Gravity’s Rainbow
and the Post-Rhetorical

Now everybody, we too, started reading Gravity's Rainbow in 1973.¹ We haven’t spoken to hitch-hikers in Arizona, like Siegel, but we've met a few who never got past the first hundred pages, like Leverenz.² A Sydney film critic and feminist friend thought it was pretentious to be seen with a tattered copy at an academic conference and was surprised to meet someone who had not only actually read it but was almost through a second time. We thought the novel merited at least two readings, being perhaps the most important work of fiction of the second half of the century. And yet the literary-critical responses we read failed to do justice to its importance. Certainly they sung its praises but this amounted finally to little more than a dry and repetitive litany. They failed, it seemed to us, to provide the analytic framework that might delineate the novel's difference.

Hoping eventually to arrive at such an analysis, we decided to rehearse some types of reading for ourselves. We came up with some ideas of our own which other critics seemed not to have gone into; but, being afraid as ever of the reproach that theorists over-generalise without textual substantiation, we decided to do some spade-work. Besides, with Brecht, we wanted to admit that any attempt at what might be called an “immediately theoretical reading” would amount to forgetting the production process necessitated by the organisation of such a large, and ever-increasing, body of writing – Gravity’s Rainbow and the texts it has spawned. And besides, with everybody, we really did want to know what happens to Slothrop; kept searching back through the pages to remind ourselves who Dodson-Truck was; tried to keep track of the various possible components of the S-gerät, and so on.

Like others entering the labyrinth, we began by noting points of reference, producing a page-by-page sketch map which came under constant revision, still has a lot of loose ends and often leads nowhere. Even at this level, the nearest we got to degree-zero of interpretation, it proved impossible to avoid double readings, to separate commentary and paraphrase; we inevitably made either intelligent or far-fetched guesses and what turned out later to be very obvious mistakes.

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sometimes there was nothing at all to say about a passage, an obvious privileging of certain themes, or the operation of arbitrary selection and exclusion criteria.

Working from the map, we set out to produce our readings. In the first instance this took the form of a summary of the narrative based on a finite set of characters and which involved trying to relate a limited set of events to each; a very traditional approach but we admitted it to be one which we would have at some stage indulged in anyway. Given the obvious amount of overlap, we thought that by starting from a number of different characters we would come up with a set of data (or *capta*) which could be given to a hitch-hiker in Arizona who asked what *Gravity's Rainbow* was about; or to one's mother who wanted to know the story but didn't get past the first hundred pages because of *sotto voce* "the sex"; or for that matter a feminist friend in a similar situation—after all, it is a pretty blatantly sexist book. So we are still reading *Gravity's Rainbow*, like this:

The first character mentioned by name in the book is Captain Geoffrey ("Pirate") Prentice. He works for Special Operations Executive, the Firm having been informed of his talent for dreaming other people's dreams for them. He dreams at least the first couple of pages of the novel. Such experiences are said to cease after V-E day but he remains haunted by Frans van der Groov, Katje Borgesius' ancestor who helped exterminate the Mauritius dodo, and whose cosmic windmill is reminiscent of the rocket symbol and the Zone-Hereros' mandala. Slothrop finds one of the latter and later gives it to the Schwarzkommando in return for the mantra which Enzian had taught him at their second meeting.

Enzian (Oberst Enzian of Bleicheröde, whence Bicero also takes his name) and the Schwarzkommando are some of the survivors of a Nazi plan to set up puppet governments in British and French colonies in Africa. As it happens a similar unit is invented by British intelligence as a propaganda exercise, using mock-up films, after S.O.E. learns of the existence of a black rocket corps. After the war they live in abandoned mineshafts in the mountains around Nordhausen. There are a number of factions among these Zone-Hereros or Erdschweinjähle, including the Otukunguru who advocate racial suicide by refusing to procreate, as a means of preventing a repetition of the situation where an uprising in Africa was repressed by von Trotha at the expense of 60,000 Herero lives, or 60% of the race, perhaps the century's first genocide. To the end Enzian has an uneasy relationship with the Otukunguru led by Josef Ombindi and they may be responsible for his undoing.

Prentice shares a Chelsea maisonette, famous for its home-grown banana breakfasts, with, among others, Osbie Feal and Teddy Bloat. He has privileged access to incoming mail (rockets)
and uses his ejaculate to render legible a Kryptosam message found in the cone of one which falls at Greenwich, as a result of which he goes to Holland to bring out Katje who is his Dutch operative. She stays in the maisonette and she and Pirate form some sort of attachment. She never talks much about her experiences in Holland. He arranges for her to work at the White Visitation but doesn’t know exactly what Pointsman has her doing there. Prentice’s nosing around later leads Pointsman to suspect that they are in love. In fact she trains with Pointsman’s octopus Grigori, to which end Osieb Feel makes films of her, for the “attack” from which Slothrop will rescue her in the south of France. She and Slothrop have a short, intense affair before her cover is blown by Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck and Slothrop begins his search for the rocket.

In Holland, Katje has been spying for the British at the rocket site near The Hague where, along with the young soldier Gottfried, she becomes the third member of Blicero’s sado-masochistic trio, often acting out Hansel and Gretel fantasies involving the threat of the oven. Dominus Blicero, Master of the White Death, is the SS code name for Weissman, captain of rocket launch control units at various firing sites. He likes Rilke’s Duino Elegies, transvestism, and sadism, and has spent some time in South West Africa where he met Enzian. He brought his Herero favourite back to Germany and they worked together on the rocket program until parting company at the time of the move from Peenemünde to the Mittelwerke (Nordhausen). Blicero secretly builds the 00000 rocket, with its mysterious Schwarzgerät apparatus, thanks to the cooperation of Franz Pökl er and Klaus Nährisch. Pökl er, a plastics chemist and former student of Jamf, inventor of Imiplex G and Kryptosam, among other things, is brought to the rocket project by Kurt Mondaugen, a fellow student, whom Pökl er runs into one night when he is out sticking up posters for Erdmann/von Göll/Schlezig films. Mondaugen had known Weissmann in South West Africa, as recounted in V. The latter manipulates Pökl er by controlling visits by Pökl er’s daughter Ilse to her father, during the time she is imprisoned with her mother in Dora. As a result of this indirect blackmail, Pökl er is responsible for developing the plastic fairing for the S-gerät.

Blicero never forgives Katje for escaping, although she seems not to betray the actual location of the firing site to the British, either to protect Gottfried, or out of some feeling for Blicero. After Holland, Blicero retreats to Germany and to the Lunéberg Heath where his “final madness” occurs. It is there that the firing of the 00000 is supposed to have taken place, with Gottfried dressed in white lace and accommodated in the specially designed S-gerät, an Imiplex-G shroud, located in the tail section of the rocket. When Slothrop meets up with Enzian’s Schwarzkommando in the Zone after the War they are attempting to assemble a rocket on the model of the 00000, to be called the 00001. They build an A4 piece by piece, find the Jamf Oelfabriken Werke AG in working order, and by the time of their disappearance from the narrative the Schwarzkommando have gained all the information they need about the 00000, and have transported their disassembled A4, and necessary parts for the 00001, to its firing site where its reassembly is said to occur “in a geographical
The firing which occurs at the end of the book makes sense as that of the 00000, but in terms of narrative sequentiality it could be that of the 00001. For the Schwarzkommando and for Enzian, a high priest of the rocket, the latter has come to be the godhead of a mythology which combines tribal beliefs and technology fetishism.

The plan to bring Katje and Slothrop together, as a prelude to setting him loose in search of the 00000, has been contrived mainly by Kevin Spectro and Pointsman. Mr. Edward W. A. Pointsman F.R.C.S., an extreme behaviourist with a position of some importance in Pisces. He has Katje indulge Brigadier Pudding's coprophilic and masochistic fantasies there. He works with dogs to begin with but seems to know a lot about Slothrop—his conditioning to Impolex by Laszlo Jamf when his father "sold" him as a guinea pig in return for a Harvard education for the boy; his subsequent before-the-fact erection responses to the dropping of V2s on London. He places Slothrop under sodium amytal in The White Visitation and learns something of his fear of black cock. Pointsman seems to have sexual hang-ups of his own, gets lonely at night and a blow-job at a Christmas party in 1944.

Working with Pointsman, unhappily, is Prentice's friend Roger Mexico, an American statistician. He is plotting the full of the rockets according to a Poisson distribution and his map corresponds exactly with that Slothrop has made of his London sexual conquests, each of which prefigures a strike by an average of four and a half days. Teddy Bloath has microfilmed this map and Prentice passes it on to Mexico. Mexico is in love with Jessica Swanlake, a liaison which reminds Prentice of a relationship he had with Scorpia Mossman. Mexico and Swanlake often go for drives and one Christmas they end up at a Church service somewhere in Kent. On Boxing Day 1944 they visit Jessica's sister and children. After the war Jessica goes back to Jeremy, to whom she was forsworn, to Cuxhaven where they are to fire disused rockets out to sea.

Mexico dislikes his colleagues at The White Visitation for being mystics, psychologists, and ESP freaks, and has a view of science diametrically opposed to that of Pointsman. There is a work called The Book, probably connected with Pavlov, that circulates there among its seven owners. Mexico eventually discovers that he is being manipulated by Pointsman who has planted Jessica with him, and that Pointsman knew about Slothrop from well before the war through his ICI/IG Farben connections. But Slothrop gets out of Pointsman's reach after the Riviera episode until his men catch up with him at Cuxhaven and try to neutralise him by castration but perform the operation on Major Marvy instead. Pointsman had already gone pathological at a post-war seaside holiday and after the castration incident he falls into official disgrace and has his activities curtailed. He goes back to working with dogs.

The Old Firm Convention sees a bittersweet reunion between Prentice and Katje. Then Prentice, Mexico, and Katje set out separately into the Zone to try and reach Slothrop. Katje hears of him from Enzian, who knows her as the "Golden Bitch of Blicero's last letters." Mexico gets sidetracked to take revenge on
Jessica and Jeremy and at the Cross Suckling Conference he and Seaman Bodine do their alliterative shit-food number. Mexico has already at least imagined pissing all over Pointsman's corporate friends. Pirate Prentice hijacks a plane to Berlin and is last heard of flying over the top of Slothrop asleep in a field before he runs out of fuel.

