

The American Epic Novel in the Ulyssean Tradition

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Dominik Steinhilber

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS	1
I. JAMES JOYCE'S <i>ULYSSES</i>	63
1. Introduction: Methods and Patterns – The Ulyssean Problem Terms	65
2. The Odyssey and the Metempsychotic Method in <i>Ulysses</i>	69
3. Secular Consubstantiality and Joyce's Mass in <i>Ulysses</i>	83
4. Ulyssean Parallax and the Good European	114
5. Conclusion: The Jew's Harp	138
II. THOMAS PYNCHON'S <i>GRAVITY'S RAINBOW</i>	141
1. Introduction: The Joyce Harp Lost (?)	143
2. A "German Odyssey": <i>Gravity's Rainbow's</i> Anti-Parzival	150
3. Joyce's Mass and Pynchon's Liturgical Calendar: Time and History in <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i>	203
4. Parallax and Moiré: Superposing Flat Perspectives in <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i>	287
5. Conclusion: The Joyce Harp Regained	354
III. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE'S <i>INFINITE JEST</i>	363
1. Introduction: "I'm just starting on <i>jew's-harp</i> "	365
2. Metempsychosis: Gendering <i>Infinite Jest's</i> "Family Mythology" and the Reincarnation of Postmodern Styles	373
3. From "Consubstantial Father" to "Grammatical Mother": Wittgenstein and the Return of the Author in <i>Infinite Jest</i>	426
4. Joycean Parallax and the Doppler Effect in <i>Infinite Jest</i>	488
5. Conclusion: Bloom through Bloom	513
CONCLUSION: RETURNING TO <i>ULYSSES</i>	523
BIBLIOGRAPHY	539

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Ulyssean Tradition

Without a doubt, James Joyce's 1922 *Ulysses*, Thomas Pynchon's 1973 *Gravity's Rainbow* and David Foster Wallace's 1996 *Infinite Jest* are seminal masterpieces of their time. According to general consensus, these novels – famously complex and long doorstoppers everyone knows (to appreciate) yet few, so the polemic goes, have read – are singular works that have come to serve as the paradigm of their literary period. This perceived singularity is so strong that comparing *Gravity's Rainbow* to *Ulysses* has been likened to “comparing apples and oranges” (Solberg 33). While *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* regularly lead lists of the greatest novels ever written and are oftentimes uttered in the same breath when talking about the complex and influential, reading them in relation to one another is usually seen to “make[] for very problematical comparison” (Solberg 38), as if their singular autonomy ruled out all but the most superficial forms of relatedness – length, complexity, importance.

This study argues that not only *can* Joyce's *Ulysses*, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and Wallace's *Infinite Jest* be meaningfully put in relation to one another but that their singularity and paradigmatic status in 20th century literature must be understood through the relationality of a Ulyssean Tradition. Novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* – and certainly others that, however, exceed the limited scope of this study – can be read in a Ulyssean Tradition, their singular, paradigmatic aesthetic projects emerging from a reciprocal dialogue with *Ulysses* in their self-inscription into a Ulyssean Tradition. The intertextual connection, I hold, of this Ulyssean Tradition is integrally constitutive of the autonomy through which these novels claim the status of singular representations of their respective human condition and thus epic paradigms of a new way of writing the world. The novels in the Ulyssean Tradition can be seen to pick up on the systems of order of *Ulysses* as represented in the novel's central negotiation between the triad of its problem terms metempsychosis, consubstantiality, and parallax which Joyce develops to make the modern world accessible to literature. These problem terms – terms that not only continually occupy Joyce's protagonists throughout the novel and establish its central themes, but also serve to describe and negotiate the novel's own aesthetic as its principles of internal organization – represent a complex structuring device in which the novel's

thematic, poetic, and aesthetic dimensions come together. The novels in the Ulyssean Tradition make use of the multilayered function of the Ulyssean problem terms as systems of order as they (re)interpret and transpose them to meet their own, singularly changed human condition.¹ By thus inscribing themselves into the intertextual constellation of the Ulyssean Tradition through their variant transpositions of the Ulyssean model, they establish their own, autonomous aesthetic project through the Ulyssean Tradition. Relationally positioning themselves in the literary field alongside *Ulysses* as the central paradigm of modernist epic literature, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* develop their singular, and themselves to-be-seminal, aesthetics of Pynchon's postmodernism and Wallace's New Sincerity or metamodernism through, with, and in the Ulyssean Tradition. The Ulyssean Tradition presented in this study must therefore be understood not only as an investigation into a way of writing the modern epic novel, tracing the permutations of Joyce's novel in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest*, but also a way of reading that, through the tension between a monologic strife for autonomy and paradigmaticness and a dialogic intertextual reciprocity with *Ulysses* as pre-text that defines the Ulyssean Tradition, can offer new, independent readings of these novels.

Intertextuality in the Ulyssean Tradition

Although the concept has its precursors, e.g., in T.S. Eliot's notion of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" which this study will partly make use of, the term 'intertextuality' was first properly coined by Julia Kristeva in her – as Guido Isekenmeier et al. note itself highly intertextual (Isekenmeier et al. 20) – discussion of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism in the novel. According to Bakhtin, the individual parole is always "half someone else's" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 293), earlier usages and contexts impressing themselves on the word and thereby constituting the communal nature of language. Whereas Bakhtin views this polyglossia as internal to the text, Kristeva reformulates it as a dialogue between texts. In conceiving of (inter)textuality as an all-encompassing web of textual relations, Kristeva radicalized the conception of the relatedness of texts. For the poststructuralists, each text is

¹ The Ulyssean problem terms and their variant transpositions in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* will be further outlined at the end of this chapter.

made up of an infinite recombination of other texts, putting the concepts of authorship, originality and the interpretative closedness of texts into question. However, while convincing, such a universal concept of intertextuality as ultimately defining all texts as parts and nodes of one network from which they derive their perpetually unstable meaning raises problems for the practical study of intertextuality. As for instance Manfred Pfister has argued, Kristeva's wide definition of intertextuality is hardly operational, almost entirely of only theoretical interest and next to useless heuristically (Pfister, "Konzepte Der Intertextualität" 15). If all texts are intertexts of all other texts, how does this help investigate relations between texts, and how can this explain that some texts clearly appear to be more related to one another than others? My use of 'tradition' as the specific, intertextual relationship between novels like *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* will therefore narrow down the concept of intertextuality to a more manageable and usable size, i.e., to the way intertextuality is by now conventionally used in literary criticism.

One fruitful attempt to provide such an operational understanding of intertextuality which will serve to further explicate the shape of the Ulyssean Tradition can be found in the French structuralist Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests*. Genette replaces what Kristeva calls 'intertextuality' by the term 'transtextuality,' using 'intertextuality' solely to refer to direct appropriations of one part of a text into another, and distinguishes between five forms in which texts can relate to other texts.² While Genette calls the phenomenon of textual transcendence in general 'transtextuality,' he uses 'intertextuality' to refer to "the actual presence of one text within another" (Genette 2) such as in the practice of quoting or plagiarizing or, less explicitly, allusions. Intertextuality proper thus describes one text borrowing from another, the latter thereby inhabiting the former. As becomes most apparent in the practice of allusion, the full meaning of such a borrowing "presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text" (Genette 2). Another form of textual transcendence according to Genette can be seen in the relation between the text proper and its surrounding and framing texts like "a title, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal

² While I shall use Genette to approach what I mean by a (Ulyssean) tradition, the term 'intertextuality' has by now been so firmly established that, for simplicity's sake, I shall use 'intertextuality' in the general sense of any relation between texts unless a use of Genette's terminology is necessary or explicitly noted.

notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic” (Genette 3), which Genette terms paratextuality. However, although otherwise fruitful, it has been widely questioned whether Genette’s transtextual category of paratextuality even constitutes a real form of inter/transtextuality or whether it should rather be considered *intratextual* (Stocker 59).

While intertextuality describes the reappearance of a segment of a text within another, foreign text, Genette distinguishes this limited intertextuality from metatextual and hypertextual relations. These pertain to the global relations between works as structural wholes. Metatextuality, of which Genette says fairly little, is defined as a commentary-like relation which “unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it) in fact even without naming it” (Genette 4), i.e., a text which refers to and could not exist without another such as can be seen most overtly in (scholarly) criticism. While (literary) criticism, such as this study, provides the readiest example for this relationship, more often than not substantiated by intertextual quotations, Genette also provides a less explicit example for a text metatextually relating to another such as in the way Hegel’s “*The Phenomenology of the Mind* [...] allusively and almost silently evoke[s] Denis Diderot’s *Neveu de Rameau*” (Genette 4).

Genette distinguishes the metatextual relationship through which, in commentary, one text inheres in or derives from another from the more complex and generally more ‘literary’ relationship of hypertextuality. Hypertextuality, the primary subject of Genette’s *Palimpsests*, describes a relationship between texts in which an earlier hypotext is transformed by various, more or less explicit means into a hypertext. A hypertext does not come into existence without the hypotext it derives from. While it does not comment on it, it nevertheless still evokes the preexisting text. Like metatexts, hypertexts derive from another prior text. However, whereas in metatextuality this derivation through which one text relates to and inhabits another takes the shape of, in the widest sense, commentary, hypertextuality describes a transformation by which a text is grafted onto another. A hypertext thus not only “‘speaks’ about a second text” (Genette 5) – as Aristotle’s *Poetics* as a metatext of *Oedipus Rex* would – but generates itself from the model of its hypotext. A hypertext can hence either imitate a given hypotext or transform it in a

ludic, satirical or serious mood. Genette distinguishes in hypertextuality between transformations like the ludic parody, which consists of “applying, as literally as possible, a noble text to a (real) vulgar action very different from the action in the original but analogous enough to make the application possible” (Genette 143), satirical travesty, by which he means a noble text being transcribed into a lowly register while retaining its action and relationships of characters, thus producing a stylistic dissonance (Genette 56), and serious transposition, the transformation of a hypotext into a new context such as can be seen in the relation between Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* and *Faust*, as well as imitative practices such as pastiche, a playful mimicry of another text’s language, the satirical effect of the caricature’s imitation of a hypotext’s style as in the mock-heroic, and, lastly, forgeries, which, like pastiche and caricature, imitate a hypotext’s style yet do not do so for comic or satirical effect (Genette 27–28).

While transformations can thus be product of simple alterations, different stylistic registers or courses of action applied to a hypotext to produce the hypertext, Genette views imitative transpositions as more complex procedures since they require the reproduction of an abstract, underlying model found in the hypotext in the later hypertext. Such transpositions, according to Genette, can range from formal procedures, such as the act of translation, which imitates the hypotext as closely as possible in another language, or excisions and additions that derive from an earlier hypotext, to thematic transpositions like for example the spatial transposition of the Greek *Odyssey* into the Irish *Ulysses*. As can be seen, e.g., in adaptations, which transpose a hypotext into another mode of presentation, formal and thematic transpositions form a continuum. Formal transformations may lead to thematic variations and thematic transpositions may require formal changes. Both Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Joyce’s *Ulysses* can thus be regarded as differently realized transformations of the underlying hypotext of Homer’s *Odyssey*. *Ulysses* can be understood as “transposing the action of the *Odyssey* to twentieth-century Dublin,” a transposition that retains the *Odyssey*’s “pattern of actions and relationships” yet “treats [it] in a different style,” whereas the *Aeneid* does not translocate the *Odyssey*’s action into Rome but instead draws from Homer’s model, “that is, following the hallowed formula, by *imitating* Homer” (Genette 5–6). Similarly, novels like Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* or *Joseph and His Brothers* transpose their hypotext, *Faust* and parts of the

book of Genesis respectively, through modernization and naturalization – Mann’s Leverkühn’s deal with the devil is realized as him voluntarily contracting syphilis, thereby exchanging the musical genius the illness affords him with for the decline into dementia it will eventually result in – or adding a motivation where the original hypotext lacks one. While hypertextuality can thus take many different shapes, from simple transformation as in parody to transposition and from the formal transformations of translations and adaptations to thematic reenvisionings, and these forms can, oftentimes depending on the pragmatic context the work is read in, occur in the same text, what connects all types of Genette’s hypertextuality is the relationship texts enter if one text derives itself from a prior text in a manner that does not exhaust itself in commentary.

Lastly, whereas ‘hypertextuality’ describes the relationship between singular hypertexts and hypotexts, Genette’s ‘architextuality’ refers to the abstract and implicit relation of a given text to the class of texts it belongs to, of which genre is only the most apparent example. The recognition of architextual relationships thus produces certain thematic and figurative expectations that shape the way a text is understood, Genette noting that “generic perception is known to guide and determine to a considerable degree the readers’ expectations, and thus their reception of the work” (Genette 5). Architextuality is “the most abstract and most implicit” (Genette 4) form of transtextuality. It is at most marked by the paratext but in itself a category that transcends the organization of a given text: “One might,” Genette remarks, “even say that determining the generic status of the text is not the business of the text but that of the reader, the critic, or the public” (Genette 4). While hypertextuality hence unites texts as singular entities, the architext describes a reservoir of textual characteristics shared by a number of texts from which a specific text emerges – yet, importantly, not treated as referencing one singular text.

For this study, Genette’s notion of serious transposition is the most important one. The Ulyssean Tradition can perhaps be best understood as an extreme and highly complex form of hypertextuality with *Ulysses* as its hypotext. However, the (Ulyssean) tradition is such an extreme case of hypertextuality as to warrant further classification since it also echoes, or broaches, features reminiscent of the archi- and metatextual in its mode of transposition and transformation of *Ulysses*.

As Genette remarks, his transtextual categories are far from exclusive, separate or absolute but bleed into one another and describe different, coexisting aspects of textuality that vary in the degree of how they actually occur. Hence, the hypertext also “makes use of textual allusions” (Genette 8) both to mark and realize its hypertextual connection to the prior text. *Infinite Jest* thus uses distinctly Joycean vocabulary such as “scrotum-tightening” (112), features an auteur-character whose first name, James, and in the novel commonly abbreviated full name (JOI) must remind one of James Joyce or, more abstractly and hence hypertextually, is thematically and aesthetically concerned with ‘metempsychosis.’ Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* similarly references Joyce and *Ulysses* by openly mentioning Joyce’s name,³ visiting places connected to Joyce, parodying the ‘mythical method’ Eliot had argued to be the central innovation of *Ulysses*, and utilizing and transforming important Ulyssean symbols and structures like the mass or harp or establishing both the year *Ulysses* is set in – 1904 - and was published – 1922 – as “critical points” (451) in time.⁴ However, while intertextual allusions to Joyce and *Ulysses* seem to ‘naturally’ occur in the Ulyssean Tradition – because they signal the novels’ self-inscription in the Ulyssean Tradition, because this self-inscription can perhaps only happen on the back of intertextual references or at least greatly motivates them, and, most pragmatically, because a study like this could hardly find exemplars of the Ulyssean Tradition which do not mark their hypertextual tradition intertextually at all, even if they were theoretically possible – the interest of this study lies not in listing and analyzing in Genette’s

³ Leon Forrest’s 1992 *Divine Days*, another possible candidate for an epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition, goes even further by presenting itself as an African-American counterpart to *Ulysses* – by, as Walter Göbel notes, simultaneously also referencing Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*’s “I yam what I am” (Göbel 210) – as follows: “I am what I am; I jam what I am; I yam-yam what I am; I am that I am, God-damn. But I must ram against Ham, as I jam, as I cram on the classics. More than simply a problem to box out Joyce. Be out-boxed by him, probably in a title-tilt. Fifteen rounds of boxing [the novel has fifteen chapters] or perish; even if you publish. [...] Still and all I’ll run scats with Joyce, and shake the tree in which the Bard climbed to Heaven, before I go down dead; or die trying and lying and spieling and flying” (Forrest 1102).

⁴ As Genette remarks, hypertextuality may also be marked in a hypertext’s title. Judging from the extreme remove the hypertextuality of the Ulyssean Tradition displays, this seems not to be necessary though. Nevertheless, the title of *Gravity’s Rainbow* can be found encoded into the Circe chapter, the, as McHale argues, most postmodernist *Ulysses* chapter (McHale, “Constructing (Post)Modernism: The Case of *Ulysses*” 8), in “(HE PERFORMS JUGGLER’S TRICKS, DRAWS RED, ORANGE, YELLOW, GREEN, BLUE, INDIGO AND VIOLET SILK HANDKERCHIEFS FROM HIS MOUTH) *Roygbiv*. 32 feet per second” (459; emphasis mine), i.e., the colors of the rainbow (*Roygbiv*: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet) + the speed by which gravity accelerates a falling object (32 feet per second), Pynchon as artist in *Gravity’s Rainbow* ‘juggling his balls’ in a perpetual circular motion. Similarly, *Infinite Jest* is connected to *Ulysses* via a chain of hypertextual connections tying the title-giving *Hamlet* quotation to *Ulysses*, which itself intertextually references Shakespeare’s tragedy.

restrictive sense ‘intertextual’ allusions to *Ulysses*. Although this is where the Ulyssean Tradition may show itself most clearly, quotations and direct allusions are not primarily relevant to the concept of the Ulyssean Tradition.

Instead, what ‘makes’ the Ulyssean Tradition is not (simply) a matter of intertextual allusions and linkings but rather lies in the texts’ hypertextual engagement with a specific set of aesthetic practices developed in *Ulysses*, identified as paradigmatic and transformed in novels in the Ulyssean Tradition to accommodate their own historically contingent problems. Due to the level of abstraction, complexity and variation that appears in the transpositional procedures novels in the Ulyssean Tradition perform on *Ulysses*, the Ulyssean Tradition is a phenomenon of hypertextuality that, however, exceeds Genette’s formal subcategorizations. Rather than an imitation of Joyce’s stylistic innovations in *Ulysses* or any ‘simple’ transformation of the pattern of actions or relationships of *Ulysses* into a new context alone, the Ulyssean Tradition primarily hinges on a renegotiation of the systems of order *Ulysses* derives from the methods displayed through the novel’s three problem terms metempsychosis, consubstantiality and parallax and the patterns of a parallelism to the *Odyssey* and the Catholic mass as well as synthesizing superimposition they result in in Joyce’s novel. Joyce’s triad of problem terms represent complex structuring metaphors in which the novel’s seminally modernist methods and patterns are contained and negotiated. As will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, the Ulyssean Tradition identifies these three methods and patterns as the central components of the aesthetic Joyce’s modernist novel seminally develops to make the modern world accessible to literature. As the analyses of *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* will show, each novel, in its own way, transposes these systems of order to establish their own aesthetic grafted on *Ulysses*. Although their response to the hypotext *Ulysses*, as they see it in its tradition, is at the heart of the genesis of these texts, the shape of these transpositions is not sufficiently described by the thematic, stylistic, or spatial transfers these texts perform on *Ulysses* alone. Even Genette’s examples of the more complex transformations between Homer’s *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* or Joyce’s *Ulysses*, although they begin to approach what is being described here, do not fully grasp the procedures within the Ulyssean Tradition. If the transpositions within the Ulyssean Tradition took the shape of Joyce’s transformation of the *Odyssey* into *Ulysses*, the tradition’s

hypotext would not be *Ulysses* but the *Odyssey*, which is not the case. Rather, the transpositional procedure *Ulysses* effects on the *Odyssey* – the expression of its metempsychotic method – is itself only one subject of dialogic variation in the Ulyssean Tradition. Hence, whereas *Ulysses* performs a thematic transposition of the *Odyssey*, the Ulyssean Tradition is described by a systemic transposition of *Ulysses* that also involves the method through which Joyce uses Homer. The Ulyssean Tradition is an order of references to a single text that, however, are performed as system-references (cf. Pfister, “Zur Systemreferenz”). This means that, while referencing a singular hypotext, the Ulyssean Tradition affords the novels that inscribe themselves into it a greater autonomy than that of a ‘simple’ thematic transposition of *Ulysses*.

Although metempsychosis, consubstantiality, and parallax are also *themes* of the hypotext *Ulysses* that are, more or less explicitly, thematically referenced and transformed in later novels of the Ulyssean Tradition, their primary role for the tradition is that of *systems*, more abstract modes of textual organization. The Ulyssean Tradition’s transpositional procedures may show themselves in thematic affinities, such as the Homeric parallelism of *Ulysses* being reworked in *Gravity’s Rainbow* into a reference to *Parzival* as another ‘mythical’ quest narrative. However, such thematic references may be more or less explicit. The fundamental motivation for these novels’ engagement with *Ulysses* resides in a transposition of *Ulysses*’ abstract systems of order rather than the themes they establish. *Gravity’s Rainbow* ‘translates’ the systems of order in *Ulysses* into the postmodern language of relativity and irony; *Infinite Jest* ‘adapts’ the Ulyssean solution to the problem of modernity to the issues of a time after postmodernist literature. Due to the level of abstraction these systems come to afford, their respective transformations in novels of the Ulyssean Tradition can take a variety of shapes. Therefore, whereas for instance *Ulysses*’ use of myth, through which its metempsychotic method is realized, reappears in *Infinite Jest*’s references to mythology, the Ulyssean traces in Wallace’s novel can only be fully deciphered when viewed not merely as a (albeit complex)

theme played upon but as an abstract system underlying and motivating the text's aesthetics.⁵ The following analyses will therefore make use of Joyce's problem terms in their plural function (for the Ulyssean Tradition) as theme, diagnostic problematization, and mode of aesthetic execution rather than reducing, e.g., metempsychosis to myth, consubstantiality to religious themes, or parallax to multiperspectivalism alone. Instead, I shall use Joyce's problem terms as structural units in order to – like the works discussed here – attempt to capture their multilayered function in the Ulyssean Tradition. As already noted, the Ulyssean Tradition is not so much described by a transposition of one or the other theme of the plot of *Ulysses* but rather assumes the shape of a system reference to the Ulyssean problem terms as structuring metaphors in which thematic, structural, and poetic levels are connected.⁶ While these themes are hence certainly also present in the Ulyssean Tradition, it is their corresponding problem terms' abstract function as multifaceted complexes that organize *Ulysses* in which they operate in the Ulyssean Tradition and which represents the subject of this study. Hence, as will be further elaborated upon toward the end of this chapter, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* not only approach and transpose the Ulyssean systems of order differently as a result of their respective aesthetic projects, they also fundamentally attach themselves to different aspects of these systems of order, thereby making use of the multifaceted nature of Joyce's structuring metaphors in order to produce their respective aesthetics.

Seen this way, the hypertextual transformations of the Ulyssean system in the Ulyssean Tradition also have an architextual quality to them. As Genette remarks, “generic architextuality is, historically, almost always constituted [...] by way of hypertextuality” (Genette 7). Imitations of a given hypotext in time become generalized to the point as to produce discernible generic features which a text can play on and inscribe itself into without having to show (direct) traces of the original hypotext to be grouped into a genre said hypotext lays the foundation to.

⁵ As thematic allusions, *Infinite Jest*'s references to Eve, Helen or Medusa would only provide weak links to *Ulysses*. As system-references to the Ulyssean metempsychotic method, however, they are central to *Infinite Jest*'s internal organization and overall aesthetic as a novel in the Ulyssean Tradition.

⁶ Parallax, for instance, is on the one hand a central theme in *Ulysses* and experienced by many of its characters, on the other hand a metaphor for the novel's overall structure, yet also integral to the modernist aesthetic Joyce develops through his negotiation of this term. In each case, the nexus that spins around the problem term 'parallax' cannot be reduced to issues of multiperspectivalism, synthesis, Nietzschean philosophy, astronomic themes, and so on, even though all these issues and many more come together to shape parallax as a system of order and structuring device in *Ulysses*.

Generic system-references thereby also allow for more ample variations than direct linkages to a hypotext, even though the hypotext, referenced not in its individual but its generic quality, remains present. Hence, as Ulrich Broich shows, exemplars of a genre reference their genre's pretext (which, in its singular existence, would not be seen as part of the genre but of another, e.g., Robinson Crusoe being a bildungsroman yet laying the foundation to the Robinsonade) as much as their genre, whereby the individual pretext is primarily not present in its individual but in its generic quality (Broich 51). In the case of the Ulyssean Tradition, something related yet obverse seems to happen. The Tradition's systemic or paradigmatic (paradigmatizing) approach to the hypotext *Ulysses* produces a certain number of tightly defined yet highly variable features, the aforementioned Ulyssean systems of order based in *Ulysses*' triad of problem terms, that allow for great, genre-like freedom of variation yet always remain directly connected to the individual pretext. The Ulyssean systems of order constitute an abstract aesthetic that other novels can reference and renegotiate without necessarily having to play into the distinct themes through which they find their expression in *Ulysses*. Even though, of course, novels of the Ulyssean Tradition may also respond to Ulyssean themes,⁷ the primary role of *Ulysses* lies in providing a system from which these novels can set out to (re)claim a sense of representing an entire human condition in aesthetic totality. In a 'tradition,' paradigmatic references to a single pretext establish constituent system-features which, as in a genre, a) exceed intertextual allusion and become abstract and aesthetic, and b) can be transformed and adapted to fit the given project without, in stark contrast to 'genre,' ever losing sight of the hypotext. Since the novels of the Ulyssean Tradition approach their hypotext *Ulysses* in a manner akin to system-references rather than thematic allusion, their transformations can lead to highly distinct, at first sight unconnected, results that, however, can be traced back to *Ulysses* as a system.

While these texts all draw from the systems developed by *Ulysses*, the expression of this aesthetic derivation is realized with such genre-like freedom as to at times obfuscate the close affinities between texts like *Infinite Jest* and *Gravity's Rainbow* – affinities whose full

⁷ This may include both themes directly connected to the Ulyssean systems of order such as Joyce's use of astronomical metaphors in the course of his pattern of stereoscopic superimposition reappearing in *Gravity's Rainbow*'s interest in astronomical red-shifts, and thematic structures like the bi-partite plot of *Ulysses*, held between the poles of the pragmatic everyman Bloom and the hyperintellectual aesthete Stephen, that is picked up by *Infinite Jest* with its two protagonists, one an uneducated but well-meaning former addict, the other a young genius and tennis-prodigy.

meaning can oftentimes only be deciphered when viewed through the lens of a Ulyssean Tradition. ‘Tradition’ hence semi-architextually establishes a group of texts that share a family resemblance. This traditional family, however, though its features reside in references to a system, remains tightly connected to its proclaimed founder. It is an individual reference that acts as a system-reference. Though approaching genre and not-quite-yet-genre, ‘tradition’ does not resolve itself in architextuality eventually but remains hypertextual.⁸ For the Ulyssean Tradition, *Ulysses* cannot be ‘forgotten’ (which seems to be a feature of genres with regard to their respective pretexts) but always remains to provide a system of methods and patterns to be permuted indefinitely with great, definitory, import to a text’s interior workings while being possibly less overt than other intertexts. One can write a detective story or read and identify one as such without necessarily knowing Poe’s Dupin; conversely, the accomplishment of novels in the Ulyssean Tradition is always an effect of a direct, if system-oriented and paradigmaticizing, renegotiation of the accomplishment of *Ulysses*, even though what they accomplish through this transposition might still ‘work’ on one without knowledge of *Ulysses* and is thus distinct from intertextual allusion. ‘Tradition,’ and with it the Ulyssean Tradition in particular, inhabits a transtextual space between complex allusion to a single text and genre-like system-reference.

In this paradigmaticizing system-approach to an individual pretext, the Ulyssean Tradition also displays a metatextual quality which defines it. Product of a twentieth century literature of increasing intellectualization, self-reflection and closeness to literary criticism only further intensified during postmodernism and the rise of the program era in American literature in the late 20th and early 21st century (McGurl, “The Program Era”), the Ulyssean Tradition assumes a commentary function. While this commentary function is highly veiled and mainly realized in the Ulyssean Tradition’s hypertextual transpositions of *Ulysses*, these aestheticized responses always constitute not only a hypertextual reworking of *Ulysses* but also a critical commentary on *Ulysses*, the methods and patterns identified as paradigmatic of the Ulyssean Tradition, and its uses. Novels that inscribe themselves into the Ulyssean Tradition hence could not only not exist without *Ulysses* in the hypertextual sense – as transpositions of Joyce’s novel

⁸ It would be hard to imagine a ‘genre’ defined by a negotiation of three interconnected problem terms derived from a single novel. At the same time, the Ulyssean Tradition exceeds what one would call intertextual, thematic allusions.

– but also as metatextual comments – as critique and negotiation of the relevance of *Ulysses*, the usefulness of its systems of order, and its place in literary history. Hence, whereas Genette remarks that “the metatext is by essence nonfictional” (Genette 397), the described commentary-function novels in the Ulyssean Tradition perform on *Ulysses* appears different from that of “a pastiche or a caricature” as being “always ‘criticism in action’” (Genette 397).⁹

This becomes particularly apparent in the way a novel like *Infinite Jest* or *Gravity’s Rainbow* takes recourse to scholarly writing – a practice central to the metatextual genre par excellence, (literary) criticism – to establish the *Ulysses* in turn to be reworked. Although such drastic academicism is certainly not definitory for the metatextual characteristic of the Ulyssean Tradition, it illustrates a core difference between a parodistic (and hence hypertextual) ‘moral’ critique and the almost scholarly, functionalized commentary the Ulyssean Tradition performs in addition. While, certainly, hypertextual practices like caricature also critically comment on their hypotext – and the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition definitely do so as well in this manner – the Ulyssean Tradition’s metatextual subdominant serves, as will be seen, to position the hypertext in relation to the hypotext *Ulysses* in the literary field as Bourdieu would conceive of it.¹⁰ In course of their (hypertextual) self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition, novels locate themselves (metatextually) in a literary history within which *Ulysses* is (made to be recognized as) relevant as the paradigm of modernist literature in the West. In order to justify their own aesthetic project and hypertextual transpositions, novels that inscribe themselves into the Ulyssean Tradition need to discuss *Ulysses*, both highlight and themselves shape the status of *Ulysses* as a paradigm to be referenced.¹¹ Therefore, whereas the individual *Ulysses* contains

⁹ Seeing how Genette otherwise takes great care to keep the different functions of transtextuality apart, his claim that “[t]he hypertext is [...] in several respects more potent than the metatext from an Aristotelian viewpoint” because it can both more freely rework the pretext and “function[] like a metatext” (Genette 397) seems out of place. Although Genette says fairly little about metatextuality in particular, there appears to be no reason why metatextuality should be restricted to non-fiction or, to put it differently, why a fictional text’s commentary-function should exhaust itself in the satirical. While at times also satirizing and parodying *Ulysses*, the Ulyssean Tradition also engages in a metatextual commentary distinct from these functions.

¹⁰ Cf. Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art*. In order to not further complicate the discussion of the Ulyssean Tradition’s intertextual (or transtextual) situatedness, I will deal with the role of the literary field separately below.

¹¹ Notably, this critical function pervades more or less clearly the Ulyssean Tradition including Joyce’s novel itself, of which Joyce famously remarked he had “put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what [he] meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality” (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 521).

various, at times contradictory readings, the *Ulysses* presented in and through the Ulyssean Tradition, i.e., the paradigmatic *Ulysses* with its classically modernist aesthetic based in its negotiation of its central problem terms, is a rather conventionalized, *traditionally* read and thus historically contingent reading of *Ulysses*. Novels in the Ulyssean Tradition are therefore highly concerned with (metatextually) outlining what *Ulysses* is, even if that critical relationship is hidden behind the dominant aesthetic relationship it helps justify and generate.

Reminiscent of literary criticism, then, the commentating transpositions in the Ulyssean Tradition rely on literary criticism and the general, historically contingent, reception of *Ulysses*. Hence, what “we all know” about *Ulysses* at a given point in time¹² shapes the *Ulysses* the Ulyssean Tradition references as much, or even more so, as the individual *Ulysses* with its not only modernist, but also postmodernist, postcolonialist, or esoteric readings. Whereas F.R. Leavis, ironically in a book titled *The Great Tradition*, doubted the continuing productivity of *Ulysses* by denying it to have any

organic principle determining, informing, and controlling into a vital whole, the elaborate analogical structure, the extraordinary variety of technical devices, the attempts at an exhaustive rendering of consciousness, for which *Ulysses* is remarkable, and which got it accepted by a cosmopolitan literary world as a new start

and calling it a “dead end” (Leavis 25–26), T.S. Eliot can be seen as a principal figure that shaped the novel of the Ulyssean Tradition by outlining the “mythical method” of *Ulysses*, one key method the Ulyssean Tradition keeps renegotiating, as akin to a “scientific discovery” which “others must pursue after [Joyce]” in their “own, independent, further investigations” (Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” 177). Eliot not only inductively predicts a Ulyssean Tradition of hypertextual transpositions. He also, in comparing *Ulysses* to a scientific discovery which literature, as if it were an academic discourse, has to grapple with and develop further, already elucidates the metatextual subdominant of the Ulyssean Tradition. The Ulyssean paradigm of the Ulyssean Tradition, that is the *Ulysses* novels formulate and critique in order to transform

¹² For instance, that *Ulysses* is a great and important novel that is hard to read, that it is the paradigmatic novel of literary modernism, that its last chapter is the primary example for an *écriture féminine* by a male author, that it employs a “mythical method,” that Joyce uses his “Uncle Charles Principle” to relate interiority, and so on.

(in reciprocity, both it and themselves), is thus historically contingent. This is the case both because it is product of an increasingly ‘academically’ intellectualized literature – which, to make matters exceedingly more complicated, is also partly Joyce’s legacy as well – and because the traditional *Ulysses* as paradigm is shaped by the nexus of commentaries surrounding it and the questions posed to it, i.e., the historically relative import of *Ulysses*. It is this traditional *Ulysses* the Ulyssean Tradition primarily references.

The system references in the Ulyssean Tradition’s transpositional procedures are a product of a metatextual commentary novels in the Ulyssean Tradition perform on *Ulysses*. Its systemic features, the patterns and methods which *Ulysses* develops, are relatively stable in the Ulyssean Tradition and provide its framework. However, their hypertextual (re)interpretation in the singular novels is motivated by a historically contingent and strategic metatextual commentary and thus highly variable.¹³ Novels in the Ulyssean Tradition thus employ metatextual commentary on *Ulysses*, their time’s knowledge of what *Ulysses* is and represents, to shape the hypotext they reference, thereby performing themselves a commentary function on *Ulysses*. Writing forth *Ulysses* in the Ulyssean Tradition necessitates writing about, and thereby looking back to, *Ulysses*. The novels’ commentary function thereby shapes *Ulysses* as a paradigmatic texts which these texts then both positively associate themselves with and negatively dissociate themselves from. To justify their own (hypertextual) project of writing forth a Ulyssean Tradition, *Ulysses* has to be established as a paradigmatic text. Thereby, a historically contingent *traditional* reading of Joyce’s novel, i.e., a metatextual commentary on what this *Ulysses* is whose tradition the novel self-consciously inherits, becomes (hypertextually) productive and formative of a tradition.

As one can see, I use ‘tradition’ to designate a so far underexamined category of transtextual relationality. While, as Genette admits, the forms of transtextuality always

¹³ Through this metatextual commentary, a single *Ulysses* is turned into a number of historically contingent *Ulysseses*. Metatextuality thereby generates a genre-like system in which *Ulysses* is x-times represented, giving the ‘original’, individual *Ulysses* the appearance of being almost ‘forgotten’. It is through this shifting commentary which produces multiple *Ulysseses* that the Ulyssean Tradition becomes almost genre-like. Characteristics that are deemed ‘Ulyssean’ in criticism (e.g., its multiperspectivalism) are contained in its problem terms, yet, depending on which *Ulysses* is produced by a later novel’s paradigmatic self-inscription, afforded with different weighing or interpretations. For instance, Joyce’s metempsychosis can be variably understood as an engagement with mythology, an intertextual method, or a representation of change and continuity.

inevitably overlap in their forming a reciprocal relationship and can thus always, to varying degrees, be found in all texts, a description of the hypertextual shape of the Ulyssean Tradition warrants a discussion of its specific inter-, archi- and metatextual qualities to distinguish this group from other texts that differently relate to *Ulysses* and are not in what I call its 'tradition.' Although hence dominantly a hypertextual phenomenon, the Ulyssean Tradition is also formed by the subdominant appearance of other transtextual procedures. Necessarily also based in intertextual allusions to *Ulysses*, the hypertextual transpositions within the Ulyssean Tradition approach their individual pretext *Ulysses* in a system-referential mode, giving the tradition a semi-architextual shape. The exact shape and (re)interpretation of this paradigmatic, and actively paradigmaticized, system is established through metatextual commentary that locates *Ulysses* as paradigm.¹⁴ Dominantly hypertextual, the Ulyssean Tradition's inter-, archi- and metatextual subdominants shape the Ulyssean Tradition as a semi-generic system-reference to one singular, conceptually indispensable paradigmatic pretext.

This in-betweenness of the Ulyssean Tradition, between a generic quality it never quite becomes and an individual allusion it perpetually exceeds in its distinct system-reference, also affects the oscillating intertextual dominance afforded to the hypotext *Ulysses* in novels of the Ulyssean Tradition. As Broich remarks, texts that only reference one pretext probably only exist theoretically (and, considering Kristeva's theories, even that is highly questionable). At least, one would have a hard time finding a text in which only one pretext alone is present. Instead, it is more useful to distinguish between the relative dominance with which intertexts are present in a given text (Broich 50). In the Ulyssean Tradition, the position afforded to *Ulysses* gives it at once both a relatively low intertextual dominance, and, as central pretext and 'key' to the Ulyssean Tradition, the highest dominance since its transpositions organize the aesthetic core procedures of novels in the Ulyssean Tradition.

Hence, on the one hand, texts other than *Ulysses* are certainly more overtly present in novels of the Ulyssean Tradition. This is particularly evident in the American epic novels

¹⁴ While the above-described necessary yet fundamentally not relevant intertextuality as well as the quality of (semi-)architextuality appear to be features that describe literary traditions as specific, complex hypertextual constellations in general, the Ulyssean Tradition's metatextual subdominant, at least in its great intensity, is probably peculiar to the Ulyssean Tradition as a phenomenon of the twentieth century.

discussed in this study, which, within the framework of the Ulyssean Tradition, mobilize a variety of much more overtly referenced intertexts to translocate the Ulyssean Tradition and put it into the service of their own, (trans- and post-) national American projects. In *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest*, American key-texts like *Huckleberry Finn* or *Moby Dick* that negotiate the novels' American present thus appear with a far greater dominance than allusions to *Ulysses*. The vast networks of intertextual connections these novels, like *Ulysses* itself, spin, however, are not restricted to 'high' literature, nor American literature alone. Since it would be both beyond the scope of this study and entirely missing the point of my argument, a crassly incomplete list should suffice to illustrate how seemingly 'unimportant' *Ulysses* is in these novels when compared to their other intertexts: *Moby Dick*, *Parzival*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Borges, *Huckleberry Finn*, the early and later Wittgenstein, *Hawaii Five-0*, Heinrich von Kleist, Wagner, Pavlov, Plastic Man comics, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Behind the Green Door*, the list continues. Like the novel they are in the tradition of, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* constitute a polyphony of all kinds of texts. Certainly, an epic novel so integral to American literature as *Moby Dick* makes its presence felt in *Gravity's Rainbow*, whose central symbol the Rocket Richard Poirier calls "Moby Dick and the *Pequod* in one" (Poirier 60). *Moby Dick* reprises its role in *Infinite Jest*, another novel about an incessant search, where toward the end the protagonist Hal is "picturing himself doing a lazy backstroke in the Azores, spouting glassy water up out of his mouth in a cytological plume" (808). All in all, many texts seem at first sight to be more thematically relevant, more explicitly discussed, and more closely related to *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* than *Ulysses*. Due to the nature of the Ulyssean Tradition, this can be surmised for all hypothetical texts of the Tradition.

On the other hand, I argue that *Ulysses* and the Ulyssean Tradition it spawns provides the integral key to an understanding of these novels' internal organization and literary project. *Ulysses*' central dominance in such novels of the Ulyssean Tradition is not in contradiction to its apparent low visibility. While novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* employ various intertexts to perform their specific explorations of America, the human condition and postmodernity, and while *Ulysses* is certainly not the only lens through which to read these novels, their Ulyssean Tradition provides these texts with a framework, a tradition, they employ

and renegotiate in the production of their own aesthetic. It is the system within which these other intertextual explorations can occur.

Hence, while I read for instance the loss and rediscovery of Slothrop's blues harp in *Gravity's Rainbow* as a reference to *Gravity's Rainbow's* transposition of *Ulysses*, whose aesthetic can be argued to be emblemized in the jew's harp Stephen Dedalus leaves the novel with, the harp can also convincingly be read as an intertextual echo of the "juice-harp" (Twain 336) the imprisoned Jim is to train rats with in *Huckleberry Finn*.¹⁵ That Slothrop's harp can be easily traced back to *Huckleberry Finn*, among other texts, however, does not diminish its Ulyssean significance. On the contrary, this overlaying of intertexts illustrates the transformative procedures of the Ulyssean Tradition: Pynchon traduces the Ulyssean Tradition into his own, postmodern American context and instills Joyce's Irish jew's harp with an American significance. Allusions, after all, can reference more than one intertext at once and thereby link them to one another in a new context. While *Ulysses* thus may have a presence overtly weaker than other texts, it provides novels in the Ulyssean Tradition with a system they transpose in accordance with their own specific projects, thereby renegotiating, reinterpreting and rejuvenating *Ulysses* and its tradition in a constant, multidirectional dialogue. It is also through this excessive intertextuality that *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest*, like *Ulysses* before them, seek to capture as much of their world as possible in aesthetic totality.

The Epic (Novel)

One thing the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition thus share is the epic mode of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which seeks to represent the modern world in its entirety, the modern (epic) novel responding to the discontinuities of modernity by coupling and resolving its banality with epic grandeur. As Catherine Morley remarks, "[a]lthough Joyce was by no means the inventor of the prose epic, he has a good claim to have produced a form of the genre that was particularly suitable to the description of the modern experience" (Morley 2). The epic, and by extension the prose epic revolutionized by Joyce's *Ulysses* and the novels after it, is described not merely by its size but

¹⁵ The Joyce and Pynchon expert Dirk Vanderbeke pointed this connection out to me in a private conversation.

also its epic scale, weight and proportions as an attempt at representing a civilization in aesthetic totality.

Like ultimately all genres, the epic (and its novel hybrid, the epic novel) resists any essentializing definition. Paul Merchant hence locates it within the dual points of “surpassing the dimensions of realism” (Merchant 1) and Ezra Pound’s definition of the epic as “a poem including history” (Pound, “Date Line” 86). The epic thus dually relates to history and everyday reality. It surfaces “in the need for an established history” (Merchant 2) as a chronicle of custom and tradition and founding myth. As the ‘book of the tribe,’ the epic seeks to compound the (hi)story of its people and is thus inherently polyglossic. In addition, however, since, as Merchant adds, “even our earliest epics date from a period when epic narrative had already been in use for some hundreds of years” (Merchant 2), the epic is also a product of aestheticization and surpasses the realism of the collective history book into the fictional, instructive and self-reflexive.

The classical epic thereby exceeds the recording function of the chronicle and becomes functional in the formation of nationhood, self-understanding and -justification. As national epic, it classically locates a people’s place in history, recording its way of life and the origin thereof. Homer seeks to “represent and reveal the significance of [...] the whole of ancient Greek life” (Puckett 57) and Virgil sings of Rome in the *Aeneid*, providing not only a history and founding myth of the state he lives in but a legitimization and explanation of its current state. Hence, while singing of a distant, already aestheticized and mythical past, Homer’s epic muse in the *Odyssey* may “sing for our time too” (Homer 1.12). Significantly, although overtly about past events, the epic is classically narrated in the present tense. The epic records and argues the present nation, its customs and traditions in totality. It pertains to contain the human condition of its time through the narrative of individual(s’) experience. While early epics are more overtly concerned with the founding of nations, modern epics, Morley notes, become increasingly concerned with “the meaning and implications of contemporary nationhood and citizenship” (Morley 20) and, in light of their increasing transnationalism co-inhabited by

national and postnational issues, the human condition in general.¹⁶ Nevertheless, as Stefano Ercolino summarizes Franco Moretti's theses on the modern epic, despite its apparent discontinuities "the power and the universalizing dream of the ancient epic envelop the modern epic as well" (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 14).

As Morley argues in *The Quest for Epic in Contemporary American Fiction*, the prose epic Joyce's *Ulysses* helped revolutionize and the novels after it fulfill this epic function of totalizing representation in a what Northrop Frye calls 'ironic,' modernly novelistic mode. To Morley's transnationalist comparative project, Joyce's *Ulysses* offers American novel-writing a model of the epic (novel) to discuss the American nation and its history (and mythology), a transnational influence put into the service of a national yet thereby post-national project. Citing John P. McWilliams, Morley notes that "the epic in the New World had no choice but to take the shape of the novel, a medium whereby it would attract the widest possible audience and thereby fulfil its characteristic and classical aim of speaking to and of 'the people'" (Morley 15). For Morley, Joyce's *Ulysses* provides American literature with a mode of the modern epic in the novel that allows for a return to the epic's original, pluralistic function as 'book of the tribe,' questioning the national and at once forming and parodying it – in short a hybrid epic novel as "an exemplar for the contemporary, post-national epic of the United States" (Morley 50).

According to Northrop Frye, Joyce's *Ulysses* can be seen as the culmination of generic cross-currents into the "complete prose epic" (Frye 314) as the literary hybrid of the epic novel, the mythical epic in the ironic mode whereby the perspective is shifted from the (epic's) divine into the (novel's) human world. Frye sees Western literature as based in an underlying mythology variably retold in different, cyclically recurring modes. His *Anatomy of Criticism* offers a flexible approach to genre in accounting for genre mixes and the reappearance of the epic in the contemporary novel. Frye suggests that literature continuously cycles through modes of characterization which correspond to different phases in ancient and Western-European

¹⁶ While Homer's ancient epic is predominantly concerned with representing the totality of Greek life, one may argue that this, too, constitutes to him an attempt at representing an overall human condition since Homer writes from within a culture that did not afford women and foreign 'barbarian' slaves with full personhood. He therefore too aims at a universal, human, at least what is to it fully 'human,' condition and identity. In a way, the contemporary epic novels *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* do so as well: they claim total representation while primarily representing a white, male 'totality' that for instance widely excludes the African-American experience.

literature. Culminating in the ironic mode for which *Ulysses* is exemplary, according to Frye literature's central perspective increasingly shifts toward the human, banal and lowly. Hence, Frye notes that "[i]n the mythical mode the encyclopaedic form is the sacred scripture, and in the other modes we should expect to find encyclopaedic forms which constitute a series of increasingly human *analogies* of mythical or scriptural revelation" (Frye 56).¹⁷ Frye's five modes are realized differently in the four forms of literary fiction he identifies for which some modes are more fitting, of which, however, pure forms are impossible: the romance, the verisimilitude of the novel, the confession or autobiography and the anatomy or Menippean satire. From sacred scripture to the ironic mode of *Ulysses*, texts in which all four forms are equally weighted, and which thus evidence a desire for totality, bespeak an encyclopedic tendency of which epics of all modes serve as the readiest example.

To Frye, Joyce's *Ulysses* is thus the ultimate expression of a work in the encyclopedic or epic form in the ironic phase. Joyce's encyclopedic tendency presents the vast panorama of history and human life in the ironic, miniscule and mundane. For Frye, the epic, with *Ulysses* as its modern ironic epitome, is not defined by the monologism often ascribed to it in order to contrast it against the novel but by its dialogism and hybridity, the ironic coinhabitation of genres in the unity of combination of *Ulysses*. Joyce's modern epic thereby sustains the epic in its own subversion, irony and the recognition of discontinuity not diminishing the epic's appeal to aesthetic totality. Instead, *Ulysses* constitutes the complete hybridity of the polyglossic 'book of the tribe' for modernity. Frye's theory may appear complex to the point of being over-complicated¹⁸ as well as outdated both in light of the (poststructuralist) theories that have appeared in the now more than 60 years since its publication and in its universalistic desires for literary criticism (Schwarz, *The Humanistic Heritage: Critical Theories of the English Novel from James to Hillis Miller*) and thus does not provide the principal theoretical framework for

¹⁷ At the same time, however, since Frye's modes arrange themselves in a circle, the ironic mode, though evidently concerned with the debased, shows its closeness to the mythical's overt concern with creation and apocalypse as revealed in the structure of sacred scripture. This, according to Frye, also becomes apparent in the ironic, modern and contemporary period's engagement with myth and cyclical return as evidenced in Joyce's *Ulysses* – and the variant treatment of circularity in the other novels analyzed in this book.

¹⁸ Frye's myriads of concepts, matrices, modes and forms, some not openly defined at all, some completely estranged from their common meaning or defined ad nauseam, form a web perhaps even more closely knit, restrictive and prescriptive than the models they were meant to replace.

this study. His theory nevertheless offers a helpful example for a way of conceiving of generic hybridity, transnational and transtemporal reformulations of texts and the closeness of ironic subversion to its 'original' myth – a closeness also observable in the Ulyssean Tradition's permutations of its own founding 'myth' *Ulysses*.

In sharp contrast to the inherent hybridity of the epic Frye postulates, Bakhtin's "Epic and Novel" strictly divorces the novel from the epic. Not without his own ideological undertones, Bakhtin definitively distinguishes the epic from the novel in order to establish the novel as a new and developing "genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it," a genre imbued with the "spirit of process and inclusiveness" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 7). To Bakhtin, the epic is an "antiquated," completed and stagnant genre the study of which is "analogous to studying dead languages," whereas the study of the implicitly revolutionary novel genre is "like studying languages that are not only alive, but still young" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 3). The epic as a genre of narrative bespeaks for Bakhtin a (highly reactionary) totalizing tendency and static closedness inadaptable to modern times and the techniques of writing and reading that can be seen in the temporal orientation toward a closed and completed, "absolute past" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 15), the nationalism and the monologism Bakhtin ascribes to the epic. Seeking to define the novel as the polyglossic, subversive, infinitely variable and open polar opposite to the epic, Bakhtin argues that

- (1) a national epic past – in Goethe's and Schiller's terminology the "absolute past" – serves as the subject for the epic;
- (2) national tradition (not personal experience and the free thought that grows out of it) serves as the source for the epic;
- (3) an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (the author and his audience) lives. (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 13)

The epic is thus defined by the "wholeness, crystal clarity and artistic completedness of [its] image of man" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 35). Seeking to represent the totality of the nation, the epic is monologic, the voice of the dominant discourse on what constitutes the state and the

human condition of those who live in it. Since it thus temporally orients itself toward an absolute past, the epic as a totalizing genre to Bakhtin does not allow for (character) development, discontinuity and change. Instead, “epic completedness” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 32) means that the epic cannot account for the individual, dissonances, and temporality. To Bakhtin, both its form, its characters, and the world and history the epic presents are immutable.

The novel, on the other hand, is defined as a polyglot, highly plastic and versatile genre that, in standing in complete opposition to the epic’s totalizing monologism, has inherited the place in literature the poetic epic once held. According to Bakhtin, where the epic had been totalizing in its monologic efforts to represent and thus stabilize the status quo, the novel contains humanity, both in its (cannibalistic) adaptability to other genres it absorbs without stabilizing into them, and its attunedness to the individual with all its failings, contradictions and thus open-endedness. Most importantly, then, the novel is an inherently (self-)critical, subversive and adaptive “ever-developing genre” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 6). In its defining plasticity, the novel parodies and incorporates other genres, thereby exposing conventions and resolving them into dialogicity. Bakhtin thus negatively defines the novel’s characteristics against the epic as follows:

- (1) the novel should not be “poetic,” as the word “poetic” is used in other genres of imaginative literature;
- (2) the hero of a novel should not be “heroic” in either the epic or the tragic sense of the word: he should combine in himself negative as well as positive features, low as well as lofty, ridiculous as well as serious;
- (3) the hero should not be portrayed as an already completed and unchanging person but as one who is evolving and developing, a person who learns from life;
- (4) the novel should become for the contemporary world what the epic was for the ancient world (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 10)

For the Soviet scholar, the novel becomes “the vanguard of change” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 33), exploding received conventions in its subversive adaptability that motivates a (self-)critical

stance which never stabilizes but always remains in the open-ended mutability of an attunement to the present and thus polyglossic and heterogeneous.

Before Bakhtin, Georg Lukács, similarly, conceptually opposed the epic's aesthetic totality to the novel's openness. Lukács thus opens his influential *The Theory of the Novel* writing about the epic:

Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths – ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light. Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded in this duality: complete in meaning – in sense – and complete for the senses; rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded because its action separates itself from it and, having become itself, finds a centre of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself. “Philosophy is really homesickness,” says Novalis: “it is the urge to be at home everywhere.” (Lukács 29)

Again, whereas the epic is a genre of a simpler age which could, as Lukács sees the epic to do, perceive and thereby (re-)produce itself in closed-off, homogeneous wholeness, the novel is a product of, and represents, the modern world as discontinuous and open. Nevertheless, as Puckett notes, although he distinguishes between novel and epic (one is self-conscious, open, and ironic, the other complete, homogeneous, and transparent), “both genres are at last defined by their aesthetic relation to what Lukács calls ‘aesthetic totality,’ to their shared commitment to representing as much of a whole world as they can” (Puckett 60).

