

## Abstracts of the Other Papers Presented at the Conference

### Jeff Baker: "Pynchon and Pragmatism"

This reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* argues that, coming as it does out of a particularly "revolutionary" era in American history, the novel must be contextualized within this radical or revolutionary framework. Moreover, the philosophical foundation for much of the organized radical movement derives (through C. Wright Mills) directly from John Dewey and William James, pragmatists in the American grain whose philosophy was (especially in the case of Dewey) radically democratic.

In this light, the "idealist" tradition in Western thought and philosophy, which James and Dewey located within an epistemology-centered thoughtway that they believed simply masked (in the name of various "ideals") a much more parochial interestedness throughout human history, is very much akin to the "They-systems" Pynchon characterizes as European death-structures.

In the pragmatists' view, the rationalist or idealist tradition in Western thought characterizes the universe as predetermined, fixed, a "petrified sphynx" (in James's words) and, in that sense, is akin to Slothrop's "paranoid" vision of the world, in which everything is connected (through a tendential web of control and power) to everything else. On the other hand, the pragmatists' radical "pluriverse," in which nothing is necessarily connected to anything else, is akin to the "anti-paranoid" phase of Slothrop's cycle, in which nothing seems connected.

When this analogy has been established, the parallels between They-systems and the pragmatists' idealist tradition are remarkable indeed; more important, however, are the answers or alternatives suggested by the text when read under this pragmatic rubric. The dilemma of a postmodern incredulity of metanarrative (which is traceable to the platonism inherent in the pragmatists' idealist tradition) is mediated by the pragmatists' limited acceptance of useful narrative constructs, symbolized in the novel by examples like Geli's "arrangements," William Slothrop's *on Preterition*, Mexico's relation with Jessica, indeed, by the very structure of the narrative itself.

*Gravity's Rainbow*, as a deconstructive postmodern text, undermines the reader's credence in platonic metanarratives which attempt to account for the world in such totalizing ways. However, the novel, as a reconstructive postmodern text, allows for limited,

"pragmatic" alternatives which a purely deconstructive reading is unable to account for, and this democratically-oriented pragmatism is the direct result of the novel's having been written during the sixties, a revolutionary period in American history when the pragmatism of Dewey, James, and Mills manifested itself in a number of wonderfully democratic experiments, not the least of which is Pynchon's writing from *The Crying of Lot 49* to *Vineland*.

**Justin Barton:** "Hinterlands: *Gravity's Rainbow* and Transcendental Fiction"

*Gravity's Rainbow* can be partially located within the strange and diverse tradition of transcendental fiction. Woven into its feverish proliferation of styles, events and characters are repeated invocations of "external" zones just beyond the boundaries of normal experience—other worlds that are intricately and potently connected to this one. This means that it can be made to engage with a line of writing from the heavily Christian-influenced but nonetheless immanently constructed double worlds of conventional fantasy fiction to the far more important mutant fantasy texts including the stories of H. P. Lovecraft and texts by William Gibson like "Hinterlands." However, *Gravity's Rainbow* differs from most of these other texts in that it repeatedly (though distortedly) suggests that its "other world" is the site of what can be called "virtual matter"—the space of shifting configurations of new material elements that suck actualized matter into new metamorphoses. The two worlds involved are presented as a crazed dance of forces in the form of information and desire (respectively, in their technical and post-Nietzschean senses). The aspect that is information can be symbolized by Eddie Pensiero's sensitivity to the subtle frequencies of people's shivers (641). Desire can be simplistically symbolized by the regular curves of gravity: gravity's rainbows. However, the story is more complex than this. These ideas are infused into a disturbingly Christian context. As with Wittgenstein, who took functionalism to a whole new level, and yet retained a fascination for what he saw as the religious, "un-thinkable" aspect of existence, Pynchon infectiously undercuts the concept of matter as an amorphous medium, and yet simultaneously demonstrates an obsession with the mystical and apocalyptic Christian traditions. This is apparent in many ways: for instance, through the many references to the "preterite" and to "angels," and, less obviously, through the central apocalyptic theme of the Freudian death-drive. It is therefore necessary to say that, along with other more beautiful forces, the "Spirit of Gravity" is at work within *Gravity's Rainbow*.

