## *The arc and the circle: linearity and return in the novels of Thomas Pynchon*

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# THE ARC AND THE CIRCLE:

# LINEARITY AND RETURN IN THE NOVELS OF THOMAS PYNCHON

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the opposing, but integrally connected themes of linearity and return as a starting point for a discussion of the novels of Thomas Pynchon, from *The Crying of Lot 49* to his most recent novel *Vineland* (1990).

The recurrence of these two basic tenets in his fiction are indicative of a preoccupation with the conflicts that characterize a civilization built upon the Cartesian basis of subject/object duality. These conflicts are overseen in Pynchon's writing by a cyclical, unified cosmos against which the accelerating evils of technology and industrialization are representative of a doomed impulse to achieve transcendence in material terms. Pynchon's writing emphasizes the ever-balancing nature of the universal forces that lie behind this complex scenario, and places the current global situation of ecological, sociological and technological crises inside a larger recurring whole. The potential for transcendence exists in Pynchon's fictive world, albeit tentatively so, but whatever universal absolute is in existence, it cannot be approached by premeditated design, and respect for a balanced, regenerative universe is at least suggested as the most immediate object for our attention.

These are most conspicuously the concerns present in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Vineland*. Chapter One examines the idea in less complex form in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and focuses on Pynchon's use of music as metaphor and supporting device in his delineation of the difficult boundaries of the Cartesian dichotomy. Chapters Two to Six consider the ideas as they are present in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Chapter Four using the findings of LSD research to suggest a possible framework for some of the novel's most difficult aspects. Chapter Seven serves as both a consideration of *Vineland* and as a conclusion to this study, since Pynchon's latest novel restates the fundamental preoccupations of his previous writing in a fresh and vivdly contemporary form.



What I write, whilst I write it, seems the most natural thing in the world; but yesterday I saw a dreary vacuity in this direction in which now I see so much; and a month hence, I doubt not, I shall wonder who he was that wrote so many pages.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays*

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## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Page references to the works of Thomas Pynchon are abbreviated as follows:

*SL* - *Slow Learner* (London: Pan Picador, 1985)

*V.* - *V.* (London, Pan Picador, 1975)

*CL* - *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Pan Picador, 1979)

*GR* - *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Pan Picador, 1975)

*VN* - *Vineland* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1990)

Ellipses within square brackets indicate an omission. All other ellipses are Pynchon's own.

# INTRODUCTION

In Pynchon's lifetime the population of the United States has nearly doubled.[1] His generation is the one that witnessed the Second World War and annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during childhood, and then Korea, Vietnam and American imperialism across the world in both corporate and military guise. It is the 'new world' anticipated by Henry Adams[2] - the 'energy burst of war' (*GR* p.521) spilled over into societies and bureaucracies. The dangerous acceleration of the times is reflected in the writing of this period. The fifties and sixties saw a surge of new writers - for example Heller, Vonnegut, Pynchon, Roth, Coover and Burroughs - all arising from the same upheaval but all characteristically different - perhaps collectively a recognition of the waning significance of the old orders of causality and determinism, but individually heterogenous and spontaneous. Accordingly Pynchon occupies a unique position within this picture. His distinction, it seems, is what Edward Mendelson calls 'his refusal to dwell in psychological drama or domestic detail'. This presents problems for the modernist reader, since, as Mendelson continues, in Pynchon's fiction 'character is less important than the network of relations existing between characters and social and historical patterns of meaning'.[3] This would seem appropriate in the turmoil of the postwar world (albeit disguised by

technological advancement), but the unorthodox emphasis in his writing is due to more than the immediate nature of the times he lives in.

Fritjof Capra in *The Tao of Physics* draws attention to the Cartesian division of the isolated ego, separating mind from body and compartmentalizing the spirit into beliefs and feelings, the result of which is metaphysical confusion and conflict.[4] He explains:

> This inner fragmentation of man mirrors his view of the world 'outside' which is seen as a multitude of separate objects and events. The natural environment is treated as if it consisted of separate parts to be exploited by different interest groups. The fragmented view is further extended to society which is split into different nations, races, religious and political groups.[5]

This, he maintains, is at the root of classical physics, technology, and ultimately 'the present series of social, ecological and cultural crises'.[6] The generally optimistic mood he observes now, however, is one that looks again to the unity expressed in the early Greek, and Eastern philosophies. This, broadly speaking, is the attitude shared by Pynchon and displayed in his fiction. He is acutely aware of the impulse to exploit that terrorizes society and the natural environment, and perceives it as a misinterpretation, a cataclysmic breaking-off from a naturally-recurring cycle. The view emphasizes also the counterbalance that this perversion implies - and looks beyond our own particular state of crisis towards a wider context in which universal equilibrium must inevitably be reasserted. The possibility open to us, as hinted by Capra and present in Pynchon's writing, is to turn to the

unity lying *behind* the Cartesian dichotomy as the definitive 'reality'. Katherine Hayles in *The Cosmic Web* approaches Pynchon via the scientific field model which 'pictures objects, events, and observer belonging inextricably to the same field'.[7] Her basis is similar to Capra's, to use an idea from modern scientific thought to approach an epistemological problem - not simply as metaphor, since, as Capra recognizes, the same universal movement can be approached by various forms of expression, be they in science, philosophy, or literature. Indeed, as she says, 'the significance of the conceptual revolution in science derives less from the field models themselves than from their philosophical and epistemological implications'.[8]

A considerable amount of the difficulty encountered in 'traditional' readings of Pynchon is the result of this implicit truth that, as Hayles says, the 'dichotomy between [...] the thinking mind and the physical object, is not absolute, but an arbitrary product of the human mind'.[9] The boundaries between self and universe are repeatedly tested and traversed, in *Gravity's Rainbow* in particular - hence Mendelson's observation that 'character' is no longer an integral concept. David Leverenz gives a frank reaction to the initial experience of tackling *Gravity's Rainbow* - '[I] wondered why the characters didn't seem... well, complex, richly human and all that. The sequences of words and paragraphs made no sense to me, seemed in no special order, accrued no momentum'.[10]

The experience described, ironically, is that of the Cartesian impulse in action, demarcating the land-lines of subject and object and proceeding hopefully towards a satisfying conclusion. Pynchon does not accommodate such a reading. The fundamental division between

traditional 'objective reality' and 'Pre-Christian Oneness' (*GR* p.321) is precisely the conflict and opposition dramatized *in* Pynchon's writing, as well as in a reading of it. Katherine Hayles identifies the embodiment of the idea in graphical form in *Gravity's Rainbow*:

> two central 'patterns' in *Gravity's Rainbow* [...] may be represented as the circle and the line. The circle is consistently associated with the natural cycles and processes, and with the prospect that we can return to some simpler, more innocent identification with the universal 'field' of the cosmos. The line, or circle that has become linear by being opened into a parabola, is associated with the artificial structures of control that drive toward some final terminus. The contrast is embodied in two forms similar in shape but antagonistic in meaning: the rainbow and the ballistic arc of the Rocket.''

The distinction is integral in Pynchon's writing. In *Gravity's Rainbow* it is expressed as 'that familiar division between return and one-shot visitation' (*GR* p.584), and it is a useful representation of a fundamental conflict at the centre of his fictive universe. In *Gravity's Rainbow* one example expresses the epistemological dilemma well, and is a basis for Hayles's formulation of circle and line. The 'planetoid Katspiel' occupies an extremely elliptical orbit, such that its passing by Earth has been followed by a long ominous absence. For its inhabitants exiled on Earth there is competing hope and despair as to whether it will return or leave 'these kind round beings in eternal exile' (*GR* p.584). From their limited perspective, marooned on an alien

planet, the latter is the most immediately discernible situation - the angle of their vision does not encompass the circularity of their planet's path. Such is the ostensible dominant civilization that fills the pages of Pynchon's writing - aware only of an inevitable end to all things, moving under the arc of the Rocket that mimicks transcendence, but promises only annihilation. The false hope and clinical death this culture sustains form a double nihilism, for Enzian in *Gravity's Rainbow* 'worse than being told you won't die by someone you can't believe in...' (*GR* p.661).

An approach to Pynchon should involve the higher awareness, expressed most comprehensively in *Gravity's Rainbow*. We must elevate *our* angle of vision to incorporate the 'cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning' (*GR* p.412) cosmos that is evident throughout Pynchon's writing. Failure to do so risks entrapment in the Cartesian rigidity that is our most conspicuous, and in this case damning intellectual heritage. One critic's view is that 'Pynchon savours doom'[12] - symptomatic of the blindness of those *inside* the 'System', a linear view of Pynchon's writing that responds to the arc of the Rocket but fails to see the continuity of death and rebirth that is all around, the 'green uprising' (*GR* p.720) that springs from an ever-reasserting universal equilibrium. Worthy of attention also are the dopers of Pynchon's fiction. They oppose the earth-bound bureaucracies of Technology and War symbolically and in actuality, and the abandoned use of consciousness-widening drugs in their lifestyle dramatizes the move away from subject-object duality imposed by the ubiquitous System. As an extension of this, a study of the findings of LSD research provides a surprisingly appropriate framework within which to consider many

otherwise seemingly diverse aspects of *Gravity's Rainbow* in particular. This is examined in Chapter Four.

The image of the circle, integral in the concept of return and regeneration (and identified specifically by Katherine Hayles as a 'pattern' in her interpretation of *Gravity's Rainbow*) is manifested in *Gravity's Rainbow* in particular as the mandala (Sanskrit for 'circle'). As a symbolic diagram in Tantric Hinduism and Buddhism it provides a representation of the universe and an analogy for perceiving the guidance of Man (the microcosm) into the macrocosm, through the cosmic processes of disintegration and reintegration. It was observed by Carl Jung as an 'archetype' of the unconscious, and its appearance in *Gravity's Rainbow* largely follows from Jung's conception. Thomas Schaub states that 'the mandala in *Gravity's Rainbow* is not an image of a realm transcending our own but one which represents the integration of conflicts within the realm'.[13] As a point for the combining of opposites, which proliferate in Pynchon's writing, it implies a centre, the possibilities of which are uncertain, but accommodate the potential of transcendence. Whatever is at the centre of the mandalic vision in *Gravity's Rainbow* its enduring importance is as a unifying force - the continuity from which the arc of linearity has been broken.

The background thus described is largely that of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which is discussed in the central five chapters. These examine the opposing tenets of circle and line, and finally (in Chapter Six) focus on the 'singular point', the natural fusion-point of a non-linear rationale. In *Vineland*, the same ideas are present, albeit in less dense form, and the complex mode of expression of the previous novel has evolved a more direct and (largely by virtue of its setting)

contemporary manner. As a depiction of a world in a crisis of imbalance but at the same time in touch with its potential for return and equilibrium, *Vineland* is an accomplished sequel to *Gravity's Rainbow*. *The Crying of Lot 49* sees the ideas in less developed form, but present nonetheless. The consideration of this novel here uses as its starting point music - a persistent presence in the novel that has been somewhat overlooked in criticism to date. It occurs throughout the novel, in many forms and for various purposes. Most important, perhaps, is its rôle as linking device between Oedipa's conventional, rationally-perceived world (that is, based upon the Cartesian division discussed above) - and the increasingly confused state of her husband which provides, comic portrayal permitting, a necessary counterbalance. Pynchon thus offers us two approaches that lie either side of the difficult area of interaction between observer and observed. It is in this sense a useful introduction to *Gravity's Rainbow* - the edges of the subject are not so clearly defined as in the large novel, but Mucho's drift into ego-less existence and the seldom-noted reference to the Buddhist *Bardo* in the novel's title (49 days being the length of time between death and rebirth) look towards the fuller development of this area to come.

*V.* is not considered in this study.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

1. James D. Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.490.

2. *The Education of Henry Adams*, edited by Ernest Samuels (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), p.457.

3. Edward Mendelson, 'Introduction', in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1978), p.4.

4. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration on the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (New York: Bantam, 1977), p.21.

5. Capra, p.22.

6. Capra, p.22.

7. N. Katherine Hayles, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.9.

8. Hayles, p.31.

9. Hayles, p.31.

10. David Leverenz, 'On Trying to Read *Gravity's Rainbow*', in *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, edited by George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), p.185.

11. Hayles, pp.169-70.

12. Marshall Walker, *the Literature of The United States of America* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.185.

13. Thomas Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p.54.

# CHAPTER ONE: MUSIC IN *THE CRYING OF LOT 49*

"None of this works without mood music. Serenade us."

*The Crying of Lot 49*

In his early short story 'Entropy' Pynchon makes extensive use of the fugue as a structural underpinning to the action in a way that also provides an important depth of metaphorical suggestion. Robert Redfield and Peter L. Hays in their article 'Fugue as a structure in Pynchon's "Entropy"' make this their thesis, and we see that an idea at first sight perhaps unlikely has been utilized by Pynchon with great subtlety, woven sympathetically into the text.[1] David Cowart in *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* devotes an extensive chapter to Pynchon's use of music in his first three novels, and with regard to *The Crying of Lot 49* he focuses on Pynchon's reference to particular composers to comment on Oedipa's complex experiences.[2] These studies aside, the significance of music is rarely investigated in any detail - in *The Crying of Lot 49* it is certainly located at the thematic core, and provides an interesting starting point for a discussion of some of the novel's fundamental aspects.

In a very broad sense, music provides a consistent backdrop to the novel, in the same way that a theatrical score proceeds, in its execution, from somewhere offstage but is nonetheless an integral element in the audience's experience. In the closing lines of the novel the auctioneer mounts the stage, marking the beginning of a development, perhaps a revelation: 'Passerine spread his arms in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some remote culture; perhaps to a descending angel. The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49' (*CL* p.127). The anticipation of Oedipa and the 'pale, cruel faces' (*CL* p.126) that accompany her in the saleroom, and the focused, enigmatic preparation of the auctioneer recall an orchestral conductor gathering the attention of his assembled players. The cyclical implication here compares to the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*, where the audience in the Orpheus Theatre awaits the impact of the rocket that heralds the novel's opening line. Back at the beginning of *The Crying of Lot 49* one of Oedipa's first unconnected thoughts in reaction to her newly-discovered executorship is of 'a dry, disconsolate tune from the fourth movement of the Bartok Concerto for Orchestra' (*CL* p.5). David Cowart reminds us of the use of 'this mad Hungarian' in 'Mortality and Mercy in Vienna' and accordingly sees 'an intimation of impending disorder' in its use here.[3] There have also been parallels identified between Oedipa and Judith in Bartok's opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*.[4] On the following page we witness the first assault of numbing informational media as Oedipa takes a 'trip to the market in downtown Kinneret-Among-The-Pines to buy ricotta and listen to the Muzak (today she came through the bead-curtained entrance around bar four of the Fort Wayne Settecento Ensemble's variorum recording of the Vivaldi Kazoo

Concerto, Boyd Beaver, soloist)' (*CL* p.6). Throughout the novel music interjects in support of developing themes, not least in the form of songs supplementing the narrative flow (Miles' Song, Baby Igor's song, Serenade, Adeste Fideles, Hymn, Glee, Serge's Song). There is the avant-garde influence of The Scope bar, and the troubadour-like band The Paranoids even contribute to the 'narcosis' that characterizes San Narciso, as at the time of Oedipa's return to Echo Courts at the beginning of Chapter Six:

> When she got back to Echo Courts, she found Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard arranged around and on the diving board at the end of the swimming pool with all their instruments, so composed and motionless that some photographer, hidden from Oedipa, might have been shooting them for an album illustration. (*CL* p.101)

The presence of 'narcosis' indicated in the example above is emphasized when aspects of the fugal element in 'Entropy' are recalled towards the end of Chapter Two. Thomas Schaub cites Marshall McLuhan with regard to narcosis: '"American culture, in short, is numb, and is addicted to what protects it from pain (and, ultimately, death) [...] our culture has become addicted to the material forms which the American Dream has assumed."'[5] This is the condition reproduced here, and in the aftermath of the game of 'Strip Botticelli' Oedipa wakes to the onset of a sexual climax and hears the Paranoids playing outside: 'Outside a fugue of guitars had begun, and she counted each electronic voice as it came in, till she reached six or so and recalled only three of the Paranoids played guitars; so others must be plugged in' (*CL* p.27). As

in 'Entropy' this suggests a counterpoint of thematic lines, as Oedipa's 'sexual crescendo' (*CL* p.27) takes its place in an exchange with the musical crescendo outside. The climax, both musical and sexual that is anticipated, arrives: 'Her climax and Metzger's, when it came, coincided with every light in the place, including the TV tube, suddenly going out, dead, black. It was a curious experience. The Paranoids had blown a fuse' (*CL* p.27). The scene is an appropriate end to Oedipa's sojourn in San Narciso. The exchange of counterpoint performed by Oedipa, Metzger and the Paranoids is trapped inside the transfixed mirror-image America that McLuhan describes. The collision of their themes leads to no transcending conclusion, but appropriately to a chaotic debris across the motel room: 'she and Metzger lay twined amid a wall-to-wall scatter of clothing and spilled Bourbon' (*CL* p.27). As if to seal the episode, Baby Igor in the film achieves no escape, but dies grotesquely in a sinking submarine: 'Something short-circuited then and the grounded Baby Igor was electrocuted, thrashing back and forth and screaming horribly' (*CL* p.28). The atmosphere that this is creating is one of no escape, of 'exitlessness' as we hear later (*CL* p.118). It is, in the dead-end impotence of San Narciso, a microcosmic precursor of what Oedipa finds later to be 'just America', as she is 'assumed full circle into some paranoia' (*CL* p.126) in the novel's closing pages. The contrast visible later in the novel is between Oedipa's perception of music in this situation, wherein it results in no leap to possible fulfilment or progression, but back to a state even more troubled and messy than before; and what is seen as a catalyst for change towards ego-less consummation for Mucho. The passage is thus to some extent representative of Oedipa's fate. An early strike for some clarification

via Metzger yields none, and her sexual exploits in particular seal a hopelessly stagnant episode. It is perhaps fitting here to refer also to the definition of fugue in psychiatry, as a 'loss of awareness of one's identity, often coupled with disappearance from one's usual environment' (*OED*). This defines the state that Oedipa so desperately wishes to avoid; the preservation of an objective reality being her constant priority, however anguished and disturbing this proves to be.

In one of the most difficult passages of Chapter Five (and at the height of Oedipa's vexed nocturnal wanderings) Pynchon reasserts the theme of music:

> Later possibly, she would have trouble sorting the night into real and dreamed.
>
> At some indefinite passage in night's sonorous score, it also came to her that she would be safe, that something, perhaps only her linearly fading drunkenness, would protect her. (*CL* p.81)

The idea of Oedipa's journey through night-time San Francisco being located in an orchestral score is an important one. It recalls again the fugal structure in 'Entropy' - as Redfield and Hays say: 'Were we to do a lateral section of the apartment building, it would be very much as if we were looking at the upper two staves of a fourpart musical score.'[6] A similar idea could be applied to Oedipa's experience here. The episode is characterized by its lack of points of reference and Oedipa's attempted submission to chance ('she had decided to drift tonight' (*CL* p.76)), and as the action unfolds, her experience becomes an indefinable mixing of consciousness, dream and hallucination. Let us

consider the idea, that Pynchon is hinting at, that Oedipa's experiences might be seen as one line in an orchestral score. Slightly earlier, the idea of 'lines' has been introduced, and her relationship with her surrounding environment has assumed deterministic overtones, as she recalls her own college days and their location, juxtaposed against the campus at the University of California: 'In another world. Along another pattern of track, another string of decisions taken, switches closed, the faceless pointsmen who'd thrown them now all transferred, deserted, in stir, fleeing the skip tracers, out of their skull, on horse, alcoholic, fanatic, under aliases, dead, impossible to find ever again' (*CL* p.71). On her own 'line' she is 'wanting to feel relevant' (*CL* p.71) and senses an affinity with her physical present, despite 'knowing how much of a search among alternate universes it would take' (*CL* p.71). Music, as is seen later, is representative in the novel of dimensions beyond the immediately discernible. As Oedipa moves through the metaphorical score *her* perspective is limited (to a passage, or line in the score), but around her is a continuous whole (by implication the entire orchestral sound). Such is the feeling she experiences slightly later, a sense of simple, definitive 'place' in her situation: 'She touched the edge of its voluptuous field, knowing it would be lovely beyond dreams simply to submit to it; that not gravity's pull, laws of ballistics, feral ravening, promised more delight. She tested it, shivering: I am meant to remember' (*CL* p.81).

The scope and range of perspective that Pynchon has introduced into Oedipa's outlook is repeatedly reasserted in this chapter. The realms of latent possibilities stretch out around her - 'She had safe-passage tonight to its far blood's branchings' (*CL* p.81) - and the fresh

intervention of actual music embellishes the idea. In Golden Gate Park, an episode painstakingly located by Pynchon in a confused twilight of real and dreamed, children sing a nursery rhyme, gently animating a tangle of memories of the Tristero in Oedipa's mind. A few pages on music again emerges, a figure theme divorced from Oedipa's own, but still a part of 'night's sonorous score', meshed effortlessly into her floating, unanchored drift through the night: 'In the buses all night she listened to transistor radios playing songs in the lower stretches of the Top 200, that would never become popular, whose melodies and lyrics would perish as if they had never been sung' (*CL* p.84). The disconnected, ephemeral nature of these songs is analogous to Oedipa's experience in the novel. Her paranoia and state of near-psychosis testify to the dogmatism with which she insists on maintaining her objectivity and working only within those dimensions which are definable and stable in conventional terms. As such, the data she can reasonably consider as reliable is inevitably limited to a narrow range of perceptible reality. To link this specific, relatively inflexible attitude to external data with an *all-encompassing* comprehension is the impossibility that finally becomes embedded at the novel's close. Hence, she is almost haunted by these flimsy, inconsequential pop songs which are as fragile and tenuous in her experience as her own discoveries are in an attempted understanding of the Tristero and the true forces that are shaping her existence. Moreover, their almost random nature, coming as they do from the most obscure reaches of the music charts, parallels the randomness of Oedipa's own chosen data in her search; and prompts an awareness that what she learns is unlikely to be conclusive or transfiguring, but rather equally as inconsequential.

The music and her discoveries can only be relevant if they are considered as part of a *total* framework, in which '*everything is connected*' (*GR* p.703). *The Crying of Lot 49* anticipates the treatment of paranoia in the following novel, where this state of complete paranoia is an integral feature in a consideration of the universe that passes *beyond* the duality of subject/object perception. *The Crying of Lot 49* is concerned rather with the difficulty of existing with limited data such as Oedipa's in a world that demands objectivity and rational thought. Music, in this context, is frequently a representation of the areas that lie beyond this lamentably narrow perception of the world - it poses a challenge to the Cartesian division of subject and object, the division that marks out Oedipa's alienation and is distilled at the novel's close to the image of ones and zeroes taunting her menacingly.

This point is made by David Cowart, with reference to more than specifically *The Crying of Lot 49*: 'Music, in these books, seems always to hint at the extra dimensions of experience that one misses because of the narrow range of frequencies - physical or spiritual - to which one is attuned.'[7] The idea appears conspicuously when Oedipa encounters a convention of deaf-mutes at a hotel dance:

> Each couple on the floor danced whatever was in the fellow's head: tango, two-step, bossa nova, slop. But how long, Oedipa thought, could it go on before collisions became a serious hindrance? There would have to be collisions. The only alternative was some unthinkable order of music, many rhythms, all keys at once, a choreography in which each couple meshed easy, predestined.

> Something they all heard with an extra sense atrophied in herself. (*CL* pp.90-1)

Cowart identifies the predominance of atrophied senses in Oedipa's outlook that this points towards and the polarity it embodies, being, as a silence filled with music, the opposite to muzak (sound that is not heard). Indeed, the passage is of substantial significance. The dancers, we note, are deaf mutes, suggesting a heightened sensitivity. This same awareness is approached, albeit briefly, by Oedipa, another glimpse perhaps of the 'voluptuous field' mentioned above. The pointer is unambiguously towards a wider range of dimensions than Oedipa can imagine, and significantly, an area even if experienced for which there is little scope for verbal description or communication. This itself ironically precludes it from consideration - 'Oedipa, with no name for it, was only demoralized. She curtsied and fled' (*CL* p.91).

This opening up of limitless possibilities is signified consistently by music. David Cowart recognizes the use that Pynchon makes of music theory, and in particular the significance of avant-garde electronic music in this context: 'Oedipa Maas discovers that her country has been operating only on a well-tempered scale, one that excludes too many possibilities, particularly opportunities for variety and choice.'[9] The well-tempered scale he speaks of imposes specific pitches at gradated points in the octave. It is rigid and easily defined, and as such is representative of an attitude that must for Oedipa be surpassed if an ultimate expression and understanding of the music/situation is to be achieved. Just as the spaces *between* the specified notes of the well-tempered scale are passed over, so Oedipa is unable to accept or

accommodate *every* signifier and nuance of potential meaning from her environment. This helps to explain the relevance of the 'strictly electronic music policy' at The Scope bar (*CL* p.31) - it promotes the music of composers such as Stockhausen who sought to transcend the well-tempered scale, working with and beyond the twelve-tone constraints. The intention is to allow an infinity of possibility within the creative act; hence the bizarre range of equipment at The Scope: '"We got a whole back room full of your audio oscillators, gunshot machines, contact mikes, everything man"' (*CL* p.31). The same idea appears in *Vineland*, as Van Meter removes the frets from his bass guitar, seeing in the act 'further dimensions, the abolition of given scales, the restoration of a premodal innocence in which all the notes of the universe would be available to him' (*VN* p.224). The contrast is important, as The Scope's music is a background, at a relatively early stage in Oedipa's quest, to her desire to connect in logical steps her morsels of discovery. Behind her, the infinite range of sound is a lurking testament to the vanity of her intentions. It is a reminder of a wholeness, in which an isolated part cannot by itself impart any revelation.