Notably, then, there seems to be a tradition in theories of the novel (and the epic) to contrastingly compare the epic to the novel and thereby define the novel as both opposite of and modern successor to the epic. Pitting the epic against the novel is a common procedure in literary theory. Interestingly, however, depending on what the respective scholar seeks to

describe, comparable characteristics seem to be applied to the novel and the epic and vice versa. Hence, whereas the characteristics Bakhtin names certainly seem to fit the epic and fruitfully illuminate the novel as a mutable, open and ironic modern genre concerned with the individual in its private, sentimental and discontinuous dimension and relation to the world and thus also the possibility of identification, the at once incidental and integral “contrast of novel with epic” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 10) through which the critical and self-critical novel elevates its significance, “making of it the dominant genre in contemporary literature” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 11), is questionable. As Bakhtin defines the novel against the epic, the novel is defined by its dialogicity as becomes apparent in its special relationship to other texts and genres, “letters, diaries, confessions, the forms and methods of rhetoric associated with recently established courts and so forth” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 33). However, in its attunement to the national Bakhtin criticizes as monologic, the epic as collective ‘book of the tribe’ is, too, product of multiple voices and could be shown to incorporate other genres (A. J. Boyle 94–98) as well as ironic subversions of the nation and martial heroism (Puckett 65). Furthermore, the novel’s characteristic present temporality can also be argued to appear in the epic’s beginning and end *in medias res*, a quality it shares with the books discussed in this study, and traditional present tense that links the past to the present. Lastly, while Bakhtin argues that epic heroes, in contrast to novel characters, do not suffer inadequacies nor do they change, Odysseus is oftentimes inadequately prepared and helpless, lest he would not need his characteristic cunning, and *does* evolve and change through the epic. He is unfaithful and loyal, flawed yet resourceful.¹⁹ In fact, Gérard Genette even interprets the *Odyssey* as anticipating novelistic features, Homer “cover[ing] more than half the distance separating the epic from romance” (Genette 179). Yet, if even Homer’s status as an author of epics becomes questionable, how can one speak of ‘epic’ at all? Rather than opposite extremes, novel and epic, though distinct genres, show a strong bond that allows for the cross-contaminations so typical of the novel.

Massimo Fusillo thus sets up a hybridization paradigm between the epic and the novel. In his article “Epic, Novel,” Fusillo argues that the early novel legitimized itself by “laying

¹⁹ Similarly, even Achilles of the *Iliad* is more complex than he seems, criticizing the war and offering anti-authoritarian arguments. Cf. Guido Paduano’s “Le scelte di Achille” and Massimo Fusillo’s “Epic, Novel.”

claim to the more canonical genre whose narrative rules and broad dimensions it shares” (Fusillo 41) in order to establish its (still fragile) identity and display its diversity. Once the novel had superseded the epic as dominant narrative genre, it devoured the epic “to expand and achieve new and increasingly totalizing forms” (Fusillo 41). Turning from, so to speak, the novelistic epic to the novel as a polyphonic genre-cannibal, the epic novel as a novel structurally hybridized with the epic expands its scope and weight to the epic – as modal adjective – proportions of a representation of the human condition of its time. In this vein, I argue, similarly to Ercolino, that the books I am discussing in this study as within a Ulyssean Tradition are novels, with the modal qualifier that they are *epic* novels, novels hybridized with the epic with *Ulysses* as exemplar, that is novels that seek to represent their time’s human condition in epic scope and mode yet within the novel’s distinct attunement to the individual, dialogic, ironic and discontinuous.

Such issues of encyclopedism and epic proportion in the novel have given rise to a number of theories that, interestingly, provide a considerable overlap with the subject of this study. One of the most important attempts to formulate a genre for texts like Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* can be seen in Edward Mendelson’s theory of the encyclopedic narrative he establishes in his two essays “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon” and “Gravity’s Encyclopedia.” According to Mendelson, texts like Dante’s *Commedia*, Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* are encyclopedic narratives that appear as a “national culture [...] becomes aware of itself as a separate entity” (Mendelson, “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon” 1268). They retrospectively assume the status of a “sacred text” (Moretti 4) as they “attempt to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture, while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge” (Mendelson, “Gravity’s Encyclopedia” 162). For Mendelson, encyclopedic narratives are defined by their inclusion of multiple literary genres and styles, their reference to non-literary art, their representation of a full account of their culture’s knowledge through the synecdoche of a summary of a science or technology, their concern with providing a history of language, and the central position in their culture’s literary system they come to occupy

(Mendelson, “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon” 1267–75). These features, according to Mendelson, form “a genre that is of central importance in western literature” (Mendelson, “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon” 1267). Mendelson’s encyclopedic narratives thereby fulfill a function evolved out of that of the classical epic. However, while this study takes from Mendelson the notion of an encyclopedic impulse toward aesthetic totality and paradigmaticism, the Ulyssean Tradition does not describe a genre as such nor is it congruent with Mendelson’s features. Hence, whereas the Ulyssean Tradition, too, is characterized by its novels’ claim to totality and paradigmatic status, and although the novels discussed in this study also fit Mendelson’s definition, the Ulyssean Tradition does not require as rigidly proposed characteristics nor *actual* cultural centrality, however this should actually be ‘measured.’ In addition, while Mendelson’s genre of the encyclopedic narrative goes back to Dante yet does not have a distinct starting point nor considers intertextual cross-references, the Ulyssean Tradition, as the name implies, starts with *Ulysses* and continuously relates to it intertextually as a dialogue between the texts that inscribe themselves into a Ulyssean Tradition.

Encyclopedism, in mode rather than genre, also represents a key element of the genre of maximalism Stefano Ercolino conceptualizes in *The Maximalist Novel*. Ercolino’s ‘maximalist novel,’ too, identifies a genre of excessively long and complex narratives among which he counts – with continuous references to *Ulysses*, which he, however, conspicuously does not include in his genre – novels like *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Infinite Jest*, Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections*, Roberto Bolaño’s *2666*, and *2005 dopo Cristo*. These ‘maximalist’ novels are exemplary of the “transversal presence” (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* xii) of a tradition of contemporary novels originating from postmodern American roots yet spreading to “Europe and Latin America at the threshold of the twenty-first [century]” (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* xi). Analyzing the literary historical pressures from which emerges an aesthetic of massiveness, Ercolino offers ten characteristics of the maximalist novel which, with varying intensity, are always “systematically *co-present*” (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* xiv) in the genre. For Ercolino, the maximalist novel is thus constituted by its great length (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 19–25), its encyclopedic mode (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 26–47), its fragmentary and segmented representation of an

anti-individualist plurality of voices, styles and knowledges (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 48–64), digression due to an excessive desire for inclusiveness (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 71–76), structural practices that control chaos into an overarching arrangement (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 77–96), a holistic vision that points toward an authorial entity (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 97–104), a postmodern attempt at sublimity through a playfully undercut, paranoid all-connectedness (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 105–13), a tendency toward intersemioticity and “hybridization of the textual and visual spheres” (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 133), an ethical commitment in a “postmodern *recuperation* of modernist elements” (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 136) and lastly a hybrid realism in which antireferentiality and realistic representation, anti-mimesis and mimesis, intertwine in a lower-case-r ‘realistic’ representation of an always-mediated, image-saturated reality (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 136).

While Ercolino’s description of the maximalist novel fits the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition analyzed here, this may also be due to the tautological manner in which Ercolino seems to find his criteria. Ercolino, as Martin Paul Eve notes, seems to have selected texts based on clearly ‘maximalist’ components like length and encyclopedism and then filled in the subsequent characteristics (Eve, “Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow to Roberto Bolaño’s 2666 (Review)*”). Nevertheless, Ercolino’s *Maximalist Novel* provides a strong framework for thinking about novels like *Ulysses*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and *Infinite Jest*. In particular Ercolino’s description of the maximalist novel’s desire to represent its human condition in totality resonates with the function of the epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition, which, as I will argue, employs and reinterprets the very strategies *Ulysses* is said to have developed to control a fragmented modernity through literature. Nevertheless, this study is not concerned with arguing for or against Ercolino or conceptualizing the Ulyssean Tradition as a sub-group of the maximalist novel – which, seeing how Ercolino situates the ‘beginning’ of maximalism in postmodern America, would already contradict the seminal role this study affords to the Irish, modernist *Ulysses*.

Ercolino draws most liberally from Franco Moretti’s study of the *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez*. Both share the same focus on ‘long and

complicated books' that, even though these features are not the central concern of this study, also appears to partially describe the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition. Moretti is concerned with aesthetic "monuments" (Moretti 1) from *Faust* to *The Waste Land* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, arguing that they all belong to the genre of the modern epic, which he briefly describes as follows:

The idea behind this book, therefore, is that the works just mentioned – along with others we shall encounter along the way – all belong to a single field that I shall term 'modern epic.' 'Epic,' because of the many structural similarities binding it to a distant past (something to which I shall naturally return, when the time comes for analysis). But 'modern' epic, because there are certainly quite a few discontinuities: important enough, indeed, in one case – the supranational dimension of the represented space – to dictate the cognitive metaphor of the 'world text' (which, in what is not just a verbal calque, recalls the 'world-economy' of Braudel and Wallerstein) (Moretti 2)

Even though this study will employ the term 'epic novel' rather than Moretti's 'modern epic,' Moretti's claims about a literary approach to reality which seeks to represent in aesthetic totality – held in an equilibrium with the discontinuities of modern experience that perpetually question such a totality – the world we live in in a supranational 'world text' strongly resonates with my findings about the Ulyssean Tradition. As will be seen, the American epic novels in the Ulyssean Tradition pursue a similar goal in the way they, transnationally, transform *Ulysses* to arrive at an aesthetic that again allows for a representation of the world, and America, from a modernist starting point not satisfied with the opportunities of the realist novel. In particular Moretti's notions of a synthesis of the individual and the "totalizing will" (Moretti 5) of encyclopedism, the modern epic as a "super-canonical form" (Moretti 4) that greatly "depend[s] [...] upon scholastic institutions" (Moretti 5) as well as Moretti's supranational perspective are also central to the Ulyssean Tradition.²⁰

²⁰ Where Moretti speaks of 'world texts,' Tom LeClair's *The Art of Excess* and Fredrick R. Karl's *American Fictions: 1980-2000* discuss similar global representations in the 'systems novel' and the 'mega-novel,' respectively. For both, a distinct internal ambiguity is central to these novel types that seek to capture the world in excess. As Karl defines the mega-novel: "The so-called Mega-Novel is loaded with paradoxes: it *is* long but lacks any sense of completion; while it has no boundaries for an ending, of course it does end; it seems to defy clear organization – it seems decentered, unbalanced – yet has intense

Like Moretti's modern epics then, the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition discussed here are "texts that strain to capture the whole of an expanding, increasingly complex, and internally differentiated world system in spite of that system's maybe intractable scalar resistance to representation" (Puckett 62–63). However, Moretti's conceptualization of his 'modern epic' by juxtaposing a to him polyphonic epic to a monologic novel only reverses Bakhtin's mythicizing contrast and thereby simply furthers a Hegelian grand binarism.²¹ I therefore view the hybrid appellation as more useful to this study. That the novel, in particular that of the modern type *Ulysses* set the scene for, is aware of its discontinuities and the ultimate impossibility of the epic's totality does not diminish the *epic* novel's ambition for a universal and synthetic representation of the world and the human condition. This study's titular reference to the adjectivized hybrid epic novel is justified not only because, pragmatically speaking, the books in this study are commonly called novels. As novel, the epic novel, is concerned with the individual, ever-adaptive, attuned to irony and discontinuity and temporal. Yet, in the epic mode, it expands its polyphony into the epic's aspirations to represent the human condition of its time, the national and transnational made coinhabitable, in aesthetic wholeness. The epic novel as hybrid thereby become a new, dialogic 'book of the tribe.'

Aesthetic Monstrosity and the Ulyssean Tradition in the Literary Field

The novels in the Ulyssean Tradition, however, are not content with representing in aesthetic totality their human condition as modern epics of their time. Through their self-inscription into the tradition of Ulysses, their authors also seek to install monsters on the literary field. Epic in scope and inclusivity, the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition are monster novels, intimidating and

order; it is located outside traditional forms of narrative, but still employs some conventional modes. Its aim posits disorder, messiness, the chaos of our existence and by extension of our times; nevertheless, its length, complexity, and on-goingness make it a model of order" (Karl 155). Coordinates of order and openness, traditionalism and variation also underlie the Ulyssean Tradition. Karl, however, relates the rise of the mega-novel to the "American spirit" of a 1960s US culture of "the overwhelming sense we were on a frontier of knowledge; that we had glimpsed, however imperfectly, another kind of experience; and that this experience was open-ended, spatial, expansive, resolute but without resolution" (Karl 162). Clearly, even though US literature appears particularly susceptible to the Ulyssean, this cannot be said of the Ulyssean Tradition as an inherently transnational phenomenon. Since the Ulyssean Tradition by definition traces itself back to the Irish author Joyce, in whom this supposedly American desire for totality is already more than apparent, there can be no distinctly "American spirit" that drives it.

²¹ Moretti views in particular the nineteenth-century novel to "pin the story at the centre of the nation-state" (Moretti 56).

imposing in more ways than their monstrous scale, their monstrous complexity, and their monstrous ambitions – although these features, as will become clear, contribute to their specific aesthetic monstrosity.²² Monsters classically appear as omens of change, anomalies *contra natura* that “show[] the future and warn[] of the will of the gods” (J. B. Friedman 111). Like the monsters and giants they include – from Pynchon’s all-consuming Rocket-state to Wallace’s rampant “gargantuan feral infant” (211) roaming the wasteland of *Infinite Jest*’s Great Concavity – the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition are monstrosities themselves that appear at the shift of times “showing God’s power and desire to revitalize man’s sense of the marvelous” (J. B. Friedman 3) when the true faith is no longer followed and old rules cease to apply, portents of change and divine wrath.²³ Etymologically, ‘monster’ derives from the old Latin ‘monstrum,’ itself derived from the verb ‘monere’ (to remind, warn, instruct or foretell) and the verb ‘monstrare’ (to show), whose meaning survives into the English ‘demonstrate.’ Out of the natural order yet, importantly, not outside of divine will, monsters from antiquity to the church fathers signified warnings of coming events, breaches against the divine will but also instructions.

The aesthetic monstrosity that is a feature of the epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition, expanding its epic mode in both the specialized, etymological and common meaning of ‘monstrous,’ is described in this doubling of warning of dire change and instructive demonstration. This aesthetic monstrousness the novels of the Ulyssean Tradition display, their simultaneous function as admonition and instruction, can be understood as an effect of their authors’ position(ing) in the internal dynamic of power of what French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls the literary field in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. The (posture of) monstrousness which Wallace and Pynchon assume in *Infinite Jest* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* as they enter an intertextual relationship with Joyce’s *Ulysses* is thus entwined with issues of legitimization, autonomy and, as becomes particularly apparent in the Ulyssean Tradition’s metatextual quality, a strife for authority over the literary

²² As Ercolino remarks, such novels’ sheer length is not only the stage for formal innovation and dreams of totality but also sigil of a late capitalist commodification of culture, signaling sophistication and thus generating symbolic capital (Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel* 19–25).

²³ Mendelson, too, uses monstrosity to describe the encyclopedic narrative and *Gravity’s Rainbow* in particular, whereas Theodore D. Kharpetian uses the synonymous ‘prodigy’ to the same ends. In both works, however, monstrosity as an aesthetic category is only commented on in passing.

field consecrated by the perceived importance of *Ulysses* and thus not only an interrelation between works but also their perceived value among the institutions, most importantly academia. The act of writing a novel in the Ulyssean Tradition constitutes a complicated posture²⁴ meant to legitimate an independent work's claim to autonomy and paradigmaticness – singular greatness – through the author's momentary filiation with the tradition of *Ulysses*.

On the one hand, the monster novels of the Ulyssean Tradition appear as omens, warnings that a way of writing the world can no longer apply and must thus be reformed to again meet the 'divine will' expressed in *Ulysses* and accepted as the orthodox paradigm in the literary field. Novels in the Ulyssean Tradition purport in their ascendance that the methods and patterns of *Ulysses*, which they have paradigmatised into *the* way to make the modern world accessible to literature, are no longer applicable to the new human conditions these novels face and hence require reinterpretation. This posture of having produced a monster of the Ulyssean Tradition affiliates authors of novels like *Infinite Jest* and *Gravity's Rainbow* with Joyce's *Ulysses* and the principle of autonomy – art's internal logic of valuing artistic innovation detached from and contrary to the heteronomy of the logic of the market (Bourdieu 216) – which its modernism has come to embody in the established literary intellectual community. In showing how the model of *Ulysses* can no longer be easily applied to the present human condition, the novels of the Ulyssean Tradition assume a relation to *Ulysses* that cannot be reduced to antagonism, correction or imitation alone. Rather, in demonstrating the necessity of the Ulyssean systems of order to be revised, the novels of the Ulyssean Tradition do not deny the legitimacy of *Ulysses* but instead purport that *Ulysses* remains worth saving. Through their works, their authors thereby position themselves in the literary field alongside the dominant powers for which *Ulysses* represents the paradigm of modern literature, consecrating their own project through a recourse to the legitimacy afforded to *Ulysses*.

Hence, as already noted, the intertextual relationships within the Ulyssean Tradition are structured around simultaneous positive reference to and negative dissociation from the

²⁴ For a detailed description of 'posture' see Jérôme Meizoz's "Die *posture* und das literarische Feld. Rousseau, Céline, Ajar, Houellebecq" in *Text und Feld: Bourdieu in der literaturwissenschaftlichen Praxis*. 'Posture' refers to the "singular manner of assuming an objective position within the literary field that is in turn delimited by sociological parameters" (Meizoz 177; my translation). By inscribing themselves into the Ulyssean Tradition through the composition of a novel like *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Infinite Jest*, authors assume such a posture that may grant their artistic product a certain value.

hypotext. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus reforms the Ulyssean Tradition into its postmodernist style, becoming the exemplar of a changed, now postmodern human condition. In Pynchon's novel, the 'mythical method' Eliot ascribes to Joyce's *Ulysses* hence is represented most overtly in the nazi-monster Blicero, Joyce's structuring of *Ulysses* around the Catholic mass turns into the physical mass of the Rocket pulled down to earth by gravity and the parallaxic synthesis, which for Joyce created a hopeful Europeanism, gives rise to the insidious, multi-national Rocket-cartel, as if *Ulysses* losing its way in postmodernity generated monstrosities. Reread by Pynchon, *Ulysses* becomes a monster. At the same time, however, *Gravity's Rainbow* generates the warning monstrosity of its own aesthetic from its dialogue with *Ulysses*. Misunderstanding the Ulyssean 'divine will' brings forth a monster the monstrosity of *Gravity's Rainbow* signals and seeks to correct by reinstating the 'true' order of the Ulyssean Tradition.

Wallace, similarly, self-consciously situates *Infinite Jest* as succeeding the postmodern irony of Pynchon run amok and turned monstrous, a project he pursues in his novel by revisiting and (re)transposing Joyce's *Ulysses*. Again, literature has lost its course and the epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition can no longer fulfil its function of representing the human condition in aesthetic totality, necessitating yet another reinterpretative return to *Ulysses* to rediscover its 'divine will.' Containing, according to Frye, the form of the anatomy or Menippean satire, the epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition is a (self-)critical monster that signals a new human condition, the need to rethink *Ulysses* and the catastrophe that follows if this is not done. In *Infinite Jest's* case, this is the existential solipsism, failure of interpersonal communication and fatal irresponsibility – embodied in the mute, regressive (giantly grown up yet childlike) giant infant the novel's metafiction-metaphor of annular fusion creates – with which the novel warningly diagnoses an American culture in which Pynchon's prior reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition has become dangerous and monstrous, i.e., has lost sight of the 'true faith' Wallace reads in *Ulysses*.

The relation between later novels in the Ulyssean Tradition and *Ulysses* (or, more properly, their authors as they write such novels) hence does not take the shape of a "heresy" (Bourdieu 219) by which a new principle of artistic legitimation is introduced. Instead, authors like Wallace in *Infinite Jest* and Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* recognize the symbolic capital

afforded to *Ulysses* as valid as becomes apparent in the novels' historically contingent metatextual commentary on *Ulysses* and employ it to support their own project. Rather than heretics, in their monster novels of the Ulyssean Tradition they assume the posture of 'priests' or 'prophets' of Joyce's 'divine will' of reintegration in *Ulysses*. Even though they are understood to be reforms, the relational position-taking novels in the Ulyssean Tradition perform for their authors establishes them as orthodox with regard to the principal hierarchy of the literary field. Although it may need reform and reinterpretation, the Ulyssean Tradition as the most exclusive and literarily autonomous, yet also by now most orthodox club is never questioned. Its power structures are upheld as the Ulyssean paradigm is affirmed and, importantly for this strategy of affiliation with the dominant powers, constructed along the present, conventional, that is *traditional*, lines.

Significantly, while a monster is *contra natura*, Isidore remarks in the *Etymologiae* that it arises "not contrary to nature, but contrary to what nature is understood to be" (Isidore de Sevilla qtd. in J. B. Friedman 115) since, St. Augustine explains, "this [monster] is the will of almighty God" (St. Augustine qtd. in J. B. Friedman 120). By reinterpreting *Ulysses*, the authors of these monstrous epic novels of the Ulyssean Tradition do not only negatively distance themselves from *Ulysses* turned monstrous but also reference it positively as the pretext for their monstrous aesthetic. In their self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition, they announce what its nature is and what the nature of *Ulysses* is currently, erroneously, understood to be. The monsters of the Ulyssean Tradition are hence "outside the existing order" yet, as Eliot remarks on tradition, the tradition's

existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" 38–39)

While heresy comes with the potential of fundamentally reshaping the literary field according to one's own modes of production (Bourdieu 2006), not being heretics (to an orthodox *Ulysses* as embraced by the symbolic order that for instance also produces the literary canon) affords the author of a novel in the Ulyssean Tradition with a number of opportunities for claiming paradigmaticness for their novel as well. Not only does relating to *Ulysses* as a point of orientation afford the monster novels of the Ulyssean Tradition with legitimacy, it also in turn can be seen to authorize their authors to claim the status of having produced such a point of orientation themselves in these novels. The 'restrictions' the Ulyssean Tradition imposes onto writing therefore ultimately contribute to greater freedom and autonomy as the symbolic capital generated from an affiliation with the tradition of *Ulysses* produces a surplus that is reinvested to further the authors' own, autonomous projects in their novels. Through the posture of reforming *Ulysses* – a position-taking that clearly announces its orthodoxy – Wallace in *Infinite Jest* or Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* reform the order of the Ulyssean Tradition they inscribe themselves into. They thereby install their own, singular and autonomous project as the new, old, orthodoxy. What ensues is thus, as will be discussed further on, a reciprocal dialogue between *Ulysses* and the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition: while *Ulysses* provides a paradigm for the novels of the Ulyssean Tradition to follow and thus shapes the underlying organizational principle of novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest*, these novels in turn themselves shape the *Ulysses* they transpose as they realize their own, monstrous ambitions.

Notably, then, neither *Gravity's Rainbow* nor *Infinite Jest* (nor, for that matter, *Ulysses* itself) are their authors' first work nor the first text of the literary paradigm they shall come to represent as its (and their authors') magnum opus. Monster novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Infinite Jest*, but evidently also *Ulysses*, surface at the turning points of cultural and literary history, not at the beginning of such shifts of coordinates (*Ulysses*, for instance, is certainly not the first modernist novel nor the first novel of modernity; this honor rather goes to texts like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) but when the omens of a drastic change in the human condition become so perceptible, undeniable and unbearable as to produce (and necessitate) monsters. Homologously belated, they appear only after their authors have already gained a certain symbolic capital through their earlier writing and established themselves as 'prodigies' in the

literary field.²⁵ The habitus thus acquired is reinvested into the Ulyssean Tradition. This reinvestment of symbolic capital generates the surplus value of the author of a novel like *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Infinite Jest*, the work now able to be uttered in the same breath as *Ulysses*, to establish their own, independent yet un-heretical project as paradigm.²⁶

Hence, in addition to their function as admonitions, the monsters of the Ulyssean Tradition are also instructive demonstrations. To the Church Fathers, monsters were “showing God’s power and desire to revitalize man’s sense of the marvelous” (J. B. Friedman 3) and used by Him “for didactic ends” (J. B. Friedman 109). While as epics the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition seek to represent their human condition, as monsters they also seek to show how literature can continue to do so. Consecrated as priests of the Ulyssean ‘divine will’ that has come to dominate literary production, their authors’ ambition is to become God themselves through their novel in the Ulyssean Tradition.²⁷ One important feature of the monstrosity of novels like *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and *Infinite Jest* is hence how they self-consciously thematize the genesis of their own aesthetic. In Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the author’s alter-ego Stephen Dedalus is uncreative and sterile, his artistry unfit to face a radically changed human condition meaningfully, until he is ‘run through’ the syllogism of the novel’s problem terms, the very principles *Ulysses* itself bases its paradigmatically modernist aesthetic in to reintegrate the

²⁵ Thomas Pynchon’s *V* won the William Faulkner Foundation Prize for a best first novel in 1963 and Wallace’s *The Broom of the System* was equally met with critical praise. Interestingly, ‘prodigy’ is another synonym of ‘monstra’.

²⁶ The earlier works, in contrast, will appear as if their authors had not quite yet found the aesthetic they fully establish in their Ulyssean novel. This also means that their later novels, e.g., Wallace’s *The Pale King* or Pynchon’s *Vineland*, even though they may still retain some Ulyssean characteristics, no longer need to be in the Ulyssean Tradition. ‘Ulyssean Tradition’ is hence much more descriptive of specific novels than it describes any given ‘style.’ In addition to not being debut novels but instead the works of ‘mature’ artists that shall become their ‘magnum opus,’ novels in the Ulyssean Tradition share a number of other connections with regard to their authors’ habitus. Interestingly, as Morley and Karl also observe about novels of this kind, they are written by (middle-aged) men, or are at least more likely to be written by them. Seemingly, such projects are more likely to proceed from the habitus such a privileged social position affords one with. Furthermore, although I am, apart from Joyce, investigating works by authors from the historically predominantly protestant USA, Joyce, Pynchon, Forrest, and Wallace are all in some way connected to Catholicism. Joyce grew up Catholic, Pynchon and Forrest have Catholic mothers, and Wallace repeatedly tried to convert to Catholicism. Perhaps, it is the Catholic imagination that provides the remedy for the “realistic-romantic dichotomy” (Werner 1) that is apparently integral to an American culture founded in a protestant background that rejects the transubstantiation and thus the realness of the symbolic.

²⁷ As will be shown in the respective chapters on Joyce’s consubstantial method and mass structure in *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest*, this happens quite literally in the case of *Ulysses* and *Infinite Jest*, who both use theological imagery to situate authorship. While Pynchon’s ‘solution’ to interpretative authority and literary engagement appears to display a greater humility in decentering the author, *Gravity's Rainbow* nevertheless proposes a fundamentally reformed conception of literary meaning.

problem of modernity. In the end, he leaves the novel equipped with the “jew’s harp” (657), the emblem of the Ulyssean aesthetic, to go on to write *Ulysses*. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, as Mendelson notes, “Slothrop’s disintegration, Pynchon implies, summarizes the historical fate of literary modernism” (Mendelson, “Gravity’s Encyclopedia” 166) yet also becomes the model for the novel’s own, scattering and decentered, ironic postmodernist style. Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* lastly features the filmography of the authorial alternate-ego JOI, culminating in the (only seemingly) title-giving movie ‘Infinite Jest,’ to describe the genesis of the novel’s aesthetic. Like Wallace’s own project, JOI’s film works through the Joycean touchstones of perspectival change, myth, and paternity both from within and against the postmodernist paradigm yet fails where the novel is implied to succeed. The filmography thereby allows for a refractively distorted glance at the novel’s newly developed own aesthetic, an aesthetic for the production of which *Infinite Jest*, like its protagonist Hal in the novel’s beginning, is “starting on *jew’s-harp*” (30) in order to in the end arrive at an (aesthetic) “way out” (981) of the postmodernist double-bind of self-consciousness.²⁸ While aesthetic self-reflection is common to the (modern and postmodern) novel as a whole, the monstrosity in which the epic novels of the Ulyssean Tradition establish themselves as programmatic texts of their project through their self-thematization of and meditation on their aesthetic genesis, though not exclusive to the Ulyssean Tradition, is distinct from ironic aesthetic self-reflection. The epic novels contained in the Ulyssean Tradition display a monstrous ambition in seeking to become instructors, paradigmatic cases for their literary program. Through the act of their self-inscription into the tradition of *Ulysses*, authors of such novel not only derive their new aesthetic solutions from *Ulysses* as paradigm but themselves claim a paradigmatic position, elevating their project to the level of *Ulysses*, an importance their works themselves actively construct and subvert. Their Ulyssean Tradition makes them Ulyssean questers for a new, old home for literature, like the epic hero returning, nostalgically, home to find it new, changed.

²⁸ The eventual scrapping of *Infinite Jest*’s original subtitle ‘A Failed Entertainment’ is hence fortunate since the subtitle would have turned the title into nothing but a reference to the movie central to the novel’s plot, whereas its deletion establishes an ‘Infinite Jest’/*Infinite Jest* dichotomy in which the novel *Infinite Jest* is established as the successful refractive counterpart to the intratextual failed entertainment of the self-reflexive ‘Infinite Jest.’

Importantly, though it may at first glance appear so, authorial intention is of little to no importance here. The interactions within Bourdieu's literary field are driven by "*illusio*" (Bourdieu 227), the belief that the stakes of the field and investment in symbolic capital and self-legitimations prescribed by the field are given and meaningful. They are therefore only to be (re)constructed in a retrospective analysis (Joch and Wolf 7–8). One of the greatest strengths of Bourdieu's sociology of literature is its capacity to synthesize internal, immanent and intertextual, and external approaches to the analysis of literature (Ahearne and Speller 4). As Bourdieu remarks, "[t]he producer of the value of the work of art is not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of the work of art as a fetish by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist" (Bourdieu 229). It therefore makes no sense to speak of ulterior motives, dishonesty, or sham orthodoxy with regard to *Gravity's Rainbow's* and *Infinite Jest's* self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition. Rather, what is described here are the internal and external parameters that allow for novels in the Ulyssean Tradition to appear (both in the, deeply interrelated, senses of 'come into sight' and 'emerge') as paradigmatic texts in the first place. The Ulyssean Tradition emerges from this constant tension between monologism and dialogism, a seemingly disguised heresy that produces a new, autonomous aesthetic and an orthodox response to *Ulysses*. The specific relationality to *Ulysses* novels of the Ulyssean Tradition enter, and construct, thereby not only legitimizes the hypertext as 'heir' to *Ulysses* but also, only seemingly paradoxically, serves to construct a singular, independent work in its own right.

Ulysses as Doubled Pretext

The novels in the Ulyssean Tradition thereby employ *Ulysses* as a pretext in both senses of the word, as a hypertextual pre-text chronologically and, more importantly, intertextually conceptualized as prior, and as a pretext, an excuse or alibi, to situate and legitimize their authors' own project. On the one hand then, *Ulysses* as pre-text offers later novels in the Ulyssean Tradition a model or system they can hypertextually transform according to their new

human condition in the search for their own aesthetic.²⁹ The pre-text of *Ulysses*, understood as the paradigm of a modernism that has run its course, is transformed to make its model re-applicable to a new cultural situation. Joyce's 'solution' to the problem of modern literature is referenced and reinterpreted to tackle a new problem. A tradition forms in which, in order to solve new problems, later texts respond to the founding pre-text and transpose it, adding themselves to a tradition which thereby becomes itself altered.

On the other hand, with *Ulysses* as pretext, a tradition is actively formed as *Ulysses* appears as the problem to be overcome. *Ulysses* thereby not only provides the paradigm for the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition, the Ulyssean Tradition makes *Ulysses* paradigmatic, thereby co-creating the problem they respond to. As already noted, this pretextual paradigmaticizing happens in a historically contingent manner. The paradigmatic *Ulysses*, as opposed to the individual *Ulysses* with which it is nevertheless related and which provides its boundaries, is (also) a product of a metatextual commentary that reflects the circumstances, the knowledge and the perceived problem of the later novel. It is in the co-creation of *Ulysses* as a paradigmatic text to be responded to that these novels elevate themselves as part of a tradition that goes back to a novel as 'influential' as *Ulysses*. *Ulysses* and the permutative engagement with it thus serve to not only elevate *Ulysses* as founding myth but also serve a self-elevation only through which can the new to-be-paradigmatic aesthetic gain traction. Only by strategically elevating the pretext in writing itself into, writing forth and writing against it can the later novel's claim to paradigmaticness be formulated and its monstrous ambition be realized.³⁰

It is therefore not a coincidence, nor entirely the product of this study's framing, that the 'history' of the Ulyssean Tradition, which is more extensive and complex than what is only

²⁹ In this sense, there is hardly any practical difference between 'influence' and the intertextual paradigm this study applies.

³⁰ This relationship, simply because it describes transformations from a hypertext to a hypertext, may appear similar to the strategies Harold Bloom describes in *The Anxiety of Influence*, in particular the process of apophrades, yet is not equal to it. For one, according to Bloom, apophrades necessitates a reduction of the pretext in some way or the other, something which cannot exactly be observed in this specific way in the Ulyssean Tradition. Furthermore, Bloom's psychologizing version of the rhetorical imitatio conceives, in its misogynous mode and devotion to the literary canon it takes from its rhetoric forebearers (cf. Orr 61–83), of literary transformations as an interauthorial ("poems are written by men" (Bloom 43) and intertextuality happens in the mind of the poet) competition in which one author oedipally fights the other (cf. Isekenmeier et al. 40–44). None of this applies to the intertextual framework presented here. The literary canon of Bloom's "Dead White European Males" (Bloom xviii) is here only approached as an intertext a novel like *Gravity's Rainbow* makes use of (cf. Bérubé). Bloom's model on the other hand compresses intertextual relationships to interauthorial ones.

roughly sketched here along three examples, appears to map literary history (*as we know it*). As already noted, in the Ulyssean Tradition a traditional reading of *Ulysses* becomes productive of a tradition that, rather than producing imitations alone, brings forth works that can be read on their own merit. Hence, while certainly all hypertexts co-produce their hypotext through their transpositions according to their own historically contingent perspectives and demands (cf. Genette 533), the Ulyssean Tradition does so referencing not only the individual novel *Ulysses* but its received, paradigmatic role in literary history. It thereby intensifies this process by playing on and into the ‘importance’ the orthodox literary field affords to *Ulysses*. Under the pretext of *Ulysses* being written forth, authors of novels in the Ulyssean Tradition consciously set out to write forth a literary history in which *Ulysses* is afforded the role of modernist paradigm. Their novels thereby not only enter an individual tradition, a pre-text reworked into later permutations, but posit a paradigmatic tradition wherein ‘*Ulysses*’ as important, modernist pretext is transformed.

Authors of novels like *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* play into this paradigmaticness of *Ulysses* to raise claims to their novel’s own paradigmatic status. *Ulysses* proper, the individual text which contains various, contradicting readings, is thereby slightly obfuscated in favor of a paradigmatic or traditional *Ulysses*, the ‘great’ modernist novel, with and against which an aesthetic project is formed. A postmodernist text like *Gravity’s Rainbow* will thus paradigmmatize *Ulysses* differently and structure its response differently than a novel like *Infinite Jest* which programmatically situates itself after postmodernism. In inscribing itself into the tradition of a *Ulysses* it ascribes a modernism to it in turn supersedes, *Gravity’s Rainbow* thus positions itself to *Ulysses* in such a way as to in retrospect seemingly not be able to help itself but be post-modernist. The project of *Infinite Jest*, on the other hand, is oriented toward what has been variously called a New Sincerity by the likes of Adam Kelly or Vermeulen and Van den Akker’s metamodernism. To attain these ends, the novel not only approaches *Ulysses* differently, its transpositional procedures being qualitatively different from those of, e.g., *Gravity’s Rainbow*, but thereby also constructs the modernism of *Ulysses* differently. Operating between a reference to the individual novel *Ulysses* and the system it provides and a paradigmmatizing reference to the collective, conventional recognition of *Ulysses*,

Joyce's novel serves the Ulyssean Tradition not only as a system to be reformed and reinterpreted, a pre-text, but always also as a pretext for the construction of a new aesthetic.³¹ The Ulyssean Tradition is thereby continuously held in a suspense between *Ulysses* as pre-text and pretext, the framework *Ulysses* provides and the paradigmaticness ascribed to it, and thus in an equilibrium of monologic and polyphonic tensions that continually interfere with one another, one both allowing for the occurrence of the other and setting its boundaries, thereby defining each in relation to the other.

Preposterous Reciprocity in the Ulyssean Tradition

In this light, the literary history the Ulyssean Tradition traces becomes a "preposterous history" (Bal 7), the term coined by Mieke Bal to describe the seeming inversion of chronology in the double perspective of intertextual relations. Drawing inspiration for her discussion of Ken Aptekar's neo-baroque works from a phrase in Eliot's "Tradition and Individual Talent", Bal notes that

We cannot read his work without a sense of history into which the artist is inscribing himself. At the same time, the baroque works gain a new dimension through the juxtaposition, as much as through the overwriting and reworking in each of Aptekar's works. [...] This reversal, which puts what came chronologically first ('pre-') as an aftereffect behind ('post-') its later recycling, is what I would like to call a preposterous history. (Bal 6–7)

The Ulyssean Tradition maps itself so preposterously onto literary history because it partially derives its internal organization from the historical perspective of the orthodoxy it aligns itself with. In the Ulyssean Tradition, the limitations that come with a dialogic recourse to *Ulysses* have the paradoxical effect of producing the freedom of singular works in their own right. *Ulysses* and its systems of order hence provide the novels that inscribe themselves into a Ulyssean Tradition with a frame and model they, in reinterpretation, have to adhere to in order to claim orthodox legitimacy through *Ulysses*. Joyce's novel 'influences,' for lack of a better word, the later novels in the Ulyssean Tradition. Novels like *Infinite Jest* and *Gravity's Rainbow*

³¹ This role of *Ulysses* as an important novel is particularly important in the American context of the Great American Novel which novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* strive to become. Cf. Lawrence Buell's *The Dream of the Great American Novel*.

therefore paradigmaticize their pretext in such a traditional manner as to reflect the orthodox understanding of *Ulysses* as, e.g., the paradigmatically modernist novel in order to be able to claim orthodoxy and legitimacy for their own project as part of the Ulyssean Tradition. However, this also means that Joyce's novel itself must be framed as a problem to overcome since the novels of the Ulyssean Tradition must subscribe to the dominant principle of autonomy – at the latest point at the conceptual moment they inscribe themselves into the tradition of a novel that like few others is seen to epitomize this ideal of autonomy, constant innovation and rule-breaking. To attain orthodoxy from within the bounds of their own, singular aesthetic project, these novels must understand and thus shape *Ulysses* in a manner as to have their response be provoked by *Ulysses*: their singularity and thus 'heresy' through which they (or rather, their authors) seek to establish a new literary paradigm must appear under the assumption of orthodoxy. Pynchon thus preposterously shapes *Ulysses* in such a manner as to retrospectively produce *Gravity's Rainbow* as what must appear as, as McHale puts it, "one of the paradigmatic texts of postmodernist writing, literally an anthology of postmodernist themes and devices" (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 16). After Joyce, and therefore after modernism, Pynchon surfaces as a post-modernist, his heresy remaining within the bounds of established Ulyssean orthodoxy. As much as *Ulysses* thus shapes and influences the Ulyssean Tradition, the Ulyssean Tradition also shapes *Ulysses* according to its respective needs. Thereby, the Ulyssean hypertext can assume the status of a singular and autonomous work in its own right and transcend the Ulyssean influence it is moored in.

Nevertheless, *Ulysses* remains as a residue after being transformed into the new symbolic order thus established. Almost like that second-order real of Lacanian psychoanalysis that always remains as a residuum after socialization through a transfer of the real into the symbolic order – the Lacanian cause – *Ulysses* retains a presence in the Ulyssean Tradition. Evidently, commonsensically even, *Ulysses* is the cause of the Ulyssean Tradition, the pretext later novels reference and transpose to create their own aesthetic. Despite the paradigmaticizing efforts performed onto Joyce's novel in course of a novel's 'socialization' into the literary field, *Ulysses* is never fully mastered. Instead, the second-order *Ulysses* itself interacts with the Ulyssean Tradition it is formed by. The contingently paradigmaticized *Ulysses* thus raises new

questions the novels of the Ulyssean Tradition must respond to. Rather than a monilinear chain of source and influence – or, conversely, resymbolization and (re-)attribution – the Ulyssean Tradition should be understood as a reciprocal dialogue. The novels of the Ulyssean Tradition are simultaneously ‘bound’ to *Ulysses* as products of its tradition and to be viewed as independent works. It is exactly within that tension between the monologism of a heresy being established by speaking over *Ulysses* as pretext and an orthodox dialogue with the pre-text, thereby speaking through and with *Ulysses*, that the Ulyssean Tradition is positioned. This tension makes the Ulyssean Tradition not only a way of writing that would allow for the traces of *Ulysses* to reappear in later novels in its tradition but also a way of reading these very novels that can, as this study will show, offer new and deep readings of their own aesthetic project rather than simply outlining various connections to Joyce as a sources-and-influences study would be content with.

That the traces of *Ulysses* in novels like *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* are at times hardly overt, instead residing in the more abstract principles of their internal organization, is not of matter here. In fact, it only bespeaks the extremeness (the principle of) autonomy takes in such novels: the Ulyssean Tradition is a literary club so autonomous and exclusive you might not even have heard of it yet. Nevertheless, there are some precedents to this study. One such precedent can be found in Morley’s *The Quest for Epic in Contemporary American Fiction*. In her study, Morley reads novels by John Updike, Philip Roth, and Don DeLillo for their connection to Joyce’s *Ulysses*. According to Morley, these American writers can be seen to take recourse to Joyce’s *Ulysses* “in their quest for the so-called Great American Novel” (Morley 13). Revisiting the Ulyssean thereby becomes a gateway to achieving literary greatness as it offers the means to realize the Great American Novel’s project of cultural self-examination. Joyce’s postcolonialism, his interest in hybridity, his polyphony and multiperspectivalism and his use of myth, Morley argues, offer a post-national America an attractive framework for the exploration and critique of the nation.

Morley particularly underlines the influence of Joyce’s ironic prose epic’s reconciliation of the mundane and realistic with the grandiose, the symbolic and mythical on the Great American Novel. As Morley’s study, and likewise Craig Hansen Werner’s own study of James

Joyce and the tradition of the American novel, argues, Joyce's main attraction for American writers lies in the characteristic merging of the symbolic with the realist in his writing. Drawing on Richard Chase's reading of the American novel as a romance form in *The American Novel and Its Tradition* and Richard Poirier's *A World Elsewhere*'s argument about an uneasy mixture of realistic and romantic elements in American literature, Morley and Werner both similarly argue that the American literary tradition as a whole (not only in the epic tradition) is described by conflicting journalistically naturalistic and metaphysically symbolist traditions. Joyce, Werner notes, "provided a general model for American writers struggling with these difficulties, by redefining symbolism and realism to support his vision of the possibility of human equilibrium *within* a hostile environment" (Werner 3). Tracing back this uncomfortably unresolved binary to Emerson and the early days of American literature, Morley likewise argues that Joyce fills a gap in the American imagination by offering American authors of epics a mode of the epic novel capable of resolving this apparently quintessentially American clash (Morley 53).³²

Although Morley approaches the issue of *Ulysses* from a different angle, more oriented toward the American national context, and does not offer uniform criteria for the 'survival' of *Ulysses* in US literature other than it offering a compromise between the realist and the symbolic, instead identifying varying, slightly related aspects of novels in her corpus as *Ulysses*-influenced, the general project of her study is related to the Ulyssean Tradition. As Morley summarizes her fundamental argument, "to understand and shed new light on the issues of the present, contemporary American writers turn to, engage with and borrow from the models

³² That is to say that while other American writers resolve this clash differently, such as for example "by separating their essentially powerless characters from the hostile social realities" (Werner 2), American epic novelists could find a useful model for the resolution of this traditional conflict between the realistic and the romantic in *Ulysses*. My study's focus on American epic novels is hence warranted since the American literary tradition appears to provide a fertile ground for an interrogation of Joyce and *Ulysses* in the American epic novel. Just as the (epic) novel is not necessarily the only genre, or rather 'container', that might produce a text of the Ulyssean Tradition but its most probable genre, the Ulyssean Tradition cannot be understood as an exclusively American phenomenon, even though this national context appears beneficial to it. Obviously, the importance of a specifically American context for the novels discussed here cannot be dismissed. However, their American themes develop within a transnational framework the Ulyssean Tradition provides. Hence, while it produces texts that also critically examine nationhood and can be clearly located in an American context, the Ulyssean Tradition itself results from a 20th century literary cosmopolitanism that traverses national, cultural and temporal boundaries.

of the past” (Morley 47), models in which Morley brings together an American tradition of Emerson and Thoreau with the Joycean tradition of revisiting *Ulysses*.

Like Morley, Werner’s 1982 *Paradoxical Resolutions: American Fiction since James Joyce* analyzes Joyce’s, this time general rather than *Ulysses*-centered, influence on American fiction. Reading authors ranging from Faulkner to Kerouac, Barth, and, notably, also Thomas Pynchon, Werner “explores the diverse ways in which the current generation has created a *post-Joycean tradition* in American fiction” and thereby how (mis)readings of Joyce “have helped shape the contemporary American novel” (Werner 6; emphasis mine). He for instance comments on the importance of “a recognition of the ‘humanity’ of the pages” (Werner 215) for both Pynchon and Joyce and identifies other crucial points of contact between the two authors and *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Ulysses*. However, similarly to Morley’s book, Werner does not come to a more concrete perspective on Joyce’s influence other than Joyce serving as an “intermediate focus” (Werner 196) used to reconcile the romantic or symbolic with the realist side of the American literary tradition, Joyce’s influence otherwise showing itself to Werner in multiple, heterogeneous aspects.

This focus on Joyce’s legacy as a repertoire of styles and themes is also at the core of Robert Martin Adams’ *Afterjoyce: Studies in Fiction After Ulysses*. In his study, Adams examines European, South and North American novels for the various ways they have been influenced by Joyce’s *Ulysses*. He thereby shows how the influence of *Ulysses* is not merely one of simple imitation but plays out through “active and individual response“ whereby authors like Faulkner or Woolf “fought to free themselves from Joyce, and found their own voices in the process of doing so, yet not without taking on a tincture of the force with which they had had to cope” (Adams 196). Tracing Joycean ‘innovations,’ which Adams duly notes are not necessarily Joyce’s yet had come to be identified with him, in later writings, Adams identifies resemblances between, e.g., *Ulysses* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* “in its scope, penetration, and cold perspective” (Adams 179) or Joyce’s, Woolf’s and Faulkner’s stream-of-consciousness. However, Adams never arrives at a distinct framework for these influences. Instead, he simply maps aspects of post-Joycean works that are reminiscent of Joyce’s *Ulysses* without substantiating his rather poetic readings too much.

In contrast to Adam's exercise in tracing the various ways in which Joyce's *Ulysses* has stamped itself on the artistic voices of other writers across the world, Monika Fludernik's account of "The 'Ulyssean Paradigm' of the Modern Novel" seeks to establish characteristics of a distinct group of texts that paradigmatically stem from *Ulysses*. She thus provides this study with an important precedent for understanding a special class of modern epic novels through Joyce's *Ulysses*. Fludernik distinguishes between ways in which *Ulysses* generally influenced modern fiction, e.g., through his use of stream-of-consciousness or montage,³³ and "a specific pattern or paradigm with its distinctive emphasis on epic breadth and inclusiveness" (Fludernik 295). Although Fludernik's rather short and cursory essay does not describe exactly the same phenomenon as this study, she, to my knowledge, was the first to discuss the notion of a "Ulyssean tradition of the modern novel" that "can be defined as a paradigm which is still productive" (Fludernik 293) and distinct from an imitation of style. Fludernik traces her "Ulyssean Paradigm" in "some of the finest modern novels written since the 1930s" (Fludernik 293), including *Gravity's Rainbow*, and defines the distinctive features of this paradigm as:

- (a) self-referentiality of the narrative, implicit or explicit irony
- (b) awareness of language as the medium of narration and frequent distortion of that medium
- (c) great complexity of form and content
- (d) an essential correspondence between form and content
- (e) (auto-)biographical elements with resultant subjective world-view (not obligatory)
- (f) fantastic or surrealistic elements (not obligatory)
- (g) epic dimensions of the novel
- (h) epic inclusiveness and, sometimes, a tendency towards encyclopaedianism
- (i) structural and symbolical finesse. (Fludernik 293–94)

Whereas, as Fludernik admits, "characteristics (a) to (f) apply to the modern novel in general" (Fludernik 294), she notably ascribes epic dimension and inclusivity, i.e., the same features of

³³ See also McHale's reading of the influence of Joyce's 'Circe' chapter on modernist literature in "Henry Roth in Nighttown, or, Containing *Ulysses*."

encyclopedism and totalizing desires akin to the (modern) epic described above for the Ulyssean Tradition, to a distinctly Joycean influence on the modern novel.

According to Fludernik, this epic mode, which is unfortunately not further described, spawns a tradition in the modern novel that can be traced back to *Ulysses*. Fludernik thus argues that for instance Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* or Dos Passos' *USA* trilogy display "distinctive features of the Ulyssean paradigm" (Fludernik 295) while Günter Grass' *Die Blechtrommel* is a "Ulyssean novel" (Fludernik 295) that gets its Ulyssean paradigm indirectly via Döblin. It is perhaps this monolinear notion of textual influence, direct or indirect, in which the Ulyssean Tradition presented here differs most clearly from Fludernik's model. In contrast to Fludernik's Ulyssean tradition, the constellation of texts presented here has both more clear-cut parameters than 'experimentation' or 'symbolic finesse' and constitutes a more complex interrelation between texts in the tradition than a monolinear influence such as the one proposed by Fludernik could describe. Although the examples Fludernik provides for novels in the Ulyssean tradition also include texts that are or could be discussed here as well, she also includes novels that would not fit my definition of the Ulyssean Tradition, either because they do not fully conform to the aesthetic characteristics I view as central to the Ulyssean Tradition, *V* would be an example for this, or do not directly 'descend' from *Ulysses*, like, e.g., Grass' *Die Blechtrommel*. Certainly, novels in the Ulyssean Tradition also stand in contact among each other, not only relating to *Ulysses* alone but equally reflecting on other texts in its tradition, and, in general, are not product of a hermetically sealed textual cosmos with *Ulysses* as its sole center. However, they inscribe themselves into a tradition that *Ulysses* is the (conceptual) start and paradigm of, the Ulyssean patterns and methods they transpose forming the key to their own aesthetic project. One way of reading this study is thus as it following through on Fludernik's concluding outlook that "[f]urther comparative studies will no doubt help to specify the precise position of the 'Ulyssean paradigm' in the novelistic literature of the twentieth century, classifying as well as modifying these propositions" (Fludernik 298). Fludernik's notion of a sub-group of the modern novel that, without regard for national or cultural borders, traces itself back to *Ulysses* and its epic, totalizing tendencies, strongly resonates with my own project. However, rather than positing a very loosely defined 'style' that has proven to be

influential, what I refer to as the Ulyssean Tradition describes a potentially smaller, in any case more clearly framed, group of novels that is more complexly interrelated than being simply all inspired by, in one way or the other, *Ulysses*.

This fundamental methodological and conceptual difference also becomes apparent when comparing the present study to those of Morley, Adams, and Werner. Whereas the intertextual category of the Ulyssean Tradition evidences distinct characteristic features throughout that are reinterpreted and transposed in different yet traceable ways, Werner for instance identifies the Joycean influence in his novels in numerous, unsystematized and only loosely connected ways, be it in the way “[s]ome contemporary writers delight in Joyce’s technical achievement” or “consolidate his advancement of traditional forms,” or in the “conception of the relationship between the artist and his work” or the way “[s]till other writers reexamine Joyce’s thematic concerns” (Werner 7).