Castration victim Major Marvy is a bigoted American whom Slothrop meets on a train when he first arrives in the Zone, before the Major is thrown overboard by Enzian who gets angry at his racist talk. After that Marvy has it in for Slothrop and chases him in more than one scene. He teams up with the Russian Tchitcherine, who is Enzian's half-brother. Tchitcherine's father had gone AWOL in the Südwest in 1904, en route to the Pacific to relieve the Russian fleet during the war with Japan, and in the course of things fathered Enzian. Tchitcherine develops a private obsession to eradicate Enzian and his Schwarzkommando. He had had an association with Wimpe, from a subsidiary of IG Farben, the company responsible for the development of plastics research in Germany before the War, and possibly for shadowing Slothrop since his conditioning by Jain. Later, and Tchitcherine thinks it is because of this association, he is assigned to work on the New Turkic Alphabet in Central Asia, where he sees the Kirghiz Light, before coming to the Zone to hunt Enzian. He catches up with Slothrop at Potsdam and puts him under sodium amytal. Slothrop has been sleeping with Geli Tripping, one of Tchitcherine’s lovers in the Zone, and has stolen his boots. He will later steal his whole uniform at Peenemünde, and inform Enzian of an impending raid by the Russians. Tchitcherine fears his superiors will catch up with him before he gets to Enzian and they may well do, but he and Enzian meet in passing and exchange a few words in broken German without recognising one another.

When Slothrop comes round after the sodium amytal session he is in a disused movie studio near Potsdam that Tchitcherine has commandeered. Former actress Margherita Erdmann has come to reminisce and she and Slothrop begin a sadomasochistic relationship there and then using the torture chamber set from old von Gül movies in which she had starred. Margherita is a Lombard and her entry into the narrative has been prefigured through the Satire Bümmer Potsdam dope deal. She is described as Slothrop’s “Lisaura,” existing less than the film images of her. She has been, or still is, in love with former co-star Max Schlepzig, whose identity card Slothrop used to enter Potsdam. She thinks Schlepzig is the father of her daughter Bianca, conceived prolificly during the shooting of Alpdrücken, although Stefania Procalowska, wife of the owner of the ship Anubis, will claim it could have been any one of the jackal men playing in the pack-rape scene in footage which only survives in Goebbels’ private collection.

Margherita played in a number of S&M movies directed by von Gül, who used a special emulsion invented by Jain for developing. It is von Gül who makes films for the British Schwarzkommando project before returning to the Zone as Der Springer, a marketeer ostensibly raising money for future films. He is said to have the Sgerät for sale, and Slothrop tracks him
down at Swinemünde, in the company of Klaus Närrisch who worked on the apparatus with Franz Pökler. Der Springer gets captured by Tchitcherine and is sprung by Närrisch and Slothrop, which is when Slothrop steals the Russian's uniform, but this is at the expense of Närrisch whom Tchitcherine drugs and so learns important details about the 00000. Närrisch worked on guidance and modified weight specifications and reveals that there was a one-way ground-to-rocket radio in the Sgerät and an oxygen line running to it.

It is after a screening of Alpabichten that Franz Pökler comes home horny to his wife Leni, as a result of which Ilse is supposed to have been conceived. Leni leaves Franz when the child is still young, after he switches from paint to rocketry. She has perhaps been a prostitute since World War I times and is involved with Peter Sachse, a medium at séances on behalf of corporate Nazi chemists. She is also close to a group of leftist intellectuals and draws Sachse into anti-Nazi activities. He is killed in a street action, receiving it would seem the truncheon blow meant for Franz who happens to be standing beside him. Leni is interned with Ilse at Dora, near Nordhausen, and thinks her relations with the SS secure some freedom for her daughter. Slothrop will meet Leni at Cuxhaven where she is the prostitute Solange, and so avoid being castrated. When they sleep, Slothrop dreams of Margherita's daughter Bianca on the ferris wheel at Zwölfton (where Franz and Ilse often went during her visits), and Leni dreams of Ilse riding a freight train through the Zone.

Slothrop and Erdmann stay together for a while in an old house near the Spree and he becomes less motivated to solve the rocket mystery. But Greta's agoraphobia and masochism create an increasingly unlivable situation and they set out for Swinemünde — she to find Bianca, he after the Sgerät, acting on information from Geli Tripping. Erdmann is called the White Woman but dresses in black, and is frightened by a woman in black they meet on the street at Bad Krumma. According to Ensign Morituri's story, this would have reminded her of herself when, before the war, addicted to Oneirine (an IG Farben/Jamf product) and other things, having returned from an unsuccessful spell in Hollywood, she began to imagine she was part Jewish, and perpetrated ritual killings of Jewish children. Morituri, a native of Hiroshima, tells Slothrop this story on board the Anubis where Greta is reunited with husband Miklos Thanatz and daughter Bianca. There are a number of suggestions that Thanatz and Bianca have a sexual history together, just as Margherita has long history of masochism. She tells Slothrop how Thanatz used to read her scars and fashes like a gypsy the palm of a hand, as well as the story of their involvement with Blicero when they were touring camps and rocket sites to entertain the SS. Blicero called Greta "Katje" and in an orgy which took place in a petrochemical plant called the Castle, she dressed in an Impolox G suit open at the crotch. Thanatz seems to have fallen for young Gottfried who, for both him and Greta, is another Bianca, and stays on to witness the firing of the 00000 on the Heath. Enzian claims in conversation with Katje that that is as far as Blicero got, but Thanatz hears of him later as the chosen absolute leader of a group of homosexuals liberated from Dora, who have resettled in the Russian zone. Blicero's identity or
status here is never confirmed, though Thanatz asserts that, whether alive or dead, myth or just name, he is "real." Erdmann's story convinces Slothrop that he will keep being reminded of the rocket no matter how much he tries to ignore it, but after the Peenemünde episode, when he and Narrisch are said to approach a holy Center, he begins to fade from the narrative, although he does tell the Schwarzkommando all he has heard from Margherita.

Still on board the Anubis, Slothrop sees Margherita, on the urging of the other passengers, beat Bianca as the climax to an orgy. Then, after hearing Morturi's story, and subsequent to having frenzied sex with the girl himself, he begins to fear for her safety as her mother slips into a delirium in which Slothrop comes to be seen as the reincarnation of Margherita's sacrificial victims. He looks for Bianca but only finds a fragment of her clothing in the engine room, and can get no sense out of Margherita. There are glimpses of her later and it may be Bianca who mugs Slothrop when he boards the Anubis again later, that is if she hasn't hanged herself.

That is not how the book ends, and it is no doubt more than one needs to tell Mother. There is obviously no minimal narrative summary one can make; one is immediately in the business of anticipating the host of questions posed by the listener, making mnemonic repetitions, and indulging one's own narrative pleasure. On the other hand, in spite of trying to have provided readers, at any given point in the summary, with sufficient information for them to know who was who and what was what up to that point, we inevitably repeated some of the irregularities of the narrative order, the ellipsis and anachrony with which the text is constructed.4

The fate of Bianca highlights the problem with reading Gravity's Rainbow even at this level. One will never know just what does happen to her. The episode after Margherita's story about the Imipolex G suit orgy has a storm and Slothrop is swept over the side of the Anubis when he thinks he catches sight of Bianca again, slipping "on the slimy deck . . . under the chalky lifelines and gone" (491). But even that is ambiguous, and hinges on how one reads the syntax: "Slothrop will think he sees her, think he has found Bianca again . . . he will see her lose her footing on the slimy deck . . . he will lunge after her without thinking much, slip himself as she vanishes under the chalky lifelines and gone," which could either mean "slip himself . . . under the chalky lifelines," or "she vanishes under the chalky lifelines." He is rescued by Frau Gnabb and taken to Swinemünde. During the voyage he sleeps for a few hours in the pilot house, and "Bianca comes to
snuggle in under his blanket with him” (492). She talks to him. Did she not then drown? A little later Der Springer will reassure a still anxious Slothrop that “Bianca’s a clever child, and her mother is hardly a destroying goddess” (494). Did Slothrop imagine having her in his bed again the previous night? Whoever mugs Slothrop in the engine room of the Anubis again kicks his head in with what feels like “the pointed toe of a dancing-pump” (530), and at the end of the ordeal, getting up in a stupor, he touches “stiff taffeta, . . . slippery satin, . . . hooks and eyes, . . . something hanging from the overhead. Icy little thighs in wet silk, . . . long wet hair, . . . cold nipples, . . . the deep cleft of her buttocks, perfume and shit and . . . ” (531).

And so we resort to the longhand of citing and encounter two associated problems. Firstly, the narrative summary given above was already a type of citation, a paraphrase which took its terms as closely as possible from the text whenever there was doubt about an event. Secondly, there is no simple opposition between the said and the unsaid in Gravity’s Rainbow. What does it mean to say that Katje never says much to Pirate about “her experiences in Holland”? The text, more precisely, says: “Pirate is having second thoughts. . . . He keeps recalling that Katje now avoids all mention of the house in the forest. She has glanced into it, and out, but the truth’s crystal sheets have diffracted all her audible words — often to tears — and he can’t quite make sense of what’s spoken, much less infer to the radiant crystal itself. Indeed why did she leave Schußstelle 3? We are never told why” (107, italics ours). So although Katje, through Prentice, never tells us much about her experiences in Holland, Katje, through the text, and the text through itself, says a great deal about those experiences. And similarly, it may be that Katje had already told Prentice all we know before she started avoiding all mention of the house.