In the last few pages of the novel the alienation that has been encroaching steadily around Oedipa is complete. Her last hope, the nameless face in The Greek Way bar, deserts her; the luxury of reference point, of dimensional footholds has gone. Pynchon draws the scene thus:

> She stood between the public booth and the rented car in the night, her isolation complete, and tried to face toward the sea. But she'd lost her bearings. She turned pivoting on one stacked heel, could find no mountains either. As if there could be no barriers between

> herself and the rest of the land. San Narciso at that moment lost (the loss pure, instant, spherical, the sound of a stainless orchestral chime held among the stars and struck lightly), gave up its residue of uniqueness for her; became a name again, was assumed back into the American community of crust and mantle. (*CL* pp.122-3)

She has pushed her stamina for investigation to the limit - she cannot determine more about her environment without taking it on in its entirety. The moment carefully delineates two levels, however. The semi-conscious fatigued state of her night in San Francisco brought a fleeting sense of *place*, indicated in the orchestra metaphor, and glimpsed again at the deaf-mutes' dance. This endures but cannot be maintained, an ambivalence first manifested back in Chapter One as 'what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away' (*CL* p.12). The loss of this is embodied in the 'stainless orchestral chime', and the resulting environment is identical, but not one that can be reconciled with her faltering quest. The vision burned into her memory cannot survive the harsh light of sober analysis. The musical lines have become railway lines, and she stands between the cold steel rails hoping perhaps for a new revelation. The hard, tangible translation into her present waking mind can no longer lead anywhere: 'Becoming conscious of the hard, strung presence she stood on - knowing as if maps had been flashed for her on the sky how these tracks ran on into others, others, knowing they laced, deepened, authenticated the great night around her' (*CL* p.124).

Again, it is music, in the orchestra's final note, that links her with the last fleeting sense of a tenuous unity in her world. The

passing of the subliminal musical moment is one of needing to locate bearings (but losing them), of needing to feel the vital relevance of the place she is in (but seeing it become simply 'a name again'). It is the same observation as Slothrop's in *Gravity's Rainbow* - 'Two orders of being, looking identical' (*GR* p.202) - that holds him flickering momentarily between a connectedness and unity, and frightened dislocation. Oedipa has to re-mark the boundaries of perception, to tighten her hold on, she hopes, a rationally-justified world. The result, tragically, but inevitably, is deeper alienation.

*Gravity's Rainbow* is a marked advance upon the previous novel in several senses, but most significant perhaps is the more assertive jettisoning of subject/object duality - embodied and dramatized by Slothrop who literally merges with his surroundings; and present more fundamentally in a cyclical cosmic unity which unites opposites, sees continuity and connectedness in all things and invokes a self-imposed nihilistic curse on those who seek to assert complexity on unity and linearity on circularity. Transcendent hope is a tenuous presence, but more fully explored than in *The Crying of Lot 49*. The shorter novel is primarily a study of Oedipa, a rationally-thinking, if flawed heroine, as her name suggest an inheritor of the Western fondness for solving riddles. The experience she undergoes in *The Crying of Lot 49*, particularly in relation to her part in the musical analogy discussed above, is contrasted by her husband Mucho. His 'regular crises of conscience' (*CL* p.7) about his work push him towards the use of LSD. Oedipa's integrity and stubborn refusal to compromise her own quest prevent her from adopting it herself. Her determination is obsessive - she 'would be damned if she'd take the capsules he'd given her.

Literally damned' (*CL* p.11). What Mucho dramatizes, though, is a necessary counterbalance to Oedipa's gradual hardening of intent, and he alone experiments with a method of approach which acknowledges the arbitrariness of the limits of her proudly maintained objective reality.

At the beginning of the novel we first see Mucho at odds with his work as a disc jockey, supported by Oedipa's laconic comment that he is 'too sensitive' (*CL* p.7). This is intriguing when we know of Oedipa's later problems, unable to be the 'true sensitive' who can animate Nefastis's machine, (*CL* p.74) and frightened by the 'extra sense' displayed by the deaf-mutes. A dividing line can, it seems, be drawn between Oedipa with her doggedly sober rationalism, and basically, the rest. It would be convenient to dismiss Mucho from consideration *because* of his use of LSD, and the fact that by so doing he effectively becomes useless to Oedipa. This last point is undeniable, but we have also to consider whether Oedipa's quest, despite its heroism and integrity, would be enhanced or exacerbated by a closer affinity with Mucho's outlook. It should be pointed out that Pynchon's use of LSD in the novel operates on two levels. Firstly, as a drug, distorting conscious reality and rendering its user virtually unable to operate in a conventional society. This might seem to ally it to the 'narcosis' discussed above, and as such is a negative force, obscuring clear definitions and imposing a distorting lens on the user. Secondly and more importantly, however, it is a means of allowing access to the realms of the unconscious not normally, in Western tradition, acknowledged. Pynchon places the relevant definition in the mouth of Dr Hilarius: '"You know, with the LSD, we're finding, the distinction begins to vanish. Egos lose their sharp edges. But I never took the

drug, I chose to remain in relative paranoia, where at least I know who I am and who the others are"' (*CL* p.94). Oedipa refuses it point blank, and this might suggest Pynchon dramatizing in extreme terms a fundamental trait of her character. Her statement of intent: '"I want to see if there's a connection, I'm curious"' (*CL* p.52) is a comment of profound implication. It is her cultivated, conditioned nature to seek, to rationalize, an impulse that is well-documented in Pynchon's writing. The result of this is frustrating, and she ultimately only intensifies her alienation and jeopardizes her sanity. Mucho, at the other extreme, achieves a state of strong identity with his environment, albeit at the expense of removing himself from the action. Pynchon must, it seems, be prompting us to consider at least a middle ground, wherein a conscious assimilation of the environment is allied with a contentedness and a stability derived from what is *felt* as much as from what is learnt. Accepting perhaps the improbability of such a state, Pynchon does put Oedipa in touch with emotions that at least recognize the possibility of this. When she is with Cohen during Chapter Four, his dandelion wine, and his description of where he obtained the dandelions ('"in a cemetery, two years ago. Now the cemetery is gone. They took it out for the East San Narciso Freeway"' (*CL* pp.65-6)) cause her to register, tenuously, Metzger's relation of the same event. The connection induces a momentarily expansive awareness, a fleeting vision of the configuration of facts, events, impulses that make up her experience:

> She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to - an odour, colour, pure piercing grace note sounding his seizure. Afterwards it is only this signal,

> really dross, this secular announcement, and never what is revealed during the attack, that he remembers. Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold: which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an over-exposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (*CL* p.66)

Oedipa's own thoughts are the most revealing: she acknowledges the inconsequentiality of 'compiled memories of clues' and considers the impossibility of her goal: 'She glanced down the corridor of Cohen's room in the rain and saw, for the very first time, how far it might be possible to get lost in this' (*CL* p.66). She has, however, sensed, if not recalled, a wider significance in her world. 'The central truth' itself has been touched, without any lasting understanding. Later, in a moment of uncharacteristic *stillness* on Driblette's grave, the furious activity of her search shelved for a while, the same feeling emerges:

> Perhaps - she felt briefly penetrated, as if the bright winged thing had actually made it to the sanctuary of her heart [...] She waited for the winged brightness to announce its safe arrival. But there was silence. Driblette, she called. The signal echoing down twisted miles of brain circuitry. Driblette! But as with Maxwell's Demon, so now. Either she could not communicate, or he did not exist. (*CL* p.112)

Oedipa, we see, is party to, but unable to accept the feeling without awarding it 'tangible' existence or non-existence. It is significant in this scenario that what she attains is an equal invasion of the rational mind as Mucho's LSD experiences might be, but for her the tone is unequivocally negative: 'The toothaches got worse, she dreamed of disembodied voices from whose malignance there was no appeal, the soft dusk of mirrors out of which something was about to walk, and empty rooms that waited for her. Your gynaecologist has no test for what she was pregnant with' (*CL* p.121). What Mucho's state represents is an approach to the world in which 'external' phenomena do not automatically imply a distinct separation from the self, imposing a definition and interpretation of that data. Rather it advocates co-existence - an affinity with surroundings that can be simply that. Oedipa, 'brought up [...] believing in the primacy of the "conscious" self' (*GR* p.153) as we hear of Carroll Eventyr in *Gravity's Rainbow*, needs to force interaction, to define the borders of her self more clearly. She and Mucho stand simply for two modes of perception - and to approach these characters with such equality would seem to be a more equitable reaction to the novel than automatic endorsement of Oedipa's determination - consigning, as this latter view does, the relevance of Mucho to the status of failed accessory. The nature of the difference between them is expressed, appropriately, through music. As Oedipa moves semi-aware through 'night's sonorous score', Mucho *inhabits* his music, a world that must have essential relevance to the heroine's predicament.

Oedipa's last genuine sympathy for her husband comes at the beginning of Chapter Two. At this stage they are both still on the 'outside' as far as his later LSD-induced contentment in concerned. She

imagines him watching a fellow disc jockey at the radio station who is 'really tuned in to the voice, voices, the music, its message, surrounded by it, digging it, as were all the faithful it went out to: did Mucho stand outside Studio A looking in, knowing that even if he could hear it he couldn't believe in it?' (*CL* p.15). At the other end of the novel the situation has transformed dramatically. After the sequence of Oedipa's nightmare wanderings in San Francisco the prose is charged with the immediacy of music that has shadowed her experience, both in metaphor and reality. Mucho's manner initially disturbs her, and then a comment he makes suddenly opens out into a revelation of the change that has taken place in him:

> 'There are seventeen violins on that cut,' Mucho said, 'and one of them - I can't tell where he was because it's monaural here, damn.' It dawned on her that he was talking about the Muzak. It had been seeping in, in its subliminal, unidentifiable way since they'd entered the place, all strings, reeds, muted brass. (*CL* p.98)

Immediately we are struck by the appropriateness of the situation - a sharpened sensitivity to music - after a dense, difficult chapter in which Oedipa has been uncertainly located in a vast metaphorical score, unable to determine her position or direction by conscious analysis, and has fled at the sight of a group of people responding to an 'unthinkable order of music' (*CL* p.90) in a subliminal, intuitive fashion. Then, Mucho suggests the following:

> 'His E string,' Mucho said, 'It's a few cycles sharp. He can't be a studio musician. Do you think somebody could do the dinosaur bone bit with that one string, Oed? With just his set of notes on that cut. Figure out what his ear is like, and then the musculature of his hands and arms, and eventually the entire man. God, wouldn't that be wonderful.' (*CL* p.98)

The idea is a startlingly pertinent analogue to the task Oedipa has taken on with the Tristero, and Pynchon's dark irony cues her reply of '"Why should you want to?"' (*CL* p.98). This is *exactly* what she has been attempting, but the obliqueness of the comparison causes only bewilderment. What Mucho then proclaims gives a totally new outlook on her situation:

> 'But I can do the same thing in reverse. Listen to anything and take it apart again. Spectrum analysis, in my head. I can break down chords, and timbres, and words too into all the basic frequencies and harmonies, with all their different loudnesses, and listen to them, each pure tone, but all at once.' (*CL* p.98)

His starting point is the totality of the situation, a vast interconnected whole, from which he can identify the constituent parts, the musician who can annotate an entire score from simply hearing the music. Oedipa's fate is that she can only 'hear' one line at a time, and by clinging to her conscious need to rationalize is unlikely to achieve the same revelation with the Tristero that Mucho has with music. To do this would require a freeing from the constraints of three-

dimensional perspective, a state Pynchon suggests is dogged by the centuries of conditioning inside a Cartesian-dominated civilization. The ability to step outside a rigidly-cultivated objective reality is indeed observed in LSD subjects, and as is discussed in Chapter Four, the ensuing realization is relatively straightforward - as one subject states: 'It appeared rather obvious that there are no limits in the realm of spirit and that time and space are arbitrary constructs of the mind.'[9] Mucho expresses the same sentiment exactly:

> 'Everybody who says the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time, you dig? But time is arbitrary. You pick your zero point anywhere you want, that way you can shuffle each person's time line sideways till they all coincide. Then you'd have this big, God, maybe a couple hundred million chorus.' (*CL* pp.98-9)

Pynchon's escape clause, perhaps, is hidden in his humour. Mucho's status as a character is undermined. His farewell to Oedipa is punctuated by sharp irony: 'At the station they kissed goodbye, all of them. As Mucho walked away he was whistling something complicated, twelve-tone' (*CL* p.100). This, though, is Pynchon's characteristic mode of understatement - if Mucho's status is dissolving in our enquiring minds, he is dissolving on the page anyway - ('"He's losing his identity Edna, how else can I put it?"' (*CL* p.97)). We must remember Pynchon's virtuosity as a liberated and uninhibited wordsmith - in *Gravity's Rainbow* the human link with the continuity and resonance of the universe is dramatized and personified by the physical break-up of Slothrop. The

device is valid and effective - naturalistic faithfulness was never an objective. When Oedipa says 'the day she'd left him for San Narciso was the day she'd seen Mucho for the last time. So much of him had already dissipated' (*CL* p.100) we lose the perceivable character, but Mucho's relevance is much the same as Slothrop's as a commentary on the textual centre. The suggestion of this conclusion detracts tentatively from Thomas Schaub's attitude to a fundamental concern in Pynchon's writing, that of addressing the necessity of the excluded middle:

> In Pynchon's writing the imminence of death and the chances of a vital alternative are always set in opposition to one another [...] typical of the world 'in a West of such extremes' (*V.* p.440), and are used by Pynchon as a structuring device and theme to characterize the increasingly polarized Situation in which modern western man finds himself. The primary figures of his fiction are always caught between these poles, and experience the alienation and ambiguity which accompany their lives in 'the excluded middle'.[10]

Rather than trapping ourselves also among 'the matrices of a great digital computer' (*CL* p.125) the music metaphors in the novel point us towards a more open-ended attitude, wherein the possibility of a 'vital alternative' is not summarily trashed, but assumed in an attitude to existence that accepts unselfconsciously the living texture of our world and a broader range of dimensions that, though all experience, few can express or communicate - the same dimensions Pynchon involves us in so deeply, even if his heroine cannot share these without being 'Literally damned' (*CL* p.11).

NOTES: CHAPTER ONE

1. Robert Redfield and Peter L. Hays, 'Fugue as a Structure in Pynchon's "Entropy"'. *Pacific Coast Philology*, 12 (1977), pp.50-55.

2. David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).

3. Cowart, p.78.

4. John Dugdale, *Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.107.

5. Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p.26.

6. Redfield and Hays, p.51.

7. Cowart, p.81.

8. Cowart, p.82.

9. Stanislav Grof, *Realms of the Human Unconscious: Observations from LSD Research* (London: Souvenir Press, 1979), p.187.

10. Schaub, p.6.

## CHAPTER TWO: PATTERN-PLAYING -
## AN INTRODUCTION TO *GRAVITY'S RAINBOW*

His voice sounded sharply, saying: 'Look here, Marlowe, I think I can understand your detective instinct to tie everything that happens into one compact knot, but don't let it run away with you. Life isn't like that at all - not life as I have known it.'

Raymond Chandler, *The Lady in the Lake*

Near the start of the second part of *Gravity's Rainbow* Slothrop finds himself spread across the abyss of the 'excluded middle', as it is described in *The Crying of Lot 49* (*CL* p.125) - surrounded by conspiracy and sinister control, but unable to see any coherent end or all-embracing conclusion to the frustrating and potentially malevolent uncertainty: 'How did this all turn against him so fast? His friends old and new, every last bit of paper and clothing connecting him to what he's been, have just, fucking, vanished. How can he meet this with any kind of grace?' (*GR* p.205). His question is addressed, obliquely, in many ways. The hope of locating a 'formula' with which to attack the problem is lost in a forced examination of surrounding environment which can rely on neither order nor chaos, but has, ultimately, to accommodate both in an honest perception of context.

Slothrop's problem is of similar complexity to that of the reader of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and an examination of the central figure in this respect is a useful preparation for a consideration of the novel. Tony Tanner describes the disorienting and initially unexpected effect on the unwary reader of Pynchon's fictive world, and in particular that displayed in *Gravity's Rainbow*: 'The reader does not move comfortably from some ideal "emptiness" of meaning to a satisfying fullness, but instead becomes involved in a process in which any perception can precipitate a new confusion, and an apparent clarification turn into a prelude to further difficulties.'[1] The approach suggested is paradoxical - a (seemingly necessary) constant assimilation of data of which the most notable characteristic is its refusal to crystallize into intelligible form. An instinctive reaction is panic, a desperation corresponding to Slothrop's described above. With more emphasis on observation and acceptance than methodical enquiry however, a more fruitful attitude can evolve. One scenario which encourages this sentiment is a surreal structure, Beaverboard Row, seen later in the novel: 'It seems to be some very extensive museum, a place of many levels, and new wings that generate like living tissue - though if it all does grow toward some end shape, those who are here inside can't see it' (*GR* p.537). The place depicted serves well as a description of the novel itself. The impossibility of finding a definitive comprehensible reality within this structure might be interpreted as a curse on the worthy motivations of the traditional quester. However, such a formulation implies a strict Cartesian division of observer and separate events and objects - precisely the deterministic ethos that is under attack throughout the novel. This is the sentiment expressed by Sidney

Stencil in *V.*, that '"short of anatomizing each soul, what hope has anyone of understanding a Situation?"' (*V.* p.470). Brigadier Pudding provides an effective illustration in *Gravity's Rainbow* of the hopelessness of attempting an understanding of any phenomenon by way of methodical causal progression. His belief in a 'literal Chain of Command' precludes his book on European politics from communicating anything meaningful. No base criteria can ever be perceived to be stable, hence his frustration: '"Never make it," he found himself muttering at the beginning of each day's work - "it's changing out from under me. Oh dodgy, very dodgy"' (*GR* pp.76-7). The idea is supported by Gödel's Theorem, to which Pynchon refers openly. This means that:

> Pudding's *Things That Can Happen in European Politics* for 1931, the year of Gödel's Theorem, don't give Hitler an outside chance. So, when laws of heredity are laid down, militants will be born. Even as determinist a piece of hardware as the A4 rocket will begin spontaneously generating items like the 'S-Gerät' Slothrop thinks he's chasing like a grail. (*GR* p.275)

It is 'the end of history' to which Pointsman refers (*GR* p.56), a recognition of the eternal uncertainty in a universe where connectedness can be sensed, but is beyond the grasp of the conscious mind. It is at the heart of what physicists during the 1980s came to recognize as Chaos Theory. The movement finds its twentieth century intellectual heritage in the work of Einstein, Bohr, and the other pioneers of relativity and quantum mechanics, but Chaos Theory opens the field much wider, taking its experimental data from the most commonplace systems. In the terms

of the theory 'the simplest systems are now seen to create extraordinarily difficult problems of predictability. Yet order arises spontaneously in those systems - chaos and order together'.[2] The scientists' approach is, broadly speaking, to observe existing data in a much less structured, premeditated way; to acknowledge the patterns existent in nature and to avoid a coercion of these into a definitive theoretical framework. As such, the concepts are at home in Pynchon's writing. Even in the hands of Weissmann, master of manipulation and control, the enduring *unknown* always provides the possibility of chaos, even if this is the result of many *orders* operating at cross purposes. As he says to Pökler: '"How can anyone predict where you'll go? We'll see how it all develops"' (*GR* p.428). As the textual forage through the Zone approaches an end the same truth still remains. As Pirate Prentice is told, '"by the time you get *any* summary, the whole thing will have changed"' (*GR* pp.540-1).

Slothrop may not understand directly the significance of these ideas, but does at least intuitively feel them to be part of the movement around him. This is his realization on seeing 'big globular raindrops, thick as honey, begin to splat into giant asterisks on the pavement, inviting him to look down at the bottom of the text of the day, where footnotes will explain all. He isn't about to look. Nobody ever said a day has to be juggled into any kind of sense at day's end' (*GR* p.204). The passage marks a turning-point. It is at this stage that Slothrop departs from his fellow quester Oedipa Maas. She exists as an intelligent but rationally-motivated individual driven to near-insanity by the litter of significances that she *cannot* form into a meaningful pattern. The same agony is Enzian's in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as

he is assaulted by an overflow of details which 'swirl like fog, each particle with its own array of forces and directions... he can't handle them all at the same time, if he stays too much with any he's in danger of losing others...' (*GR* pp.326-7). Slothrop passes this point, halting momentarily in the stasis of despair, making an oath and continuing. It is something of a parallel to Leni's passionate intuition for the purest moment: 'the level you reach, with both feet in, when you lose your fear, you lose it all' (*GR* p.159). Slothrop's own version communicates a similar impression of release, of freedom: 'a clutch mechanism between him and Their iron-cased engine far up away in a power train whose shape and design he has to guess at, a clutch he can disengage, feeling then all his inertia of motion, his real helplessness... it is not exactly unpleasant, either' (*GR* p.207). The moment fulfills in a sense the conviction of Roger Mexico that cause-and-effect has gone too far, and one must 'strike off at some other angle' (*GR* p.88). It is an impulse of surrender, but positively so. From this point onwards Slothrop, and we, as readers confront a new dilemma, the resolution of which will dictate our ability to interact sympathetically with the text, and (in Slothrop's case) to confront the morass of detail that fills the Zone. The loss of paranoid linkages is a release, but also a burden - frames of reference become blurred and distorted - what is there to hold on to? In a piece of fitting symbolism Slothrop finds himself in a balloon, unanachored, moving at the will of the elements without control, without destination. The scene is somewhat representative of the whole Zone ethos. Such surrender yields uncertain rewards: 'There is no action the balloon can take. Binary decisions have lost meaning in here' (*GR* p.335). The helplessness is recalled by Slothrop as he considers anti-

paranoia, 'where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long [...] Either They have put him here for a reason, or he's just here. He isn't sure that he wouldn't, actually, rather have that *reason...*' (*GR* p.434). Slothrop effectively dramatizes the link between the two states of extreme. He is content with neither situation, and in fact the assurance of plot and conspiracy would be a not wholly unwelcome presence. There is an approach to the complexity of the situation, however, that accepts the mess of chaos and order, but simply attempts an informed reaction to it. It arises when Slothrop is provided with a new identity on his leaving the Casino. The execution of this process we, and he, can see to be an orchestrated plan, specific components acting out specific rôles. As for its place in the *larger* structure however, this has delicately been withdrawn from view. The explanation is an important one:

> 'Why are all you folks helping me like this? For free and all?'
>
> 'Who knows? We have to play the patterns. There must be a pattern you're in, right now.'
>
> 'Oh....' (*GR* p.257)

'Playing the patterns', it would seem, is a possible key to Zone existence. Geli Tripping echoes the sentiment: '"It's an arrangement," she tells him. "It's so unorganized out here. There have to be arrangements. You'll find out"' (*GR* p.290).

Pynchon is careful enough not to make the idea into a dogmatic resolution. It is an acknowledgement that patterns, orders, must exist - 'arrangements for warmth, love, food, simple movement along roads' (*GR*

pp.290-1) - for anything discernible, of any coherence, to take place. What is beyond feasible consideration, though, is that these patterns can be fixed upon and interpreted. They can have no solid foundation, and the movement is still in its own way as unpredictable as the balloon drifting across the Zone. As Margherita Erdmann says, '"the two patterns create a third: a moiré, a new world of flowing shadows, interferences"' (*GR* p.395). The situation fuses paranoia *and* anti-paranoia - a constant awareness that designs exist, *must* do, in fact, but by so being, create their own chaos. Whether a meaningful existence in this world entails a design (albeit a flexible one) or submission it would not be appropriate to state. A pointer perhaps exists on the very first page of the novel. In the opening scene we follow the journey of Pirate Prentice into 'The Evacuation', a surreal penetration of the dimensionless urban labyrinth, 'pushing into older and more desolate parts of the city [...] ... ruinous secret cities of the poor, places whose *names he has never heard...*' (*GR* p.3). The place is one from which there is no escape in convenient, accessible terms. Worse than a maze, it is a swamp-metropolis, once manufactured but later evolved into a complexity of indistinct realms of order, perhaps chaos: 'Is this the way out? Faces turn to the windows, but no one dares ask, not out loud' (*GR* p.3). This is the novel's first landscape, and appropriately so. The narrator's nod to the reader is one of advice as much as it is description: 'No, this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive *knotting into*' (*GR* p.3). These words demand an attitude that enshrouds the whole novel, implying a necessity to *inhabit* rather than to solve. As the novel unfolds a disentanglement becomes impossible. The falling away of each page cannot add to a catalogue of significances, of

pocketable ideas, but can rather only immerse us even more deeply in a fictional terrain without reference points or protracted ground lines.

Whether 'playing the patterns' or 'knotting into' imply a measured, unharrassed assimilation and processing of data or a double curse of paranoia and anti-paranoia in constant fluctuation is uncertain. Pynchon offers us a choice - a perspective that fuses the two extremes, or a state of constant flip-flopping between the two. It is potentially the one universal movement seen from different vantage points (perspective always being a fundamental issue in the novel); the same visible paradox that shows a constant flow of light from a light bulb. An alternating current, we know, creates a succession of on/off optical beats, but the reality perceived is the opposite - a visible continuum. It is the kind of simultaneous mutual exclusion and coexistence that Kathryn Hume recognizes as an important issue in *Gravity's Rainbow*, that 'when we concentrate on one such order of being, we lose all sense of the other'.[3] For Slothrop, it is a fact to be accepted and passed over: 'Not paranoia. Just how it is. Temporary alliances, knit and undone' (*GR* p.291).

To adopt a similar attitude in a reading of the novel is advantageous. Threads of discernible theme and development proliferate constantly, and any number can be pursued beyond their context to the point of obscuration, of varying and distorting emphasis. A duty to the text and to Pynchon's fictive world, though, is to acknowledge the fragments equally, whilst accepting what arrangements are evident without prejudice. Alan J. Friedman and Manfred Puetz describe our act of perception as *characteristically* limited, and suggest that it be recognized as such, 'that all we usually see on our wide trajectory of

ascent and descent are isolated beginnings, apexes, ends, or various other substructures of the rainbow curve of existence'.[4] This is a realization that it is important to remember, and serves as a fitting introduction to a study of the novel.

NOTES: CHAPTER TWO

1. Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), p.75.

2. James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (London: Sphere Cardinal, 1989), p.8.

3. Kathryn Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to* Gravity's Rainbow (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p.2.

4. Alan J. Friedman and Manfred Puetz, 'Science as Metaphor: Thomas Pynchon and *Gravity's Rainbow*', in *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, edited by Richard Pearce (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), p.80.

# CHAPTER THREE: THE CIRCLE AND THE LINE

I don't like linear, but spheral people.