**Fakhereddine Berrada: "Gravity's Rainbow: The Postcolonial Dimension"**

Pynchon's various narratives have been considered from many different perspectives, but his work in general, and *Gravity's Rainbow* in particular, have suffered from a lack of focus on what can be called Pynchon's critique of western ethnocentrism. Indeed, both *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* can be seen as deconstructive studies in logocentrism, in the sense that the narratives' postmodern questioning of the ideological and epistemological premises of the Enlightenment project—much commented on in the Pynchon critical industry—go hand in glove with an attack on a Western gaze characterized by mastery, authority and self-legitimation.

I argue that the object of this gaze—the Western subject's Other—is constantly interpellated as inferior, degenerate, and yet threatening. Focusing on *Gravity's Rainbow*, I suggest that the picture Pynchon offers us is that of a white culture obsessed by its denial and fear of the Other. The world of Slothrop, for example, is confronted with that of Enzian; what ensues, however, is not a clash of the titans as much as a foregrounding of the historical and cultural forces that have contributed to the erection of empire systems and their concomitant creation of stereotypes, prejudices and other forms of subjection. Indeed, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, it becomes increasingly difficult to make a distinction between subjection and the construction of subjects. In sum, the fear of blackness that seems to haunt the novel translates unambiguously into a fear/denial of Otherness paradigmatic of the West's articulations of its sense both of identity and of the Other against which this identity is posited.

**Thanasi Douvris: "Thomas Pynchon and the Sublime: Fragmenting and Reconstructing the Subject in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Vineland*"**

The status of the unified, coherent subject has been problematic since Pynchon's early fiction, where we see that the characters receive such a barrage of information that they are threatened with the loss of self. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the author goes a step further: His "central" character Slothrop fragments and dissolves as a subject. Though very ambiguous, the "schizophrenic" condition suggests Slothrop's freedom from the forces that were pursuing him. In *Vineland*, however, Pynchon does not present the dissolution of the self, but characters who embody conflicts of all sorts. In this sense, they too can be considered "Schizophrenic," although they retain a degree of unity and continue to exist.

I discuss the tension between Pynchon's radical 1960s dissolution of the self and his 1980s reconstruction of a self that is more adaptable to the postmodern scene. To elucidate Pynchon's views on the self, I examine the interaction of the characters with experience that can be termed "sublime," after Jameson's work on the concept. Pynchon's use of the postmodern sublime is exemplary in highlighting the unrepresentable forces which threaten to overwhelm selfhood.

**Michael Hines: "Slothrop's Dis-integrating Search for Self"**

Incorporating the work of Bruno Bettelheim and D. W. Winnicott, as well as my own experience with unintegrated children, I name Slothrop's progress through *Gravity's Rainbow* an annihilating discovery of his unintegrated self. Positing the Firm as the mother, realizing Pynchon's most paranoid fantasy, Slothrop's sexual abuse during infancy (within which time Winnicott says the self should be formed completely) determines his lack of self and his inability to act in an integrated manner. When as an adult he searches out this self, this Holy Center, he tragically but inevitably disintegrates. He is given glimpses of the truth about his self in a crucial early epiphany which, because of his damaged past, he is unable to incorporate. It overwhelms him in a white infinite moment: "amazing perfect whiteness. [. . .] Slothrop feels a terrible *familiarity* here, a center he has been skirting" (GR 312). Because of this failure (where the powerfully integrated Lyle Bland succeeds), Slothrop suffers from future infinite moments, both white and black, which produce an "unmanageable anxiety" (Winnicott) and, following Mondaugen's Law of Personal Density (GR 509), diffuse him by the end of the novel.

