

## Linguistic Distancing in Gravity's Rainbow

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"Not me," Thanatz sez..

"Not you, eh? Tell me about it."<sup>1</sup>

When we read Malamud's The Fixer or Updike's Rabbit, Run, Percy's The Moviegoer or even Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor, something happens that would be curious were it not so common: although we know Yakov and Harry, Binx and Ebenezer to be fictive creatures existing only in a world of words spun by their authors, we nevertheless become involved in their lives, laughing with them, fearing for them, wishing them luck. The novel becomes the Hilton of our minds' latest vacation from reality, although, like tourists overwhelmed in a Mexican sidestreet, once sucked into the author's world, we are often at his mercy. That fiction should often be this way is neither good nor bad; still, given the fact that Gravity's Rainbow is the Iran of fictive worlds today, we might be grateful to know it is a place we can read about yet never really visit.

And we cannot visit because the novel has been so constructed as to keep the reader out, looking in from a distance, though that distance varies almost from page to page. That the book is uninhabitable by readers of traditional fiction is in large part a function of its modernism. Other characteristics, easily documented, which serve both to remove the reader from empathetic participation and to place Gravity's Rainbow in the modernist camp, include its emphasis on process over product, the forwarding of multiple realities, the renunciation of any desire to communicate, the dismissal of traditional means of characterization and narration, the element of play apparent throughout, the constant reduction of man to his biological and/or brute features, and a rejection of Humanism. It is, however, the novel's attitudes toward itself and its readers as established by the language of the book that I wish to address here: the efforts Pynchon makes to thwart whatever possibilities might exist for the reader to identify with the work, to reach some sort of empathetic understanding with

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characters or message. Pynchon succeeds in leaving us ever outside the circle of his novel, I suggest, by careful if chaotic manipulation of distance. Although distancing could be approached at a structural, thematic, or content level, I intend to concentrate on certain linguistic ploys calculated to keep a wall between reader and work: multiple vocabularies, syntactic complexity and sentence length, inadequate contextualization, and the juxtaposition of styles, tones and genres.

Distance is an important concept for modernists, as Chester Eisinger notes in "Another Battle of the Books: American Fiction, 1950-1970," wherein he cites various modernists on aesthetic distance. Ortega y Gasset is quoted as asserting that "Preoccupation with the human content of the work is in principle incompatible with aesthetic enjoyment proper," while John Barth argues (in Eisinger's words) "that since art is not life it requires distance and artificiality."<sup>2</sup> Other modernists voicing similar opinions could be cited. However, as the reader must suspect, distancing is not the concern of modernism alone. Edward Bullough, for example, has discussed its importance in his essay "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle."<sup>3</sup> While it is not my intention to abstract this study here, a few of its central points are worth repeating. Bullough begins by noting that a fog at sea cannot be considered aesthetically by a sailor in fear of his life because of it (at least his likelihood of viewing it aesthetically is slight), although the fog may be a source of beauty and enjoyment for a spectator safe on shore. The difference is one of distance, "obtained by separating the object and its appeal from one's own self, by putting it out of gear with practical needs and ends. Thereby the 'contemplation' of the object becomes alone possible"(96). Bullough, no modernist, argues that the most affective (and hence effective) art is that which manages "the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance" (100, Bullough's emphasis). Yet underdistancing, which leads to charges of the art's being "'crudely naturalistic,' 'harrowing,' 'repulsive in its realism'" (101), is not the only dilemma the artist faces. In attempting to compensate for the audience's inability to distance itself, art can

become overdistanted, which "produces the impression of improbability, artificiality, emptiness or absurdity" (101).

I suggest that Pynchon attempts to distance his readers from his work by constantly changing the distance between text and reader, by alternately over- and underdistancing via a strategic amalgamation of tones and styles, genres and vocabularies. The result is that we are never certain for long of our exact relation to the book and so can never relax and lose ourselves in the novel's world, for that world is constantly changing: one moment we are adrift in an overdistanted world of scientific equations; a few paragraphs later we cross the border into the underdistanted world of pornography or pop culture. Before we can become totally familiar with London during World War II, we are hustled onto a linguistic bus and deposited in German Southwest Africa twenty years prior. And before we become accustomed to the accents of black humor or forties' military slang, we are stopped by a passage of lyric beauty. The consequence is a continual need to reevaluate our position relative to the world of Gravity's Rainbow. There is no time for participation, for bags must be repacked constantly, passports checked, new languages learned.