Emerson, *Journals*

It is a tribute to Pynchon that in the twenty-seven years since the publication of *V.* there have appeared at least as many books devoted to his writing, besides several hundred articles, theses and dissertations, and even the occasional study of the criticism in its own right.[1] Within this blossoming industry, however, development has been fast, and several diverse interpretations of his work have appeared. The process has not resulted in the evolution of 'schools of thought' so much as a chronologically developing awareness that somehow continues to synthesize diverse theses. However, comparisons between the early and more recent criticism still highlight radically different attitudes to some of the major preoccupations of his writing. Bernard Duyfhuizen identifies three phases of Pynchon criticism that span this development. The first was 'overly concerned with narrow readings of "entropy" and "paranoia" as distinct themes rather than integrated features in a full textual matrix'.[2] The latest phase appears finally to have rescued the critical community from what one critic characterizes as:

> the dark critical vision of the text as a nihilistic chaos of uncertainty; they resituate the novel in a mythographic cosmos that reclaims the possibility of transcendent certainty. *Gravity's Rainbow* comes to fulfil 'hope' and 'possibility' [...] in abundance, stressing a humanistic ethos of 'kindness,' 'caring,' and 'love' as Pynchon's universal message. Moreover these critics see Pynchon's attention to messages from the 'Other Side' as examples of a transcendent vision underscoring a deeply held - if iconoclastic - spiritualism.[3]

One critic recently wrote that *Gravity's Rainbow* 'is not arch-shaped, as is commonly supposed. It is plotted like a mandala, its quadrants carefully marked'.[4] This observation marks the boundary between the major stages of Pynchon criticism very well - the fuller significance of the mandala in the novel is discussed more comprehensively in Chapter Four, but it is a critical emblem for the balance that the novel expresses. When George Levine reviewed the novel he said that 'it is a book of moments wonderfully, satisfyingly realized by Pynchon. The connections are mine'.[5] This is a premature acknowledgement of a concept not to come to fruition for some years yet - that the 'moments' are as if configured at equidistance around a unified centre, and that a valid interpretation must recognize this. The more accessible response, however, was to assume a linear mentality at work in *Gravity's Rainbow*. This resides more easily inside traditional critical approaches, and provided for a time a convenient framework for an analysis of the novel. It ignores, however, several crucial elements that contribute towards a view of the novel and of the world it describes, as a balanced, cyclical

entity. Within *this* approach many more potentially optimistic features receive just emphasis, and the 'counterforce' and 'green uprising' of the closing section are integrated equally into a consequently more fully-considered critical reaction.

The development that took place in Pynchon criticism appears to have been a necessary one in many senses, and most refreshing in recent studies is the more accommodating desire to discuss what Pynchon *offers* us rather than demands us to take on - an array of alternatives that should not eclipse each other, but rather testify to numerous and versatile frames of reference. Peter L. Cooper's book *Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World* predates the third phase defined by Bernard Duyfhuizen (this being on dates of publication 1986-88, and after, one presumes) by three years, but the most fundamental change of attitude is present here. Cooper's thesis endures coherently and points towards an attitude which allows the most scope for development and innovation with a minimum of obstruction of other critical approaches.[6]

A persistent element of irony is present in this discussion, and it is one in which every critic must inevitably be implicated. In *The Crying of Lot 49* Oedipa comes to see everything in terms of the Tristero, but still without concrete affirmation stands divorced from the possibility of a synthesizing revelation. Something of the same problem is apparent in earlier Pynchon criticism, the trap of attempting 'to regard one's particular fantasy of the world as the definitive reality' as Tony Tanner puts it.[7] An example of this perhaps originates in Pynchon's meticulous use of entropy as a metaphor. The presentation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics is accomplished and sympathetically

woven into the text throughout his writing and it survives in *Vineland*, though is never mentioned directly. The recurrence of entropy in his first three novels, as well as in the eponymous short story has set more than several academic minds racing - the novelty of his approach demands investigation without doubt, but the importance of the concept has at times received dangerous over-emphasis to the point of precluding many other worthwhile areas from the consideration they deserved. Some undertake to marvel at his understanding and re-creation of entropy in metaphor and theme, and then use their knowledge of the concept as a wide theoretical framework for the whole novel. The idea is one-sided and exclusive - and tends towards a rather frustrated reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

In his chapter 'Death Transfigured' in *The Grim Phoenix* William Plater distils his ideas to an unequivocal essence: 'If the final measure of life is death, then death must be implicit everywhere in life.'[9] Immediately one feels inside a critical strait-jacket, and despite his erudite and persuasive arguments it is apparent that there is a more developed reading of the novel lurking between the lines of what Plater *allows* himself to say from this rather blank starting point. One of Pynchon's characters seals the declaration - Mehemet in *V.*: '"the only change is towards death.... Early and late we are in decay"' (*V.* p.460), and Plater takes this morsel gratefully: 'While it is the rôle of art and human invention to embellish and disguise simple facts, complex formulations can always be reduced to Mehement's cheerful observation.'[9] Plater refers to the passage in *Gravity's Rainbow* in which Walter Rathenau speaks through the medium Peter Sachsa to the assembled VIPs of IG Farben: 'Rebirth is an illusion; the only

transformation is as Walter Rathenau expressed it so well, "from death to death-transfigured."'[10] Plater's reading relies heavily on the emphasis on entropy already mentioned, and the obstruction of the scientific metaphor in this instance begins to be apparent. Rathenau's utterings, fished out of their place in the text, do reside inside the entropy framework. The scenario Plater sees as predominant is presented on the following page: 'The persistence, then of structures favouring death. Death converted into more death. Perfecting its reign, just as the buried coal grows denser, and overlaid with more strata - epoch on top of epoch, city on top of ruined city.' (*GR* p.167) This *is* the situation dictated by entropy - the redistribution of a system's parts into the more probable randomness of disorganization - an all-embracing momentum of which all life, human included, is part. However, Peter Cooper is quick to attack Plater's method, saying that Rathenau's words are 'delivered in bizarre circumstances' but more importantly that 'Pynchon's mediating structures should encourage the reader to question any statement that presents itself as conclusive and to give it no more than provisional assent'.[11] Certainly it is dangerous to seek the author's voice in any such specific context in such a novel as *Gravity's Rainbow*. This appears to be a persistent problem in interpretations of this, and Pynchon's other novels. Avoidance of identifying a definitive authorial mouthpiece, or assigning any character the status of 'spokesperson' is essential in a balanced study. Equally however, no individual voice should be excluded from consideration, and a reading of the novel should attempt an equal synthesis of all the textual 'moments'. An observation by George Levine illustrates this as well as commenting on the readiness of critics to accept an entropy-based

interpretation. He understands the epigraph to 'Beyond The Zero' as an indication that 'physic will become metaphysics' but then goes on to say that this 'would be unequivocally serious if it weren't from a real rocket monster, Wernher von Braun'.[12] The sentiment expressed in von Braun's words is one compatible with the enduring view in *Gravity's Rainbow* of human existence as part of an interconnected whole, a universe of cycle and continuity. If we are to criticize the extraction and isolation of Rathenau's words by Plater, the same egalitarian attitude should be shown in all other instances, and the von Braun quotation thus not summarily dismissed. We cannot *assume* an irony that invalidates his words, but rather accept a situation of positive ambiguity that is present not only here, but indeed throughout the novel. This is only one instance showing that we cannot afford, it seems, to attach *any* labels to the hundreds of 'voices' operating in the novel without incurring the risk of distortion.

To return to the interpretation of Rathenau's words in Plater's argument, Cooper's objection is valid but perhaps even this does not reach far enough. The issue requires a more perceptive attitude to *context*, both being aware of it on the page, and of distorting it in the process of analysis. Rathenau's words are to the directors of IG Farben. A few pages earlier Pynchon indulges in a biting satire of cartelized bureaucracy with the story of an IG subsidiary which had developed 'a new airborne ray which could turn whole populations, inside a ten-kilometer radius, stone blind [...] Poor Spottbilligsfilm. It had slipped their collective mind what such a weapon would do to the dye market after the next war' (*GR* p.163). IG Farben is a supreme example of the needs of business, profit and control subverting the natural

balance. Its self-perpetuating impulse is one realized into connivance and exploitation - and this is the object, in context, of Rathenau's attention. He speaks to the IG VIPs of the futility of *their* endeavours. The passage offers evidently less ambiguity out of Plater's hands: '"But this is all the impersonation of life. The real movement is not from death to any rebirth. It is from death to death-transfigured. The best you can do is polymerize a few dead molecules. But polymerization is not resurrection. I mean your IG, Generaldirektor"' (*GR* p.166). Pynchon is pointing the terror of entropy at *this* audience, the directors of IG Farben and their numerous sympathizers in the novel. An exploitation, a corruption of the natural world incurs this curse, and the point requires assertion as forceful as the corporate empires themselves. As Rathenau continues, '"it's only another illusion. A very clever robot. The more dynamic it seems to you, the more deep and dead, in reality, it grows"' (*GR* p.167). It is not therefore, at the risk of over-emphasis, an authorial mouthpiece in progress, but an apt snippet of interaction in an extremely complex scenario. As if in mockery of the dependability of any voice in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the possibility of which has been dismissed above, Pynchon himself labels Rathenau as 'prophet and architect of the cartelized state' but only 'according to the histories' (*GR* p.164). Pynchon will never allow us to attach definitive validity to any specific standpoint, and the finely-wrought ambiguity here serves as a fitting illustration.

An awareness of this means that entropy can be understood and appreciated in a more balanced manner. The significance of entropy can largely be determined by the way in which *time* is perceived in *Gravity's*

*Rainbow*. As is discussed later, the novel repeatedly indicates an emphasis on a non-linear understanding of time, and in such a case, a 'movement' towards entropic disorganization does not imply an empty, meaningless termination, but rather an inclusion of this state in a constant condition of dissolution and assembly; the same eternal return that is symbolized by the Great Serpent (*GR* p.412). The corruption inherent in a linearized system does create (as Pynchon's use of the word as a collective label testifies) a 'System' that is a separate scenario inside which entropy can be a valid metaphor. Beyond this, however, its application should be made with more care, and misinterpretation is dangerously easy. Katherine Hayles's 'line and circle' approach to the novel and a mandalic interpretation both accept this - that entropy is a convincing metaphorical tool, a process unfolding inside a larger framework that looks rather to a constant or ever-returning state of being. This is a similar understanding of entropy that is embraced by Chaos Theory, a scientific basis that does more to acknowledge the inherent patterns and forms in natural phenomena than to impose a hypothetical framework thereon. James Gleick explains:

> the slippery notion of entropy [is] reasonably well-defined for thermodynamic purposes in terms of heat and temperature, but devilishly hard to pin down as a measure of *disorder* [...] Nature forms patterns. Some are orderly in space but disorderly in time, others orderly in time, but disorderly in space.[13]

Katherine Hayles arrives at the same conclusion via a consideration of the black and white holes that indicate a universe of cycle and return.

This is based largely on P.C.W. Davies's *The Physics of Time Asymmetry*: 'the universe will not end in the heat death predicted by the Second Law of thermodynamics (and Pynchon's "Entropy"), but will continue to exist in unending cycles of Flight and Return that some see as a cosmic analogue to reincarnation.'[14] Norbert Wiener's understanding of entropy in *The Human Use of Human Beings* also, on close scrutiny supports the same idea since his hypotheses are (he openly admits) dependent on a consideration of the Second law inside a *closed system*. If this is not the situation, a perpetual cycle *can* be maintained and a device such as the 'demon' *can* operate.'[15] Where Wiener can be challenged, however, is in his conception, ultimately of the universe (that is, encompassing *everything*) as a closed system and therefore one condemned to entropic heat death. The wisdom of such an assertion would seem doubtful - the extrapolation of a model in thermodynamics to embrace a cosmic whole contains a rather groundless supposition - and this is supported by the view of entropy borne out by Chaos Theory. Pynchon himself comments significantly on the subject in the introduction to his collected short stories *Slow Learner* (1984). In a retrospective consideration of 'Entropy' he describes his youthful delight at the possibilities the Second Law held for his writing:

> a pose I found congenial in those days - fairly common, I hope, among pre-adults - was that of somber glee at any idea of mass destruction or decline [...] Given my undergraduate mood, Adams's sense of power out of control, coupled with Wiener's spectacle of universal heat-death and mathematical stillness, seemed just the ticket. (*SL* p.15)

Implicit in this is that the 'pose' of the late 1950s is not the major preoccupation at hand in the writing of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The 'somber glee' would later seem to be the reserve of the narrower critical interpretations of the novel. Entropy does exist, in thermodynamics and in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but it is part of a whole outside which we never really (as Wiener attempts to) stand, and that involves regeneration and growth as well. This, as we shall see, is everywhere in Pynchon.

The relevance of the Great Serpent in the novel incites a similar collision of ideas. It is evident, with little investigation, that the device has an integral importance by virtue of its fusing the worlds of linearity and circularity. The serpent triggers an image of cyclical self-sufficiency (it forms a mandala) and wholeness as well as Kekulé's discovery of the benzene ring. It could be seen therefore as a linking motif for the most radical opposites in the novel - System/Zone, Technology/sympathy with the natural world, nihilism/transcendent promise. As such it would seem that hardly enough time could be spent in a study of this crucial symbol. Plater's attitude is that '[while] the Great Serpent offers the illusion of return at the same time it cloaks the real action. After the transformation of depletion, there is "no return, no salvation, no Cycle" (*GR* p.413)'.[16] Again Plater's use of the words puts them in unsettling immunity from their context. This is in fact as follows: 'One of Their favorite slogans. No return, no salvation, no Cycle - that's not what They, nor Their brilliant employee Kekulé, have taken the Serpent to mean' (*GR* p.413). The information is reasonably clear - the breaking of the cycle is the doing of Them, the Firm: the underlying, original state *is* the Cycle, and it is not an

illusion. A page before Pynchon has laid the unadulterated unity before us so as to appreciate exactly its corruption:

> Kekulé dreams the Great Serpent holding its own tail in its mouth, the dreaming Serpent which surrounds the World. But the meanness, the cynicism with which this dream is to be used. The Serpent that announces, 'The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning,' is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to *violate* the Cycle. (*GR* p.412)

In fairness to Plater he recognizes that 'the world, its systems and bureaucracies, its people are betrayed by their own corporate cleverness',[17] that the cycle *has* been violated and accordingly oblivion is assured. But under this curse he groups all protagonists of the novel. He turns away from the 'eternally-returning' to the rigidity of the entropy textbook: 'As they document the vicissitudes of the closed system, Pynchon's stories and novels also define a loss - to us as well as to his characters.'[18]

From this seed it is difficult to nurture a spirit of optimisim in the novel. Another critic, Speer Morgan, follows the same path as Plater, though with less deference to Pynchon. Here the obsession with entropy is at an extreme, and results in a less than accommodating point of view, viz: 'the good guys are those who learn to accept nature's entropies and the bad those who oppose them.'[19] The emphasis is strong enough to obscure the transcendent possibility present elsewhere, and Morgan takes the entropy that topples bureaucracy and war as applying to any valid action that is *not* a violation of universal unity as well:

> Entropy may be more fearful than death in certain ways, since it applies to all that we know, from the suns down to the living creatures, the molecules, and very atoms. It is a universal sentence to extended death which through its very absoluteness carries greater horror than the Biblical curse of mortality.[20]

The 'all that we know' is a significant giveaway, and ties in with Norbert Wiener's view of the universe as a closed system mentioned above. If we cannot participate in a reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* without attempting to stand outside the 'System' at some stage then our reaction to the novel must be susceptible to the same penchant for nihilism. Peter Cooper quotes Clerk Maxwell in his consideration of this attitude: '"It is very seldom that any man who tries to form a system can prevent his system from forming round him, and closing him in."'[21]

The problem with Morgan's view is that the switch has been thrown at so basic a level that however persuasive the evidence is from that point on, no change will take place, and the strong and joyfully positive elements in the novel appear only to reinforce the nihilism, albeit accompanied by some desperate black humour:

> The joke is on Slothrop and the other good guys who accept nature (Roger Mexico, Leni Pökler, and others), as well as on 'Them', the protagonists of the rocket-worshipping system. By accepting nature they accept death by dissipation, and the author posits his greatest sentiment in their hopeless actions. Their jokes, their opposition to the system, their very energy can only be hollow, since they

> merely speed up the end, and the more useless their action, the more hysterically farcical they become.[22]

Even more exasperating is the charge of *Pynchon's* 'peculiar blindness' - Morgan winds up his essay as follows:

> One can only wonder if in some odd way Pynchon has not taken the concept of entropy too seriously, allowing an idea from physics, which has validity as a psychological delusion, to dominate his own view of human life. All life - all biological and historical events immediate enough to be of human concern - involves growth and self-regulation as well as decay and death, and in not recognizing that fact Pynchon falls prey to a peculiar blindness, a heady eccentricity, broad and fascinating and about as metaphorically inaccurate as Heraclitus' notion that all things are of fire.[23]

With a modest amount of juggling and rearrangement Morgan's comments could be a telling criticism of his own approach, and praise for the universal, comprehensive picture that Pynchon creates in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The blindness would certainly appear to be more the affliction of the observer than the observed in this case, but the stance is one vantage point, and one that *Gravity's Rainbow* accommodates without automatically excluding it. An important quality of Pynchon's writing is its ability to accommodate multiple frames of reference, and his scientific metaphors are essential elements in the process of weaving together these viewpoints. The danger they provide for the unwary reader is that of convenience, of easy interpretation. It is an

evolution that any critical community is fated always to endure, it seems. The paranoia of academic study is no different from that experienced by Slothrop - his situation is ours: not to be goaded by a fresh set of 'clues', but rather to accept no one's explanation quite so readily - not cynicism, but a more discerning openness. No answers will ever fall at his feet, but he 'isn't about to look' (*GR* p.204) even if they do. This attitude seems to be a sincere reaction to a timeless problem. To attempt to isolate and understand is almost by definition at odds with a genuine deeply-felt comprehension. The conclusiveness of this problem is referred to late in the novel, during Geli Tripping's dream-reverie: 'This is the World just before men. Too violently pitched alive in constant flow ever to be seen by men directly. They are meant only to look at it dead, in still strata, transputrefied to oil or coal' (*GR* p.720). A sharp, specific, focus on any one entity must always mean that awareness is blurred around it. It is the same blindness that Rathenau warns IG Farben against, the one-way flow to dead molecules - the only thing we will see if we *insist* on seeing, so precisely. In a continuation of the excerpt above, the motivations behind the System, its bureaucracies and cartels, are put in perspective:

> Alive, it was a threat: it was Titans, was an overpeaking of life so clangorous and mad, such a green corona around earth's body that some spoiler *had* to be brought in before it blew the Creation apart. So we, crippled keepers, were sent out to multiply, to have dominion. God's spoilers. Us. Counter-revolutionaries. *It is our mission to promote death.* The way we kill, the way we die, being

> unique among the Creatures. It was something we had to work on, historically and personally. To build up from scratch to its present status as reaction, nearly as strong as life, holding down the green uprising. But only nearly as strong. (*GR* p.720)

The conflict described here is the point of convergence that *is* life, and that which contributes to the cohesion and unity of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The passage would be a better focus for the reader seeking the novel epitomized, certainly better than the ambiguity of Rathenau's out-of-context words. It locates the negative impulse, the down-curve in the circularity of existence, inside a larger framework, and as a point of origin (despite being near the end of the novel) for the forces of reasserting life that are all around. Plater, in some ambivalence, does accommodate this. The passage is a positive one in his view, but he proposes a radically different emphasis:

> Earth's own process is a one-way continuity of life becoming death, one form giving way to the other even as the Earth itself runs down - but not at all the horrible specter that the living seem to think it, as Lyle Bland and Geli Tripping reveal in their visions.[24]

He implies an intuition of greater unity, but only as a continuity of molecules still on a path to entropic heat-death. There is no consideration of its mystical nature. He is, in this situation, betraying himself as one of the 'crippled keepers'. Cooper provides a welcome counterbalance to this view:

> An integrating force competes with the disintegrating one so conspicuous in this novel and dominant in *V.*. The integrating force is a real alternative that calls for choice, not submission. Certainly it is not the false face of entropy.[25]

The 'green uprising', then, should be a more worthy focus of our attentions. Its manifestations are pervasive - they could almost be seen as Preterite features - certainly they have been 'passed over' by some earlier critics, in the greater glorification of the entropy metaphor. The rainbow itself, a versatile symbol even to the most narrow-minded comes freshly upon us following the passage discussed above: 'Pan - leaping - its face too beautiful to bear, beautiful Serpent, its coils in rainbow lashings in the sky' (*GR* pp.720-1). It is, therefore, the interface with life as well as death and is not only an analogue to the death-curve of the Rocket. Right from the crucible of concentrated fecundity in Pirate's banana garden there is a 'spell, against falling objects' (*GR* p.10), the assertion of life, an uprising as elemental as the rise of Slothrop's penis, that is no death-transfigured. Slothrop is the natural focus for this as he is for so many elements in the novel. Deep in the Zone he dreams a surrealist nightmare, but it settles to images of lush fertility, a woman, perhaps Mother Earth herself, (like the Herero woman 'in touch with the Earth's gift for genesis' (*GR* p.316)) the living birth channel of *all* life:

> From out of her body now streams a flood of different creatures, octopuses, reindeer, kangaroos, 'Who can say all the life / That left her womb that day?' [...]

This dream will not leave him. (*GR* p.447)

He dreams, but the dream becomes him - the falling away of distinctions between waking and dreaming, even life and death is a point of increasing familiarity in the novel, and Slothrop's lack of specific volition in the process ceases to matter - as we hear later, he 'is closer to being a spiritual medium than he's been yet, and he doesn't even know it' (*GR* p.622). His ultimate state is described unambiguously: 'He is now always the same, awake or asleep - he never leaves the single dream, there are no differences between the worlds: they have become one for him' (*GR* p.721).

This leads us to a point which is in a sense the epicentral fusion point of the whole novel. The entropy-view of Slothrop is emphatically linear in its conception, since it assumes that he enacts the breaking down, disorganization of molecules in a chronologically perceptible process. This *is* the objective truth for those in the novel who pursue him because they are condemned to define the data in terms of their own system, a system that has developed on the grounds of unnatural ordering. Slothrop's breakup *is*, therefore a mockery of their dominion, the element they cannot capture long enough to study it. To Them, he *is* the assertion of entropy that (in Their terms, were they to examine it) results in chaotic nullity. This is where entropy, as a metaphor becomes 'a thrust at a truth and a lie' (*CL* p.89). Slothrop *does* demonstrate the 'one-way continuity' as Plater expresses it, from completeness to total dissipation that should be a cautionary sight to the advocates of the System - ostensibly the same forces at work that will condemn the Rocket, deluded by 'a promise, a prophecy, of Escape'

(*GR* p.758), to annihilation. At the same time, however, this restricted setting must be stepped beyond: Slothrop bridges self and universe and is held visibly in a process outside the rule of time. In a distorted linearized perspective it appears akin to one-way entropy, but is indicative of infinitely more.

In the novel's widest terms, Slothrop's progression is from individual physical wholeness to universal wholeness, not a 'decline of the animate into the inanimate' as Edward Mendelson perceives the dominant theme in *V.*.[26] He breaks up, not to nullification, but into the 'eternally-returning' (*GR* p.412) Cycle. A passage in 'The Counterforce' marks the delta-t stage where his crossing the interface makes him a living intersection between the two poles:

> ... and now, in the Zone, later in the day he became a crossroad, after a heavy rain he doesn't recall, Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet-valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural... (*GR* p.626)

He is a cross, a mandala himself, and for the imperceptibly small sliver of time stands at the thinnest edge of his consummation. Appropriately, the content of his vision is a luxuriant fecundity. This stresses again the grossness of Speer Morgan's conclusion that 'the joke is on Slothrop'. After this point we lose sight of him, only *because* he ceases to be a classifiable entity - his importance in fact increases, not diminishes as his separate identity dissolves.

A recognition of this underlying truth in the novel swings us even further away from the narrow linear interpretation discussed above. Even before Slothrop's profoundest experience Pynchon has planted the seed firmly in the text with the sequence centring around Lyle Bland. On this passage, Cooper comments in definitive but hardly exaggerated terms, that 'Pynchon does not portray humankind as stranded without hope in an alien and dying cosmos [...] In *Gravity's Rainbow* [...] physical forces appear to be spiritual, even loving if considered from a mystic's perspective: not only can people care for the Earth - it can care back'.[27] The truth alluded to here has always been present, but is most discernibly related as follows, by Lyle Bland:

> it's hard to get over the wonder of finding that Earth is a living critter, after all these years of thinking about a big dumb rock to find a body and a psyche, he feels like a child again, he knows that in theory he must not attach himself, but still he is in love with his sense of wonder, with having found it again, even this late, even knowing he must soon let it go.... To find that Gravity, taken so for granted, is really something eerie, Messianic, extrasensory in Earth's mindbody... (*GR* p.590)

The same intuitive concern emerges in the idea of 'mineral consciousness'. The significance of this is reasonably straightforward: that a vast movement is in progress all about, of which our own perception is inadequately narrow: 'that history as it's been laid on the world is only a fraction, an outward-and-visible-fraction. That we must also look to the untold, to the silence around us' (*GR* p.612). It

also injects life into the *apparently* inanimate; the same as Bland's transcendent realization; and the difference that allows this is one of perspective, of looking *beyond* conventionally-defined *lengths* of time. A fitting comment on this axiomatic fact is made, appropriately, by Walter Rathenau: '"You are constrained, over there, to follow it in time, one step after another. But here it's possible to see the whole shape at once [...] Is it any use to tell you that all you believe is real is illusion?"' (*GR* p.165). Real interaction with the natural world, identified tentatively by Cooper as one of Pynchon's 'Solutions'[28] and noted specifically in the case of Lyle Bland is played out by Slothrop as well. In juxtaposition to the Slothrop family's enslavement by *paper* ('Shit, money, and the Word, the three American truths' (*GR* p.28)) Tyrone is able almost to *care* for this lucrative resource - 'understanding that each tree is a creature, carrying on its individual life, aware of what's happening around it, not just some hunk of wood to be cut down' (*GR* p.552). The example is important as a *contrast*: an opposing force is at work in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and it is one that is worthy of more emphatic treatment than has perhaps been the case before.