**Eugene Holland: "From Schizophrenia to Social Control: Deleuze-Guattari Reflections on Social Organization"**

This paper outlines the evolution of Deleuze and Guattari's main ideas about social organization, starting with the notion of "schizophrenia" presented in *Anti-Oedipus*, then examining the notions of capture presented in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and ending with Deleuze's essay on "Control Societies" and Guattari's essay (with Antonio Negri) on the "New Spaces of Liberty" (translated as *Communists Like Us*). The aim is to lay groundwork for comparing and assessing various concepts of social organization and different prognoses for disorganization and reorganization.

**Sang-Koo Kim: "Chaos Theory and Its Interpretation of Noise in *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*"**

*V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* are "problematic" novels. That is, in each novel there is a lump of information together with noise. The most conspicuous surprises are *V.* and the Tristero (system). In explaining the true nature of *V.* and the Tristero, including many other noisy phenomena and figures inherent in numerous pieces of information, I allude to and make use of theories and assumptions of nonlinear dynamics: Prigogine's concept of structures of "self-organization," Wilson's notions of "tiny whirlpool" and "reorganization group," Mandelbrot's explanation of the existence of "the fractional dimension," Shaw's belief in "new information in chaos," and Atlan's concept of "the autopoietic function of equivocation." In addition, some neurophysiologists' and literary theorists' theories and beliefs are provided: Hoffmann and Honeck's view of "the pleasure of noise in the literary text," and Lotman's assertion of "the change of noise in art into information." And then I put this question: What is the "strange attractor" of each novel?

To conclude, the more elusive information a literary text has, the more noise increases in the text. Pynchon is, I think, more interested in the printed page than in the real "blank" page. Seen from the cultural anthropological point of view, just as rubbish or dirt has a necessity of existence in the composite of material, so noise is and inseparable background of information in a hypercomplex system. The greater a literary text is, the more noise it has.

**Don Larsson: "Dreams That Could Never Again Be Entirely Safe: Counterforce and Repression in Three Pynchon Works"**

Pynchon's work begins to take an overtly political stance in 1964 with the publication of his short story "The Secret Integration." In addition to the story's commentary on the functions of racism in American society, Pynchon introduces a theme that will continue to be examined in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Vineland* (and in a somewhat different way in *The Crying of Lot 49*): the cooptation of resistance movements, often with the willing participation of resisters themselves. In "The Secret Integration," resistance takes the form of a group of children who organize themselves as a society known as "Operation Spartacus." The attempts of the children to foil various forms of adult control, though, are stymied when they are confronted with the reality that repressive adults are also parents they depend on and love. When the group proves ineffectual at countering the town's racist response to the presence of a black jazz musician, the children voluntarily give

up the imaginary black friend that they had created and return to the apparent safety of their families.

Part of Oedipa Maas's quandary in *The Crying of Lot 49* is her search for a form of resistance in a world that oppresses the weak and poor. Unable to understand or join in the campus youth movements that abound in the mid-1960s, Oedipa seeks an answer from the mysterious Tristero system, but that search is never resolved, and whatever solution the Tristero may offer seems to be at least as threatening as it is promising. Similarly, the Counterforce of *Gravity's Rainbow* is unable to offer a viable alternative to the social control represented by the cartels and the Elect who run them at the expense of the Preterite, seduced by the attitudes and techniques of the cartels and the Elect as well as by the rewards offered in an increasingly mass-entertainment society. The general failure of the Counterforce appears as a more specific instance in *Vineland* in the physical and moral seduction of Frenesi Gates by Brock Vond. In each case, Pynchon mitigates the potential for total despair by sketching the failure of the repressive force to fully utilize its own agents, usually members of the Preterite who aspire to be Elect themselves. Thus, Pointsman in *Gravity's Rainbow* and Brock Vond in *Vineland* both fail in their objectives, largely because of the contempt in which they are held by their own superiors. Any room for social, political or emotional liberation is thus always constrained by the desires of those who seek to resist, and what victories emerge can only be provisional.