Morley similarly identifies a “declared negotiation with Joyce’s *Ulysses*” (Morley 6) in the works of American authors’ attempts to, like Joyce, “discover[] the grand and the consequential in the apparently mundane” (Morley 4). To Morley, this can be seen in Updike’s concern for the banal in advertisements and the metempsychotic transformation of the past for the present in the *Rabbit* series, DeLillo’s experimentalism and recourse to the mythical and the epic in *Underworld*, Roth’s “approach to literary apprenticeship and paternalism” (Morley 2) in the “American Trilogy,” and the overall role of Joyce’s postcolonialism, hybridity, multiperspectivalism and reinvention of the epic novel for the formation of the American post-national. While these issues will also play a role in the following analyses – the question of artistic paternity and the relationship between artist, work, and audience surfaces most prominently in the discussions of the Ulyssean consubstantiality and mass-structure, myth, temporality and reinterpretation in the chapters on metempsychosis and the Homeric parallelism of *Ulysses*, and perspective, nationhood and hybridity in the sections on parallax – the framework of the Ulyssean Tradition presented here is much more clearly demarcated by the discussion of distinct, central aesthetic categories rather than scattered, unsystematized references to one or the other Joycean stylistic inspiration under the umbrella of a resolved American realistic-romantic dichotomy in the modern epic novel after Joyce.

A Ulyssean Methodology: The Ulyssean Tradition as a Way of Reading

In contrast, this study is based in an investigation of the triad of problem terms that underlie *Ulysses* as a structural device in the production of Joyce's modernist aesthetic and the variant ways novels in the Ulyssean Tradition pick up on and transform them to realize their own aesthetic projects. By employing the systems of order developed in *Ulysses* as the central structural units of the Ulyssean Tradition, this study provides a more focused, and therefore more comparable, framework for an analysis of the Ulyssean in novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Infinite Jest*. Furthermore, whereas the aforementioned studies principally approach the Ulyssean as a *way of writing* in their analysis of how the Joycean model has impacted other authors' writings, the Ulyssean Tradition presented in this study is also a *way of reading* these novels as both connected to *Ulysses* and works with their own, independent aesthetic project. Since, as already mentioned, the Ulyssean Tradition produces works that can stand on their own, reading novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* through the conceptual lens of the Ulyssean Tradition not only allows to intertextually view these novels in their relation to *Ulysses* but also serves to relate otherwise disparate elements *within* these novels to another under the sign of a transposition of the Ulyssean systems of order. The Ulyssean Tradition thereby not only provides this study with its subject but also becomes its own central methodology, producing new and autonomous readings of the novels at hand.

The following analyses of *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* will therefore be structured around the Ulyssean systems of order, the methods of metempsychosis, consubstantiality and parallax and the resulting patterns of mythical parallelisms, mass-structure and multiperspectival synthesis, with each chapter dedicated to the respective novel's treatment of the given system. The problem terms from which the Ulyssean methods and patterns are generated thereby come to serve not only as themes but also centrally pertain to structural, poetic, and aesthetic dimensions.³⁴ Through their inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition, the

³⁴ 'Metempsychosis' can hence not be reduced to 'myth' as theme and structure alone but is also entwined with aesthetics of intertextuality, a discussion of literary heredity and thus autonomy and artistic independence, and literature's relation to reality as well as an ideology of flux and permanence. 'Consubstantiality' as a problem term similarly conjoins thematic dimensions like (artistic) paternity, religion, or community with structural patterns such as Joyce's mass-structure in *Ulysses* and the novel's overall aesthetic and poetic self-interrogation. In the same vein, 'parallax' here does not simply refer to

novels read in this study gain independence as singular works. Notably, this not only goes for the novels at hand but also for this study's own method. Rather than stopping at a reconstruction of the presence of *Ulysses* in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* and thus analyzing the Ulyssean Tradition as a way of writing in the style of a sources-and-influences study, my reconstruction of their transpositional procedures produces readings of these novels that, in the Ulyssean Tradition's tension between relationality and independence, stand on their own and can thereby provide insights that go beyond an appreciation of Joyce's influence on Pynchon and Wallace and reflect on *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Infinite Jest* and the literary paradigms they have come to stand for in general.

Each respective analysis will therefore begin with a (sub-)chapter on the metempsychotic method and the pattern of mythical parallelisms. As will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, metempsychosis establishes a parallel to a mythical past through which the novel's everyday-action is instilled with epic potential. However, Joyce's metempsychosis is not equivalent to the novel's mythological themes and structures. Instead, the novel's investigation of metempsychosis as a problem term involves a poetic and aesthetic dimension as for instance a method of organizing literary heredity, a form of intertextuality, and the novel's temporal and verbal transmigrations realized in and through metempsychosis, ultimately leading into a renegotiation of how meaning is created in literature. Metempsychosis in *Ulysses* proposes a philosophy of permanence within flux through which the fragmentary, unstable experience of modernity is reconceptualized and the modern novel thus made capable of recovering the ancient epic's claim to aesthetic totality. In *Gravity's Rainbow*'s response to the reintegrative strategy of a mythical parallelism, it is exactly this totalizing

multiperspectivalism alone but turns into a complex of themes, structures, and methods of representation and meaning-making.

The Ulyssean problem terms are not simply umbrella terms for these thematic, structural, and aesthetic concerns. Instead, the various themes, motifs, structures, and aesthetic negotiations contained in the Ulyssean problem terms are so conjoined as to become structuring devices for the model *Ulysses* provides to the Ulyssean Tradition. It is this multifaceted function of the Ulyssean problem terms as structuring metaphors that the novels in the Ulyssean tradition make productive use of, each (re)interpreting and transposing the problem terms differently, focusing on different aspects, and thus producing their singular aesthetic paradigm. I therefore use Joyce's problem terms as my own structural units since, even though one perhaps could title the analyses to come 'Myth in *Gravity's Rainbow*,' 'Myth in *Infinite Jest*,' or 'Visuality in *Gravity's Rainbow*' and so on, such reductions would miss the overall point of this study and loosen the relationality to *Ulysses* central to it (e.g., 'visuality' is certainly not in itself 'Ulyssean,' whereas 'parallax' in its multifaceted function is).

tendency of Joyce's attempt to recover the epic for the perceived banality and chaos of modernity that comes under fire. Pynchon's novel thematically transposes the Ulyssean pattern of a parallel to the *Odyssey* into a paranoid correspondence to the fairytale of Hansel and Gretel and the (anti-)quest of the chivalric romance *Parzival*. However, *Gravity's Rainbow's* Ulyssean Tradition does not exhaust itself in a transposition of Joyce's Greek parallelisms into the German context of fairytales and chivalric quests more fitting to the novel's setting. Nor is Pynchon's treatment of the Joycean pattern of mythological correspondences a rejection of 'metempsychosis' itself. Whereas Joyce's use of mythical parallels serves *Ulysses* to establish a sense of continuity in change that allows the novel to recover the epic's aesthetic totality for modernist writing, Pynchon perceives a transhistorical and transcultural continuity in the West's urge for totality, an impulse to construct closed systems of continuity and all-encompassing meaning through the paranoid recognition of parallels that ultimately results in a life-denying and victimizing totalitarianism. Rather than a Joycean reintegration through myth, *Gravity's Rainbow's* anti-quest raises disintegration and frustration to an aesthetic principle of liberation. Whereas Joyce's novel seeks to control modern chaos into a mythically meaningful permanence within flux, Pynchon embraces chaos, ambiguity and plurality in itself as an aesthetic project. Thereby, *Gravity's Rainbow* comes to eschew all principles of global, transcendent determination in favor of localized and provisional systems of meaning. Instead of consolidating reality into a monolithic mythical structure, *Gravity's Rainbow* therefore proposes a new, decentered myth of the postmodern condition in the plural and heterogeneous image of postmodern 'plastic man.'

Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, too, utilizes the metempsychotic method, yet in a wholly different way that is oriented toward the production of an aesthetic for literary writing after postmodernism. In *Infinite Jest*, the metempsychotic method's link to the past is turned into a discussion of the late 20th century's uneasy heritage of postmodernism, the philosophical and intertextual baggage a literature after postmodernism has to come to terms with.³⁵ As for Pynchon, an eternal recurrence of myth is seen to victimize and damage the individual. However, Wallace employs his Ulyssean Tradition in a wholly different sense, focusing rather

³⁵ Cf. Adam Kelly's "Beginning with Postmodernism."

on the method of Joycean metempsychosis, a negotiation of the continuity between past and present through intertextual connections, than on the pattern of a parallelism to a mythological text from which order and control are generated as which it is realized in *Ulysses* and for which Pynchon primarily reads the Ulyssean problem term. For Wallace the founding myths of (post-) postmodernity are not those of any remote mythical antiquity. Instead, they are formed by the existentially ironic worldview Wallace's present US culture has adopted from postmodernism and poststructuralism and naturalized into its dominant discourse. Wallace's investigation of metempsychosis hence hinges on a Lacanian analysis of the postmodern psyche. With Wallace being conscious of his own inescapable entanglement in this ironic language, Lacan thereby provides both the methodological language of Wallace's critique as well as the 'mythical forefather' of the solipsistic construction of selfhood through an ironic objectification of self and other Wallace thus critiques. *Infinite Jest's* Lacanian myth of selfhood as constituted in a phallogocentric othering of the female is continuously reincarnated in the next generation through the misogynist mass media they consume and from which they form their world view. Due to the addiction to ironic mass media Wallace diagnoses American society with, the implicitly misogynous postmodern language of the fathers eternally recurs in the discourse of their sons. As a result, they become internally empty and with no means to rebel against an institutionalized ethos of rule-breaking. The metempsychotic method is thereby turned into a reflection on the interconnection between gender, language, and existential loneliness. Ultimately in *Infinite Jest*, the reintegration through a construed transmigration of souls which Joyce performs and Pynchon continuously frustrates and over-determines is transformed into and realized as a proposed change in perspective of the reader from a masculine, postmodern and solipsistic language to a redemptive, feminine one.

Even though the topics negotiated through the Ulyssean problem terms necessarily, as aspects of coherent novels, tend to overlap at times, the question of the relationship between authors, texts and the world of their audience as well as interpretation and authority are most clearly examined in the novels' treatment of the Ulyssean consubstantiality, a theological term designating the mystery of the shared divine substance of the distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of the Christian trinity. Joyce transfers this notion of consubstantiality to the

secular sphere, combatting the estranged state of modern man through a recognition of a shared humanity. Thereby, *Ulysses*, which is structured in parallel to the Catholic mass, becomes a celebration of human life as, though earthly and banal, made meaningful through artistic effort. It is therefore not only the novel's characters Stephen, Leopold and Molly Bloom who attain meaningful communion by locating themselves in a secular trinity but also the modernist artist, Joyce, whose reintegrative work is conceptualized through the consubstantial method. Contriving art and authorship through the metaphor of consubstantiality, Joyce's *Ulysses* proposes its paradigmatically modernist aesthetic of art being able to transform the perceived fragmentation and banality of modern experience into a meaningful whole. This redemption of modernity through the artist's pseudo-divine creation, Joyce's use of consubstantiality implies, is an effect of modernist art's and artist's unidealized yet transfigurative engagement with everyday reality through which Joyce distinguishes himself in *Ulysses* from the traditions of romanticism and aestheticism. The artist's 'divine' intervention transforms the fragmented and trivial contingency of modernity into a meaningful aesthetic totality.

While community and reenchancement of the mundane are also central to Pynchon's transposition of the Ulyssean Tradition, *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodernist aesthetics redistribute interpretative authority from the monologic Joycean author-God to a plurality of heterogeneous readings of which none can claim precedence to the others. Pynchon thus reformulates the linearity of *Ulysses'* mass-structure into the circular ontology of the church year. The novel's transposition of the mass-structure thereby motivates an exploration of modes of temporality and interpretation. As is established through the novel's discussion of topics such as physical and informational entropy, mathematical calculus, probabilities and Max Weber's account of Protestantism, *Gravity's Rainbow* reevaluates the present, divorced from the totality of historical and interpretative coherence, as the locus of a transformative, communal moment of meaning and liberation. Although this moment resists all totalization into history, its presence bespeaks the possibility of meaningful interpretation. Interpretation thereby turns from a capacity of any singular master-organizer to a provisional, communally negotiable yet meaningful endeavor. Pynchon employs the religious language of the Ulyssean Tradition to establish his own, postmodernist project which values the absent over the present, and the

preterite, abject and aberrant over the elect, defined and unambiguously recognized. Instead of localizing authority in a Joycean author-God, Pynchon's Ulyssean, postmodernist aesthetic conceives of all meaning as plural, heterogeneous and untotalizable, a decision every reader has to individually make.

In its attempt to move beyond postmodernist self-reflection and constitute literature as a form of communication between author and reader, *Infinite Jest* on the other hand employs the consubstantial method to again renegotiate the role of authorship. Seeking to attain a New Sincerity for literature after postmodernism, *Infinite Jest* reevaluates the notion of authorship while not reversing the agency and authority postmodernism affords to the reader (Kelly, "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction"). To formulate his metamodern aesthetic from the Ulyssean Tradition, Wallace reinterprets the consubstantial method through the later Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy. *Infinite Jest* thereby becomes capable of reimagining the consubstantial method's principle of authorial engagement into a form of engaged literature that conceives of author, reader, and text as reciprocal partners in conversation. The aesthetic of a New Sincerity thus generated through the Ulyssean Tradition thereby proposes an alternative mode of metafiction. Its textual transcendence no longer points toward the mediatedness of all interpretation but instead leads to a recognition of presence outside the text, establishing a contact between author and reader. Through its recourse to *Ulysses* and the consubstantial method, *Infinite Jest* realizes its aesthetic project of absorptive reflection and transcendence and thereby reevaluates the potential of literature to become an ethical communication that, although plural and heterogeneous, can raise claims to stable meaning and thus a maximally, within the bounds of what is possible, full representation of the world.

Every third larger chapter will be dedicated to parallax, which is not only the third and last of the Ulyssean problem terms but also constitutes *Ulysses*' synthesizing principle that puts metempsychosis and consubstantiality in relation to one another. As will be shown, Joyce's pronounced multiperspectivalism seeks to represent modernity in totality. Whereas meaning in the modernity of *Ulysses* is presented as inaccessible to the individual, through the parallax method, most clearly reflected in Joyce's investigation of visuality and perspectival changes,

modernity's disparate fragments can be synthesized into the coherent whole of a three-dimensional image. The visual metaphor of parallax and stereoscopic vision in *Ulysses* thereby establishes a modernist aesthetic of artistic organization being able to reintegrate the seemingly meaningless contingencies of modern life into a meaningful whole. The parallax method's role as concluding, synthesizing master-organizer not only touches on the information provided in the novel but ultimately governs the Ulyssean structure as a whole. Parallax in *Ulysses* therefore serves to synthesize the novel's two other systems of order, metempsychosis and consubstantiality representing the binary cultural forces of Hellenism and Hebraism, into a complete coherence, the wholeness of the Nietzschean Übermensch or Good European which Joyce's novel presents as the aesthetic paradigm of its modernism.

In sharp contrast to this Joycean principle of synthesis and depth perception, Pynchon's postmodernist aesthetic is dominated by a pronounced depthlessness. Pynchon's Ulyssean Tradition thus transposes the depth of Joyce's representation of character and world into a flattened out ontology. *Gravity's Rainbow* mobilizes the image of the moiré as a counterfigure to Joyce's pattern of totalizing superimpositions. Orienting its reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition on the theory of relativity and quantum physics, *Gravity's Rainbow* employs the depthless moiré as its structuring principle. Whereas meaning for the modernist *Ulysses* is transcendently present yet only observable through (the artist's) synthesis of disparate observations, *Gravity's Rainbow* reformulates the Ulyssean pattern of superimposition into a pattern of superpositions that proposes meaning to be an effect of observation. Hence, while Joyce's parallax's synthesis-function is framed by Pynchon as a paranoid mode of textual organization that ends in life-denying totality, *Gravity's Rainbow* proposes a creative and self-aware paranoia as the aesthetic principle for writing postmodernity. *Gravity's Rainbow* thereby never fully rejects the Ulyssean model but instead, through its reciprocal dialogue with *Ulysses*, reformulates it into its own postmodernist aesthetic of meaning as subject to perpetual, egalitarian renegotiation. In its self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition – a relational position-taking from which *Gravity's Rainbow*'s singular, paradigmatically postmodernist aesthetic emerges – *Gravity's Rainbow* at once rejects the Joycean model as totalizing and

paranoid and embraces the Ulyssean Tradition by radicalizing the Ulyssean principle of communal effort and creativity into a democratic aesthetic of interpretation.

A similar tension between superimposition and superposition, stabilizing authority and the interpretative freedom of relativity, in short, paradigmatically modernist epistemological and postmodernist ontological questions,³⁶ also underlies the treatment the Ulyssean Tradition undergoes in *Infinite Jest*'s metamodern aesthetic. *Infinite Jest* applies the parallax shifts in perspective of the Ulyssean model to its superstructural organization. In its programmatic attempt to reconcile a modernism which must appear as naïve from a postmodern perspective with a postmodernism the novel criticizes as cynical and solipsistic yet cannot fully leave behind, *Infinite Jest* as a novel in the Ulyssean Tradition employs parallax in order to set modernist epistemological dominants in oscillation with a postmodernist, ontologically dominated perspective. Inscribing itself into the Ulyssean Tradition, *Infinite Jest*'s metamodernism establishes a dialogic interrogation between these poles: depending on the reader's perspective, *Infinite Jest* can be said to assume its Ulyssean Tradition either as if it were *Gravity's Rainbow*, circulating, plural and endlessly deconstructive, or *Ulysses*, a claim to literature's capacity to capture the world in a stable and meaningful manner. The novel transposes the paradigmatically modernist epistemological question of Joyce's parallax method into an ontological parallax that leaves the choice which ontology, a modernist or a postmodernist one, to apply to the text to the reader. *Infinite Jest* thereby realizes its metamodern aesthetic through the Ulyssean Tradition as it at once both contains modernist and postmodernist aesthetics in oscillation and, as the reader makes her final choice, nevertheless assumes a stable meaning. It is hence in *Infinite Jest*'s transposed parallax method that not only the novel's own metamodern aesthetics but also this aesthetic's genesis from a constant, reciprocal dialogue with the Ulyssean Tradition becomes most apparent.

As should have become apparent in the above cursory overview over what is to come, this study of the Ulyssean Tradition goes beyond a reconstruction of Joycean traces in other novels in the style of a sources-and-influences study and instead makes use of the Ulyssean

³⁶ Cf. Brian McHale's theses on the epistemological and ontological dominants of modernism and postmodernism in *Postmodernist Fiction*.

Tradition's tension between intertextual cohesion and aesthetic independence to produce self-sustained readings. Reading the American epic novels *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* in the Ulyssean Tradition – this study's title already containing its central methodological tension between the Ulyssean Tradition as a way of writing and a way of reading – allows for readings of these novels that, through recourse to the Ulyssean model, help come to terms with their own aesthetic project. Such readings offer the potential of moving beyond the act of tracing Joycean influence in *Infinite Jest* and *Gravity's Rainbow* and thereby the potential of using the reconstruction of their variant transpositions of the Ulyssean model for self-sufficient readings of their singular attempts to (re)claim epic totality and paradigmaticness for their own project. Just as the complex, reciprocal dialogue with *Ulysses* in the Ulyssean Tradition is productive of singular, independent works, this study does not stop at an investigation of Joyce's influence but employs the Ulyssean systems of order that underlie their aesthetic project to itself perform new, autonomous readings.

A relational reading of the Ulyssean Tradition therefore not only allows for a recognition of the continued relevance of Joyce's novel, the seminal role *Ulysses* continues to play across temporal and national boundaries. Furthermore, reading novels like *Infinite Jest* or *Gravity's Rainbow* under a Ulyssean Paradigm places texts usually treated as diametrical opposites in a relation to another that allows for a deeper understanding of their respective aesthetic project and place in literary history. It is the Ulyssean Tradition's receptiveness to literary history through its positioning in the literary field which, in addition to further illuminating the individual novels, also allows for more general insights into the literary periods these novels represent. Their respective responses to *Ulysses* also indicate their specific relation to the paradigmatic modernism they ascribe to *Ulysses*. This is especially fruitful with regard to novels like *Infinite Jest*, whose relation to postmodernism and modernism is still subject to scholarly debate yet can be read in the specific ways Wallace's novel inscribes itself into the Ulyssean Tradition and transforms *Ulysses* toward its own ends. While this represents the core of the following study, this study's relational reading of the Ulyssean Tradition in *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and *Infinite Jest* lastly offers yet another return to *Ulysses* and its relevance: in the spirit of Richard Pearce's argument to read Joyce after Pynchon in order to allow for an

appreciation of *Ulysses* untainted by readerly preconceptions of its modernism (Pearce), an understanding of the Ulyssean Tradition also helps to highlight aspects of *Ulysses* our traditional readings critically obfuscate. Rediscovering Joyce in Pynchon and Wallace (and vice versa) thereby not only entails a deepening of insight into the later novels in the Ulyssean Tradition but also helps to shine a fresh, rejuvenating light on *Ulysses* itself.

Evidently, even though this study's selected corpus comfortably maps the most central developments in the literary history of the 20th century after Joyce – a timeline from Joyce's modernism to Pynchon's postmodernism and Wallace's New Sincerity or metamodernism – I raise no claims to completeness whatsoever. There is little reason to suspect that the Ulyssean Tradition exhausts itself in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* and that no other epic novels can be fruitfully read through this lens.³⁷ In fact, I would be more surprised if the Ulyssean Tradition proved to meaningfully apply to the works discussed here exclusively. I do not desire to hermetically seal off what is presented here nor police it lest anyone were to revise or add to it. So far, *Ulysses* has not lost its perceived relevance. *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* are most likely not the only long, complex novels that can be fruitfully read in the Ulyssean Tradition. Judging from the considerable overlap in corpora, themes and features between this and other related studies of the Ulyssean, it could be fruitful to (re)read what Morley, Fludernik and others

³⁷ As already mentioned, Leon Forrest's 1992 *Divine Days* could be a candidate for an African-American novel epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition. In fact, the Ulyssean Tradition could even exceed the generic boundaries of the novel and be applicable to movies like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In danger of anticipating several concepts (the interested reader might want to come back to this note later on), a reading of *2001* in the Ulyssean Tradition could orient itself on the Ulyssean systems of order in the following ways: the movie already marks its Ulyssean, or at least Odyssean, tradition in its title, purporting to be a futuristic, transposed epic *Space Odyssey*. In addition, *2001* locates itself in Kubrick's oeuvre, similarly to the paradigmatic ambitions of novels in the Ulyssean Tradition, as his masterpiece, the paradigmatic case of what can be done in the medium of film in the 1960s. Yet, this does not already turn it into a movie in the Ulyssean Tradition. However, *2001* can also be seen to be organized around the Ulyssean Tradition's systems of metempsychosis, consubstantiality, and parallax. Kubrick's metempsychotic method can hence be seen in the transhistorical continuity *2001* constructs, a permanence within the changes of time visualized in the movie's famous use of the match cut technique in which both technological progress, from bone-club to satellite, and essential sameness is represented. *2001*'s consubstantiality can be seen in the movie's paternity theme, the Ulyssean search for the father reappearing in *2001*'s voyage to Jupiter, the father of gods, as well as the central theme of humanity as discussed through the fight with the computer-person HAL. Notably, *Infinite Jest*, receptive of other texts in the Ulyssean Tradition, also references *2001* in the name of one of its protagonists, Hal Incandenza. Ending, like *Ulysses* in a section temporally located in infinity and, like *Ulysses*, with the birth of a new man, both *2001* and *Ulysses* are undergirded by a strong Nietzschean theme. *2001* thus, in parallel to *Ulysses* witnesses the birth of an Übermensch, the movie's starchild finally appearing to the score of Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the tone poem inspired by the text in which Nietzsche first described the Übermensch and the concept of eternal recurrence in detail. Such observations could serve as a starting point for a future reading of *2001* in the Ulyssean Tradition.

have revealed about *Ulysses*' lasting impact through this new lens of the Ulyssean Tradition and apply it to a novel like Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* or DeLillo's *Underworld*. In the worst case, such readings could lead into dead ends that would but little affect the overall argument of this study. Obviously, not all long, complex novels are to be read in the Ulyssean Tradition. In the best case, they would add to or even revise it and thereby ultimately only strengthen my argument about the Ulyssean Tradition.

I. JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES*

1. Introduction: Methods and Patterns – The Ulyssean Problem Terms

To argue for a Ulyssean Tradition that pervades the American epic novel long after James Joyce's *Ulysses*, one must first investigate the origin of this convention, which shall be picked up on and transformed in novels to come, in *Ulysses* itself. When T.S. Eliot prophesied that *Ulysses* develops an aesthetic of writing and making sense of modernity that should give rise to a kind of tradition others after Joyce could pursue after him, he may have been, as will be shown, correct. However, in locating this influential discovery in Joyce's mythical method alone, Eliot only touched upon a third of what shall be shown to be the, admittedly rather conventionally modernist, reading of Joyce's aesthetic in *Ulysses* that, in turn, has become convention building for the epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition. *Ulysses*, as shall be seen, develops the aesthetic that would make it the paradigm of modernist fiction through, in and from the negotiation of its three problem terms and the patterns that result from the methods implied in these terms. As Thomas Sawyer remarks, "Joyce seems to consistently think of significant words in triads" (Sawyer 201). In the paradigmatic *Ulysses* of the Ulyssean Tradition, these problem terms – terms that seem to disproportionately interest the novel's protagonists – are metempsychosis, consubstantiality, and parallax. As will be shown in the following chapters, these three terms establish aesthetic methods that surface in the novel's patterns of a parallelism to the *Odyssey*, the Roman Catholic mass, and a stereoscopic, synthesis-like superimposition of obverse perspectives into a coherent and meaningful whole that may not be openly accessible to the modern individual but, through art, can be ascertained in a communal effort. This chapter hence investigates the workings of these methods and patterns in Joyce's development of a literary aesthetic suitable to the perceived fragmentation and meaninglessness of the modern condition, serving as reintegrative systems of order through which *Ulysses* counters the confusions and contingencies of modernity and restores them into meaningful order.

As already said, in order to discern how later novels in the Ulyssean Tradition negotiate and transpose Joyce's methods and patterns in *Ulysses*, it must first be explained how they form

this new aesthetic in the novel that is the origin of such a Ulyssean Tradition. As Sawyer shows, the terms that occupy Stephen's, Molly and Leopold Bloom's minds throughout the course of *Ulysses* stand in a complex interrelation to another. They appear as parts of "the syllogistic system that Joyce seems to have used as a structuring device in *Ulysses*" (Sawyer 201). Hence, Sawyer shows, "Metempsychosis is Molly's word, and *M* is the middle term in a medieval syllogism. Parallax is Leopold Bloom's (or Poldy's) word, and *P* is the predicate or third term of a syllogism" (Sawyer 201). While Sawyer, after many ruminations, identifies the missing term, Stephen's word, as "Synteresis" (Sawyer 203), I shall argue that the third term in Joyce's "triadic organization" (Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* 2) should in fact be read as the Substance in consubstantiality, the theological concept that most occupies Stephen throughout *Ulysses*.³⁸ The Joycean aesthetic in *Ulysses*, which becomes productive in the Ulyssean Tradition it gives rise to, hinges on the triad of its problem terms, akin in their composition to thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and the methods and patterns they can be seen to establish in the novel. Although depicting a fragmented and disordered world, *Ulysses* offers in its use of metempsychosis, consubstantiality and parallax, as well as their intricate interplay, a number of ordering principles that seek to, through art, counter this disintegration and instill meaning into a seemingly meaningless modernity.

Metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls, marks one of these methods. Widely equivalent to what Eliot calls Joyce's "mythical method" (Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" 178), the metempsychosis in *Ulysses* produces the novel's parallelism to the mythical *Odyssey*. In constructing a discrete parallel between a mythological antiquity and modern day Dublin, *Ulysses* affords the banality of the novel's modernity with heroic significance and meaning. Through an eternal recurrence, contemporaneity is set in continuity with a more meaningful

³⁸ As Fr. Boyle shows, theological concepts concerned with the issue of substance, e.g., the transubstantiation of the Eucharist, the consubstantiality of the trinity, and the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ as man, shift contexts and merge in *Ulysses* into a "consubstantiation" (Boyle 60) that describes a kind of transubstantiation of the human into the human in a secular or humanistic "divine" that, for Joyce, art can accomplish. Indeed, as it seems to be the norm both in *Ulysses* itself and *Ulysses* criticism, Sawyer is both off and perceptive in his reading of synteresis. Synteresis, a kind of "remorse or prick of conscience" (Sawyer 203) underlies Stephen's thoughts about consubstantiality, triggered by his apparent, shameful, estrangement from his family and the trivial facts of everyday human existence and his resulting, creatively infertile, orphanhood. However, as will be shown, it is exactly this slavish guilt which Stephen, and Joyce, must expunge from their 'theology' in order to attain a fertile aesthetic for modernity in the consubstantial method.

past. Nevertheless, Joyce's use of myth does not portray modernity as in any way deficient or derivative of Hellenic antiquity. Instead, through what can be termed an "intertextual metempsychosis" (Ramey 97), *Ulysses* presents itself as another iteration of the myth of Odysseus, a renegotiation dependent on its antecedents but independent in its own claim to (mythical) import and meaning. Joyce thus not only employs Homer's *Odyssey* in his metempsychotic method but equally employs sources from Ovid to Vergil and Dante to inscribe himself into myth and create his own (hi)story. Metempsychosis in *Ulysses* thereby generates a philosophy of permanence within flux that reconciles the modern experience of instability and change with the continuity the novel's mythological parallelism establishes.

The problem term of consubstantiality, most apparent in Stephen's ruminations yet to be found throughout the novel, serves as a counterpart to metempsychosis. Issues of paternity and atonement structure both *Ulysses*' mythological parallelism and its treatment of consubstantiality. Consubstantiality describes the mystery behind the Christian trinity, in which three persons, the Son, the Father, and the Holy Ghost, are all the one true God in their shared substance. *Ulysses* transposes this theological concept to the human sphere. By locating its human protagonists in a secularized trinity, the mass *Ulysses* employs as a structure similar to that of the *Odyssey* becomes a celebration of human life. Creativity, meaning and order, both for the novel's protagonists and Joyce's aesthetic project, lie in a recognition of a shared human substance. Hence, just as Bloom and Stephen can repair their estrangement through a sense of interconnection structured along the Christian trinity, Joyce as artist stages himself as the God of *Ulysses* consubstantial with his subject matter. It is in this engagement with the trivialities of modern life that the Ulyssean consubstantial method realizes the novel's modernist aesthetic project. The mundanity of the modern condition invested with secularly 'divine' import, *Ulysses* transubstantiates the alienation of modernity into coherent order and meaning.

Parallax is the third and final problem term from which *Ulysses* develops its aesthetic. Through Bloom's term, the novel's fragmented perspectives can be seen to converge into a coherent whole. *Ulysses* employs the stereoscopy that is a result of visual parallax as a metaphor for the synthesis of disparate positions. Hence, for instance in the parallaxic 'Ithaca' chapter, Stephen and Bloom, thesis and antithesis, conjoin into the stable unity of Stephen Bloom.

Joyce's use of parallax as a metaphor thereby describes meaning and order as, though no longer accessible to the modern individual alone, not altogether lost but attainable through a shared human effort. The fragmented perspectives of *Ulysses*, on their own hopelessly disordered and seemingly devoid of meaning, are thus shown to conjoin into a coherent and meaningful unity when superimposed by the synthesizing, artistic intellect.

The last term of Joyce's triad or syllogism, parallax superimposition not only converges the characters' perspectives into a holistic, three-dimensional picture of life, but also serves as a structural metaphor for the novel's own synthesizing and ordering impulse. The novel's strands of metempsychosis and Odyssey, and consubstantiality and mass can thus be seen to represent the cultural forces of Hellenism and Hebraism which Joyce, schooled in Arnoldian and Nietzschean philosophy, views as shaping Western civilization. In parallax synthesis, Joyce's stereoscopic structure merges these two strands to form an aesthetic resembling what Nietzsche calls the new man or good European, a new and fertile vision of order and life for modernity. Stereoscopic vision thereby becomes a structural metaphor for Joyce's aesthetic of reconciling polar opposites to another, parallax providing the key to the resolution of fragmentation and disorder in *Ulysses*.

Hence, the jew's harp with which Stephen is equipped as he leaves the novel, finally able to become creative and deal with the modern world, becomes an emblem of Joyce's new aesthetic in *Ulysses*: in the jew's harp, Hebraism and Hellenism, Bloom and Stephen, mass, consubstantiality, Odyssey and metempsychosis converge in parallax, forming the Europeanized, modernist aesthetic that underlies *Ulysses* – and which Stephen, it is implied, will apply to in turn himself write the novel as Joyce's artistic alter-ego. This aesthetic, based in the triad of metempsychosis, consubstantiality, and parallax as well as Odyssey, mass and stereoscopy, is the model of writing and reintegrating modernity later novels in the Ulyssean Tradition each in their own way, as the following chapters on *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* will show, pick up on, respond to and reinterpret to develop and describe their own, reformed Ulyssean aesthetic.

2. The Odyssey and the Metempsychotic Method in *Ulysses*

James Joyce's *Ulysses* structures the otherwise mundane and senseless events of a day in 1904 Dublin around the *Odyssey*. Since the novel's publication, the enigma of the seeming parallel between modernity and a mythical antiquity the novel's title suggests has been widely commented on. However, the exact nature and function of this parallelism, how the ancient Greek epic appears and is used in *Ulysses*, is up to debate. Clearly, the role of the *Odyssey* in *Ulysses* extends further than simply functioning, as Ezra Pound claims, as a "scaffold, a means of construction" (Pound, "*Ulysses*" 406). Although the novel suggests a parallelism, it is never fully clear "what is to be equated with what, and who with whom" (Iser, "Patterns of Communication in Joyce's *Ulysses*" 32). The seeming metempsychosis at play in the novel evades any permanence. What happens in *Ulysses* is not in any way a simple, derivative copy of a mythological ideal. Bloom's Odyssey, although conducted within the monotony and distinct non-heroism of an everyday modernity, cannot be said to be presented as but a miniscule recollection of a more heroic and meaningful past. Instead, the novel's negotiation of its mythical antecedents establishes *Ulysses* as the epic of modernity, not a product of epigonism but, in its artistically self-asserted heredity, both in continuity with the past and singularly modern and new. Rather than harking back to an idealized mythical past, Joyce claims through artistic negotiation a proclaimed ideal that both *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*, from Homer's to Ovid's interpretation of the tale, share in. Art thereby instills modernity with meaning as it provides it with a historical continuity that is nevertheless never reduced to simple derivation.

The *Odyssey* as a System of Order in *Ulysses*

Joyce's intertextual transmigration of souls becomes most apparent in the novel's treatment of the travels of Odysseus as a pattern that structures the novel. The novel establishes both *Odyssey* and *Ulysses* as instantiations of a deeper, mythical meaning. The *Odyssey* is not just a scaffold for the plot of *Ulysses*, imposed upon the text to give it a narrative order. If the *Odyssey* were a scaffold employed for narrative concerns, a means to construct a plot, *Ulysses* would be a rather badly done rendition of the Greek epic. As David Wykes shows, the "plot development

of *Ulysses* is independent of the *Odyssey*” (Wykes 306). Comparing Bloom’s wanderings through Dublin and Odysseus’s travels in the Mediterranean, *Ulysses* neither fully conforms to the narrative order of the *Odyssey* nor to its chronological order (Wykes 306). As the Gilbert and Linati schemata suggest, the chapters from *Ulysses* correspond to events in the *Odyssey*. Nevertheless, the *Odyssey* does not appear to serve as an ordering principle on the narrative level as the metaphor of a scaffolding device would suggest.

Furthermore, Homeric and Joycean Odyssean episodes seem to differ drastically in importance with respect to the text as a whole. Taking a closer look at the structure of Homer’s *Odyssey*, the relationship between *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey* becomes even less scaffold-like and plot-motivated. The *Odyssey* consists of 24 books whereas *Ulysses* has 18 chapters. Events such as Odysseus meeting the Lestrygonians, a “paragraph about a page and a half long” (Prescott 429) in the Homeric tale, take up thirty-one pages in Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Not only does the Homeric parallelism in Joyce’s *Ulysses* not follow the order of the *Odyssey*, it also departs in proportion in a number of instances (Prescott 428ff).

Indeed, *Ulysses* does not even adhere to the characters acting in the corresponding episodes in the *Odyssey*. For example, Telemachus does not appear in Homer’s ‘Proteus’ episode. If Homer were no more than a plot scaffold used to structure the plot of *Ulysses* on, Stephen’s fight with the protean universe would be a great blunder. It is Menelaos, not Telemachus, who binds the ever-changing Proteus. Furthermore, the novel does not assign Homeric roles to its characters in the style of an analogy. Rather than clearly defining its characters as one or the other Homeric figure, *Ulysses* perpetually undermines any too simple equations. Chapters like the ‘Eumaeus’ section may have multiple Odysseuses and thereby resist a reading of the novel’s use of the *Odyssey* as a scaffold or an echo of a more meaningful past. The order the parallels between the *Odyssey* and *Ulysses* invoke goes deeper than narrative method. The parallelism of *Ulysses* is not one of incident but of situation, of mythical, Hellenic quality. Homer’s plot is reduced to its most basic, archetypal form. As Wykes sums it up: “man in search of son finds son in search of father; they return to wife/mother at home where father defeats her suitors” (Wykes 309–10). As will be seen, from this archetypal configuration of familial interconnection, *Ulysses* asserts its own place in literary history, both responsive to the

past which gives it a sense of continuity seemingly lacking in modernity and decisively singular, a representation of modernity.

While Pound's reading of the *Odyssey* as a scaffold appears to fail to contain the complexity of *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot seems to have been more influential and nuanced in the construction of the paradigmatically modernist *Ulysses*. Through its "'hellenizing' [...] of Mr Bloom's journey through Dublin" (Gilbert 82), the *Odyssey* can be seen as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" 177). The way the *Odyssey* serves as a system of order in *Ulysses* is more aptly described in what T.S. Eliot terms "the mythical method," an intertextual transmigration of souls through which modernity is instilled with meaningful potential. *Ulysses* uses myth to create order and find meaning. That way, Eliot argues, the chaos and apparent meaninglessness of the modern world is "[made] possible for art" and given "order and form" (Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" 178). Modernity in *Ulysses* appears as disorienting, alienating and fragmentary. Through its use of the *Odyssey* as a pattern, however, *Ulysses* gains a mythical quality. Its arbitrary, chaotic action, the "flood of Dadaism" (Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" 175), is invested with meaning. The use of myth in *Ulysses*, the situational retelling of the *Odyssey* in 1904 Dublin, battles the novel's disjunctiveness by establishing a "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" 177). Reintegrating the arbitrariness of *Ulysses* into the order of the *Odyssey* gives the contingent wanderings of *Ulysses* meaning. Thereby, Joyce's treatment of myth conjoins what Iser sees as the "two constituent poles of *Ulysses*" (Iser, "Patterns of Communication in Joyce's *Ulysses*" 34): the antinomy of the novel's simultaneous constructed mythical continuity on the one side, the *Odyssey*-viewpoint, and its representation of modern discontinuity, the Dublin-viewpoint, on the other. As will become even more apparent in the section on the parallax method of *Ulysses*, Joyce's novel is primarily invested in superimposing such viewpoints to develop a meaningful aesthetic for modernity.

The parallelism between *Ulysses* and *Odyssey*, offering an ever-instable sense of order, can be noticed throughout the novel. As can be taken from the Gilbert and Linati schemata, the

novel follows Homer's three-part structure of the Telemachia, the son, his heritage usurped by his mother's suitors, searching for the father, the Odyssey, the wanderings of the father Odysseus back to his son and wife, and Nostos, the return home, meeting with the son and reestablishment of order at home through the expulsion of the suitors. In the Telemachia, Stephen, the Telemachus of *Ulysses*, is concerned with the concept of paternity, no longer viable in modern times, and in search of a new concept of fatherhood. The situation in the Martello Tower parallels that of Telemachus. Stephen Dedalus, disinherited, is forced to surrender the key to the tower he "paid the rent" (20) for and his last "twopence" (22) to the "usurper" (23) Buck Mulligan and his English friend Haines, colonizer of Ireland. The "snotgreen sea" (5), metaphor for "Mother Ireland" (Benstock, "Telemachus" 15), is usurped by the Englishman Haines in his function as "the sea's ruler" (18). Dispossessed both personally and as an Irishman, Telemachus-Stephen's kingdom of Ireland is usurped and he is driven away from his rightful place. Speaking the language of the oppressors in a conquered country and wearing someone else's clothes (50), the Irish artist Stephen mirrors the dispossession of fatherless Telemachus.

The Odyssey, beginning with the 'Calypso' episode, follows Leopold Bloom as a 1904 Odysseus. Odysseus, the "most 'universal' hero" (Wykes 305), is mainly concerned with his return home to his son and the question of his wife's fidelity. These are the questions that follow Bloom through the day as well. Missing his dead son Rudy, developing fatherly feelings for Telemachus-Stephen and continually reverting to thoughts about his wife's affair with Boylan, which is to be consumed that day, Bloom wanders through Dublin. The experiences he makes are situationally parallel to the adventures of Homer's Odysseus. Each episode of *Ulysses* echoes the main concern of a Homeric episode in style and subject, yet in a trivialized version. The voyage through Hades and the meeting with the ghosts of the dead thus turns into Paddy Dignam's funeral and thoughts about deceased loved ones and friends. The winds of Aeolus find their echo in the hot-air rhetoric of their respective chapter in *Ulysses*, and Circe's magic, turning men into beasts, is translated into the costume changes and metamorphoses of 'Circe.' Correspondences between *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey* appear in motif, their deeper symbolism and situation rather than narrative structure.

Through parallelisms, the paradigmatically modernist *Ulysses* Eliot's reading helps to construct sets the *Odyssey* in a modern-day context, establishing continuity between the modern age and the mythical. For example, the Citizen of 'Cyclops' is said to be, like Polyphemos, with whom he shares his one-sided perspective, a champion at "putting the stone" (303). The rock gulled Polyphemos throws at Odysseus reappears in the tin the Citizen throws at Bloom (328-330), just like Odysseus's glowing stake can be found in Bloom's glowing "knockmedown cigar" (293). In its Homeric parallels, *Ulysses* transcends causal motivation of events, mythologizing the only seemingly random events of June 16, 1904. Therefore, no matter when, be it in ancient Greece or modern day Dublin, an Odysseus will have to enter his house by "a stratagem" (621). He will be hit by a stool (658) as Odysseus was hit by a stool and Stephen, as did Telemachus, must necessarily "help [...] to close and chain the door" (622). The bow Odysseus alone can string can be discovered in the "bow of the key" (656) Bloom uses. As one can see, the *Odyssey* is distinctively present in *Ulysses*. Though Bloom does not literally slay Boylan in 'Ithaca,' *Ulysses* is in continuity with the *Odyssey* and a sense of order established.

At the same time, *Ulysses* seems to continually trivialize the *Odyssey*. Myth appears to be transported into the banality of everyday life. Nevertheless, it must be noted that this does not diminish its heroism. As Wykes notes, "the heroic is handled ironically in *Ulysses*, but the ends it serves are not ironical" (Wykes 315). The Homeric echoes in *Ulysses* might be trivialized or even funny as for example the Citizen's championship in putting the stone and the recurring I/eye-puns in 'Cyclops' show. Nevertheless, *Ulysses* is not a satire on or parody of the *Odyssey*. Its sometimes trivial events are instilled with a mythical quality that is real and sincere. Although jokingly, the Dublin of *Ulysses* is nevertheless seriously Hellenized. The father does meet the son, the son does find the father and the suitors are dealt with. As Wykes notes, Bloom is not "a small, petty Ulysses-Bloom enacting on an insignificant scale the deeds of great Odysseus" (Wykes 316). Trivializing in *Ulysses* does not diminish significance, heroism, and mythical quality. On the contrary, Homer is fully realized on the level of modern, banal middle-class life. Bloom thus does not appear as a deficient modern copy of Odysseus that would suggest a decline from a mythological ideal past. His travels, although recalling those of Odysseus, are independent of the *Odyssey*. The metempsychosis at play in the novel

thereby resists the permanence an analogical reading would imply as much as it rejects a presentation of modernity as, despite its apparent fragmentation and alienating effect, any less meaningful than an idealized past. Instead, the novel's enigmatic convergence of the opposite poles of a perceived senseless modern banality and a suggested mythological import holds that meaning and order, despite their apparent problematization, are nevertheless attainable to the artistic analytic intellect.

Metempsychosis

The novel's metempsychotic method conjoins the novel's two poles of apparent contingency and undecidability on the one hand and Homeric significance and continuity on the other in establishing a philosophy of permanence within flux. Metempsychosis, "the philosophical center of the reanimation of all mythologies in *Ulysses*" (Schell 427) also functions as "one of the most important [...] *leitmotifs*" (Gilbert 33) of the novel. The mythical transmigration of souls, and its structural analogue, metamorphosis, provide the novel with a philosophy that consoles the change and flux experienced in modernity with the modernist urge for permanence and order. It is thereby at once both a theme in the novel and represents a reflection on intertextuality, representation and the possibility of meaningful and autonomous art in modernity.

Metempsychosis is introduced as one of the Ulyssean tradition's three central problem terms when Molly asks Bloom about the meaning of "Met him pike hoses" (147). At first, Bloom provides Molly with the lexicon definition of the term, answering "It's Greek: from the Greek. That means the transmigration of souls" (60). He goes on to explain that

[s]ome people believe [...] that we go on living in another body after death, that we lived before. They call it reincarnation. That we all lived before on the earth thousands of years ago or some other planet. They say we have forgotten it. Some say they remember their past lives. (62)

Forced to give an example, however, Bloom, inspired by the picture of "*The Bath of the Nymph over the bed*" (62), slips into 'metamorphosis.' He explains that the Greek "used to believe you

could be changed into an animal or a tree” (63). In this instinctive linkage of metempsychosis and metamorphosis, Bloom casually presents a central theme of *Ulysses*. As Fritz Senn remarks, “Bloom is not really wrong [...] but quite on target” (Senn, “Met Whom What?” 109). Bloom’s slippage points toward the novel’s metempsychotic method as not merely a reduplication of mythical events in contemporaneity but as informed by the philosophical underpinnings of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

Metempsychosis, and the Odyssean parallelism it produces in the novel, contains the idea of order and meaning being not in contradiction with the contingency *Ulysses* displays. The metempsychotic method of *Ulysses* thereby infuses the everyday of the novel with mythical import without renouncing modernity’s inherent fragmentation or lamenting modernity as but a diminished version of the ideal. Instead, this seeming contradiction provokes the establishment of unity through a creative act. The Ovidian influence on *Ulysses* has been greatly underappreciated in Joyce Studies. However, as Ariela Freedman notes, already “the Latin appellation of the novel” (Freedman 70) highlights the importance of Ovid, rather than exclusively Homer, to the novel’s metempsychotic return to ancient mythology. Not only Homer, but also Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* Joyce diligently studied in his school years (Freedman 71–73), covers the travels of Ulysses. There are a number of thematic similarities between *Ulysses* and Ovid such as their “obsessions with narratives of adultery, lust, and love” and “stylistic analogies” like the “encyclopaedic aspirations, [...] incorporations of many different genres and narrative voices [and] intertextuality” (Freedman 71) in both works. Bloom is much closer to Ovid’s Ulysses than to the Homeric hero in his characteristic cleverness and eloquence and relative lack of sheer strength in comparison to the other heroes. Most notable, however, the two works share a “preoccupation with change and flux” (Freedman 71). In its function as one of the novel’s problem terms, metempsychosis describes both what happens to the characters of the novel and the way *Ulysses* itself inscribes itself into an intertextual network of mythology. Significantly then, the metempsychotic method of *Ulysses* does not simply mirror Homer’s *Odyssey* but instead sets out “to master not merely Homer’s version but the whole literary tradition of Ulysses’s exploits” (Stanford 125–26). This aesthetic of productive intertextual self-inscription into a mythical tradition *Ulysses* revisits and reinterprets for

modernity is itself undergirded by a philosophy of metempsychosis, the notion of permanence and meaning within the flux of modernity. It is hence the novel's apparent disjunctiveness, the way, e.g., the Odyssey metamorphosizes into the modern Dublin of *Ulysses* in the novel's modernist style, through which it asserts both its continuity with the meaning of myth and its aesthetic independence.

Metamorphosis, as the *OED* defines it, refers to the "action or process of changing in form, shape or substance" (*OED* "metamorphosis"). Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are about this kind of bodily transformation. Most often, the metamorphosed's inner being is represented in their new exterior form. This Ovidian transformation is recalled in a number of passages in *Ulysses* such as when Stephen in 'Proteus' recollects "God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain" (49) or when Bloom remembers the Greek who "believed you could be changed into a tree from grief. Weeping willow" (360) and in direct references to Ovid such as the story of "the Minotaur which the genius of the elegant Latin poet has handed down to us in the pages of his *Metamorphoses*" (391) or for example the "image of Narcissus" (663) on the table in 'Ithaca,'

As Senn shows, Bloom's linkage of the two terms into one is completely in line with Ovid. In Ovid's poem, the stories of the metamorphoses are given a philosophical underpinning in the last book, most of which is centered on Pythagoras, the philosopher from Samos who started a cult around his belief in metempsychosis (Senn, "Met Whom What?" 109). Ovid, like Bloom, draws a connection between metamorphosis and metempsychosis, using the latter as a "philosophical basis for the whole anthology of mythological changes" (Senn, "Met Whom What?" 109). Bloom's use of the two terms as interchangeable is sign of a deeper, instinctual understanding of the matter. The presentation of metempsychosis as a problem term and its – typically Bloom – incorrect yet on-point slippage with metamorphosis highlight the significance of the theme for the novel. Bloom's explanation of metempsychosis is, as Freedman wittily points out, in itself "an instance of metamorphosis, the word itself transformed in use and through an act of mishearing that is nonetheless creative and suggestive" (Freedman 81). Metamorphosis, the transformation of the body while the soul remains, and metempsychosis, the "transmigration of souls" (62) in reincarnation, have always been deeply interrelated.

The *Odyssey* in *Ulysses* is a product of metempsychosis as much as it constitutes a metamorphosis of the ancient myth into modern shape. As Bloom, scholar of “mnemotechnic” (662), points out about the transmigration of souls and our past lives, “we have forgotten [them]. Some say they remember their past lives” (62). Indeed, Pythagoras, the ‘inventor’ of metempsychosis, is said to remember his past lives, having been “a Trojan hero defending the city against the Greeks” (Senn, “Met Whom What?” 110). Stressing the historical continuity of metempsychosis, *Ulysses* associates Bloom, “a literary reincarnation of Odysseus” (Senn, “Met Whom What?” 111), with the Pythagoras from another source, also a warrior in the Trojan wars. As Senn notes, Bloom’s versatile knowledge and the role of a teacher he automatically assumes link him to Pythagoras (Senn, “Met Whom What?” 111). The “watchful study” (Ovid 15.61-62) the *Metamorphoses* attribute to Pythagoras is also “a characteristic of Bloom and Odysseus” (Senn, “Met Whom What?” 111). The Pythagorean lore is definitely philosophically present in *Ulysses*. As his title in ‘Sirens,’ “Bloohimwhom” (253), parallel to “Met him what” (62), shows, Bloom, as an equally heroic, modern day reincarnation of Odysseus, is subject of metempsychosis. As already shown, the Homeric correspondences and historical analogies create a sense of order and continuity in *Ulysses*. This “eternal recurrence of personalities and things” (Gilbert 36) which can be observed in *Ulysses* has its foundation in the concept of metempsychosis. Therefore, Ovidian metempsychosis serves as a method in the creation of the Homeric system of order in *Ulysses*. As Gilbert summarizes the integrative function of metempsychosis, historically recurring personalities might not always “attain equal eminence” (Gilbert 41). Figures might reappear in different forms such as Nestor who is now a pedagogue and Circe, the ‘Madam’ of a brothel, but “there will always be a substantially exact reproduction, a recall, of a set of circumstances which have already existed” (Gilbert 41). Therefore, the novel’s “intertextual metempsychosis” (Ramey 97) is not confined to the Homeric *Odyssey*. It is in continuity with texts as diverse, and yet ultimately similar, as *The Arabian Nights* (591), the *Bible* (Hodgart, “Aeolus” 118–19) or *Hamlet* (Damon 203). Intertextually drawing on all these ‘metempsychoses’ of a mythical ideal, *Ulysses* asserts its own position as an instantiation of the theme in its own right. Through this assertion of both

continuity and heredity and self-created identity does *Ulysses* develop its modernist aesthetic of metempsychosis.