The assertive 'counterforce' that is present throughout the novel as an affirmation of an ever-returning, constantly regenerating universe is evident in more than simply an emphasis on natural forces and their steadily-gained dominion. The fulfilled sexual relationship in *Gravity's Rainbow* is an important component in the mandalic unity that binds together the novel's principal conflicts. Its significance is not misplaced - in the context of human interactions it is the most significant gesture possible, integral in the cycle of death and

regeneration with which the linearly-conceived forces of the novel are at odds.

For Roger Mexico, his affair with Jessica is the only part of his life where something unfurls naturally without paranoias and neuroses intervening and obstructing his genuine convictions. He faces the apparent solidarity of his colleagues' superior awareness, 'that there must be more, beyond the senses, beyond death, beyond the Probabilities that are all Roger has to believe in...' (*GR* p.91) - but his anxiety and impending alienation turn him instinctively towards Jessica. The two lovers in this sense form a crossroads, since they are both constantly under threat from and profoundly affected by their respective occupations, but at the same time are open to the most consummate and transfiguring rapture. As such a point of intersection they automatically demand our attention. There is no higher expression of abandoned positive will between individuals, and Pynchon scatters enough sterile, nasty contrasts for us to appreciate this. Significant in the sexual union portrayed here is the rebellion against linear time. The War/System setting surrounding Roger and Jessica forces Roger to see his affair in specifically linear terms. In this light (that is, the System's method of measurement) the relationship is belittled and undermined: 'The time Roger and Jessica have spent together, totaled up, still only comes to hours. And all their spoken words to less than one average SHAEF memorandum. And there is no way, first time in his career, that the statistician can make these figures mean anything' (*GR* p.121). Its worth and importance must therefore reside inside a non-linear framework, wherein intensity - 'it is love, it is amazing' (*GR* p.120) - surpasses duration. The basic oppositions of Hayles's circle

and line are reproduced fairly exactly, as the 'Home Front' for the two lovers seeks 'not too subtly' to 'subvert love in favour of work, abstraction, required pain, bitter death' (*GR* p.41). This imposes a systematized authority of linear control on a timeless euphoria: the purity of love's opposition in the context of the war becomes increasingly clear; and thus also the aptness of Roger and Jessica as the novel's most sympathetically portrayed couple.

Their clandestine meeting place is symbolic of their fugitive coupling, a stubborn hold-out against the omnipotent forces around them. There is a kind of 'enclave' here, ironically opposite to the conventional thermodynamical enclave. The war in its conception opposes entropy, and therefore is an ever-increasing enclave in itself (and thus more and more likely to succumb to chaos and annihilation, as it ultimately does) while within this movement Roger and Jessica find yet another enclave, an obstinate and irreverent gesture of frank, uncomplicated love. By 'opposing the opposition' it is an act of danger, but also of pure benificence: 'It is marginal, hungry, chilly - most times they're too paranoid to risk a fire - but it's something they want to keep, so much that to keep it they will take on more than propaganda has ever asked them for. They are in love. Fuck the war' (*GR* p.41). The worlds they have upturned are delicately balanced in the hideaway, and a careful ambivalence of fragility and unyielding vitality emerges:

> an empty milk bottle holding scarlet blossoms from a spurge in a garden a mile down the road: [she] reaches to where her cigarettes ought to be but aren't. Halfway out now from under the covers, she

> hangs, between the two worlds, a white, athletic tension in this cold room. (*GR* p.53)

Whatever fragile beauty their condemned affair can yield, Pynchon does not allow the presence of war to drift far from their consciousness. More than disturbing what they have attained, it is an omnipresent curse on their emotions. This piece of emotional emancipation held against their war-governed world spills over onto several other characters, and this, if nothing else, alerts us to the significance of their union. Pirate Prentice is struck by the sight of them together, and there is a feeling of the opposites and polarities that characterize the war and its supremacy fusing in these two lovers and losing their malevolence: 'He is suddenly, dodderer and ass, taken by an ache in the skin, a simple love for them both that asks nothing but their safety, and that he'll always manage to describe as something else - "concern," you know, "fondness..."' (*GR* p.35). The aura that follows them here is a consistent presence and their bond is almost too radically at odds with the events and attitudes around them: 'They confuse everyone. They look so innocent. People immediately want to protect them: censoring themselves away from talk of death, business, duplicity when Roger and Jessica are there' (*GR* p.121). The relationship is to some extent a reference point for the constellated polarities that proliferate elsewhere. While Pointsman's binary world of ones and zeroes treads methodically on accompanied by his routinized masturbation ('a joyless constant, an institution in his life' (*GR* p.141)), the contradictions weighed against Roger and Jessica are shed in uninhibited love-making and union.

From this central position shades and elements of the unity spread outwards. Their attendance at the advent service conjures an atmosphere of harmony and bending of barriers, despite the overwhelming presence of the war behind the scene. The church choir there accommodates one black man amongst all the whites. The difference is superficially slight, but hints of a joining together that expands in significance, 'bringing brown girls to sashay among these nervous Protestants, down the ancient paths the music had set' (*GR* p.129). This feeling is the one that drifts in their wake, that despite their eventual (and inevitable) demise, and the occasional idiocy of Roger's mind, a scatter of positives and near-reconciliations lies behind them on the paths they have trodden. He may still lack a frame of reference in which to perceive, and hence evaluate his most intimate and profound communication with Jessica (in a sense of understanding rather than as dialogue) but it is the absolute contradiction of the war-bureaucracy he is trapped inside. The point is understated delicately by Pynchon, but the message is clear: 'She forgets her annoyance, comes up out of the fat paisley chair to hold him, and *how does she know* [...] muscles, touches, skins confused, high, blooded - knew exactly what Roger meant to say?' (*GR* p.58). Roger does not *need* to express the reality of what is happening, and Jessica can be equally at a loss for description or explanation, as she says: '"...pictures, well scenes, keep flashing *in*, Roger. By themselves, I mean I'm not *making* them...' (*GR* p.122). Perhaps because they cannot discuss or explain the truth of their feelings, there is no place for this in the world they inhabit - such ultimately-conceived emotions must inevitably become tenuous when set against earth-bound physicality and the demands of the war. The pathos

is startlingly acute, and the passage at the end of 'Beyond The Zero' is among the most poignant in the novel. The heights that they have attained, however, remain unchallenged, and the sadness is not thereby diminished, but more properly in perspective:

> in another time that might have sounded romantic, but in a culture of death, certain situations are just more hep to the jive than others - but they're apart so much....
>
> You go from dream to dream inside me. You have passage to my last shabby corner, and there, among the debris, you've found life. I'm no longer sure which of all the words, images, dreams or ghosts are 'yours' and which are 'mine'. It's past sorting out. We're both being someone new now, someone incredible.... (*GR* p.177)

Peter Cooper talks of their affair as 'an end in itself',[29] its characteristics being that it is *not* founded on corrupted motivations such as the desire to control or manipulate. The completeness of this synthesis is such that Jessica can only think of Roger objectively when at a distance (*GR* p.126), and her view is then divisively changed.

The sexual positives are not exclusively those of Roger and Jessica. Their relationship is a convenient focus by virtue of its closely-followed development and sympathetic portrayal, but is only part of a larger thematic movement. In the meantime the amorous Slothrop continues shamelessly on his way, adding to his ever-growing catalogue of conquests. His relationship with Darlene, a nurse at St Veronica's hospital, invokes a blending of opposites that is comparable to Roger

and Jessica's union. We are shown again the radical conflict, the ideologies of suppression and manipulation - and the location of the opposition to this - in love, uninhibited coming together, unconscious impulses and actions.

As Slothrop and Darlene meet in the street, his immediate preoccupations fall aside as impending union wells up in both their minds. A quick glance at the external world sets in train the affirmation that is to be made: 'Tire tracks in the slush have turned to pearl, mellow pearl. Gulls cruise slowly against the high windowless brick walls of the district' (*GR* p.115). The habitual opposites of black and white immediately fuse in greys and indeterminate shades, and when Slothrop and Darlene are wrenched from the simple, elegant rapture of their love-making it is by the rocket, and is accompanied by a shocking reassertion of the antithetical colours: 'the room is full of noon, blinding white, [...] as the concussion drives in on them, [...] gone all to white and black lattice of mourning-cards' (*GR* p.119-20). The blacks and whites here are an unwanted focusing, a fundamental detraction from the intuitive and tenuously conscious qualities of the coupling.

Should contrast to the postive sexual unions discussed above be necessary, than it is present in abundance. The despicable Blicero and his uncertain minions Katje and Gottfried occupy scenes populated by grotesque sexual negatives: submssion, rôle reversal, masturbation, sadism; and all are framed by a (one time comforting?) context of deceptively innocent fairy-tale with more than a pinch of malice. Indeed, the whole rests easily inside a cocoon of childhood imagery that is ominously compatible with the extremes of Nazi ideology: 'this

Northern and ancient form, one they all know and are comfortable with - the strayed children, the wood-wife in the edible house, the captivity, the fattening, the Oven' (*GR* p.96). Katje provides the objectivity, but also admits the seriousness of their capitulation to the forces of exploitation: 'it's better, she believes, to enter into some formal, rationalized version of what, outside, proceeds without form or decent limit day and night' (*GR* p.96).

For Gottfried such awareness seems an improbable luxury. He is on the other side of the divide, *inside* the ritual, and unable to perceive its seductive power. A feeling of abandonment prevails, and far from positive, this is the measure of his loss to Blicero's world and the abuse of his sexuality and consciousness: 'Here he feels *taken*, at true ease. Without the War what could he have hoped for? But to be part of *this* adventure... [...] if not actually judged and damned, he's gone insane' (*GR* p.103). The scenes (including the sickening and unforgettable Brigadier Pudding sequence) are a necessary adjunct to the scenes already discussed. Sexuality, like other human attributes, is nakedly defenceless to the dark workings of a 'culture of death' (*GR* p.445), but the manifestations of that corruption are especially grotesque; an unwelcome truth Pynchon portrays with impressive candour.

Thus, fusion in the uncorrupted sexual act is a well-established constant in the novel. Roger and Jessica for all their individual flaws and idiosyncracies create something that transfigures them both - for Roger taking him beyond 'his bitterness, his darkness, run deeper than the War, the winter' (*GR* p.126) - and also those around them. Other indications of the same are scattered liberally - the eccentric Mrs Quoad professes to a broken, defensive existence without her husband

alive - '"He was my good health [...] I've had to become [...] all but an outright witch in pure self-defense"' (*GR* p.115). Slothrop, with his unpremeditated and consistently instinctive preterite responses to his world pursues his sexual adventuring with sincere enthusiasm. These occasions do not betray desire for exploitation for desire or control, as in the polluted flip-world of Blicero, but rather genuine desire to be in sympathy and connection with his surroundings. The impulse even stretches to the half-joking prospect of intercourse with Frieda the pig (*GR* p.575), but even here the motivation is of positive origin and not malicious or fetishist.

Sexual union is an obvious expression and embodiment of mandalic circularity, and appears in the novel as an emphatic counter to the various fragmented alternatives. Between Slothrop and Katje, as well as their own carnal act, is (geographically, from Holland to London) the semi-circular arc of the Rocket ('"Between you and me is not only a rocket trajectory, but also a life"' (*GR* p.209)). The image is of a living sexual analogue - 'a clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet [...] over its peak and down, plunging, burning, toward a terminal orgasm...' (*GR* p.223), but the rocket mirror-image, anti-mandalic and systematically doomed to annihilation, is purely negative. Its covenant in logical Biblical faithfulness is accordingly no gospel, but 'its own black-and-white bad news certainly as if it were the Rainbow, and they its children...' (*GR* p.209). In the novel's broader terms this is engaged by a sexual counterforce. For every rocket that finds its 'terminal orgasm' in the London target, Slothrop has already planted his seed, his most sincere gesture of life-assertion. To complete the picture, this joins the broken mandalas: Roger's circles

are superimposed on Slothrop's girl-stars; and the 'great airless arc' (*GR* p.223) of the V-2 is joined from the point of death/orgasm to a rebirth - both Slothrop's seed and the city-wide process observed by Gwenhidwy: '"Ah, I've been keep-ing my *own* map? Plot-ting da-ta from the maternity wards. The ba-bies born during this Blitz are al-so following a Poisson distribution you see"' (*GR* p.173).

The image is as timeless as the Great Serpent. Even in the terror of war, a natural balance is fighting for reassertion. This hope is present throughout the novel - 'up through cracks in the pavement, everywhere life may gain purchase, up rushes green summer '45' (*GR* p.502) - perhaps less hope than an inevitable thrust for equilibrium growing in proportion to the structures of civilization; maintaining the mandala, preserving the unity. This underlying truth is symptomatic of what Robert Shaw, a physicist and exponent of Chaos Theory expresses as the fact that '"You don't see something until you have the right metaphor to let you perceive it"'.[30] What better metaphor can there be than the mandala, the archetypal archetype - the expression of a constant glimpsed in Roger's statistics, a 'music, not without its majesty' (*GR* p.140), and something 'in the air, right here, right now' (*GR* p.86) that both is and dictates the essence of the cosmos.

NOTES: CHAPTER THREE

1. Bernard Duyfhuizen, 'Taking Stock: 26 Years since *V.* (Over 26 Books on Pynchon!)', *NOVEL*, 23 (1989), 75-88 (p.77).

2. Duyfhuizen, pp.75-6.

3. Duyfhuizen, p.77.

4. Duyfhuizen, p.81.

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8. William M. Plater, *The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon* (Bloomington and London, 1978), p.135.

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11. Cooper, p.84.

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13. James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (London: Sphere Cardinal, 1989), p.308.

14. N. Katherine Hayles, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.193.

15. Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1954), p.30.

16. Plater, p.62.

17. Plater, p.62

18. Plater, p.63.

19. Speer Morgan, '*Gravity's Rainbow*: What's the Big Idea?', in *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, edited by Richard Pearce (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), p.87.

20. Morgan, p.87.

21. Cooper, pp.136-7.

22. Morgan, p.97.

23. Morgan, p.97.

24. Plater, p.174.

25. Cooper, p.83.

26. Edward Mendelson, 'Introduction', in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p.6.

27. Cooper, p.83.

28. Cooper, p.80.

29. Cooper, p.80.

30. Gleick, p.262.

# CHAPTER FOUR: DRUG-EPISTEMOLOGIES

all of a sudden Slothrop picks up the scent of an unmistakable, no it can't be yes it is it's a REEFER! A-and it's burning someplace close by.

*Gravity's Rainbow*

## ONE: 'THE DOPE-FIEND NEEDS HIS DOPE' (*GR* p.66)

Pynchon's dopers, a disconnected, jumbled stratum of low-life individuals, form an omnipresent sub-community in *Gravity's Rainbow*. If they form a sub-community (albeit a 'community' not defined by spatial or temporal parameters), their significance forms a sub-text, a forum of action worthy of separate identification. Pynchon's attitude to this area of action and characterization is complex. It would be convenient to pronounce the dopers an unqualified positive in the novel's framework, but the idea cannot be accepted without extensive consideration and balancing of views. Indeed, seeking a concrete attitude to this area calls to mind some of the most fundamentally difficult concepts involved in an understanding of the novel. The situation can to a large extent be seen as an extrapolation of the opposition present in *The Crying of Lot 49* (discussed in Chapter One), where Oedipa's hardening intent to rationalize the complexities of her

situation are set against the antithetical loosening of the boundaries of ego played out by Mucho, consumed by his use of LSD. These polarities highlight the nature of the Cartesian-dominated civilization under scrutiny, and the issue is even more starkly at hand in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

On the positive side, the dopers form a kaleidoscopic mass of benevolent enjoyment - more as a method of existence than as simple diversion. We should remember *Gravity's Rainbow*'s provisional title *Mindless Pleasures*, of which the dopers' pastime is quite clearly one. This sits unambiguously inside Roger Mexico's classification of 'love, dreams, the spirit, the senses and the other second-class trivia that are found among the idle and mindless hours of the day' (*GR* p.177) that exists almost as a manifesto of optimism and positive assertion, at his vexing imminent estrangement from Jessica. The situation recalls Katherine Hayles's argument that in Pynchon's writing we are constantly reminded of the fact that narrative itself, both within the novel and between novel and reader, is a division, the 'possibility that the Text is an interface, on one side the Word, on the other reality'.[1] The black marketeer Semyavin in Zürich underlines the distinction to Slothrop thus: '"Information. What's wrong with dope and women? Is it any wonder the world's gone insane, with information come to be the only real medium of exchange"' (*GR* p.258). The dopers, whatever reality they inhabit, are placed firmly on the other side from the Word. Lines of communication, *methods* of communication are dangerous divisions, and it is a truth that the dopers have seen and attempt to avoid. Hence the more instinctive modes of expression such as the familiar 'hyeugh, hyeugh,' of Pig Bodine, and his 'dexterously rolling a reefer one-handed

on a cigarette paper he has first torn, with straightfaced bravura, in half' (*GR* p.370). The atmosphere is of good-natured but paranoid brotherhood. Pynchon prefers to characterize it as much with *impression* and *form* than spoken intention. That the Zone-emancipated Slothrop is steered by the plan to remove 'six *kilos*! of pure, top-grade Nepalese hashish!' (*GR* p.370) is only another 'pattern' that he comes to play, but *dope* is an appropriate focus for it. The same vital essence that Slothrop's garish dress-sense brings to the Casino is also the prerogative of the dope-dealers in Nice who have shoes 'in contrasting colors (such as orange on blue, and the perennial favorite, green on magenta)' (*GR* p.254). Raoul's party, and the Bodine-organized 'Runcible Spoon Fight' are among several instances of colourful chaos in which 'dopers and drinkers struggle together without shame' (*GR* p.245).

Pynchon's arch-doper Emil 'Säure' Bummer (his nickname unsurprisingly meaning 'acid') talks of the production of cocaine and establishes a critical metaphorical link between the Rocket and the dopers:

> 'the cocaine will appear first, at the edges, then the vegetable cut, the procaine, the lactose at the other well-known positions - a purple target, with the outer ring worth the most, and the bull's eye worth nothing. An anti-target. Certainly not the A4's idea of one, *eh, Rocketman.*' (*GR* p.376)

The same substance (potassium permanganate) is crucial both to the rocket and to cocaine, and these mutually-excluding (and mutually-defining) opposites take their place in the novel's most fundamental

division of linear arc and eternally-returning circle. They seek their transcendence in material and spiritual form respectively, in rocketing to the moon and dissolving the boundaries of a separate self.

The polarity locates drugs quite plainly in Pynchon's epistemology. They widen and enhance the senses, and in their extreme (LSD for example) allow a complete loss of subject-object duality and a fulfilled sense of place in the surrounding environment; they oppose symbolically and realistically the primacy of the Rocket, and are the preserve of the least malicious and exploitative characters of the novel. With reference to the last point, it is appropriate to class dopers as 'Preterite', in the same stark polarity as the anti-target of cocaine. Säure Bummer consistently questions and subverts what he sees as contrived grandeur, the pomposity of the Elect, for example in his argument about the relative merits of Beethoven and Rossini (*GR* p.440). In this sense the dopers fall into the category John Stark identifies as the theme of 'minority tastes', this encompassing 'powerless characters who have developed bizarre tastes in order to create a small area of their lives where they can resist the control of the powerful'.[2] It is the fate of such individuals to be the victims, the exploited schlemiels, protective of their limited spheres of influence. Hence Pynchon's description of the coolly-premeditated introduction of opium into China: 'This classic hustle is still famous, even today, for the cold purity of its execution [...] You win, China loses. Fantastic' (*GR* p.346). The perverted manipulation of 'market forces' even yields the unnatural distortion of 'look-alikes that were worth even more than cocaine' (*GR* p.375). Everywhere therefore, the frequent casualties of the System are the dopers - a persecuted minority in isolation perhaps,

but in a wider view they are a formidable community and by many indications appear to be a positively-charged force running through the novel. There is almost a proportional relationship in the fictional worlds Pynchon creates, between the damnation of individuals or groups by 'civilization' and the establishment and their importance and positive values demonstrated therein. He champions the lowest - those whose attitude to and relationship with their environment is the least complex and the most instinctive - as he does every item of waste or trivia, that are still (despite their apparent insignificance) equal parts of the vast continuity of a returning universe.

One unsettling but persistent point needs to be addressed, however. That the dopers are symbolic opponents of war and technology is not in question, but their loosening grip on 'reality' is on initial consideration a disquieting fact. Raoul's party is a doper's field day of harmless frolicking but is 'all out of shape, no focus to it'. They cease to determine anything, and simply 'dopers are looking around, blinking, smiling, saying yes in a number of ways' (*GR* p.246). In the same way the Bodine-organized merry-making in the Zone leads to complete ineffectiveness, where 'a good half of the crowd are out in the foothills of unconsciousness, and the rest are not exactly sure what's going on' (*GR* p.597). If such a loss of faculties is the inevitable destination, then can the dopers really represent a serious counterforce in the novel's design? The question recalls Oedipa in the previous novel who tells Dr Hilarius to 'face up to your social responsibilities' (*CL* p.94), while Mucho in the meantime is rendered effectively inoperative by LSD, and regardless of his personal fulfilment can have no further influence on those around him.

A distinction is presented late in *Gravity's Rainbow* that helps to elucidate the problem. Slothrop is talking to his father, a self-confessed 'doper all m'life':

> - I mean it was always understood that *this* would still be here when you got back, just the same, exactly the same, right?
> - Well ha-ha guess that's why we called 'em *vacations*, son! Cause you always do come back to old Realityland, don't you.
> - *You* always *did*. (*GR* p.699)

In this scenario the experience is controllable, accessible at will, but with no profound or lasting distortion of objective reality. Hence, 'Realityland' is still the determining environment, and that in which any responsibility has relevance. Slothrop fields the idea of shifting the emphasis away from 'Realityland'; the determining environment becomes completely different:

> A-and who sez it's a dream, huh? M-maybe it *exists*. Maybe there *is* a machine to take us away, take us completely, suck us out through the electrodes out of the skull 'n' into the Machine and live there forever with all the other souls it's got stored there. *It* could decide who it would suck out, a-and when. Dope never gave *you* immortality. You hadda come back, every time, into a dying hunk of smelly *meat*! But *We* can live forever. (*GR* p.699)

There remains a dilemma of moral responsibilty, that the promotion of the transcendence of objective reality ignores issues that are dictated

by the temporal and physical. This is the capitulation made by Mucho in *The Crying of Lot 49* where Pynchon is tentatively ambiguous as regards the merits of taking this route. In *Gravity's Rainbow* this sentiment is Pig Bodine's, the question of whether 'he'll *have* to let go? *But somebody's got to hold on, it couldn't happen to all of us - no that'd be too much...'* (*GR* p.741). As is the case so often, Slothrop is the natural focus of attention. He undergoes a drift towards a wholly connected universe which is manifestly a positive progress. The ego-less consummation is not specifically drug-induced, but Slothrop is unmistakably a doper, and his steadily-loosening sense of self is a natural extension of the use of these consciousness-widening tools. It is a genuine, valid reaction to every archetype and unconscious constant that points towards an eternally-returning universe; not the linearized corruption that enshrouds the rest of the novel. Katherine Hayles addresses this issue:

> But if to overcome the subject-object duality completely is to merge with the 'mind-body' of the cosmos, it is also to cease to exist as a person localized in time and space, and thus to be unable to influence the temporal unfolding of events. Those who have made the transition, for example Walter Rathenau and Lyle Bland, cease to care how events unfold in secular history, for the good reason that to them secular history is an illusion. Something of the same indifference occurs in those who immerse themselves in the 'mindless pleasures' that are the proletarian equivalent to Rilkean transcendence. If from one perspective this is salvation, from another point of view it is a betrayal of the revolution by becoming

> incapable of effective social action. To stay at the barricades, however, is to remain in the realm of cognitive thought, thus contributing, through the very act of remaining conscious, to Their enterprise.[3]

The most acceptable balance of these ideas would be perhaps to acknowledge Pynchon's dexterity in framing the alternatives in delicate enough fashion not to advocate either forcefully. It has always been a painful and damning process attempting to perceive instructive didacticism in Pynchon's writing. A useful structure for incorporating the ambivalence might exist in (again) the mandala, simply in the sense that opposing impulses of 'social resposibility' grounded in a sharply-defined self, and positive capitulation that passes beyond subject-object duality, can be located around a universal centre that binds both alternatives in a higher, all-encompassing reality. The same action is at once 'betrayal of the revolution' and also a 'salvation', and we should perhaps be content to accommodate both within the same reading of the novel.