**Yves-Marie Léonet: "The Inhuman Use of Human Beings"**

The purpose of my paper is to study the conception of human identity in *Gravity's Rainbow*, to show how, especially in relation to the science of cybernetics, it poses the question of what it means to be a human being in the face of a power that threatens to run out of control, and ultimately to describe what could be called a postmodern identity. Starting from the related themes of submission and domination (domination of the individual by other individuals, and, more important, domination of the individual by an obviously evil but always elusive dehumanizing power, embodied most explicitly in the cybernetic monster of the rocket), I move on to a discussion of the robotization (a cybernetic form of colonization) of the human body in the novel, with references to *V*. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, several characters are transformed into cyborgs (cybernetic organisms) by a form of power that can be defined as social control. Finally, this leads to a discussion of postmodern identity as a fragmentation of the individual, a redefinition of what it means to be human in the age of the intellectual machine and of artificial intelligence.

**Barry Lewis:** "Thomas Pynchon and Schizophrenic Language Disorder"  
[Abstract not available]

**José Liste Noya:** "Pynchon's Postmodern Fantastic: The Fantasy of Control and the Control of Fantasy in *Gravity's Rainbow*"

Pynchon's works evince an increasingly self-conscious use of fantastic modes of fictional representation, a strategy which has been specifically associated with the postmodern paradigm. The epistemological fluctuations of the earlier works give way to the ontological disruptiveness of the last two novels. But Pynchon's use of the literary fantastic also includes, especially in *Gravity's Rainbow*, a self-reflexive awareness of the representational cooptability of fantasy itself. The deconstructive urge of Pynchon's novels can be seen to work in a dual direction, disrupting the "fantasy" of a mimetic representational control whilst also laying bare the "real" susceptibility of fantasy itself to an assimilationist control. In this context, the fantastic effect of Pynchon's novel arises as a destabilizing hesitation or "interface" between the representational domains of reality and fantasy, between the equally controlling categories of the real and the unreal. The Franz Pökler episode in part 3 of the novel provides a convenient illustration of the peculiarly hybrid nature of Pynchon's postmodern fantastic.

**Juan Lopez Gavilan and Paul Scott Derrick:** "Film, Language and Control in the Work of William S. Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon"

Burroughs's work provides both a literary example and a theoretical framework for the analysis of Pynchon's use of film in his fiction. If, for Burroughs, "in the electronic revolution a virus is a small unit of word and image" through which power is transmitted, our understanding of film as a means of control becomes central for the development of subversive alternatives. In this sense, aspects like textual discontinuity and montage encourage the exercise of individualism, since they offer the reader the possibility of "turning the hands of time." However, this possibility is not collective or permanent, but a single moment in the timeless dialectic of power, for the language/image virus is the foundation of the individual's subjectivity.

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

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon presents an image of late corporate capitalism as dominated by multinational cartels engaged in a complex struggle with the forces of nature, over which they seek total control. However, recent developments in management theory and initiatives

like Vice President Al Gore's "National Performance Review" indicate that a trend towards decentralization, diversification and "organized anarchism" characterizes the direction late capitalism is advancing. Powerful reinforcement of this view comes from contemporary thinking about evolution which suggests that diversification has always taken priority over totalization. So how genuinely "postmodern" is *Gravity's Rainbow*? This paper invites us to rethink the Force/Counterforce dialectic in Pynchon's novel and also to reassess the significance of popular scientific representations of diversification in the light of Pynchon's work.

### **Stephen Metcalf: "Paraphrenia"**

A fictional drift through Pynchon's tensors. The intensive states of disintegration of a character called from Freud's case histories processed through both positive and negative cybernetic pulses: on/off, one/zero.

Judge Schreber on a package tour of Interzone, Intensive (chartered) flight from the domestic: bouncing off a white wall, hurtling into a black hole. The action takes place in two episodes, following the judge's collapse in Freud's text.