Linguistic distancing occurs on several levels, and I can do no more than suggest them here. Pynchon's vocabulary--or vocabularies--is the first factor alienating the reader (I use alienation here as synonymous with distancing). The reader has not only foreign words and passages to contend with, but esoteric and technical vocabularies as well (how many of us, for example, could describe an Erlenmeyer flask without doing some research? And how many others are comfortable with the language of Tarot card reading?). Further, as mentioned, there is an attempt to capture military and forties' slang, and the hip ebb and flow of pop culture ("Mont Blanc sez hi, lake sez howdy too. . .," 266); there is the language of serious literature, replete with allusions and spoofs on literary criticism (the parodic search for meaning, and the symbol hunting); and there is the lewd voice of pornography. Certain readers are apt to be alienated by one or another of these vocabularies: left confused, perhaps worried that they have missed some-

thing, perhaps offended. And to the extent this happens has Pynchon succeeded in achieving distance.

However, language also functions to distance the reader in ways that have little to do with specialized vocabularies or obscene words. Critics as well as admirers have noted the difficulty of Pynchon's prose. Gore Vidal's exaggeration is built on a truth when he writes that "the energy expended in reading Gravity's Rainbow is, for anyone, rather greater than that expended by Pynchon in the actual writing."<sup>4</sup> Pynchon's syntax breaks down whatever opportunities for reader involvement remain once vocabulary has been mastered (again, this is to ignore for the moment problems inherent in the content and structure, and, in conjunction with these, the book's length). I should like to approach syntactic distancing via a notion of relative readability developed by E. D. Hirsch in The Philosophy of Composition.<sup>5</sup> Though my digression is rather long, it does suggest a psychological basis for Pynchon's technique.

In essence, Hirsch is interested in determining what constitutes good prose, and taking his cue from Herbert Spencer's essay "The Philosophy of Style," Hirsch writes that "we should choose the most economical expression from among those different expressions which serve the same purpose" (144). This point is refined through explorations of the psychological bases of reading comprehension and the controls which, on the other hand, often work against this "most economical expression."

It is the short-term memory which makes possible, among other things, the act of reading, because it is the short-term memory that retains and orders the flow of words as our eyes scan a page. However, it can store only a very few items (five to seven) at a time before it must reach at least some tentative semantic closure. And this fact has a direct bearing on the readability of prose:

If the clause requires a reader to exceed the capability of the short-term memory, then the clause will not be very readable, because some of the functional words or phrases will have been forgotten before the clause terminates,

and the reader will have to go through the scanning-reviewing process all over again.  
(111)

Clause length, then, is one important factor of readability, because the mind has difficulty handling too many discrete items before assimilating the meaning and transferring it to the long-term memory.

"Depth" is another determining factor of readability. It involves "the number of relationships which any grammatical structure requires a person to keep in short-term memory" (112). Depth is what makes the phrase "a certainly not very clearly defined color" more difficult to understand than "certainly not a very clearly defined color."

The length and grammatical complexity of Pynchon's clauses, which most readers have observed, are illustrated in the Slothrop/Bianca and Mexico/Pointsman passages to which I will turn in a moment.

Yet readability is relative because Hirsch realizes that some prose must be difficult, and he is careful to distinguish readability from simple "reading ease." The desire to achieve several effects simultaneously, to convey meaning fully, or to avoid stylistic monotony will each necessitate at times a prose less readable than rules of absolute readability might dictate. Meaning in particular works against speed of closure and so reduces readability. Hirsch writes: "if [the writer's] meaning is complex and subtle, he cannot always convey it with rapidly closed and familiar phrasal units." And he goes on to explain: "readability demands rapid closure to avoid taxing the reader's short-term memory. But readability also demands explicit constraints on meaning in order to guide the reader's understanding" (134). These constraints include contextualization, audience awareness, and the strategic use of proleptic devices ("moreover," "but," and so on) and thematic tags (such as "he" for Slothrop and "Slothrop" for a complex of personality traits). The purpose of constraints is to "reduce the number of plausible alternatives which must pass through our matching-monitor [which makes predictive leaps from word to succeeding word] before a stretch of discourse is understood" (102). Pynchon, on the other hand, seems to subvert the devices of constraint

in order to increase the number of plausible alternatives; he thereby distances the reader by forcing him to work overtime to decode the text. Pynchon himself might relate this to information theory and the fact that information communicated decreases as ambiguity increases.