A philosophy of permanence within flux is at the core of the concept of metempsychosis, both in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Joyce's *Ulysses* (Freedman 82). As Ovid's Pythagoras summarizes the metempsychotic philosophy of permanence within flux in the *Metamorphoses*:

All things are always changing
 But nothing dies. The spirit comes and goes,
 Is housed wherever it wills, shifts residence
 From beasts to men, from men to beasts, but always
 It keeps on living. As the pliant wax
 Is stamped with new designs, and is no longer
 What once it was, but changes form, and still
 Is pliant wax, so do I teach that spirit
 Is evermore the same, though passing always
 To ever-changing bodies. (Ovid 15.163-172)

The "pliant wax" is subject to change but remains the same wax, nevertheless. Thus, continuity is necessarily implied in flux. As Ovid writes

Nothing is permanent in all the world.
 All things are fluent; every image forms,
 'Wandering through change. Time is itself a river
 In constant movement, and the hours flow by
 Like water, wave on wave, pursued, pursuing,
 Forever fugitive, forever new.
 That which has been, is not; that which is not,
 Begins to be; motion and movement always
 In process of renewal. (Ovid 15.179-187)

This fluvian image of “the concept of metempsychosis and metamorphosis [...] encompassing a larger philosophy of flux” (Freedman 80) Ovid presents is comparable to the aphorism ‘panta rhei,’ everything flows, ascribed to Heraclitus by Plato. As Heraclitus claims “We both step and do not step into the same rivers” (Rapp 74; my translation), implying the permanence of what we call the river despite and in its quality of everchangingness. In Heraclitian philosophy, change does not preempt identity and permanence but implies it as the true nature of things (Rapp 61–90). The philosophy of flux and permanence displayed in metempsychosis, the question of identity, continuity and change, is “one of the novel’s dominant philosophic preoccupations” (Freedman 80). Bloom’s ponderings about water and the nature of the river follow the same train of thought as Heraclitus’s ‘panta rhei’ or Ovid’s Latin equivalent from the *Metamorphoses* ‘omnia mutantur nihil interrit’ (Senn, “In Classical Idiom: Anthologia Intertextualis” 32). Originally Molly’s problem term, metempsychosis in the novel is discussed through the water imagery that also surrounds Joyce’s representation of Molly’s femininity. In the theme of water, *Ulysses*’ philosophy of permanence within flux, the idea that continuity and order is created from the disordered, everchanging state of modernity, becomes most apparent.

As he goes to seek “answers from the river” (146) in ‘Lestrygonians,’ Bloom sees an advertisement on a rowboat on the Liffey which leads him to his own ‘panta rhei’:

Good idea that. Wonder if he pays rent to the corporation. How can you own water really? It’s always flowing in a stream, never the same, which in the stream of life we trace. Because life is a stream. All kinds of places are good for ads. (146)

Bloom, in his pragmatic ad-man mode, discovers the same paradox of permanence within flux as Ovid’s Pythagoras and Heraclitus.³⁹ On the one hand, Bloom identifies the river as everchanging, “always flowing in a stream, never the same” (146). On the other hand, the place where the rowboat advertisement is anchored is a “place[]” (146) that is permanent like a property. Thus, although the waters of the river are ever changing, Bloom instinctively senses the permanence within flux, wondering if the owner of the advertisement “pays rent to the corporation” (146). Although Bloom, like *Ulysses* as a whole, deals in the trivial and mundane,

³⁹ Obviously, Bloom is not only set in parallel to Ovid’s Pythagoras but also to the Ulysses of the *Metamorphoses*. See also for example José Laners’ “*Ulysses, Metamorphoses* 13, and the Death of the Beloved Son.”

the conclusions he reaches are those of ancient myth. Unsurprisingly, this thought is shortly followed by another intrusive thought about “Met him pikehoses” (147) which contains, both in meaning and representation, the very phenomenon Bloom philosophized about.

The philosophy of permanence within flux taken from the *Metamorphoses* is a consoling revelation as it reconciles the modern experience of instability and change with the modernist urge towards a unified order. The theme of “neverchanging everchanging water” (625) is the clearest and most important example for the philosophy of metempsychosis and metamorphosis. Water in *Ulysses*, true to Ovid and Heraclitus, is admired for its “universality” (624) and “constancy” (624) that paradoxically stems from “its metamorphoses” (625) and “variety of forms” (625). It is thus, in its close connection to Molly and her problem term of metempsychosis, the principle of unification and reconciliation, i.e., the principle of life.

Therefore, Stephen’s hydrophobia (625) can be seen as part of his general “negative associations with metempsychosis” (Schell 430) and hence, since he does not yet affirm the metempsychotic aesthetic *Ulysses* develops, his artistic infertility. Stephen, “aware of the continuity of his self under the modality of temporal forms” (Gilbert 38), does not yet see the reconciling effect of metempsychosis but only the meaninglessness of instability. Thus, the memory of the death of his mother is imagined as “a bowl of bitter waters” (9), Stephen having refused to pray for her because he is “another now and yet the same” (11), To Stephen, the link to the past his mother signifies is meaningless and reproachable. In the same vein, the protean flux of the sea only signifies senseless change and makes him feel “lonely” (48). Stephen sees water, symbol of flux, as something a man can drown in (45). To him, water solely represents the overwhelming instability of modernity. The line of association for Stephen goes “Waters: bitter death: lost” (45). As an aesthete, Stephen tries to produce art in a Promethean fashion from a vacuum (art for art’s sake) where *Ulysses* proposes life for art’s sake. Contrary to Bloom, who enjoys the “fine tang of faintly scented urine” (53) kidneys have and is generally fond of urinating (171), Stephen is repulsed by “the stench of his green grave” (49) and the “urinous offal from all dead” (49). The ever-changing waters of life, to him, only ever represent the oppression of the past or the groundlessness and uncertainty of modernity, yet never both as

they appear in the novel's "convulsions of metamorphosis" that are "the basis of human mentality" (650).

Habitually trivializing the profound, *Ulysses* links the "stream of life" (146) to "greenhouses" (146), public toilets. Water as symbol of permanence within flux is also present in the urinal (Heusel 138). This gives the communal urination scene in 'Ithaca' its significance as a landmark of unification. In the 'Ithaca' chapter, the two protagonists' streams of life cross, quite literally, in their "simultaneous [...] urinations" (655), foreshadowing a reintegrative recognition of the other. Stephen is now able to produce water. 'Ithaca' marks a drastic change in Stephen's acceptance of water and thus the metempsychotic method's implications of permanence within flux. It is the acceptance of this philosophy of metempsychosis that allows Stephen and Bloom their atonement. This newly achieved order and stability can also be seen in another correlation to Heraclitian philosophy, Bloom's observation that for a cat "the door of egress [was] a door of ingress" (651). This thought mirrors the Heraclitian hidden harmony of the "upward-downward path" (Rapp 80; my translation) that represents the harmony and unity of opposites. The path that leads up a mountain is also the path that leads downward as a door of ingress is also a door of egress.

As one can see, metamorphosis and metempsychosis are central leitmotifs in *Ulysses*, establishing coherence through a philosophy of permanence within flux, unity in multitude. In this use as a leitmotif, metempsychosis can also be discerned as a method that underlies the novel's aesthetics. Playing with the slippage between metempsychosis and metamorphosis, a concept that can already be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Ulysses* proposes a consoling revelation that order and meaning can be found in the ever-changing, contradictory nature of reality. Hence, Stephen only becomes creative as he assumes a more positive stance toward water, the body and human interconnection. Similarly, the novel's own aesthetic favors the dynamic reinterpretation of the past in its metempsychotic self-inscription into not only Homer's but also Ovid's *Odyssey*. Proposing a metempsychotic, fluent aesthetic, *Ulysses* offers the image of water as both one of "democratic equality and constancy" and an erosive, metamorphosizing force (624-625). Reintegrative, artistic work, *Ulysses* shows, warrants the acceptance of continuity as well as a 'fluid' reinterpretation of this heritage as a form of self-

assertion, i.e., the “necessity of destruction to procure alimentary sustenance” (650). This sense of stability and continuity within a fluctuating modernity is realized through what Ramey refers to as Joyce’s “intertextual metempsychosis” (Ramey 97). In its use of intertextuality stylized as a “transmigration of characters from ancient to modern texts” (Ramey 97), *Ulysses* mobilizes a meta-textual dynamic in order to inscribe itself into mythology. Artistic negotiation establishes the modern novel as equally meaningful and heroic as its ancient antecedents. The theme of paternity running through metempsychosis and *Odyssey*, this intertextual metempsychosis lays claim to the novel’s continuity with, yet not epigonic relation to, the mythical past. Instead, Joyce’s metempsychotic intertextuality portrays *Ulysses* as part of a tradition of mythopoetic writing, not a derivative of any prior text but another, modern instantiation of a seemingly timeless ideal the artistic intellect establishes in modernity. Notably, *Ulysses* thereby not only inscribes itself into an Odyssean tradition but also itself develops a method through which later novels like *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* will in turn inscribe themselves into the Ulyssean Tradition. Through its metempsychotic method, the pattern of the *Odyssey* gives the chaos of modern world order and meaning. The parallels to the *Odyssey*, not simply a retelling of Homer’s tale but, in the novel’s intertextual negotiation of various antecedent sources, a continuation of and self-conscious claim to mythological import, serve to Hellenize, heroize and instill meaning into the events of *Ulysses*, thereby creating order in disorder.

3. Secular Consubstantiality and Joyce's Mass in *Ulysses*

The Hellenizing of *Ulysses* through the order of the *Odyssey* is contrapuntally contrasted by the Hebraic system of order of the Roman Catholic mass. *Ulysses* is not only set parallel to the *Odyssey*, but it is also, simultaneously, a secularized mass. Joyce's mass celebrates human interconnection in its negotiation of artistic creativity and humanity through the metaphor of the trinitarian Godhead. *Ulysses* as mass suggests the "theme of the search of the father for the son, and the son, for the father" (R. M. Walsh 328), their atonement, the potential for redemption, a "regeneration of the soul" (Harrigan 37) that Stephen, Bloom (and Molly) find in their reintegration. If *Ulysses* is a sincere if trivialized and comic mass, Communion, the escape from or reversal of alienation and establishment of a new, meaningful order, is possible despite all of modernity's failings. The Godhead thus worshipped in Joyce's mass, Paul Briand notes, is human life itself, "the union of head (Intellect-Stephen) and body (Flesh-Molly) in the 'mystical' body of mankind (Intellect and Flesh-Bloom)" (Briand 312). Joyce thus combats the alienation of modern man by arguing for a secularized consubstantiality. Bloom as Father, Stephen as Son, and Molly as (un)Holy Ghost are shown to share a common human substance. Through the establishment of such a human consubstantiality, Joyce's protagonists can redeem their solipsistic alienation from both themselves and one another. This consubstantial method is not only applied on the level of character but also underlies the aesthetics Joyce develops in *Ulysses*. In using the Roman Catholic mass as an ordering pattern, *Ulysses* suggests the potential for redemption and human communion, the breaking out of the isolation both Bloom and Stephen suffer (R. M. Walsh 324). Although heavily criticizing the Catholic Church, Joyce retains its aesthetic, secularizing it to allow for its reparative application in modernity.

Joyce's Mass as Celebration of Human Life

Joyce's falling out with the Catholic Church is well-known. Indeed, Joyce's entire literary career is informed by his criticism of the Catholic Church as producing a slavish mentality. The Church not only betrays Irish liberation and nationalism but also, as becomes most evident in Stephen Dedalus, creates a sense of guilt in the individual that estranges it from the body,

desire, and its fellow humans. Joyce, M. Keith Booker remarks, uses “the Church as a figure of tyranny and oppression against which he formulates his project of transgression and liberation” (Booker 24). Nevertheless, Catholic theological concepts and imagery abound in Joyce’s writing, not only in Stephen’s and the other Dubliners’ imagination, but also in Joyce’s own aesthetic, to the point that the mass, in a secularized and trivialized fashion, becomes a structural device in *Ulysses* parallel to that of the *Odyssey*.⁴⁰

The presence of a secularized mass in *Ulysses* further establishes the new aesthetic Joyce develops in *Ulysses*. As Briand notes,

Just as James Joyce uses the myth and episodic framework of Homer’s *Odyssey* to help him “forge upon the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race”-*Ulysses*, so does he use the Catholic Mass as another structure for the same purpose. The *Odyssey* and the Mass furnish contrasting, contrapuntal themes of the Hellenic and Hebraic.

(Briand 312)

Joyce’s parody of the mass in *Ulysses* points toward an aesthetic that primarily values human, not divine, connection. Utilizing the mass as a structure yet expunging its theological import, instead shifting it toward a celebration of humanity, Joyce’s *Ulysses* develops an aesthetic of artistic divine immanence and communality: the Communion of Joyce’s mass is not a reconciliation between man and God but one between human beings; the artist-God Joyce, consubstantial with his fellow humans and attuned to their situation, “convert[s] the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own,” Joyce told his brother in a conversation regarding the “resemblance between the mystery of the Mass and what [he is] trying to do” (S. Joyce 103–04). As in the Catholic mystery of the transubstantiation of bread

⁴⁰ For studies of Joyce’s references to the mass see also Paul L. Briand’s “The Catholic Mass in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” Robert Boyle’s “The Priesthoods of Stephen and Buck” and “Miracle in Black Ink: A Glance at Joyce’s Use of His Eucharistic Image,” Kevin Sullivan’s *Joyce Among the Jesuits*; Patrick A. McCarthy’s “Further Notes on the Mass in *Ulysses*,” Ruth M. Walsh’s “Joyce’s Use of the Mass in *Ulysses*,” as well as Ursula Harrigan’s “*Ulysses* as Missal: Another Structure in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*” and Michael O’Shea’s critical “Catholic Liturgy in Joyce’s *Ulysses*.” Richard Ellmann started this conversation in his reading of Joyce’s art as Eucharist in *Ulysses on the Liffey*. While the Homeric parallelisms in *Ulysses* are a well-accepted theme in the novel, the mass as another structure of *Ulysses* is more disputed. Strangely, however, the arguments offered most commonly against a mass-structure in *Ulysses*, e.g., the novel not adhering strictly to the precise liturgical order and the parodic trivialization and mundanity of Joyce’s mass references in *Ulysses*, could also be applied to the Odyssean parallels, where they seem to create no such problems. In fact, as will be shown further on, the counterarguments, e.g., O’Shea provides actually play into a reading of the mass as a secularized, Hebraic parallel structure to the Hellenic *Odyssey*.

and wine into body and blood of Christ, though in a worldly manner, no physical means can uncover the change in substance. Joyce's mass tells of trivial human lives. Art, however, transubstantiates the banality of modernity without changing its outward appearance and instills it with a new substance, meaning and order. Although Joyce's mass is sacrilegious, profane and parodic, to the project of *Ulysses* it is not less sacred. For Joyce, the sacred lies in the worldly, not the other-worldly.

The first words spoken in *Ulysses* are those of the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar. Opening the mass that is *Ulysses*, Buck Mulligan intones "Introibo ad altare Dei" (3). In parody of the priest, Mulligan carries "a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed" (3), trivialized parallels to the "Chalice, covered with the crossed Veil and Burse" (Briand 313) a catholic priest carries. His "yellow dressinggown" (3), the color of Judas, vulgarly "ungirdled" (3) and his "gurgling" (3) blessings complete Mulligan's blasphemous impersonation. Though parodic, as could analogously be seen in the use of the *Odyssey*, Mulligan's ironical intent does not diminish the significance of the presence of an Introibo. *Ulysses* is a "jocoserious" (629) novel. As the way Mulligan crosses himself towards the end of the chapter denotes, *Ulysses* might not 'confess Christ,' yet the idea of communion and redemption is nevertheless at its heart and mind. Notably, the cross that Mulligan makes before jumping into the water, shortly before *Ulysses* opens into 'Nestor,' is not the one usually made by Catholics before a perilous feat. Instead of touching the forehead, heart, left and right shoulder, Mulligan "crosse[s] himself piously with his thumbnail at brow and breastbone" (21), the cross made before the reading of the Gospel. Interestingly, Mulligan does not make a cross over his lips, as would have been customary since the 11th century, implying that the message of Christ should be on the recipient's mind, lips and in their heart. Mulligan's opening of the mass, and what will follow throughout *Ulysses*, although seemingly parodic, spoken ironically and reversed, is still real and sincere at its heart, a presence that, despite its pronounced trivialization, cannot be argued away.

As the mass continues, the congregation confess their guilt in the Confiteor. In *Ulysses*, too, as Ursula Harrigan shows, the "inhabitants of the Martello tower [...] confess their guilt" (Harrigan 38) and ask for forgiveness. Stephen feels guilt over his mother's death (9-10), Mulligan apologizes for calling Stephen's mother "*beastly dead*" (8), noting that he "didn't

mean to offend” (8) and Haines “is apologising for waking [them] last night” (10). Absolution is granted through the thought of the “great sweet mother” (5), the sea, that does not “care about offences” (9) and the command not to “mope over it all day” (9). As Harrigan shows, the “special mystery or theme of the day’s celebration” (Harrigan 38) presented in *Ulysses*’ Introit can already be ascertained to be the father-son motif “linked, as in the redemptive sacrifice, to inheritance wasted or usurped” (Harrigan 38). Through allusions to Stephen’s Hamlet theory (18), parenthood and consubstantiality (18), the Introit introduces to the theme of this mass.

‘Aeolus’ serves as the Kyrie of the *Ulysses* mass. The most obvious argument for this is the actual presence of a “KYRIE ELEISON!” (128) that intrudes into the text in the chapter’s commenting headline style. During the Kyrie, the *Catholic Encyclopedia*⁴¹ notes, the celebrants call to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (*Catholic Encyclopedia* “Kyrie Eleison”). Interestingly, ‘Aeolus’ is one of the pre-‘Circe’ incidents where both Bloom, the Father, and Stephen, the Son, appear (Gilbert 60). The Holy Ghost as inspiration is also present, even if only implied by absence, since the inspiration of this chapter so very much concerned with the production of the written word is mostly the un-inspired *inspirare* of hot air. Nevertheless, the production of words is a central topic of ‘Aeolus.’ Set in the offices of the “Freeman’s Journal” (113) and Evening Telegraph (113), this chapter shows both Bloom and Stephen, in their respective sense, working in the word-trade; Bloom an advertiser, Stephen a writer. However, “the plumstones of his Parable” (Hodgart, “Aeolus” 119) fall on stony ground and deaf ears, just like Bloom is thrown out with the words “Kiss my royal Irish arse” (141). At this unreconciled stage, the production of meaningful words is a “lost cause” (129). Stephen and Bloom, the “two halves of the artist” (Hodgart, “Aeolus” 118) are still divided. True art and meaning cannot be created by the “still uncreative” (Hodgart, “Aeolus” 118) Stephen. As Briand notes, in the paragraph following the Kyrie Eleison MacHugh proceeds “from the Greek of the Kyrie to the wonders of the intellect, to the Irish spirit, which will never be donated by the English, because the Irish are *liege subjects* of Catholic Europe” (Briand 314). By means of allusive and

⁴¹ As Fr. Robert Boyle, S.J., notes, “the turn-of-the-century-theology of these volumes usually accords closely with the doctrines and theological speculations Joyce learned” (R. Boyle, “Miracle in Black Ink” 47) and will therefore be used here to provide the theological background Joyce’s *Ulysses* plays on and transforms.

symbolic extension, the Catholic Church, and also the production of words in Ireland, is identified as a “Pyrrhus” (129), a “*lost cause*, to which spiritual support is given by the Dublin Irish” (Briand 314). ‘Aeolus’ might offer “foretastes of the godlike creative power to come” (Hodgart, “Aeolus” 118), but at this point, Communion is not yet achieved, there is only the hot air of rhetoric and borrowed words, paralyzed like the Dublin tram near the office (142-143).

The Gloria of *Ulysses* is again brought to us by the ironic blasphemer Buck Mulligan. As before in ‘Telemachus,’ what is spoken ironically still retains its significant presence in the text. Entering the library scene of the ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ episode, Mulligan intones “Glo-ori-a in ex-cel-sis De-o” (189). Mulligan, in imitation of the priest, “lifts his hands” and “[v]eils fall. O flowers! Bells with bells with bells acquiring” (190) as it was “the practice of the women communicants in the Ireland of 1904 to lower their veils, and for the Altar boy to ring the bells” (Briand 315) for the Gloria. The discussion in the library, mainly Stephen’s Hamlet theory, which is to be discussed more thoroughly further on, ties in with the mystery expressed in the Gloria, the praise and glory of the Son “consubstantial with the father” (189) that became incarnate as man in the name of the Lord (*Catholic Encyclopedia* “Gloria in Excelsis Deo”).

A parallel to the Credo can be found in ‘Cyclops’ (“They believe in rod” (315)), reversed and set into the third person plural. It is also ‘Cyclops’ where the novel’s real creed, Bloom’s pragmatic humanism of “Love, [...] the opposite of hatred” (319), is presented. After the Credo follow the Offertory and Lavabo, the priest placing the unsanctified Host and wine on the altar and washing his hands in preparation, and the preparatory Orate Fratres (Briand 316) is represented in ‘Oxen of the Sun.’ In announcing “Oratre, fratres, pro memetipso” (375), Stephen is seen to be highlighting “the extraordinary egocentricity which characterizes him throughout the novel” (Briand 316), an isolation which shall be resolved in the Communion of Stephen and Bloom in ‘Ithaca.’ As the Offertory and Secret are preparatory for the miraculous transubstantiation of bread and wine into body and blood of Christ, so is ‘Oxen of the Sun’ a preparation for what is to come in ‘Circe.’ In ‘Oxen of the Sun,’ Bloom finally meets Stephen. Having “no son of [his] loins” (393) and “none [...] to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph” (393), Bloom starts to feel “paternal” (393) toward Stephen, the “eternal son” (375) in whom he sees his deceased son Rudy (401). Feeling responsible for drunk Stephen, “punctual

Bloom” follows the group of young men “at heels” (402). This sets the foundation for Bloom meeting Stephen in ‘Circe’ and their Communion in ‘Ithaca.’

The climactic ‘Circe’ chapter parallels the climax of the mass in the miracle of transubstantiation. ‘Circe’ is a world of opposites. What really happens, the external reality, plays only a minor role. Instead, the unreal, hallucinatory, bizarrely reversed is at the center of this episode. This can also be seen in its handling of its mass parallelisms. ‘Circe’ contains a black mass celebrated in a brothel. Ripe with reversals, Father Malachi O’Flynn says “Introibo ad altare diaboli” (556) instead of *introibo ad altare Dei*. The words of the mass are spoken backwards: “Htengier Lnetopinmo Dog Drol eht rof, Aiulella!” (556) and “Dooooooooooooog” (556) are black mass reversals of “alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” and “God!” (Briand 318). The transubstantiation of the real mass finds its reversal in the general oppositeness of ‘Circe.’ When in the mass bread is changed into Christ, the bread’s accidents remain while its substance is changed. In ‘Circe,’ the exact opposite happens and “accidents change and substances remain the same” (Briand 318). Briand summarizes the most notable metamorphoses and ‘metaphors in the flesh’ as follows:

Lipoti Virag, Bloom’s grandfather, who becomes a moth; Stephen, who becomes Cardinal Dedalus, primate of Ireland; Molly, who becomes a Turkishwoman, called to "reality" by Bloom’s thought of the lemon soap which he has bought for her; Bloom and Stephen, who look into a mirror and see Shakespeare; Bella Cohen, who becomes a man, Bello, who treats Bloom, now a woman, with sadistic indecencies which masochistic Bloom enjoys; the nymph cut from Bloom’s girlie magazine and hanging over his bed, which comes to life and cavorts in a woodland come to life from the wallpaper in the brothel. (Briand 318)

Another parallel to the mass can be seen in Stephen’s own *Agnus Dei*, "Lamb of London, who taketh away the sins of our world" (320) and the presence of "bread and wine" (412) in Stephen’s gesture. Stephen’s sign language suggests another similar black mass reversal that seeks to represent the substance of bread and wine but is not the same accidentally, whereas in the mass bread and wine are present in accident but their substance is changed. Using a strategy

Joyce already applied in his *Dubliners*, the "gnomon" (J. Joyce, *Dubliners* 3), we can infer the real transubstantiation of the mass from that which is not there in 'Circe,' its general reversal of the miracle. "[U]nnarrated but existent by implication" (638), the Consecration can be found in 'Circe.'

'Ithaca,' the Communion, is the most important part of *Ulysses* in its offering of a potential for redemption. Redemption in *Ulysses*, however, is not the reconciliation of man with the divine but, in Joyce's secular mass, the recognition of a shared humanity. Joyce's aesthetic is thereby also described through the imagery of the Eucharist, Joyce's transubstantiation of the mundane into the meaningful, secularly divine through art without changing its outward appearance. As Briand states, "Stephen and Bloom partake of communion at 2:00 a.m., in Bloom's house at 7 Eccles street, in the Ithaca episode" (Briand 320). In 'Ithaca,' the reconciliation of the isolated, disordered, identification and integration, the reversal of alienation, in short, a communion of modern man is achieved. Communion happens in the joint drinking of the cup of cocoa Bloom prepares for the two of them. Cocoa, *theobroma*, "god food" (Tindall 222), *Ulysses'* trivialized version of the Communion wine, is a "massproduct" (629): on the one hand a product produced in great quantity but on the other hand, in this specialized context, also a product produced for mass. The "creature" (629) cocoa is transubstantiated into a *massproduct*. Although Stephen earlier refused "to eat solid food" (590), the bread roll given to him, Communion is complete in either wine or bread as both Body and Blood of Christ are concealed in either respectively (*Catholic Encyclopedia* "The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist"). In the "human communion by the outward sign of cocoa" (Briand 321) all three protagonists, Stephen, Bloom, and Molly, are joint together. Bloom, the "stickler for solid food" (590) is in the solid "two level spoonfuls, four in all, of Epp's soluble cocoa" (629), Stephen, who only partakes of "[l]iquids" (590), is contained in the liquid "ingredients for diffusion" (629) to which cream "reserved for [...] Marion" (629) is added.

The communion in cocoa might appear trivial, too mundane an act for the all-changing "most important action of the novel" (Briand 321). Indeed, scholars such as S.L. Goldberg have ridiculed the "excessive faith in cocoa" (Goldberg 28) of the likes of Tindall or Briand. However, this trivializing, of the serious and sincere appears to be the mode of work of *Ulysses*.

Ulysses, in its modernized form, does not lose the aspect of redemption inherent to any mass. Instead, the paradigmatic *Ulysses* searches for the (secularly) divine within the banalities of everyday life. Although buried in the senselessness of modern life, human connection is real to the novel. While such communion is no longer easily attainable, nor transcendent, there still remains the possibility for redemption in the equanimous acceptance of the (human) other.

Hence, 'Ithaca,' the Communion of the *Ulysses* mass, is a chapter of redemptive integration and identification. The theme of communion is already expressed in Bloom's and Stephen's preference of "a continental to an insular manner of life" (619). Wandering lonely throughout the novel, Bloom and Stephen acted as islands. Now, however, a continental lifestyle, interconnected instead of insularly isolated, is proposed. This theme of interpersonal identification and community is also expressed in the language of the chapter. In its frequent merging of words, 'Ithaca' linguistically depicts the communion of Stephen and Bloom. During the Communion, Bloom "jocosely" directs Stephen's attention to the "marks of hospitality" to him and Stephen accepts the cocoa "seriously" (629). Their two positions, jocose and serious, are linguistically blended into the "jocoserious" (629) drinking of the cocoa. This jocoserious mode also represents the general mode of *Ulysses*, joking yet serious, only at first glance a paradox. In the act of Communion, Bloom and especially Stephen give up their insular lifestyle for an interpersonal connection, a connection also expressed in the subsequent blending of their names. Relating Bloom to Stephen, Bloom turns into "Stoom" (635) while Stephen takes up attributes of Bloom and turns into "Blephen" (635). In this blending of names, the identification of Bloom with Stephen and vice versa finds its climax. Their two temperaments, "[t]he scientific" and "[t]he artistic" (635), are merged. The "apparent intuition that they are both separate and united," that individual selves are not islands but can share "a substance that includes all being" (Herr 42), a vision of communion and order, is also expressed in their "each contemplating the other in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhisnothis fellowfaces" (655). The other can be a mirror for one's self. The compound at once signifying individuality and sameness, Bloom and Stephen experience that isolating estrangement can be resolved in the recognition of a shared human substance.

‘Ithaca’ is notably concerned with relating and comparing Bloom and Stephen to one another. By putting them into relation to each other, they are made conceivable as occupying one shared world rather than distinct, isolated fragments. The relating and comparing of Stephen and Bloom, setting up paradigms and paragons (625), aims towards the possibility of reconciliation of the self with the other. Through shared experience, a communal effort, the modern world can be made sense of. Therefore, various comparisons throughout the chapter map Stephen and Bloom onto another. Comparing similarities and differences in perception, e.g., “What did Stephen see”, What did Bloom see” (623); “What was Stephen’s auditive sensation?”, “What was Bloom’s visual sensation” (642); “What echoes of that sound [the bells; my comment] were by both and each heard” (656), differences in action such as “who drank more quickly?” (630), “what did each do at the door of egress?” (651) and the manner of their urination (655), in age (632), of number of baptisms (635), temperament (635) or lifestyle (“Bloom, diambulist [...] Stephen, noctambulist” (648)), in opinion and thought (Stephen’s and Bloom’s “reactions to experience” (619) are similar, “on some points divergent” (620) and “different problems present[] themselves to each concerning the invisible audible collateral organ of the other” (655)) and in “parentage[]” (634) and comparing “the ancient Hebrew and the ancient Irish languages” (640) and their “phonic symbols” (640), Stephen and Bloom meet on a human level. Their experiences, though sometimes divergent, are comparable and therefore “similar” (647). In putting the two characters into relation, contact becomes possible. Stephen and Bloom are no longer isolated after their communion but share one cosmos, allowing them to understand the other. In the catechist style of ‘Ithaca’ one can see the potential for integration and identification. The novel read as a secularized mass, Stephen’s refusal to stay at Eccles Street 7 for the night (648) cannot be seen as an ultimate failure of Communion as some critics would have it (Kain 154). Every mass concludes with the dismissal of the congregation, the priest sending them out into the world. As Briand notes, the communion of ‘Ithaca’ “marks the end of the search for the father by the son, the finding of the son by the father [and] the attainment of identification for both” (Briand 321). Man reintegrated in a new, meaningful order, Bloom can deal with his anxieties about Molly’s adultery, Molly will rediscover her love

for Bloom or at least prepare breakfast for him and Stephen “can now go forth to create as an objective artist” (Briand 321).

The Eucharist partaken of in the communion serves as a metaphor for Joyce’s artistic project in *Ulysses*. As Boyle notes, Joyce “is concerned merely to use the theological materials for his artistic and imaginative purpose” (R. Boyle, “Miracle in Black Ink” 51). Mass and communion in *Ulysses* are related in pointedly mundane terms, that, however, as could be seen, far from reduce their significance to the novel. On the contrary, through its mass-parallelism, mundane human experience is instilled with a quasi-religious, secularized meaningfulness through artistic renegotiation. “Joyce,” Daniel Schwarz remarks, “perceived the Eucharist as a metaphor for the transformation of the Word into flesh” (Schwarz, *Reading Joyce’s Ulysses* 85). Joyce’s Eucharistic imagery thus professes that “as in the Eucharist, the artist’s recreated world is more real than the actual day to day one because it has significance” (Schwarz, *Reading Joyce’s Ulysses* 85). *Ulysses*, however, shifts the mass’s divine focus toward the human. The novel’s communion, as related in the communion of the characters Stephen, Bloom and Molly, is one that appreciates human connection, and the mass-parallels that lead up to it are established in decidedly human, irreligious terms. Hence, like Joyce’s treatment of the *Odyssey*, the Ulyssean mass is not derivative of the Catholic one. Neither does it need to adhere too strictly to its order to achieve its reintegrative effect, nor does it seek to offer a theological meaning.⁴² The novel as Eucharist instead affords a vision of the (secular) ‘holiness’ of human community that underlies Joyce’s aesthetic. By setting the triviality of *Ulysses* in parallel to the mass, Joyce self-consciously transubstantiates meaningless everyday life into something meaningful and humanely ‘divine.’ Art, engaged in a human union of artist and humanity and attuned to human concerns, fulfills the same function the triune God, incarnate in human flesh, fulfills in the miraculous change of the everyday bread and wine into the Eucharist: through art, that is through Joyce’s manipulation of the everyday of June 16 Dublin into a parallelism to the mass, the meaninglessness and fragmentation of the human condition in modernity is

⁴² Like the *Odyssey*, Joyce’s mass thus does not serve as a scaffold as Harrigan’s reading in “*Ulysses* as Missal: Another Structure in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*” implies. It is, instead, Joyce’s own mass, a celebration of human life as sacred and meaningful, that is achieved in *Ulysses*.

transformed, without changing its accidents, into meaning. Art's communion is a reconciliation between and through humans and not with the Catholic Godhead.

The Catholic mass in 1904 ends with the Last Gospel of St. John (Harrigan 48). A “coda for the Mass, a recapitulation of Catholic belief” (Briand 321), this part is paralleled in the stream of consciousness of ‘Penelope,’ equally recapitulating the past day. Likewise, as in the Gospel of St John 1:14 “the Word became flesh,” the language of *Ulysses* in ‘Penelope’ is at its most fleshly, revolving around Molly’s breasts and bottom (Ellmann, *Selected Letters of James Joyce* 285) and sex in general while at the same time being the most mentally contained – eight sentences of interior monologue with little to no action – chapter of the novel. In this last chapter, the novel’s aesthetic of valuing the everyday and, through art, transforming it into a meaningful order, is completed. As Ellmann remarks,

In allowing Molly to menstruate at the end Joyce consecrates the blood in the chamberpot rather than the blood in the chalice[...]. For this blood is substance, not more or less than substance. The great human potentiality is substantiation, not transubstantiation, or subsubstantiation. It is this quality which the artist has too, in that he produces living human characters, not ethereal or less than human ones. It is human blood, not divine. Menstruation is Promethean. (Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* 171)

Joyce’s mass celebrates the human, indeterminate, free-flowing. Through art as a recognition of shared human community, modern life is substantiated into meaningfulness. Mass and *Ulysses* end in the affirmative, Amen and “Yes” (732). Molly’s – and Joyce’s – ‘Yes’ is an affirmation that the all too human meaninglessness and indecidability of modern life can be resolved into order and meaning.

Joyce’s Secular Trinity of Man

Joyce’s mass is motivated by the novel’s consubstantial method. A celebration of everyday life and love, *Ulysses* constructs a secular trinity in the human consubstantiality of Stephen, Bloom, and Molly. The “*nacheinander*” of metempsychosis and metamorphosis on the novel’s Hellenic side is juxtaposed with the “*nebeneinander*” (37) of consubstantiality and transubstantiation in

its Hebraic Mass (Schell 435). In its consubstantial method, Joyce's *Ulysses* proposes an aesthetic for modernity developed from a complex interplay and manipulation of the three principal mysteries surrounding the Catholic Godhead and the mass: the Eucharist, the Incarnation, and the Trinity. As Robert Boyle remarks, "[i]n *Ulysses*, Joyce (or Stephen) with sophisticated skill shifts the terms, which operate in different ways when applied to different dogmas, from one theological context to another" (R. Boyle, "Miracle in Black Ink" 47), thereby constructing a modernist aesthetic on the grounds of a secularized Catholic theology.

Joyce's use of consubstantiality serves to heal the artistic estrangement and meaninglessness the novel most prominently depicts in its characters' familial dysfunctions. Stephen Dedalus's problematic family relations bespeak the deep alienation and fragmentation within Joyce's modernity. Dislocated and estranged from his family, the family ceases to be "a viable social unit" (Bentley 160) for Stephen. Stephen, the son in search for his father, actually need not look far for him: his name is Simon Dedalus. However, apparently the accidental, genetic family can no longer serve as a stable unit that could provide meaning. Modernity has made the unifying role of the family as a point of orientation, the smallest part of community, impossible. Throughout the novel, Stephen rejects his connection to his biological father and humanity in general. The family in *Ulysses* is not exempt from modern alienation. As Stephen remarks in the end of the 'Telemachus' episode, driven away from the Martello Tower by his "brother soul" (49) Mulligan, "Home also I cannot go" (23).

Stephen, the intellectual "eternal naysayer" (Gilbert 60), is isolated from his genetic father. He renounces the "fiction" (199) of fatherhood and, for example through his refusal of solid food (590), his corporeal humanity in general. At Sandymount Strand, the sight of two midwives thus leads Stephen to think about his own birth and his disrupted relationship with his family. A "[c]reation from nothing" and "made not begotten" (38), Stephen highlights his embodiment, his sexual conception in contrast to Christ, the Son who existed before time and was begotten, not made (*Catholic Encyclopedia* "Son of God"). The thought of his humanity, the fact that he shares with all other humans his being "[w]ombed in sin darkness," lets him imagine a "misbirth" (38) in the midwife's bag. Stephen sees himself as this abject misbirth. He is filled with contempt for everything that connects him to humanity and the body, "a

changeling” even though “[t]heir blood is in me, their lusts my waves” (45). A “dispossessed” (42) changeling, Stephen feels that he does not belong to his family even though he knows of their genetic relationship. However, biological paternity can no longer serve as a foundation of familiarity and unity. Even though his father is “the man with my voice and my eyes” (38), Stephen cannot form a connection to him. The notion of “House of...” (45), denoting paternal family relationship, is thus met with contempt as one of his “medieval abstrusities” (45). Set in contrast to Stephen’s preceding thoughts about the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, Stephen can only mockingly call his biological father “consubstantial” (38). Stephen’s and Simon’s consubstantiality is certainly not comparable to the divine consubstantiality of the Father and the Son (R. Boyle, “Miracle in Black Ink” 49). Not sharing anything substantially but only accidents, Simon Dedalus is much more Stephen’s “unsubstantial father” (191). His solipsism isolates him from other people. Repelled by his body, rejecting his basic familiarity with humanity, and unable to form interpersonal relationships, the solipsistic Stephen is “lonely” (48).

Stephen’s “struggles with the demands of patrilineal identification,” Daniel Shea notes, bespeak the problems of “the artist’s engagement of history, especially in the dominating pressures of inherited cultural dictates” (Shea, *James Joyce and the Mythology of Modernism* 57–58). The “legal fiction” (199) of familial descent, and the “patrilineal demands of history” (Shea, *James Joyce and the Mythology of Modernism* 65) implied by it, prove a problematic connector for Stephen. At the same time, historical and paternal identification of some form remains a “necessary evil” (198) to both Joyce and Stephen. Stephen’s rejection of both as medieval abstrusities and “a nightmare from which [he is] trying to awake” (34) makes him artistically uncreative: bereft of a past, the historically contingent which his art could draw from, Stephen has no (artistic) future just as him having no father, and thus not being a son, as will be shown takes away from him the possibility of fathering his own work. Conventional history, like conventional, accidental biological parenthood, cannot provide the grounds from which modern art, especially modern Irish art, can proceed. Rather, such history is presented as an imperialist ideology that effects “the oppression of both Ireland as a nation and the individuals within it” (Shea, *James Joyce and the Mythology of Modernism* 58) from which

Stephen and Joyce's writing with it seek to escape. Hence, the Englishman Haines, who has come to Dublin to study Irish culture and thus sanction the imperialist past, unceremoniously remarks that "[w]e feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly," adding that "[i]t seems history is to blame" (20). Similarly, Mr. Deasy in 'Nestor' portrays history as a force beyond human control by viewing it as a movement "towards one great goal, the manifestation of God" (34), thereby, too, employing history as a justification of injustice. Joyce, and his characters Stephen and Bloom, reject historical and "patrilineal identity in terms of their own self-identification" (Shea, *James Joyce and the Mythology of Modernism* 58). Like Stephen, however, Bloom needs some form of historicized being in time to make sense of his present. Bloom is isolated from his family history: his father, who committed suicide, changed his Hungarian surname 'Virag' into the English 'Bloom,' cutting Bloom off from the past, and Bloom's biological son Rudy's early death leaves Bloom, the son without father and father without son, without a future. Completely displaced and turned into the figure of the "wandering jew" (209), Bloom, like Stephen history- and family-less, cannot come to terms with the present issue in his family, Molly's unfaithfulness, and must wander aimlessly through Dublin. Although it does not show itself as overtly as in Stephen's fundamental rejection of the body, Bloom, too, faces the issues of paternity and history modernity poses to him. Although consubstantiality is Stephen's problem term, family relations and in particular the issue of paternity also plague Bloom. As Stephen searches for a father, Bloom searches for a son. Only through their atonement, the forming of a trinity with Molly as the third Person (Briand 321), can stability and completeness be achieved.

Stephen's discontent with biological relatedness and history leads him to think about other forms of relatedness and being in time, namely the consubstantiality in the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Pondering the nature of the Trinity, Stephen comes up with "contransmagnificandjewbangtentiality" (38), a merging of consubstantiality, being of the same substance but not the same person (*Catholic Encyclopedia* "Homoousion"), transubstantiation, the changing of the substance of a thing while its accidents remain as it happens in the Eucharist (*Catholic Encyclopedia* "The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist"), and the magnification of God incarnate as a Jewish man in a Big Bang-like self-creation. Similarly to Bloom's

slippage between metempsychosis and metamorphosis discussed earlier, Stephen explains the trinity through a convergence of related terms that will be shown to also be descriptive of Joyce's own aesthetic. The search of the father for the son and the son for the father, central to the Hellenic system of order of the *Odyssey*, plays an equally important role in *Ulysses* as the Hebraic "Son striving to be atoned with the Father" (18).

Shakespeare's Ghoststory: Trinity and History in Stephen's Artistic Theory of Hamlet

When Stephen should be teaching history in the novel's second chapter, his students ask him to tell them a "ghoststory" (25) instead. This 'ghoststory' as an alternative to the history that oppresses both Stephen – and his unmotivated students – appears in the 'Scylla and Charybdis' chapter of *Ulysses* in Stephen's trinitarian theory of Shakespeare's ghost and art's relation to historical reality in *Hamlet*. The controlling metaphor of the trinity (LeBlanc 3), discussed through Stephen's and Bloom's quest for paternity, is central to *Ulysses*. This theme of paternity, trinity, and consubstantiality becomes particularly apparent in the Hamlet theory Stephen proposes. Through his theory of *Hamlet*, Stephen seeks to come to terms with the demands of history and paternity and thus artistic production. In his reading of Shakespeare as artistic trinitarian Godhead consubstantial with his work and the autobiographical subject it stems from, Stephen offers an aesthetic capable of dealing with the oppressions of history the novel itself, as will be shown later on, mirrors.

Familial relations and secularized theology are intricately tied up with artistic creativity and the historically contingent human life in *Ulysses*. As Edward Duncan notes, the paternity theme of *Ulysses* must be seen in unison with the theological concept of consubstantiality (Duncan 136). Stephen's use of the trinity to explain *Hamlet* provides the blueprint for the "consubstantial creative trinity" (Tindall 175) Stephen as the Son meeting Bloom, the Father, will compose, as well as the aesthetic of divine immanence and worldly engagement *Ulysses* assumes for itself. Stephen's lecture in the library throws light on his "relations with his father and mother" (Duncan 126) and the trinity motif in *Ulysses*. Stephen produces an interpretation of *Hamlet* in which Shakespeare, the creator of *Hamlet*, is equally the ghost, young Hamlet and, through his own son Hamnet being dead, old Hamlet. According to Stephen's theory,

“Shakespeare not only plays the ghost [...] but recreates himself as Hamlet *père*. He makes his own dead son Hamnet to live again in Prince Hamlet” (Duncan 129), Hamnet, who is dead, also sharing the quality of a ghost and Shakespeare also being a revenger like Hamlet. Thus, Stephen sees an aesthetic trinity in Shakespeare’s work as (also) a form of autobiography. More explicitly, Stephen claims that Ann Hathaway’s seduction of the eight years younger Shakespeare has sexually emasculated him as evidenced in the “tusk of the boar [that] has wounded him there where love lies ableeding” (188) described in *Venus and Adonis*. Shakespeare, after the birth of his children, had to leave Stratford for London because of rumors of deerstealing. There, according to Stephen, he could not recreate his masculinity lost in the early seduction through “dongiovannism” (188) as expressed in the sonnets to the dark lady. Feeling cuckolded by Ann, Shakespeare writes his own brothers, the adulterers, as villains into *Richard III* and *King Lear*. Thus, Hamlet’s ghost’s cry for vengeance expresses Shakespeare accusing Ann of adultery, paralleled in the incestuous Queen Gertrude (Kellogg 152). His own dead son Hamnet and the death of Shakespeare’s father reappear in the paternity theme of *Hamlet* (Duncan 127–29). In Stephen’s autobiographical reading, Shakespeare, the creator, is thus the ghost in *Hamlet*, a ghost “through absence” (180), exiled, while his son Hamnet, a ghost “through death” (180), lives again as the son Hamlet. Stephen, himself exiled, dispossessed, fatherless and sonless since uncreative, builds a trinitarian aesthetic theory on *Hamlet* and Shakespeare in which he reflects his own family relations (Duncan 129).

As Mulligan mockingly remarks in the first chapter of the novel, Stephen “proves by algebra that Hamlet’s grandson is Shakespeare’s grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father” (18), syntactically leaving open who is meant by “he himself” (18). As can be seen in Haines confusedly “beginning to point at Stephen” (18) Stephen, Shakespeare or Hamlet could be meant. This confusion is ultimately meaningful since it points toward the fact that Stephen’s theory is not only an attempt at interpreting *Hamlet* but also both a means of coming to terms with the concept of paternity, history, and the artistic creativity Stephen so far lacks. Stephen identifies with all of the Hamlet trinity, the father, the son and the ghost. As Duncan notes, Stephen sees a “theme of banishment” (Duncan 131) running through both his and Shakespeare’s life. Identifying with Shakespeare, Stephen reads his work as an autobiographical

expression of his dysfunctional family. Stephen likens Shakespeare's exile "from Stratford" in "Elizabethan London" to his own situation, exiled from "virgin Dublin" to a "corrupt Paris" (180) as he was before his dying mother called him back home. This identification can also be seen in the way Stephen's imagination dresses Shakespeare, playing the ghost in *Hamlet*, "in the castoff mail of a court buck" (181), alluding to his own wearing the "castoffs" (49) of Buck Mulligan (Duncan 131). The library scene is a lecture of an (uncreative) "great poet on a great brother poet" (176). At the same time, as Stephen argues Shakespeare identified himself with the ghost, so does Stephen. Walking on the strand in 'Proteus,' Stephen "sees himself as the ghost of Hamlet's father, 'in the moon's midwatches I pace the path above the rocks, in sable silvered, hearing Elsinore's tempting flood'" (Duncan 131). Additionally, since to Stephen Shakespeare "is the ghost and the prince" (204), the father consubstantial with the son and the ghost, Stephen also identifies with Hamlet. Indeed, both feel they "live in a world of usurpers" (Duncan 131), are cynical and bitter soliloquists and are dressed in black. In addition, one student frequently quotes the other student from Wittenberg. Stephen calls himself "*Le distrait* or absentminded beggar" (521), a reference to a French title for *Hamlet* (Duncan 132). The thought of Ann, Gertrude, standing at Shakespeare's deathbed leads him directly to his own "[m]other's deathbed" (182), linking Stephen's feeling "that he has been betrayed by his mother" (Duncan 130) to Queen Gertrude's betrayal of both King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet. Stephen's "Hamlet hat" (47) certainly fits, making Stephen's Shakespearean "trinity of father, son, and ghost, unholy ghost maybe" (Tindall 175) complete.

The Trinity, the central doctrine of Christian religion that "in the unity of the Godhead there are Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, these Three Persons being truly distinct from one another" (*Catholic Encyclopedia* "The Blessed Trinity") but of the same substance, consubstantial, is a central image of unifying order in *Ulysses*. The importance of this theme and, as will be seen, structuring device can also be seen in the fact that among "the four great heretics Stephen is preoccupied with, Arius, Photius, Valentine, and Sabellius, three were guilty of various heresies concerning the Trinity" (R. M. Walsh 340). *Ulysses'* concern with establishing a "concept of relatedness" (Vogel 110), contact based on substance rather than accidents, genetics, the union of the trinity, can be seen as one of the principles seeking to

resolve alienation and fragmentation that make *Ulysses* “a hopeful book” (R. M. Walsh 110). Through “contransmagnificandjewbangtentiality” (38), the possibility of “kinship with a stranger” (R. M. Walsh 110), humanity and atonement are presented.

Throughout ‘Scylla and Charybdis,’ Stephen compares his Hamlet theory to a number of heresiarchs of the trinity as he considers their potential usefulness to make sense of the nature of the aesthetic relationship he is trying to outline (Kellogg 168). Stephen’s problem lies in the nature of the sameness of his Shakespeare, Hamlet/Hamnet, ghost triad. He tries to grasp how Shakespeare “is all in all” (204). To do so, Stephen consults various heresiarchs. A rejection of Arianism, the belief that God the Father, the only deity, created Christ and is therefore neither the same person nor of the same (divine) substance, in short, denying the divinity of the Son and the Holy Ghost (*Catholic Encyclopedia* “Arianism”), appears in Stephen’s dismissal of “Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting” in favor of “an apostolic succession, from only begotter to only begotten” (199). The problem Stephen attempts to solve through Arianism is that he cannot accept the “greying man with two marriageable daughters” to be the same person as “the beardless undergraduate from Wittenberg” (198). Nor does “the corpse of John Shakespeare [...] walk the night” (198) as the ghost. As one can see, as in the Arian heresy, the son is not the father nor the ghost (Duncan 139). However, this heresy cannot fully explain the Hamlet problem to Stephen.

Sabellianism, the belief that “the Father was Himself His Own Son” (199) is also parodied in the creed that goes through Stephen’s mind. Denying the distinction of person, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost to Sabellius being one person in different modes (*Catholic Encyclopedia* “Homoouison”), Stephen attempts to explain the relationship between “Shakespeare and the older Prince Hamlet, whose bitterness, like the bitterness of the betrayed cuckold, makes them spiritually identical” (Duncan 138). The “undiminished personality” with which Stephen explains how the ghost, “done to death in sleep” (189), could know the manner of his death is thus taken from the Sabellian belief of the personal unity of God.

As one can see, Stephen tries out and rejects various heresies in the process of coming to terms with his theory. Styling himself as enfant terrible, Stephen must (failingly) attempt to align himself with heresies to the orthodox Catholic doctrine. More of a self-analysis than a

proper literary theory, these problems also bespeak both Stephen's lack of familial relations and his artistic sterility which, as will be shown, results from it. Arianism, although able to explain some problems, does not work for him since paternity is not transferred through creation but "an apostolic succession" (199). Sabellianism, too, has its advantages but ultimately fails to explain how "the greying man with two marriageable daughters" is not personally "the beardless undergraduate from Wittenberg" (198) but, as will be shown, consubstantial with the son. Stephen clearly bases his Hamlet theory on theological terms, consulting various heresiarchs in his dialectic method. Ultimately, however, Stephen rejects all heretical doctrines and "supposes the filial relationship to exist between the artist and a consubstantial second person whom he sends into the world of creation to mediate between it and himself" (Tindall 168). Following the technic of dialectics of 'Scylla and Charybdis' the Gilbert scheme names, Stephen musters different opinions on a philosophical, or theological problem, juxtaposes and compares them and finally comes to one conclusion, namely the orthodox Catholic Trinity.

The key to all problems Stephen's Hamlet theory faces lies in the discrete mention of another heresiarch of the Trinity, "Photius" (189). The progenitor of the schism between the Roman Catholic Church and the eastern churches enters Stephen's consciousness through the entrance of Mulligan who, like the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Church, "will never be reconciled to Stephen" (LeBlanc 27). As Victoria LeBlanc notes, "Stephen identifies Mulligan with Photius' brood of mockers" (LeBlanc 27), thus leading Stephen to assume the role of the Son, whom the Patriarch Photius, like the usurper Mulligan, tried to limit in power. This connection made, Stephen identifying with Shakespeare and Hamlet, but also Christ, Stephen can use the *filioque* refuted by Photius to make sense of the Hamlet trinity, thereby also establishing a blueprint for the trinity pattern in *Ulysses*. *Filioque*, the belief that the Holy Ghost of the orthodox Trinity eternally proceeds from both the Father and the Son, the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father in a state in which both "[a]ct [and are] acted on" (203), is central to the end of Stephen's theory. Arguing with the orthodox "bulldog of Aquin" (199), Stephen refutes all heresies and is able to state an aesthetic theory in "analogy to orthodox theology" (Kellogg 168). In this aesthetic trinity, Shakespeare, the creator (204) and Father, sends his "son consubstantial with the father" (189), the deceased "Hamnet Shakespeare,

who has died in Stratford that his namesake may live forever” (181), an obvious parallelism to Christ “who had died for us on the cross that we may live forever” (Duncan 139), as Hamlet into *Hamlet*. The ghost, following the *filioque* argument, proceeds from both the Father and the Son. Therefore, the ghostliness of Shakespeare “through absence” (180), exiled to London, and the ghostliness of Hamnet “through death” (180), the requisites Stephen gives for being a ghost, produce the (un)holy ghost of the play. As one can see, the Son needs the Father and the Father needs the Son in order to achieve wholeness and inspiration, Stephen’s problem as an uncreative artist.