Episode 1: Paraphrenic convergence. O, Schreber! Your ex-old lady is fucking your boyfriend's girlfriend's sister in a promiscuous chain which proliferates its momentum until it freefalls in autosodomy. The FBI are watching the house. English techno-guerrillas are tapping the FBI, whose conversations go public as a club soundtrack. You don't know who anyone's working for any more, because their temporarily autonomous segments of social authority interlock. The FBI intercept secret porno bulletin boards in Florida and bust them in Birmingham, England. The CIA, MI5, MI6, the KGB, the Mafia and the Phantom SS are interfacing with each other. World War III is about to break out in your central nervous system, heated to the boil by the rays of God. You are an effaced node in the transport networks of the convergence of schizophrenic involution and cancerous growth of state authority.

Episode 2: On the rebound. Your ex-old lady, your boyfriend, his girlfriend, her sister are all talking about you. The rays of God pockmark the skin with melanoma. The shit, prevented from flowing by theopolitical authority, is really coming down, and you begin to fortify security systems to combat the well-orchestrated cabal being organized to pass you around and use you like a strumpet. This time you become the cancerous state authority, 'cause the central authority has dispersed to evade your grip. A war machine lumbers into motion, proliferating through every metastatic cell. Fascist avenger Schreber, O Judge! You condemn the not-self to extermination!



**Pierre-Yves Pétillon: "Thom & Thom & Co.: Pynchon's History as a Dynamic System"**

[Abstract not available]

**Mark Robberds: "From Subject to Deject: Looking for Slothrop's Harp"**

Much has been made of Tyrone Slothrop's gradual disassembly and eventual disappearance in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Traditional linear readings of the text tend to trace Slothrop's movement from presence to absence, beginning with Slothrop's apparently real antics in war-torn London and ending with Pig Bodine's lament, "'You poor fucker.'" However, if we consider Slothrop in the light of contemporary psychoanalytic theory, it becomes apparent that his *aphanisis* also operates on a microtextual level. Throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* Slothrop is present, absent, and somewhere in between the two. This paper examines these propositions through the work of both Lacan and Kristeva, arguing that their respective work finds a nexus in Slothrop's subjectivity. This nexus can be illustrated by a close reading of Slothrop's hallucinated trip down the toilet in the abreaction ward of St. Veronica's.

While Lacan's work provides an illuminating perspective on Slothrop's disappearance in the narrative as a whole, the notion of *aphanisis* is also appropriate for examining smaller sections of the text, like this one. Here, and in many other sections of the text, Slothrop's subjectivity is demonstrated to be both constructed and compromised by its linguistic nature. However, as the episode proceeds, the nature of Slothrop's subjectivity seems to reflect the mechanics of a Kristevan subjectivity rather than a Lacanian subjectivity, and questions of ontology take precedence over epistemology.

**Elaine Safer: "High-Tech Paranoia and the Jamesonian Sublime: An Approach to Pynchon's Postmodernism and the Absurd"**

The particular aspect of Pynchon's postmodernism I discuss follows from Fredric Jameson's sociopolitical critique of American society which focuses on "high-tech paranoia" and its relation to the sublime. Jameson examines an information age that produces "machines of reproduction rather than of production" (*Postmodernism* 37), a process of "commodification" represented, he points out, in Andy Warhol's billboard images of the Campbell's soup can. The process signals the loss of the individual subject as it fragments into a proliferation of images and codes. Jameson stresses that this era is also an information age, one in which people benefit from high-tech communication, but behind complex electronic technology is a "network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imagination to grasp"

(38). Jameson contends that all this holds a "mesmerizing and fascinating" interest for us, and "the most energetic postmodernist texts" tap into this phenomenon and afford us a "glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime" (37). When Pynchon's characters whisper to one another "'Watch the paranoia, please'" (VI 160), we suspect we are in the world Jameson describes. The postmodern themes I emphasize in Pynchon's fiction relate to Jameson's "high-tech paranoia" and its relation to the absurd and entropy. Jameson asks: "But is this now a terrifying or an exhilarating experience?" (34). We realize it is both/and; and we glimpse the complexity of the postmodern sublime.