Still, good prose as Hirsch defines it is prose that is as readable, as efficient, as it can be while continuing to do everything its author intends. Hirsch formulates a "principle of linearity":

So long as the reader can process what he reads without having to circle back and reread an earlier part of the text, then the writing is linear. It is writing that has not crossed over the boundary line into unreadability. . . . Since the reader stores textual meaning mainly in non-linguistic form, and since his memory for linguistic form begins to decay very rapidly, the only memorable feature of difficult, un-linear prose is the memory of its difficulty. (136)

Throughout Gravity's Rainbow certain syntactic features combine with subject matter, tone, and diction to undermine the novel's readability: a lack of transition and coherence devices (apparently to suggest the suddenness of a movie scene bursting in its totality across the screen); the difficulty of determining referents, even when proper names are supplied (not only because some of the characters answer to more than one name, but also because many of the three hundred plus cast have their entrances separated by hundreds of pages); the subordination of main ideas; the very length of some of the clauses and sentences; the omission of certain sentence elements and the inclusion of "extra" punctuation (quotation marks, italics, ellipses, dashes); and the frequent interrupters which aid the syntax in conjuring up the fragmented world presented. Consider, for example, the following passage, chosen at random. Here, early in the novel, Mexico and Pointsman confront one another.

Like his master I. P. Pavlov before him, [Pointsman] imagines the cortex of the brain as a mosaic of tiny on/off elements. Some are always in bright excitation, others darkly

inhibited. The contours, bright and dark, keep changing. But each point is allowed only the two states: waking or sleep. One or zero. "Summation," "transition," "irradiation," "concentration," "reciprocal induction"--all Pavlovian brain-mechanics--assumes the presence of these bi-stable points. But to Mexico belongs the domain between zero and one--the middle Pointsman has excluded from his persuasion--the probabilities. A chance of 0.37 that, by the time he stops his count, a given square on his map will have suffered only one hit, 0.17 that it will suffer two. . . .

"Can't you . . . tell," Pointsman offering Mexico one of his Kyprinos Orients, which he guards in secret fag fobs sewn inside all his lab coats, "from your map here, which places would be safest to go into, safest from attack?"

"No." (55, Pynchon's ellipses)

The prose is clearly understandable; the reader can certainly recall more confusing passages. Yet even here, the use of ellipses, the inclusion of parenthetical information--set off by dashes--the distracting quotation marks, and the imbedding of phrases and clauses all slow down the reader. It is, in Hirsch's term, a question of depth. The free modifiers "bright and dark," for instance, don't contribute additional information so much as break the sentence's flow, distracting the reader. It is perhaps a small example of entropy in information theory--an excess of facts disturbing rather than enhancing communication. It is not so much a matter of bad grammar, as Vidal would have it,<sup>7</sup> but of purposely manipulated syntax. Consider another example. Here, Slothrop, leaving Bianca, is provoked into reminiscence by her farewell glance. The prose reflects the rush of memories of adolescence that crowds his mind. The effect is exact and not unlike John Ashbery's use of the past and memory. Yet the passage, in its effort to escape closure, in its headlong accumulation of data, and despite its constraints, requires a conscious decoding effort on the reader's part, an effort which prohibits his losing himself in the flow of Slothrop's thought--

Her look now--this deepening arrest--has already broken Slothrop's seeing heart: has

broken and broken, that same look swung as he drove by, thrust away into twilights of moss and crumbling colony, of skinny clouded-cylinder gas pumps, of tin Moxie signs gentian and bitter-sweet as the taste they were there to hustle on the weathered sides of barns, looked for how many Last Times up in the rearview mirror, all of them too far inside metal and combustion, allowing the days' targets more reality than anything that might come up by surprise, by Murphy's Law, where the salvation could be.