In every case we face indeterminacies of this kind. The narrative refuses to be stitched together as whole cloth out of the wefts and warps of the characters. Most of the critical readings one encounters make that very clear, but they often go on to make surprising assumptions about events or characters, or to develop interpretations of the novel which rely on an assumed determinacy behind it all. Slothrop of course is the paradigmatic case of the vanishing hero. After Peenemünde he turns up only infrequently and as a minor figure in other people’s
accounts. Not that his appearances weren't always somewhat infrequent and aleatory. By the "end" he becomes a legend in his own novel. It seems to us that even a narrative summary that recounted the tale from the point of view of Slothrop as protagonist would be occluding that indeterminacy. But the same goes for any other character. Prentice is literally left up in the air. One cannot be sure whether Gottfried really is the pilot/cargo of the O0000, whether it is actually fired by Blicer on the Lüneberg Heath and whether he meets his end this way. The Schwarzkommando, after beginning on film, then coming into focus, or reality, express doubts about their own existence (361-62).

A further problem with a "characterological" reading is that the characters cannot be kept separate as persons in any obvious way. They are often paired: Slothrop with Pödler, for example, through the rocket and through their respective paternal relations to Ilse and Bianca (who also go proxy for each other at certain points). Enzian and Tchitcherine are another obvious pair, and Enzian can also be paired with Gottfried; as can Katje, his "sister" in the Grimm fantasy; as can Bianca with Erdmann and Thanatz. Erdmann herself is called "Katje" by Blicer, and so on. And furthermore, if characters are not based on the idea of separate and unique biological, psychological, or social personages, then one could easily make a case for recounting the narrative from the point of view of, say, Impollex G, as much a node in the grid or a thread in the weave of the story as "someone" like its creator Jamf. Not to mention the rocket.

Seeing the idea of a narrative structured through the trajectories of characters put in jeopardy, we were led to look elsewhere for a reading of Gravity's Rainbow, albeit in the form of another traditional approach common in literary studies in general, and, to our surprise given the look of the novel, to Pynchon studies in particular. Critics return to the book in terms of its themes. The "entropy" theme, relevant to a number of Pynchon's texts, has been worked to death; but many other "themes" present themselves in Gravity's Rainbow: death itself, sex, science, religion, art, music. Perhaps as devotees of semiosis or grammatology, perhaps because the choice hardly matters, we decided to pursue inter alia the idea or the theme of the word, the alphabet, the book, the sign, or the linguistic mark in Gravity's Rainbow. Thus we continued to read,
like this:

The word, sometimes the “Word,” has a large number of material configurations in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. There are four sizes of standard typeface if one includes the section titles, two sets of italics, one in the text proper, another for references to epigraphs; two sets of lower case capitals whose function sometimes doubles for that of the italics; two sets of mixed lower and upper case capitals, one of which is used most notably for the (inter)titles which become frequent in the last eighty pages of the book; and a set of upper case capitals, occasionally italicised, used in the main for acronyms and onomatopoeic neologisms. A small number of phonetic characters is used. There are diacritical subscripts in technical discussions along with delta, integral, and other mathematical symbols. A mandala, the rocket symbol, and a finger are other instances of graphic representation. Runes, on the other hand, are described without typographical intervention.

Onomatopoetic neologisms range from “lumb” (405) to “KRUP-PALOOMA” (690) and beyond, but are far from being the only concrete linguistic interventions to be found in the book. Instances such as “A-and” (65) and a consistent “sez” (64, 200, 201), the seemingly random capitalisation of words in passages like that which recounts Katie’s time with Blicero (65-97), a fondness for alliteration (“Kute Korrespondences” 890) and an arcane lexicon (“ctenophile,” 123, “crwth,” 639), similarly foreground the written word. Much of the emphasis here is on vocalisation of written language through phonetic rendition of accents (“Getcher ass ollf dat fire,” 641), or the use of hyphens for unusual intonation patterns (“shape-less blob of experience,” 81). Mention of film actors like Cary Grant (240) or Bela Lugosi (537) is a shorthand for typifying accents. Argotic usages also carry over into the narrative prose (“but def,” 128, “natch,” 635). When Hilary Bounce talks to an increasingly paranoid Slothrop on the Riviera, two of his words occur between quotation marks which Slothrop is said to be able to hear (241). Place names referred to by Katje, Slothrop and later Bianca, are prefixed by the demonstrative adjective “that” (193, 195, 493) in their direct speech as well as in the narrative proper (198).

Further intralinguistic play includes the series of puns on the Kenosha Kid sentence (60ff); a play on the expression “unto thee I pledge my trough” (576); Mexico’s literalisation of Rózsa-völgyi’s “I say” (634); and a cryptic reference to the Hiroshima headline (693). Just as common are interferences relating to interlinguistic functions such as the mistranslations of a Morse message (518), Michele’s misunderstanding about getting fixed up with a big oilman (245), the narrator’s play on Géli Tripping’s sub-enunciated “warum” (331), and the discussions concerning “ass-backwards” and “shit ‘n shinola” (683-88). Languages in use include English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin, Russian (not Cyrillic), Herero, and Japanese (not characters).

Mastery of the spoken word is related on more than one occasion to life and death situations. The Dodoes are exterminated because they can’t speak, except in Frans van der Groov’s fantasy conversion miracle (110-11), and Germans have to be taught to
pronounce words of surrender correctly (230). For the Kirghiz who have the New Turkic Alphabet imposed upon them, the written word represents a destruction of cultural values, incapable in any case of translating their silences (338-41). The alphabetisation program is given over to bureaucratic infighting aimed at reducing the diversity of oral utterance and rides roughshod over political sensibilities (332-56).

The idealisation of unmediated communication implied in Tchitcherine’s Kirghiz experience is more explicitly referred to in a case where an intralinguistic misunderstanding occurs without the humour that normally characterises such instances. During a discussion with the Schwarzkommando that marks the final mention of her, Katje asks why anyone would want to fight for a desert. The preposition is corrected to “in” and the narrator notes that it “Saves trouble later if you can get the Texts straight soon as they’re spoken (729). The Schwarzkommando with their rocket mystique, and Enzian with his Illumination, perhaps come closest to this type of idealised communication, but the séance cultists may well be another example.

On the other hand the Word that is the Rocket, “the one Word that rips apart the day” (25), like the word “death” the most frequent utterance during séances (32), is an instance of direct communication. Thus it stands at the centre of the Zone-Hereros’ new religion as the vehicle of the true message for a people whose history is one of lost messages (322), although Enzian will later oppose that the rocket is only apocryphal to the real Text (520). When Slothrop and Näärisch approach the holy Center at Peenemünde there is a reference to words being only delta-t from what they stand for, such words being contrasted with the Operational Word (510). The delta-t gap is echoed in the fall of the Rocket in the book’s penultimate paragraph, reinforcing the idea that what the rocket communicates, so directly as to perform (contact) before it itters (sound), is death. The rocket is also referred to as the Torah (727) and incoming mail (6).

The Word exists along with shit and money as one of the American truths which the Slothrop family paper industry embraces in producing paper for newspapers, toilet tissue, and banknotes (28). Other types of text range from the orthodox – quotations, songs, limericks, poems, epitaphs, proverbs, graffiti, the Tarot, a mantra; to the less so – human palimpsests (50), Teddy Bloat (188), the day (204), joint papers (442), whipped bodies (484), shivers (641), Blasco’s eye (670), a photograph (693), Slothrop who is only a pretext (738), and the screen seen as a page (760). There is also the Book to do with Pavlov which circulates at The White Visitation and has a reducing membership (47, 159).

In Herero the holy Text of the rocket is called “oururumo orunene,” except that the second word, meaning “the great one,” is being modified to “omunene,” the eldest brother (520). The Empty Ones make their own linguistic change to take the name “Otukunguru” with its prefix referring to the inanimate. The act of naming is given prominence in Herero. The name “Enzian” is used as a chant (321), the name of God is the same as the word for
fucking (100), and they have many words for shit (325). Saüre Bummer revives the ritual of naming when he christens Slothrop the “raketemensch” (366). The narrator refers to the German habit of naming (probably that language’s use of compound nouns), which seems to be adopted by Slothrop under Tchitcherine’s sodium amytal, as an analytical mania for dividing the Creation finer and finer, setting namer apart from named, building words like molecular structures (591). This sort of naming presumably contrasts with that practised by the Hereros. But Slothrop has been naming since the days of his London map (271), and the book’s characters not only have strange proper names of their own, but many nicknames and pseudonyms. Besides, there is some confusion of characters’ names such as when Blicero calls Greta “Katje.” The relationship between naming of characters and neologism in general is highlighted when Slothrop takes on the name and role of Plechazunga for a day, that name being repeated as the onomatopoeia “PLECCCHHAZUNNGGA!” (569) when the fireworks begin.

Gravity’s Rainbow’s most obvious neologisms apart from names and vocal transcriptions are proper nouns like Onetirne, Imipolex, and Schwarzerat, which exist as words needing to have meaning ascribed to them. More than that, being written without being spoken, these words remain strictly speaking unpronounceable. A first ordering of such words during Slothrop’s second meeting with Enzian provides the basis for the twin possibilities of random events or organised conspiracy (363).

What proceeds, however naively or ingenuously, as a simple presentation of data (capta) collected along thematic lines, is obviously less able to contain itself and prescribe its limits than that which relied on the notion of integral characters. The word here concludes by abutting on to a theme as broad and as commonly referred to as entropy in Pynchon studies, namely the plot/conspiracy vs chaos/randomness relation. From there it is but a short distance to questions of ethics and recipes for living, and thereupon a host of political questions arise: black/white, men/women, force/counterforce, right/left, humane/inhumane, and so on. Thus a modernist reading of Gravity’s Rainbow is also in jeopardy. How can a novel of ideas, especially one whose philosophers and technocrats are so close to the surface of the text, slip and slide around so much? For if our characterological reading overlooked but was forced to confront the problem of narrative time in the novel, what thematic studies must deal with, and will never solve, are the matters of narrative mood and voice (cf. Genette, Narrative Discourse). These are plural in Gravity’s Rainbow, so much so as to preclude the organisation of thematic material into anything resembling a coherent set of ideas which might be called the “philosophy” of
the novel. And we are leaving aside the enormous associated problems of authorship on the one hand, and, pardon the shorthand, logocentrism on the other, that is to say the underlying notion(s) that the signifiers of the novel can ultimately be returned or reduced to a coherent whole, be it an author or a philosophy. Nevertheless many of the commentators we have read are happy not only to overlook the plurality of narrative voices in the novel, but also to perform unconsciously the enormous ellipsis which assimilates the narrator(s) to someone called Thomas Pynchon.8

Thus our comments on the word were not so naïve or ingenuous as they might have appeared at first. They go too far, inevitably, and are already in the business of making interpretations which fail to examine the assumptions upon which they depend; but from the point of view we adopted there, that is one which is directed towards some final ideological of philosophical coherence, such a study of the novel can hardly go further than a taxonomy of instances and still retain its own critical integrity. Many readings we have encountered illustrate this dilemma.

