in its final phase of decadence" (29), this sweeping overview goes on to postulate, in a critical-moralistic tone redolent of what the writer sees as the genuine

postmodern impetus of the 1960s cultural climate, that, by 1978, having lost its "larger apocalyptic vision" (37)—cf. Graff, note 58 below—to an institutionalized self-reflexive language, "the postmodern project [was] over" (36), and that, after its long-drawn-out dilution as "new postmodernism," it is being/will be succeeded by "postliterature." All (philosophical, critical, literary, etc.) encounters which chart how our understanding of the evolution of the literary "project" of postmodern*ism* needs to be framed within the larger context of a still hotly debated postmodern*ity* would thus be the belated proof of its academic ossification and even of its "postmortemism."

[58]Thus Gerald Graff could summarize earlier critical pronouncements (see note 2 above):

[T]wo strains can be discerned within the general complex of attitudes which have become associated with postmodernism: the apocalyptic and the visionary [that is, prophetic—Martin Buber's distinction, derived from Biblical criticism, in "Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour"]. . . . The first strain is dominated by the sense of the death of literature and criticism; literary culture assumes a posture acknowledging its own futility (384)

—leading to the negative manifestation of the "literature of silence."

[59]See, for example, Lucia Boldrini 1995 and 1998. The birth of the (after all) not-so-well-known term "faction" is documented in Richard Johnstone.

[60]This is Henri Focillon's well-known thesis on humanity's projection of existential anxieties onto history in *The Year 1000*. See also Hillel Schwartz. For an excellent, if controversial, attempt to "work through" the "tiresomely repetitive" recurrence of such apocalyptic/visionary fantasies throughout history, and more specifically the postmodernist inability to mourn, see Martin Jay.

[61]For the familiar Derridean "themes" of the apocalypse of "missivity" itself, combined with the motifs of holocaustic burning, see especially Derrida 1984a, 1984c, 1987b and 1991. Derrida has developed the "logic of obsequence" of *je suis* (I am [following]) in Derrida 1986, especially 117bi, 174bi, 255bi–57bi.

[62]See also Baudrillard 1986 and Rapaport, especially 326: "The end is not something to come but something whose realized potential we have philosophically passed through, an apocalyptic moment which postmodern consciousness survives as a 'turning' between apostrophe and catastrophe."

[63]In a short but correct analysis of Derrida's "Of an Apocalyptic Tone," in his study of the rhetorical, textually embodied communal dimension of apocalypticism, Stephen D. O'Leary notes:

Derrida's attempt demonstrates that apocalypse is a discourse that is inherently self-refuting, one that bespeaks continuity with every utterance of closure. For the declaration of ending cannot be accomplished except by a language act of speech or of writing, connected in time to a seemingly

endless series of other such acts, a series implying a continuity denied by the words themselves. (219)

[64]More time should be given to exploring this parallel numerological motif in Derrida's work and Pynchon's twice seven-lettered *Gravity's Rainbow*—the latter having seven colours—or *The Crying of Lot 49*, which uses the two numerological traditions for working out the date of Whitsunday, seven times seven and (Greek) fifty for Pentecost, as the sum and multiplication of the seven times seven meanings of "crying" (two), "lot" (three) and "49/50" in the book's Revelation of Revelation: the anticlimactic doubling of its programmatic title. Such a study would inevitably focus on the deferral of Pentecostal atonement in Pynchon's work. For the parodic or impossible manifestation of the tongues of fire, associated with Puritan preterition, in Pynchon's fiction, see, for example, W. T. Lhamon, Jr., especially 78–79, and Edward Mendelson, especially 134–35.

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