Stephen’s uncreativity is deeply connected to the issue of fatherhood and the Trinity. As already shown, artistic creativity and divine creation are analogous. Shakespeare, the father of Hamnet, is also the artistic Father of his work, equal to God, the “playwright who wrote the folio of this world and wrote it badly” (204) just like Shakespeare “puts Bohemia on the seacoast and makes Ulysses quote Aristotle” (203). Both are “bawd and cuckold” (205; 204), “ostler and butcher” (204; 180) as God is “doubtless all in all in all of us” (204). Clearly, an “analogy of the creative artist to the God of creation” (Kellogg 166) is forged here. Stephen’s question “Am I a father?” (199) must be answered in the negative at this point. Reading the father as a creative being like God or Shakespeare, Stephen certainly does not fit the description. Wandering lonely on Sandymount Strand, Stephen imagines a series of books “with letters for titles” (40). He bathes in fantasies of fame and notoriety to come but in the end, the pages of his alphabet book series are not filled. As Tindall notes “[t]alking about art is no substitute for art” (Tindall 176). Stephen talks a lot throughout *Ulysses* but writes very little. The “[h]ints of perversion” (Tindall 177) strewn throughout ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ apply less to Shakespeare than to Stephen, suggesting his current artistic “infertility” (Tindall 177). Stephen may have the artistic idea. He, however, lacks engagement with the world around him, i.e., that which would give (human) flesh to the (divinely artistic) idea.

In order to become an artistic genius like Shakespeare, Stephen must find a father he can accept as such, i.e., a consubstantial father of the orthodox Trinity. Fatherhood, in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ synonymous with creativity, as “an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten” (199) is transferred from father to son. Therefore, since “if the father who has

not a son be not a father can the son who has not a father be a son?" (199), fatherhood being defined by having a son and being a son being defined by having a father, Stephen must become a son and be atoned with the father. Only that way can the "mystical estate" (199) of fatherhood be devised onto him. Then, Stephen is able to become like Shakespeare "father of all his race, the father of his own grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson" (199). In a fictional work, the complete artist "could become the father of his own father" (Kellogg 166) by writing about him. This also means that, like Shakespeare, Stephen must learn to use (his own) life as his subject and thereby become creator and master of, and not merely created and mastered by, his own history, i.e., father himself through an engagement with the world as it is.

The Trinity of Stephen, Bloom and Molly

It is important to note that Stephen, seeing himself as "a changeling" (45), completely renounces the relation his biological father Simon Dedalus has to him to be the "mystical estate" (199) of what he means by paternity. Therefore, Stephen cannot be "no more a son" (199) and then father for the sole reason that he never had a father in his definition and thus never had been a son. A son without a father and thus a father without a son, however, is logically impossible. As the *filioque* implies, inspiration, the Holy Ghost, proceeds from the atonement of Father and Son. Since father and son are consubstantial, Stephen must become son, i.e., find his father, to be father of a work, the book about him, *Ulysses*, that he will write "in ten years" (239). It is Bloom, another ghost by absence in the "ghoststory" (180) of the library scene, passing unnoticed, who will be Stephen's father.

Bloom is as incomplete as Stephen, a father without a son. The son consubstantial with the father, not only Stephen but also Bloom can be identified with Stephen's Shakespeare, the blueprint for the order the "contransmagnificandjewbangtentiality" (38) of the trinity creates. Bloom's domestic situation is that of Shakespeare. In the full knowledge of being cuckolded he is exiled from his home, forced to be a "wandering jew" (209) for the rest of the day (Tindall 176). Like Shakespeare, he follows "a literary occupation" (434) and is at the same time "a commercial traveller" (475). Finally, both Bloom and Shakespeare have lost a father, Rudolph Virag's suicide mirrored in the death of Ophelia (Vogel 111) and a son, Rudy Bloom who died

eleven days old and “would be eleven now” (64) and Hamnet who died eleven years old (Duncan 139).

Bloom’s claim to paternity however is as problematic as Stephen’s situation. Bloom, having lost his son Rudy, has “none now to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph” (393), yet he cannot be “what Leopold was for Rudolph” (393), a son, either, since his father is dead. The fact that both Bloom’s father, Rudolph, and his deceased son, Rudy, bear the same name further highlights the logical mutual dependence of son- and fatherhood. Bloom needs to find a replacement for his dead son Rudy, a replacement which he shall find in Stephen Dedalus, in order to achieve wholeness. Bloom’s paternal, Fatherly feelings are central to his character. Throughout the novel he is portrayed as generous and caring, feeding the birds (146) as the Heavenly Father of Mt 6:26 does, helping a “blind stripling” (172) cross the street and feeling compassionate for Mrs Purefoy and many others. In his Son-counterpart Stephen, Bloom’s paternal feelings can find their full realization. Therefore, as noted elsewhere before, Bloom decides to follow Stephen in ‘Oxen of the Sun’ after a number of missed connections, caring for him fatherly throughout the rest of the novel.

The same sense in which Bloom can be seen as the Father identifies Stephen, the “eternal son” (375), with Christ. As already noted, Stephen “emeshes Hamlet, Shakespeare, Christ and himself” (Duncan 135). Stephen repeatedly acts as Christ throughout the novel, e.g., quoting Christ’s “Come. I thirst” (50) in ‘Proteus’ as he sees “two crucified shirts” (41) and the “crosstrees” (50) of a ship that shall reappear in the creed of ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ (189). Duncan notes other “proof of Stephen’s identity with Christ” (Duncan 136), most of which to be found in the last chapters of *Ulysses*, such as the Last Supper he celebrates in ‘Oxen of the Sun’ or the “symbolic death at the hands of the soldiers” (Duncan 136) in ‘Circe.’ In fact, as Hodgart remarks, “[i]n every chapter in which Stephen appears there is a correspondence with the Gospel story or *Vita Christi*” (Hodgart, “Aeolus” 118). *Ulysses* is a gospel as Mulligan’s crossing of the forehead and heart in the opening chapter already implies. It is significant that Mulligan, not Stephen, opens *Ulysses*. “Malachi Mulligan” (4) is God’s messenger Malachi, whose book ties the Old Testament to the New Testament, who announces the coming of the Messiah (R. M. Walsh 325). As the Book of Malachi prophecies, God will send Elijah before

He sends the Messiah. Elijah is an important figure in *Ulysses*, his thunder announcing the Messiah as the thunder Stephen, not ready for atonement, fears in ‘Oxen of the Sun’ (376-377) and finally produces in ‘Circe’ (542), accepting his role as the Son (Schell 439). As shown in Tekla Schell’s “The Role of Elijah in *Ulysses*’s Metempsychosis,” Elijah is embodied by a number of characters in *Ulysses* through metempsychosis (Schell 429–30) or, in adherence to his function in the Hebraic scheme, transubstantiation, among which is also Mulligan, who is seen to act as a messenger (191). As the man who according to the Book of Malachi announces the Messiah, the Christian reading of the Old Testament identifies him with John the Baptist (R. M. Walsh 330). This is also true for Mulligan, who comments to Stephen “I’m the only one that knows what you are” (7) and whose swim in the sea (23) can be read “as the baptism of St. John” (R. M. Walsh 330). As one can see, Mulligan’s assumption of the role of the messenger points at Stephen’s Christness.

Stephen and Bloom are Joyce’s secularized Son and Father. They are linked to each other throughout the novel, culminating in the recognition of the other as the sought for father or son of the same substance. Hence, one oftentimes assumes attributes and thoughts of the other. In ‘Eumaeus’ for example, Stephen, searching his pockets for money for Corley, has a recollection “about biscuits he dimly remembered” (574). These appear to be the biscuits Bloom bought in ‘Lestrygonians’ (146), resulting in Stephen’s confusion, who asks himself “who now exactly gave them, or where was, or did he buy?” (547). Instances of this “seepage of the current [...] between Stephen and Bloom” (Gilbert 57) can be found throughout *Ulysses*. When Bloom was twenty-two, he cut his hand (525). Stephen, twenty-two years old in *Ulysses*, also “[h]urt his hand somewhere” (525). Notably, this connection established leads Stephen to think that he “[m]ust see a dentist” (525). His need to see a dentist, in connection with the noting of their spiritual link, can be seen as another instance of the “Son striving to be atoned with the Father” (18) if one remembers that Bloom’s namesake in Dublin is a dentist (323) whose identity Bloom assumes as one of his alter-egos (431). Thus, the two of them feel their consubstantiality even before their actual atonement and appear drawn to another. Hence, shortly after Stephen quotes from Maeterlink, saying “[i]f *Socrates leave his house today he will find the sage seated on his doorstep, If Judas go forth tonight it is to Judas his steps will*

tend [...] we walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants [...] [b]ut always meeting ourselves” (204), Bloom passes between them and Stephen, feeling the presence of a consubstantial being, suddenly notes that “[t]he moment is now” (209), recalling the same passage from Maeterlink (209). Stephen and Bloom, consubstantial, must meet “ineluctably” (209). Stephen’s need to meet with Bloom is also expressed in the following abrupt recognition: “God, the sun, Shakespeare, a commercial traveller, having itself traversed in reality itself becomes that self. [...] Damn that fellow’s noise in the street. Self which it itself was ineluctably preconditioned to become. Ecco” (475). Stephen, “the sun” (475) and the homophone Son must meet Bloom, the Father, a counterpart to the godly Shakespeare and God as everyman, a “noise in the street” (178) like the God of Stephen’s imagination. Thus, the circle closes. In meeting Bloom, who is God the Father, Stephen shall become himself consubstantial with the Father (Rutledge 34–35).

Though Stephen and Bloom are not the same person, they are linked to each other through consubstantiality. As Gilbert notes, the recognition of Stephen and Bloom takes place in the drama chapter ‘Circe’ at a point where, in the Hellenic drama, the anagnorisis, the recognition of the other and the self, would take place (Gilbert 57). In the ‘Circe’ chapter, Stephen and Bloom finally really see each other as consubstantial. Their consubstantiality is also responsible for their both seeing the “face of William Shakespeare” (528) in the mirror. ‘Circe’ as the recognition and atonement chapter is filled with such images of sameness, consubstantiality and transubstantiation that explain the trinity. Their seeing the same face, the face of the ‘divine’ artist Shakespeare, in the mirror affirms their shared substance as part of a trinity. Shakespeare, Hamlet, God, Stephen and Bloom form a net of correlations that points towards a trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost trivialized but jocoserious in *Ulysses*. In ‘Circe,’ where “Stephen [...] sees Bloom” (476) the point where “[e]xtremes meet” (474) is finally reached. The extremes of “jewgreek” and “greekjew” (474), Stephen and Bloom, finally recognize and join each other. Stephen accepts his role as the Son, the logos “known to all men” (540) that needs Bloom as a father to be complete in consubstantiality and Bloom superimposes Rudy and Stephen (565), accepting him as a son. As Bloom as a “womanly man” (465) exclaims he “so want[s] to be a mother” (466), Bloom the man wants to be a father.

Stephen and Bloom recognize each other as consubstantial father and son and leave into 'Nostos' to find wholeness in a trinity. In 'Ithaca,' the *Ulysses* trinity is completed with Molly, as the Holy Ghost, a Ghost "through absence" (180) and Stephen and Bloom are fully reintegrated in their assumption of their roles as Father and Son. Therefore, the completion of the trinity in 'Ithaca' also marks Stephen's new life as a complete artist and Bloom's new-found fatherhood and reconciliation with his wife. The trinity *Ulysses* carefully establishes in the chapter can for example be seen in the way Bloom, "[r]elinquishing his symposiarchal right to the moustache cup" (629) drinks his communion cocoa from "a cup identical with that of his guest" (629). Serving "the creature cocoa" (629), creation, Bloom appears as a creator or father figure while at the same time stressing his sameness with Stephen through the choice of identical cups.

For the first time in the novel, Stephen is seen to form an interpersonal identification. Thus, Stephen, accepting his role as the Son having found the Father, hears "the past" in Bloom's voice while Bloom, the Father, sees "a future" in Stephen's "young male familiar form" (642). The son perceiving the past in his (consubstantial) father and the father seeing the future in his son, Stephen recognizes Bloom's "concealed identit[y]" as the "traditional figure of hypostasis" (642). Hypostasis (*Catholic Encyclopedia* "The Blessed Trinity") referring to the distinct Persons of the Trinity, consubstantial in their Divinity, Stephen senses his consubstantiality but not personal identity with Bloom the Father (Rutledge 36–37). However, whereas in theology the shared substance is divinity, in *Ulysses* wholeness is achieved through the recognition of a shared humanity. In what Boyle calls 'consubstantiation,' everyday life is transformed into meaningful connection. However, this transformation does not take the shape of a transubstantiation, in which the everyday is changed into the divine, but remains within the sphere of humanity: through an engagement with the other, the meaninglessness of everyday life is transformed into the meaningful, not of the divine, but of the human. Thus reconciled with humanity, Stephen can go off to become an artist. This can be seen in the sound of Stephen's feet, leaving, being identified as "the double vibration of a jew's harp" (657). The harp, symbol of the Irish poet, is given to Stephen by his Jewish father Bloom, fatherly in his Jewishness like God who "was a jew" (327), too. As discussed in Stephen's Hamlet theory,

Stephen, now a son, having recognized his consubstantial relationship with Bloom whose concealed identity is hypostatic, Bloom being the Father, can go off to create himself, having acquired his harp, ideal poethood, from his Jew father (Tindall 223).

Notably, Stephen is not the only one who profits from the meeting in 'Ithaca.' Bloom's problems, too, are resolved. As Duncan notes, "[s]eperated from Stephen, who symbolizes Christ or the Divine Imagination, Bloom is Noman, falling and suffering humanity" (Duncan 139). Like Ulysses, who, by telling the Cyclops his name was Noman "had denied the divine part of his nature" (Duncan 139) as he leaves out the 'Zeus' from his name, Bloom on his odyssean wanderings, sonless and "known to none," is "Noman" (679). In union with Stephen, the Son, however, Bloom can be "Everyman" (679), God the Father. Parts of a trinity, Stephen and Bloom need the other to become whole. Hence, as Bloom and Stephen meet, Bloom can now be called "son of Rudolph" (643) and "father" (644) again. In 'Ithaca,' the logical problem of a father who is not a son and has not a son is resolved for Bloom and Stephen as a mode of spiritual parentage becomes viable in 'Ithaca' (Rutledge 36). If Stephen's problem had been artistic infertility, being not a son and therefore not able to become a father, Bloom's problem, sonless and impotent, is facing his adulterous wife Molly with whom Bloom has not slept in almost 11 years (687). Having found his consubstantial son in Stephen, Bloom is able to face his problems with Molly with "[e]quanimity" (684). Therefore, what "incline[s] him to remain" (657) with Molly is his meeting with Stephen, "the apparition of a new solar disk" (657), i.e., a new sun/son. Through a self-fashioned history based in mutual care for the other human, they can gain control of the present and become equipped with a future.

Two does not make a trinity. Molly as the Holy Ghost of the *Ulysses* trinity is central to its theme of unity and reconciliation. Molly as the Holy Ghost, proceeding *filioque* from Bloom and Stephen, contributes the feminine creativity, the aspect of maternity Stephen continually neglects, to the composition of the "consubstantial creative trinity or the artist Stephen wants to be" (Tindall 175). Thinking back to Stephen's Hamlet theory in the library, a (holy) ghost can be generated "through absence" (180). This is certainly true for Molly. In 'Ithaca,' "an invisible person, [Bloom's] wife Marion (Molly) Bloom, denoted by a visible splendid sign, a lamp" (655), present yet absent, is perceived by Bloom and Stephen *Patre Filioque*. Molly is absent

yet present throughout 'Ithaca' and, in fact, throughout all of *Ulysses*. Looking up at her window, her ghostly presence, though invisible, can be inferred from the light of her lamp. Thus, absent Molly is also present in the cream that according to Briand completes the trinity of mankind consubstantial in cocoa (Briand 321), "the moon" (654) that is like woman and the water, Molly's menstrual blood (719), urine (720) and creative maternal force and thereby, through extension, in Stephen and Bloom's, *Patre Filioque*, "simultaneous [...] urinations" (655) that form the letters Y-S (655) of Molly's final "yes" (690) in 'Penelope.' Indeed, although she does not appear in *Ulysses* until the last chapter, Molly is continually present in Bloom's thoughts and by extension in Stephen's reminiscences about maternity and the Madonna. Molly is the Holy Ghost, inspiration, or, as Tindall identifies her following a similar train of thought, Stephen's "Muse" (Tindall 225).

Stephen's neglect of eternal female creativity in favor of the paternal creation can be seen in his estimate of women and in particular his ridicule of mariology (199). However, not his communion with Bloom per se but his joining the *Ulysses* trinity, the final ingredient being Molly's eternally feminine procreative power, will allow him to leave as a mature artist. As Suzette Henke notes, "Stephen's fear of woman and contempt for sensuous life are among the many inhibitions that stifle his creativity" (Henke 102). That the Holy Ghost in 1904 Dublin must be female can be seen in the fact that, a few days before June 16, Hamlet, consubstantial with the father consubstantial with the ghost, was played by a woman (73). As Stephen argues in the library "that Shakespeare's productivity grew out of his encounter with a sexually powerful woman" (Mahaffey 167), the feminine, maternal is needed without which the "artist [...] cannot fulfil himself and become truly creative" (Hodgart, *James Joyce* 129). Molly is the embodiment of all aspects of femininity. In her "attitude of Gea-Tellus, fulfilled, recumbent, big with seed" (688) Molly is the protean Earth-mother, Greek Gaia and Latin Tellus, her procreative power of a different, complementary nature to paternity. At the same time, Molly embodies another aspect of maternity, that of the virgin Mary. Marion, the name a form of Mary, has her birthday on September 8, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin (687). As in 'Penelope,' "two associations, motherhood and art, converge toward the end in the figure of Stephen" (Gordon 131). Marion bears the artist Stephen through her union with him like Mary

bore Christ. Thus, Molly as the Spirit of Inspiration, the Muse, contains all aspects of motherhood. Through her, Bloom, consubstantial with the Son, can become “the manchild in the womb” (688) and Stephen can go forth to create.

In ‘Ithaca,’ “the trinity of the one substance of humanity in the united identities of the persons of Stephen, Bloom, and Molly” (Briand 315) is achieved. In forming a trinity with Stephen as the Son, Bloom as the Father and Molly as the Holy Ghost, a “union of head (Intellect – Stephen) and body (Flesh – Molly) in the ‘mystical’ body of mankind (Intellect and Flesh – Bloom)” (Briand 312), estrangement and disorder are resolved. Bloom, having found a son in Stephen, is now reconciled with the past and can now face his wife Molly just like Stephen, finally a son, can now become a creator himself. Through a now found compassion and sense of belonging, the two halves of the artist, Stephen and Bloom, form a complete whole (Tindall 222). With Stephen, Bloom and Molly assuming the roles of Christ the Son, God the Father and the Holy Ghost, maternal spirit of inspiration, estrangement is battled and unity in a shared humanity becomes feasible. Nevertheless, it must be noted that, with the words of William Tindall, “parallel is not identity” (Tindall 128–29). Stephen is certainly not Christ reincarnate nor is Bloom the Creator of the universe. Their relationships are simply analogous, allowing for conclusions parallel to the trinity yet resolutely human.

“Contransmagnificandjewbangtentiality”: Joyce’s Poetics of Consubstantiation in *Ulysses*

The problem term consubstantiality, making the trinity in *Ulysses* possible, is fundamental to the establishment of the Catholic mass as the Hebraic pattern in *Ulysses*. Without the mystery of the Trinity, “the Church maintains that the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist celebrated in the Mass, would be meaningless” (LeBlanc 9). The same goes for Joyce’s secularized mass in *Ulysses*. Coordinating its characters into a trinitarian constellation, *Ulysses* also outlines its own aesthetics of authorship and epic representation of the world as based in a secularized artistic trinity. Like Stephen, Joyce can be seen to play with Catholic theology, transposing its terms and concepts into varying contexts and thereby developing an aesthetic that is both deeply Catholic in its imagery and a conscious secular reinterpretation of its terms for artistic, modernist ends. Taking up the place of Shakespeare in

Stephen's theory of the consubstantial *Hamlet*, Joyce conceptualizes art and artist through the figure of the trinity. Thus, Stephen's parodied romanticism and turn-of-the-century aestheticism in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* shifts into the fully developed modernist aesthetic of *Ulysses*. Stephen in *Portrait* conceived of the artist as "the priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (*Portrait* 252) and professed that

The esthetic image in dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic, like that of material creation, is accomplished.

The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.

(*Portrait* 244–45)

This Wordsworthian notion of the artist as priest, channeling nature and God through his work, and the God-creator of this work, art purifying and reprojecting the world through the omnipotent artistic imagination, shifts into the Ulyssean artist as "father of his own grandfather" (199). Joyce as author-God is divinely immanent, self-creative of his history, and consubstantial with his subject. Above all, Joyce's new trinitarian artist is all but one thing: indifferent. As Shea notes, in *Ulysses*, in contrast to romanticism and aestheticism, art is not transformed into life but life itself turns into art (Shea, "From 'God of the Creation' to 'Hangman God': Joyce's Reassessment of Aestheticism" 128), warranting an acute, consubstantial closeness between the artist and his subject matter, the world and its human concerns, both ugly and beautiful.

The aesthetic theory Joyce develops from Catholic theology in *Ulysses* can be compared to the similarly trinitarian poetic of the English Catholic writer Dorothy Sayers. As Shea outlines, Sayers' analogization of Catholic dogma and creative writing assumes art as a trinity of "the Creative Idea from which proceeds the Creative Activity or the Word" and the "Creative Power, the emotional and intellectual impact of the writing which 'from the reader's point of view [...] is the book'" (Shea, *James Joyce and the Mythology of Modernism* 34–35). These correlate to Father, Spirit and Son. The consubstantial aesthetic of Joyce's novel is thus contained in the slippage of terms through which Stephen in the novel explains the Trinity: "contrasmagnificandjewbangtentiality" (38). As Ellmann perceptively deciphers the problem

term: “the consubstantiation, transubstantiation, magnification of a Jewish, explosively begotten God-man” (Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* 28).

Idea, Activity, and Power share a substance in the artist and his art. The book is the incarnation, the physical form, of the author’s Idea, Activity and Power. Hence, the power of the book, through which the artist’s idea becomes present in the world, is begotten through his Activity. Furthermore, consubstantially, artist and art are defined by a partaking in, essential sameness with, and sympathy for the subject, the world and the word. Thus, artistic, meaningful work must be, as the consubstantiation of Stephen, Bloom, and Molly shows, informed by human concerns, reality not romantically elevated and purified but accepted and cherished in all its triviality. Like Stephen’s Shakespeare, the artist is to draw from the world and his position therein, both its ugly and beautiful sides.

This process amounts to a transubstantiation. The consubstantial transubstantiation of *Ulysses*, as one can see, is one in(to) human, not divine substance. Through the artist’s spirited engagement with the world, the triviality of the modern condition is transubstantiated into the meaningful yet (still) fleshly word. Life is turned into art, order and meaning. Read from the other direction, this means that the book’s Power, the idea incarnate through active engagement with the world, offers the world the possibility of an epiphanic revelation of its sanctity and meaning: through art, the world has been con/transubstantiated into a meaningful unity. The ‘magnificat’ in Stephen’s word thus describes the ‘divinity,’ i.e., symbolic meaningfulness, of the world. It is the divine side of the artistic incarnation, that in which the artist becomes godlike creator of the artwork and the artwork, in turn, reintegrates modern fragmentation – Joyce’s symbolism. Closely linked to this magnification of world and artist through the word turned (to) flesh with a thrown in ‘and’ is the next part of Stephen’s word, ‘jew.’ ‘Jew’ here points toward the lowly human side of the incarnation and the author’s engagement with a humanity he is consubstantial with – Joyce’s naturalism. The redeeming incarnation, Joyce shows, can only be achieved in the artist’s capacity as ‘Everyman.’ Incarnate, art and artist are not only divine artificer but equally human, lowly and trivial. Hence, whereas Stephen early on in the novel relativizes God as a “shout in the street” (34), *Ulysses* views the reintegrative artist to assume

exactly this position. 'Divine' meaning lies in the trivial and mundane, the naturalist turning symbolic.

Lastly, the aesthetic of *Ulysses* has the characteristic of 'bangtentiality.' The artist, *consubstantial* with his work and engaged with his subject, *transsubstantiates* the world into the meaningful word, thereby becoming *magnified* into the work's quasi-divine mover and creator who is, at the same time, sympathetically engaged with the trivial world he draws from (*jew*), and thus creates himself and the world anew, escaping history by creating his own Big *Bang*. In an expression of avant-gardist elitism, the modernism of *Ulysses* thus constructs artist and art as begotten, not created, by the history of the world. Placing himself as primary to yet connected to a past and future that is the humanity he is *consubstantial* with, the Joyce of *Ulysses* creates himself as the "father of his own grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson" (199), historically independent yet interconnected. Through this trinitarian aesthetic of self-creation, the modernist artist Joyce escapes from the oppressive demands of history yet does not get lost in history-less isolation. Instead, paradigmatically fulfilling the modernist battle cry 'make it new,' *Ulysses* gives the modern world a history through *consubstantiation*. Thus effaced, the author-God Joyce channels the entirety of his world through his all-connecting perspective. This strategy directs attention to the divine within the trivial and even ugly. Through art, the realm of humanity is reintegrated into a new meaningful order. Like Joyce's use of *metempsychosis*, then, the Ulyssean *consubstantial* method affords modernity with meaning and makes it accessible to literature.

4. Ulyssean Parallax and the Good European

Visual parallax, used as a metaphor for synthesis, represents the third problem term in Joyce's *Ulysses* and produces the pattern of stereoscopic superimposition through which the novel's disparate perspectives are converged into a coherent whole. Defined as the "difference or change in the apparent position or direction of an object as seen from two different points" (*OED* "parallax"), parallax is an important "theme or way of reading" (Kiczek 292) *Ulysses*.⁴³ Through a synthesis of individually lacking perspectives into a 'stereoscopic vision,' the single, fragmentary and disorderly points of view of *Ulysses* can be superimposed in order to allow for an experience of meaning and order, life in three dimensions. The novel's parallax shifts in perspective, style and technique produce a kaleidoscope of modern life that, in the metaphor of stereoscopic vision, is synthesized into a coherent whole. Through this parallax process, Patrick McCarthy notes, "we see Dublin through Bloom's eyes and Stephen's (and eventually through Molly's as well), and while each viewpoint is limited, the juxtaposition of various perspectives hints at the larger, fully human, viewpoint toward which *Ulysses* reaches." (McCarthy, *Ulysses: Portals of Discovery* 5). Whereas single perspectives can never touch upon the whole 'truth,' their synthesis into depth perception provides a sense of order and meaning. As Barbara Stevens Heusel remarks, "[w]hen we close one eye, focusing on one character at a time, we lose perspective on all the rest of Joyce's world" (Heusel 143). As the novel's third problem term, parallax is both thematized, thought about and experienced in the novel and ultimately serves as a structuring device in its modernist aesthetics of synthesis.

The fragmenting, constantly shifting perspectives of *Ulysses* are unified and thus made meaningful in their stereoscopic superimposition. As in astronomy, while one perspective alone cannot locate the position of a star, from the data of two points of view the position of a celestial object can be calculated. 'Truth,' inaccessible to any single perspective, can be ascertained by superimposing two points of view. Parallax not only informs the daily lives and thoughts of the

⁴³ Parallax is widely discussed as both a stylistic device and central structural metaphor in *Ulysses* and beyond. See for example the early discussions by Marilyn French in *The Book as World* or Myra Glazer Schotz's "Parallax in *Ulysses*," as well as Barbara Stevens Heusel's "Parallax as a Metaphor for the Structure of *Ulysses*," David Chinitz's "All the Dishevelled Wandering Stars: Astronomical Symbols in 'Ithaca'," Kiczek's "Joyce in Transit: The 'Double Star' Effect of *Ulysses*," Sam Slote's "Joyce and Science" and C oil n Parsons' "Planetary Parallax: *Ulysses*, the Stars, and South Africa" among others.

novel's characters but also informs the novel's structure. Repeatedly staging parallax drifts both in what the novel's characters experience and the style through which this experience is related, the novel, "caught up in the parallax process" (Schotz 495), subtly drives toward the full realization of parallax in 'Ithaca.' Here the "parallel courses" (619) of Stephen and Bloom converge into the unity of "Blephen" and "Stoom" (635).

Ulysses resolves the epistemological crisis of the modern experience by stressing the ultimate attainability of meaning through a parallax process. Even though the modern experience is depicted as fragmentary and disordered, meaning is accessible through a joint effort. The superimposition of these fragmentary perspectives through art allows for a unified, reintegrative vision of life and hope. *Ulysses* displays a belief in the redemptive function of art typical for high modernism. Even though meaning is no longer openly accessible in the modern world, it is far from relative. Instead, the synthesizing artistic effort, a multiperspectivalism related by the visual metaphor of stereoscopic vision, allows for the discovery of "common centers of gravity," a shared human experience or substance around which the novel's characters and action revolve.

Parallax, in its reintegrative function as not only theme but overall structuring principle of the novel, thereby ties all the novel's different strands together to form a unified whole. The structure of *Ulysses* is itself parallax. As a structural metaphor, parallax in *Ulysses* serves to produce the vision of what Nietzsche calls the good European, a mode of approaching the modern world in a fertile manner derived from the transnational synthesis of 'races,' i.e., the Hellenic and Hebraic cultural forces that to Nietzsche, Arnold and Joyce constitute Western culture. In stereoscopic vision, the Hellenic and Hebraic strands of the novel, its metempsychotic Odyssey and its mass through secular consubstantiality, are reconciled, forming the redemptive potential of the Europeanisation of Ireland. The novel's third problem term 'parallax' ties the other problem words, 'consubstantiality' and 'metempsychosis,' together, superimposing them in order to create a new, reintegrative sense of order. Ultimately, then, parallax in *Ulysses* serves to establish a Nietzschean aesthetic of crosscultural, multiperspectival synthesis.

Parallax and Joyce's Perspectivism

Parallax is Bloom's problem word. Throughout the novel, Bloom imagines different perspectives and identifies with other people's points of view. This becomes not only apparent in Bloom's visual imagination but also in his parallaxic style of thought. Hence, his aforementioned definition of metempsychosis follows a parallaxic process: to explain the term, Bloom gauges it from multiple directions. Starting with the dictionary definition of metempsychosis, Bloom does not end with the one point of view but instead sets multiple explanatory approaches in dialogue that, in their parallaxic slippage, prove to provide a fuller and deeper understanding of the term. Bloom, however, must learn to apply this parallax to his personal life in order to put his own vulnerabilities, his sense of isolation and inadequacy to rest. As will be shown, this happens during the climax of 'Ithaca,' when Stephen and Bloom conjoin in parallax and get a glimpse of the sharedness of their human condition.

The astronomical term first enters Bloom's mind in 'Lestrygonians.' Passing the ballast office, Bloom looks for the time and the thought of the "[f]ascinating little book [...] of Sir Robert Ball's. Parallax" (147) crosses his mind. The fact that Bloom "never exactly understood" (147) the meaning of the word parallax highlights the problem term's importance as both a theme and a metaphor for the structure of *Ulysses*. Bloom's failure to understand the term is as confounding as it bespeaks his own isolation. Parallax, as Sir Robert Ball explains it in his *Story of the Heavens*, the book in Bloom's library (661) from which he knows the astronomical term, is quite straight-forward and easy to understand. Ball defines astronomical parallax as follows:

We must first explain clearly the conception which is known to astronomers by the name of *parallax*; for it is by parallax that the distance of the sun, or, indeed, the distance of any other celestial body, must be determined. Let us take a simple illustration. Stand near a window from whence you can look at buildings, or the trees, the clouds, or any distant objects. Place on the glass a thin strip of paper vertically in the middle of one of the panes. Close the right eye, and note with the left eye the position of the strip of paper relatively to the objects in the background. Then, while still remaining in the same position, close the left eye and again observe the position of the paper with

the right eye. You will find that the position of the paper on the background has changed. As I sit in my study and look out of the window, I see a strip of paper, with the right eye, in front of a certain bough on a tree a couple of hundred yards away; with my left eye the paper is no longer in front of that bough, it has moved to a position near the edge of the tree. This apparent displacement of the strip of paper, relatively to the distant background, is what is called parallax. Move closer to the window, and repeat the observation, and you will find that the *apparent displacement of the strip increases*. Move away from the window, and the displacement decreases [...] It is this principle, applied on a gigantic scale, which enables us to measure the distances of the heavenly bodies. (Ball 181–82)

Parallax in astronomy is “the difference in direction of a celestial body as seen from some point on the earth’s surface and from some other conventional point” (Gifford and Seidman 160). Therefore, one point of view alone cannot locate the position of a star. From the data of two points of view, however, the position of a celestial object can be calculated. *Ulysses* turns this visual and astronomical phenomenon into an artistic device. Not only the experience of its characters but the novel itself is parallaxic. A catalogue of styles, perspectives and knowledges, *Ulysses* perpetually juxtaposes multiple subjective experiences without ever fully privileging one as absolutely true and unbiased. As in astronomical parallax, ‘truth’ in *Ulysses* can only be ascertained through the superimposition of multiple perspectives.

Although he claims he “never exactly understood” (147) it, Bloom unwittingly tries out the very phenomenon in an “[i]nteresting” (159) experiment. Holding “out his right hand at arm’s length towards the sun” Bloom is able to blot out the sun, having found “the focus where the rays cross” (159), where the “different parallaxic angles of Bloom’s eyes,” visualized by rays from his eyes as it is often done in scientific illustrations and as Plato’s emission theory imagined sight, “converge on to his finger” (Kiczek 293). Having created his own little man-made solar eclipse, Bloom even remembers that “[t]here will be a total eclipse this year” (159). Strangely, although Bloom just proved his understanding of parallax, even linking the observation to an astronomical phenomenon, he still asks himself afterward “what’s parallax” (159). This is because he does not yet see the reconciliatory function of parallax in which it is

used as a structural metaphor in *Ulysses*, a knowledge he will only acquire in the depth perception of 'Ithaca.' At the moment, however, the movement of the stars serves no reconciling function to him.

Interestingly, Bloom is not the only one who experiments with "stereoscop[ic]" (48) perception. The "ineluctable modality of the visible" (37) is also one of Stephen's concerns in 'Proteus.' Stephen considers the mutability of perception, Ball's strip of paper changing its position, on his walk over Sandymount Strand. Like Bloom he eclipses the sun by throwing a shadow (Kiczek 294). Stephen experiences distortion by parallax as he notes: "I throw this ended shadow from me, manshape ineluctable, call it back. Endless, would it be mine, form of my form? Who watches me here?" (48). The visible, as exemplified in Ball's experiment, is mutable as Stephen's shadow changes "depending on who is watching" (Kiczek 294). Essentially reenacting Ball's experiment, Stephen tries to understand the stereoscope: "Hold hard. Coloured on a flat: yes, that's right. Flat I see, then think distance, near, far, flat I see, east, back. Ah, see now: Falls back suddenly, frozen in stereoscope. Click does the trick" (48). In 'Proteus,' Stephen tries out depth perception, a phenomenon "which works on the principle of parallax" (Heusel 137). Stephen's experiment will remind one of Bloom's investigations into parallax. The text thereby performs its own parallactic shift. By having both Stephen and Bloom experiment with parallax, *Ulysses* can be seen "to join Stephen's and Bloom's thought patterns" (Heusel 137), foreshadowing their final stereoscopic superimposition in 'Ithaca.'

As Heusel points out, this parallactic phenomenon is central to *Ulysses*. *Ulysses* strives toward a "depth perception" in order to "synthesize the shifting perspectives" (Heusel 135) of the novel and reach a more objective vision. As already noted, the constantly shifting perspectives and styles of *Ulysses* fragment the text and meaning itself. These confusing parallactic shifts in *Ulysses*, however, serve to generate a multiperspectival outlook on the novel. *Ulysses*' shifting points of view "produce continually altering pictures of Bloom and Stephen" (Schotz 490) that can only reach completeness when seen together through parallax, the "metaphor for Joyce's technique in *Ulysses*" (Schotz 491). Truth in *Ulysses* cannot be ascertained through one perspective alone. Through a stereoscopic vision, however, "one experiences a fuller or more correct vision of life" (Heusel 135). Thus, the novel's oftentimes

confusing presentation of disparate perspectives is conducive to an objective examination of what is represented: fragmentation calls for an analytical, three-dimensional perspective that synthesizes the novel's fragmented perspectives into a whole, thereby making sense of modernity. Just like a star cannot be located through one perspective alone but can be proven to exist in one space through parallax, so can meaning be found through a synthesis-like depth perception in/of *Ulysses*. Parallax can produce order in a seemingly orderless, meaningless and many-voiced modernity.

Used in astronomical measurements of Joyce's time, the metaphor of parallax establishes the characters of *Ulysses* as celestial bodies in motion (Kiczek 293). This motion, as Kiczek argues, produces eclipses, the obscuring of meaning if one views *Ulysses* through one eye at a time only (Kiczek 295). Only through the multiperspectival can modern life in its fullness be ascertained and made sense of. One such eclipse can for example be seen in the 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode. Here, Stephen's perspective obscures the presence of Bloom, who is reduced to a "dark figure" (192) that "briefly enters the reader's periphery" (Kiczek 295). Distortive parallax obscures "the relation between these bodies" (Kiczek 295), Stephen and Bloom. With Stephen as focalizer, Bloom's appearance is reduced to a "bowing dark figure" (192) and Mulligan's anti-Semitic slurs (192), the only things that point at the identity of Bloom. Again, when leaving the library, Bloom's presence is – as if they were celestial bodies – overshadowed by Stephen, who only perceives that a "man passed out between them, bowing, greeting" (209). The distortion of parallax not only deceives Mulligan, who interprets Bloom's paternal magnetism as homosexual "lust" (209), but also informs the text itself, where the protagonist is almost completely decentered (Kiczek 295). The dangers of a too one-sided perspective, i.e., the eclipses the narrative style of *Ulysses* produces, can also be seen in 'Hades' when, again, "major characters [are] rendered small only by parallax" (Kiczek 298). Thus, Stephen and Boylan turn into Bloom's passing recognition of "a lithe young man, clad in mourning, a wide hat" (85) and "the white disc of a straw hat" (89). Seeing through one eye only renders them trivial.

Perhaps nowhere do the problems *Ulysses* identifies with the reliance on one single perspective become clearer than in 'Cyclops.' Here, the Citizen's pronounced

monoperspectivism, true to the chapter's Homeric parallel, bespeaks an unreflected nationalism and antisemitism the novel rejects. As Sam Slote notes, "[b]y having only the one eye, he cannot reconcile multiple perspectives through parallax; that is, the monoptic Cyclops is blind to perspectival sight and insight" (Slote, "Joyce's Nietzschean Ethics" 79). Hence, the section's first-person narrator, reduced to one I/eye, and the other cyclopic drinkers at the pub ridicule Bloom's attempts to view an issue from multiple sides in order to gain a better perspective: "Bloom with his *but don't you see?* and *but on the other hand*" (293) is brushed off as unnecessarily digressive, passive, weak and un-Irish. Thus, when Bloom interjects that the posthanging erection of Irish nationalist Joe Brady they appreciatively see as a sign of the "ruling passion strong in death" could "be explained by science" (292), the Citizen takes the offer of a different perspective as an insult to the struggle for Irish independence. Unable to tolerate anything but his own absolutist view of national purity, expressed in Brady's machismo and virility, the Citizen delves into an anti-Semitism that excludes Bloom from Irish nationhood:

- The memory of the dead, says the citizen taking up his pintglass and glaring at Bloom.
- Ay, ay, says Joe.
- You don't grasp my point, says Bloom. What I mean is...
- Sinn Fein!* says the citizen. *Sinn fein amhain!* The friends we love are by our side and the foes we hate before us. (293)

Sinn fein amhain, 'We ourselves alone,' Bloom cannot be a citizen in the Citizen's monoperspectival eye/I. Construing Irish nationhood as more than political independence and autonomy but along the parameters of racial purity and unambiguity, the one-eyed Citizen rejects all multiplicity of perspective and hybridity and can therefore not identify with Bloom, i.e., see him, from his, naturally different, perspective as a citizen like him. Challenged in their one-sided nationalist ideology by the hybridity Bloom both advocates and embodies as an Irish-Jew, the conversation on Irish nationhood erupts into open anti-semitism. Bloom's multiperspectivalism makes him conspicuous to the group: "is he a jew or a gentile or a holy Roman or a swaddler or what the hell is he?" (323). Indeed, Bloom's Jewishness turns him into

an ambiguous, hybrid parallax figure. Depending on the perspective, Bloom is and is not Jewish: with a gentile mother, Bloom is technically not a Jew. He does not eat kosher, has been baptized (twice!), and is uncircumcised. Nevertheless, Bloom, whose father was Jewish, identifies, although not unequivocally, as a Jew, follows Jewish customs as when he kisses the hall-door (727) and sees himself as in some way separate from Irish Catholics and their traditions. Comically, however, although observing Jewish customs by kissing the (mezuzah-less) hall-door, Bloom confuses the mezuzah – a small box containing a parchment of scripture at Jewish front doors which it is customary to kiss upon entering – with the “tephelim” (361), indicating his hybridity as both Jewish, and aware of Jewish customs, and non-Jewish, non-observant. As Slote remarks, Bloom’s “(social, religious, national) identity is not fixed and unequivocal but rather inhabits a *range*” (Slote, “Joyce’s Nietzschean Ethics” 83), giving him the quality of an Everyman. However, while Bloom views himself as Irish and even connects this Irishness with his Jewishness, a notion corroborated later on as John Wyse asks “why can’t a jew love his country like the next fellow?” (323) and Martin Cunningham, also fashioning a connection between the Jews and the Irish, adds “Well, they’re still waiting for their redeemer [...] For that matter, so are we” (323), the Citizen and his fellow national and racial purists cannot contain hybridity and reject Bloom as “Half and half... A fellow that’s neither fish nor flesh” (307). Unable to perform shifts of perspective, to them Bloom’s status as a hybrid everyman only appears as a noman, the stereotypical figure of the wandering jew they want to exclude from their mono-vision of Irish purity. Like the Homeric Cyclops to whom Odysseus, ‘Son of Zeus,’ becomes ‘Nobody,’ the Citizen is blinded by his ideology of purity and fails to perceive the secularly divine unfixity of the human *sui generis*. Hence, he invokes Saint Patrick who, according to him, “would want to land again at Ballykinlar and convert us [...] after allowing things like that to contaminate our shores” (324). What the Citizen, Slote notes, fails to see is that the Irish patron saint, like all men, is hybrid in that he “was himself an immigrant, of sorts, who contaminated by conversion” (Slote, “Joyce’s Nietzschean Ethics” 85). Similarly, the violence that erupts after Bloom’s seemingly blasphemous response to the Citizen’s antisemitism that “Christ was a jew like me” (327) shows his continued failure to apprehend an issue from multiple perspectives: not only is his outrage at Bloom’s supposed blasphemy ironic

in light of the repeated blasphemies committed in the chapter by the Irish nationalist, showing how this cyclops cannot view himself from the outside, but strictly speaking Christ *was* a Jew even though he is the God of Christians. Indeed, *from a certain perspective*, Jewish Bloom appears as a far better Christian than the Citizen. As Bloom quotes, yet another ocular metaphor, Mt 7:3-5, “Some people [...] can see the mote in others’ eyes but they can’t see the beam in their own” (312).

Multiperspectivism in *Ulysses* allows to see the world in its fullness and hybridity where a reliance on one single perspective as the Citizen embodies it can ultimately only produce sterile totalitarianism. Therefore, whereas the narrator’s I/eye can only perceive one point, Irish national purity, the style of the chapter itself assumes a multiperspectival attitude. Interspersed with parodies from the journalistic to sagas in the style of the Irish Literary Revival (McKenna 61), the pastiche-style of the chapter provides ironic, multiperspectival commentary on the scene that appears to serve to counteract the Citizen’s blindness through a plurality of styles. Notably, however, although divergent in tone and perspective, these parodies nevertheless center on the same thing as they, from within the restricted first person narration, shed light on the events of ‘Cyclops’ from different angles. The novel thereby parallaxes through styles as it provides a more complete picture.

The necessity of stereoscopic vision in *Ulysses* becomes especially apparent in the bipartite structure of ‘Nausicaa.’ Different points of view reveal different aspects of character. Only by superimposing all of them “can we hope to glimpse the satisfaction of truth” (Chinitz 432) just like a star can only be located with the data of multiple perspectives. ‘Nausicaa’ can be seen as exemplary for the one-eyed vision that fragments meaning in *Ulysses*. Yet, all perspectives on Bloom taken together provide a full view of the man as the information from multiple perspectives is superimposed into a synthesis. Kiczek notes that “[f]rom Gerty MacDowell’s perspective, we learn that, unlike in ‘Cyclops’, Bloom’s foreignness and homelessness are no traits to be mocked or treated with scorn” (Kiczek 298), but even desirable. Hence, a parallaxic shift not only happens within ‘Nausicaa’ in the shift from Gerty’s to Bloom’s perspective, but also from ‘Cyclops’ to ‘Nausicaa,’ shedding different lights on Bloom’s status as Every/Noman. Additionally, the parallax in ‘Nausicaa’ gives insight into

female and male sexual desire, Joyce thus painting a picture of sexuality as a whole. While single perspectives taken alone obscure and fragment meaning, a depth perception forms a complete and meaningful picture.

The shifting perspectives produced by the novel's parallaxes are as isolating and fragmenting as they are ultimately reintegrative and unifying. As Kiczek notes, Stephen and Bloom's experience as "singular bodies in space [...] reminds both characters of their loneliness" (Kiczek 294). Before the reconciliation through parallax in 'Ithaca,' the movement of the celestial bodies through space is perceived as arbitrary and meaningless, a "[w]aste of time. Gasballs spinning about, crossing each other, passing. Same old dingdong always" (159). Aimlessly "drifting around" (159), these Dubliners experience modernity as disordered, fragmented and meaningless. This sense of incompleteness tied to the movement of celestial bodies and the characters of *Ulysses* also becomes apparent in "Stephen's recurrent, unconscious omission of the stars from his recitations of Yeats" (Chinitz 432), David Chinitz notes. Only as parallax is finally understood and employed in 'Ithaca' can these wandering stars become meaningful. Parallaxic synthesis thereby not only allows for a recognition of a shared humanity without giving up on individuality, it also informs the novel's style and structure. Parallax not only helps Stephen and Bloom recognize themselves but also serves to focus the novel itself on the kaleidoscope of human life in modernity that forms the basis of its aesthetic.

The parallax theme culminates in its full reintegrative potential in 'Ithaca.' As Heusel notes, "the chief points of view, Stephen's and Bloom's, are subtly superimposed until the urination scene in which literal convergence of their creations, water, foreshadows a fuller vision of life" (Heusel 135). This makes the communal urination of Stephen and Bloom, now Stephen Stoom, "the climax of not only the parallax sequence but the novel" (Heusel 138). In the astronomical catechism of 'Ithaca,' Stephen and Bloom are realized as celestial phenomena, their paths "discussed as if they were trajectories of two heavenly bodies coming into conjunction for some universal purpose" (Heusel 140–41). Opening with the question "What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning?" (618), *Ulysses* establishes the discussion of their relationship from an astronomical point of view set up throughout the novel. Bloom and Stephen gazing at the stars and becoming heavenly bodies themselves, 'Ithaca'

resolves their estrangement on a cosmic scale. These “two bodies [...] no longer seem suspended in parallactic drift” (Kiczek 299) but are about to be superimposed in depth perception. Through the artistic vision, these parallels are merged like railroad tracks meeting at the horizon. Nevertheless, the union and meaning presented in the parallactic shift of ‘Ithaca’ is not wholly relative to the observer. Rather, parallactic measurement, i.e., the novel’s continuous illumination of life from multiple perspectives, reveals a common center that, although subject to constant renegotiation, is nevertheless perceived as a real property of the world art establishes.

Parallactic superimposition unites the wandering stars of Stephen and Bloom (Heusel 143). What shall happen in ‘Ithaca’ is already discussed in Ball’s *Story of the Heavens*: “the astonishing spectacle of pairs of suns in mutual revolution” (Ball 435). Stephen and Bloom appear as these “two stars close together, and in motion round their common centre of gravity” (Ball 435), their shared humanity in which they shall appear to be superimposed parallactically, one blending into the other. This “eclipse of character” (Kiczek 300) can be seen to gradually proceed throughout ‘Ithaca.’ Thus, Stephen and Bloom turn into “Blephen” and “Stoom” (635), their names superimposed into a convergent image of unity. As noted before, their temperaments of “[t]he scientific” and “[t]he artistic” (635) combine, as does the theological and scientific of the chapter’s astronomical catechist style, to form a new vision of completeness, unity and order. Blephen Stoom is the stereoscopic vision in which the “two complementary types, the intellectual and the instinctive” (Gilbert 58) halves conjoin into one, more sustainable, state of being.

The concept of parallax is ultimately a consoling, reintegrative one. Under the “heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit” (651), Bloom, a character read as a celestial body reading the stars, “finally grasps parallax” (Kiczek 300). Meditating on “parallax or parallactic drift” (651), Bloom understands that the stars are not a symbol of loneliness and meaninglessness, but that the “so-called fixed stars [are] in reality evermoving” (651). The stars, and therefore, following the astronomical metaphor, Stephen and Bloom, are not “dead shells” (159), unrelated and arbitrary, but share a center of gravity. Bloom, who throughout the novel experiments with parallax, finally applies the method to his own life. In order to understand this

revelation of order better, it becomes necessary to consider Ball's 'double star,' "a concept essential to the theory of ecliptic movements and one closely associated with parallax and eclipse" (Kiczek 296). As Kiczek explains, the 'double star' or 'binary star' in Ball "is the phenomenon created when two stars – not necessarily anywhere near each other in space – appear close enough to another (due to parallax) as to seem to be one star" (Kiczek 296). Ball remarks that this double star effect is not "only accidental," an effect of subjective perception, but "that in many of the double stars the components are so related that they revolve around each other" (Ball 435). These double stars, two stars appearing as one as Stephen and Bloom merge into Stephen Stoom, are not "fixed stars" (651) but "in mutual revolution" (Ball 435), sharing a gravitational center. In 'Ithaca,' the movements of the stars of Stephen and Bloom, sometimes close and sometimes far apart, "spinning about, crossing each other, passing" (159), achieve this double star effect. The movements of the stars are not without purpose, arbitrary and meaningless, but share a common center of gravity. As in the answer to the catechist the earth and the moon are "approaching perigee" (651), their closest proximity, so are Stephen and Bloom "following trajectories that will converge" (Heusel 141). Thus, Stephen meeting Bloom is not meaningless, an arbitrary, random event, but written into the stars, following a clear, meaningful order. Though its perception may be relative to the observer's position, the mergence in superimposition is not an accident but reveals a depth in the universe. Deborah Warner thus remarks that "what you see depends on where you stand. Thus parallax was both a symbol of absolute knowledge and a metaphor for subjectivity" (Warner 863). As in *Ulysses'* aesthetic as a whole, the accidental and trivial the artistic vision engages with becomes meaningful in and through artistic engagement. Through the multiplicity of subjective experiences Joyce's art establishes, its perspectives, styles, sciences and pseudo-sciences, an omni-science becomes, if not ultimately humanly attainable, perceivable.