## TWO: 'A ROUTE IN' - LSD RESEARCH AND *GRAVITY'S RAINBOW*

Having attempted an integration of Pynchon's portrayal of drugs and dopers more fully into the textual whole, it is interesting to examine further the connection that these elements form with some wider aspects of the novel. Katherine Hayles is helpful in defining a strand in modern thinking that she defines as the 'field concept', discussed earlier, that can be easily located in the conception of *Gravity's Rainbow*. This is the sense of oneness that connects the 'Other Side' through the crossroads of Slothrop and the other points of intersection, with traditional perceptions of reality. It is also Pynchon's invention, Oneirine, a drug that reveals the absolute *connectedness* of all things. This fact is at the base of a transcendence of subject-object duality and is characterized in *Gravity's Rainbow* as a drug presented as a possible 'route In' for Tchitcherine (*GR* p.703). However, the relevance passes beyond Oneirine and the several characters who traverse the boundaries of the strictly-defined ego. The field concept is the basis from which Pynchon approaches nearly *all* phenomena in the novel, and the idea is a useful one in linking the myriad of unconventional moments and experiences that populate the pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Also a 'route In' is an approach which binds together many aspects of the novel into a more all-embracing understanding of the unconscious and the elusive, difficult concepts surrounding it in *Gravity's Rainbow*. With any study of the novel more than one theoretical framework or frame of reference is often applicable to the same area. So far, the most

useful unifying symbol has been the Great Serpent, a mandalic image of the ever-returning cycle, of fundamental importance in Buddhist and Hindu thinking, and also recognized extensively by Jung as an archetype of the unconscious. The emblem can thus be considered a fundamental linking device with an omnipresent, *connected* universe. Katherine Hayles looks to this point and opens it out: 'When the subject-object duality is considered as an illusion that is imposed on reality rather than inherent in it, all we must do to recover the wholeness is to abandon the perspective that leads us to believe it is real. This provides one explanation for Slothrop's final dissolution.'[4] It provides considerably more as well - indeed, every element in the novel that questions the 'primacy of the "conscious" self' (*GR* p.153). Hayles's comment suggests that we should approach the novel with as much of the abandonment of perspective she refers to as possible. She continues, placing Slothrop's final scattering in a less conventional context: 'Slothrop has arrived at a transcendent realization of the essential connectedness of all things. In Zen terms he has achieved satori, experiencing the self as a manifestation of the Universal One.'[5] The many paths of approach this opens up recalls Fritjof Capra's combination of modern physics and Eastern philosophies, aptly reinforcing the emphasis here of the connectedness of all things regardless of the intellectual discipline used as a mode of perception. To be investigated here is an approach which is admittedly Western in its conception, but is refreshingly aware of the fact, and fosters an attitude that resembles the abandonment of subject-object perspective suggested by Katherine Hayles. As an appropriate extension of the theme of drugs and dopers already discussed it is based on the attempts of

Stanislav Grof, a psychiatrist working in Czechoslovakia and the United States, to 'outline the cartography of the human unconscious'[6] by the use of LSD research. He is fully aware that the method is only one of many possible for conducting such a study, but it presents easily-processed data, and without a large degree of artificial distortion. He explains:

I have been quite encouraged by the fact that in various areas of human culture there are numerous indications that the maps of consciousness emerging from my LSD work are fully compatible and sometimes parallel with other existing systems. [...] This parallel between the LSD experiences and a variety of phenomena manifested without chemical facilitation provides additional supportive evidence for the unspecific and catalyzing effect of LSD.[7]

His study is particularly helpful with regard to *Gravity's Rainbow*, since it also allows us to consolidate the array of drugs and dopers into a more unified movement of Pynchon's Preterite, linking them and the uncontrived honesty of their motivations to many of the most profound moments in the novel. This approach admits the irony of making connections that are not necessarily inherent in the text, but is as plausible as Hayles's Zen comparison, using simply a different approach to address the same area. It is also no accident that Pynchon's strikes at defining an ego-less, non-Cartesian basis within our present society are frequently via drugs - for example Oneirine, cocaine, and LSD (the latter conspicuously so in *The Crying of Lot 49*).

Grof's introduction considers the misinterpretation of the potential of LSD in American society, and the specific emphasis on reckless abuse that ignores its wider usefulness and relevance:

> Almost every day sensation-hungry journalists would bring new reports about the horrors and disasters due to unsupervised experimentation [...] These reports created an image of LSD as a diabolic drug and provided sufficient background for a witch-hunting response from parents, teachers, ministers, police authorities, and legislators.[8]

There is something of an analogue to Pynchon's writing in the sense of not being able to accommodate his flexible, responsive attitude to 'self' inside a conventional critical approach. It is a difficulty of discussion that has perhaps contributed to the tendency of Pynchon criticism to over-emphasize the linearity in *Gravity's Rainbow* and attempted to apply this to the whole novel. Meeting this area head-on is, it seems, a problematic task, such as is an acceptance of the positive and therapeutic uses of LSD. Because it involves areas that Western thinking has not yet integrated intuitively into its vocabulary it is most easily dealt with by narrow classification, 'pigeon-holing', and by implication distortion - Jung comments that 'with us, philosophy and theology are still in the pre-psychological stage where only the assertions are listened to [...] while the authority that makes them has, by general consent, been deposed as outside the scope of discussion'.[9] Pynchon, however, will not let us do this. The subject

is conclusively integrated in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and must be examined accordingly.

Grof is particularly concerned that the LSD session-derived data should be shown to be valid from the point of view of whether there are 'effects of LSD that are purely pharmacological in nature, are unrelated to the personality structure of the subject, and occur without exception in every subject who takes a sufficient dose of the drug'.[10] His research data is meticulous, comprising the analysis of over 3,800 records from LSD sessions the result being that there was not 'a single symptom that would be an absolutely constant component in all of them and could thus be considered truly invariant'.[11] This does add considerable cudos to the heuristic value of LSD as a tool for the exploration of the human unconscious, as well as the manifold parallels between LSD-induced experiences and methods in many cultures and religions worldwide. On this point Grof comments as follows:

> powerful procedures have existed in many ancient and so-called primitive cultures to facilitate such experiences in individuals as well as groups [...] The techniques employed by these cultures cover a wide range of methods [...] such as those developed within the Hindu and Buddhist traditions.'[12]

*The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is a particularly appropriate sacred work that by its intended application as guidance through the process of death and ultimately transcendence or rebirth parallels remarkably closely the experiences of the perinatal stage identified by Dr Grof and discussed below.

The significance of the LSD framework here is how it so aptly complements the areas of emphasis with which Pynchon is also concerned. It helps to demonstrate many diverse parts of the novel - experiences, attitudes and levels of perception - residing within one ever-present movement. This, not surprisingly, is the movement that reaches its furthest transition in the transcendence of subject-object duality. It is in a sense the field concept applied to psychological phenomena. For the troubled reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* it also presents verifiable scientific data forming a framework for some of the more difficult aspects of the novel. The critical key to a fulfilled reading is, it would seem, the jettisoning of the Cartesian perspective of subject versus object. This is the experience of David Leverenz whose initial 'linear' reading is cheated by the dissolution of Slothrop: 'My involvement with Slothrop, like my need to understand, had shown my membership in the Firm.'[13] Dr Grof's LSD research provides a means for reaching the same conclusion. It does so via the observation of LSD experiences, which are unusually appropriate parallels to the unfolding experiences in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon's Oneirine *is* the field concept - 'the discovery that *everything is connected*, everything in the Creation' (*GR* p.703) - and in less hypothetical form LSD, and its influence is present in the novel's most fundamental origins. Grof's study is applicable to a reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* in three major respects, which are to be considered in turn. It describes the 'perinatal' experience, that is, of death and rebirth, the cycle at the novel's core and manifested variously throughout; the 'transpersonal' experience in which consciousness is observed to pass beyond the bounds of the separate individual; and the natural recurrence of various

symbols and archetypes. In the final instance, Grof's findings serve as a useful starting-point for a consideration of the substantial presence of the mandala in *Gravity's Rainbow* - both as a symbol and as a structuring device.

* * *

(i)

As a door into the realms of the unconsciousness, LSD is particularly effective in relocating the birth experience, from 'Primal Union' inside the womb, to the labour contractions to propulsion through the birth canal to ultimate separation from the mother. The same experiences are present in *Gravity's Rainbow*, albeit indirectly so. Grof classifies these stages as Basic Perinatal Matrices, and associates each stage with specific experiences re-enacted under LSD therapy. He emphasizes the fundamental significance of the birth experience with considerable insight, most importantly that 'the similarity between birth and death - the startling realization that the beginning of life is the same as its end - is the major philosophical issue that accompanies perinatal experiences'.[14] This is closely tied to the central canon of circularity, of the death and rebirth cycle portrayed in the novel. What he continues to say is of considerable relevance to parts of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Take, for example, the case of Lyle Bland, a minion of the System until his metamorphosis of realization. Grof comments thus that 'even hard-core materialists, positivistically oriented scientists, skeptics and cynics, and uncompromising atheists

and antireligious crusaders such as the Marxist philosophers suddenly became interested in a spiritual search after they confronted these levels in themselves'.[15] A major characteristic of such revelation in the novel is the loosening of the boundaries of ego. It is exemplified in Slothrop and allies him to the cyclically-resonating universe sensed throughout, at a merciful remove from the deluded scientists and profit-mongers proliferating elsewhere. Grof points to the first Basic Perinatal Matrix as an illustration of this experience (it is, we should note, difficult to speak of 'experience' without an implicit subject-object interaction, and hence Slothrop's and others' 'experiences' should equally be understood as 'enactments' or simply 'occurrences'): 'An individual can, for example, talk about this experience as being contentless and yet all-containing [...] He refers to a complete loss of ego and yet states that this consciousness has expanded to encompass the whole universe.'[16]

A parallel to the utter fulfilment of the womb experience is dreamt by Slothrop in the dream-sequence discussed above in Chapter Three, images of fertility centring in an archetypal woman-figure giving birth to all creation in a setting of clean bright waters (*GR* p.447). In Grof's observations a subject recalls the experience graphically, and again ego-loss is a crucial element:

> 'I lost my sense of individuality; my ego dissolved, and I became all of existence. Sometimes this experience was intangible and contentless, sometimes it was accompanied by many beautiful visions - archetypal images of Paradise, the ultimate cornucopia [...] I *was*

the ocean, animals, plants, the clouds - sometimes all these at the same time.'[17]

Pynchon keeps the ideas at careful distance by specifying that these images are contained in a *dream* but delicately draws the significance out into the open with the prophetic - 'This dream will not leave him' (*GR* p.447) - in fact it signals a source and destination towards which Slothrop progresses, and with which he ultimately connects, even though this culmination is beyond the reach of the senses. The idea of return implicit in the birth-experience fulfilment is perfectly compatible with the universe as overseen by the tail-eating Serpent, and Slothrop himself dramatizes a similar impulse. David Cowart points out that Slothrop 'travels in a giant circle on the map of Europe: from London [...] then, come full circle, back to London, where the falling rockets started it all'.[18] This final observation is of Slothrop on a record album photograph taken 'near an old rocket-bomb site, out in the East End, or South of the River' (*GR* p.742), but even this tenuous clue does gently confirm the circle of return he circumscribes. The same subject observed by Grof in the example above relates exactly this impulse of return as a fundamental motivation within which Slothrop is comfortably placed:

'The craving for reinstitution of the state of real fulfilment that was once experienced in the womb appeared to be the ultimate motivating force of every human being [...] It became clear to me that here was the answer to mankind's most fundamental dilemma: this insatiable craving and need cannot be satisfied by any degree of

> achievement and success in the external world. The only answer is to reconnect with this place in one's mind, in one's own unconscious.''[19]

The impulse is one governing, it would seem, any search for fulfilment or transcendence. This reinforces the irony of Rocket 00000 considerably. Its symbolic significances are manifold, but from this point of view it becomes a *womb* surrounding the embryo Gottfried. Pynchon is unequivocal in his portrayal of this:

> The glove is the cavity into which the Hand fits, as the 00000 is the womb into which Gottfried returns.
>
> Stuff him in. Not a Procrustean bed, but modified to take him. The two, boy and Rocket, concurrently designed. Its steel hindquarters bent so beautifully... he fits well. (*GR* p.751)

The image is the final damnation of Blicero's Rocket-madness and technology's assault on an unchangeable universe. *Their* transcendence is constructed with violation and aggression - a hard-edged masochistic rocket-womb that will obliterate itself in a linear arc. As Gottfried 'returns' to this *mockery* of the life source, spiritual transcendence elsewhere lies in true return, that which was not cynically perverted by Kekulé's misinterpreted dream or the multitude of similar assaults on the natural course. The mirror-image nihilism is to respond to the 'craving for reinstitution' by constructing a material womb, and this final image of *Gravity's Rainbow* is a uniting one, taking the fusion of man and technology to its ultimate conclusion: Gottfried and the rocket

'are mated to each other' (*GR* p.751), and the dark chuckling behind Pynchon's zany Rocket Limericks assumes a deathly, malicious relevance.

The second distinguishable phase of perinatal experience provides an equally useful parallel to aspects of the novel. The phase is characteristic of antagonism with the Mother, and produces intense awareness of mortality, identifiable as a confusion of the birth/death agony. Grof labels it a 'no exit' situation, in which 'the individual [...] sees that human existence is meaningless, yet feels a desperate need to find meaning in life'.[20] This is a useful description of, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa's 'exitlessness' (*CL* p.118), and in *Gravity's Rainbow* looks towards the impulse to seek transcendence in material terms. It represents conscious attempts to overcome the limitations of naturally 'dying' organisms and processes (such as entropy) which attempt to answer to the 'meaningless' intuitions otherwise inspired. The phase locates desperation and nihilism inside a larger process that ultimately surmounts both feelings, and as such is analogous to that view of the novel which perceives one-way processes of deathward technology consumed *inside* a larger circularity that is at once corrupted and yet all-encompassing.

The progression implicit here is that originating in passage through the birth canal, a difficult and unpleasant process, but one prompting widening perspectives. Grof's description links with an important thematic strand in *Gravity's Rainbow*. He describes it thus:

> a subject will typically scrutinize the value system that has previously dominated his life. He has to reconsider the sensibleness of complicated power schemes as compared to a simple

> and quiet existence; the relevance of love and interpersonal relationships versus professional ambitions aimed at status, fame, and possessions; and the emotional value of pursuing shallow and promiscuous sexual adventures instead of cultivating one meaningful love relationship.[21]

One could almost identify a 'counterforce' therein, of complementary relevance to Pynchon's own as portrayed in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Grof's description is an uncannily accurate summary of Roger Mexico's developing awareness and reactions thereto. For example his view of Jeremy Beaver:

> he is every assertion the fucking War has ever made - that we are meant for work and government, for austerity: and these shall take priority over love, dreams, the spirit, the senses and the other second-class trivia that are found among the idle and mindless hours of the day.... Damn them, they are wrong. They are insane. (*GR* p.177)

The force is hardly attributable only to Mexico. Enzian's horrifying realization of the extent to which he has been abused and exploited in the final pages is of the same origin. The feelings they vocalize are crucial ones in Pynchon's writing because of the transition they embody between Elect and Preterite, those who know and exist in the System, Their conspiracies, yet are given the insight to perceive the wider deeper reality also present.

(ii)

It is certainly apt that Roger Mexico, unwittingly or otherwise, finds himself a participant in what Grof describes as 'transpersonal experiences'. The perinatal experiences discussed above are not infrequent elements of LSD experimentation and represent a constant affinity of the individual with the universal cycles of death and rebirth not unlike the Buddhist Bardo, echoes of which are equally discernible in Pynchon's writing. Less frequent, and by implication located more deeply in the realms of the unconscious are transpersonal experiences. These commonly appear *after* a working through and integrating of psychodynamic (that is, accessible in usual states of consciousness) and perinatal levels. This suggests that they are concerned with the widest and most far-reaching 'experience' in the unconscious. For Mexico, it is his relationship with Jessica that treads in this ethereal territory. Grof describes the phenomenon of 'Experience of Dual Unity' thus: 'The subject experiences various degrees of loosening and losing of his ego boundaries and merging with another person into a state of unity and oneness [such as] the unitive fusion with a sexual partner (with or without the element of genital union).'[22] It is a rapturous height of experience unlocked by an LSD session, but one of which Pynchon is intuitively aware and reproduces in delicate form. He dramatizes the shifting depths of the unconscious that break through into our waking thoughts and actions and symbolizes by so doing an ease and positive affinity with the surrounding universe. For Roger Mexico, his conscious can scarcely accommodate it, but the feeling is unmistakable:

> And there've been moments, more of them lately too - times when face-to-face there has been no way to tell which of them is which. Both of them at the same time feeling the same eerie confusion... something like looking in a mirror by surprise but... more than that, the feeling of actually being joined... When after - who knows? two months, a week? they realize, separate, again, what's been going on, that Roger and Jessica were merged into a joint creature unaware of itself.... In a life he has cussed, again and again, for its need to believe so much in the trans-observable, here is the first, the very first real magic: data he can't argue away. (*GR* p.38)

This passage is more powerful for its position just after a description of the affair between Pirate Prentice and Scorpia Mossmoon. This is a liaison of nasty opposites, the 'incredible black-and-white Scorpia' (*GR* p.35), temporarily emancipated by the absent Clive, taunting Prentice with what he sees as his 'last chance'. The situation is one of simultaneously attracting and repelling poles, a taut and difficult position, and a harsh contrast to the instinctive synthesis that appears in the description of Roger and Jessica.

By observing such instances inside the framework provided by Grof it is easier to sense the collective effect that is emerging, that sympathetic human feelings like Mexico's are part of the same movement that leads into ultimately, cosmic unity. In simplified terms Grof sees transpersonal experiences against a background of 'the three-dimensional phenomenal world as we know it from our normal states of consciousness', in which 'an individual experiences himself as existing within the

boundaries of his physical body, which separate him distinctly from the rest of the world'.[23] By contrast, transpersonal experiences are summarized as 'experiences involving an expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the usual ego boundaries and beyond the limitations of time and/or space'.[24] These experiences traverse entirely the definitions of 'objective reality' and usual ego boundaries. In their most extreme versions the subject's consciousness appears to 'encompass elements that do not have any continuity with his usual ego identity and that cannot be considered simple derivatives of his experiences in the three-dimensional world'.[25] Thus in a relatively coherent, though 'rich and ramified group of phemomena'[26] a broad sweep of Pynchon's characters and portrayals are incorporated. Perfectly paralleled here is the abandonment of subject-object duality that characterizes Katherine Hayles's thesis as well as a more general rebellion against the Cartesian division of self and universe.

At a reasonably primary level in these transpersonal phenomena are what Grof terms Ancestral Experiences. It is a remarkably sensible concept even in conventional terms when considered carefully, that the biological connection with parents and ancestors should be capable of being experienced on some level, even if not normally perceived. Grof states:

> The individual feels that his memory has transcended its usual limits and that he is in touch with information related to the life of his biological ancestors. Sometimes, such experiences are related to comparatively recent history and more immediate ancestors on the maternal or paternal side, such as parents or grandparents.

> In an extreme form, however, they can reach back many generations or even centuries.[27]

In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon introduces the idea at a relatively early stage. The example used is appropriately the Hereros, enduringly symbolic in the novel of tacit commitment to the peaceful stability of a cyclical universe. Edwin Treacle is talking to Roger Mexico: '"There are peoples - these Hereros for example - who carry on business every day with their ancestors. The dead are as real as the living. How can you understand them without treating both sides of the wall of death with the same scientific approach?"' (*GR* p.153).

The 'Great Serpent' passage (*GR* p.412) already discussed as a pivotal intersection point is also representative of an experience located in Grof's observations. He refers to what is termed 'Oneness with Life and All Creation':[28]

> The consciousness of all living matter can also be associated with the explorations of the contradictions and conflicts intrinsic to life, with attempts to estimate the relative power of life's self-preserving forces versus self-destructive potentials, and with an assessment of the viability of life as a cosmic phenomenon. Experiences of this kind can result in an enhanced awareness of and sensitivity to ecological problems related to technological development and rapid industrialization.[29]

The economy of this definition is almost surprising in its lucid relevance to the central issues of *Gravity's Rainbow*. From its rather

epicentral position (almost central in the chronology of the book as well as thematically) the Great Serpent passage, and its corresponding standing in Grof's theoretical framework leads into several integrally-connected sub-strands. The idea of 'Oneness with Life and All Creation' in Grof's vocabulary is one that develops conceptually throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. This is the persistent presence that suggests a preference for Peter Cooper's critical interpretation over William Plater's, as discussed in Chapter Three. Slothrop is as ever a prominent intersection point for the development. He enacts an awareness that joins easily to this revelatory experience discussed above, a state that links perinatal and transpersonal experiences in Grof's discussion. It is a heightened sensitivity to the natural world that proceeds comfortably from the feeling described above:

> there is an increased sensitivity and enjoyment of the perceptual nuances discovered in the external world. The perception of the environment has a certain primary quality; every sensory stimulus, be it visual, acoustic, olfactory, gustatory, or tactile, appears to be completely fresh and new, and, at the same time, unusually exciting and stimulating. Subjects talk about *really* seeing the world for the first time in their lives, about discovering entirely new ways of listening to music, and finding endless pleasure in smells and tastes.[30]

With Slothrop, this stage appears just before his 'crossroads' experience (*GR* p.626). For him it stands at the leading edge of a profounder unity:

> he likes to spend whole days naked, ants crawling up his legs, butterflies lighting on his shoulders, watching the life on the mountain, getting to know shrikes and capercaille, badgers and marmots. Any number of directions he ought to be moving in, but he'd rather stay right here for now. (*GR* pp.622-3)

The leap from this state of effectively only sharpened sensitivity to fuller absorption and identification with environment might seem substantial, but with Slothrop the passage is smooth and unforced, just as Grof's classification of perinatal and transpersonal is distinguished only by the subject's development between the early and advanced LSD sessions in his research. Slothrop's awareness is a precursor to his more or less complete dissolution into his surroundings. In the meantime he is able to perceive that 'each tree is a creature' and 'not just some hunk of wood to be cut down' (*GR* p.552). Linking this with Grof's definition of 'plant consciousness' is straightforward. Especially applicable to Slothrop is Grof's observation of *sympathy* in this experience:

> Several subjects, for example, have pondered over the purity and unselfishness of plant existence and have seen plant life as a model for ideal human conduct [...] They are in direct contact with all four elements - earth, water, air, and fire (sun) - and their ability to transform cosmic energy is absolutely indispensable for life on this planet. Plants are uncontaminated by questions about purpose, [...] rather they seem to represent pure being in the here and now, the ideal of many mystical and religious schools.[31]

Moreover, Grof's observation of animal identification as a specifically primary variety of transpersonal experience has parallels in Slothrop's rôle as Pig-Hero. He finds companionship with a real pig, Frieda, and despite the obvious ridiculousness of the pig-suit, there is implied a deep affinity in Slothrop's rôle - 'the pig a wandering eastern magus' sharing Slothrop's intimacies and minutiae of day-to-day survival (*GR* pp.573-5).

In the same way, the reference to 'mineral consciousness' and Lyle Bland's realization that 'Earth is a living critter' (*GR* p.590) are symptomatic of another of Grof's observations:

> subjects often consider the possibility that consciousness is a basic cosmic phenomenon related to the organization of energy, and that it exists throughout the universe [...] Episodes of consciousness of inorganic matter can be accompanied by various insights of a philosophical and religious relevance, they can mediate a new understanding of animism and pantheism.[32]

The instances discussed above involve identification with, and awareness of wholly external factors, that is, to do with a projection from and breaking down of barriers with the individual body image. Equally significant is an acknowledgement of shrinking *and* expansion of consciousness that exists inside the human body, and Pynchon patently understands the place that such awareness has in the less definable workings of the psyche. From the opening pages of the novel, with his 'peculiar sensitivity to what is revealed in the sky' (*GR* p.26) Slothrop is disproportionately aware of and dictated to by his penis, something

linked inextricably to whatever it was 'back in a room, early in Slothrop's life, a room forbidden to him now' (*GR* p.208). In opposition to this paranoia and lack of knowledge about the motivating sources of his most active organ is a sequence Grof would classify as 'Organ, Tissue, and Cellular Consciousness'. He observes that it is possible for 'the individual's consciousness [...] to be confined to areas smaller than the usual body image; in most instances it involves the parts of the subject's body and physiological processes that under normal circumstances are not accessible to awareness'.[33] For Slothrop the experience is graphic - as an additional example it demonstrates Pynchon's intuition for the expansive potentials of the conscious, inside the most comprehensive cosmic scenario:

> but later on, it will occur to him that he was - this may sound odd, but he was somehow, actually, well, *inside his own cock.* If you can imagine such a thing. Yes, inside the metropolitan organ entirely, all other colonial tissue forgotten and left to fend for itself, his arms and legs it seems *woven* among vessels and ducts, his sperm roaring louder and louder, getting ready to erupt, somewhere below his feet.... Maroon and evening cuntlight reaches him in a single ray through the opening at the top, refracted through the clear juices flowing up around him. He is enclosed. Everything is about to come, come incredibly, and he's helpless here in this exploding *emprise*... red flesh echoing... an extraordinary sense of *waiting to rise*.... (*GR* p.470)

The example is demonstrative of a perception of the self that assumes an arbitrariness of barriers equal to that already witnessed with supposed 'externals'. What Pynchon intends and what Grof's study allows us to see even more easily, is an acceptance of a universe in which, patently, everything *is* connected.

* * *

(iii)

Thus far, Grof's framework has been useful as a means of looking at a number of instances in the novel where the barriers of 'self' are transcended both inwardly and outwardly; bringing the individual into the same eternal movement that embraces all that is perceived as the natural world. Their significance in this discussion, though, is that they are experiences still based on what is normally perceived in the conventional three-dimensional world. However, the novel and Grof's study also incorporate more profound phenomena that are at another remove. In Grof's classification he names them 'Experiential Extensions beyond the Framework of "Objective Reality"'.[34] They include the numerous occurrences and uses of symbols and archetypes - elements not perceived in 'normal' states of consciousness, and belonging thus to Jung's 'psychic heredity'[35], forms that are common to all and indicate a universal whole of which we are all part. The images recorded by Grof cover a wide range of cultural and religious symbolism, and several are present in Pynchon's writing:

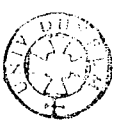
> Many individuals undergoing LSD treatment have had visions of complicated geometrical compositions closely resembling oriental mandalas [...] The most frequent symbols observed in the sessions were the cross, the six-pointed star of David, Indoiranian swastika, the ancient Egyptian ankh (Nile Cross or *crux ansata*), the lotus flower, the Taoist yin-yang, the Hindu sacred phallus (Shiva lingam), the diamond and other jewels, the Buddhist wheel of death and rebirth, and the circle (frequently appearing as the archetypal gigantic shake Uroboros devouring its tail).[36]

Immediately obvious with reference to *Gravity's Rainbow*, are the Uroboros and swastika, both of which are underlying symbols of unity and eternal return, but have been perverted and manipulated by chemistry and Nazism respectively. The ubiquity of the mandala as a living emblem in the novel should not be understated. It is present in the geography and ethos of the Herero village (with its mirror-image in the Schwarzkommando insignia, and the similarly-configured Raketen-Stadt), the Great Serpent (opposed by Kekulé's architecture of carbon molecules), the Kazakh singing duel, and numerous rocket images. As has already been mentioned, the journey of Slothrop follows a roughly circular route, thus investing the novel's central figure with a unifying significance, embodying the mandala in his own approach to physical and spiritual union with the cosmos. Thomas Schaub notes that Jung's preoccupation with the image relies on its positive psychological significance: '[mandalas] often follow chaotic, disordered states marked by conflict and anxiety. They express the idea of a safe refuge, of inner reconciliation and wholeness',[37] but its symbolic importance is in

its ability to unite opposites. On one level the mandala is an image of the positive, and, as we have seen above, prompts a mirror-image opposition, but the opposites themselves can be united therein - the concept is paradoxical and difficult, but absolutely essential to the novel's cohesion. Schaub explains that 'the mandala symbols that pervade the Zone of *Gravity's Rainbow* are meant to invoke an integrating force which spars with the disintegrating forces of analysis, and is itself a symbol capable of uniting both (as it unites all opposition'.[38]

The mandala is not simply a meaningful symbol inserted for descriptive effect, but an attempt at a true presentation of the universe and self, in synchronous interaction and synthesis. Archetypes are accepted constituents of such a scenario and hence assume a striking profile in *Gravity's Rainbow*. That the novel lies so easily inside/around the mandala supports its manifestation in the novel's heart, as 'the dreaming Serpent which surrounds the world' (*GR* p.412). Alex Comfort refers to the mandala as 'a schema for the "self," or for a real or imaginary cosmos, or for both'.[39] He usefully delineates the objectifying of the "feel" of identity in art and iconography that the mandala represents. He states:

> Jung was right to select it, since it is one of the few schemata where the neurological basis of the diagram can be inferred, and where it probably represents some kind of zero-input display, intimately connected both with vision in three dimensions and also with our appreciation of symmetry, both intensely associated with the way that "identity" is experienced. In this sense, the mandala



> is not only a diagram of the experience but arguably an actual part of it.[40]

This expresses the same paradox mentioned above, that the mandala is a symbolic framework for conflicts *within* our range of perception as well as our expression of an all-encompassing unity whose shape and nature is *beyond* our grasp. This should not produce dichotomy so much as awareness of perspectives and our ability to accommodate distinct but complementary frames of reference. It allows, for instance, an understanding of the novel that recognizes the predominance of the archetype used *symbolically* throughout; but also its relevance as an all-containing framework.