Accordingly we wanted to undertake a reading which worked from not just a different theme or idea, but a whole new order or conception of textuality. Such an order has been the source for much of that commentary which considers Pynchon as a post-modernist — with its overtones of intertextuality and the encroachment of the non-literary.9 Cinema might be such an order, it seemed to us, already instanced by Cowart, although not on our terms.10 In our reading of cinema we deliberately abandon the ideal of a “degree-zero” reading; by letting a certain degree of free-play emerge in, or as, the reading; by letting reference lead to reference in a looser or less structured way than is normally practised in either traditional or modernist readings. However, it should be remembered that this is still an empiricist reading. It still works close to the text; it still cites instances of the text as its evidence; it still works through the text in a very particularistic and piecemeal fashion, even though it re-uses the material (data? capta?) it obtains there in a less constrained manner than previously. Thus we continued reading Gravity’s Rainbow, like this:

Cinema, like Pirate Prentice, has the ability to dream other people’s dreams for them. Since the novel begins with one of Pirate’s dreams, it may be read as one whole dream or one whole
film. To write about cinema in *Gravity's Rainbow* then would be to begin with "A screaming comes across the sky ..." and to proceed from there to the final falling of the rocket (which precedes the screaming) upon the picture theatre where the readership sits watching the trajectories of the bouncing ball from word to word, at the end of the rainbow, now ... everybody. It's not that life imitates cinema, or vice versa. The two are indistinguishable here, or related in some yet to be defined manner.

Katie first appears only as the film image of herself in the fourteenth subsection of Part One, right after the line of seven sprocket holes or frames (who put them there does not seem to us to be an important question — why should we believe publishers who are under express instructions to cover over the "real" Thomas Ruggles? And if we were to believe it was Ruggles himself, what would that tell us when we hardly know who he is?) The film she is in, made by Osbie Feel, is probably one of those used to train Grigori, "the biggest fucking octopus Slothrop has ever seen outside of the movies, Jackson" (186). But the film soon gives way to some supposedly non-filmic details of Katie's life with no clear boundaries separating the two. At the end of the section, the whole film plays again: "The camera follows as she moves deliberately nowhere" (92, 113). It loops around perhaps. And later still in the novel (535ff) Katie, or another image of her, watches this film of herself, "the same unfolding" (29). *Gravity's Rainbow* is full of the same unfolding difference. Science, death, sex, parabolas, literature, the word, language, psychology, plot, history, ESP, theatre, music, religion and Angels are played as films. The curve, the geometrical rainbow, the curve, the parabola, the rocket's trajectory are essentially projected. Ballistics and optics, missile and camera obscura, both had a common ancestry in Leonardo's monocular perspective long before Kekulé and Rathenau.

Most of all the war is played as a movie containing, as Cowart points out (35), action, scenarios, bombing, shooting and theatres. "Yes, it is a movie! Another World War II situation comedy" (691-92). Early on, Pointsman directs, but only on Their behalf. "... you are trapped inside Their frame with your wastes piling up, ass hanging out all over Their Movielola viewer, waiting for Their editorial blade" (694). Mexico, for example, finds one "bad cinema spring" (628) that his "love" for Jessica was no more than a fiction dreamed up by Pointsman in order to keep camera-like surveillance on her, the deviant statistician, lost man of science in a ghost movie. For another example, let's not mention again the (dis)appearance of the black rocket corps. In this connection though, it is worth noting that even someone as distantly removed from Hollywood as the Herero Enzian gobbles Pervertins "like popcorn at the movies" (522), he's "just as smooth as that Cary Grant" (661), and his fellow Schwanzenkommando, Pavel, on a massive sniffing binge, sees, *inter alia*, "Bing Crosby in a baseball cap" (523).

Von Göll's other major film project in the novel concerns a group of Argentinian U-boat sailors with heavy nationalist tendencies. Their idea is to make a film of the great gaUCHO epic *Martín Fierro*. One of their number, Squalidozzi, is first encountered
hiding in a cinema in Bavaria where “the filmlight flickered blue” (385). On the U-boat there are stock puns like “Gaucho Marx.” The proposed film is never made but sections of it survive in filmprose on the pages of Gravity’s Rainbow (386-87). Von Göll is driven to believe that his film can make the Argentinians’ political dreams come true, for “since discovering that Schwarzkommando are really in the Zone, leading real, paracinematic lives that have nothing to do with him or the phony Schwarzkommando footage he shot last winter in England for Operation Black Wing, Springer has been zooming (!) around in a controlled ecstasy of megalomania” (388). Later (612-13), though the film is yet to be made, the Argentinians are inhabiting a set of real buildings which will remain unstruck, a type of statehood thus realised, and Felipe explains his weird notion of the intellect of rocks in terms of cinematic discontinuity — “We’re talking frames per century . . . per millennium!” (612).

In this war/movie where the sets have more “reality” than historic materialities like the Reichstag building — “is that King Kong, or some creature closely allied, squatting down, evidently just, taking a shit” (368) — who can distinguish the cinematic from the real?

No wonder the War drives Slothrop to paranoia, of the type learned in cinemas — “there’s always someone behind him careful not to talk, rattle paper, laugh too loud: Slothrop’s been to enough movies that he can pick up an anomaly like that right away” (114). In the theatre, in the film, cinema combines the two. And many a manipulation can be produced or directed in the space in between. But as we have already seen, the film is not only out to shoot Slothrop, no one escapes it. Not even the director, Pointsman, can stay out of camera range, appearing “in a medium shot, himself backlit, alone at the high window” (142). Not even the critic, Mitchell Prettyplace (who might be called “Sprocketman” because he picks technical holes in film), for all his scholarship including eight volumes on King Kong, can anticipate that the film ape will give birth to the Schwarzkommando.

The War film, of course, extends to the Axis powers. Leni Pökler, like Erdmann, conceives thanks to film, and she dreams of flight while the film/novel projects its own cinematic theory: “Real flight and dreams of flight go together. Both are part of that wing movement. Not A before B, but all together” (159), that “all together” prefiguring the final words. Later “film and calculus, both pornographies of flight” (567) will set up another parallel between forms of representation, modes of abstraction. Husband Franz sticks bills for Ufa movies. He sees, among other films, Lang’s Die Frau im Mond for which the countdown is said to have been conceived (753), and nods off to sleep occasionally. As a rocket engineer he watches “the daily rushes” taken of the rocket’s flight, its fall “photocopied by Askania cinetheodolite rigs on the ground” (407). When his daughter Ilse makes her annual visits she will appear so different each time that he will wonder whether it is her or an actress playing the part. Film has made the child and “Isn’t that what they made of my child, a film? . . . the moving image of a daughter, flashing him only these summertime frames of her, leaving it to him to build the illusion of a single child” (398, 422). Strangely enough, their last
visit to Zwoßkinder, where rear-projection creates an Antarctic panorama (420), occasions the mention of an Ilse who persists "beyond her cinema mother, beyond film's end," in the context of a Double Light that "was always there, outside all film," seemingly the shadows of shadows of Cain and Abel (429). We don’t know what that might mean after all this, for an outside of/to representation seems a slim hope given the net of interconnected or overlaid mediations that the novel throws out.

Film, especially in war, works as propaganda, as a way of making a certain political version of the world seem natural. In Gravity’s Rainbow it works by being indistinguishable from real tyranny and freedom — real oppression and flight — and so on. But the material of film is also a political matter, of political substance. The many chemicals in the book centre around international capital deals and conspiracies and co-incidences of ownership, especially among ICI, IG Farben and their subsidiaries. Von Goll’s special developing emulsion which makes the skin transparent (like a literal dissolve) is a case in point. Pirate’s Kryptos which makes messages legible only when doused in semen is another. But IG Farben also own General Anilines and Film and Spottbilligfilm AG, a manufacturer of cheap film connected with the dye market and with the emerging polymer research that leads to the production of the quasi-organic Imipolex G. Cine film is taken as the distant relative of this living chemical, the "plastic film" activated by, inter alia, projection of an "electronic image" analogous to a motion picture (700). One could go on into Erdmann’s addiction to Oneirine, her bathing in Imipolex like Gottfried in his shroud in the final frames of the film, moving "image to image" (721); for the film, like the rocket, exists as a series of delta discontinuities run together to produce a semblance of smooth flight, and like the rocket it needs to be forced to get going until at a certain point, its bremschluss, it gathers its own, gravity's, or history's momentum, and we are in its grip.

Some sort of reference to cinema underwrites much of what happens in Gravity’s Rainbow, so much so that one could well ask whether narrative prose is still possible without such reference. But here there is no need to look any further than the explicit. The casino where Slothrop and Katje get involved is like one huge set, where they are trying to get their lines right, where her wardrobe is "mostly props" (195), and Slothrop begins his series of costume changes: US Army uniform to an English one; a Rocketman costume and a tuxedo. Once the series is established in the context of a cinema set, and even if it hadn’t been — his borrowing of Tchitcherine’s boots and later his whole uniform, his pig costume, to final ‘fade-out’ (‘letting his hair and beard grow, wearing a dungaree shirt and trousers Bodine liberated for him from the laundry of the John E. Badass,’ then spending "whole days naked," 623) — all such changes obey a metonymy which is cinematic through and through, right up to the Pay Wray costume in the transvestites’ toilet (688), although we would refrain from placing that (or any other) episode chronologically. Slothrop’s only definite ID, registered on paper, is that of the film actor Max Schlepzig. He takes a Russian accent thanks to Bela Lugosi (537, 561), resorts to Fred Astaire wistfully
searching for a lost Ginger when completely at a loose end (561),
and after kicking a would-be attacker in the balls lets out his own
version of hiyo Silver — "Fickt nicht mit der Raketemensch" (435).
Chase scenes begin in the Casino. The infamous They have
planted the props, right down to an American Seltzer bottle, and
Slothrop anticipates the cream pies to complete the slapstick
(197), although the cream pies come later when Major Marvy
comes at him for the second time (333ff). There is more chasing
when Der Springer/von Göll falls into the Russians' hands and is
rescued by Slothrop and Närrisch. Here it is pure slapstick
complete with chimp, trombones and vodka bottles (505-04);
then "sneaky-Peteing like two cats in a cartoon" (508), a hold-
up, chase, chorus girls (511-14), and Närrisch's imminent late
written under the sign of Dillinger/Clark Gable and further film
allusions (516-17). Dillinger, we are later reminded, was shot
outside a movie theatre — "subdebs just out the movies with the
sweat still cold on their thighs... everybody was there..."
<trying to> soak up some of John Dillinger's blood" (741).