. . . Lost, again and again, past poor dambusted and drowned Becket, up and down the rut-brown slopes, the hayrakes rusting in the afternoon, the sky purple-gray, dark as chewed gum, the mist starting to make white dashes in the air, aimed earthward a quarter, a half inch . . . she looked at him once, of course he still remembers, from down at the end of a lunchwagon counter, grill smoke working onto the windows patient as shoe grease against the rain for the plaid, hunched-up leaky handful inside, off the jukebox a quick twinkle in the bleat of a trombone, a reed section, planting swing notes precisely into the groove between silent midpoint and next beat, jumping it pah (hm) pah (hm) pah so exactly in the groove that you knew it was ahead but felt it was behind, both of you, at both ends of the counter, could feel it, feel your age delivered into a new kind of time that may have allowed you to miss the rest, the graceless expectations of old men who watched, in bifocal and mucus indifference, watched you lindy-hop into the pit by millions, as many millions as necessary. . . . Of course Slothrop lost her, and kept losing her--it was an American requirement--out the windows of the Greyhound, passing into beveled stonery, green and elm-folded on into a failure of perception, or, in a more sinister sense, of will (you used to know what these words mean), she has moved on, untroubled, too much Theirs, no chance of a beige summer spook at her roadside. . . . (471-72, Pynchon's ellipses)



When to the vocabulary and syntax is added the number of scenes, characters, and ideas the reader must bear in mind--the amount of information contained in what Robert Alter has called the novel's "encyclopedic account of the relentless destruction of history in our own era"<sup>8</sup>--all within a sprawling 760 pages written in a variety of styles and genres, contextualization becomes even more of a problem. Referring again to entropy and information theory, I agree with John Leland that Pynchon's quantity of noise relative to amount of information exchanged is rather great, thanks to ambiguity, redundancy, excessive detail, and so on. Leland: "Language as a mirror of reality or as a medium capable of establishing significant contacts beyond its own closed systems is radically denied in Pynchon's fiction."<sup>9</sup> The inadequacy of contextualization is apparent when we consider one of the many minor characters. Géza Rózsavölgyi first appears on page 79, where he is introduced as a "violently anti-Soviet" refugee. He fails to appear again until page 273, after which he vanishes for 350 pages before reentering the scene on pages 632, 647, and 692. The question is how even the most straightforward prose can adequately contextualize the sudden reappearance of such a minor figure absent for hundreds of pages at a time. It cannot; Hirsch's notion of linearity is destroyed as we flip back and forth, trying to recall Géza's role. Hence, even the simple passages containing Géza ("Of course Géza Rózsavölgyi is still with the project. A fanatic," 273; or "Not in his office. But Géza Rózsavölgyi is. . .," 632) are rendered unintelligible.<sup>10</sup> Though the problem is one of structure more than syntax, it does involve information overloads, lack of constraints, ambiguity, and so on--factors contributing to reading difficulty at the sentence level as well. Contextualization is a significant problem in Gravity's Rainbow, for although individual passages often do make sense, it is often difficult to place them in their proper relation to the rest of the book.

As noted before, a wide range of subject matter is detailed in Gravity's Rainbow, and distinct literary genres or sub-genres are represented: the war novel, the detective novel, the horror story, science fiction and science disquisition, pornography, history text :

and historical fiction, journalism, pop fiction, mathematics textbook, fantasy fiction and drug literature, psychological casebook, occult speculation and theological commentary, literary parody, comics, song lyrics and poetry, and cinema script. Several of these genres are presented in various styles, from high to low, technical to lyric to abstruse. It is an illusion-shattering synthesis of often incompatible styles and genres which manages to distance the reader through its dislocating effect. Rather than an exhaustive classification of Pynchon's exhausting tactics, a representative sampling might suffice. The mathematics textbook, to begin, weaves in and out of the narrative, wearing a variety of stylistic masks. At times it appears in fairly straightforward textbook dress (chalk on the elbows and so forth)--

"Personal density," Kurt Mondaugen in his Peenemünde office not too many steps away from here, enunciating the Law which will one day bear his name, "is directly proportional to temporal bandwidth."

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

And again, it can appear in its most esoteric and technical abstractness, as in this equation "explaining" the rocket's passage:

$$\theta \frac{d^2 \phi}{dt^2} + \delta \cdot \frac{d\phi}{dt} + \frac{\partial L}{\partial \alpha} (s_1 - s_2)^\alpha = - \frac{\partial R}{\partial \beta} s_3 \beta \quad (239)$$

And the mathematics is often presented with uncharacteristic humor, as in this joke straight from the math teachers' lounge:

$$\int \frac{1}{(\text{cabin})} d(\text{cabin}) = \log \text{cabin} + c = \text{houseboat} \quad (450)$$

Mathematical/linguistic puns ("c" and "sea") provide what humor there is for the non-mathematician. Yet because the math is accurate,<sup>11</sup> it presents a curious blend of fact and fiction in itself disconcerting, as is the case with Pynchon's mix of historical fact and

fiction, or psychological accuracy and character presentation.