To perceive *Gravity's Rainbow* in mandalic form (or perhaps rather of mandalic nature) has an interesting implication with regard to narrative. Katherine Hayles accommodates this view, seeing an equally-weighted configuration of 'events', the effect of which is a more accurate representation of our own relationship with the universe than a 'traditional' novelistic approach:

> Psychologists have shown that this subordination of perceptual data into background is an essential element of cognition; it is what allows us to 'tame' the incoming signals so that we are not constantly overwhelmed by a mass of detail. The texture that we identify as 'novelistic' recapitulates this process by encoding its signs with distinctions between significant events and 'irrelevant' details. The traditional novel is thus 'realistic' precisely in the

> sense that it mirrors the process that allows us to bring reality into focus [...]
>
> Pynchon explodes the traditional distinction between foreground and background by taking a radically egalitarian attitude toward his material. In effect, he refuses to make the distinction between the meaningful event and the 'irrelevant' detail.[41]

This is mandalic simply because the mandala combines and unites all elements in equal balance.

The idea is present also in the writing of Robert Coover, a contemporary of Pynchon's. *Gerald's Party* is an unbroken account of an increasingly chaotic party, wherein much of the action is related through the characters' dialogue. This, however, is as far as possible 'realistically' presented, that is, a roomful of conversation transcribed virtually as heard. The result is not immediately coherent *because* every line of speech is given equal emphasis, and it is for the reader to distinguish between information and noise, and to identify whatever levels of interaction are present. The effect is to stimulate the reader into a textual involvement comparable to that elicited by *Gravity's Rainbow* (and it also provides considerable humour). The impulse that this nurtures, and ironically also the downfall of several characters is what one describes thus: '"Since I was a child, I have been troubled by, let's call it the irrational, and have been trying to find an order, a logic, behind what is given to us as madness and disorder."'[42] The lesson, it would seem, is not to be damned by the inevitable creation of arbitrary logic but simply to recognize that to connect discrete events naturally in isolation is our own act of

individual perception, and not in itself a definitive reality, since after all, 'everything is connected'. This point of view accommodates the ungrounded fluxing narrative technique in *Gravity's Rainbow* well. The concept is mandalic in the sense that it imitates the equal balancing of opposites; be they black and white, North and South, or whatever; with regard to *every* 'event', '"the cosmic design of darkness and light"' (*GR* p.495) of which von Göll speaks. This is also the same idea that champions the Preterite in Pynchon's fiction - not that they are superior, but are as essential in their existence as the Elect because they *define* the Elect, and are thus equally worthy of 'salvation'.

Kathryn Hume summarizes the concern succinctly, emphasizing the important point that our critical reaction must always, as far as possible, take place with the specific nature of our cultural and intellectual heritage firmly in mind:

> Readers able to divorce themselves from Western bourgeois values argue that Pynchon is upholding nonrational knowledge and a non-linear organization of reality (including non-linear time), that he is even creating in *Gravity's Rainbow* a mandala, with all opposites balanced, the void at the center - radiant, beyond good or evil and beyond human understanding.[43]

The mandala represents symbolically, and actually, an outline for the cosmos in which we, and the novel, are situated. Furthermore, the mandalic nature of the novel suggests, as Kathryn Hume indicates above, that there is a central entity around which the numerous polarities are

constellated, and that whatever this is constitutes some kind of conclusive underlying reality. Comfort explains 'that what should occupy the middle of a truly schematic mandala/diagram of I-ness is a vortex or black hole'.[44] Accordingly in *Gravity's Rainbow* the centre (or zero) is approached and addressed repeatedly by several figures. Enzian and Josef Ombindi demonstrate opposing attitudes to the same - the latter proposing nihilistic tribal suicide for the Hereros, while Enzian searches for 'the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place...' (*GR* p.318). Schaub refers to Mircea Eliade's *The Myth of Eternal Return* at length, but specifically in examination of Enzian's centre. Eliade's words fit the scenario comfortably: 'the Center, then, is pre-eminently the zone of the sacred, the zone of absolute reality. Similarly, all the other symbols of absolute reality (trees of life and immortality, Fountain of Youth, etc.) are also situated at the center.'[45] This frames the Herero myths, and locates Pynchon's own Zone even more centrally. That it is either a zone, a void of nothingness, the 'final Zero'; or a zone of substance, central and self defining, is, it seems, an all-encompassing polarity integral to its very nature. Grof's LSD subjects were on rare occasions able to experience this - it is a realm clearly troubled by the stark inadequacy of language in any attempt at expression, but one so all-embracing that this hardly seems to trouble:

> The last and most paradoxical transpersonal phenomenon to be discussed in this context is the experience of the supracosmic and metacosmic Void, of the primordial emptiness, nothingness, and

> silence, which is the ultimate source and cradle of all existence and the 'uncreated and ineffable Supreme.' [...] It is beyond time and space, beyond form or any experiential differentation, and beyond polarities such as good and evil, light and darkness, stability and motion, and agony and ecstasy.[46]

It is a centre around which *Gravity's Rainbow* is firmly located; the Zone, the territory Slothrop circumscribes and then the centre he becomes, the Herero village and all the mandalas. The 'Void' itself *is* specifically addressed as well as being defined by implication. Kathryn Hume draws attention to what is neatly paralleled by the Buddhist 'Clear Light of the Void'. It is both the zero of Nora Dodson-Truck - 'She *has* turned her face, more than once, to the Outer Radiance and simply seen nothing there. And so each time has taken a little more of the Zero into herself' (*GR* p.150) - and the 'amazing perfect whiteness' of a phosphoros flare, prompting Slothrop to feel 'a terrible *familiarity* here, a center he has been skirting, avoiding as long as he can remember - never has he been as close as now to the true momentum of his time' (*GR* p.312). Conversely the Kirghiz Light Hume interprets as a Moslem (being of substance) rather than Buddhist version of the same radiance. The conclusive and definitive aura of its expression testifies to the *ultimate* quality of this universal force.

> But It comes as the Kirghiz Light -
> There is no other way to know It
>
> The roar of Its voice is deafness

The flash of Its light is blindess. (*GR* p.258)

A major achievement in *Gravity's Rainbow* is that it provides a representation of humanity, the universe and cosmos, that accommodates numerous and diverse modes of perception and understanding. Stanislav Grof's LSD research offers one such method, and its usefulness is above all to unite many aspects of the novel inside one approach. This identifies a unity already inherent, rather than one externally imposed, and is a reminder of the impressive breadth of Pynchon's vision.

NOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

1. N. Katherine Hayles, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.185.

2. John O. Stark, *Pynchon's Fictions: Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), p.68.

3. Hayles, p.188.

4. Hayles, p.187.

5. Hayles, p.187.

6. Stanislav Grof, *Realms of the Human Unconscious: Observations from LSD Research* (New York and London: Souvenir Press, 1979), p.33.

7. Grof, p.33.

8. Grof, p.4.

9. C. G. Jung, 'Psychological Commentary', in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, compiled and edited by W.Y. Evans-Wentz (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.xxxvii.

10. Grof, p.26.

11. Grof, p.26.

12. Grof, p.99.

13. David Leverenz, 'On Trying to read *Gravity's Rainbow*', in *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, edited by George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), p.230.

14. Grof, p.95.

15. Grof, p.96.

16. Grof, p.105.

17. Grof, p.114.

18. David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), pp.123-4.

19. Grof, p.114.

20. Grof, p.120.

21. Grof, p.134.

22. Grof, pp.178-9.

23. Grof, p.155.

24. Grof, p.156.

25. Grof, p.155.

26. Grof, p.154.

27. Grof, p.162.

28. Grof, p.183.

29. Grof, pp.183-4.

30. Grof, pp.139-40.

31. Grof, p.182.

32. Grof, p.184.

33. Grof, p.191.

34. Grof, p.194.

35. Jung, p.xli.

36. Grof, p.201.

37. Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p.54.

38. Schaub, p.52.

39. Alex Comfort, *I and That: Notes on the Biology of Religion* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc, 1979), p.25.

40. Comfort, p.26.

41. Hayles, p.174.

42. Robert Coover, *Gerald's Party* (London: Paladin, 1988), p.135.

43. Kathryn Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to* Gravity's Rainbow (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p.217.

44. Comfort, p.26.

45. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.18.

46. Grof, pp.204-5.

# CHAPTER FIVE: THE MANDALA CORRUPTED

Without radar and jet engines, the rapid, complex - and safe - world travel by airplane would be an impossibility. And without the advances in military missilery, space travel would still be a dream. Such are the more beneficial dividends of war.

Frederick I. Ordway and Mitchell R. Sharpe, *The Rocket Team*

It is useful to turn once again to Pynchon's consideration of Kekulé dreaming the 'Great Serpent'. The situation is a microcosmic representation of the whole novel, since it isolates an image of universal unity, based on cycle and return, being misinterpreted and exploited. The most immediate symptom of this exploitation is the adoption of a linear mentality - '"Once, only once..."' (*GR* p.413) being the words that Pynchon lifts from Rilke to vocalize Their philosophy. This pivotal example has profound implications: it shows the mandala represented by the Serpent corrupted, made 'one-shot and disposable' (*VN* p.127), calling to mind immediately the ubiquity of the archetype that is *under attack* throughout the novel. It also shows us the consequent outcome, the crescendo of linear self-destruction that this basic

corruption necessitates. This image is one of the most memorable of the novel:

> the System, which sooner or later must crash to its death, when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the World can supply, dragging with it innocent souls all along the chain of life. Living inside the System is like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide... (*GR* p.412)

This deathward ride is the trajectory followed by the western powers situated around the central Zone, and the subject of a substantial amount of the novel. The breaking-off of this circularity almost incorporates its own cycle, but it is a 'cycle of infection and death' (*GR* p.724), 'a co-operative structure of lies' (*GR* p.728), and one which moves irrevocably towards annihilation. Katherine Hayles expresses the point with refreshing simplicity:

> In contrast to the artificial structures of organization and control that deny the cycle of Return, then, are the natural structures of decaying organic matters that embody and affirm it. One is evil and insane, driving toward death; the other is natural and good, a source of life and hope.'

The realm of the 'evil and insane' is attendant in diverse forms. The symbolically broken mandala lies behind several crucial scenarios in the novel - not least the Raketen-Stadt, the representations of which are abundant throughout, in technology, religion and folk-consciousness.

The comprehensiveness of this malign presence consitutes a mock reality. It is the seductive culture that links many with their incarceration in the System - from within its bounds the chance of enlightenment is scarce, but equally, as an elemental opposite it defines the balance that is positive and regenerative. Between the poles movement is difficult. Pointsman, for one, demonstrates the scope for development *inside* the limits; and he is one useful point of focus for the ever-polarizing conflicts that war across the novel's pages.

In persistent attendance is the confusion of war, technology and corporate bureaucracy, in which the primacy of none is absolute, but the whole is a self-perpetuating tangle of interrelationship of which the end can only be nihilistic death. The true underlying reality is difficult to discern, a dismal fact implanted since the 'it's all theatre' of the first page. This reappears later in the novel in more sinister guise:

> It means this war was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted... secretly, it was being dictated by the needs of technology... by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques, by something that needed the energy burst of war. (*GR* p.521)

The idea is disquietingly familiar - the manufactured reality that surrounds Slothrop for so long, feeding his blossoming paranoia, is a real possibility stretching far further than he can discern from his own limited view-point. The Potsdam conference is no *political* power ritual, but sham and ephemera, so much so that Slothrop himself can

operate inside it: 'The whole joint is lit up like a Hollywood premiere [...] They must deal here with a strange collection of these showbiz types. [...] "you just don't know me in this getup. I'm that Errol Flynn"' (*GR* p.381). Behind the façades we are invited to assume the existence of a self-generating entity, labelled Technology, and somehow responsible for its own being. However, even this is a dangerously simple proposition, and we must beware of divorcing ourselves from the phenomenon by the act of naming:

> 'All very well to talk about having a monster by the tail, but do you think we'd have had the Rocket if someone, some specific somebody with a name and a penis hadn't *wanted* to chuck a ton of Amatol 300 miles and blow up a block full of civilians? Go ahead, capitalize the T on technology, deify it if it'll make you feel less responsible - but it puts you in with the neutered, brother, in with the eunuchs keeping the harem of our stolen Earth for the numb and joyless hardons of human sultans, human elite with no right at all to be where they are - ' (*GR* p.521)

The true nature of the situation baulks at definition, but a civilization that simultaneously fosters and is directed by dangerously accelerating technologies carries with it a sinister foreboding of control and chaos. Hence there is a cyclical momentum, but one that is closing in on annihilation, not self-sufficiency. Peter Cooper quotes a sociologist, Michael Harrington, on the subject: '"Technology has literally been creating a new civilization. But since this process has taken place... without conscious direction, thought has not kept pace

with technology."' Cooper continues: 'The disparity between events and consciousness leads to terrifying and ludicrous incongruities, a truly grotesque society marked by loss of scale and accelerating unreality.'[2] The 'grotesque society' is graphically reproduced by Pynchon. A frequent characteristic is sheer illogical idiocy - the elaborate 'Story of Byron the Bulb' contains such nuggets of lamentable System-logic as the fact 'that through no bulb shall the mean operating life be extended. You can imagine what would happen to the market if *that* started happening' (*GR* p.647). With Byron, a kind of fugitive Everyman riding the System, a disturbing sense of deterministic constriction intervenes. As a component in the System's greater structure, all that is potentially creative and fertile is obstructed: '"But there are other frequencies above and below the visible band. Bulb can give heat. Bulb can provide energy for plants to grow, illegal plants, inside closets, for example. Bulb can penetrate the sleeping eye, and operate among the dreams of men"' (*GR* p.653). The tone then turns downwards, expressing a tragic constant of the corrupted unity, the same paralysis that grips all Preterite, from dodo to doper: 'He is condemned to go on forever, knowing the truth and powerless to change anything' (*GR* p.655).

Equally characteristic of the grotesquerie is the confusion of technological apparatus and human corporeality. This fundamental strand in the novel culminates in the launch of the Rocket 00000, harbouring the sibling Gottfried, and it would be unwise to attempt a worthy consideration here of the blending of, and the relationship between animate and inanimate in Pynchon's fiction. However, it involves a matter of perspective that is especially pertinent to this discussion. The cynical abuse of the Great Serpent, the exploitation of archetypal

unity, can only be perceived if one is determinedly distanced from the System - a position as difficult to maintain perhaps, as initially is Slothrop's with the menace of anti-paranoia. The closer in one gets, the more awareness is clouded, and the unnatural laws of the System are likelier to go unquestioned. The problem is intensified by Pynchon's emphasis on how inextricably combined flesh, spirit and technological hardware have become. His examples are at once humorous, as in the Rocket Limericks ('singing about different ways of Doing It with the A4 or its related hardware' (*GR* p.306)), and eerily grotesque - consider, for example, the futuristic exaggerations to be seen in the Mittelwerke:

> Nasal bone and upper teeth have been replaced by a metal breathing apparatus, full of slots and grating [...] Once inside *these* yellow caverns, looking out now through neutral-density orbs, the sound of your breath hissing up and around the bone spaces, what you thought was a balanced mind is little help. (*GR* pp.296-7)

One of the most malicious devices in the novel, manifested here, is the potential to limit an individual's perspective, precluding the possibility of balanced, considered judgment. The atmosphere is nightmareish: as fiercely malevolent and uneasily amusing as the 'maniac bent on suicide' who's 'amiable enough, keeps cracking jokes' (*GR* p.412) but is nevertheless at the wheel of the hell-bound System.

The fact that perspective is always by necessity limited, makes the identification of boundaries inside the labyrinthine System impossible. It is thus not easy to distinguish the naturally-recurring from the artificial when the source of the phenomenon is out of sight.

Symptomatic of this problem is the emergence of a Rocket culture that assumes a folk-consciousness mimicking the rites of the Spring Equinox - 'erecting strange floral towers out in the clearings and meadows, [...] going round and round with old Gravity or some such buffoon' (*GR* p.361). Similarly, registering the end of the 'war' could be an observation of only the smallest part of a vast movement. Roger Mexico senses the same:

> 'There's something still on, don't call it a "war" if it makes you feel nervous, maybe the death rate's gone down a point or two, beer in cans is back at last and there *were* a lot of people in Trafalgar Square one night not so long ago... but Their enterprise goes on.' (*GR* p.628)

Such is the civilization that has evolved, metaphorically, in all its monstrosity, from a misconception, a twist in the tail of Uroboros. More acceptable societies remain in *Gravity's Rainbow* - in Kathryn Hume's architecture of the novel they are peripheral territories outside the Zone which is flanked by the Western powers and their ideologies of death (this being virtually a mandalic structure of concentric rings, though Hume interprets it in terms of medieval myth). As she says:

> The Kirghiz tribes, the gauchos of the Argentine pampas, and the Hereros of South West Africa - these are the broken and distorted remnants of an alternative to the Western style of living. Within memory, their lives were ahistorical, cyclical, and in some senses,

free. But these peoples are more reminders of lost options than viable choices now.[3]

In all three cases there is a fresh opportunity to consider self-sufficient unity at odds with the demon of rationalization, and the evolution of a serpent-monster from Uroboros. In this sense the mandala is as much a catalyst for an understanding of the exploited origin than a free-standing symbolic statement. Schaub reinforces this point: 'The mandala, throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*, exists as a symbol for a unified sensibility fragmented by the western European habit of understanding something by taking it apart.'[4] Indeed, having absorbed Kekulé's travesty of Uroboros we become aware of corrupted mandalas in abundance; both in seemingly unassailable form as Nazi swastika and rocket base, and in methodical deconstruction in the Kirghiz community and Herero village.

Mandalic significance can be read into the Argentine example via a passage late in the novel, where Tchitcherine observes expatriate Argentinians in the Zone: 'he sees two men, one white, one black, holding guitars. Townspeople are gathered in a circle [...] - a coming together of opposites' (*GR* p.611). The corruption here can be distilled to a basic opposition between openness and complexity, the same chasm between circularity and linearity that is forced wide open by analysis, enclosure, and imposition of control. Squalidozzi preaches to an unreceptive Slothrop:

'In the days of the gauchos, my country was a blank piece of paper. The pampas stretched as far as men could imagine, inexhaustible,

> fenceless. Wherever the gaucho could ride, that place belonged to him. [...] Fences went up, and the gaucho became less free. It is our national tragedy. We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that *openness*, it is terror to us [...] the Argentine heart, in its perversity and guilt, longs for a return to that first unscribbled serenity... that anarchic oneness of pampas and sky...' (*GR* p.264)

This is not blindly proposed as a model utopia but simply reflects a natural unity that *could* be a definitive reality, if only the desire to control and *understand* were dismissed. Attempts to order send waves of consequence far beyond what we can hope to predict. Empty transcendence in a flip-universe Raketen-Stadt is the other extreme, something set up, we hear later, 'to Avoid Symmetry, Allow Complexity, Introduce Terror' (*GR* p.297). Slothrop's man-in-the-street quip - '"you can't just stand in the way of progress -"' (*GR* p.264) is a hollow proclamation for this ideology. Squalidozzi's alternative may not be an easily-accepted idea - the lack of lines of reference implies the inability to define, invoking to the conscious mind a terror closely-knit with Slothrop's anti-paranoia - but it expresses an existence in sympathy with the natural cycle. This underlying truth has been present in the novel all along. In the midst of the war-dominated environment in 'Beyond The Zero' a continuity, a unity persists, but it is out of sight and obscured from within the Firm's structures. Pynchon locates an example characteristically in a rubbish dump, the lowest level to which everything is returned and will return again, a pool of atomic

dismemberment in this case focusing on toothpaste tubes, but equally loyal to the most grandiose constructions that take their place in the same unending cyclical whole:

> it is true return - to be melted for solder, for plate, alloyed for castings, bearings, gasketry, hidden smokeshriek linings the children of that other domestic incarnation will never see. Yet the continuity, flesh to kindred metals, home to hedgeless sea, has persisted. [...] The War, the Empire, will expedite such barriers between our lives. The War needs to divide this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together. The war does not appear to want a folk-consciousness [...] - it wants a machine of many separate parts, not a oneness, but a complexity.... (*GR* p.130)

The unity, a wholeness of continuity, is where the natural emphasis falls, and the structures that obstruct it can only ever be assumed back into the cycle. In deference to this perennial maxim, the Herero basis for existence is to do with inner rather than external and worldly orders and shapes. In *Gravity's Rainbow* they are natural inhabitants, at least originally, of the veld, the Südwest's own zone: the same natural anarchy Squalidozzi yearns for, and that which is illustrated by Slothrop - by action, and in body - in the Zone:

> Considered outcasts, they lived on the veld, in the open. You were likely to come across them at night, their fires flaring bravely against the wind, out of rifle range from the iron tracks: there

> seemed no other force than that to give them locus out in that emptiness. (*GR* p.315)

What does give them shape is the very nature of their lifestyle. They live not in accordance with a code, but simply in intuitive balance with their world. The mandalic village is a microcosm of their wider context, an iteration on a quotidian basis of recurring cycles of decay and regeneration that are enduring forces in a 'resonant, eternally-returning' world (*GR* p.412). In short, as a collective people, they *live* the unity of the universe. Andreas explains the village plan to Slothrop:

> 'Klar,' touching each letter, 'Entlüftung, these are the female letters. North letters. In our villages the women lived on the northern half of the circle, the men on the south. The village itself was a mandala. Klar is fertilization and birth, Entlüftung is the breath, the soul. Zündung and Vorstufe are the male signs, the activities, fire and preparation, or building. And in the Center, here, Hauptstufe. It is the pen where we kept the sacred cattle. The souls of the ancestors. All the same here. Birth, soul, fire, building. Male and female, together.' (*GR* p.563)

Allied with the timelessness of this image is the Herero woman, buried up to her neck, 'a seed in the Earth' (*GR* p.316), that the narrative voice concedes as a 'powerful symbol of fertility and life' (*GR* p.316). Their empathetic existence is thus a strongly symbolic channel for the reasserting life of the universe. The place of the Hereros in *Gravity's*

*Rainbow*, however, is as a violated people, in factual historical terms as the rebels decimated by German troops in 1904, and as Pynchon's fictional Zone-Hereros, the Schwarzkommando, attempting to adopt new groundlines for existence. Thomas Schaub sees their importance in the novel specifically in these terms: 'The Zone-Hereros are Pynchon's example of a people caught with a foot in either camp: one cyclical and returning, the other western and Christian, linear and "one-way."'[5]

That the Herero mandala is broken by characteristically European impulses is crucial in the novel's design. A conflict of the circle and the line (to use Hayles's image) has no more marked expression than here. The Hereros, for this argument, belong to the wider collective term of 'colonies', which are:

> the outhouses of the European soul, where a fellow can let his pants down and relax, enjoy the smell of his own shit [...] Christian Europe was always death, Karl, death and repression. Out and down in the colonies, life can be indulged, life and sensuality in all its forms, with no harm done to the Metropolis, nothing to soil these cathedrals, white marble statues, noble thoughts.... (*GR* p.317)

The utterly fundamental nature of the conflict is substantiated in factual as well as fictional form: an anthropological study of the Hereros quotes first-hand witnesses of the German occupation, and the eventual move towards rebellion in 1904:

> When the Germans found a Herero woman alone, they would shoot and kill her for sport [...] they would also shoot Herero men when they found them in the pasture with the cattle. And they made light of Herero beliefs and customs. They purposely destroyed the sacred fire when they came upon it.
>
> The Germans also tried to force the Herero to buy European goods and clothes, though the Herero at that time did not want them.[6]

> The Germans were disrespectful about Herero traditions. They would destroy their sacred hearth, take away the upturned bush, and put out the fire. They would shoot herero cattle in the field for meat. The Herero were angry at the German contempt for their way of life, so they went to war.[7]

Pynchon's portrayal of these 'murderers in blue' (*GR* p.323) is hardly too severe. The astonishing violence and flagrant disrespect directed at the tribal people by German soldiers verged on the sadistic. The Hereros' place in *Gravity's Rainbow* testifies not least to Pynchon's virtuosity in drawing upon the most appropriate historical material, from a vast and comprehensive knowledge of world events and anthropological detail.

The perversion and betrayal of the tribe by the Germans is frightening in its very purity - it is not that the mandala has been broken and scattered, but even worse, reconstructed under the gaze of a new master. The result is an illusion of unity, of purpose. The German intent is not to destroy the identity, but to turn it towards new goals, a negative-image set of co-ordinates. Hence, the complementing elements

of the village become insignia - still a deeply expressive image for them: 'For the Zone-Hereros it has become something deep, Slothrop gathers, maybe a little mystical. Though he recognizes the letters - Klar, Entlüftung, Zündung, Vorstufe, Hauptstufe, the five positions of the launching switch in the A4 control car - he doesn't let on to Enzian' (*GR* p.361). Outside their intimate thoughts it is an image not of their customary integrity, but rather of the completeness of their own exploitation by the System.