The parallax sequence reaches its culmination in the communal urination scene of 'Ithaca' which is, in the all-embracing, unifying function of stereoscopy in *Ulysses*, not only the climax of the parallax theme but arguably the climactic moment all of *Ulysses* drives towards. Through parallax, "father and son appear as one body" (Kiczek 300). Stephen and Bloom "contemplating the other in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhisnothis fellowfaces"

(655) are seen as one body. Meeting “in perfect unity” (Kiczek 300), Stephen and Bloom together create two streams of water, “which simulate the two visual axes and the axes of the two geographical courses of travel,” forming one axis, “the mutual inclination of two lines meeting in an angle” (Heusel 143). In the urination scene, the novel’s two major points of view are superimposed. The stereoscopic picture thus established creates a synthesis of opposites. Artistic and scientific, idealist and realist, Jewish Irishman and Irish-Greek, “Stephen (the thesis) and Bloom (the antithesis)” (Heusel 142) unite into a vision of completeness. The double star effect is reached and provides a glimpse of depth and meaning in modernity. This revelation is central to the hopeful tone of *Ulysses* since it states that despite the deficiencies of modernity, its fragmentation and disorder, a star, truth or meaning can be located and, even more importantly, proven to be existent, not relative, through synthesizing effort. Thus, meaning, though obscured in the confusions of the modern world, is nevertheless attainable.

As if to affirm the significance of this stellar event, a “celestial sign [is] by both simultaneously observed” (656). A meteor, like the epiphanic star that rose at the birth of the Redeemer, crosses the firmament. Chinitz notes that here, the narrative “reverts to the mystical view despite its earlier tendencies to the contrary” (Chinitz 439), merging the two and instilling the meeting with a higher purpose. In fact, remembering Stephen’s lecture in ‘Scylla and Charybdis,’ another important, God-like person’s birth was marked by a star. Shakespeare was born under a

star, a daystar, a fire-drake [that] rose at his birth. It shone by day in the heavens alone, brighter than Venus in the night, and by night it shone over delta in Cassiopeia, the recumbent constellation which is the signature of his initial among the stars. His eyes watched it, lowly on the horizon, eastward of the bear[...]. (201)

Notably, the urination scene is framed by references to exactly these stars, alluding “to Cassiopeia three pages before the urination scene and [...] to Vega, the lyre, Berenice, and Leo immediately afterward” (Heusel 141). A star not only marked the birth of Shakespeare, the “reconciling ideal” (Kellogg 158) of the artist, but “a star appeared at the birth of each of Joyce’s heroes” (Heusel 142). Stars of “similar origin” to the one that appeared for the birth of

Shakespeare also appeared “about the period of the birth of Leopold Bloom” and “about the period of the birth of Stephen Dedalus” (653). The “celestial sign” (656) that is seen now marks a rebirth, the birth of the now complete man, the union of the opposite characters Stephen and Bloom that can now go forth reborn, reintegrated and reformed. Through parallax, the strands of Hellenism and Hebraism, *Odyssey* and mass, metempsychosis and consubstantiality are conjoined, seen together to form a full vision of life, an ideal artist and man like Shakespeare.⁴⁴

The communion of Stephen and Bloom and their now reconciled state is signaled by their merging into a double star. However, Kiczek remarks that “[t]he ‘double star’ that occurs in ‘Ithaca’ is [...] only the relative product of perspective” (Kiczek 301), an illusion created by parallax. From any other angle, Kiczek argues, the double star ‘Blephen’ would not appear. Therefore, Kiczek comments, a “careful reader who has established parallactic views of the text” must “reject a sentimental reading of their relationship” (Kiczek 301–02) as a product of parallax. However, *Ulysses* leaving behind realist practices, no division between subjective and objective reality appears possible in the novel (Schotz 491). Although a product of the artistic vision, it is this very special angle the novel’s staging of parallax produces that allows for a recognition of this double star of human interrelation. Like the astronomical double star, this meaningful order is perceived as very much real even though its perception only becomes possible through Joyce’s artistic negotiation, i.e., the multiperspectival point of view *Ulysses* creates. Indeed, “Bloom and Stephen are separate bodies” (Kiczek 302). Nevertheless, the union of Stephen and Bloom is quite literally in the text, denoted in its very letters when their names converge. Stephen and Bloom are not identical. However, like Ball’s double star, they share a “common centre of gravity” (Ball 435). As noted in the chapter on consubstantiality, Bloom and Stephen are certainly not the same persons. In fact, they are quite opposite. Yet, like binary stars they have “components [...] so related that they revolve around each other” (Ball 435). Stephen and Bloom’s consubstantiality in their humanity is exactly that shared component. Thus, though decentered, there is still something, a gravitational pull, that joins them. Movement in space is not aimless nor meaningless. Parallactic drift and the double star effect, subtly established in a

⁴⁴ See also Littmann and Schweighauser’s “Astronomical Allusions, Their Meaning and Purpose, in *Ulysses*” for a more detailed reading of the novel’s interconnection between Shakespeare, the paternity theme and astronomical parallax.

synthesis of antithetical, subjective experience, instill meaning into the seemingly meaningless wanderings of the Dubliners. Like celestial bodies, they turn out to be not fixed stars, lonely, but in revolution around a common center of gravity that makes communion possible, “likely, if not certain” (Kiczek 302). While man in *Ulysses* is decentered, the novel’s use of parallax shows that this decentering does not ultimately mean the final loss of any center or meaning. As Kiczek notes, “[a]n understanding of parallax forces us to accept our own drift and to shatter the illusion of our ‘centerness’” (Kiczek 303). Nevertheless, *Ulysses* is not absurd. Although not perceptible to the individual, there still is a gravitational center and thus meaning, hope and truth to be found through the artist’s synthesizing efforts.

In the metaphor of stereoscopic vision, opposing and fragmentary views synthesize into a complete whole. Throughout the novel, a “constant focus on sight imagery” (Heusel 143) stresses the necessity of a synthesis of multiple perspectives to acquire the full picture in depth perception. Both Bloom and Stephen are similarly preoccupied with perception, the question of seeing and being seen. Thus, one of the first things we learn about Bloom is how he wonders what he looks like from the perspective of his cat (53), the animal that also finds repeated mention in the parallax climax of ‘Ithaca’ (646; 651). Later, helping a blind boy cross the street, Bloom again wonders about “the relativity of the visible to the viewer and the relativity of reality both to the mode of perception and to the particular perceiver” (Schotz 494) as he tries to imagine how the blind perceive the world. Finally, in Molly Bloom’s infinitely parallax stream of consciousness, the binary star “constellation of ‘Stoom’ replaces Boylan” (Kiczek 302). Unlike Boylan, Molly sees that Bloom has the ability to “[s]ee ourselves as others see us” (161). His ability to imagine different points of view, i.e., identify with the other and think about a topic from multiple perspectives, even though he is, all too human, never not also biased, makes parallax Bloom’s problem term and ultimately reconciles him with his wife, his past and his future. As Molly remembers that she liked Bloom because she “saw he understood or felt what a woman is” (731), knowledge of parallax is shown to be a reintegrative power in contrast to fragmenting one-sightedness.

Parallaxing *Ulysses*: Superimposing Hellenism and Hebraism into the Aesthetic of Nietzsche's Good European

Parallax not only conjoins the courses of Stephen and Bloom (and Molly) but, serving as a structuring principle for the whole novel, binds together the entirety of *Ulysses*. As the third, concluding term of the syllogism of problem terms Sawyer finds in *Ulysses*, the synthesizing principle of parallax superimposes metempsychosis and Odyssey, consubstantiality and mass, into the parallactic structure that lies at the basis of the Ulyssean modernist aesthetic and the tradition it gives rise to. Metempsychosis, consubstantiality, and parallax hence do not organize the novel independently from one another but form an intricate pattern of superimpositions. Metempsychosis and consubstantiality, as already hinted at, represent the cultural forces of Hellenism and Hebraism which to Joyce, who was deeply familiar with the philosophies of Matthew Arnold and Friedrich Nietzsche, underlie Western culture. Although he was not per se an orthodox Arnoldian or Nietzschean, Neil Davison shows Joyce “knew both Arnold’s and Nietzsche’s version of Hebraic-Hellenistic discourse” and “recognized Nietzsche’s ideas about Hellenic freedom and Hebraic law as the more useful key in the discernment of Western (de)evolution” (Davison 106). Nietzschean thought was very much en vogue in Joyce’s time. As Davison points out, Joyce’s *Ulysses* can be seen to subscribe to Nietzsche’s racialist framework in its interpretation of modernity.⁴⁵ Furthermore, as will be shown, Joyce’s ‘solution’ to the problem of the modern condition closely orients itself on, yet does not fully replicate, Nietzsche’s thoughts about the future of Europe and the Übermensch. Through parallactic superimposition, *Ulysses* conjoins the separate Hellenic and Hebraic strands of both the novel and Joyce’s view of modern culture, forming the fertile aesthetic of Nietzsche’s “good European,” a synthesis-like “amalgamation of nations” in which Hellenism and Hebraism are brought together into a new, free and fertile Europeanism, the “strongest possible European mixed race” (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* 175). In mix and synthesis, for Nietzsche and Joyce alike, lies the potential for strength, freedom and a new future.

⁴⁵Nietzsche’s arguments hinges on stereotypes of racial identity which Joyce’s generation would have taken for granted. For a more detailed discussion of the discourse Joyce and Nietzsche reference in their writing see also Davison’s chapter on “Cunning and Exile – Greeks and Jews” in *James Joyce, Ulysses, and the Construction of Jewish Identity*.

According to Nietzsche, Hellenism and Hebraism describe antagonistic forces in Western culture. While Nietzsche associates Hellenism with the zenith of Western culture, unbounded and unrestrained in its productive force, Hebraism subverted the Greek “will to power” and replaced it with a self-hating “*slave morality*” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 153). Christianity, rather than standing on its own right the way the Church presented it, is understood by Nietzsche as but the last instantiation of Hebraic mentality, a notion which fed into Joyce’s criticism of the Catholic Church. As Davison notes, through this notion of continuity, Joyce “recognized this ‘Hebraism’ as the impulse he himself was excoriating in the ‘puritanical’ attitude of Irish Catholicism” (Davison 109). In pitting a Hellenic freedom and affirmation of life against the self-repression and guilt of Hebraism, Nietzsche is highly critical of the latter. However, Nietzsche also sees the sublimation of animal impulses as necessary, since without it Greek culture would have imploded in an uncontrollable Dionysian excessiveness, and sees Judaism as the primary example of “a mass will to power” (Davison 121) that created a new *Weltanschauung*. As Walter Kaufmann argues, although Nietzsche rejects the Judaic law as representing the first step toward the inhibition of the individual will,

[he] is hoping to initiate a ‘revaluation’ comparable to that [which he] ascribed to the Jews... they are his model. Of course, he does not agree with the values he ascribes to them; but the whole book [*Beyond Good and Evil*] represents a model to rise beyond simpleminded agreement and disagreement. (Kaufmann, qtd. in Davison 121)

Modern Jewry to Nietzsche thus describes paradoxically both the antithesis to Hebraic slave-morality and the (positive) permutation of Hebraism in modernity. As Davison remarks, both Nietzsche and Joyce with him view, from within the racialized binary opposition of Hellenism and Hebraism, the modern Jew in a resolutely positive light:

What Europe owes to the Jews? Many things both good and bad, but mainly one thing that is both best and worst: the grand style in morality, the horror and majesty of infinite demands, infinite meanings, the whole romanticism and sublimity of the morally questionable – and, consequently, precisely the most appealing, insidious, and exceptional aspect of those plays of colors and seductions to life in whose afterglow the

sky of our present European culture, its evening sky, glows away – perhaps goes away.

This is why, among the spectators and philosophers, artists like us regard the Jews with – gratitude. (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 141)

Nietzsche's stereotypical notion of a "Jewish nature" affords modern Jewry a privileged and highly positive position. For Nietzsche, modern Jews are hardened by centuries of prosecution and discrimination and, nation-less, the antithesis to a rejected nationalism. Nietzsche treats modern Jews as a model, praising them for "their energy and higher intelligence, their capital in will and spirit accumulated from generation to generation in a long school of suffering" which "must come to preponderate to a degree calculated to arouse envy and hatred" (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* 175). Instead of depicting "Jewish nature" as racially corrupt, Nietzsche's stereotype of the Jew is one of "most subtle outwitting and exploitation of misfortune and chance," adaptability, "steadfastness" and "heroism" (Nietzsche, *Dawn* 151), in short a pronounced will to life formed by the pressures of history. They are, as Sander Gilman interprets the positive stereotype of "Nietzsche's Jew," "the antithesis of all decadence, self-sufficient and incorruptible" (Gilman 206).⁴⁶

Nietzsche's thoughts about ancient and modern Jewry are integral to his thinking about the future "new man" which, as will be shown, also informs the aesthetic Joyce devises for *Ulysses*. To Nietzsche, a fertile and freer future through which the individual can strive toward a will to power lies in the formation of a multicultural aristocracy, a transnational synthesis of the best qualities of all European cultures into what he calls the "good Europeans" (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* 332), which includes the Jew as an integral part. As Davison summarizes, "[b]ecause their estrangement had transformed the Jews into such a willful people, Nietzsche believed they must assimilate with other Europeans so as to create a superior 'new ruling caste for Europe'" (Davison 116). In this pan-European mixture of opposites lies the potential for "perfect self-knowledge and perfect self-transcendence" (Heller 11).

This Nietzschean notion of Hellenism, Hebraism and the good European as a mixed model of the future deeply informs the aesthetic of *Ulysses* and the function of parallax as that

⁴⁶ As Davison argues, Bloom is modeled on Nietzsche's view on Hebraism and modern Jewry. Plagued by self-doubts and repressions, Bloom is also a pragmatic and jovial Everyman, highly adaptable and cunning (Davison 120–21).

which synthesizes opposites into a fuller whole, a European *Weltanschauung*, in the novel. To Joyce, as for Nietzsche, one-sided notions of purity and unambiguity are abhorrent since only “[w]here races are mixed, there is the source of great cultures” (Nietzsche qtd. in Kaufmann 303). The aesthetic interplay of the Ulyssean problem terms forms can thus be seen as closely resembling that of the good European. As Joyce argued against Oliver Gogarty, the blueprint for Buck Mulligan who discusses a similar opinion with Stephen in the novel, Ireland does not need “Hellenizing” but “Europeanizing” (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 118). *Ulysses* accordingly advocates “a continental [...] manner of life” (619) in its aestheticization of Nietzschean European mixture as the prescribed art for Irish culture and modernity in general. Indeed, throughout the novel, Irishness is discussed in reference to the two poles of the Greeks and the Hebrews. The Irish are repeatedly envisioned as either the Hebrews of their time, enslaved by a foreign king that denounces their religion – and themselves paralyzed in their strife for freedom by that Church that is at the end of the Hebraic continuum – or as the Greeks, artistic and life-affirming but conquered and subjugated by imperialists. In Stephen, the “ancient Greek” (4) and the non-Jewish Jew Leopold Bloom, *Ulysses* presents two foils for the forces of Hebraism and Hellenism in its two main characters. However, as will be seen further on, Joyce does not compose a simple allegory. Instead, the two appear always in parallax as “[j]ewgreek” and “greekjew” (474). Thus, the Hebrew Bloom with his physicality and concern with the Greek problem words parallax and metempsychosis and metamorphosis can be seen as Hellenic whereas the at first glance Hellenic Dedalus is a guilt-ridden and self-hating “jew jesuit” (208), one “who ascetically question[s] life and nourish[es] [his] apocalyptic visions” (Davison 108) as Heine describes the Jew.

The Ulyssean metempsychotic method and the pattern of the *Odyssey* which derives from it in *Ulysses* thus represent the Hellenic strand in the novel’s good Europeanism. In a Nietzschean eternal recurrence, Greek myth returns in Dublin modernity. Past and present interpenetrating one another in a dynamic of permanence and flux, modernity is instilled with meaning and continuity yet not reduced to epigonism. Instead, in concurrence with the paternity-theme of the *Odyssey/Ulysses*, the novel claims a history for itself which it self-creates through art in a modernist and Hellenically Promethean gesture. *Ulysses* thus depicts “history

repeating itself with a difference” (609). However, while this Hellenic self-assertion forms one half of Joyce’s good European aesthetic, ‘James Overman,’ as which Joyce would sign letters, portrays an overman that subtly but markedly refrains from the glorified selfishness and pitilessness of Nietzsche. As John Turner remarks, Joyce’s *Ulysses* rejects Odysseus’s violence, instead recasting the triumph of its Ulysses as a decidedly non-violent and self-controlled one. Bloom’s inaction is marked as significant through the absence of a violent action that would further parallel the *Odyssey*. Bloom thereby, Turner notes, becomes a “*differential* repetition of Ulysses” (J. Turner 43). Rather than fully Hellenizing *Ulysses* through its use of myth, the modern hero is given Hebraic self-control as he “slays the suitors by qualities of transcendence” (J. Turner 44), thereby representing an equally heroic and meaningful myth that, however, imposes an ethic and aesthetic of the new, mixed man. Rewriting and writing himself into a mythological continuum and continuity, Joyce makes Hellenism, and myth, useful for modernity since, as Turner shows, “[a] difference is required if the past is actually to repeat with the force it once had” (J. Turner 54).

Similarly, the Hebraism of the problem term consubstantiality and its Mass is both utilized and reformed so as to allow for the revelation of Joyce’s Nietzschean Europeanism. Clearly, if metempsychosis and *Odyssey* form the novel’s Hellenic side, consubstantiality and mass represent the Hebraism of *Ulysses*. In its secularization of the theological and liturgical and the resulting shift of focus toward the human and this-worldly, however, *Ulysses* expunges the slave-morality from the Hebraism, and its Catholic continuation, both Nietzsche and Joyce reject as paralyzing yet retains its “will to power.” Taking up the position of God in the trinitarian aesthetic *Ulysses* develops, Joyce asserts himself as the Nietzschean overman artist. While *Ulysses* provides the liturgy as its Hebraic structure and organizes itself around theological terms from consubstantiality and incarnation to transubstantiation, the novel empties these concepts of their religious meaning and directs them toward humanity. The slavish mentality also evident in Stephen’s romantic artist-as-priest aesthetic is renounced in favor of willful self-assertion and -creation in *Ulysses*. Hence, as Michael O’Shea remarks, the majority of liturgical allusions in the novel “are not introduced as ‘literary metaphor’ by a distanced narrator but rather as ‘common metaphor’ in characters’ thoughts and conversations” (O’Shea

129). Thus, O'Shea notes, "most characters mentioning the liturgy in *Ulysses* refer not to its sacred mysteries but rather to its surface trappings," wherefore "[t]he Mass [...] in the novel [...] can be considered a special lingua franca – a source of symbols which are used for common humor, metaphor, and other conventions of conversation" (O'Shea 130). Thereby, the liturgy in *Ulysses* appears in and expresses not the theological but common human life as the sacred becomes mundane, a rhetoric means of communication among everyday people about everyday matters. However, while O'Shea raises these points to argue *against* a mass structure in *Ulysses*, within the parallaxic Europeanism presented here his counterarguments in fact *support* a reading of the mass as structurally significant. It is the pronounced secularization and trivialization of Catholicism through which *Ulysses* eliminates "the influence of Judaism on European culture in the forms of Christianity and post-Christian humanitarianism" (Muller qtd. in Davison 125) and redirects the Hebraic will to power from a self-negating submission to God to a self-assertion of that which is all too human. Hence, there is no contradiction between "identifying the Mass symbolism in theological or mystical terms" and their "superficial" (O'Shea 129–30) use in the novel. Instead, in its markedly worldly negotiation of consubstantiality, the Joyce of *Ulysses* raises himself to the status of a God-like superman. The novel retains and makes useful Hebraism in its secularized use of theological language and thereby establishes the human as 'divine,' thereby proposing its new, no longer slavish, aesthetic of modernism. However, while Nietzsche's superman-ethos is described by disdain for the masses, the aesthetic of *Ulysses*' 'new man' is more nuanced and communal in that, while advocating for willful self-assertion, the artist's and art's elitist conceptualization as God is for *Ulysses* dependent on his making himself common, consubstantial, with the Everyman. The superman, European aesthetic *Ulysses* assumes for itself is far from pitiless but inherently hinges on an engagement with the human. By employing and secularizing mass and consubstantiality, *Ulysses* salvages the Hebraism of the modern Jew so integral to the good European as it rejects Christian morality in favor of a celebration of human life.

Parallax, the novel's third problem term, thus serves as a structural metaphor in which the Hellenism and Hebraism that result from metempsychosis and consubstantiality are synthesized into an aesthetic informed by what Nietzsche refers to as the 'good European.'

Hence, while exhibiting Hellenic and Hebraic strands to be superimposed, Hellenism and Hebraism are at the same time always already in superimposition in *Ulysses*. The novel both develops and describes its aesthetic of europeanizing and itself already embodies it since these strands in the novel are never fully divorced but always already in parallax. Thus, while for instance the *Kyrie* in 'Aeolus' furthers the novel's Hebraic mass structure, the reference itself in the chapter "illustrates not a theological point, but rather a linguistic one, and a Hellenic one at that" (O'Shea 131). Parallaxing Hebraism and Hellenism, the aesthetic *Ulysses* generates from and in its interplay of its three problem terms is resolutely 'European,' mixed. While the *Kyrie* of 'Aeolus' thus establishes a Hebraism in the novel's mass structure, it appears in the Hellenic context of a discussion of Greek language, the two fields held in parallax: "- The Greek! he [MacHugh] said again. *Kyrios!* Shining word! The vowels the Semite and Saxon know not. *Kyrie!* The radiance of the intellect. I ought to profess Greek, the language of the mind. *Kyrie eleison!*" (128)

Similarly, at the level of character, Hellenism and Hebraism are always at once both separately perceivable and intermixed in the novel's europeanized aesthetic. Hence, whereas Stephen Dedalus is, already by his name, the only really Greek one in the novel, marked as 'Hellenic,' he is also the "fearful Jesuit" (3) who negates the bodily, is plagued by guilt and self-denial that paralyzes his artistic ability and is most overtly concerned with the novel's Hebraic problem term; and whereas Bloom is, with his background as a descendant of Jews, characterized as the stereotype of the 'wandering jew' and, as Davison argues, embodies both the positive aspects Nietzsche and Joyce see in modern Jewry as well as being plagued by the self-doubts that come with his Hebraic style, he is also life-affirming, experimental and a character who always thinks along Greek concepts. Bloom is at once clearly 'Jewish' and not Jewish at all, just as Stephen parallaxes between Hellenism and Hebraism. While thus their parallaxic conjoinment in 'Ithaca' into Blephen Stoom appears to amount to the reconciliation of extremes into Nietzsche's new man, these extremes are not analogies but are themselves held up in the mixed paradigms of jewgreek and greekjew. Due to the parallaxic style of characterization and structure of the novel, they are always both 'self' and 'other.' In the novel's multiperspectivalism, this inherent ambivalence is never fully resolved. While the meeting of

the artistic and the pragmatic in Blephen Stoom may announce the coming new man, and certainly signals both Stephen's coming potential creativity as matured artist and the possibility of Bloom coming to terms with his familial troubles, in the novel's aesthetic of flux this seeming resolution never turns into a fixed state yet also cannot be said to be relativistic or random. Although they become Blephen Stoom as they see each other in "theirhisnothis fellowfaces" (655), they are nevertheless individuals going separate, if connected, ways. Keeping in the metaphor of depth perception *Ulysses* mobilizes for this synthesis of Hebraism and Hellenism, Stephen Bloom as mixed characters are not flat analogies for these cultural forces but *deep* characters always in parallax.

In this vein, just as Stephen (the artist) and Bloom (the pragmatic Everyman) are superimposed into a more viable lifestyle, each, to simplify it, getting from the other what they themselves lack, the aesthetic of *Ulysses* as a whole bespeaks a parallaxic structure that superimposes the Hellenic and the Hebraic of its systems of order metempsychosis/*Odyssey* and consubstantiality/mass into the conclusion, parallax, of good Europeanism. The novel favoring the mixed and multiperspectival, metempsychosis and consubstantiality are never purely Hellenic or Hebraic as well but exhibit resemblances to one another. Both metempsychosis and consubstantiality are explored in the novel through parallaxic slippages that not only converge terminologies within their own contexts through which a new, fuller vision is generated – Bloom mixes up metempsychosis and metamorphosis and Stephen literally merges a number of theological terms into his "contrasmagnificandjewbangtentiality" (38) – but also ultimately project metempsychosis and consubstantiality onto one another. Both sides of the novel are equally concerned with themes of paternity, history, the artistic and ideal and the pragmatically real and shed different yet comparable light on these issues. Advocating a "two-eyed" aesthetic perspective, *Ulysses* sets Hebraism and Hellenism into a dialogue that establishes both their singularity and artistically induced convergence. Behind the Hebraic aesthetic of consubstantiation can thus also be seen the Hellenic principle of transmigration: can the artist's consubstantiality with the Everyman and Noman, his 'incarnation' as 'divine' creator and human, not also be understood as a kind of metempsychosis? And does the transubstantiation in human substance in which the artist's activity changes the world into art not remind one of the

metamorphoses *Ulysses* links to that metempsychosis, just as the *Odyssey*'s theme of paternity and atonement resurfaces in the artist as Father being consubstantial with his work and activity? In parallax, the separate strands meet. It is in their interplay, thesis and antithesis conjoined into synthesis, i.e., for example the fusion of Stephen and Bloom which *Ulysses* assumes for its own aesthetic, that the novel's problem term act in unison in the creation of the stereoscopic, whole good European. Through their superimposition, Hebraism and Hellenism, consubstantiality and metempsychosis meeting in parallax, the aesthetic of the good European appears in and as the novel. Thereby, *Ulysses* develops its paradigmatic aesthetic, a Ulyssean paradigm that shall become productive for later novels in the Ulyssean tradition, from its three problem terms through which modernity becomes accessible to literature. As Leopold Bloom, champion of parallax, remarks: "See? It all works out" (147).

5. Conclusion: The Jew's Harp

As already hinted at, the synthesis of opposing forces, Hellenism and Hebraism, into a stable and productive unity of meaningful Europeanism that is the aesthetic project of *Ulysses* is emblemized in the “jew’s harp” (657) Stephen, now on his way to become a true artist, is equipped with at the end of the novel. In this instrument, the Ulyssean aesthetic, reproduced and transformed in the Ulyssean Tradition, can be seen. The “double vibration of a jew’s harp” (657, emphasis mine) runs through the parallaxic *Ulysses*. As Tindall notes, the (sound of the) jew’s harp can be read to represent Stephen’s newfound fused artistry and, the harp a classic symbol of (Irish) art, the aesthetic *Ulysses* discovers for itself: “[a] Jew’s harp could be an Irish poet created by a Jew” (Tindall 223). The jew’s harp and the double vibration it produces can be seen to point toward the parallaxic fusion of Hellenism and Hebraism into an aesthetic that shall be suitable to deal with modernity the Ulyssean problem terms put forward: in the jew’s harp, Bloom’s Jewishness and the Apollonian harp of Stephen’s Hellenism come together. Just as Stephen must synthesize within him the jew’s Hebraism and the harp’s Hellenism to become a complete artist who shall “write something in ten years” (239) – just like Joyce began writing *Ulysses* ten years after 1904 – *Ulysses* assumes a double vibration of Hellenism and Hebraism as instrumental to dealing with modernity. The jew’s harp as an image for the new, parallaxic aesthetic Stephen, and Joyce, attain in *Ulysses* not only informs *Ulysses* but appears in *Infinite Jest* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* as well. That this symbolic instrument and the unity and new life it implies appears in the novel as “a function of narrative caprice and enframing” (Slote, “Questioning Technology in ‘Ithaca’”), as Slote frames it, does not diminish its emblematic significance. On the contrary, while Slote, skeptical of the reintegration *Ulysses* suggests in the momentary figure of Blephen Stoom and the more fertile jew’s harp as “a kind of symbol that unites Bloom, a Jew, with Stephen, an Irishman” (Slote, “Questioning Technology in ‘Ithaca’”) Stephen is equipped with as they go separate ways – critically the “son, reared by the father, [...] not stay[ing] with father but go[ing] off to rear a son” (Tindall 223) – notes that “Stephen does not have a Jew’s harp” (Slote, “Questioning Technology in ‘Ithaca’”) but that this instrument is wholly a figment of the narrator’s description, therefore questioning “the idea of a

union of Bloom and Stephen”, and the parallax Europeanism that comes with it, as “purely an effect of narrative contrivance,” (Slote, “Questioning Technology in ‘Ithaca’”) this seems in fact to be completely in line with the aesthetic Joyce devises in *Ulysses*. As could be seen, it is art which instills the modern world with meaning in *Ulysses*. The meaningful union which *Ulysses* proposes in its con/transubstantiating, metempsychotic, parallax aesthetic is decidedly one created through art, and therefore, its emblem is the same. Rather than dismissing the jew’s harp as nonexistent and thus a kind of red herring that cannot signify a reparative fusion, it is in the status of the jew’s harp and the reintegrative meaning it signifies as product of artistic framing that Joyce’s *Ulysses* attains the modernist aesthetic it should become the paradigm of. Through artistic contrivance, the modernist art of *Ulysses* establishes a synthesis that resolves the disorder and alienation of modernity into meaning. Based in the problem terms of metempsychosis, consubstantiality and parallax and the patterns that result from these methods, *Ulysses* forms a modernist, Europeanized aesthetic that gives rise to a Ulyssean Tradition of novels which in turn dialogically interrogate this aesthetic triad in order to develop their own aesthetic from, with, and through *Ulysses*.

**II. THOMAS PYNCHON'S *GRAVITY'S*
*RAINBOW***

1. Introduction: The Joyce Harp Lost (?)

Joyce's novel ends with Stephen Dedalus leaving the scene to the "double reverberation of retreating feet on the heavenborn earth, the double vibration of a jew's harp in the resonant lane" (657). Reformed and at last hopefully creative, he is at last equipped with the instruments to deal with the modern world. For the paradigmatically modernist *Ulysses* of the Ulyssean Tradition the jew's harp, as could be shown, can be seen to serve as an emblem for the state of the New European Bloom and Stephen attain and thus for the reintegrative patterns and methods of the Ulyssean Tradition, the new way of writing the epic in modernity Joyce 'discovers' in his 1922 novel. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the harp, albeit this time a blues harp rather than a jew's harp, too, serves its traditional role as a symbol of art as it comes to emblemize the novel's aesthetic project. It is thus tellingly in Boston, arguably the most Irish of American cities and therefore the most suitable replacement for Joyce's Dublin for the American epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition,⁴⁷ that early on in the novel – and, though it is but a hallucinated prolepsis, the chronologically earliest narrated scene of Slothrop's life in the novel – a harp, and with it symbolically Joyce's modernism, is flushed down the toilet. Pynchon appears to reserve little reverence for the Joycean systems of order. As Slothrop thus dives behind his harmonica into the Roseland Ballroom's toilet, the futile attempt to conserve Joyce's aesthetic still driven by the same racist, sexually repressed and death-driven anality Pynchon criticizes Joyce for implicitly reproducing, he journeys into a poignantly vulgar and ridiculous underworld of all-legibility. On his headfirst escape to keep his "virgin asshole" (65) and his modern, centered and meaningful selfhood intact, he "read[s]" (65) the excrements that line the pipes of the toilet as he phantasmagorically travels to the Atlantic. At first sight, the implicit criticism is apparent: Following Joyce's instrument is a journey into paranoid all-connectedness. To those who follow Joyce even "shit" can be arranged into legible "patterns thick with meaning" (65). Joyce's "harp has fallen" (63). Its aesthetic is no longer easily applicable to a post-modern world. Pynchon's postmodernism apparently rejects the paradigmatic modernism of *Ulysses* as a perverted and

⁴⁷ As will be seen, Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, too, concerns itself with "the general theory of oral lyres" (30) and uses Boston as a setting.

untenable paranoid illusion of meaningful unity that ultimately only serves to stabilize an oppressive status-quo. Pynchon thus stages a renunciation of Joyce's modernist modes in *Gravity's Rainbow* as he flushes them, like feces, down the toilet. *Gravity's Rainbow* is an iconoclastic rebellion against established (literary) authority that performatively relegates Joyce's aesthetics to the shit heaps of (literary) history.

Postmodernism, which fully entered the literary stage in the US 1960s, is a rebellion against all authority, not only against the by then established authority of the modernist avant-garde for which Joyce stands like no other, but also, e.g., the socio-political authority of the Nixon administration and American society's totalizing view of normalcy in general. Postmodernity, as the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard observes, saw the widespread loss of modernity's "grand narratives" (Lyotard 60). As Lyotard notes,

Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.

[...] The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language [...].

Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside? (Lyotard xxiv–xxv)

Increasingly skeptical toward the totalizing nature of structures of knowledge that posit a master idea, divine providence, (late) capitalism's free markets, Marxist dialectics, and the perfected emancipation of the enlightened subject, which legitimates a society through its anticipated completion, the postmodern condition, and its postmodernist literature, began to question the concept of transcendent and universal truth. Exchanging modernity's mistrusted metanarratives of ultimately all-pervading, centralizing order for an experience of chaotic and disordered localized small narrative, postmodernity was faced with the complexities of subjectivity and identity which became increasingly unstable and decentered. This mistrust toward history's and the subject's perfectibility also becomes apparent in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Indeed, as Brian McHale remarks,

we might go so far as to say, not that postmodern theory depends on Pynchon's fiction for exemplification, but that, without Pynchon's fiction, there might never have been

such a pressing need to develop a theory of literary postmodernism in the first place.

(McHale, "Pynchon's Postmodernism" 97)

The quintessential novel of an age of growing skepticism toward totalizing essentialism and universalism, *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts the postmodern subject as a decentered and unstable interface of oftentimes contradictory narratives. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon recasts Joyce's imposition of a coherence-providing metanarrative through mythological continuity which in *Ulysses* ends in the atonement of the fragmentary self into a meaningfully centered and stable subject as an indefinitely frustrated grail-quest that asymptotically approaches yet never reaches a center discovered to be wholly absent. *Gravity's Rainbow* transforms the traditional quest for meaning and stable selfhood of Joyce's *Odyssey* into a frustrated anti-quest. In a parody of the Ulyssean Homeric parallelism, *Gravity's Rainbow* parallels the medieval quest of Parzival. However, although driven by the same nostalgia for a coherent, meaningful whole that drives the likes of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, *Gravity's Rainbow's* grail-questers never fully reach the Nostos of their "holy Center" (508). Instead, they can only ever approach an ever-receding unity. Neither the novel's narrative nor its narration can reach a satisfying conclusion. Instead, both the novel's main-quester Slothrop and the novel itself scatter into small, provisional and localized narratives that, plural and internally contradictory, resist totalization into an authoritative, all-coherent whole. *Gravity's Rainbow* thereby updates the pattern of mythological parallelisms of the Ulyssean Tradition with its own, postmodern and pluralistic, plastic myth.

Not only the subject but history's progress toward a transcendent ideal in general is questioned in Pynchon's postmodernity. The human catastrophe of WWII and the Holocaust and the constant threat of a Cold War about to go nuclear and result in total annihilation had raised mistrust toward the notions of historical and technological progress toward a transcendent telos in Pynchon's Post-War generation. In light of recent and current events, for example the increasingly obvious senselessness of the Vietnam War, the authority of a historicism that views history as marching toward a transcendent goal had become more and more questionable. In *Metahistory* for instance, the American philosopher of history Hayden White rejected the view that historiography is fully objective and unaffected by anything. Instead of a record of 'what

really happened,' White argued that historiography is, like fiction, a narrative act, a subjective ordering and selecting of historical data without inherent claim to transcendent and universal truth (White 276).

As Linda Hutcheon shows, postmodernism in its function as "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 50) for which Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* serves as a prime example subscribes to this view of history and reality as a product of narrative, linguistically *created* rather than *reported*. Postmodernist texts subvert history's claim to authority and totality by metafictionally laying open the narrative strategies of historiography. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, history thus appears as a paranoid illusion. Historical continuity and teleology, its transcendent and objective meaning, is product of an ordering mechanism only distinguished from pathological paranoia by being "officially defined" (638) as the 'true' narrative. Transcendence and teleology are not only not simply 'out there' but products of an obsessive, yet necessary, narrativization of time. The totality they imply is shown to legitimate and lead into oppression, victimization and ultimately total annihilation. Thus, rather than replacing one linearly progressing history with another, e.g., the modernist gyres of Yeats or Joyce's vicodan cycles, *Gravity's Rainbow* opens up time to the momentary, provisional and untotalizable structures.

Pynchon's response to *Ulysses* thus rejects Joyce's modernist novel's mass structure as yet another totalizing and death-driven, paranoid chronometry. *Gravity's Rainbow* therefore reinterprets the linear and teleological structure of the Ulyssean mass into the unhierarchical circularity of the Catholic liturgical calendar. This section's second chapter thus investigates the ways in which *Gravity's Rainbow's* correspondences to the mandalic Church year establish a temporality of the simultaneously circular and uniquely singular moment as a life-affirming countermodel to the West's death-driven rationalizations of time into a uniform history. Viewing such rational disenchantments of the contingencies of one's being in time, among which he also counts Joyce's model, as secularized remnants of a Puritan binary distinction between Election and Preterition and the routinization of time into a history that points toward a predetermined transcendence which results from it, Pynchon plots the momentary, circular and transitional against the totalizing terminal linearity of historical progress. The novel resists totalization into a single coherent interpretation of chronology. Instead, in calling for an

embrace of the non-signified, preterite, plural, probable yet not certain, a life in the moment that exceeds abstract rationalization, *Gravity's Rainbow* offers a liberation from the victimizing demands of historical systematization. Opposing postmodernity's routinized "technological sublime" (Jameson 36) of transcendence through historical progress toward a predetermined, all-controlling goal he identifies with the stillness of Death with the unknowable sublimity of the Catholic liturgical calendar, Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* develops an aesthetic of 'recycling': postmodernist irony and metafiction point toward a liberating, eternally provisional and egalitarian way of approaching the world and history.

Gravity's Rainbow's interpretative egalitarianism also becomes apparent in the novel's treatment of visuality. The last larger chapter on *Gravity's Rainbow* will concern itself with the novel's reinterpretation of the Joycean pattern of parallax superimposition into a mode of superposition of patterns into ever-changing, mutable moirés. Whereas *Ulysses* organizes its multitude of perspectives and styles through stereoscopy, a visual metaphor for the synthesis of divergent positions into a coherent, "three-dimensional" whole, *Gravity's Rainbow* resolves its perspectivism in a distinct depthlessness. Joyce's stereoscopic multiperspectivalism is framed as a paranoid mode of vision, a totalization of meaning that posits a transcendent structure behind apparent fragmentation that Pynchon views as ultimately untenable and life-denying. The parallax superimpositions of *Ulysses* therefore turn into moirés, interference patterns that, too, are product of an overlaying of patterns which, however, do not provide insight into a deeper, underlying structure, in Pynchon's novel. Nevertheless, despite the ultimate incompleteness of all interpretation, *Gravity's Rainbow* does not indulge in fatalist unconnectedness. Instead, the novel advocates a mode of creative paranoia that, in its awareness of the always-mediated and local nature of all interpretation, offers the potential for insight into, resistance to and liberation from modernism's totalizing vision. While Joyce's parallax assumes a totality of meaning as a result of the synthesis of its multiple perspectives, aesthetically resulting in the multinationalism of the good European, Pynchon's use of the moiré counters the Joycean paranoid vision by advocating a postnational and radically democratic aesthetic of in-betweenness, meaning being understood as product of an always-unfinished and localized interpretative dynamic between the novel's interweaving moirés. Hence, whereas Ulyssean synthesis affords an act of untangling

and combining various perspectives into a utopian all-coherence, *Gravity's Rainbow* champions a self-conscious moiréification of its text. Interpretation thereby remains always local and provisional, self-contradictory and thus open to restructurings. The novel thereby rejects the Joycean aesthetic of the Author-God and 'good European' in favor of a pluralistic understanding of meaning as a creation of the observing entity constantly renegotiating the novel's localized moirés. Drawing on the findings of modern physics, *Gravity's Rainbow* understands meaning and presence as product of the observer, the absolutism of the astronomical parallax Joyce employs in *Ulysses* being countered with the always relative self-positioning *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts in its counter-metaphor of red-shifting. The modernist interpretative utopia of the possibility of all information being pared down to one absolute interpretation through synthesis is replaced by a vision of constantly changing, shimmering moirés set in democratic dialogue without ever putting an end to that movement.

At the same time, the postmodernism Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* so embodies is not merely an anti-modernism but also a post-modernist expansion, continuation, and intensification of modernism. While this may go for all of postmodernism, the primary aesthetic of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is not only such a simultaneous antagonistic reaction to and continuation of modernism, its distinctive, yet so far uncommented on, revisions of the conventionally understood as modernist patterns *Ulysses* provides places it in a Ulyssean Tradition. Hence, just as *Ulysses* can be considered the paradigmatically modernist novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* is the paradigmatically postmodernist novel, a postmodernist counterpart to *Ulysses* in a manner that actually goes deeper than usually appreciated. *Gravity's Rainbow* (widely) develops its full-fledged postmodernist aesthetic – broached by Pynchon in his earlier two novels and short stories but only fully attained in *Gravity's Rainbow* – not only in the same way Joyce only fully attains high modernism in the *Ulysses* that should become its paradigm but, importantly, by way of *Ulysses*: *Gravity's Rainbow* places itself in a Ulyssean Tradition which it dialogically renegotiates in its development of a new aesthetic suitable to the postmodern condition. *Gravity's Rainbow* reflects on and transforms Joyce's patterns in a complex dialogue with the Ulyssean Tradition, writing it forth into postmodernist literature. That is not to say postmodernism, or even Pynchon's postmodernism (in *Gravity's Rainbow*), is solely the

(by)product of and influenced by modernism, or *Ulysses*. However, while for example *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn* are integral intertexts to Pynchon's project in *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Ulysses* gains the additional function of providing *Gravity's Rainbow* with a tradition it inscribes itself into through and against which it develops its new aesthetic. As Roger Sale, the brother of Pynchon's best friend Kirkpatrick Sale, husband of Pynchon's editor Faith Sale, recalls, "[w]hen [Pynchon] finally finished *Gravity's Rainbow* [...], he sat on the floor of Kirkpatrick's apartment rearranging the galleys of the book so that it would have the same number of pages as James Joyce's *Ulysses*." (Appelo).⁴⁸ Neither the harp nor the Ulyssean Tradition it emblemizes are altogether lost and left behind in *Gravity's Rainbow* but are instead subject of transformation. Despite Pynchon's criticism of Joyce's 1922 novel, the Ulyssean Tradition that springs from it appears still worth recovery in 1973. The harp Slothrop loses in Boston reappears toward the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*, transformed, after the long journey through the novel, to suit the postmodern human condition of a decentered Slothrop who will, both like and very much unlike the artist Stephen Dedalus, become the instrumentalist for a new generation.⁴⁹ The harp recovered, emblemizing once again the revised aesthetics *Gravity's Rainbow* generates from its dialogue with the Ulyssean patterns of *Odyssey*, mass, and parallax superimposition, Pynchon's 1970s dialogic response to *Ulysses* locates *Gravity's Rainbow* not outside its Tradition but firmly within it.

⁴⁸ The article's author, Tim Appelo, confirmed in a private conversation that Roger Sale is the source of this otherwise unpublished anecdote. Pynchon is a famously reclusive author of whose life and writing process is little known. True or not, these categories, in particular with regard to Pynchon's fictions of creative paranoia, being more or less irrelevant anyway, the anecdote highlights the close yet often brushed over connection between *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ulysses*.

⁴⁹ Apart from his considerable skill on the ukulele, kazoo and mouth harp, Slothrop is not an artist at all. However, while in *Ulysses*, art (i.e., *Ulysses*) and author are imbued with a restorative power, in *Gravity's Rainbow* this power is relegated to everyday slobs like Slothrop – us.

2. A “German Odyssey”: *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* Anti-Parzival

Gravity’s Rainbow’s postmodernist response to the Ulyssean Tradition embarks its characters on a “German Odyssey” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 486) through the seemingly anarchic, mythological space of the Zone, the novel largely set in a post-WWII Germany before its division into sectors controlled by the allies. True to its historical setting, *Gravity’s Rainbow* ‘Germanizes’ Joyce’s Irish Odyssey of *Ulysses* by replacing the modernist novel’s mythical parallelism to the searching travels of Odysseus with the grail quest of the German medieval romance *Parzival*. Germany, however, does not merely serve as a historical setting for the novel nor is the novel’s critique directed solely against Nazism per se. While the atrocities of the Third Reich and its philosophical backing in technological rationalism and an ideal of purity and transcendence are thematized, the novel expands its critique in depicting “[its] *time’s assembly*” (738) in WWII, drawing an unbroken continuity between past racist and colonialist ideology, German totalitarianism, and the novel’s present USA under Richard Nixon. The novel thus speaks of an unending War to which the end of WWII is not a disruption but another step toward a global order: the America of the novel’s present, a United States increasingly hostile and oppressive against critical voices of an emerging counterculture, involved in the arms race of the Cold War that is putting the world at the brink of a nuclear holocaust, and waging for the last 18 years a more and more unpopular war in Vietnam.

The German setting and mythology of *Gravity’s Rainbow* point toward *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* larger theme of Western culture’s totalizing tendencies, modernist systems of order such as mythical parallelisms, employed to contain and give shape to the contingency of postmodern experience, controlling and victimizing the individual. As David Cowart remarks, “[f]or Pynchon, the West defines itself by a negative capability of ultimately German provenance: a secular dream of total knowledge and power coexists uneasily with a vision of transcendence” (Cowart, “Germany and German Culture in the Works of Thomas Pynchon” 306). *Gravity’s Rainbow* thus rejects the exemplarily German yet trans-German modernist urge toward totalizing order as “structures favoring death” (167), pointing out the utter impossibility

of any system to comprehensively contain and control a reality experienced as plural and heterogeneous. The System, the novel's evasive chief antagonist stylized as 'They,' thus coopts the novel's nostalgic questers longing for essential, meaningful selfhood into their own victimization. The search for transcendence produces a closed system that inevitably must increase the entropy it seeks to decrease. The "drive toward myth" (579) that motivates the novel's characters into searching for an all-determining structure, the plot, in its double-meaning of conspiracy and narrative principle of cause and effect, thus makes these characters, and the reader with them, subjects of an oppressive System. Science and myth, Lyotardian "grand narratives" (Lyotard 38) the postmodern novel rejects, are thus equally representations of totalizing tendencies that attempt to reduce contingency to the radical cause of a transcendent, mythological originality the novel views as illusory and support an inhumane System of control and repression.

Paralleling *Parzival's* grail quest, the traditional quest pattern ending in the subject's stabilization and reintegration into society, *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodern grail becomes the German V-2 Rocket. The grail, which promises access to transcendent insight into the self, is thus parodically debased into the technological, rather than religious, sublimity of an indefinitely reproducible plastic object, the Imipolex G Schwarzgerät, built into a weapon of mass destruction. *Gravity's Rainbow's* grail(s) and grail-questers prove incapable of sustaining the meaningful import afforded to the mythical grail. Generalizing *Parzival's* grail quest, the grail knight's definitory negligence and continual search for an evading grail, *Gravity's Rainbow* presents transcendent meaning as an illusion ultimately unattainable and always deferred. It is object of an asymptotic approach that, in the novel's trope of the unavailability of final insight, can never fully bridge the gap between world and language. *Gravity's Rainbow's* characters have no mythological original unity to return to as the quest's Nostos, still reached in *Ulysses*, is replaced by a globalized not-at-homeness. *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts the postmodern self as radically decentered, a product of discursive roles such as the varying names and costumes of Tyrone Slothrop without an essential core of meaning. Thus frustrating the quest pattern into an anti-quest of indefinite approach, *Gravity's Rainbow* resists totalizing structures. Its decentered aesthetics of 'in-betweenness' do not allow the novel's dissolution to

be transformed into a conclusive resolution. Fading out, the novel subverts the quest pattern's binarity shown to lead into oppression and death.

However, far from depicting a nihilistic meaninglessness, this frustration contains the potential for political and literary liberation. Despite ironically subverting modernist totalization in its rejection of the mythical method, *Gravity's Rainbow* nevertheless follows, by modifying, the Ulyssean Tradition in its 'Germanic,' postmodern actualization of myth. Offering an alternative, plural and partialized myth of disintegration, rather than (Cartesian) integration, for the postmodern individual, *Gravity's Rainbow's* frustration of mythical parallelisms disrupts the System's totalitarianism evident in fascist Germany and the novel's present USA. *Gravity's Rainbow*, the "story about Tyrone Slothrop" (738), provides a new, countercultural myth to oppose the oppressive function of narrativizing reality in its postmodern reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition.

Hansel and Gretel, and Modernist Mythical Systems of Control in *Gravity's Rainbow*

Gravity's Rainbow's rejection of a Joycean mythical method as totalizing – and thereby both oppressive and ultimately leading into death – and unable to accurately represent experience already becomes apparent early in the novel when the Nazi captain and former colonialist Weissmann/Blicero engages in a sadistic power-play referred to as the "Oven-game" (102). Blicero, next to the – possibly nonexistent – They or Firm that seek to control the entirety of the world of the novel, an unpersonal, international Establishment behind the War manipulating the novel's characters in a self-serving drive toward order embodied in the assemblage of the V-2, emblem of the rational, ordered technology of death the novel rejects and views as symbolic of postmodernity, serves as "one of the novel's most apparent villains" (Sears 109) and most clear-cut representative of the oppressive, modernist System (Russell 254). His code name as the Nazi officer responsible for said V-2 rocket, Dominus Blicero, referring to both control and domination (through technology) and Death personified, Weissmann seeks to transcend, "to break out – to leave this cycle of infection and death" (724) that is contemporaneity through a

techno-mythological recourse to ancient times.⁵⁰ A clear parody of modernist mythological parallelisms, the Oven-game Blicero plays out with the young conscripts/slaves Katje and Gottfried at his rocket launching site enacts Grimm's fairytale "Hansel and Gretel." The "Northern and ancient form, one they all know and are comfortable with" functions as "their preserving routine [...] against the War, the absolute rule of chance" (96). Thus plays out a sadomasochistic, deeply serious game between Katje and her "[b]rother in play, in slavery" (95) Gottfried, Gretel and Hansel destined for the "Kinderofen" (94), and captain Blicero as the fairytale's witch "in highest drag" (95) who subjects his "children out of old Märchen" (94) to mental and physical, sexually depraved humiliation and torture.

Notably, this imposed "form" employed against the "pitiable contingency" (96) of modern existence closely echoes T.S. Eliot's praise of *Ulysses*' use of myth as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape [...] to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot, "*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*" 177).⁵¹ Faced with a "paper impotence" (97), the modernist experience of a language insufficient to make sense of an increasingly fragmented and contingent world, like Joyce, Blicero "trusts, perhaps only, by now, in the form, this out of all Märchen and Sagen" (97), controlling and preserving himself against "accident" (97) through the enactment of archetypal figures. This archetypal structure behind Blicero's Oven-game also becomes apparent in the typically Pynchonian capitalization of the terms 'Oven' and 'Witch,' such terms thereby referencing the stable, transhistorical figures of the fairytale rather than merely their spontaneous, individual enactment in the game. Practiced, in a Teutonic version, by the novel's chief representative of totalitarianism (and the fittingly named "System" (228) or Them), the modernist urge toward order and control through "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (Eliot, "*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*" 177) gains a sinister, oppressive and destructive dimension in *Gravity's*

⁵⁰ Even though some critics read Blicero as a "prophet who seeks to transcend a dull, rationalized world" (Moore 76), going so far as to posit him as a spokesperson for Pynchon's own postmodernist project, the character's function as, even on the most basic level, the novel's main Nazi disqualifies Blicero from providing a positive foil. As will be shown, the novel's postmodernism is far from constituting a nihilism that would relativize Nazi atrocities, actively positioning itself against totalitarianism.

⁵¹ The reference to Eliot, repeated in *Gravity's Rainbow*'s employment of the Parsifal legend and the motif of a (post)modernist wasteland contained in the novel's Zone is exemplary for the Ulyssean Tradition's reference to a paradigmatic, traditional *Ulysses* emerging from modernist readings attached to the text, readings which, in their drive, substantially originate in Eliot's critique.