From the world of higher mathematics we drift into a world of Freudian psychology:

Unexpectedly, this country is pleasant, yes, once inside it, quite pleasant after all. Even though there is a villain here, serious as death. It is this typical American teenager's own Father, trying episode after episode to kill his son. And the kid knows it. Imagine that. So far he's managed to escape his father's daily little death-plots--but nobody has said he has to keep escaping. (674)

Scott Sanders has called Gravity's Rainbow not so much a "plot of interwoven facts" as a series of "overlapping case histories of private manias."<sup>12</sup> Talk of Pavlov and of psychology generally proliferates throughout, and critics have found Freud the only means of accounting for such scenes as this, starring the incomparable Brigadier Pudding:

Despite himself--already a reflex--he glances quickly over at the bottles on the table, the plates, soiled with juices of meat, Hollandaise, bits of gristle and bone. . . . Her shadow covers his face and upper torso, her leather boots creak softly as thigh and abdominal muscles move, and then in a rush she begins to piss. He opens his mouth to catch the stream, choking, trying to keep swallowing, feeling warm urine dribble out the corners of his mouth and down his neck and shoulders, submerged in the hissing storm. When she's done he licks the last few drops from his lips. More cling, golden clear, to the glossy hairs of her quim. Her face, looming between her bare breasts, is smooth as steel. (235, Pynchon's ellipsis)

I have seen Hollandaise sauce keep fairly rank company before, but never anything quite like this.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of what such a scene might "mean" in terms of the novel or of Pudding's personality in particular, it is certainly calculated to offend even devotees of the hardest core pornography, and juxtaposed with such scenes as the following, leaves the reader dizzy in

his rapid transit from style to style.

The winter's in suspense--all the sky a bleak, luminous gel. Down on the beach, Pointsman fishes a roll of toilet paper, each sheet stenciled PROPERTY OF H. M. GOVERNMENT, from a pocket to blow his nose. Roger now and then pushes hair back under his cap. Neither speaks. So, the two of them: trudging, hands in and out of pockets, their figures dwindling, fawn and gray and a lick of scarlet, very sharp-edged, their footprints behind them a long freezing progress of exhausted stars, the overcast reflecting from the glazed beach nearly white. . . . We have lost them. No one listened to those early conversations--not even an idle snapshot survives. They walked till that winter hid them and it seemed the cruel Channel itself would freeze over, and no one, none of us, could ever completely find them again. Their footprints filled with ice, and a little later were taken out to sea. (92, Pynchon's ellipsis)

This passage, though it begins in the same vein, more or less, as Pudding's *divertissement*, becomes prose poetry that is quite evocative. Meanwhile, the bewildered reader is left to wonder how these two passages found their way into the same novel.

Again, the reader is continually aware of the novel's self-referential nature from the opening page--where the observation that "this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive knotting into" (3) seems as much about the novel's structure as about anything else--to the implicit comparisons to Joyce and Tolstoy, Burton and Browne, Melville and Henry Adams, elaborated by the critics. And then there are those literary comparisons the novel itself seems to request: to Ishmael Reed, say, or to Borges: "We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that openness: it is terror to us. Look at Borges" (264).

Another stylistic ploy to achieve distance, one used by Brecht for the same purpose, is the abrupt shift from prose into song or verse. And again, the

lyrics move from dirty limericks and music hall burlesques to the poetry of Rilke and Dickinson. As Richard Poirier, among others, has noted, Gravity's Rainbow, like V. and The Crying of Lot 49, assumes the obligation of

[shaping] the world occasionally in compliance with techniques developed outside literature or high culture. All three books take enormous, burdensome responsibility for the forces at work in the world around them, for those "assemblies" of life, like movies, comics, and behaviorist psychology, that go on outside the novel and make of reality a fiction even before the novelist can get to it.<sup>14</sup>

The comic book--often underground Comix--figures rather self-evidently here. Plastic Man, Sundial, Zorro, and Green Hornet are mentioned; Slothrop as Rocketman parodies those superheroes so popular both in the years of the war and in the sixties and seventies during which Pynchon wrote this book; and Slothrop in his pig suit recalls those "funny animal" strips equally popular during the Golden Age of Comics.