**Megan Stern: "Gödel's Theorem and *Gravity's Rainbow*: A Metaphoric Misidentity"**

"When everything has been taken care of, when nothing can go wrong, or even surprise us . . . something will."

This paper concentrates on the "Sold on Suicide" episode of *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which Gödel's Theorem is allied metaphorically to Murphy's Law and suicidal procrastination. Initially clarifying the bridge ostensibly being built here between deferred meaning and transcendental signification in poststructuralist literature and science, it then moves on to examine the possibility of such bridge building.

Central here is the metaphoric use of scientific ideas, in spite of the claim made by scientific discourse to non-metaphoric clarity. This "misidentity" draws attention to the concealed metaphoric structure of such discourse. The residual connections dormant in dead scientific metaphors are reawakened. Meanings are inferred over which scientific intention loses control. The metaphor, in other words, proves to be greater than the sum of its ostensible parts. All of which, ironically enough, leads us back to Gödel's Theorem, but this time incompleteness is not theorizable. Gödel's Theorem of incompleteness metaphorically undoes itself. How, after all, can we have a theory of the incomplete?

The effect of making science talk about itself metaphorically (unscientifically) bears directly on Heidegger's notion of scientific ontology. The essential strength of science, its ontological blindness (inability to perceive the basis on which scientific structures are built), is also, according to Heidegger, its potential weakness. To describe scientific ontology is to step into an area where science cannot go, and yet which it cannot dismiss either. Pynchon's misidentification of scientific ideas, in particular the self-reflexive disruption undergone by Gödel's Theorem, accesses scientific ontology in precisely this way.

**Joseph Tabbi:** "Meteors of Style: *Gravity's Rainbow* and the Technological Sublime"

This paper considers various versions (and inversions) of the romantic sublime relevant to Pynchon's novel. Along with contemporary theorists like Friedrich Kittler and Jean Baudrillard, Pynchon imagines a "critical mass" or network of illimitable connections that threaten to replace nature and eliminate human freedom. Such all-encompassing technological systems also suggest the infinite power that is the traditional, unrepresentable object of sublime aesthetics. Yet the structure of sublime transcendence (in Pynchon as in those English romantic poets studied by Thomas Weiskel in *The Romantic Sublime*) is as much rhetorical as it is technological. The rocket, worshiped by many characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* as a "Holy Text," provides a sublime uplift-as-text, a disembodied web of information that floats above nature's gravity.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, we may discover both the power and referential limitations of the sublime, when it is thus conceived as wholly textual. More than most writers, Pynchon has proven capable of releasing the full rhetorical force of the sublime, to the extent that he risks indulging in the "meteors of style or false sublimity" the German critic Samuel Werenfels isolated for censure in his eighteenth-century contemporaries. At its best, Pynchon's narrative conducts the reader along a projectile-like movement of thought, creating the heady illusion that the world is nothing more than a linguistic construct. Yet Pynchon is instructively ambivalent about using the force of his language either to carry the reader to exalted heights or to penetrate hidden levels of the human psyche. His sublime is, as it must be, referential. Its excess is not only linguistic, but rooted in concrete engineering practices that are, in the end, neither infinite nor reducible to symbolic meanings.

**James Williams:** "Subjectivation on the Edge of Order and Chaos: *Vineland* and *Makbara*"

The concept of subjectivation is developed in the work of Gilles Deleuze. In particular, it is applied to Michel Foucault's late work to draw a distinction between essentialist definitions of the subject and the subject defined as a process of becoming, that is, as the auto-affectation of a force in a given diagram of power and knowledge. As such, the subject becomes, by necessity, a revolutionary relation of self to self in the context of a given social and natural environment. First, the paper investigates modes of subjection in *Vineland* and in *Makbara*, by Juan Goytisolo. Through their central characters, the novels present

the process in the limit context of postmodern societies, where the space between order and chaos has been reduced to a minimum, that is, to a thin edge. Yet this very instability provides opportunities, as well as devastating threats, to subjectivation. Thus, second, the paper considers the importance of these limit cases of subjection for Deleuze's philosophy.