Rainbow's postmodernist response to *Ulysses*. The Oven-game, evoking associations with the ovens of Nazi-Germany's concentration camps, displays the fatal dangers *Gravity's Rainbow* sees as inherent in (modernist) system-building impulses. Control through ordered form is thereby depicted as a perversion of nature that leads into organized death. The manipulation of mythical parallels as a "preserving routine" (96) is more important than the self's preservation. Blicero, who knows that Katje/Gretel "must push the Witch into the Oven intended for Gottfried" (96), like Gottfried himself, who succumbs to his own destruction in voluntarily playing his part and entering the Rocket as Oven, willingly accepts annihilation in exchange for a grasp on reality, "something real" (754). Notably, this reality can only be experienced in the sadomasochistic play of "the straps and whips leathern, real in his hands which still feel" (97). Not only are modernist systems of order associated with the sexually and morally degraded, they lead into genocidal totalitarianism.⁵²

This rejection of modernist order through myth, exemplified in the novel's Hansel and Gretel reference, as oppressive and destructive also becomes apparent in the transformation Grimm's tale undergoes in *Gravity's Rainbow*'s postmodernist retelling. As Yves-Marie Léonet remarks, the use of Hansel and Gretel in *Gravity's Rainbow* "emphasizes the fundamental change that has occurred in human history" (Léonet 43). Thus, while the original tale highlights the concepts of freedom and a providence guarding children, the 'Hansel and Gretel' of *Gravity's Rainbow* becomes a mark of complete domination and "the improvidence of children" (99). Zofia Kolbuszewska thus notes that the fairytale "about escaping control and surviving is cynically used by a system which seeks global control and is infatuated with death" (Kolbuszewska 116). The fairytale parallelism thus provides its players a closed system to permanently reside in, sheltered from the unpredictability of the world, rather than "a stage to pass through in the process of individuation" (Kolbuszewska 116). Hansel and Gretel's faith in providence, a faith which, as Molly Hite shows, has become replaced with the secular narrative

⁵² *Gravity's Rainbow*'s use of non-normative sexual behavior as repulsive and to be rejected, a stand-in for the oppressive 'perversion' of nature that is totalitarianism is, particularly in light of the novel's embrace of the non-typical and freakish, surprisingly conservative and borders the reactionary. Using non-normative sexual behavior to negatively connote modernist methods, linking both to German totalitarianism and the Shoa, *Gravity's Rainbow*'s conservative treatment of sexuality is at odds with its otherwise progressive and pluralistic tenor. At the same time, it is not sado-masochism itself which Pynchon attacks. In fact, the self-aware, playful enactment of such binaries can also be seen as an instance of the 'creative paranoia' Pynchon's novel proposes.

of technological progress, *Gravity's Rainbow* describing a “metamorphosis of theology into post-Newtonian metaphysics” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 106), no longer serves as a provisional step toward individuation but becomes an end in itself, the form as an overarching system seeking to control, and thereby neutralize, contingency permanently. Robbed of individual agency, *Gravity's Rainbow's* Hansel and Gretel lack the support of each other that characterizes the children of the fairytale. Thus, Katje departs without thought of Gottfried nor does Gottfried, who “styles himself a passive observer” (102), react as he “watches her slip her bonds and go” (102). The preserving routine supersedes agency and interpersonal connection. On the contrary, Gottfried, within the Oven-game, “feels *taken*, at true ease” (103), enjoying the “stifling” (103) of Blicero’s archetypal domination.

The fairytale as a means of exerting control also becomes apparent in the novel’s depiction of Zwölfkinder, a German “children’s resort” (419) Blicero uses to control the rocket-technician Pökler. The order Blicero’s mythical “game-variations” (424) provide is thus presented as inducing submission, the “gift of Daedalus” allowing refuge from “the inconveniences of caring” (428). Notably, while Pökler’s “gift of Daedalus” clearly points toward his rationalized “engineering skill” (428) employed against the disorder of experience, a reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* within a Ulyssean context allows for also viewing this gift as the gift of Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, Weissman, whose “cruelty” (428) said gift could also specify, using the Ulyssean mythical method against Pökler. Ultimately, both myth and technology, like Pointsman’s – another master controller of the novel – behaviorist research, related as a labyrinth at which center the Nobel Prize as minotaur awaits (142), serve to build labyrinths of control between the individual and its experience, representing equivalent structures to control one’s environment.

The narrator thus comments on Zwölfkinder that

[i]n a corporate State, a place must be made for innocence, and its many uses. In developing an official version of innocence, the culture of childhood has proven invaluable. Games, fairy-tales, legends from history, all the paraphernalia of make-

believe can be adapted and even embodied in a physical place, such as at Zwölfkinder.

(419)

As Luc Herman and Steven Weissenburger point out, Zwölfkinder appears as “an official site for the Nazi state to cultivate its citizens’ racist ideology as well as a belief in their innocence for the nation’s genocidal crimes” (Herman and Weissenburger 116), a ritual meant to extend the state’s citizens’ productivity for technology and enterprise. Thus, while “[f]rom behind the decaying mythical statues, sentenced children shouted to each other” (430), order through myth both obfuscating and leading into the real horrors of the Nazi regime, Weissman’s fairytale schemes allow Pökler “a dream of a gentle Zwölfkindern that was also Nordhausen, a city of elves producing toy moon-rockets” (431). As Kolbuszewska remarks, “the liberating effect of fairy tales connected with their partaking in the collective unconscious [...] is replaced in Zwölfkinder by the captivating property of representation and simulation” (Kolbuszewska 116). Inhabiting “fairyland” (423), Pökler’s own “drive toward myth” (579), a need to be led by a text, coopts him into a ready submission to the Oven-state of Blicero.

At Zwölfkinder, where models of Hansel, Gretel, and the witch reappear among the “Wheel, myths, jungle animals, clowns” and other “paraphernalia of make-believe” (419), Weissmann stages yearly meetings between his subordinate rocket scientist Pökler and Pökler’s daughter, Ilse, another of the novel’s lost children linked to Gottfried, “the slender boy who flickered across her path” (429), through a chain of doublings (de Zwaan 161), in order to keep him under control. Narrative order serves as a tool of control. Hence, Pökler is induced to submit to Blicero’s demands through Ilse, “his movie-child” (398) whom he only experiences as “the moving image of a daughter” (422), each visit at Zwölfkinder providing a frame of a metaphorical film consisting of possibly numerous distinct Ilses, “leaving it to him to build the illusion of a single child” (422) that allows Pökler to continue his work for Weissmann. Film, the technology Pökler uses to control reality when working on the rocket’s trajectory, “the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement” (407), and fairytales force Pökler into submission. Narrating reality by mythologizing, or disneyfying it at Zwölfkinder, aptly summarized as “a kind of Nazi Disneyland” (Morgan 206), appears as a tool to submit the individual to domination and make it useable in Their war to further the progress of technology,

and thereby, order. Similarly, in an early, drugged sequence, a metempsychotic image of “ten thousand stiff humped under the snow in the Ardennes tak[ing] on the sunny Disneyfied look of numbered babies under white wool blankets, waiting to be sent to blessed parents in places like Newton Upper Falls” (70) invades Slothrop’s dream. Disneyfication of reality thus represents and motivates dead soldiers’ metempsychotic travel to a pre-born state reminiscent of the metempsychotic plane Byron the Bulb resides in before his “birth,” waiting to be reborn into American families, potentially to be again killed in the war. The modernist, disneyfied imagination of metempsychosis is thus used by the warmongering System to justify continued sacrifice of the underprivileged, the soldiers who had died in the Battle of the Bulge, the second deadliest battle in American history, being reborn into the idyll of a Massachusetts village. As in *Zwölfkinder*, Disney, fairytale and film, provides a means to submit the masses to the war effort. Notably, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s 1970s America, Richard Nixon as Richard M. Zhubb also foretells a concentration camp for rebelling “freaks” (755) situated “[r]ight next to Disneyland” (756), literally putting totalitarian state control into the vicinity of Disney, whose post-War success was founded on fairytale adaptations. As will be shown, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s critique is not directed solely against the German totalitarian state but, politically, against the “corporate State” (419) as represented in the formation of the novel’s global “*Rocket-cartel*” (566), the control and domination of the masses through structure and, literarily, modernism’s totalizing tendencies bespeaking the same urge toward order. German and Allied strategies of submitting the masses to the war effort are thereby represented as widely interchangeable, the novel drawing a continuity of domination and control between the two sides of the war. The novel thereby criticizes a disneyfied, fairy tale narrativization of reality, the captivating representation of history and the self as plot, as a means to burn up the nation’s innocents, indiscriminately on both the German and the Allied side, in the Ovens of war.

Notably, however, the closed system of “fairyland” (423) is described as decaying and paralyzed, the mythic form unable to sustain and fully represent life. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s *Zwölfkinder*, Hansel is “corroded” while a “plaster witch, wire mesh visible at her breasts and haunches” is static as her poke is held “in perpetual arrest” (398), foreshadowing the concluding moment of the novel, the V-2 statically poised above a 1970s movie theater. Following the

second law of thermodynamics, systems of order such as Blicero's mythical fairytale scheme, but also the discourse of science Pökler employs, help "to concentrate energy into one favored room of the Creation at the expense of everything else" (411). Myth allows for "continuity" (422), a "preserving routine [...] against [...] contingency" (96) just as it is used as a means to dominate the individual and further technological progress, and thereby order. However, as the decaying state of Zwölfkinder shows, such closed systems inevitably move toward entropy.⁵³

Hansel and Gretel in Britain

Gravity's Rainbow rejects Blicero's Oven-game, a clear example for the Joycean, modernist mythical method of controlling and making meaningful a contingent world, as totalitarian, leading into the oppression and domination Nazi Germany represents. However, the novel's critique is not directed against Nazism but in fact focuses on all totalizing structures in general, systems of order employed to contain and control experience. The theme of Hansel and Gretel thus reappears, having crossed the North Sea, in a children's pantomime attended by Roger Mexico and Jessica. When "the Germans drop[] a rocket just down the street from the theatre" (174), the play ends without giving Gretel the chance to push the witch into the oven. As Victoria de Zwaan notes, "for whatever reason, be it indifference, ignorance or weakness, Gretel cannot, in the world of *Gravity's Rainbow*, kill the wicked witch" (de Zwaan 162). The novel's version of the fairytale stresses a theme of control, exchanging the act of liberation with the inevitable paralysis of any closed, totalizing system. Instead, the pantomime's Gretel interrupts the performance for a didactic song romanticizing the war effort yet ending with a lesson "of children who are learning to die" (175). Death, not liberation, lies at the heart of the fairytale in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Thus, parallels to Hansel and Gretel are evoked by the all-controlling They as parents are "conditioned into deliberately dying in certain preferred ways [...] – leaving their children alone in the forest" (176). The meaning-providing mythical reincarnations of modernist literature thereby become less reassuring but a form of "[d]emonic possessions" (176) of conditioned parents as the staging of a fairytale teaches children not to live but conditions an

⁵³ The significance of entropy in *Gravity's Rainbow* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

impulse toward death into the dispensable masses. As Joseph Slade notes, “[t]he System achieves its dominance by programming through culture and upbringing” (Slade, “Religion, Psychology, Sex, and Love in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 186). The demon seeking to possess Jessica’s niece Penelope and *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s children, or, more correctly, the childlike masses in general, is thus Maxwell’s sorting demon, a metaphor for the System’s drive toward order that victimizes the individual for the sake of an elect few. The Oven-state, the overarching, order-providing routine that burns through its children, is not confined to Nazi Germany nor to the war but spans the globe as a system of order. The actual war, the novel remarks, does not end in peacetime but continues beyond it, furthering technological progress and order. The novel’s critique of totalitarianism thus expands from fascist Germany to the Allies and 1970s America, *Gravity’s Rainbow* depicting the ways in which culture and upbringing, the myth of order and transcendence, are employed to manipulate the individual into ready submission to the System.

Similarly, for Katje, the escape from Blicero’s influence does not mean an escape from mythically structured systems of control. Under the command of the Pavlovian Pointsman at the White Visitation research-institute, Katje still “belongs [...] cruelly to the Oven” (94). Thus, directly after her escape from the Nazis, Katje’s dress is commented on as being “a rich cocoa shade known as ‘n*****’ in this country” (94, asterisks used to not reproduce offensive language), highlighting the continuity of Blicero’s colonialism in Britain. While an escape from Blicero’s specific Oven-game may be possible, dehumanizing structures of control and domination persist in *Gravity’s Rainbow* just like “the oven is closed again, but for Katje it will never close” (94). As de Zwaan notes, “Katje [...] falls prey – though again ‘voluntarily’ – to another wicked witch of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Edward Pointsman” (de Zwaan 161). Pointsman, like the “brand-new military type, part salesman, part scientist” (401) Blicero, is a scientist with attributes of the businessman who constantly seeks to secure funding by exerting control over his superior Brigadier Pudding. Notably, as with Blicero’s domination of Pökler, the mythological parallelisms of Joyce’s modernism are integral to that control.

This inescapability of the System as an Oven to which the individual is sacrificed becomes apparent in the sadomasochistic “ritual” (231) which Pointsman makes Katje play out

with Pudding in order to secure his submission and thereby more funding for his behaviorist (human) experiments. A variation of the Oven-game continues at the White Visitation as Brigadier Pudding goes through a “satirical inversion of the Kabbalistic ascent to the Merkabah” (Weisenburger, *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* 144). Mythical structures are employed to exercise control, both ritualistic control over Pudding’s traumatic experience in WWI through the transposition of (senseless) “mass slaughter” into (meaning-providing) “myth” (234) and control over Pudding himself, and thereby secure funding for the progress of Pointsman’s studies. Pudding thus, Steven Weisenburger explains, passes through an inverted version of the Kabbalistic ascent to the throne of God, descending through seven anterooms which “invert[] the comparable motif in Kabbalistic lore” into a “private hell” (Weisenburger, *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* 145). Here, in a distant “cell” (231), the reference to the in fact seemingly spacious and decorated room highlighting Pudding’s own captivity in a narrative spun by Pointsman, controlling Katje awaits him as “Domina Nocturna ... shining mother and last love” (232), a witch of Grimm’s *Teutonic Mythology* (Weisenburger, *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* 146). Having “learned the proper style” (236) from Blicero, Katje as witch subjects Pudding to a (racist,) demeaning sadomasochistic power-play that ends with Pudding eating Katje’s feces and, later on, his death due to ecoli. The Oven-game thus continues with Katje serving as this variation’s witch, her body meanwhile becoming the “bitter intestinal Oven” (236), the capitalization of Oven here again underlining the archetypal quality of “this game” (235) and its coherence with the “Oven-game” (102), in which the “dark turd” (235) Pudding swallows is “baked” (236).

Like in the original Oven-game then, its “form” providing Blicero with a sheltering “magic” (97), Pudding sees a “sympathetic magic,” rather than Pointsman’s cruelty, in the “repetition high and low of some prevailing form” (232). Submission to the mythically patterned sadistic ritual thus fulfills Pudding’s symptomatic need “for something real” unattainable in the “paper illusions” (234), as in Blicero’s “paper impotence” (97), of (linguistic) contingency, just like Gottfried believes to feel “something real” (754) when he is put into the Rocket, Blicero’s Oven, at the end of the novel. A longing for “truth” (234), purity, and basic reality, i.e., a need for control over a contingent experience through structuring

efforts, conditions the adherence to the mythically scripted sadomasochistic games of *Gravity's Rainbow*, a need that, ironically, is used to control and victimize the seekers of patterns and meaning as much as it affords them an (illusory) control. As one can see, the proceedings at the White Visitation mirror the Nazi Oven-game with mythical forms being employed to control and transcend death, the rule of chance, and thereby impose a coherent meaning onto reality.

However, although Katje as Domina Nocturna serves as the game's female Dominus Blicero, the witch, domination and victimization are inescapable in *Gravity's Rainbow's* systems of order. Those who exercise control, as can be seen, are always ultimately themselves being controlled. Preceding Pudding's ritual, the novel's episode relates an incident surrounding the rats and mice in the facility's behaviorist laboratory. Watching rats in their mazes, Webley Silvernail observes that "this lab here is also a maze" (229) in which "behaviorists run these aisles of tables and consoles just like rats 'n' mice" (229), opening up the possibility that the controlling scientists are themselves subjects of control. Thus, as the animals break out into a song about how "Nothing's left in Pavlovia, But the maze and the game" (230), forming more intricate patterns until they take the generalized "shape of a single giant mouse" (230), systematic observation rids the individuals of their uniqueness. Silvernail joins the song's climax assuming the ambiguous pose of "arms up in a V" (230) which leaves the question: "Is Webley's V here for victory, or ssörrender?" (230), the freedom of the controller being caught into doubt as each system of control becomes inherently controlling itself. Such "rationalized forms of death" (230) prevail in *Gravity's Rainbow* as "[a]ll the animals, the plants, the minerals, even other kinds of men, are being broken and reassembled every day, to preserve an elite few, who are the loudest to theorize on freedom, but the least free of all" (230). Systems of order such as the cause and effect of behaviorist science or mythical parallelisms ultimately make the subject seeking control unfree. Similarly, while Pudding can seemingly experience "something real" (234) through Katje's domination and Katje exerts control over Pudding, servant and dominatrix are themselves dominated by Pointsman, who is himself controlled by his obsessive scientific interest, related in the mythical form of a labyrinth at the center of which awaits the Nobel Prize as Minotaur for Pointsman (142). The fact that such hierarchies of control extend indefinitely in the novel is exemplary for the novel's resistance to the

overarching, all-explaining structures of control its paranoid characters seek. Thus, Katje in the role of the dominatrix “wants a cigarette desperately, but her instructions are not to smoke” (233). The witch, controller, is thereby herself shown to be controlled by the outside force of Pointsman, the witch, “lust[ing] after [...] pretty children” (50) for his experiments, from which the “sympathetic magic” (232) Pudding is taken by truly emanates. Mythical Oven-games of control are thus not confined to the novel’s Nazis but are found on all sides of the war. As one can see, *Gravity’s Rainbow* depicts structures of mythological parallelisms as tools of control, subjugating the individual for the advantage of an “elite few” (230) driven toward total order and control.

Thus, both Blicero and Pointsman, one enthralled by “bookish symmetries” (101), the other equally a disciple of “the Book” (142), Pavlov’s teachings of the “symmetrical opposites” (144) of stimulus and response, appear as master organizers attempting to reduce experience to a totalizing structure. They employ mythical patterns to achieve their goals while ultimately being themselves victimized by these grand narratives. The two are thereby connected by the same drive toward a realm “beyond the zero” (84), Blicero’s return to the “*mythical regions*” of an “Ur-Heimat” (486), a transcendence intended to be reached through the firing of the quintuple zero rocket at the end of the novel in a fulfillment of the Hansel and Gretel pattern, and Pointsman’s behaviorist interest in the survival of Slothrop’s rocket-reflex through “a silent extinction beyond the zero” (85), promising the possibility of discovering a principle that may reduce and thereby control all reality to cause and effect. Both bespeak an urge to control chance with a symmetrical pattern that reduces all action to a singular Ur-cause. The oppression of pattern making is not confined to the novel’s Nazis but shows itself in a cosmopolitan, modernist “rage for order” (254). The mythical method of “look[ing] for some mechanism to make sense of [chaos]” (144) is thus portrayed as a perverse, dehumanizing tool of subjugation employed by representatives of a modernist System spanning all nations.

This also explains why characters like Blicero, and to some extent Pointsman, serve as what in a regular novel could be referred to as the novel’s villains. Strikingly, even though it normally does not shy away from including historical personnel, Pynchon’s WWII novel completely omits Adolf Hitler, instinctively the best candidate for an antagonist in *Gravity’s*

Rainbow's setting. However, while ostensibly about WWII, *Gravity's Rainbow* is far more concerned with, as McHale argues, deconditioning the reader from modernist reading practices it deems oppressive and totalizing (McHale, "Modernist Reading, Post-Modern Text: The Case of *Gravity's Rainbow*" 108).

Death by Structure

As Hite argues, all all-encompassing structures the novel provides and critiques are revealed as "structures favoring death" (167), the attempt to organize experience in a modernist "model of universal connectedness that would contain time in a narrative pattern" (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 20) being associated with totalitarianism and death. Such a zeroing in on a universally connective center is both ineffectual, the novel resisting any final resolution in the modernist sense, and destructive, systems of order being represented as vampires that suck the life out of their environment as is most clearly shown in the oppression surrounding the assembly of the V-2 rocket.

This tyranny of structures expands over the entire novel. Thus, e.g., the mystery of the connection between Slothrop's erections and the German V-2 rockets, one seemingly predicting, or summoning, the other, arguably the driving aspect of the novel's plot, motivates a variety of explanatory patterns. From science, most importantly behaviorism which, through repeated personifications of the Rocket's movement as 'behavior' (517) and simultaneous machinization of descriptions of human behavior, blends with other scientific approaches built on cause and effect such as rocketry, to séances and mysticism in general, the vast majority of human endeavor in the novel seems dedicated to the proposition that "*everything is connected*" (703) and can thereby be reduced, and thus controlled, to a unified system. Indeed, the homophony of science and séance is far from coincidental. Rather than juxtaposing the scientific and the mystic as distinct categories, *Gravity's Rainbow*, by directly following episodes of scientific discourse with séances and thus allowing for an overlap of their vocabulary, e.g., in both practices' shared need for a medium and a "control" (145), depicts apparently incommensurable yet interconnecting meaning systems as equivalent forms of the same "Control work" (238) of the System. Physics thereby become the novel's postmodernity's

metaphysics as Pointsman researches Slothrop's "Mystery Stimulus" (84) to prove the "stone determinacy of everything, of every *soul*" (84, emphasis mine) while Blicero seeks transcendence through secular technology invested with the mythical, an "engineered [...] symbolism" (750).

However, while universal patterns are presented as affording control over an alienating experience and individuals, such modernist systems are portrayed as on the one hand never wholly capable of containing all of reality, and, on the other hand, victimizing the pattern-maker seeking autonomy by ultimately, and inherently, controlling those caught up in the lure of closure and totality. As Hite shows, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, "[b]y unifying experience within a controlling vision, humanity has arrived at a model of universal coherence that makes freedom impossible and annihilation imminent" (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 98). Thus, while Blicero's Hansel and Gretel game is meant to contain the war in a modernist, mythical system, the prevalent paranoid view in *Gravity's Rainbow* that "*everything is connected*" (703) promising transcendence from the contingent and merely human, such systems in *Gravity's Rainbow* prove to control the seeming controller, diminishing characters' autonomy as they become more invested in their patterns. As could be shown, all attempts to escape from a controlling system only further solidify a character's un-freedom, the novel's controlling, "authoritative figures only confirm[ing] that there is a more comprehensive system controlling them" (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 121). The more comprehensive the system that is created, the less is left of the controller's autonomy, the system seeming, as in the recurrent personifications of the quasi-mythical Rocket, to gain an agency of its own.

Thus, Blicero, in the midst of his modernist, totalizing Oven-game, "doesn't even know the Witch, can't understand the hunger that defined him/her, is only [...] bewildered that it should coexist in the same body as himself" (98). The archetypal category of the upper-case Witch becomes, rather than a means of control, controlling itself, distinct from Blicero who performs and embodies her. The Witch as a transhistorical, comprehensive structure, a (fairly tale) plot Blicero imposes onto reality, dictates Blicero's behavior. Initially a means of controlling the world, Blicero's Oven-game appears to take on its own agency, the game driving the witch Blicero to "the kind of end it will bring him" (99), an annihilation of the self. As with

all systems throughout the novel,⁵⁴ Blicero's game betrays its creator in its very totality. As can be seen in the Nazi launching site at which much of the Oven-Game plays out being "as much target as launch site" (96), the rockets, the novel's primary symbol of man-made structures of control ultimately leading into domination and death, *Gravity's Rainbow's* systems always latently aim toward their own destruction, victimizing the pattern-maker in search for transcendence through order. Similarly, the Rocket itself, created from "a dream of flight" (159), leaving earth in a transcending escape from the title-giving, death-ensuring gravity, must become a weapon of mass-destruction. Death is thereby always latent in structures seeking transcendence through control.

Attempts to escape from Their war, and reverse entropy, thus invariably play into Their hands as Blicero's Tarot reveals his future in the US as part of Them: "If you're wondering where he's gone, look among the successful academics, the Presidential advisers, the token intellectuals who sit on boards of directors. He is almost surely there. Look high, not low. His future card, the card of what will come, is The World" (749). The Hansel and Gretel game, culminating in the sacrifice of Gottfried as Hansel in the Rocket-Oven, thus fails to open Blicero a way to transcendence through myth, instead situating his future in "The World" (749), not the transcendental. Indeed, *Gravity's Rainbow* mirrors *Ulysses'* parting sight of Leopold Bloom, equanimously resolving his conjugal troubles as he fetally curls into Molly Bloom, a modern Odysseus finally reaching home, in the image of the 00000 Rocket as "the womb into which Gottfried returns" (750). However, *Gravity's Rainbow* presents itself as the post-modernist antithesis to Joyce's *Ulysses*. As Judith Chambers remarks, "[u]nlike the modernists Joyce and Eliot, however, Pynchon does not use myth as the positive alternative means for articulating hope" (Chambers 130). The, even if ambiguously problematized, life-affirming resolution of Bloom, the father, cradling into the living womb of Molly as the novel closes is replaced in *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodern response to the Ulyssean Tradition by the cold, technological womb of the Rocket, Molly's female body turned into an image of death and submission as, this time, the father, Blicero, sacrifices the son-like Gottfried. Mythical

⁵⁴ Pointsman, like Blicero, must ultimately come to the conclusion that his Pavlovian behaviorism renders himself an effect of stimulus and response rather than a transcendent, privileged observer: "They own everything: Ariadne, the Minotaur, even, Pointsman fears, himself" (88).

parallelism, the Rocket serving as the Oven of Blicero's game, leads into destruction as the return to the meaningful stability of home which *Ulysses'* Nostos promises becomes impossible in *Gravity's Rainbow*. As will be shown further on, this home, the central, radical meaning the majority of *Gravity's Rainbow's* personnel seek, keeps receding, any attempts to control, and thus resolve, a contingent experience through a modernist structure-building resulting in a loss of autonomy and the eventual paralytic death of closed systems.

Gravity's Rainbow rejects the modernist notion of controlling a contingent and fragmented reality through overarching structures inherent to the mythical method underlying Joyce's Ulyssean parallelisms. Structures that seek to create a global determinism, the narrativization of the world within a universal system, inevitably metastasize, victimizing not only the underprivileged, like Gottfried or Pökler, who are sacrificed to the System's rage for order, but also their own creator. Referencing Murphy's Law, "that brash Irish proletarian restatement of Gödel's theorem – *when everything has been taken care of, when nothing can go wrong, or even surprise us... something will*" (275),⁵⁵ *Gravity's Rainbow* demonstrates that, since a given system cannot contain itself, any totalizing structure of control inherently insinuates an even more comprehensive system controlling the controller, making a system that represents reality in totality impossible. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus offers structures of seemingly perfect control, e.g., Pointsman's deterministic Pavlovianism or the theme of Hansel and Gretel reappearing throughout the novel, to present the metastasizing "mutants" (275) such systems must generate, the ultimate, total insight "to be postponed indefinitely" (320), generating its energy and humor from its resistance to any globalizes structure of interpretation. The novel thereby reflects the "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv) Lyotard identifies in postmodernity. In its rejection of such grand narratives, all-ordering structures from the mythological to the scientific, séance and science alike, *Gravity's Rainbow* breaks with the modernist vision of instilling meaning into a contingent world through systems of order, eschewing totalizing binarities in favor of an aesthetic of 'in-betweenness.'

⁵⁵ Gödel's incompleteness theorems state the limitation of formal systems in the impossibility of them containing themselves. The application of its "brash Irish proletarian restatement" (275) in *Gravity's Rainbow*, valuing the Irish version rather than the more fitting, Austrian theorem, evokes *Gravity's Rainbow's* positioning within the equally brash Irish proletarian Ulyssean Tradition, reinterpreting the Ulyssean Tradition in a postmodernist mode yet, as will be shown, not discarding it.

Thus, a Ulyssean mythical method as expressed by T.S. Eliot is voiced most clearly in *Gravity's Rainbow* in the mythical Oven-Game of the Nazi officer Blicero, the (claim to) totality of modernist systems of order generating associations with German totalitarianism, mass murder and repression. Mythical parallelisms as a means of controlling an alienating experience are negatively connoted in the novel, being associated with megalomaniac madness, and, in effect, the Shoa. However, as becomes apparent in the novel's Hansel and Gretel theme, such totalizing tendencies crop up not only on the German side of the war but are in fact a globalized result of a destructive urge toward order continuing into the military industrial complex of Pynchon's present. Global structures, Lyotard's grand narratives, as opposed to a "local determinism" (Lyotard xxiv), a plurality of little narratives Lyotard identifies in postmodernity, cannot fully control and represent reality, instead serving as a means of oppression, such closed systems inevitably driving toward death. *Gravity's Rainbow* thereby offers a critique of totalizing, modernist structures, parodying the Ulyssean mythical parallelisms. Indeed, as Charles Russel argues, "the central struggle in *Gravity's Rainbow* between the Firm and the Counterforce may be read as one expression of the conflict between [a modernist rage for order and longing for what transcends language and postmodern, self-deconstructingly heterogenous subversions]" (Russell 254). If the (modernist) System, with the manipulative yet self-victimizing pattern-makers Blicero and Pointsman as its chief representatives, seeks to control reality in its entirety, thereby inadvertently furthering entropy, *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodernism undercuts this totalizing, oppressive order by resisting the lure of the grand narrative and breaking with the "bookish symmetries" (101) of narrative structure.

Frustrating the Quest: *Gravity's Rainbow* as (Anti-)Parzival

Gravity's Rainbow thus rejects modernist systems of order, the Ulyssean mythical method, as repressive grand narratives unable to fully represent reality. Nevertheless, *Gravity's Rainbow* clearly operates from within a Ulyssean Tradition, staging patterns of mythological parallels in its discussion of the postmodern condition. The Odyssean quest enacted in Joyce's mythological parallelism thereby evolves into a frustrated quest, as Mark Siegel calls it an 'anti-quest' "depicting the inadequacy of the traditional pattern to abet or develop a consciousness capable

of restoring the individual and his world to productive harmony” (M. R. Siegel, “Pynchon’s Anti-Quests” 5), in *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* postmodern reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition. The quest as narrative of a hero’s initiation or restoration into society and confirmation of their selfhood after a number of trials having become unavailable to *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* postmodern condition, the novel employs an anti-quest that breaks with traditional structure, offering no simple, symmetrical resolution and depicting its subject as decentered. It thus, as Siegel remarks, acknowledges “our present fragmentation as well as our eternal need” (M. R. Siegel, “Pynchon’s Anti-Quests” 9). Indeed, in *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* frustrated quest, “fulfillment [...] would not justify the original quest but would negate the true meaning of the task for the quester” (M. R. Siegel, “Pynchon’s Anti-Quests” 6). Instead, the anti-quest introduces a new myth of decentered subjectivity offering an, also political, potential of liberation from totalitarian structures.

In Germanizing the Ulyssean Odyssey, *Gravity’s Rainbow* employs another questing seeker, the Arthurian grail knight Parzival, in its postmodern modification of the Ulyssean Tradition.⁵⁶ However, while Parzival, like Odysseus, can eventually reach his goal, the grail, and restore the wasteland – the novel’s Zone (post-war Germany before its division into sectors) as wasteland further cementing *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* postmodernist dialogue with the modernist tradition of Joyce and Eliot’s *The Wasteland* – *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* Parzivals, grail knights and grails alike becoming multiple in Pynchon’s postmodernity, never reach their grail and attain stable selfhood. The novel frustrates the traditional quest pattern into an infinite, asymptotic approach to meaning, Odysseus’s Nostos. Parzival’s characteristic inability to ask the right question at the right time and thereby redeem the Fisher King, echoed in *Gravity’s Rainbow’s*

⁵⁶ Even though *Parzival* is of medieval French origin, Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*, *Gravity’s Rainbow* clearly references the romance’s German tradition in its allusions to Wagner and Wolfram von Eschenbach in this “German Odyssey” (486). Thus, Slothrop’s Rocketman is pieced together from “a stash of Wagnerian opera costumes” (365) and integral scenes in *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* Parzival-pattern such as the inconclusive meeting of Tchitcherine with his African half-brother Enzian, evoking the fight between the white Parzival and his black half-brother Feirefiz, Wolfram’s own addition to the legend, point toward a specifically ‘German’ *Parzival* in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Furthermore, Wolfram, unlike Chrétien, envisions the grail as a “dinc” (Wolfram von Eschenbach 235.23), a thing that fell from the sky, resonating with *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* parodic staging of the rocket as grail. In addition, as will be shown, *Gravity’s Rainbow* overdetermines its mythological parallelisms through allusions to (German) texts such as Hansel and Gretel, Faust, or Tannhäuser (Hume 12) as to resist the totality of a modernist, closed mythological system. Similarly, *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* “Orphic Hero Pattern” (Hume 168), apparently Greek in origin, can also be traced to the novel’s references to the German *Sonnets to Orpheus* by Rilke.

“Proverb for Paranoids, 3: If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don’t have to worry about answers” (251), is central to the Ulyssean Tradition in the postmodern age of *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* German Odyssey. The grail-quest in *Gravity’s Rainbow* thus becomes the novel’s chief vehicle for what Hite refers to as the “trope of the unavailable insight” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 24). *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* anti-quest perpetually defers resolution, thereby depicting its human condition as decentered and resisting the totalizing tendencies of the modernist System the novel warns of.

As Tzvetan Todorov defines the quest of the Holy Grail, “the quest of the Grail is the quest of a code. To find the Grail is to learn how to decipher the divine language” (Todorov 129). *Gravity’s Rainbow*, on the other hand, presents the unavailability of this “holy Text” (520) in dramatizing the “tragedy of lost messages” (520), its characters attempting to discover, through structurally forging connections, “a single root, deeper than anyone has probed” (391), the

German mania for name-giving, dividing the Creation finer and finer, analyzing, setting namer more hopelessly apart from named, even to bringing in mathematics of combination, tacking together established nouns to get new ones, the insanely, endlessly diddling play of a chemist whose molecules are words (391)

promising these modernist readers of the world an access to decipher its divine language. Mythologizing, symmetrical structures thus might appear to set “words [...] only an eye-twitch away from the things they stand for” (100) yet *Gravity’s Rainbow* depicts this final, totalizing insight as continually deferred. The novel’s anti-grail-quest thereby offers an alternative aesthetic of resisting or frustrating closure, deconstructing the traditional hero and his monomyth into a plurality of non-totalizing possibilities, a space of middles (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 21) between the binary extremes underlying both totalitarian politics and modernist order.

Indeed, almost everyone in the novel seems to have their personal grail, all of them, in one way or the other, connected to the V-2 rocket and all of them, in one way or the other, a “personal delusion” (Coward, *The Art of Allusion* 130). Pointsman is on a quest for the Nobel

Prize, the grail of “the end we all struggle toward in science, [...] the true mechanical explanation” (89), a key to decipher all experience as cause and effect, which the discovery of Slothrop’s mysterious connection to the V-2 rocket promises him. Enzian’s soviet half-brother Tchitcherine, like Slothrop, amasses information on the Rocket to gain access to an original past, i.e., to fulfill his quest to find and kill his brother Enzian, while the Hereros of the Schwarzkommando, black knights and symbolic grail questers in the assemblage of their 00001 Rocket (Sublett 37), search for an “old Tribal unity” (320) in the “purity of opposites” (321) that is related as

an image of a grail slipping through the room, radiant, though the jokers around the table be sneaking Whoopee Cushions into the Siege Perilous, under the very descending arse of the grailseeker, and though the grails themselves come in plastic these years, a dime a dozen, penny a gross, still Ombindi, at times self-conned as any Christian, praises and prophesies that era of innocence he just missed living in. (321)

The grail, as the Rocket, in *Gravity’s Rainbow* points toward a “Final Zero” (320) from which the contingencies of experience are to be deciphered.

Parodying *Parzival* in an Age of Technology

The Grail Debased

Grails coming “in plastic these years, a dime a dozen” (321), a search for an evasive meaningful pattern, both by the novel’s characters and its readers, motivates the novel. Unlike the medieval knight’s Holy Grail, however, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s grails are secularized, profane and infinitely reproducible consumer items made of plastic and weapons of mass destruction. The life-giving force of the Holy Grail is transformed into the life-draining, entropic killing machines of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s age of technology. The novel’s rocket-as-grail metaphor thus exemplifies Jameson’s “postmodern or technological sublime” (Jameson 37). Technology takes over the role of God and Nature in postmodernity. The regenerative force of *Parzival*’s Holy Grail thereby turns destructive as the blood of Christ⁵⁷ cannot sustain its redemptive significance in

⁵⁷ While Wolfram’s *Parzival* does not speak of the grail as a chalice containing Christ’s blood, this image appears in Pynchon’s other German source for the ‘myth,’ Wagner’s *Parsifal*.

Gravity's Rainbow. Transformed into a rocket, "The Grail, the Sangraal" remains a "bloody vehicle" (739) yet is turned into an instrument of bloodshed, Gottfried's Easter-sacrifice in the Rocket being devoid of any transcendental, meaningful potential, without hope for resurrection, and utterly reduced to the banality of death.

The ineffectuality of this postmodern grail is also displayed in its reincarnation as an object made from plastic.⁵⁸ Thus, when Margherita von Erdmann on her "German Odyssey" is taken to a petrochemical plant called "the Castle" (486) by Blicero, a "modern version of the enchanted castle of Klingsor, the sorcerer of the Perceval story" (Cowart, *The Art of Allusion* 130), a "heavy chalice of methyl methacrylate, a replica of the Sangraal" (487) from which "Plastic snakes" (487) flow – the new blood of Christ in this technological age – is displayed at the center of "a round conference table" (487). The novel thereby brings together the realm of the sorcerer and the community of the grail, evil and good, thus debasing its mythical structure. In playing out Blicero's Hansel and Gretel game, Margherita, whom the section refers to as "Gretel" (485), also assumes the role of a parodic Kundry, Margherita having "more identities than she knew what to do with" (482). However, while Kundry is enslaved by Klingsor and used to seduce, and thus damn, grail knights, yet seeks redemption, Margherita's Kundry in this parodic, inconsequential plastic reproduction enjoys the role as a sex object assigned to her. Clad, to her arousal, in "an exotic costume of some black polymer" (488), Imipolex-G, which foreshadows Gottfried's "Imipolex shroud" (754), and "stretched [...] out on an inflatable plastic mattress" (487), Margherita indulges in an orgy with various "plastic connoisseur" (487) knights, eventually, in a debased ecstasy experienced as freedom (487), losing track of time until: "One morning I was outside the factory, naked, in the rain. Nothing grew there" (488). Like Klingsor's castle in Wagner's opera, but also like Wolfram's Grail castle, the petrochemical plant is magically deserted. Yet, while Klingsor's castle disappears after Parsifal resists the temptations of Kundry, no saving hero arrives in Pynchon's novel and temptation is submitted to totally. In this parodic world of plastic, where meaningful distinctions must collapse into another, the grail turns ineffectual. It becomes a vulgar replica incapable of

⁵⁸ In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the production of plastic, connecting polymers to create new and larger chains, is metaphorically likened to (German) language's compounding and thereby to the seeking of "Kute Korrespondences" (590) in the construction of totalizing structures.

fulfilling its reintegrative role. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus debases its grail, the stabilizing significance of the grail quest's Holy Grail having made way to the profanity of plastic replicas.

As can be seen in the passage quoted earlier, *Gravity's Rainbow* parodies the grail-quest as "Whoopie Cushions" (321) – their capitalization indicating capitalist commodification as a brand name – invade the gravity of the grail scene and the grail itself is debased into a mass-marketable plastic product. As David Cowart remarks, "[a]n indiscriminately reproduced grail of plastic – the very stuff of vulgarity – can hardly beckon or reassure the faithful" (Cowart, *The Art of Allusion* 130). Retaining the mythical pattern, *Gravity's Rainbow* empties out the grail of its meaningful potential. Instead, the novel as joker itself subverts its quest with the debased and vulgar. While comedy is already an element present in Wolfram's *Parzival*, *Gravity's Rainbow* subverts and debases the grail-quest as a whole. This act of postmodern parody is thus distinct from Joyce's own trivialization of myth. While *Ulysses* transposes the *Odyssey* into the banality of 1904 Dublin, this trivialization does not debase the *Odyssey* nor the events of *Ulysses* but serves to instill reintegrative significance into a modern experience deemed meaningless. *Gravity's Rainbow*, on the other hand, in rendering its grail a vulgar and destructive object, parodies the quest narrative and drains the mythological structure of the reintegrative potential it held in modernism. The novel's grail quest parallels thereby decidedly fail to project themselves fully onto (post)modern experience. The plastic grail quest of *Gravity's Rainbow*, a faithful replica lacking a faith that is lost in the age of a technological, rather than divine, sublime, cannot transcend contingency.

Gravity's Rainbow's questers are thus denied the basic requirements for their quest as the grail, final object of the quest promising transcendental revelation of a conclusive identity, is degraded to a vulgarity devoid of the meaningful sublimity of its original context. As Regine Rosenthal remarks, "[w]hile in the modern period a secularization of the quest has taken place with its orientation towards the self, in Pynchon both quest and aim themselves are ironically called into question" (Rosenthal 411). Parodying the traditional quest and its modernist use to stabilize modern fragmentation, *Gravity's Rainbow's* many grails and grail questers are so far removed from their mythical prototype as to make them completely unfit to fulfill their quest for identity and uphold the significance demanded of them through mythical parallelisms. In

Gravity's Rainbow's postmodern context, the meaningful reintegration of the quester through the conclusive discovery of the object of the quest has become unavailable, grail and quester alike unable to redeem the import afforded to them.

Slothrop as Grail Knight

Slothrop, one of the novel's Parzival-like questers, appears utterly unfit to fulfill his quest. Attempting to calm his growing paranoia, Slothrop says to himself: "The Schwarzgerät is no Grail, Ace, that's not what the G in Imipolex G stands for. And you are no knightly hero" (364). Seemingly aware of his own mythological parallelism, Slothrop denies his positioning as a grail knight. Yet, this is exactly what the novel appears to suggest. As Douglas Fowler remarks, *Gravity's Rainbow* casts Slothrop "as a sort of parody Quester" (Fowler 97) and the Rocket as "of course nothing less than the Grail itself" (Fowler 183). Indeed, the parodied structure of the quest, rather than Slothrop's own agency, appears to mythically motivate the plot surrounding Slothrop as "it's the S-Gerät after all that's following him, it and the pale plastic ubiquity of Laszlo Jamf" (490). Slothrop thus appears as an anti-Parzival, one who cannot afford the mythical significance demanded of him as the (mythical) structure fails to fully control and represent *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodern world.

Resemblances between Slothrop and Parzival abound, if only to be subsequently subverted by the novel. Thus, for example, Parzival and Slothrop are offsprings of a socially high standing (aristocratic/Mayflower) family that has been impoverished before their birth, in the Slothrops' case due to poor business decisions (Sublett 42–43). Similarly, both questers have to prove themselves in a series of tests, as in, e.g., Slothrop's quest-within-the-quest to retrieve hashish from Potsdam, and go through a number of encounters with women on their way. Yet, while Parzival is distinguished by chastity, Slothrop's encounters start off as sexual only to become even more explicit and, simultaneously, increasingly pointless (Sublett 47). Most importantly, Slothrop and Parzival are connected by their status as "holy fool" and their loss of and search for identity. Like Parzival, the pure fool, enlightened by compassion, Slothrop's activity in the novel is defined by a foolish bumbling that, in spite of the moral grey areas he navigates, never become conventionally evil. A passive victim of greater forces, "fool

Slothrop” (216) allows himself to be manipulated yet perpetually fails “to get at it with any kind of style” (216) and fully see through the seeming plot against him. It is thus not a coincidence that the last sighting of Slothrop, significantly, as will be shown, after his dissolution, is of him as a harmonica and kazoo player, two instruments *Gravity’s Rainbow* links to a defiance to the seriousness, i.e., gravity, of modernist systems, “on the only record album ever put out by The Fool, an English rock group” (742).

Associated with the Fool of Tarot, a card with “no agreed assignment in the deck” (724), Slothrop is defined by a decisive lack of identity, a postmodern shortage of selfhood that makes him at once playball of the roles attached to him and possibly capable of escaping the System, being an outsider without a clear position in the structure. Like Parzival, the hero brought up outside society and not knowing his own name, Slothrop’s identity is thin at best. Slothrop’s selfhood is problematized by the various paper-identities and costumes, substitute selves that allow him to function with and be recognized by others, he assumes in his quest for the Rocket, which is, as will be shown, a nostalgic quest for selfhood. Early on in the novel, Katje, whom the knightly hero rescues from an octopus in an act of heroism that is soon called into question as the entire incident is revealed to be manufactured by Pointsman, “make[s] one American lieutenant disappear” (198), stealing Slothrop’s “[l]eave papers, ID, everything” (201) and thereby robbing him of his identity. From then on, Slothrop must do with “costume theatricals” (200), playing roles to fill his void self that soon reveal themselves to rather play Slothrop, the names and costumes Slothrop assumes influencing his selfhood. Slothrop thus assumes the names of “Ian Scuffling” (256), British war correspondent, and “Max Schlepzig” (377), a former movie actor, in his travels through the Zone. However, as Rosenthal argues, rather than serving as a disguise underneath which a stable Slothrop operates, “both the assumed names only reinforce the actual activity of a dissolving self” (Rosenthal 412), the names, language, dominating Slothrop’s self as he “scuffles and schleps across the Zone” (M. R. Siegel, *Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in Gravity’s Rainbow* 56). Language controls and defines the identity-less Slothrop far more than he can be said to control it.

This also becomes apparent in the way Slothrop, as Max Schlepzig, replaces for Margherita Erdmann the deceased former bearer of the name: by means of a name, Slothrop

becomes Schlepzig. When Slothrop reveals that “somebody also thought it prudent to name *me* Max Schlepzig” (395), Greta, or rather, the name, the pattern of “the Reich’s Sweethearts – Greta Erdmann and Max Schlepzig, Wonderful Together” (395), forces Slothrop into the role of “her Schlepzig-surrogate” (397). With Greta dismissing Slothrop’s objections of forgery and randomness as “[a]nother fairy-tale word” (395), Slothrop must succumb to the (paranoid) structure of name and named. The distinction between acting and being thus blurs as Slothrop, although not a sadistic or aggressive character at all, lets himself be pushed into enacting Schlepzig’s and Greta’s sadomasochistic movie scenes. Thus, asked to be “cruel” (396) to Greta, Slothrop does not take long to embody this foreign role “[b]ut somebody has already educated him. Something... that dreams Prussian” (396). Assuming the name of Schlepzig, Schlepzig’s cruelty becomes “his own cruelty” (396) as the name, language, conditions Slothrop’s self. The ‘metempsychosis’ of Slothrop’s self is thus shown to be product of the (discursive) roles assigned to him.

This decentering of the self, a decentering which, in its acceptance, will become the novel’s ‘hopeful’ alternative to a domination by structures, as product of discourse, the role conditioning the self, also becomes apparent in Slothrop’s Rocketman costume. Shortly after Slothrop declares himself to be “no knightly hero” (364) he becomes Rocketman, a costume looted from “a stash of Wagnerian opera costumes” (365) consisting of “a pointed helmet with horns, a full cape of green velvet, a pair of buckskin trousers” (365). The figure of Rocketman is most emblematic of Slothrop’s role as a postmodern Parzival, a techno-Wagnerian knight in whom the sublimity of the religious ethical context, the “Germanic-Christian heroic world romanticized by Wagner” (Rosenthal 413), is transformed and ironically subverted into a technological sublime. Rational technology taking up the meaning providing role of myth, the Wagnerian hero segues into the postmodern Rocketman as it “occurs to Slothrop that without those horns on it, why this helmet would look just like the nose assembly of the Rocket” (366). As Rocketman thus trudges through post-war Berlin, “Trolls and dryads play in the open spaces” (367), myth having become “citified” (367) in postmodernity. Notably, as is the case with Ian Scuffling, Max Schlepzig and Slothrop’s other identities, the costume influences not only how Slothrop is perceived by others but, more importantly, controls Slothrop’s own

behavior. Slothrop as postmodern man, an outside conditioned, technological “Raketenmensch” (366), lacks all individual essence except the name ‘Slothrop’ (Drake 49). Thus, the Rocketman costume and name compel Slothrop to act according to his discursive role when Seaman Bodine urges him to go on a mission to retrieve hashish from the Potsdam conference: “Aw come on [...] Rocketman, jeepers. You don’t want to do nothing no more. [...] You could be back tomorrow. No job is too tough for Rocketman” (371). Costume defining a selfhood that appears as decentered, lacking any essential meaning except for the name applied to it, only “[a] day or two later, it will occur to Slothrop that what he should have said at that point was, ‘But I wasn’t Rocketman, until just a couple of hours ago” (371). Nevertheless, with the assumption of the name, Slothrop’s being becomes (perversely) Rocketman. As the narrator comments, “[n]ames by themselves may be empty, but the *act of naming*....” (366).

However, Rocketman taking on a life of his own, the role(s) Slothrop is forced into by others soon becomes unmanageable for him as the comprehensive mythical structure of ‘Rocketman’ is shown to fail to succinctly represent and control reality. This can for example be seen when later on, Rocketman already having become “part of the folklore of the Zone” (596), persons who actually meet Slothrop suspect that “this pig here [i.e., Slothrop costumed as yet another ‘hero,’ the pig hero ‘Plechazunga’] [is] trying to cash in on the glory of Rocketman (whose existence Krypton has never been that sure of)” (596). Although such instances of disappointment can still be naturalized into a growing, at some point overblown, legend of Rocketman/Slothrop, at one point this discrepancy between myth and reality becomes so terminally instable as to make Slothrop’s projection onto Rocketman untenable: One evening Slothrop reads “on the wall of a public shithouse” (623) the message “ROCKETMAN WAS HERE” (624), a message that lacks any clear sender. The modernist mythical parallelism of hero and everyman, as performed in *Ulysses*, cannot be upheld anymore with increasing complexity frustrating the structure. Slothrop cannot “*make it all fit*” (626) within one (paranoid) system. Name and named cannot be superimposed anymore. A few pages onward Slothrop, unable to connect all metastasizing “paraphrases of himself” (625) dissolves, the overdetermined textualization of the self collapsing, as will be shown to be the postmodern

novel's strategy, under its own weight, leaving Slothrop undetermined but liberated, "not a thing in his head, just feeling natural" (626).

Nostalgia and the Quest: The Search for an Original Meaning of Selfhood

As one can see, *Gravity's Rainbow* globalizes Parzival's missing identity in Slothrop, depicting the postmodern grail knight as not only not knowing his true self but essentially lacking true selfhood, the decentered self appearing as a product of outside naming. Thus, in particular in the figure of Slothrop as Rocketman, *Gravity's Rainbow* corresponds the postmodern condition of selfhood, conditioned in its entirety by outside forces, to the Rocket, depicting a postmodern machinization of the self. Not only do Slothrop and the Rocket share an emphasis on the phallic element, Slothrop's plot-driving function being his mysterious erections connected to future rocket strikes, figuring, at least initially, [a]s a personified penis" (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 117) linking him to both the "phallic" (465) rocket and the Schwarzgerät built into the 00000 Rocket, composed of Imipolex-G, "the first plastic that is actually erectile" (699), and a sense of outward control, their trajectories, i.e., "selves", being the product of technology, ballistics and conditioning (the Rocket's "[e]lectric signal travelling a reflex arc" (517)), meaning that, as Alan Friedman and Manfred Puetz note, "[l]ike the rocket, like World War II, like the world-at-large, Slothrop has been sent on his specific trajectory without knowing what launched and later preceeded to propel him" (Friedman and Puetz 357), Rocket and Imipolex G (as original point 00000 and Grail) directly link to Slothrop's past, his self's childhood founding moment and thus a promise of essential, original selfhood. The Rocket, travelling, in its final transformation as space rocket and ICBM, to Pynchon's United States, is an emblem of the postmodern self, a machinized subject that appears as the product of structures without an essential core to it. Slothrop's questing for the Rocket 00000 is thus a nostalgic quest, inherently concerned with his past.

This nostalgia, parodied, as will be shown, in the novel's unavailability of a definite Nostos, an essential root or origin, is inherent to the quest pattern, the traditional quest culminating in "the return of the quester with his awards of personal growth and social salvation (the restitution of harmony)" (M. R. Siegel, "Pynchon's Anti-Quests" 5) to a stabilized self, a

return home enacted, as in the *Odyssey* and *Ulysses*, in an Oedipal reconciliation with fatherhood (Bloom can come home and be a father; Stephen, reconciled with being a son, can become a creator). “Nostalgia. The pain of a return home” (396) is thus also evoked when Greta Erdmann makes Slothrop, or Max Schlepzig, act according to his name and sadistically torture her, causing name and named to meet, transcending the deferral of signification into commensuration with an original, transcendental signified.⁵⁹ In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the Rocket as grail promises access to this launching site of the self, the possibility to “bring events to Absolute Zero” (3) as is intimated in the Imipolex-G Rocket’s quintuple Zero serial number (292). For an overwhelming number of the novel’s characters, the Rocket, in one way or another, implies a “gathering back to home” (148), in effect the discovery of a stable, harmonious central meaning of selfhood.