Movies inform the book as well: from the film sprocket holes used to indicate chapters, to overt comparisons of the text to film ("Come-on! Start-the-show! Come-on! Start-the-show! The screen is a dim page spread before us. . .," 760), to the cinematic presentation of scenes.<sup>15</sup> Other styles and genres move us from the pop absurdity of Pirate's Banana Breakfasts to an immersion in the cold water of Slothrop's toilet fantasy. We surface into the hip knowingness of "The Doper's Dream," straighten our ties, and, in Poirier's words, "lurch into Time-ese."<sup>16</sup> The comedy itself is a distancing factor if one agrees with Henri Bergson that laughter often arises from the reduction of man to the level of machines.<sup>17</sup>

In Gravity's Rainbow the reader drifts through an acid dream of juxtaposed linguistic worlds, the unlikeliest being a world of religious reflection. For example, of Slothrop we read,

"It's only a 'wild coincidence,' Slothrop."  
He will learn to hear quote marks in the  
speech of others. It is a bookish kind of

reflex, maybe he's genetically predisposed--all those earlier Slothrop's packing Bibles around the blue hilltops as part of their gear, memo-rizing chapter and verse the structures of Arks, Temples, Visionary Thrones--all the materials and dimensions. Data behind which always, nearer or farther, was the numinous certainty of God. (241-42)

Yet if this suggests a Calvinist determinism--a world view which sees everything related in some inexorable divine plan--informing the novel, as certain critics have argued, it is a Calvinism turned on its head: "Calvinist theology conceived in the mode of perdition rather than salvation," in the words of Sanders.<sup>18</sup> Sanders argues that to conceive of the interrelatedness of all things without a corollary belief in God as Prime Mover is to subscribe finally to a paranoid theory which sees history and the world as a vast and possibly sinister conspiracy hatched by a mysterious power intent on keeping us both controlled and ignorant. Further, relates Sanders, however malignant the conspiracy involving us, the alternative ("one or zero") is even worse. "To be passed over, to drop out of all plots, is to lose one's identity. Isolated from external schemes, character dissolves."<sup>19</sup> And without complete interrelatedness, nothing connects: "reality either radiates from a Center, or it is centerless; history is either wholly determined from without, or it is wholly meaningless; the individual is either manipulated, or he is adrift."<sup>20</sup> Without pattern, freedom from control and certain damnation; yet without pattern, chaos; without a place in the pattern, loss of identity.

And so distancing works both for and against us. By attempting to encompass all of history and Now, Gravity's Rainbow is too eclectic for the average reader, who is therefore left outside the pattern, adrift in an absence of gravity. However, given gravity's downward pull toward entropy and death, our weightless alienation is a blessing. And further, our position as outsiders does provide us with an identity: we are the decoders of the pattern that involvement would not permit our seeing. And so we are implicated in a special way, for with Pynchon we each

become, in a sense, the Prime Organizer, imposing pattern on this abundance of data.<sup>21</sup>

Certainly, distance is in part a by-product of Pynchon's encyclopedic novel. In addition, our intended or accidental alienation from Pynchon's world makes further points. Epistemologically and ontologically, the novel implies the insufficiency of any one style, genre, or vocabulary--that is, of any single vision of reality--to explain, to encompass the world and describe the self, while simultaneously illustrating the reader's inability to enter fully into a world defined and patterned via a necessary combination of approaches. Teleologically, the novel's orchestration of chaos flies in the face of entropy, because however much Gravity's Rainbow is exemplary of the breakdown of traditional fiction, its 760 pages do keep the rocket from falling, do present evidence that order is possible and that the end is not yet. The distancing of reader from work negates as well any "real world" concerns on the reader's part as he works his way through the book.<sup>22</sup> Gravity's Rainbow negates the horror of the modernist view of reality through overkill--a novel too convoluted, too valueless, too absurd, too grim--and the distancing indeed becomes a blessing, for it not only removes us from empathetic involvement in that world, but also suggests that such a world could not contain us. And, therefore, because we exist, . . . .