Just as no-one escapes from the movies, neither does any place.
Even the Seven Rivers country visited by Tchitcherine in the
early Stalin days is "like a Wild West movie" (338). The world is
especially seen through a Hollywood lens no matter how
culturally un-American the scene. The movies are imperialist:
Nazis are cinema Nazis, even the feelings are cinema Nazi
feelings — Slothrop sick in the English sector of the Zone, "with
that sovereign Nazi movie-villain list clamping his bowels ja —
you vill shit now, ja?" (360). And the "comic Nazi routine" Roger
does with Miss Müller-Hochleben (633) should be mentioned
here too. Even a gun, "the racy 8mm French Hotchkiss," is as
"nasal and debonair as a movie star" (697). The Nazi movie-
villain routine, like the King Kong Reichstag, makes the movie/
shit connection, movies being locales for two other types of shit
— bullshit (talk) and dope. At Neubabelsberg, the aptly named
"old movie capital of Germany (371), Slothrop goes to get
Saure's stash. Before setting off, he inspects the morning streets
of Berlin but can't recognise it as the city he "used to see back in
those newreels" (372). The people in the street are "extras"
(374) involved in this cine-plot. Talking to Saure about the
rocket turns to talk about the movies — as does a later
conversation with Pökler (578ff). In the course of the talk it turns
out Tchitcherine is setting up his HQ in the old Potsdam movie
studios and it is as the film character of Rocketman that Slothrop
must carry out his dope-quest (376). At Potsdam he gets
entangled in a smart party with "colonels' ladies in Garbo
fedoras... a strange collection of those showbiz types" (380),
for the peace conference is no more nor less than another film
with special mention going to Oliver Hardy, Don Ameche, and
Errol Flynn, and above all a guest appearance by none other than
Mickey Rooney who steps out on to the terrace for some fresh air
just after Slothrop finds the dope: "— well, this may sound odd,
but it's Mickey Rooney... Mickey Rooney stares at
Rocketman holding a bag of hashish, a wet aparition in helmet
and cape... He knows he is seeing Mickey Rooney, though
Mickey Rooney, wherever he may go, will repress the fact that he
ever saw Slothrop. It is an extraordinary moment" (382). For
Slothrop, for Mickey Rooney, and for narrative prose.
Once Margherita Erdmann comes on the scene cinematic references abound — and remember, she waits for nearly thirty pages after her first mention, in a form “less (real?) than the images of herself” (364), until meeting Slothrop in the Potsdam studios — will she be more real thereafter? The “Anti-Dietrich” (394), she hears explosions as “cue calls for the titanic sets of her dreams” (446). Aboard the Anubis, where “filthy movies are showing in the boiler room” (490), Greta materialises in the form of “a shy fade-in, as Gerhardt von Göll must have brought her on a time or two” (459). Stefania Procalowska believes Greta and her daughter are aboard only because of the cinematic possibilities, for one Karel is also there posing as a film producer “this month” (460). The orgy is stimulated to its wildest excesses following Bianca’s Shirley Temple routine, while the inscrutable Ensigin Morituri, who used to sit most of the day watching Allied footage for what could be pulled out and worked into newsreels to make the Axis look good” (473), but also knows Greta’s dark past when she wore “yellow sunglasses and Garbo hats” (476) and men had their “faces shaved very smooth, film star polished” (477), plays the part of the perfect spectator-voyeur, “(n)ot masturbating or anything” (467).

Greta fades back into her movie connection when Slothrop meets von Göll who says that she is supposed to be dead, to which Slothrop replies: “Well you’re supposed to be a movie director.” And from von Göll, “Same thing, same problems of control. But more intense” (494). Here too the cinematic creeps into the mundane aspects of people’s lives as Der Springer and Slothrop stroll along the promenade and little Otto “goes chasing seagulls, hands out in front of him movie style” (495), and Springer’s latest batch of black-market valuables happens to contain three reels of Lucky Pierre Runs Amok (497). And so on, through one of the final sections entitled “Chase Music” (751) to Richard M. Zhubb’s Orpheus Theatre and midnight showings (754-55), the repeating “CATCH” of the Ascent (759) to the “screen a dim page” of the final show (760), just as the novel opens with a Prentice dream-movie, so its last section is an odd movie scene, perhaps a Slothrop dream (within a continuing dream or fantasy of Prentice’s?). In it Bette Davis and Margaret Dumont get mixed up in with the Marx Brothers. The characters of the novel, except perhaps Gottfried, have faded rather than made dramatic Hollywoodian exits. They project their vision of the future and perhaps our present. Bicero for instance, in his final soliloquy to Gottfried, speaks of a colony on the Moon where a “handful of men have a frosty appearance, hardly solid, no more alive than memories, nothing to touch . . . only their remote images, black and white film-images, grained, broken . . .” (723). Film now less like life than death. With that muddled schema for the relations between forms and representations of reality we are back to the bouncing ball, the words of a song, within the ultimate delta of where it is the turn of everybody, a set of words to follow and little time to dwell on the subtleties of register and inflexion, caught in the space of a final ellipsis, a dash to represent a film run out or caught in the gate, a wipe, fade, or jump cut, a pulled plug, the possibilities run on and on.

It is almost impossible to resist the distinction between the cinematic and the real. However this form of distinction is virtually
impossible to make in the case of *Gravity's Rainbow*, although this hasn't prevented a number of critical readings from trying. In fact it's possible to argue that all critical readings are based on assumptions about what constitutes the "real" (as opposed to, say, the dreamed, the fantasised, the cinematic, the fictive and so on). Mrs Quoad is a case in point. McHale (95) works through a reading in which the Mrs Quoad of the Disgusting English Candy Drill (114-20) is quite different from the Mrs Quoad whom Pointsman's agents, Speed and Perdoo, uncover in their attempt to verify Slothrop's map (271). The former, on this reading, emerges in "Slothrop's fantasy life," whereas the latter has authentic status and must therefore be part of "our reconstructed world" (McHale, 95).

Given that the real/fantasy distinction arises from the contrast of two third-person narratives, on what grounds could we give priority to one over the other? For example, if the rockets do fall where Slothrop fucks, then presumably the first, quite real Mrs Quoad, is dead, and the sophomoric spies have found an equally real somebody else. Two Mrs Quoads does not mean that one is mere fantasy. Similarly, if Slothrop is making it all up, then even a cursory reading should remain sufficiently doubtful about Speed and Perdoo's integrity to allow them to be equally capable of creative invention:

They went off practically skipping, obsessive as Munchkins . . . the two gumshoes become so infected with the prevailing fondness out here for mindless pleasures that they presently are passing whole afternoons sitting out in restaurant gardens dawdling over chrysanthemum salads and mutton casseroles, or larking at the fruit monger's . . . (270)

The duo's propensity for *skipping* may well refer to more than just their ambulatory activities and point in the direction of omissions. McHale, it must be said, does recognise the unreliability of Speed and Perdoo, and concludes that "we are left with elements whose ontological status is unstable, flickering, indeterminable" (95), but as long as he retains the notion of (presumably sovereign) consciousness being represented in the text, then verification of the ontological status of each datum is an assumed possibility. But we cannot be that sure.

When a decision as to the real is based only on a comparison of text with more-text — and we have demonstrated that traditional hierarchisations of textual material, such as those which place a
narrative or authorial voice at the top, clearly collapse in *Gravity's Rainbow*—there can be no intratextual justification. Explicit decisions (such as in McHale's proposed reading) or implicit assumptions (such as Cowart's decision that V. is Stencil's mother, 67) concerning what is veridical in *Gravity's Rainbow* may not be in point at all, and yet we know of no critical reading which can do without one or the other (present company included).