Later, when Andreas explains the layout of the Herero village he dsecribes the Rocket mandala also:

> 'The four fins of the Rocket made a cross, another mandala [...] Each opposite pair of vanes worked together, and moved in opposite senses. Opposites together. You can see how we might feel it speak to us, even if we don't set one up on its fins and worship it. But it was waiting for us when we came north to Germany so long ago...' (*GR* p.563)

The Rocket somehow becomes an anti-mandala - a fitting evolution considering its symbolic rôle also as the furthest point of Western technological advance. The Hereros' instinctive affinity with the KEZVH mandala persists for them, but as Andreas lays the two opposing worlds side by side, the real ultimate result of the stratagem of the 'murderers in blue' can be seen.

The most basic distinction between the anti-worlds is the incorporation of a time dimension, and circularity and linearity are significant specifically in this respect. We hear that 'the War has

been reconfiguring time and space into its own image' (*GR* p.257) and indeed, the tenet of Western technological development can be expressed as an increasing necessity to dwell inside a one-way movement of time. Kathryn Hume addresses the point thus: 'Western culture, at least, has fallen into time and linearity, and battens on technology. Such, furthermore, has been its drive to colonize that Kirghiz tribes and Herero alike are all being forced into time.'[8] This recalls Mircea Eliade's view of man seeking a 'history outside of time',[9] with regard to Enzian's determined directioning: 'What Enzian wants to create will have no history. It will never need a design change. Time, as time is known to other nations, will wither away inside this new one. The Erdschweinhöhle will not be bound, like the Rocket, to time' (*GR* p.319).

This is the specific curse, symbolically, of the North, and the Schwarzkommando regime - it forces them to serve a linear master. Christian death can offer no redemption if their cycle has been irrevocably broken: 'But we, Zone-Hereros, under the earth, how long will we wait in this north, this locus of death?' (*GR* p.322).

The fatal split in the Herero soul is paralleled (less graphically) in the Kirghiz tribe Tchitcherine comes amongst. The scenario is the imposition of the New Turkic Alphabet. Schaub is reminded of 'Lévi-Strauss's hupothesis that "the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery"'.[10] As an analogy to the violation of the Hereros, this concept is powerful - Pynchon draws a parallel with 'Plasticity's central canon: that chemists were no longer to be at the mercy of Nature. They could decide now what properties they wanted a molecule to have, and then go ahead and build it' (*GR* p.249). The implications are the same; naturally recurring phenomena, whether

linguistic or molecular, are frozen and manufactured into premeditated structures. As we hear:

> one finds Committees on molecular structure which are very similar to those back at the NTA plenary session. 'See: how they are taken out from the coarse flow - shaped, cleaned, rectified, just as you once redeemed your letters from the lawless, the mortal streaming of human speech.... These are our letters, our words: they too can be modulated, broken, recoupled, redefined, co-polymerized one to the other in worldwide chains.' (*GR* p.355)

The image of the mandala emerges most clearly in the singing duel: 'The people are gathered in a circle [...] the boy and girl stand in the eye of the village' (*GR* p.356). The fleeting, chaotic beauty of the singing-duel, voices and words spurred by mutual exchange, is what the rationalizing alphabet must surely annihilate. From the initial uncomplaining simplicity that was 'purely speech, gesture, touch among them, not even an Arabic script to replace' (*GR* p.338), the inevitability transpires 'that soon someone will come out and begin to write some of these down [...] ... and this is how they will be lost' (*GR* p.357). It is Tchitcherine at the chapter's end who has, he proclaims, '"Got it"', that is, transcribed *The Aqyn's Song*. The conclusiveness of this explanation is held in doubt, however, as later - 'his heart was never ready' for the promise of transcendence he turns towards through the Kirghiz Light (*GR* p.359).

The conclusion of such subversion remains darkly ominous. Dzaqyp Qulan holds the sad legacy of 'the ghost of his own lynched father with

a scratchy pen in the night, practising As and Bs' (*GR* p.356), but the dismal scene hides a deeper imbalance that is fighting for reassertion. Tchitcherine's horse 'Snake' is a fitting embodiment - a foor-footed version of Uroboros tamed and suppressed but harbouring a simpler intent, 'the serpent tuck of a head disclosing that 'Snake is only waiting for his moment...' (*GR* p.342). The imposition of the ordered on the naturally and eternally unorderable is a deathly impulse, and one that will inevitably be rebalanced.

Pynchon's understanding of language, as it is used in *Gravity's Rainbow*, extends back into the genesis of European 'one-way' culture. The tenet of information theory that the less probable (and more disorganized) the message, the greater potential there is for meaning, is implicit in the initially undisturbed and unclassified Kirghiz oral culture. In consequence, there is the contrast of 'the German mania for name-giving, dividing the Creation finer and finer, analyzing, setting namer more hopelessly apart from named...' (*GR* pp.390-1). The definition is more rigorous, repeatable and succinct - unable to adapt to any nuance of flux or development. Such is the illusion, that an ever-diversifying *Lexicon* of concrete expression can eventually communicate the absolute brightness of truth - as ultimately empty as the pledge to Enzian 'that by understanding the Rocket, he would come to understand truly his manhood...' (*GR* p.329). The recognition of this illusion is the focal point of Enzian's developing self-awareness in the novel, and as a result comments on the fabric and the most basic foundations of the Western powers and their ideologies.

The tragedy and basis for the *purity* of Enzian's exploitation is the fatal similarity of transcendent hope in the two worlds. As already

mentioned, the Rocket becomes an anti-mandala - indeed a whole set of the archetypes emerge in sinister guise, even the Raketen-Stadt - 'fourfold as expected, an eerie precision to all lines and shadings architectural and human, built in mandalic form like a Herero village' (*GR* p.725) - and the deification of Technology appears as the new key to transcendence of the earthly realm. The means is not spiritual reconciliation but molecular mutation: '"Silicon, boron, phosphorous - these can replace carbon, and can bond to nitrogen instead of hydrogen - [...] move beyond life, toward the inorganic. Here is no frailty, no mortality - here is strength, and the Timeless"' (*GR* p.379). The chemical revolution, plastics and rocketry, are joined in the same ever-corrupting movement. Franz Pökler as much as any other embodies the mock promise of the Rocket mandala. His faith is unerring, that '"We'll all use *it*, someday, to leave the earth. To transcend..."' (*GR* p.400) and in his piety he performs a curious devotional act:

> once he knelt on the lavatory floor of his old rooming house in Munich, understanding that if he faced exactly along a certain compass-bearing his prayer would be heard: he'd be safe. He wore a robe of gold and orange brocade. It was the only light in the room. Afterward he ventured out into the house, knowing people slept in all the rooms, but feeling a sense of desertion. He went to switch on a light - but in the act of throwing the switch he knew the room had really been lit to begin with, and he had just turned everything out, *everything*.... (*GR* p.400)

The scene is significant. It portrays the betrayal of a mirror-image distortion, a negative reversal of the true positive acts. The world Franz has created for himself inside the paternalism of the System, is so bewitchingly similar to what he intuitively feels is correct, that he can scarcely distinguish a difference. The seduction is the same as the Zone-Herero instinctive attachment to the Rocket, a symbolism that tugs at their spiritual ties, but in actuality is a meticulously-fashioned counterfeit. Like the Schwarzkommando insignia and the Herero village the distinction is only revealed at the conclusion of the finite process, at which the leap to a transcendent infinity is impossible, and the measure of achievement nothing, since 'we have *only* the structure left us [...] It has never been, in love, become *one with...*' (*GR* pp.722-3). The impulse can *only* be to continue, blindly, a quest for transcendence that by its premeditated and manufactured nature must accept eventual annihilation. It is the trap that the Slothrop family curiously avoids, in an earlier century: 'The tradition, for others, was clear, everyone knew - mine it out, work it, take all you can till it's gone then move on west, there's plenty more. But out of some reasoned inertia the Slothrops stayed east in Berkshire, perverse' (*GR* p.28). The movement will always require further ground: it is a culture of consumption that can have no place in a balanced universe - certainly it can no longer be sated by the resources of the planet, as Blicero observes:

> 'Europe came and established its order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered. In time the death-colonies grew strong enough to break away. But the impulse to empire, the

> mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on. Now we are in the last phase. American Death has come to occupy Europe [...] Is the cycle over now, and a new one ready to begin? Will our new Edge, our new deathkingdom, be the moon?' (*GR* p.722)

Enzian's horror is at the utter emptiness of his 'supremacy' that the success can only be defined by the *next* chunk of matter to be used, devoured, and this is an ever-diminishing option. The prompt is Slothrop, true to his name and inheritance, 'some reasoned inertia' bringing no yearned-for goal, but at least true location in an unchallenged universe: '"Whatever happened at the end, he has transcended. Even if he's only dead. He's gone beyond *his* pain, *his* sin [...] I haven't transcended. I've only been elevated. That must be as empty as things get"' (*GR* pp.660-1).

The illusion of linearity for Enzian and the multitude who don' t achieve his realization is that further and higher are by a contorted logic, better. But even to reach the moon leaves the omnipresent truth that says 'Gravity rules all the way out to the cold sphere, *there is always the danger of falling*' (*GR* p.723). The precarious territory of this double-image, a *doppelgänger* that is the 'promise, a prophecy, of Escape' (*GR* p.758) reveals at last that the peak of the Rocket's achievement is '"an Aggregat of pieces of dead matter, no longer anything that can move, or that has a destiny with a shape"' (*GR* p.362). The ever-returning universe will consume and regenerate in timeless mockery of the Rocket. The struggle for material transcendence is a self-perpetuating con-game that once recognized is so conclusively negative as to hardly leave a sense of loss at its disappearance. Such

is Enzian's eventual examination of his Nazi mentors: '"They have lied to us. They can't keep us from dying, so They lie to us about death. A cooperative structure of lies. [...] We can't believe Them any more. Not if we are still sane, and love the truth"' (*GR* p.728).

The conditions for the exploitation and carefully-fostered delusion in Enzian's lamentable situation are, as has been seen, the existence of a 'cooperative structure' - a framework that suggests purpose and optimism; but that is in actuality a phoney imitation. The device is common, the broken and reconstructed mandalas proliferating in the novel, and the Rocket itself an idol, a saviour-surrogate. As conspicuous in the novel as these mock-religions, ideologies based on technological excellence, is Pynchon's treatment of conventional 'religion' itself. Broadly speaking it is the act of *definition* that breaks away the empty and salvationless from a potential fulfilment. This is the case with the symbolically-abused mandalas, Kekulé's benzene ring and the artificial structures that have subsequently resulted. The same is evident in the Advent service attended by Roger and Jessica. What exists is ritualized and vacuous - a frequent enough situation in the novel, such as far back in the 'eduaction' of Enzian: 'the ritual, the daily iteration [...] has taken over what used to be memory's random walk, its innocent image-gathering' (*GR* p.101). The fabricated magic of Christmas takes shape even in the most improbable of years, hopes rising and flowering in reflex. The sentiments have *become* the ritual, and hope is directed at a blank, blind emptiness, as misguided and manufactured as Franz Pökler's desire to escape and transcend by flying to the moon:

> The grandparents [...] will wait up beyond insomnia, watching again for the yearly impossible not to occur, but with some mean residue - this *is* the hillside, the sky *can* show us a light - like a thrill, a good time you wanted too much, not a complete loss but still too short of a miracle... (*GR* p.133)

A realization of the hopelessness of this religion-reflex is itself disheartening enough, but the idea taken further returns to the sinister ubiquity of Them, the structures and complexities existing unseen at the centre of the war. In a section of the novel heavily-preoccupied with different interpretations and experiences of the 'Other Side', of advocates and cynics alternately testing the parameters of objective reality, the blank and ineffectual tokens of an empty religion, almost conspiratorial in its nature, are even more markedly visible:

> what do you think, it's a children's story? There aren't any. The children are away dreaming and it's Adults Only in here tonight [...] And 60 miles up the rockets hanging the measureless instant over the black North Sea before the fall, ever faster, to orange heat, Christmas star, in helpless plunge to Earth [...] It's a long walk home tonight. Listen to this mock-angel singing. (*GR* pp.134-5)

The rocket, then, has become the Christmas star, and we have only a mock angel to aspire to. A reproduction of the nativity scene becomes a shameless travesty - the magi come with 'gifts of tungsten, cordite, high octane' (*GR* p.131). The fraud and sham of so many misinformed and manipulated souls reinforces only their own desperation. The chapter

ends assertively, though, albeit on the downbeat. There is no definable higher persona who will cut through the terror of the war-winter and transfigure the suffering - the only path is alone - but an attempt at surrender and openness is a positive one, even if expressed inadequately ('let your communion be at least in listening, even if they are not spokesmen for your exact hopes' (*GR* p.135)). The indication is to turn inwards, away from the degradation of lip-service:

> no counterfeit baby, no announcement of the Kingdom, not even a try at warming or lighting this terrible night, only, damn us, our scruffy obligatory little cry, our maximum reach outward - *praise be to God!* - for you to take back to your war-address, your war-identity, across the snow's footprints and tire tracks finally to the path you must create by yourself alone in the dark. Whether you want it, or not, whatever seas you have crossed, the way home.... *(GR* p.135)

The attitude remains - the 'knotting into' discussed in Chapter Two - essential in an entanglement so profound. It is a pointer towards emotional honesty, and the self-assurance of being able to react instinctively, even if this has no means of coherent expression. The same contrasts are evident with Slothrop. The religious dimension in his life, for example, is so overwhelmingly conditioned and moulded by his environment that it can only offer him an empty salvation - his genuine sentiments are intact but have no mouthpiece. Whilst pursuing the bomb-sites ('a St George after the fact, going out to poke about for droppings of the Beast') a reflex occurs, but finds no response: 'When

he couldn't help he stayed clear, praying, at first, conventionally to God, first time since the other Blitz, for life to win out. But too many were dying, and presently, seeing no point, he stopped' (*GR* p.24). This vain and empty turn to 'God' can mean nothing, but it is the followed by what in comparison is a transfiguration. Slothrop finds a girl trapped in the rubble: 'At which point she smiled, very faintly, and he knew that's what he'd been waiting for, wow, a Shirley Temple smile, as if this exactly canceled all they'd found her down in the middle of. What a damn fool thing' (*GR* p.24). It is, on one hand, a simple peek of kid-America lollipop-innocence, a trigger to memories of home and childhood. Also, though, it is a simple but strong stab of genuine humanity - confused and trivialized by Slothrop's definition of it in trashy sentimental terms - but strikingly valid after his impotent attempt at 'prayer'. He can, in this context, have no other means of expression, but this fact alone cannot diminish the instinctive nature of his bond with the girl and what she represents. This ressures him, though he cannot register it consciously, that life *will* win out, as the frail but vital child-life emerges from the bombed-out mess of destruction. The image is a pertinent one to Slothrop, and in the novel's wider context, stands alongside Pirate's bananas sprouting triumphantly from the shit and waste of his rooftop garden; or new trees stubbornly growing out of the bombsite wasteland. The 'religious' stimulus elicits a poor expression, then, of the affirmation of regeneration from the detritus of war. Slothrop's reaction, though, and the scene itself, confirms the indomitable presence of this, regardless of its understanding or definition.

'The path you must create by yourself' (*GR* p.135) gestures towards an open and receptive attitude, one that is selfless and beyond the definitions of subject and object. A worthy and sympathetic reality is at hand, but the act of perception is thwarted by labyrinths of structure; impositions and illusions deeply implanted. The fight for objectivity, the impulse of rebalancing against the System's manifestations, even in the individual, is a central issue in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Some - Slothrop and the dopers, for example - do create their own paths, and pass beyond the distinctions that allow the System's manipulations. Others are more involved, and their difficulties more deeply-entrenched. An extreme example is provided by Frans Van der Groov, ancestor of Katje and arch-destroyer, in the best European tradition, of the island of Mauritius and its fauna. Pynchon here presents us with a microcosmic world, involving blind exploitation of the worst variety - 'the purest form of European adventuring' (*GR* p.110) - tearing apart plant and animal life by justification of (for want of a better reason) Christian ungodliness. The unfortunate dodoes suffer a somewhat Preterite fate, being '"the dominant form of life on Mauritius, but incapable of speech"' (*GR* p.110). Accompanying Franz's campaign of violation, however, are clearly troubled elements of his psyche. A subconscious affinity with the virgin nature of the Mauritian ecology resides unmistakable in his thoughts, but the objection lacks sufficient clarity for it to prompt a reappraisal of his actions. Semi-delirium fosters an hallucinatory experience:

> The voices - he insomniac, southern stars too thick for constellations teeming in faces and creatures of fable less likely

> than the dodo - spoke the words of sleepers, singly, coupled, in chorus. The rhythms and timbres were Dutch, but made no waking sense. Except that he thought they were warning him... scolding, angry that he couldn't understand. (*GR* p.109)

He is troubled, deeply so, but the disquiet has no channel for expression, and his tradition and conditioning are too deeply instilled.

Pointsman, however, occupies more of a middle-ground - he is ostensibly a yes-man for the old-style determinism represented by Pavlovian psychology, a mentality founded on causal connections and recognizable lines of authority. What he illustrates, however, is the extent to which intellectual thought has been subverted by the linear perspectives of the System. *They* have created an environment which fosters deterministic interpretation - a world where action achieves gain, and material achievement is approached by block-by-block building, mechanically connected. The Pavlovian basis in Pointsman's experimentation sees the phenomena under study crystallized to 'the pathologically inert points on the cortex, the confusion of ideas of the opposite' (*GR* p.90). It is a situation they cannot comprehend *because* of this confusion. Pointsman still lusts for 'the stone determinacy of everything' (*GR* p.86) but the *indefinable* 'dance of things' (*GR* p.580) prevents, by its nature, a means of expression. He is haunted by the impulse to take the phenomenon apart, piece by piece - and linear thinking means that the idea of cortex as interface is impossible to accept, because it strikes off, beyond the reach of determinism's logic. What Pavlov could only understand as 'ideas of the opposite' in conflict and chaotic confusion is for Spectro a point of intersection between

Inside and Outside. The metaphor of 'One bright, burning point surrounded by darkness' (*GR* p.90) lifts the determinist thesis out of its foundations and suggests a more unified expression of what is observed. Spectro becomes the catalyst for Pointsman to be able to stand outside the rigidity of his science, as the latter indicates: 'He is my Pierre Janet, Pointsman thought...' (*GR* p.141). His real intuitions, and deeply felt, if imperfectly expressed emotions *are* in sympathy with an opposites-defining yet unifying mandalic world view. His education has not provided him with a frame of reference in which to perceive what he feels; but he begins to accept others' as well. With reference to his own name, and nature in transition he incorporates the statistician Mexico's proudest observation:

> A switching locomotive creeps silently across the web of tracks below.
>
> 'They're falling in a Poisson distribution,' says Pointsman in a small voice, as if it was open to challenge. (*GR* p.171)

At the end of the second part of the novel Pointsman embodies a more profound fusion. A 'voice' follows him, advocating the binding of opposites that previously had dictated his life and work:

> 'How many chances do you get to *be* a synthesis Pointsman? East and West, together in the same bloke? [...] Protagonist and antagonist in one. I'd jump at it, if I were you.'
>
> Pointsman is about to retort something like 'But you're *not* me,' only he sees how the others all seem to be giggling at him. 'Oh,

ha, ha,' he sez instead. 'Talking to myself, here. Little - sort of - eccentricity, heh, heh.'

'Yang and Yin,' whispers the Voice, 'Yang and Yin...' (*GR* p.278)

Thus, Pointsman's experiences almost fill the divide between complexity and unity. In the first section of the novel (that John Dugdale sees as 'an adaptation of the nineteenth-century city novel of Dickens and Dostoevsky'[11]) he is, as a character, worked upon by opposing influences, demonstrating finally that a less restrictive mode of thinking does lie beyond his Pavlovian education. The mandala *can* be corrupted, and mock-ideologies grow and develop in the new civilization, but the inevitable emancipation of thought and emotion resides undiminished in between.

NOTES: CHAPTER FIVE

1. N. Katherine Hayles, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.171.

2. Peter L. Cooper, *Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983), p.60.

3. Kathryn Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to* Gravity's Rainbow (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p.39.

4. Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p.53.

5. Schaub, p.83.

6. Frank R. Vivelo, *The Herero of Western Botswana* (New York: West Publishing, 1977), p.167.

7. Vivelo, p.159.

8. Hume, p.131.

9. Schaub, p.83.

10. Schaub, p.54.

11. John Dugdale, *Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.188.

# CHAPTER SIX: POINT TO NO-POINT

*Singularities!*

*Gravity's Rainbow*

Simultaneous with and integral in the mandala in *Gravity's Rainbow*, already seen as a crucial unifying symbol and framework is the 'singular point, a discontinuity in the curve of life' (*GR* p.664) - a state impossible to define (though Pynchon comes close), but one which marks an intersection between the novel's major polarities and is itself the opening to a potentially transcendent sphere. John Stark observes the divide in fundamental terms: 'the two worlds or states separated by the delta-t/Brennschluss Point/singular point experience seem to be the world of cause-and-effect populated by the Elect and its bureaucracies and a transcendent atemporal realm of uncircumscribed potential.'[1] Its significance is integral not least because of the natural development from a non-linear time dimension and its being combined with a surpassing of subject/object duality. Linear time is under attack throughout the novel - it is the yardstick of the Elect whose system's empty achievements are measured against the digital calibrations of the clock, 'ratcheting time minutewise into their past' (*GR* p.193). This is

the antithesis to Slothrop's balanced state, where he stands at the thinnest edge of discernible reality and the supreme unconscious - an intersection that touches both individual and cosmos. The ever-reasserting constant expressed in the novel is the lesson of Uroboros, that as we hear of the Herero race 'time and space have no meaning [...] all is together' (*GR* p.153). We should be mindful of Emerson's warning that 'we must be very suspicious of the deceptions of the element of time',[2] and this is a tenet whose integrity is left in little doubt in the novel: 'time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone, which sooner or later must crash to its death' (*GR* p.412).

With these ideas accepted, the possibility of specifically addressing what remains - a direct cognition of truth that is poised between the personal mind and a universal absolute - is by an inevitable irony fundamentally negated by the very essence of the subject under scrutiny. In *V.* the phenomenon is tagged the 'real present', and Thomas Schaub gives a masterly, if evasive definition of it as 'a switching point in local time in which the participant remains poised at the personal nexus of the Situation's dimensions rejecting the violent simplicity of a swing towards any single one, and integrating their competing claims in the interest of an equilibrium both expeditious and true'.[3] In *Gravity's Rainbow* there is a sustained balancing of opposite orders, between which the singular point is held. The Brennschluss Point is described as 'an interface between one order of things and another' (*GR* p.302) and Slothrop's graffiti-mandala expresses a crossroads, 'where you can sit and listen to traffic from the Other Side' (*GR* p.624). The significance of these examples is that the point approached is only located by the surrounding levels with which it is an

interface, and not directly by a relatable experience of the point itself.

A possibly more satisfactory approach to the impossibility of summarizing the significance of this concept in any definable sense, is to *accept* the positive implications of something beyond the reach of communicative media. Katherine Hayles is helpful in pointing out the paradox here:

> For if the act of naming itself introduces division, what could these moments bring into being but the fragmented reality that cognitive processing implies? And if the fragmentation of that named creation is only another version of Their synthetic, fragmented world, then the whole project of escaping Their control has been co-opted and subverted by the very attempt to speak it.[4]

If any escape is to be made from this seemingly infallible curse, then perhaps it can only be by way of Pynchon's singular points, since being beyond communication, they *do* escape the 'fragmented reality'.

As well as representing the implicit antithesis in a linear perception the point becomes a personal flashpoint, around which the major assertive and positive forces in the novel are clustered. Within Pynchon's singular point there resides the ambiguity of transcendent promise that passes beyond the divisions of good and evil. Hence there is the all-encompassing truth that 'the change from point to no-point carries a luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw in fright' (*GR* p.396). Stanislav Grof's LSD research records the observation that 'subjects frequently talk about

timelessness of the present moment and say that they are in touch with infinity'.[5] With Slothrop this phenomenon is expressed as 'temporal bandwidth'. It is the measure of the present moment as defined by the future and past that enclose it. What remains, outside these linear parameters amounts to 'personal density', the degree, appropriately, to which an objective reality is perceived by a separate egoic observer. Consequently, 'the narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are' (*GR* p.509), and Slothrop's consummation as he becomes a 'crossroads' lies in an equal division between perception of environment and an embodiment/merging with what is the same, by this description as the transition between linear and non-linear time.

The same experience is the fortune of Leni Pökler, and she attempts an explanation to an obdurate Franz. The impulsive thrust of metaphor is a curious analogy in itself - her words are delicately chosen:

> 'the level you reach, with both feet in, when you lose it all, you've penetrated the moment, slipping perfectly into its grooves, [...] There is the moment and its possibilities.' (*GR* p.158)

> 'Δt approaching zero, eternally approaching, the slices of time growing thinner and thinner, a succession of rooms each with walls more silver, transparent, as the pure light of the zero comes nearer....' (*GR* p.159)

They enact the same impossibly-placed proximity they imperfectly describe, a toiled-for expression where 'words are only an eye-twitch

away from the things they stand for' (*GR* p.100), but Leni's passionate frustration in the attempt to communicate is a reflection of the purity of her insight.