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking, 1973), 668. All further citations from this edition are included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Chester Eisinger, "Another Battle of the Books: American Fiction, 1950-1970," Prospects, 4 (1979), 281.

<sup>3</sup> This essay is found in Bullough's Aesthetics (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), 91-130. Page references will follow in the text in parentheses. Bullough's ideas are echoed elsewhere in criticism. Hazard Adams places him in that line of critical orientation that views art in terms of its

relation to audience, and suggests a specific debt to Coleridge and Kant. Bullough also warrants comparison with, in this century, Mukarovsky and Richards, who distinguish between standard (for Richards, scientific) and poetic language. Richards' notion of pseudostatements and his ideas on "doctrine in poetry" also warrant comparison. One might also compare Bullough's work with literary applications of speech act theory (for instance, Searle's "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse" or Ohmann's "Speech, Literature, and the Space Between") which argue that literature allows the reader to unearth poetic content and contemplate it with a freer play of speculation, because literature's statements are mock illocutions that remove participation from practical considerations to the realm of the purely mental and imaginative.

<sup>4</sup> Vidal, "American Plastic: The Matter of Fiction," in his Matters of Fact and Fiction: Essays 1973-1976 (New York: Random House, 1977), 123.

<sup>5</sup> Hirsch, The Philosophy of Composition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977). Page references will follow in the text.

<sup>6</sup> It is the long-term memory which stores the meaning of longer discourse units--preceding chapters, paragraphs, sentences--yet this meaning is stored "in a nonlinguistic, non-sequential form" (Hirsch, 122).

<sup>7</sup> Vidal, 121.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Alter, "The New American Novel," Commentary, 60 (November, 1975), 48.

<sup>9</sup> Leland, "Pynchon's Linguistic Demon: The Crying of Lot 49," Critique, 16, No. 2 (1974), 49. The entire essay is interesting for its discussion of the relation of entropy and information theory to Pynchon's narrative technique in The Crying of Lot 49.

<sup>10</sup> Scott Simmon's "A Character Index: Gravity's Rainbow," Critique, 16, No. 2 (1974), 68-72, goes some way toward rectifying the problem of handling the novel's large cast. However, constantly pausing to check Simmon's list proves as effective in breaking linearity as a muddled fumbling through hundreds of



pages on one's own in efforts to recall characters or other information.

11 For a partial explanation of the mathematics of Gravity's Rainbow, see Lance W. Ozier, "Antipointsman/Antimexico: Some Mathematical Imagery in Gravity's Rainbow," Critique, 16, No. 2 (1974), 73-90; and Ozier, "The Calculus of Transformation: More Mathematical Imagery in Gravity's Rainbow," Twentieth Century Literature, 21, No. 2 (1975), 193-210.

12 Sanders, "Pynchon's Paranoid History," Twentieth Century Literature, 21, No. 2 (1975), 182.

13 For one Freudian reading, see Scott Simmon, "Gravity's Rainbow Described," Critique, 16, No. 2 (1974), 54-67, (59-60).

14 Poirier, "Rocket Power," Saturday Review of the Arts, 1 (March, 1973), 62.

15 Lawrence C. Wolfley, for example, writes that "Movie techniques pervade even the finest details of Pynchon's narrative presentation. . . . Pynchon composes, it would seem, by first projecting an imagined scene on the screen of his mind and then transcribing what he has observed according to the unmediated sequence of raw perception" ("Repression's Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon's Big Novel," PMLA, 92, No. 5 [1977], 874).

16 Poirier, "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon," Twentieth Century Literature, 21, No. 2 (1975), 161.

17 For Bergson on comedy, see for instance his "Laughter," in Comedy, intro. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956).

18 Sanders, 185.

19 Ibid., 186.

20 Ibid., 186.

21 Leland forwards a similar theory with regard to The Crying of Lot 49 in his article already cited.

22 In "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon," Poirier suggests that fact is manipulated in Pynchon's works so that characters will not believe in reality. Poirier writes, "[fact] disguises itself as fiction

to placate us and the characters. Fact is consciously manipulated by 'They' in order to create the comforting illusion that it is fiction. . ." (156). I, on the other hand, argue that Pynchon's technique does not create an illusion of fiction, but finally proves that the novel can be nothing but fiction.