But if the problem with Mrs Quoad involves an intratextual distinction between “real” and “imagined,” similar problems apply where so-called extratextual material, such as the historical real, is brought into play. Cowart (159) has been very astute in identifying the Hannomag Storm motorcar which Gretel (Greta? Margherita?) and Thanatz come across in the forest at the end of their time with Blicero (485) as that in which Werner von Braun crashed and broke his arm, when driving from Bleicheröde to Berlin on March 16, 1945. Both the car and the arm have previous mentions in the novel. The arm is one of a number of historical events including the arrival of spring, Lloyd George’s imminent death and the month of March (237), which set the scene for the section which follows Brigadier Pudding’s just desert. It becomes a reference point for Slothrop and Katje’s tryst at the Casino Hermann Goering. The (?) automobile is pluralised and lost in the forest in Slothrop’s dreaming about Margherita (447). And when it turns up as the Hannomag Storm it is in one of Margherita’s accounts of her history to Slothrop, where again the distinctions between real and fantasy are not preserved. For all its astuteness, Cowart’s assertion about von Braun’s car is no more nor less a propos than Mendelson’s decision that The White Visitation’s Book is Pavlov’s.12

When historical phenomena are cited in fictional texts, corroboration can usually be had from extratextual sources (the texts we call history), as in the case of *War and Peace*. But as we can see from the treatment of von Braun/Blicero (again with the inevitable question-mark about their identity), paralleling the question of Mrs Quoad/Mrs Quoad, no such corroboration can be had. In the case of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, that corroboration is only possible if one can ascribe to a third person narrative (or authorial voice?) priority over Slothrop’s dreams or Greta Erdmann’s paranoid delusions and/or recounts. The intratextual/extratextual distinctions all fail in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. 
This then leaves us with the problem of different ways of sorting texts. While some may claim, "if the narrative says it, it's real," we could equally claim, "if the film says it, it's real" and so on for dream, hallucination, stoned rave or whatever. In this case, a narrative voice has no real privilege over or against what we might call a cinematic voice, and to this we could add, for example, the voices of science, technology, history and so on. We have already seen how, at the quite simple levels of character, event and theme, it is pushing the bounds of plausibility to make categorical assertions about Gravity's Rainbow. If this basis fails us then we must ask the question, "what actually governs the relations of difference in Gravity's Rainbow?"; for without difference, it could have no meaning and quite "senseless" readings could be generated. Quite plainly, not just any reading will do. But we have no idea what the criteria of acceptability are any more. For instance, is the following reading acceptable? We think it is, but many critics would not; but then we would want to know the ground on which such a reading should be excluded. It is far from senseless, and we doubt whether it contradicts any of the empirical data of the text:

Slothrop wants to get laid for free, like Benny profane in V., and other aimless types we could mention. His work with ACHTUNG has brought him into contact with many others with their own expense accounts and he dreams of being a big star foreign agent like Pirate Prentice. Knowing how paranoid the Firm is, if Pointsman is anything to go by, he need only leave something like a map of London lying around and their suspicions will be aroused. To this end... Next thing he is being well fucked and fed on the Riviera, travelling free through the Zone, answerable to no-one, getting to indulge his transvestism, having an extraordinary variety of sexual experiences, still perhaps ending with an honourable discharge. It is the authorities who are paranoid in this reading and Slothrop who has a firm grasp on reality and as a result connives to get out of London where rockets are falling on his head. It is normal that he is a little nervous about getting found out.

Given this indeterminacy regarding the parameters of acceptability of empirical readings, whether traditional, modernist or post-modernist, it would be as well to look outside the question of narratorial authority and thereby outside the problematic of real/non-real separations for the relations of difference upon which Gravity's Rainbow's sense turns. The question which now faces us is that of alternatives to real/non-real
or true/fictional distinctions and the ways in which the novel articulates such alternatives.

To this extent, we hope at least to be able to show how empirical readings (of whatever kind — see the partial list above) can be resisted. In our final offering/reading, the question of textual verification must cease to arise. Bits of *Gravity's Rainbow*, then, should be treated as bits of other text rather than as privileged “quotations” or points of determinate verification of the reading.

[One further problem: the upcoming reading is unsure of how to situate itself with respect to the typographical format so far employed; namely 3.25 mm leading for readings we have quoted (from ourselves), and 5 mm for our commentary thereon. (Of course a similar problem exists with respect to this paragraph — and the distinction itself is quite unfortunate given what we have been saying about the relations between text and commentary, or data and analysis, in *Gravity's Rainbow*.) Consequently what follows appears with 4 mm leading in order to point to its situation somewhere between the two.]

McHale’s hang-up with readers having to reconstruct what “really” happened from what a character dreamed, hallucinated, etc., is nicely summed up in Tony Tanner’s phrase. With *Gravity's Rainbow*, he says, we cannot tell “whether we are in a bombed-out building or a bombed-out mind.” This also shows where McHale goes wrong and how we can begin to get another reading of the text. Because: what’s the difference? That is, we can argue that the mind is no more and no less real than the building. “In the building” and “in the mind” are equivalent as mere sites for the playing-out of discursive operations.

Indeed, in the latter part of his article, McHale discusses the operations which a reader, narrator or author performs in order to make shifts in a text coherent. He works more in terms of intertextual relations at this point than in terms of consciousness (mind) and object (building). On the other hand, his analysis remains bound to a concept of consciousness as transcendent even though, as we have tried to argue, none of the categories (of character, event or whatever) was ever sufficiently fixed to give such a concept much sense. For example, in his analysis of the connection between Sachsa and Eventyr, McHale (102-04) assumes that relatively fixed texts (such as thoughts) can transfer between relatively fixed identities (such as minds). This begs the question of the reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* we are in the process of making. For can these narratorial mind-merging measures be said to
take place when neither mind nor message is fixed in any recognisable sense? McHale's reading of the passage (218-20) as *mise-en-abyme*—though he does not use the term—might therefore be dubious, which he himself suggests by moving to more complex cases. He is, however, left at the end with "the moralising prospect of free and all-but-unmanageable analogical patterning" (106). This prefigures what we are about to indicate as the "post-rhetorical" character of *Gravity's Rainbow* but rather than, perhaps, being aghast at its moralising prospects we would instead wish to exploit the capabilities of this "negativity."

For these reasons, it would be best to over-write what is a crucial separation for McHale (that between the mental and the real), for we can now see that there would be no need for a reader to make such a separation in order to make sense of the novel. Instead, the reader might be attuned to the "order of discourse" played out in mind, building, on screen or wherever and however the novel articulates these and the human subject, about moral and political dilemmas in a world of discourse, about plots and plans and knowledge of them when there are only arbitrary signifiers and no definite or independently available signifiers to match them up with.

Any analysis of relations between bits of text, before being discussed in terms of, for instance, the rhetorical, must rely on the structure of the relations between signifier and signified. We take that relation to be one of arbitrariness. In point of fact, a whole body of Pynchon criticism seems to have noticed the arbitrariness of the signifier in *Gravity's Rainbow* and, to put it mildly, panicked, sensing in an aestheticist way the absence of order, anarchy, disharmony, threats to traditional canons of literary organisation and a challenge to routine, clear and beautiful renditions of "reality." What to do in the face of this? Answers to the question have practically exhausted the pantheon of *Gravity's Rainbow* criticism—the remainder being taken up with the "technical" explanations of rocketry, entropy and so on. Sanders says, for example, that "God is the original conspiracy theory"; but we prefer to maintain that it is rather the death of God that makes conspiracy theories proliferate. Once the honest-to-God signifier is found to be arbitrary, one is necessarily paranoid until one accepts this state of affairs. A more extreme form of this exasperation is the "Please beat me again, Thomas" school of criticism, exemplified by Leverenz, who finally has "enough clarity to refuse the guilt and self-hatred that *Gravity's Rainbow* required of [him]" (242), although his final response to the insecurity is to find a Pynchon (not a Pynchon text—though this is a common transposition) who creates "the most powerfully aching language for natural descriptions in our literature" (248).

It is on the one hand surprising but also reassuring that much of this criticism just referred to takes the point that a problematic of reading such as that posed by *Gravity's Rainbow* implies also a problematic of
writing. There are indeed close structural similarities between Leverenz's picareseque commentary and our own various revisions of the strategy of reading. In an earlier text, we experimented with the bits of text at our disposal in a way which could be construed as congruent with McHale's invitation to read Pynchon with "negative capability." However, what is all the more surprising is McHale's implication that experimentation with reading/writing strategies represents a completely uncharted territory. After all, Barthes in S/Z did not wait upon the invitation of something like Gravity's Rainbow to explore a more radical form of intervention into the text on the part of the reader. He wrote about a classic realist text. Further: Derrida finds his targets anywhere on the line from Plato to Sollers. It is indeed ironical that forms of criticism/reading can mismatch so greatly with the literary forms they choose to read that we can have deconstructions of Plato and classicist as well as romanticist readings of Pynchon.

In deference to the latter, stunned as they may be by the apparent abyss of Gravity's Rainbow, we would accept that whereas the much earlier novel V. works mostly with the problematic of the arbitrariness of the signifier, Gravity's Rainbow goes further or elsewhere. It is certainly not just more of the same. We would argue that there can be a reading of Gravity's Rainbow in which the arbitrariness of the signifier is accepted for what it is and is no longer a cause for sustained humanist angst. Instead, such a reading would point to the novel's working with rhetorical strategies and devices. It would point to its status as game, design, practice, play, inscription or diagram rather than, say, its status as representation of some confused -- but really existing -- universe.

To see how Gravity's Rainbow plays with rhetorical strategies (which, following Foucault, we see as a subset of discursive orders generally) is not to examine merely its "language" in some stylistic or other technicist way, leaving for another reader the matter of "to what that language refers." It is in fact to learn our lesson and put aside completely the matter of linguistic reference and ontic referent, acknowledging that if there is a reality here it is only ever and always already a discursive/rhetorical one. Though, as we shall see, even what this means can be subject to doubt in Gravity's Rainbow.

Instead of continuing with McHale's distinction between definite/ indefinite, or real/non-real as the basis for a reading of difference and, therefore, of sense in Gravity's Rainbow, we might turn to a more obviously rhetorical distinction, that between use/mention. As this distinction is raised in formal logic, it applies to the difference between a sign's employment as such in a proposition and a reference to its capacity as a sign. Thus "Slothrop's not alone" may be a perfectly ordinary use of the term "Slothrop," whereas "Slothrop contains eight letters" would constitute a mention of the terms. The reader could no doubt separate the uses from the mentions in the sentence preceding this one, and that separation would no doubt lead to problematic terms
like “mentions of use” and “uses of mention” and so forth. At a purely
textual level, Gravity’s Rainbow plays with the use/mention
distinction:

“Oh – where’ve you been, gate?”
“Here.”
“‘Here’?”
“Yes, like that, you’ve got it – once or twice removed like
that ...” (552).