It is of no surprise that we should turn to the singular point as a crux point, an intersection in the novel itself, for the (in linear terms) fragmented pieces of hope and promise expressed in love, and caring humanity. It would not be faithful to the conception of *Gravity's Rainbow* to derive a terminal conclusion to any discussion of its content. Nevertheless it is not inappropriate to express that the central and unifying feature of a cyclically constant universe is a magnet for the purest amd most enduring human impulses. As has already been seen, sex, should it be perceived as a separate thematic line in the novel, is a powerful symbolic enactment of the unifying fusion between conflicting poles and the consequent absorption into a positively returning cycle of regeneration. Consequently the rapturous abandon of Roger Mexico takes place at exactly the point discussed here: 'He'd seen himself a point on a moving wavefront, propagating through sterile history - a known past, a projectable future. But Jessica was the breaking of the wave. Suddenly there was a beach: that was how he'd set it out' (*GR* p.126). Peter Cooper is quick to make the same connection, though 'love' expands to embrace an array of redeeming impulses: 'Love is possible in Pynchon's world, but only for a person brave enough to "risk the moment" and forgo the buffering security of withdrawal from life's immediacy. Knowledge and the "persistence of vision" depend on courage, will and effort.'[6] Franz Pökler, like Lyle Bland and (to a lesser extent) Pointsman, connects the dominating cause-and-effect culture with the sympathetically unified cosmos not bound to

time. This testifies to a junction, albeit tenuous, with a universal absolute, but its expression in waking action is selfless compassion. Pökler's gesture is one of determined capitulation, as he 'committed then his act of courage. He quit the game [...] He did, then, let everything go, every control' (*GR* p.430). Immediately, this metamorphosis shames him into realization that 'this invisible kingdom had kept on, in the darkness outside... all the time...' (*GR* p.432). This, more tham any other passage carries the timeless hope of T. S. Eloit's *The Waste Land*. The calm observation that 'An accordion played somewhere back in town' (*GR* p.430) catches the tone of welling optimism in 'The Fire Sermon':

> I can sometimes hear
> Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
> The pleasant whining of a mandoline [7]

Franz's submission that is both capitulation and act of courage is Eliot's singular point also:

> The awful daring of a moment's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract
> By this, and this only we have existed [8]

Subsequently the purest altruistic act in the novel is Franz's, as he finds a 'random woman' and 'took off his gold wedding ring and put it on the woman's thin finger, curling her hand to keep it from sliding off.

If she lived, the ring would be good for a few meals, or a blanket, or a night indoors, or a ride home...' (*GR* pp.432-3).

The timeless constant exemplified in Franz's act is a reassurance to be found in the haziest of contexts, in the Zone 'on a foggy day' - 'in each of these streets, some vestige of humanity, of Earth, has to remain. No matter what has been done to it, no matter what it's been used for...' (*GR* p.693). It is in conventional existence elusive and vague, but, we are reassured, omnipresent, and the hope thus remains of 'finding it, learning to cherish what was lost, mightn't we find a way back?' (*GR* p.693).

More than representing a string of positives throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon's 'singular points' fuse into the very essence of the universe perceived in the novel. The concept is given to us as an absolute fundament: 'there is much more here - there is a cosmology: of nodes and cusps and points of osculation, mathematical kisses... *singularities*! [...] even, according to the Russian mathematician Friedmann, the infinitely dense point from which the present Universe expanded' (*GR* p.396).

Katherine Hayles draws attention to Pynchon's allusion to Black Holes as the ultimate singular point (Jamf's code-name for Slothrop is 'Schwarzchild', referring to the scientist whose name was given to the 'event horizon' of a black hole): '- do you know what the time rate of change *is* at the cusp? *Infinity*, that's what! A-and right across the point, it's *minus* infinity! How's that for sudden change, eh?' (*GR* p.664). As the furthest modern scientific extent of an understanding of the universe, the concept is at home in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Hayles draws the parallel:

> Like other singularities, black holes too have a double edged point, both a positive and negative value.
>
> The doubleness is inherent in the equations predicting black holes, for it turns out that these equations have not one but two solutions. In the second solution, the equations yield a 'white hole', a center from which energy and matter radiate outward rather than being sucked in as they are in a black hole. *Gravity's Rainbow* is filled with black-and-white images that are mirror reflections of one another and that can reverse into one another as they move through time; a black hole can be translated into a white hole by reversing the value of time in the equations. The symbolic values of the two mirror images are also opposite. Whereas the black hole is a powerful metaphor for the absolute annihilation of no Return, the white hole promises rebirth through another 'Big Bang' [...]
>
> If the substance of the universe is being sucked into black holes, it is being spewed out again from white holes in a circular dialectic in which annihilation and rebirth are simply two sides of the same coin. Taken as a *gestalt*, the two sides merge into a single picture of the cosmos itself participating in a cycle of Return that at once transcends and validates the attempts at Return in Pynchon's text.[9]

The point that fuses both annihilation and rebirth is the purest expression of the whole that Pynchon circumscribes in the novel. It may also be taken to be central in Pynchon's mandalic vision.

Pynchon's 'final' gesture to the all-encompassing absolute is to locate the entire novel exactly in this cusp. The final page sees the

Rocket, no longer *any* rocket but the ultimate symbolic and actual amalgam of hope in an annihilistic culture, poised at 'its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre, the last delta-t' (*GR* p.760). The opening line is the same instant - 'A screaming comes across the sky' - two coordinates traversing the ambiguous present imitated by the paradoxical cause-and-effect reversal of the V-2. Edward Mendelson expresses the implicit truth, that '*Gravity's Rainbow* [ends] in the dangerous facts of a moment of crisis - which is, always, our present moment'.[10] The novel resides in the moment that is at once cyclical and instantaneously singular - it is the width of our present.

NOTES: CHAPTER SIX

1. John O. Stark, *Pynchon's Fictions: Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), p.71.

2. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, edited by Joel Porte (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), p.122.

3. Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p.12.

4. N. Katherine Hayles, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.185.

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# CHAPTER SEVEN AND CONCLUSION: *VINELAND*

'This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl.'

*The Crying of Lot 49*

Pynchon's latest novel brings with it a contemporary freshness that is absent in his previous three - it is immersed in the trivia of mid-eighties media culture and yet encompasses the previous two decades in a mixing of time-settings reminiscent of *V.*. Coming after *Gravity's Rainbow* (albeit seventeen years after - the same amount of time, many reviewers have delighted in pointing out - that lapsed between *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*) it offers no comparable density, but this seems appropriate for the most recent progression in Pynchon's career. An attempt to improve on the conception of *Gravity's Rainbow* would, one feels, be misguided. Something of an autobiographical feeling has intervened - the time perspectives of Zoyd Wheeler and the other inhabitants of Vineland looking back on the mid-sixties are those of most Americans in their early fifties, and thus of Pynchon himself. Because of the natural authenticity that writing in a contemporary context carries, Pynchon is not under obligation to, for example, reproduce the atmosphere of 1944 London during the V-2 blitz, as he does

so proficiently in the previous novel. Consequently, fewer landscapes have to be created: more of them are Pynchon's own, and the present-day settings bring to the novel a captivating immediacy. The tone in *Vineland* is lighter and the narrative manner more consistently familiar than before. The downbeat reaction of many reviewers to *Vineland* suggests a backlash (dare one say a misoneistic one?) against an evolving writer whose innovations lie more in form than content. The changes they perceive are more apparent than real, however, and the preoccupations expressed in his writing endure virtually undiminished.

In attempting (perhaps unwisely) a summary, it can be said that *Vineland* portrays a cyclical, essentially balanced universe, against which a deluded earth-bound establishment blindly pushes. Within the insane landscapes thrown up by this conflict can be seen both an active counterforce and the fugitive inhabitants of an 'excluded middle'. The latter embody a purity of spirit and assertive vitality springing from an affinity for existence that surpasses a linear conception of time. The immediacy of catastrophe promised by the soulless civilization is not understated, however, and the closing passages of *Vineland* carry an air of didacticism that turns our attention back into our own over-populated industrialized societies, civilizations that cling to an earth in precarious balance.

The ever-returning universal cycle lies behind much of Pynchon's writing, and *Gravity's Rainbow* in particular. In *Vineland* the basis is equally well-established - its expression not in mandalas or the manifestations of other archetypes, but largely through the concept of 'karma', and the implications of Buddhism and Hinduism that this carries. For the purposes here this means that spiritual well-being is

only maintained if all negative acts are balanced by positives. DL's mistaken use of the Vibrating Palm on Takeshi provides an example - '"try and balance your karmic account by working off the great wrong you have done him"' (*VN* p.163) - she is told by Sister Rochelle. The situation is a familiar one: in *Gravity's Rainbow* the System is one of 'taking and not giving back' (*GR* p.412), an imbalance that gathers size and momentum, approaching the inevitable payback symbolized by the linear arc of the Rocket. In *Vineland* Takeshi's job is actually to redress the balance of negative actions for paying clients. This occupation is representative of the attitude essential for universal stability. His description of the röle of 'karmic adjustment' paints a scene of systematized civilization, the cycle being stretched into linear form, the imbalance growing exponentially:

> 'The amount of memory on a chip doubles every year and a half! The state of the art will only allow this to move so fast!' In traditional karmic adjustment, he went on, sometimes it had taken centuries. Death was the driving pulse - everything had moved as slowly as the cycles of birth and death, but this proved to be too slow for enough people to begin, eventually, to provide a market niche. There arose a system of deferment, of borrowing against karmic futures. Death, in Modern Karmic Adjustment, got removed from the process. (*VN* pp.174-5)

As well as using the concept of karma Pynchon refers directly to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The inhabitants of the Buddhist 'Bardo' in *Vineland* appear to be the Thanatoids, and they form an entire community

of the undead ('"'Thanatoid' means 'like death, only different'"' (*VN* p.170)) whose membership thereof is determined by their karmic imbalances. Their smooth passage into death is interrupted by these obstacles, and they appear to occupy an obscure state that straddles the interface of life and death. It would perhaps not be wise to draw rigid parallels between the stages of the Bardo and passages in the novel, but certainly a frame of reference in which the distinction between life and death is an arbitrary barrier does seem an appropriate one here. The idea is familiar - the words in *Gravity's Rainbow* that 'the dead are as real as the living' (*GR* p.153) and the persistent erosion of subject/object duality in the larger novel is being recreated here, in a vague hinterland ('Shade Creek') that floats in a dimensionless reality. It is the bottom curve in the cycle of death and rebirth, in touch with continuity and connectedness cutting across linearly-perceived time (hence the difficulty in interpretation of Thanatoid speech, 'mistaking for pauses the silences between his words. Because Thanatoids relate in a different way to time' (*VN* p.226)). It is the domain of advanced entropy, as at a Thanatoid party where 'the dancing, rudimentary to begin with, tended towards gig's-end stillness, as conversation grew less and less meaningful to what few outsiders had blundered in' (*VN* p.225). It is, however, not an entropy of one-way nihilistic death, but one of the consuming of all into a fluxing, returning whole. Significant, perhaps is the fact that Pynchon does not mention entropy by name in *Vineland*. In the previous novel it stands as a covenant to the failure of the ignorant, exploiting system, that defines its supremacy in linear terms. *Vineland*, as has been seen, also points towards a non-linear universe, in which entropic dissipation is not a

permanent, final end, but part of a constant state of dissolution and assembly, as it is in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Whatever its expression, though, a world of perpetual return, of continuity that binds spirit and matter is a constant as solidly in place in *Vineland* as it is in the previous novel.

Against this background the characters move, harried perpetually by the manifestations of 1980s American society and culture; the FBI, CIA (more specifically named versions of 'Them') and the ubiquitous Tube. The collection of generally preterite individuals who move within Vineland's environs constitute to a certain extent a progression in Pynchon's vision. Previously Pynchon has drawn a configuration of forces that ranges between mutually-defining and mutually-excluding poles, implying but rarely addressing an 'excluded middle'. Zachary Leader in reviewing *Vineland* is mindful of a departure:

> Pynchon has found a way to imagine and people what in his earlier fiction he could (would?) only gesture at: a space between the vice-like polarities of pattern and accident, one and zero, flip and flop, System and Zone, paranoia [...] and anti-paranoia [...] This space is *Vineland*.[1]

The idea is hinted at frequently, for example, that Vineland marks 'some invisible boundary, met when approaching from the sea' and 'crossing the Golden Gate Bridge represents a transition, in the metaphysics of the region, there to be felt even by travelers unwary as Zoyd' (*VN* p.314).

Integral in the Vineland existence is an attitude, an approach that embraces the nature of the excluded middle, and is circumscribed by

several characters and situations. An acceptance of the arbitrariness of linear time leads naturally to an emphasis on the *moment*, (as discussed above in relation to *Gravity's Rainbow*) defined almost impossibly neither by what goes before or after it, the 'real present' that has been at the centre of Pynchon's writing since *V.*. For Frenesi Gates this comes as a moment of resolution, visiting her at an indefinite time, hung significantly between the novel's two main reference points, the mid-sixties and 1984: 'When the sixties were over, when the hemlines came down and the colors of the clothes went murky and everyone wore makeup that was supposed to look like you had no makeup on' (*VN* p.72). The location of this time is left deliberately vague, suspended between grid references, marked only by Frenesi's acute intuition:

> Here, finally - here's my Woodstock, my golden age of rock and roll, my acid adventures, my Revolution. Come into her own at last, street-legal, full-auto qualified, she understood her particular servitude as the freedom, granted to a few, to act outside warrants and charters, to ignore history and the dead, to imagine no future, no yet-to-be-born, to be able simply to go on defining moments only, purely, by the action that filled them. Here was a world of simplicity and certainty no acidhead, no revolutionary anarchist would ever find, a world based on the one and zero of life and death. Minimal, beautiful. (*VN* p.72)

This intuitive sureness is at the base of her personal philosophy. She fantasizes a similar captivation that might embrace a whole group of people, the action that is true revolution:

> a mysterious people's oneness, [...] all paths, human and projectile, true, the people in a single presence [...] individuals who in meetings might only bore or be pains in the ass here suddenly being seen to transcend, almost beyond will to move smoothly between baton and victim to take the blow instead. (*VN* p.117)

By immersing the action of *Vineland* in the spirit of sixties subversion Pynchon provides himself with considerable material for an examination of the instinctive revolutionary zeal of which Frenesi dreams. Far from finding it in abundance, the less attractive reality of a narcissistic game of acquiescent and agreeable surrender comes into view. We are alerted specifically to this point by the use of the word 'revolutionary', 'invoked in those days widely and sometimes lovingly and enjoying a wide range of meaning' (*VN* p.117). The problem is one of losing the immediacy of Frenesi's timeless sixth sense by forcing it into definition and communication. DL sees the dull, inert result of this difficulty in the Kunoichi, where 'the original purity of ninja intent had been subverted, made cruel and more worldly, bled of spirit, once eternal techniques now only one-shot and disposable' (*VN* p.127). The same situation surrounds Weed Atman, the reluctant popular leader beset by a 'swarm of disciples', 'all making the basic revolutionary mistake' (*VN* p.227) and clinging to him as a messianic guru. This misplaced allegiance and promotion of 'hippy' culture justifies a

considerable amount of incisive satire by Pynchon, such as Isaiah Two Four's parents (and indeed his name) who 'discriminated *among* vegetables, excluding from their diet everything red, for example, the color of anger' (*VN* p.20). The true situation, we are shown, is the absolute reverse of a freedom of spirit. It is a capitulation, a conformity vain enough to seek radical expression, playing semi-aware into the hands of the establishment. A realization of this is the fortune of Brock Vond - 'to have seen in the activities of the sixties Left not threats to order but unacknowledged desires for it [...] Brock saw the deep [...] need only to stay children forever, safe inside some extended national Family' (*VN* p.269). His ability to manipulate and control is hence more complete.

The distinction is a necessary one to keep in mind. A faithful mode of action, a movement in sympathy with the demands of the present exists, but beware of cheap imitations. Besides the negative overtones of the 'revolution' the isolates of Vineland have also the constricts of the 'system' out of which to manoeuvre. Frenesi's unanchored emancipation is noticeably cut short with the re-emergence of Brock Vond. Emphasized here is that her freedom resides in a *non-linear* framework. An existence otherwise is to be subordinated to causal control, of relation to 'events' in the 'past', with a focus away from personal density, as it is illustrated in *Gravity's Rainbow* (*GR* p.509) :

> She had been privileged to live outside of Time, to enter and leave at will, looting and manipulating, weightless, invisible. Now Time had claimed her again, put her under house arrest, taken her

passport away. Only an animal with a full set of pain receptors after all. (*VN* p.287)

The enforcement used here is the same as that of the Western drive for colonization that asserts itself against the Kirghiz and Herero tribes in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and to which Kathryn Hume draws particular attention as a specific compulsion to adopt the measures of linear time.[2] The change for Frenesi, as has been stated, is triggered by Brock Vond. His position in *Vineland* is as an almost overloaded embodiment of the negatives of 1980s America. His mentor is Cesare Lombroso, advocate of the 'criminal body' idea, an 'undeniably racist spin-off from nineteenth century phrenology [...] it seemed reasonable to Brock' (*VN* p.272), and more importantly the concept of misoneism. The Lombrosian idea suggests a 'deep organic human principle', the '"hatred of anything new". It operated as a feedback device to keep societies coming along safely, coherently. Any sudden attempt to change things would be answered by an immediate misoneistic backlash, not only from the state but from the people themselves' (*VN* p.273). Within the hazy landscapes of Vineland this is a philosophy fundamentally and actively obstructive - the determination of everything by what is already established as the diametrical opponent of Frenesi's 'minimal, beautiful' state. As well as being his stipulated philosophy for existence, Lombrosian rigidity is conditioned into Vond himself. This strongly supports the idea of Vond as personification of his imperfectly-conceived nation. Emphasis is delivered via his dreams, a subconscious of anguished torment, starkly contrasting to the relative bliss of Frenesi, and even Zoyd.

Pivotal in Vond's make-up is a volatile unrest which manifests itself as his 'uneasy anima', the 'Madwoman in the Attic' (*VN* p.274). She represents an imbalance constantly fighting for reassertion - on being overwhelmed by uncontrollable laughter he is on the verge of surrendering to it, the purest moment of reality he experiences: 'he glimpsed his brain about to turn inside out like a sock but not what would happen after that. At some point he threw up, broke some cycle, and that, as he came to see it, was what "saved" him - some component of his personality in charge of nausea' (*VN* p.278). The process is a misoneistic one, a parallel of the 'feedback device' in Lombrosian terms. It is a guiding hand that will, it seems, perpetuate his waking composure as much as it will trouble his unconscious.

The net effect of the civilization that both maintains and is perpetuated by Vond and his minions is a force that resists the impulse to re-balance enacted by Takeshi. Resulting is an America of misoneism in action. It is acknowledged by Ditzah: '"Then again, it's the whole Reagan program isn't it - dismantle the New Deal, reverse the effects of World War II, restore fascism at home and around the world, flee into the past, can't you feel it, all the dangerous childish stupidity"' (*VN* p.265). The lasting implications of this society strapped to its own conservatism are repression and systematic delusion, as forceful as the stink of conspiracy that surrounds Enzian towards the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* - '"They just let us forget. Give us too much to process, fill up every minute, keep us distracted, it's what the Tube's for..."' (*VN* p.314). However, the seed of hope is in Vond himself. The 'cycle' he breaks is an archetypal force, and his imbalance cannot be maintained for ever.

Away from the pursuant forces of Federal repression, reconciled with and advanced beyond the corrupted, second-hand spirit of action, there are those who accept the environment of Vineland with unpremeditated ease. These are the characters who most justify Zachary Leader's assertion that Pynchon has created a real terrain for his excluded middle. Zoyd Wheeler is a doper in the Säure Bummer tradition, and his haphazard lifestyle recalls the Counterforce antics in *Gravity's Rainbow*. He is the possessor of an uncontrived, natural receptiveness. He is exposed to dreams and hypnotic states which are characterized by a seemingly inescapable divide between experience and understanding. He dreams carrier pigeons 'each bearing a message for him, but none of whom, light pulsing in their wings, he could ever quite get to in time' (*VN* p.3), and the sight of street signs in an out-of-body experience that cannot quite connect - the language is English, '"but there's something between it and my brain that won't let it through"' (*VN* p.40). This *does* realize a balanced perspective - Zoyd is thwarted but undeterred, an experience accepted without absolute binary judgment - neither void nor transcendent, but simply taken in. For Oedipa, the task was always to read and interpret those signs, and in *Gravity's Rainbow* Lyle Bland and Slothrop both enact a complete passing beyond to the 'Other'. Here, neither extreme is indicated, but rather a welcome sensitivity that demands no results, while receiving with positive neutrality what is present. Van Meter provides a fitting contrast to Zoyd's openness - he *actively* seeks such a state and finds instead counter-productive self-analysis - 'searching all his life for transcendent chances [...] but whenever he got close it was like, can't shit, can't get a hardon, the more he worried the less likely it was to

happen' (*VN* p.223). Of comparable signficance is Frenesi's 'Dream of the Gentle Flood'. Like Zoyd's out-of-body reverie, which is connected intimately with 'moon, tides, and planetary magnetism' (*VN* p.39), Frenesi's dream occurs 'almost on a lunar basis' (*VN* p.256). It brings her images of peaceful serenity - 'all covered by the cool green flood, which almost paralyzed her with its beauty, its clarity' (*VN* p.256). Neither the case of Zoyd nor Frenesi suggests any imminent transcendence, but trouble is taken to stress the degree of empathy with global and universal lines of force that accompany the experiences and are clearly an important factor in their occurrence.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* the distinction is made between an existence inside the balanced circularity of the universe, embracing transcendent hope in a unity of opposites - the Herero village, for example - and a mockery of the same, the Rocket mandala, Der Raketen-Stadt; a mirror image seeking to transcend, only to 'the cold sphere' (*GR* p.723). The point holds fast in *Vineland*: while DL is with the Kunoichi, as has already been mentioned, she sees that the 'original purity' has gone, been taken and used. Like the Herero mandala in *Gravity's Rainbow*, taken and struck into a Rocket-insignia, a corruption of the motivating impulse is inevitable. This does not presume a manipulative or malicious intent necessarily, but simply restates the underlying truth, that resonant, eternally symbolic forms and emotions cannot be taken and duplicated for second-hand application. What remains with the Kunoichi, is something limited to the finite, to the practical and teachable - '"knowledge won't come down all at once in any big transcendent moment [...] Here it's always out at the margins, using the millimeters and little tenths of a second, you understand, scuffling and scraping for

everything we get"' (*VN* p.112). The most meticulous imitation can never reproduce the essential whole - this remains instead somewhere far back in the 'massed and breathing redwoods' (*VN* p.137) of Vineland.

The Traverse-Becker reunion in the novel's final pages is a timely fusion-point for the shifting conflicts and differences at large throughout. The occasion takes on a didactic tone - the opposing actions of karmic adjustment and misoneistic backlash are bound together in the pertinent passage from Emerson. In a characteristic desire to soften the directness of delivery, Pynchon puts the words in the mouth of Jess Traverse, quoting from William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

> '"Secret retributions are always restoring the level, when disturbed, of the divine justice. It is impossible to tilt the beam. All the tyrants and proprietors and monopolists of the world in vain set their shoulders to heave the bar. Settles forever more the ponderous equator to its line, and man and mote, and star and sun, must range to it, or be pulverized by the recoil."' (*VN* p.369)

The emphasis is reassuring as well as cautionary. An ever-returning conflict is the binding universal element, but one whose equilibrium we must be mindful of for our own sanctuary. The Yurok 'woge' attend symbolically in tacit observation, the 'dolphins, who would succeed man' referred to in *The Crying of Lot 49* (*CL* p.85), and hinted at in Frenesi's dream - 'divers, who would come, not now, but soon,' and again later those 'who had left their world to the humans', and waited to 'see how humans did with the world. And if we started Fucking up too bad,

added some local informants, they would come back, teach us how to live the right way, save us...' (*VN* p.187).

The Traverse-Becker reunion heralds a firmly optimistic end to *Vineland*. A spirit of reconciliation and union runs through the final pages - Brock Vond dismantled and 'gone over', to the celebration of gloating Thanatoids at the 'Zero Inn'; Takeshi and DL together, having 'renegotiated the no-sex clause' (*VN* p.321); and Sister Rochelle's allegorical story to Takeshi of Hell and Heaven, reminding him of the significance of the former - 'we forget that its original promise was never punishment but reunion' (*VN* p.383). The appearance of Desmond the dog to Prairie 'thinking he must be home' (*VN* p.385) returns us to *Vineland*'s opening; a hint at circularity incorporating the novel's shifting sense of time and balanced configuring of destructive and regenerative forces. The optimism is in the guise of a synthesis of both these elements, a sentiment perhaps best expressed, again by Emerson: 'I am *Defeated* all the time; yet to Victory I am born.'[3] A definitive solution to the difficulties imposed by the America of Brock Vond is rarely manifest, but the realization of the whole of which it is a part is a necessary process, and one that is integrated sympathetically in the pages of *Vineland*.

* * *

*Vineland* in a way offers its own postscript to the works of Thomas Pynchon to date. We are gathered, as are the listeners at the Traverse-Becker reunion, to hear a sentiment expressed which is one of hope, if brutally so. It states, once again, that our vain strategems of power cannot pervert the course of the universe but will only turn to annihilate the fragile structures of our own transient lives. The maturity of expression in *Vineland* is a fitting sequel to the complexity of its predecessor. The all-encompassing, encyclopedic content of the larger novel has evolved into a more natural, perhaps less self-conscious mode of discourse. The voice of Emerson in the closing pages of *Vineland* reiterates the respect in which the 'ponderous equator' of universal stability should be held. It articulates well the same persistence of return over linearity that is characteristic of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The Emersonian treatise is there also: 'Just as there are, in the World, machineries committed to injustice as an enterprise, so too there seem to be provisions active for balancing things out once in a while. Not as enterprise, exactly, but at least in the dance of things' (*GR* p.580).

The expression is of a world in which an inevitably temporary 'linear culture' has prevailed, the result being that 'not only most of humanity - most of the World, animal, vegetable, and mineral, is laid to waste in the process' (*GR* p.412). *Vineland* restates the significance of this truth in vividly contemporary terms. The basis, however, is unchanged - fulfilled, honest interaction within a civilization built upon the Cartesian duality is a difficult path to tread. Pynchon's question, without resorting to the improbability of extremes, is whether we can exist meaningfully and sympathetically in this context with a

fulfilled sense of 'self', whilst accommodating an equal awareness and capacity to 'experience' a wider reality that surpasses subject/object duality. The problem is addressed throughout Pynchon's writing - most courageously in *Gravity's Rainbow* - but *Vineland* confirms his convictions, and rumours of another novel nearing completion should be cause for excited anticipation.

NOTES: CHAPTER SEVEN AND CONCLUSION

1. Zachary Leader, 'Living on the Invisible Boundary', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2-8 February 1990, p.115.

2. Kathryn Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to* Gravity's Rainbow, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p.131.

3. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson in his Journals*, edited by Joel Porte (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.283.

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