Exactly how one is suppose to utter marks of citation (associated with
textual mention) remains to be established (not withstanding Slothrop’s ability
to hear them, 241) – but Gravity’s Rainbow or its narrator is shown to
be taking the distinction as one which is less than clear; one in which
the two terms slide into one another. Again:

“You say what,” Roger has been screaming for a
while.
“I say,” sez Rózsavölgyi, again.
“You say, ‘I say’? Is that it? Then you should have
said, ‘I say,’ “I say.””
“No, no – you said, ‘I say,’ once, is what you –”
“A-ha! But I said it again. I said it... twice.”
“But that was after I asked you the question – you
can’t tell me the two ‘I say’s were both part of the same
statement,” unless, “that’s asking me to be unreasonably,”
unless it’s really true that, “credulous, and around you
that’s a form of,” that we’re the same person, and that the
whole exchange was ONE SINGLE THOUGHT yaaagggghh
and that means, “insanity, Rózsavölgyi...” (634)

Notice here how the narrator’s “own” speech-quote marks are dropped
and interrupted, threatening the very separation between speakers, and
between them and the narrator. The whole distinction between “my
prose” and “what I cite” is crumbling away here and with it the idea of
subject separation. The distinction between use and mention is in
jeopardy; the text, as it were, is becoming flat as the levels of use and
mention, serious and parasitic, normal and citational, disappear.39
There are now, perhaps, only material marks on the page. A material
equivalence between the signifiers replaces a rhetorical difference
between them. This equivalence we should like to call material
typonomy. The term carries the sense of homogeneity (L. typus: model,
symbol), printing, leaving an impression (Gr. tupos: mark, imprint,
writing character), and naming (Nat. Hist. typonym: name based on
type or specimen).

But we can consider another instance of use and mention in
Gravity’s Rainbow. This involves the use, as against the mention, of
cinema (though other text-domains or themes could also be instanced here). In this case we could notice, following our “cinematic” reading of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, that the text in places makes direct reference to filmic texts, actors, scenes and so on while, in others, it appears to use the very techniques of the cinema itself without such mentions, relying as it does on slapstick, camera shots and angles, frames and so on. The first case is clearly a mention of the cinematic and the latter is closer to being a use. However, the two often blur into one another to the point where use and mention become materially identical. For example:

And if he could find a few triangular scraps of leather, figure a way to sew them on to Tchitcherine’s boots . . . yeah, a-and on the back of the cape put a big, scarlet, capital R – It is as pregnant a moment as when Tonto, after the legendary ambush, attempts to— (366)

Here it becomes impossible to distinguish cinematic use from cinematic mention. What remains is a levelling of the distinction, a flattening that we have already called *material typonomy*: use/mention // *material typonomy*. Below, we want to explore further this way in which *Gravity’s Rainbow* handles or plays with dualistic differences such that they are overcome by making any dilemma’s dual aspects appear identical, these then producing, conjointly, a new “first” term for a further, and qualitatively distinct, duality. However, in each case, it should be noted that the new right hand term routinely indicates “materiality,” “substance” or “being.”

We should note that rhetorical devices classically work around playing off one side of a dualism with its opposite (e.g. literal/metaphorical). In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in so far as this post-modernist rhetoric is reworked (we are loath to say “transcended”), it could be claimed that the novel is post-rhetorical.

For example, in classical semiology the sign is taken to have a dual aspect of recto and verso. Thus:

\[
\text{recto/verso} \\
\text{sign}
\]

In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, however, the entire recto/verso doublet is taken as a single side of the signifying relation. It becomes a token, one which betokens a typonymic object. Thus:

\[
\text{recto/verso} // \text{object} \\
\text{token}
\]

To make this point, we could compare *Gravity’s Rainbow* with *V*. In the latter, as we have shown in the article already referred to, there is an insistent dialectic between the animate and the inanimate, an incessant “debate” about the degree to which one has become suffused with the other through humankind’s inhumanity, through prosthesis, through the effect of a historical telos. Characteristically, there is no
“resolution” of this conflict. The text, V., does not come down on the side of soft human nature or hard synthetic machine. At times it does try to display a possible middle way, as we shall see. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, however, the debate cannot arise in this way. The recto and verso of (in)animation, to continue with this particular sign, are overridden by the existence, the *textual* existence (for there is no other kind), of certain phenomena such as Imipolex G, the living chemical, or Byron the Bulb, the living element, the light of life. Thus: animate/inanimate // Byron the Bulb. Others on the list of possible candidates here would be some persons such as the Kamikazis who have their own counter-rocket, the Hotchkiss machine-gun, the Adenoid and so on. (Could one prototype here be the speaking soap from *Ulysses*?)

The post-rhetorical process also works at the level of events. In the modernist and post-modernist novel, two events may be juxtaposed against one another such that their relation is metaphorical. In Proust, for example, the same/difference relations between Marcel’s adult tasting of a madeleine and his tasting of them in childhood become the basis for, or the device for, the recovery of “lost time.” The explicandum and explanans (each of which is a madeleine), although temporarily separated, are analogically connected. Thus points of time may be connected, metaphorically. In *Ulysses*, of course, the metaphorical relations between classical heroism (the *Odyssey*) and the mundanities of Irish no-hopers, provide the fundamental difference and sameness which sets the novel in train — at least on one very standard reading. For example:

Ulysses escapes the Cyclops throwing boulders by sailing out to sea / Bloom escapes the one-eyed man throwing biscuit tins by jumping on a passing milk-cart.

The relation is essentially metaphorical/analogical. To take one further example, in a Robbe-Grillet text like *La Jalousie*, a number of accounts of a character’s arrival in a truck are repeated through the novel and, on Genette’s account, represent a paradigmatic series (a number of choices as to what might have happened) which has been syntagmatised (deployed linearly through the text, instead of a simple selection being made). Inasmuch as Jakobson defines the poetic function in terms of a transgression of principles which govern those two linguistic planes (paradigmatic and syntagmatic), Robbe-Grillet’s writing might be said to fall within the ambit of rhetorical operations, although we would hesitate to describe the precise figure employed. Lodge’s description of the realist/modernist/postmodernist distinctions as discussed by Bennett would seem to be in the same line. (Here we might add that if *La Jalousie* marks the space of the post-modern more clearly than any other novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow* marks the space of the post-rhetorical equally clearly. Both novels have, near or at their start, a description of a banana plantation. Indeed Tony Tanner sees the banana as *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s main symbol and it is surely the
most haunting theme of *La Jalousie.* Robbe-Grillet's bananas, however, are laid out in a precise structuralist grid and induce paranoia in the narrator. Pynchon's bananas, by contrast, grow in a random collection of soils and composts. They are unpredictable and, while they have a certain commercial function — as Robbe-Grillet's no doubt also do — they are more readily used for play and pun, even though they are as scarce as Robbe-Grillet's are plentiful.)

A common "finding" about *Gravity's Rainbow* is that it reverses standard narrative sequentiality. The sight of the V2 falling precedes the sound of its arrival. Slothrop's erection precedes the mysterious stimulus (perhaps). Many readings are motivated, that is, by an odd reversal of what Barthes calls "the post hoc ergo propter hoc" fallacy. To this extent *Gravity's Rainbow* has been taken as a sometime reversal of standard narrative syntax. But, and this is the rub, nothing comes of the reversed chain. There can be no outcome; it is literally impossible to reach back before the Zero or forward into the the indefinite Void. No future or past history, no definite origin or destination can be guaranteed. The telos has been cancelled. In its place there are only possibilities which occasionally coalesce into material toponyms — Jarn, the Rocket, Imipolex, and so on.

However, it could be a matter of speculation as to whether *Gravity's Rainbow's* use of toponyms, in so far as they constitute third terms, marks a new form of narrative syntagm (three items in a chain being the minimal requirement for syntagma). While this is quite different from Jakobson's "poetic function" it nevertheless appears to us to be an interesting play on syntagmatic/paradigmatic relations. It is for these reasons that we are dubious about readings of *Gravity's Rainbow* which rely on standard rhetorical figures.

A good number of critical readings of Pynchon do resort to types of rhetorical figure in order to describe the relations between textual material, and it remains that any attempt to pinpoint the operations involved is in its conception far from misguided. The history of writing has produced something of a taxonomy of the spaces within language or between (bits of) texts. In the case of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Seidel refers to satire, whereas McHale (106) refers to "Pynchon's outrageous and subversive manipulation of analogies." The above-mentioned article by Bennet sums up some of these readings of post-modernist fiction in general, finding them to remain within Poirier's conception of self-parody; and, as Bennett is right to point out, such readings have been used to conclude with an ideal of indeterminacy, and hence interpretative autonomy, which "may be a reworking in the discourse of literary criticism of a bourgeois individualist ideology." We have encountered plenty of that, with or without any "theoretical overlay."

In our judgement, however, neither parody, satire nor analogy is sufficient to describe textual relations in *Gravity's Rainbow*, though the reader will certainly find examples of each. Such figures, modelled on the literal/metaphoric paradigm, deal only with dual relationships, that
is to say with an assumed relationship between an original and a copy, though the copies may be plural in number. On the other hand, what we have found repeatedly is a relationship of duality which is undercut, rewritten, overruled by another term, which as a result sets up a second duality (the words are uttered "under erasure") between it and the first two terms. One well-known but non-pertinent model for this type of operation involves transcendence, as for instance in Barthes's description of connotation or metalanguage. But what distinguishes what we now call the post-rhetorical from that model is the fact that the order of the third term in no way transcends or embraces the order of the first two terms; it may well be a counter-rhetorical operation, something we call material typonomy.

A further model for this sort of switch exists in post-structuralist rhetoric, and that is mise-en-abyme. Although based on the idea of the mirror within the mirror, the image within the image, it is an operation which must be performed rather than shown. However, it is probably not oversimplifying too much to say that mise-en-abyme relies on a type of second-level subdivision of a duality. For example:

\[
\text{same} / \text{other} \\
\text{difference} \\
\text{deferral} \quad <<<
\]

Here, the standard parameter for preserving the first-order difference (same/other) is subverted by its own internal difference or disunity.

Though the mise-en-abyme model effects a sort of collapsing of the dualism, which is poles apart from the transcendence of the "meta-" model, it still does not fit the operation we are trying to describe here with respect to Gravity's Rainbow.

For reasons that should become obvious, let us resume that set of dualistic rhetorical operations — analogy, parody, satire, metaphor — within the notion of the parable. It is on first sight a less apposite figure than those above, rather restricted in its usage, being largely superseded, if in name only, by allegory. On the other hand, as its prefix (para — beside, instead of) suggests, its etymology does provide sufficient imprecision to allow for any dualistic relationship between a model and a copy, a literal and a para-liter. Furthermore, it seems that readings based on the idea of either a satirical, analogical, or parodic relationship between bits of text do in the final analysis resort to the allegorical. Pynchon's free-form analogies are treated as allegories for the absence of any centring force in the modern world, of its entropy, and Slothrop's paranoia is a satire on "the pathology of the modern individual." And out of the force/counterc force, or System/Zone duality comes a reading of the banana breakfasts as an allegorical representation of the "regenerative powers of the 'Earth'" (Tanner, 88).

The parable, and hence the choice of word, is also the parabolic; in French for instance, the two senses reside within the same word (la
**parabole**. It joins that set of geometrical/rhetorical figures which includes hyperbole and ellipsis. But the switch here is not simply a case of etymological licence. The parabola is the model therefore for any plotting of dualisms, and implies the emergence or contouring of a path between the two axes. Besides, the parabola is particularly generous in its range of possibilities, allowing for any “curve” from the asymptotic to the symmetrical. Thus in spite of the precise sense given to the parable since the Gospels, and in spite of the very controlled type of analogical operation that it is supposed to describe, it, like the other figures which we have made to fall within it, finally begs the question of the exact rhetorical operation which it involves. The parable is thus undermined (*mise-en-abyme*) by the parabola, by its own internal imprecision. Unless there can be an equation for it, unless satire, analogy, and parody are superseded by their presumed meanings, the relationship between bits of text cannot be defined in terms of those figures.

In other words, readings which refer to parodic, analogical, or satiric relations between bits of the text of *Gravity's Rainbow* inevitably depend in practice on an assumed rhetorical relationship between the text and a sense which resides in the world, usually the human. For the intertextual relations themselves are not sufficiently clear for the name of a single existing figure to be ascribed to them. Such readings are therefore parabolic; on the one hand designed to both embellish and disappear in favour of a sense that was always present to itself; on the other hand, unable to define their terms more precisely than to say that they involve a type of supplement.

*So* *Gravity's Rainbow* does involve or invite the *mise-en-abyme* of relations, subdividing those relations with their own terms of reference. Either by having the assumed relation between the inside and outside of the text undercut by the variety of intratextual relations; or by having the particularity of one set of intratextual relations subverted by another set, such as seems to occur in McHale's description of “mapping” (103-05). That operation might be resumed thus: the notion of the spiritual world, or the material/spiritual opposition (surely governed by some sort of rhetorical operation) is exploited to allow the narrative to pass from The White Visitation séance to Peter Sachsa’s in Weimar Germany. But then there is another transition which relies on an occult type of mapping, a relation which is foreign to, and contradicts, the operations of the material world; the material opens a space between it and the spiritual which the spiritual exploits to ruin the coherence of the material.

However, if parable and parabolic operate as rhetorical relations in *Gravity's Rainbow*, we are overlooking the fact that the parabola also exists, in the form of the flight of the rocket, as perhaps the most important *material toponym* in the novel. Not the rocket itself, for that object is as if subordinate to the trajectory it must follow, and its design, manufacture, propulsion and so on remain obedient to, all point towards, the path of its flight. Such a parabola is gravity’s rainbow. So
first: much of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a parable of such a parabola, allowing for rhetorical operations which stretch all the way from the simple metonymy of the book’s title, to the explicit metaphorical sense of the characters’ actions:

But it is a curve each of them feels, unmistakably. It is the parabola. They must have guessed, once or twice – guessed and refused to believe – that everything, always, collectively, had been moving toward that purified shape latent in the sky, that shape of no surprise, no second chances, no return. (209)

Katje has understood the great airless arc as a clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet and herself . . .

(223)

And second: across from that set of rhetorical dualities, there is the fact of the parabola that is the rocket’s flight, material phenomenon of the simplest order. Hence:

parable/parabola // rocket trajectory

A representation of the general form of this relation might be as follows:29

a/b // substance

Other examples of it might be:

rocket/penis // Jamf
penis/polymer // Imipolex
reality/fantasy // cinema
us/Them // Slothrop

The post-rhetorical is constituted by the form of these cases. The form can only be instantiated, not defined – shown, not said. In the above cases the form is realised thus: the left-hand side, itself constituted as a dualism, is over-ridden by an object or person (at least something of material substance, no matter how mysterious) on the right-hand side. Substance, that is, supplants rhetoric – though all this, need we stress, is accomplished within and as the play of signs, in themselves, of course, nothing but material points.

One interesting thing we can notice about this formula (a/b // substance) is that it differs from the use of dualisms in Pynchon’s other two novels. For example, in *V.*, the character McClintic Sphere is introduced to the flip/flop mechanism which underpins the binary workings of computational devices. He sees this, as Tony Tanner has pointed out (49-50), as a moral dilemma. Flip represents our current denial of humanity while flip represents a challenge to that inhuman world, an acknowledgement of passions, feelings and inner life that may end up, quite randomly itself, as love or war among fellow human beings. Both flip and flop are dangerous options. Sphere decides on a narrow middle way and his motto is “Keep cool but care.”30 Trite as this
Gravity's Rainbow and the Post-Rhetorical

may be ethically, it shows V. to be searching for the crevice, the fold, between the two left-hand terms. As it were, V. is formed in the oblique strokes between the dualities. It seeks a middle way.

The next novel, The Crying of Lot 49, also devolves around the possibility of re-including excluded middles — this is in fact an explicit theme in the text itself. But it seeks to erase the oblique stroke, as it were, between opposing terms — especially moral terms — and to replace it with a new space, a breathing space perhaps. This space may be between the literal and the metaphorical (for example, the space Oedipa must traverse between "real" and "imaginary" postal organisations); or it may be between more obviously moral alternatives such as over-imagining patterns in events (paranoia) and under-imagining them (hebephrenia). In each case, Oedipa explores the possibility of re-including excluded middles. This is shown below as a form of cancellation which is not quite the form of post-rhetorical supplanting we find in Gravity's Rainbow. Consequently, if V. can be represented thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
a/b & \quad \text{look here} \\
\end{align*}
\]

then Lot 49 looks like:

\[
\begin{align*}
a \quad ( \quad ) \quad b & \quad \text{look here} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Already in Lot 49 there are a couple of awkward problematisings of rhetorical relations. One is Maxwell's Demon, for its regulating of a relation between thermodynamics and information flow; the other is that between delta-t and delirium tremens. The narrator will refer to metaphor to describe and resolve these relations, but not without some ambiguity.

Gravity's Rainbow, on the other hand, tries to override the whole idea of solutions to dualisms, moral, logical or rhetorical, by treating them as aspects of a single side of another dualism which has the moral, logical or rhetorical dilemma on one side, and the material on the other. Some critics have insisted that Pynchon's work returns the human subject and subjectivity to the novel. They argue that his work captures a new essence for humanity in a world fraught with objects. Such humanist readings now appear quite untenable. Whatever we may say of the first two novels, and there is no reason to expect consistency across all three, the last novel, Gravity's Rainbow, points towards the dissolution of this type of debate or dilemma — along with a number of others we have mentioned. In fact both the humanist and the technologistic critics of Pynchon may be getting the debate quite wrong. There may be no (re)solution to/of their readings and counter-
readings. For this would assume that Gravity's Rainbow works at a specific rhetorical level, as parody, as meta-fiction and so on. None of these things can hold up, the divisions are erased, flattened. The search for rhetorical stitches fails and we are left only with surplus yarns. Pynchon's texts do not work at or on "levels" in order to allow such readings — or rather to allow them and their opposites. Thus, for Gravity's Rainbow

a/b / / look here

What next?

Perhaps Pynchon's fourth novel has appeared — is already somewhere but not in the form of a book or in words. It could be anything. Preferably material. Something like a hot air balloon?

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Alec McHoul
David Wills

1 Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973). Further references will be given in the text.
6 See Robin R. Lakoff's article, "Remarks on This and That," in M.W. Galv et al., eds., Papers from the Tenth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1979), pp. 345-56. Lakoff notes the linguistic oddities of Slothrop's use of the demonstrative "that." Besides the fact that other characters do use it, we would see some limitations in explaining this usage in terms of the "isolation" of a unitary "character." In view of the variety of linguistic licence in Gravity's Rainbow, it is difficult to see by what criteria this usage is to be judged "extraordinary."
7 Although we have not tested it empirically, we would hypothesise that, excepting routine words like "the" and "a," "death" is the most frequently used word in Gravity's Rainbow.
8 A particularly glaring example of this occurs in Kaufman's article, cited in Note 3. "Of all her putative fathers, intones Pynchon" (215, italics ours). We accept that the shorthand of referring to the narrator by the name of the author is a recognised practice, and often convenient, but ellipses such as this require comment in view of the difficulty of establishing a single narrator in Gravity's Rainbow. The fact that Kaufman converts this piece of text into Pynchon's direct speech renders explicit the general habit of assuming that narrated material belongs to an author's scarcely mediated "world view." Leverenz's discussion, cited in Note 2, is fraught with the same assumption.


15 Scott Sanders, "Pynchon's Paranoid History," in *Mindful Pleasures*, pp. 139-59.

16 We would maintain privately, however, that we wrote our commentary as a parody of Leverenz even though we read his work after we wrote ours. Perhaps we knew what it would contain, perhaps we knew things like this would happen with regard to a novel in which effect precedes content and response stimuli. A further parallel which occurs to us after the event is that between our series of readings and the connotative codes established by Roland Barthes's reading of Balzac's "Sarrasine," in *S/Z* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975).

17 David Wills and Alec McHoul, "V.: 'Die Welt ist alles was der Fall ist' / 'Le signe est toujours le signe de la chute,'" *Southern Review*, 16, No. 2 (1983), 274-91.


23 Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 89. Further references will appear in the text. We write this extended commentary suspecting ourselves to be the only Pynchon scholars with direct experience of cultivating bananas.


29 Read as follows: "a" (one side of a given duality), "b" (the other side of the duality), "a/b" (marks which could signify the cancellation of a and b respectively), "a/b" (the tpyonym).