Not surprisingly then, Slothrop’s quest for the Rocket links back to his childhood. As Cowart remarks, Slothrop as grail knight “suffers at the hand of a powerful sorcerer (Jamf)” (Cowart, *The Art of Allusion* 129) responsible for his connection to the Rocket and thus Slothrop’s value to the forces guiding and controlling his life. At the same time, however, Jamf can also be seen as one of the novel’s controlling yet tantalizingly absent father figures, the scientist assuming the position of the past origin of creation of Slothrop necessitated by a structuring perspective: “Jamf was only a fiction to help him explain what he felt so terribly, so immediately in his genitals for those rockets each time exploding in the sky” (738). Slothrop’s predicament, setting the novel in motion, is in itself heavily invested with temporality, the interconnection of past, present, and future, cause and effect, that predicates a nostalgic yearning for selfhood. The map of Slothrop’s sexual conquests mapping onto London V-2 strikes, figures such as Pointsman long to discover the “true mechanical explanation” (89) for Slothrop’s connection to the Rocket, and thus the total determinacy of the self, setting Slothrop onto his quest through the Zone.

Although only metaphorically fatherless, Slothrop discovers in the German behaviorist/chemist Jamf his quest’s father in whose confrontation the traditional quest structure

⁵⁹ While *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s argument appears to fit the Derridean poststructuralist analysis perfectly, the novel’s warning stance toward totalizing interpretation under one structure, even a poststructuralist one, should caution one of a simple allegorical reading of the novel.

promises the meaningful consolidation of selfhood. The plot of/against Slothrop ('s self) can be traced back to Jamf, the enigmatic scientist in whom all threads of the novel, from the cartelization tying the different sides of the war together to rocketry, conditioning, and synthetic chemistry, seem to converge. Jamf, to whom Slothrop was "sold [...] like a side of beef" (286) by his family as a subject for conditioning experiments in exchange for a Harvard education, doubly setting Slothrop on his current path, thereby becomes the elusive center of origin for Slothrop's self. Slothrop's quest for the Rocket as a quest for identity is thus inherently a nostalgic quest for the past in the shape of Jamf as a father figure as Slothrop discovers that "[s]igns will find him here in the Zone, and ancestors will reassert themselves" (281).⁶⁰ Slothrop is the creation of Jamf's experiments in operant conditioning, the most personal and private aspects of his self, his sexuality, from his early childhood on, being a product of outside control. Similarly, to Watson's 'Infant Albert,' Slothrop as "Infant Tyrone" (85) had been conditioned to get a "[b]inary, elegant" erection when confronted with a "Mystery Stimulus" (84). Further linking Slothrop's machinized self to the Rocket, to Slothrop this stimulus, unconsciously remembered as "[a] smell, a forbidden room, at the bottom edge of his memory" (286), appears to be Imipolex-G, another of the polymath scientist's inventions used in the infamous Schwarzgerät built into the Rocket, as Slothrop, reading the dossier of Jamf's involvement with the Slothrops, "knows that what's haunting him now will prove to be the smell of Imipolex G" (286). Controlled and "under their [i.e., the IG's, Jamf's later employer] observation – m-maybe since he was *born*" (286), Slothrop's self becomes a text of which Jamf is the author, manipulating and effectively creating Slothrop. Thus, dreaming of reading "a very old

⁶⁰ As Cowart comments, "*Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ulysses* are quests, 'encyclopedic' fictions that, epic in scope, catalog whole cultures with broad attention to the literary and historical past. Each is, in its own way, a strange amalgam of family romance and Telemachiad: Stephen Dedalus discovers a father in Leopold Bloom, Tyrone Slothrop in the evil scientist Dr. Lazslo Jamf" (Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon & The Dark Passages of History* 113). Notably, (Pynchon's) Joyce, like Jamf a pattern maker buried "[u]p in the mountains" (264) of Zürich, yet not "toward the Uetliberg" (264) but on the exact opposite side of Zürich, in Fluntern, appears as such a 'father' to the Ulyssean Tradition whose modernist totalizing structures *Gravity's Rainbow* rejects yet, unlike Jamf's agenda of control, must not abandon completely, instead reinterpreting the Ulyssean Tradition. Slothrop, disappointed after his vigil at Jamf's grave that "[t]here's no visit. It seems that Jamf is only dead" (268) and thus unable to give him the fatherly insight he seeks, should thus maybe, in keeping with the novel's theme of characters missing their epiphany at the locus of insight, have climbed the opposite mountain in Zürich to metafictionally discover the true 'father' of the structures that condition his plot, the German Jamf, as in the Fraktur misreading of the S-Gerät as "F-Gerät" (487), translating easily into Jam(e)s, the ancestor that survives in, and conditions, Slothrop's story as a postmodern continuation of the Ulyssean Tradition. This figuration of a polymath scientist father as a partial Joyce stand-in continues also in Wallace's *Infinite Jest* in the character of JOI. Slothrop's questions are epistemological, modernist, where they should be ontological in nature.

dictionary of technical German” (287), Slothrop “would come to JAMF: The definition would read: I” (287). To the paranoid, modernist reader of his self Slothrop, the central meaning of his self resides in the original ‘father’ Jamf. Slothrop’s search for the Rocket and the Schwarzgerät, linguistically linked to his code-name “Schwarzknabe” (286) as is his entire “black-face type” (287), textual plot of selfhood, is thus a quest for the father-figure Jamf and Slothrop’s infancy, i.e., the traditional quester’s return home.

However, although tempting, Jamf’s role as a guarantor of Slothrop’s self, the quest structure’s father, remains inconclusive. Not only is the “Rocket Number 00000” the only “rocket out of 6000 that carried Imipolex G” (297) and not only did Jamf invent said plastic, the suspect Mystery Stimulus, years *after* his experiments on ‘Infant Tyrone,’ but Slothrop’s map of sexual conquests that created the interest in the American lieutenant to begin with is revealed to be forged. The novel thus resists the totalizing patterns that promise Slothrop an insight into his self in the discovery of his past with the ‘father’ Jamf.

Nostalgia in the Zone

A stabilizing, original center of meaning is inaccessible to *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s nostalgic questers. Various scholars such as Khachig Tololyan have thus commented on “the ‘you can’t go home again’ motif” (Tololyan, “Some Remarks on Professor Mark Siegel’s ‘Pynchon’s Anti-Quests’” 13) in Pynchon’s writing. While the Nostos, the return home, of *Ulysses* presents a meaningful, if trivialized, closure of the modernist quest, *Gravity’s Rainbow* posits that “[i]t may be too late to get home” (744). A site of original harmony, identity through the recognition of one’s zero cause (as related in Bloom’s recognition of his paternity), is unavailable to the Zone’s wanderers in the novel’s postmodern context. The Zone, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s anarchic liminal space of a postwar Germany before its division into allies-controlled sectors, is, both within the novel and scholarly criticism, viewed as “a quasi-mythological landscape of entropy” (Ickstadt 7, my translation), a “heterotopian multi-world space” (McHale, “Pynchon’s Postmodernism” 104) of “postmodern multiplicity” (Johnston 91) in which the fossilized structures of old – an image picked up in the petrochemical language-as-plastic metaphor of Jamf’s “National Socialist chemistry” (578) – break down. The Zone is perceived as a place

where “categories have been blurred badly” (303), with “never a clear sense of nationality anywhere nor even of belligerent sides, only the War, a single damaged landscape” (257). Geli thus explains the Zone to Slothrop as an “interregnum “(294), a momentary suspension of structures, and tells him to “[f]orget frontiers now. Forget subdivisions. There aren’t any” (294). The Zone is envisioned as an original, mythological space devoid of a stifling human condition(ing) and utterly decentered. Thus, even though “[i]t won’t last” except “for a few months [...] – for a moment of spring, perhaps” (265), the Zone offers a utopian hope to the Argentinian anarchist Squalidozzi Slothrop meets in Zürich:

In ordinary times [...] the center always wins. [...] Decentralizing, back toward anarchism, needs extraordinary times... this War [...] has wiped out the proliferation of little states that's prevailed in Germany for a thousand years. Wiped it clean. *Opened it.*
(264-5)

For Slothrop, too, the “openness of the German Zone” (265) promises “a route back” (556) to an original, utopian meaning, a return home, devoid of controlling structures: “the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up...” (556). With cultural conditioning, the “[v]ectors [...] all trying to flee a center” (318) falling away, the point 0 (the *origin*) of the self’s Cartesian coordinate system, and thereby the Cartesian self, the “Center without time” (319), might be discovered.

However, as Hanjo Berressem convincingly shows, while the Zone appears as “a landscape stripped of meanings, a purely material surface: the utopia of a *tabula rasa*, a free, unhierarchical, anarchic space without cultural [...] inscriptions” (Berressem 126), it also stages “the impossibility of a return to the origin” (Berressem 128). Applying the metaphor of inertia implicit in both *Slothrop*’s name and the *Gravity* of the book’s title, *Gravity’s Rainbow* demonstrates that the resting point an object assumes after the forces applied to it have been removed (similarly to Slothrop’s incomplete deconditioning) will not be its initial point 0. Innocence, revealed to be “Axis propaganda” (207) of a totalitarian, Cartesian origin, cannot be regained in the “real helplessness” of (Slothrop’s) “inertia of motion” (207). Such a return

would be a “journey without hysteresis” (319),⁶¹ impossible within our universe. Thus, the Zone becomes another “erogenous zone[.]” (77), preconditioned like Slothrop’s erections. Just like the Rocket after Brennschluss, freed from “yaw control” (239) yet inevitably moving toward its aim, the Zone, despite its tabula rasa quality, does not return to a mythological origin but remains propelled by the force of the System.

Far from being a space uninscribed by Them, the Zone furthers Their agenda of structures favoring death. As Katje suspects of the destruction of the war, both the literal war destruction and the radical destructuring of the Zone, “the real business of the War is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals. [...] It serves as a spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War” (105). Although the war of nations appears as a destructive force, creating the seemingly original, “unorganized” (290) Zone, “the true war is a celebration of markets” (105) working toward a transnational “giant cartel including winners and losers both, in an amiable agreement to share what is there to be shared” (326). Thus, the days of the Zone are “Bright Days for the Black Market” (585), postwar Germany sprouting “[o]rganic markets, carefully styled ‘black’ by the professionals, [...] everywhere” (105). Rather than a liberating Zone that destroys the totalitarian structures of Their control, the Zone is liberalizing the market, facilitating Their capitalistic cartelization, the totalization of entire reality under one structure, as lives become “[e]very bit as negotiable as cigarettes, cunt, or Hershey bars” (105).

The destructions of the war thus serve to further Their totalizing project, continuing, rather than disrupting, the routinization of structures favoring death as They set the tracks for Their globalized order. Therefore, “[w]hat appears to be destruction is really the shaping of railroad spaces to other purposes” (257), the war facilitating flows of capital and technologies, the “massive corporate project bulldozing all manner of human subjects [...] in pursuit of control over processes, products, and markets” (Herman and Weisenburger 106). The war, far from creating a disruption of German totalitarianism, serves as a pointsman⁶² for the

⁶¹ Hysteresis denotes “[t]he phenomenon in which the value of a physical property lags behind changes in the effect causing it, as for instance when magnetic induction lags behind the magnetizing force” (*OED* “Hysteresis”).

⁶² E. Pointsman’s function being exactly this facilitation of a globalized totality.

continuation and globalization of totalitarian structures into Pynchon's present day US. The "railroad spaces" (257) that thus open up in the Zone are used to transport scavenged rocket parts to the US, incorporating a technology of death into America. The Zone is the location of a scramble for rocket technology on all sides of the war, with the Russian Tchitcherine and his American "Project Hermes" (287) equivalent Marvy of "Marvy's Mothers, the meanest-ass technical intelligence team in this whole fuckin' Zone" (287) transporting off captured rocket parts by the opened up railroad spaces: "The long freights are rolling out from the Mittelwerke day and night, carrying A4 hardware west to the Americans, north to the English... and soon, when the new map of the occupation goes into effect, east to the Russians too" (328). The destructions of the war providing "raw material to be recorded into History, so that children may be taught History as sequences of violence, battle after battle" (105) and become suitable victims to be used in coming wars, *Gravity's Rainbow's* historiographic metafiction comments on the "[p]ost-A4 humanity" (304) of its present day America. This is a USA caught up in the Cold War arms race and fearing nuclear holocaust at the hands of ICBMs, direct descendants of the V-2 developed by researchers such as Wernher von Braun, Nazis brought to the US in the course of the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency's "Operation Paperclip" in order to give the US a military advantage in the Soviet-American Cold War and the Space Race (Simpson 33–37). It is an empire under Nixon that is growing increasingly paranoid and oppressive to critical voices and stuck in the Vietnam war, a war the novel views as not singular but in clear continuity with the racist, colonialist, militarist and totalitarian mindset that brought forth Nazi Germany (Duyfhuizen, "Critiquing the Cartel" 88). As the novel comments on this continuity, "[t]he Germans-and-Japs story was only one, rather surrealistic version of the real War. The real War is always there. The dying tapers off now and then, but the War is still killing lots and lots of people" (645).

The nostalgia evinced by the seemingly original mythological landscape of the Zone thus holds no possibility of a return home for the displaced persons roaming postwar Germany. Instead, the preconditioned Zone's inertia seals a continuity of totalitarian control from Nazi Germany through the Zone to Nixon's Cold War America of imperialism and militarism (769). Peace is just "another bit of propaganda" (628) while "Their enterprise goes on" (628).

Innocence lost, the cultural center- and homelessness of a Zone already, in its destruction that falsely promises a state of zero, “encoded, belated, and never real” (Berressem 130), is reflected on the level of the individual also in Slothrop’s inability to return. On his grail quest through the Zone, Slothrop can only move forward, unable to turn back: “So when he disentangles himself, it is extravagantly. He creates a bureaucracy of departure, inoculating against forgetting, exit visas stamped with love-bites... but coming back is something he’s already forgotten about” (470-1). As with the Zone in general, an act of disentangling, the destruction of orders in postwar Germany, cannot provide a “route back” (556) to a central, meaningful origin. Instead, Slothrop’s disentangling creates a “bureaucracy of departure” (470), bringing forth more bureaucratic structures of Their control that make an escape from the System’s manipulation in any form of return impossible.

The true liberating potential of the Zone thus does not lie in its disentangling quality, opening up a nostalgic hope for an original, transcendent center revealed to be illusory, but, on the contrary, as will be further discussed in the chapter on *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s use of the moiré and the Counterforce, in the Zone’s potential to “sustain many other plots besides those polarized upon himself [Slothrop]” (603), its overcharging metastasizing of structures, rather than their disentangling deciphering, until they collapse under their own weight, opening up vistas through the network that allow for freedom. Therefore, while the Zone’s railroad network opening up has “led to domination, not freedom” (Chambers 137), Slothrop also uses the railroad as a means to travel freely and escape from those who follow him. While attempts to disentangle and decipher the system of the Zone, i.e., return to an original, divine wholeness, only further consolidate oppression, the anti-quest, a perpetual deferral of this illusorily original meaning, can serve as an alternative. Thus, as the novel programmatically remarks in its opening, “this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive *knottling into*” (3), the postmodern novel frustrating and overdetermining its (modernist) quest for totality into an “unending anti-quest” (M. R. Siegel, “Pynchon’s Anti-Quests” 8), progressively overplotting the thicket of structures, thereby collapsing it by metafictionally drawing awareness to its textuality, rather than attempting to regress to an unavailable center of meaning. The Zone thus remains a “*synthetic wastefield*” (523, emphasis mine), its seeming disorder already inescapably

inscribed by Jamf's "National Socialist chemistry" (578) and a German, Hegelian dialectical movement toward comprehensive meaning traversing in oppressive continuity to the American 60s and 70s, that allows no return. This postmodern plastic wasteland, unlike Wolfram's medieval wasteland or Eliot's *Wasteland* of WWI, cannot be restored to its original state by grail knights denied access to the grail castle.

Decentering the Self: Asymptotic Approaches to the Grail

While modernism's center could not hold and had to be restored through structuring artistic effort such as mythological parallelisms, *Gravity's Rainbow* denies all possibility of harmonious restoration and return, any central, all-encompassing meaning being not only lost but absent in the first place, deferring its questers' return. Herein, *Gravity's Rainbow* resembles, and, at the same time, frustrates *Parzival* the most. The definitive, central moment making Parzival a grail knight, his negligence to ask the Fisher King the correct, compassionate question and become his true and final self, the Grail King,⁶³ and subsequent inability to return to the grail, is globalized in Slothrop's and the novel's other Parzival-characters' perpetual inability to perceive and apprehend their "holy Center" (508) when they appear closest to it, the location of the object of their quest, the grail, promising a nostalgic return to the past. In this perpetual deferral of meaning Hite calls the "trope of the unavailable insight" (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 24), the postmodern selves of *Gravity's Rainbow*'s grail knights are depicted as inherently decentered, lacking the central meaning the quest for the grail implies. Meaningful selfhood as the grail, similarly to the Derridean concept of *différance*, is object of an asymptotic approach.

Slothrop's "Holy-Center-Approaching"

When the two fools Slothrop and Närrisch (German for 'foolish') embark on the knightly quest to save Springer, the knight, from Russian captivity in Peenemünde, they pass the novel's "holy Center" (508), the place where the 00000 Rocket containing the Imipolex G Schwarzgerät had been launched, without noticing the relevance of their surroundings. Revelation at the quest's holy Center, "the epiphanic point in both time and space where the questing hero realizes the

⁶³ Notably, while Parzival learns to show pity, Slothrop, contrarily, becomes increasingly uncaring, undergoing "a general loss of emotion, a numbness he ought to be alarmed at, but can't quite..." (490-1).

full meaning of his search, life, and world” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 22) is unavailable to man in postmodernity, “so ill-equipped to approach a holy Center” (508). Instead, revelatory meaning in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is replaced by an “asymptotic approach to an unavailable center” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 22), a “penetration toward the Center” (509, emphasis mine) offering a stable meaning that leads to further search but is never fully redeemed, rather than a penetration to said radical cause. As the narrator comments, this infinite approach describes the postmodern condition:

Holy-Center-Approaching is soon to be the number one Zonal pastime. Its balmy heyday is nearly on it. Soon more champions, adepts, magicians of all ranks and orders will be in the field than ever before in the history of the game. The sun will rule all enterprise, if it be honest and sporting. The Gauss curve will herniate toward the excellent. And tankers the likes of Närrisch and Slothrop here will have already been weeded out. (508)

Reaching his Nostos, “the birthplace of the rocket, of himself, and of his time” (Hume 157), in the “Egg the flying Rocket hatched from, *navel* of the 50-meter radio sky” (509-10, emphasis mine), Slothrop, a true Parzival, is unable to discover the meaning behind his experience, there being, the narrator comments, “no good reason to hope for any turn, any surprise *I-see-it*, not from Slothrop” (509). Such missed encounters pervade *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Its questers, perpetually hunting for the “Kute Korrespondences” (590) that might explain their experience of self, reliably fail to transcend approximation when facing what appears to be the object of their search, the grail, in the logic of the novel, frustratingly being at its most ungraspable whenever most promisingly within reach.

Notably, in reference to the novel’s position toward meaning in language, this trope of the unavailable insight extends from the novel’s character to the reader of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Thus, while, e.g., in the ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ chapter of *Ulysses* Bloom and Stephen unknowingly pass, and miss, each other, the significance of the missed encounter, its epiphanic, redemptive potential, however being intelligible to the reader, in *Gravity’s Rainbow* it is entirely unclear what exactly the revelation Slothrop misses should entail. The world of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is thus (epistemologically) different from that constructed by *Ulysses*, the center of

meaning, lamented in the modernist novel's missed connections, not being veiled yet theoretically accessible to a comprehensive all-connecting authority but shown to be altogether absent from the text and world, the novel "loading the *promise* of insight to come with more connotations than any set of determinate meaning-statements could conceivably bear, and then deferring fulfillment of this promise" (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 26). Thus, while the fact of missed connections is seldom commented on overtly in *Ulysses*, leaving it to the reader to parallaxically triangulate meaning from fragmented perspectives that on their own lack access to meaning, *Gravity's Rainbow* continually points out acts of "one more negligence" (509) fatally obfuscating a revelation that remains unintelligible to both reader and, apparently, even narrator. The novel pointing toward Slothrop's failure to finally understand and connect, *what* exactly Slothrop is missing at Peenemünde and *why* this is his holy Center remains unclear. Like characters such as Tchitcherine and Slothrop, the reader "will miss the Light, but not the Finger" (566), textual pointers indicating seemingly relevant details while eliding any enlightening revelation.

Meaning thus being indefinitely approachable yet never finally attainable, the narrator addresses both Slothrop, the reader, and even the author himself in a second person lamentation:

But just over the embankment, down in the arena, what might that have been just now, waiting in this broken moonlight, camouflage paint from fins to point crazed into jigsaw... is it, then, really never to find you again? Not even in your worst times of night, with pencil words on your page only Δt from the things they stand for? And inside the victim is twitching, fingering beads, touching wood, avoiding any Operational Word. Will it really never come to take you, now? (510)

Employing the mathematical metaphor of an asymptotic approach, *Gravity's Rainbow*, similar to Derridean *différance*, describes language as infinitely approaching meaning yet ultimately unable to bridge the gap between words and "the things they stand for" (510), signifier and signified. Meaning thus perpetually deferred, its aim "postponed indefinitely" (320), all one is left with is a never-ending "Holy-Center-Approaching" (508) devoid of the finality of a grail-like Holy Center. With Δt , the rate of change (Δ) in time (t), "approaching zero" (159), the gap

between language and its referent diminishes yet, as *Gravity's Rainbow's* inability to reach any holy center shows, is never eliminated. Just like the rapid succession of film frames, with Δt as the time between frames, creates only the comforting illusion of movement (407, 567), so does “trying to learn the real function” (521) through an act of “zeroing in” (521) on a holy center only yield approximations. Δt thus, as Siegel remarks, “signifies the proximity of transcendence just a Δt away, and at the same time reminds us of this infinitesimal margin that somehow must be traversed if we are to attain enlightenment” (M. R. Siegel, *Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in Gravity's Rainbow* 84). Similarly, the safest place during a rocket launch is “at the center of the target area” (425), rockets, like language, never hitting the absolute center in their approximations.

Feirefiz

Slothrop's self is subject of a continuous deferral, meaning, any totalizing insight unavailable in the novel, perpetually receding, leaving Slothrop decentered. This inability to conclusively reach a form of recognition of a central meaning also becomes apparent in the character Tchitcherine. As Hume notes, “[h]e and Slothrop map onto each other in their reaching the edges of illumination but being unable to break through” (Hume 110). Another of the novel's questing Parzivals, Tchitcherine is a subject of the “terrible politics of the Grail” (701), his grail-quest for the Rocket as quest for selfhood resulting from and leading into his victimization by Their sinister politics. Thus, like Slothrop, Tchitcherine senses “*A Rocket-cartel*. A structure cutting across every agency human and paper [...] a State that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul” (566). Reading his self as a “predestined shape” (701) plotted by outside forces, he is widely Slothrop's double. Tchitcherine's immachination of self, a man “who is more metal than anything else” (337) and a “giant supermolecule with so many open bonds available at any given time [...] [which] others latch on, [...] the pharmacology of the Tchitcherine thus modified” (346), i.e., a malleable, plastic product of that which is attached to him, is even more material than the technological Rocketman Slothrop, with whom he at times even exchanges clothes and identities.

In addition, as Hume notes, both Slothrop and Tchitcherine are “haunted by a fear of blacks, Slothrop’s fears being general, Tchitcherine’s being centered on his half-brother” (Hume 109). Tchitcherine experiences himself as “under some official curse” (343), the cause of which he identifies as his illegitimate African half-brother Enzian: “It’s because of Enzian, it’s got to be damned Enzian” (349). Thus, as “[t]he dossier that Tchitcherine put together on Enzian [...] was reproduced by some eager apparatchik and stashed in Tchitcherine’s own dossier” (352), his (paper) identity merges with Enzian’s as “another *part* of him – a black version of something inside *himself*. A something he needs to... liquidate” (499). Enzian, like Jamf for Slothrop, therefore appears as the root cause of Tchitcherine’s self and the seeming plot against him, causing his “compulsive need” (338) to find and “annihilate the Schwarzkommando and his mythical half-brother, Enzian” (338). Tchitcherine’s official quest for the Rocket is personally motivated by his quest to kill his half-brother Enzian and thus, like Slothrop’s rocket-quest, a quest to recover, or annihilate, the past.

Tchitcherine’s half-black “*mythical* half-brother” (338, emphasis mine) draws directly from Wolfram’s *Parzival*. Enzian, the half-black half-brother Tchitcherine seeks to confront in order to stabilize his selfhood, clearly mirrors Wolfram’s Feirefiz, Parzival’s (literally chequered) half-black half-brother whom Parzival meets and fights with at the end of the medieval romance until they recognize each other as kin and make peace, a recognition that finally opens the grail castle to Parzival, redeeming the questing knight and concluding his search.⁶⁴ *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s anti-quest, however, denies its brothers both climactic fight and redeeming, meaningful recognition. Instead, when Tchitcherine finally reaches the object of his quest in the novel’s penultimate episode, the encounter remains markedly inconsequential, Tchitcherine, as is typical of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s postmodern anti-Parzivals, not recognizing the holy center of his quest when “black faces pass by, mba-kayere, some glancing at him curiously, others too involved with their own exhaustion, or with keeping a tight guard on a covered wagon containing the warhead section of the 00001” (734), having been put under a

⁶⁴ Feirefiz, like Enzian the product of a romantic encounter between an African woman and a white father, the father of Parzival/Tchitcherine, travelling east (Tchitcherine’s and Enzian’s father is a sailor in the Russo-Japanese War (350) while the knight Gahmuret travels East in search of adventure, an anchor, significantly, in his coat of arms, is literally chequered like a magpie, a description of an interracial offspring *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in this case more realistic, does not adopt.

love spell by the witch Geli Tripping that makes him “blind now to all but [Geli]” (734). As the narrator (inconclusively) concludes the quest: “This is magic. Sure – but not necessarily fantasy. Certainly not the first time a man has passed his brother by, at the edge of the evening, often forever, without knowing it” (735). As in Slothrop’s decentering passing of Peenemünde, a promised central insight proves to be unavailable to Tchitcherine again.

Notably, while “[t]his is magic” (735), Geli’s witchcraft is presented as different from the preserving “magic” (97) of Blicero’s totalizing mythological parallelisms, the linguistically nostalgic magic of “the *act* of naming” (366). The “apprentice witch Geli Tripping” (329) is distinct from Blicero’s structural, capitalized “Witch” (96). As the novel remarks, there are “two distinct sorts of witch, and Geli is the World-choosing sort” (718). The same way *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s anti-quest presents itself as an alternative to the totalizing modernist Ulyssean mythical parallelism, resisting the totality of structure, Geli’s World-choosing witchcraft of “love” opposes the “bureaucratic” witchery of the likes of Blicero, who are eager to turn the “Hexes-Stadt”⁶⁵ into “just another capital, where the only enterprise is administrating,” which she knows is “not what magic is about” (718). Geli’s loving witchcraft thereby comes closest to leaving behind “Their electric voices,” the human urge to “*promote death*” in imposing the “still strata” of totalizing binaries on to a Titanic existence of indescribable “overpeaking of life” against which structuring “human consciousness” is a “reaction, nearly as string as life, holding down the green uprising” (720). The controlling totality of the System, the novel suggests, can be defected from as “[a] few keep going over to the Titans every day, in their striving subcreation” (720) through an act of love resisting humanity’s totalizing tendencies. *Gravity’s Rainbow* thereby reflects, as Joanne Freer shows, the “countercultural values” (Freer 46) of its time: Make Love not War, the continuity of “Their enterprise” (628), the War, being displaced by a revolutionary love spell resisting stratification of meaning but operating in a heterotopia of middles.

Tchitcherine’s *méconnaissance* of Enzian, to borrow the Lacanian term indicating the simultaneous recognition and misrecognition of self, can thus not satisfactorily be referred to as

⁶⁵ It is unclear why Pynchon apparently gives an incorrect, anglicized plural of the German word for ‘witch.’

a non-recognition, a failure of the quest. Unlike the encounter of Parzival and Feirefiz, a recognition redeeming Parzival to the grail, Tchitcherine and Enzian's (anti-)meeting is completely inconclusive. Under Geli's love spell, the two brothers neither satisfyingly recognize *nor* misrecognize one another, opening up the text to an aesthetic that rejects such binarities:

Enzian on his motorcycle stops for a moment, mba-kayere, to talk to the scarred, unshaven white. They're in the middle of the bridge. They talk broken German. Tchitcherine manages to hustle half a pack of American cigarettes and three raw potatoes. The two men nod, not quite formally, not quite smiling. (734)

As one can see, *Gravity's Rainbow* resists totalizing structures through a decentering aesthetic of "not quite," Tchitcherine's anti-quest, in its dissolution rather than solution, conforming neither to the quest nor to its, equally structured, binary opposite negation as failed quest. Instead, there is communication in the encounter yet one that refuses to lead into climactic revelation. In finding an aesthetic between these totalizing poles, *Gravity's Rainbow* subverts binarity, the not quite climactic encounter between Enzian and Tchitcherine frustrating the categories of success and failure. The anti-quest, as can be seen, is thus distinct from a failed quest in its perpetual frustration that denies the conclusion of its questers' seeming 'failure' its finality.

The Liberating Potential of Frustration

Slothrop's Dissolution

This liberating frustration, rather than failure, of the quest in *Gravity's Rainbow's* anti-quest also becomes apparent in Slothrop's scattering decentering of self, a dissolution that, in its inconsequentiality, is a "not quite" solution to the novel's postmodern problem of selfhood and meaning and offers a (political) alternative to the System. *Gravity's Rainbow's* (anti-)quester's search for identity ends not in a harmonious integration but in a (literal) *disintegration*, Slothrop being "[s]cattered all over the Zone. It's doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again, in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained'" (712). Slothrop's radical decentering of self, the unavailability of an essential meaning of selfhood behind the (inert) cultural conditionings he discovers to produce him, is thus an escape from Their totalizing control, the

impossibility to ‘positively identify’ Slothrop, i.e., attach to him an irreducible, transcendental substance (rather than define him negatively), also meaning it is impossible to ‘detain,’ arrest and control, the lieutenant AWOL.

Slothrop’s disintegration depicts a decentered postmodern condition. On his quest for meaningful, essential selfhood, Slothrop “has become one plucked albatross. Plucked, hell – *stripped*” (712) as layer after layer of cultural conditioning, structures that force an identity onto Slothrop, are stripped away without revealing any core.⁶⁶ Nostalgically attempting to find “a way to get back” (623) to an innocent, original irreducible meaning of selfhood, Slothrop is “plucking the albatross of self” (623). However, “[o]nly feathers... redundant or regenerable organs, ‘which we would be tempted to classify under the ‘Hydra-Phänomen’ were it not for the complete absence of hostility....” (712) remain of Slothrop. The novel depicts the self as a centerless, heterotopic plurality without any coherent, all-pervading meaning. Like the romantic symbol of the albatross in Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” the notion of a central, meaningful selfhood is a good omen turned into a curse as the illusion of “the old perfect Cartesian harmony” (655) of the self serves (Their) control and domination.

Slothrop’s inability, or even frustrated refusal, to plot his/himself into ever more complex structures thus gains a liberating potential. As already noted, Slothrop’s dissolution occurs directly after him being confronted with the untenability of the roles he is meant to play, the mythical parallelism assigned to him. Feeling “brave and in control,” Slothrop’s composure, literally his structuring composition of self, is disrupted by the interference of yet “another message [...]: ROCKETMAN WAS HERE” (624). The “albatross stir[ring],” Slothrop attempts to “implicate himself” (624), trying to sustain an identity with “some yesterday version of himself” (624) that might have written the message. However, Slothrop proves to be incapable of holding up such overplotting, the untenability of the roles assigned to him, seeming “paraphrases of himself” (625) frustrating his ability to compose them into a coherent, centralized whole. Unable to integrate all of his roles into the narrative of a coherent self and “*make it all fit*” (626), Slothrop instead disintegrates into a mind- and ego-less state of “feeling

⁶⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein employs a similar metaphor when accusing positivist philosophy of trying to find the real artichoke by stripping it of its leaves (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §164).

natural” (626): “At last, lying one afternoon spread-eagled at his ease in the sun [...], he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection” (625). By turning into a “living intersection,” Slothrop’s dissolved state as a product of the Other represents the postmodern decentered self far better than the Cartesian harmony of the “white albatross” (713), the stable, coherent Ego that was the aim of his quest. In discovering his being as an intersection of forces without central core, Slothrop evades control through ego-loss, his dissolution, an acceptance of man’s basic decentering, bearing a liberating, even revolutionary potential of life.

Decentered Textual Aesthetics in Gravity’s Rainbow

Gravity’s Rainbow mirrors Slothrop’s dissolution in its aesthetics of textual decentering. In decentering the narrative, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s anti-quest, a subversive frustration of mythical parallelisms, resists the totalization that comes with both the solution of the quest and its complete negation, reversed yet equally structured, in failure. The novel’s narrative, already disorganized to begin with, thus increasingly disintegrates after Slothrop’s disintegration opening the last part of the novel, culminating in the ontologically instable, vignette-like chaos of the novel’s last section. Even though oftentimes presented as the novel’s conclusion in popular summaries of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s plot, Slothrop’s dissolution resists constituting a (negated) solution to the novel, the novel, frustratingly, continuing for another more than hundred pages *after* its quester ends, even though failingly, his quest. The novel resisting any totalization of its protagonist’s dissolution as solution, Slothrop’s decentering is denied textual centrality by the decentered text’s resistance to afford it the structural locus of a meaningful conclusion, the end, of the novel. This frustration of the notion of a solution, a consequential conclusion that unifies all of its aspects into a central insight, also becomes apparent in the novel ending with Gottfried’s, rather than Slothrop’s, sacrifice to the Rocket. *Gravity’s Rainbow* frustrates the quest pattern when, as Kathryn Hume remarks, “having established an affinity between Slothrop and the V-2, Pynchon might have launched him in one of the last rockets, but he launches Gottfried instead” (Hume 6). The novel’s end is decidedly inconsequential, Slothrop’s mysterious sexual connection to the V-2 that drives the novel’s plot destining him for the erotic communion with a technology of death embodied by Gottfried’s end inside the

Rocket, an ending the novel denies Slothrop, acknowledging the dangerous potential of such an illusion of total coherence. Consequentially inconsequential and significantly insignificant, Hume notes that Slothrop's "fadeout is not tragic, not comic, only marginally ironic" (Hume 7). Not a failed quest, negation necessarily implying the positive, but a frustrated, anti-quest, the novel escapes totalizing structures.

Indeed, Slothrop's dissolution is denied totality not only in his inconsequential negligence of the fate structurally predestined for him and the decentered location of his conclusion but also in its complete lack of consequences for the rest of the novel, an inconclusiveness that, as will be shown, does not deprive him of subversive, even revolutionary, potential. Thus, even though materially "[s]cattered all over the Zone" (712), Slothrop's disintegration remains wholly inconclusive, not leading to closure, as the character reappears again and again despite his prior fadeout, thereby even destabilizing the image of destabilization itself so as to not afford it with meaningful, totalizable finality. Despite his prior material dissolution referred to repeatedly throughout the rest of the novel, Slothrop can be discovered "playing a blues on a mouth harp" (642) outside an Army colonel's window, he appears to Seaman Bodine, "one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature any more"(740), joins the "Floundering Four" (675), a parodic team of comic book superheroes, and is supposedly sighted, after the events of the novel, on "the only record album ever put out by The Fool, an English rock group" (742). If it were not for the poetic language of Slothrop's dissolution and the repeated references to the singular event, the text would appear not much different without it, any semblance of centrality meticulously removed from the novel.

Revolutionary Frustration

Far from depicting a nihilistic meaninglessness, however, *Gravity's Rainbow's* self-decentering contains a liberating potential, opening a plurality of meaning by breaking out of the controlling modernist binary structures of the quest. Slothrop's frustration and decentering thus represents a revolutionary, subversive moment:

There is also the story about Tyrone Slothrop, who was sent into the Zone to be present at his own assembly—perhaps, heavily paranoid voices have whispered, *his time's*

assembly—and there ought to be a punch line to it, but there isn't. The plan went wrong.

He is being broken down instead, and scattered. (738, my emphasis underlined)

While the assembly of the rocket harbors a globalized, totalitarian era of technology – as Pynchon's Nixonian Cold-War presents shows, the plan was successful –, the disassembly of Slothrop, the recognition of the decentering of the human condition in postmodernity, the story of Slothrop as postmodern man lacking a "punch line"(738) that should be there, i.e., missing a coherence providing, essential meaning, disrupts Their plan by frustratedly ceasing to hunt after a transcendental signified. The decentering of the self due to frustration, both in the sense of the novel's overplotting and deferral of meaning, thus frustrating the projected quest pattern, and a resulting resignative frustration for which Slothrop's dissolution is exemplary, must not be viewed wholly negatively. Instead, as Donna Haraway's model of the cyborg subject suggests, such decentered subjectivity offers subversive and liberating possibilities in its rejection of "the myth of original unity" (Haraway 151) which domination, requiring the illusion of a self-identical individual, the novel shows, is founded on. According to Haraway, "[t]he cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled postmodern collective and personal self" (Haraway 163) that undermines totalizing polarity employed as a means of control and domination in its embrace of "partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves" (Haraway 157). *Gravity's Rainbow's* drop-out anti-questers, particularly Tchitcherine, the man with a "bodyhood of steel" (702), and Slothrop as Rocketman, but also "Plechazunga, the Pig-Hero" (567), embodying Haraway's oppositional "joint kinship with animals and machines" (Haraway 154), are dead ringers for the cyborg subject, an "illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism" (Haraway 151). Significantly, Slothrop and Tchitcherine seek to restore their legitimacy in their nostalgic quests until they, frustratingly and frustratedly, give up their quest in a dissolution into the recognition of the inherent incomplete decentered provisionality Haraway terms the cyborg.⁶⁷

Frustrating the quester's search for a mythological unity of selfhood, Slothrop's dissolution into

⁶⁷ While Haraway explicitly employs her model of the cyborg from a feminist perspective, the cyborg disrupts all forms of oppression. Nevertheless, as Raymond Olderman points out, escape from the System in *Gravity's Rainbow* implies an escape from "patriarchal behavior" (Olderman 200). Rocketman thus also fulfills the cyborg's paradigmatic gender-and sexlessness, e.g., when Slothrop, his nose rather than his defining penis becoming erect, gets a 'nosejob' that ends with Trudi climbing into, penetrating, his nose (439), disrupting conceptions of sex and gender.

plural, decentered subjectivity challenges totalizing structures, thereby offering an escape from oppression.

Thus revisiting Slothrop's missed, unenlightening encounter with his holy center in Peenemünde, it becomes clear that Slothrop's (and for that matter, Tchitcherine's) inability to sustain the indefinite "Holy-Center-Approaching [that] is soon to be the number one Zonal pastime" (508), the future norm, without frustration, giving up and dropping out of the quest, is not a negative attribute but in fact a 'redeeming' factor.⁶⁸ If the world of the future, Pynchon's present, is dominated by "champions, adepts, magicians of all ranks and orders" capable of sustaining a level of complexity inept "tankers the likes of Närrisch and Slothrop" (508) are incapable of, Blicero, who follows through on his mythical parallelism of the Oven-game in sacrificing his Hansel, Gottfried, to the Rocket-Oven being a prime example for these future rulers, Slothrop's frustrated, and to the reader frustrating, abandonment of the quest and dissolution into a cyborg state provides a subversive, even revolutionary potential. Giving up their quest, the likes of Tchitcherine and Slothrop become impossible to "ever be 'found' again, in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained'" (712), thereby evading the future planned for them, death, experimentation, and "another assignment [...] [t]o Central Asia" that is "operationally, to die" (706). Frustration, the anti-quester's "long and scuffling future" (738) without attaining, or fancying oneself to attain, an ever deferred goal, serves as a liberating, alternative function to totalizing structures. Slothrop's pronounced "mediocrity" (738) – judging from Slothrop's ability to internalize literal rocket science and learn German during the short time span of his stay at the Casino Herman Goering not necessarily a lack of intellect but a 'middleness' – is his greatest strength.⁶⁹ Thus, when Seaman Bodine offers Slothrop a shirt soaked in John Dillinger's blood (741), another grail containing the blood of a, this time countercultural, savior, as a token against disintegration, Slothrop remains unresponsive. Quitting the game altogether, not through a transcending assertion of subjective

⁶⁸ If 'redemption' were a word applicable to *Gravity's Rainbow*, the point being that, as Rosenthal notes, "Slothrop's redemption does not materialize" (Rosenthal 413), the novel frustrating the quest's end in redemption.

⁶⁹ The position of the 'Everyman,' central to both *Ulysses* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, is thus valued differently in both novels. While Joyce's mythical parallelisms ascend Bloom as Everyman in his triviality to ancient heroism, thus depicting a seeming necessity to instill an, otherwise absent, meaning into everyday life, *Gravity's Rainbow* embraces the Everyman in his mediocrity, his apparent lack of centrality being an integral factor in his liberation.

integrity against “this cycle of infection and death” (724) but through frustrated submission to ego-loss, decentering, Slothrop has no need for a new grail. His liberation lies in him giving up all possibility of self-definition, “Slothrop and the S-Gerät and the Jamf/Imipolex mystery hav[ing] grown to be strangers” (434) in the course of his overcomplex quest.

As Raymond Olderman remarks, “[s]cattering is a difficult stage in the freak’s journey because it also plays a positive role in throwing off the rigidities of the System – it plays the role of ‘deconstruction’” (Olderman 219). Slothrop’s dissolution, resembling a countercultural act of ‘dropping out,’ implies not only personal liberation but also contains a revolutionary political dimension. After his dissolution, “there’s no telling which of the Zone’s present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering” (742). The “story about Tyrone Slothrop” (738), the new “ironic political myth” (Haraway 149) of “partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves” (Haraway 157) Haraway envisions in the cyborg, installs an oppositional moment in Western culture after WWII. The offshoots of Slothrop’s scattering thus create disruptive, unaccountable cells that oppose totalization into the System.

Conclusion: *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* Postmodern Plastic Myth

Evidently, the novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* is this “story about Tyrone Slothrop” (738, emphasis mine). As Hume shows, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, following the Ulyssean tradition of ‘updating’ myth, provides postmodernity with an alternative, “new hero-myth” (Hume xv), an open, decentered individual “integrating with chaos and accepting uncertainty” (Hume 182) rather than the monomythical hero’s integration into and consolidation of society. By frustrating the fulfillment of the traditional quest pattern into one of perpetual deferral of meaning, *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* anti-quest not only subverts and evades a modernist mythical parallelism deemed oppressive in its urge toward a totality of order but also offers a (politically and literarily) liberating potential opposing totalitarian tendencies.

As could be shown, *Gravity’s Rainbow* rejects the modernist mythical method as totalizing, casting a Nazi officer as one of its most overt spokespersons. Joycean mythical parallelisms such as Blicero’s Oven-State are thus, polemically, argued to bespeak the same

totalizing ('German') tendencies that ultimately lead into the holocaust. Germanizing Joyce's *Odyssey* in its usage of, e.g., German fairy-tales and specifically German versions of *Parzival*, thereby critiquing a romance with technology and a totalizing ideal of transcendence evident in, yet not restricted to, German philosophy, culture, and history (Cowart, "Germany and German Culture in the Works of Thomas Pynchon" 306), *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, does not exhaust itself in a simple critique of German Nazism. Arguing for a continuity of a totalizing System not only between the factions of WWII but also between German totalitarianism and the novel's present US under Nixon, *Gravity's Rainbow's* critique is directed against a (modernist) urge toward totalizable order that results in domination and death. Mythical parallelism, the modernist attempt to control the contingency of modern experience within a totality of order, is thus shown to be incapable of representing and containing the plurality of human existence in its entirety, the urge toward transcendental meaning inherent in the pattern of the grail quest leading into oppression and victimization, the seeming controllers losing their autonomy in an all-comprehensive system.

Gravity's Rainbow's anti-quest, deferring the fulfillment of the quest in an asymptotic approach depicting the postmodern subject as decentered, thus offers an alternative to a modernist, totalizing use of myth, resisting the "bookish symmetries" (101) of the quest pattern. Paralleling *Parzival's* grail quest, *Gravity's Rainbow* globalizes the quester's search into an indefinite asymptotic approach to the grail. The Holy Grail, sublime object and aim of the quest, having transformed into a technological sublime incapable of providing coherency, the plastic interchangeability and commodification of the grail and its emblemization in the V-2 as a weapon of mass-destruction, *Gravity's Rainbow's* frustrating parody of the grail quest ironically undercuts the search for transcendence. Postmodern grail and quester alike are thus shown to be unfit to sustain the centrality of meaning, the promise of a *Nostos*, a return to an original, mythological unity, afforded to them by the mythical parallelism. Postmodernity denying its (anti-) *Parzivals* their redemption in a conclusive discovery of meaningful selfhood, instead depicting any such quest as destined to an asymptotic approach that suspends final resolution, *Gravity's Rainbow* questions the attainability of transcendental meaning, the grail as key to "decipher the divine language" (Todorov 129) and nostalgic return to the quester's home in a

consolidation of selfhood and integration into society. Slothrop as Parzival is thus unable to redeem his maimed Fisher King, the wheelchair-bound American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “*his president*” (374), having “died back in spring. Just before the surrender” (373) unbeknownst to Slothrop. As is typical of the novel’s trope of unavailable insight, the knightly hero Slothrop misses the redemptive connection. While, as already noted, the medieval knight’s, but also Eliot’s Wasteland of WWI could be restored, the dream of an original, radical meaningful unity, as can be seen in the novel’s WWII Zone’s inert human condition(ing), is revealed to be illusory. The postmodern subject lacks any center to return to, the anti-quest frustrating the fulfillment of the quest into an indefinite asymptotic approach.

However, as already noted, this globalized not-at-home-ness, Parzival’s defining negligence and lack of identity generalized into a portrayal of the postmodern condition, does not imply defeatist, nihilistic meaninglessness, but, at the same time as it submits the individual to a never-ending search, provides the novel with a politically and literarily subversive potential. While the asymptotic approach to meaning is presented as a hopelessly nostalgic endeavor, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s anti-quest is not without hope. The submission to the basic decenteredness of subjectivity, the impossibility of global structures of determination and their succinct being overtaken by local and provisional, plural little narratives, contains a liberating moment. Frustration thereby becomes not only a property of both characters and readers of the novel, trying to fix an ever-deferring meaning to the events of the novel, but a means of resisting totalizing structures of oppression. Slothrop’s dissolution is thus mirrored in the novel’s decentered textual aesthetics constructing a new, uncertain hero-myth. *Gravity’s Rainbow* refuses to contain itself in the binarity of the traditional quest paradigm, its *dissolution*, similarly to Derridean *deconstruction* not a reconstruction of finalizable meaning but an ever-continuing construction thereof, resisting totalizing consolidation into a type of *resolution* to the novel. By thus frustrating the quest paradigm into an anti-quest that depicts the search for meaning as the ever-deferred project of a decentered subject, *Gravity’s Rainbow* offers an alternative aesthetic to modernist, totalizing practices of reading and experiencing the world. The novel values the inherent uncertainty of the postmodern self as a positive attribute that allows for an escape from the oppressive structures that bind, politically, the individual in the West and, literarily, creative

writing. *Gravity's Rainbow's* frustration of mythical parallelisms, modernist systems of order, to a point of breakdown revealing the basic decenteredness of the subject thus deconditions, and thereby liberates, the partialized self from its totalizing tendencies that control and victimize it.

Responding to the Ulyssean mythical parallelism to the Homeric *Odyssey*, *Gravity's Rainbow's* (Anti-)Parzival provides a "German Odyssey" (486), critiquing the (German yet trans-German) totalization of meaning in an all-comprehensive system of order as leading into control and domination. *Gravity's Rainbow* is thus, as Cowart notes, "at times closer to Chrétien de Troyes or Wolfram von Eschenbach than to even so experimental a post-Flaubertian novelist as Joyce" (Cowart, *The Art of Allusion* 129). From explicit mentions of grails and knightly heroes to the adoption of the family relations in Wolfram's *Parzival*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, as opposed to *Ulysses*, in which only the novel's title overtly points toward the Odyssean parallel, the novel's Homeric chapter headings being later scholarly additions absent from the novel itself, makes its mythical parallelism most clear. Rather than discarding the Ulyssean Tradition in a rejection of modernist order, *Gravity's Rainbow* utilizes but reinterprets Joyce's *Odyssey* in a post-modern manner.

Thus, while *Ulysses* seeks to stabilize a meaningful selfhood through recourse to a mythical past, the (German) *Odyssey* of *Gravity's Rainbow* has the opposite effect, depicting not a reintegration of a meaningful subject but its decentering and the unavailability of a totalizable final insight in postmodernity. Rather, *Gravity's Rainbow's* anti-quest dramatizes the impossibility for such a closed system to fully contain, control and represent a contingent reality. By overdetermining its mythical parallelism to *Parzival* into frustration, *Gravity's Rainbow's* German *Odyssey* subverts the meaning-making function of the modernist mythical method, stressing the incommensurability of such totalizing systems of order attempting to attain an evasive central meaning with the contingency of postmodern experience. The novel thereby creates an alternative form of myth that offers political and literary liberation from totalization. While modernism's lost center had to be stabilized through mythical parallels, *Gravity's Rainbow's* parallels to *Parzival* demonstrate, in their frustration of the quest into an anti-quest of indefinite, yet not wholly negative, deferral, the liberating potential of the basic unattainability of conclusive meaning. *Gravity's Rainbow's* aesthetics of uncertainty therefore

destabilize the quest pattern, resisting totalization through evading the affixation of the binary structure of a 'solution' to its dissolution portrayed in the (inconsequential) liberating decentering of its anti-Parzivals. In the frustrated costume play of selves played out in *Gravity's Rainbow's* mythical parallelism, Slothrop as postmodern man thus appears as an "Aggregat" (362) of roles, lacking a stable center of selfhood *Parzival* might contain, thus evading totalization, and thereby oppression and control, into a single radical cause.

Notably, further problematizing any attempts to comprehensively control the novel through modernist mythologizing, *Gravity's Rainbow's* anti-quest not only projects itself onto Parzival's grail quest but is in fact overplotted by references to figures such as Faust, Tannhäuser, Hansel and Gretel or Rilke's Orpheus (Hume 12), an ever-expanding selection that, despite its resistance to be subsumed to an irreducible core, is not arbitrary, operating from the space of middles *Gravity's Rainbow* claims for itself. This overplotting of mythical parallels, a further frustration of any attempts to refer the novel to a singular root, i.e., for example *Parzival*, counteracts a consolidation of the anti-quest into yet another monolithic structure, ensuring the openness of *Gravity's Rainbow's* mythical parallelisms. Neither *Parzival* nor its postmodernist subversion into an Anti-Parzival can thus conclusively 'explain' the novel and its protagonist. Instead, eschewing the base concept of global determination, only local, provisional and open systems of determination are offered by the novel, none claiming all-pervasive, final transcendent meaning.

Gravity's Rainbow's German Odyssey represents not a rejection of the mythical parallelism of the Ulyssean Tradition but a post-modern modification thereof. True to T.S. Eliot's dictum, *Gravity's Rainbow* assimilates and modifies the literary tradition, both the modern tradition and the traditional quest, in its discussion of the postmodern condition. Although a German Odyssey, exemplarily conducted in the novel's (Anti-) Parzival pattern, *Gravity's Rainbow* remains an Odyssey like *Ulysses*. However, while the modernist Odyssey sought to reintegrate meaning into modernity, *Gravity's Rainbow's* post-modernist reinterpretation of mythical parallelisms responds to the modernist paradigm in an aesthetics of disintegration, the (anti-) quest conceding "from the outset to be factitious and unresolvable" (Coward, *The Art of Allusion* 132). With the modernist urge toward order being shown to lead

into totalitarianism, oppression, and control, however, this uncertainty, resulting from *Gravity's Rainbow's* modification of the Ulyssean Tradition, has its positive aspects: Dropping out from totalizing meaning-making by embracing the (plastic) plurality and heterogeneity of the postmodern condition contains a liberating potential. In the "story about Tyrone Slothrop" (738), *Gravity's Rainbow* provides postmodernity with an alternative, decentered and liberating myth to live by.

3. Joyce's Mass and Pynchon's Liturgical Calendar: Time and History in *Gravity's Rainbow*

As Tyrone Slothrop walks back to the Casino Hermann Goering,

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. (204)

Nobody except maybe James Joyce. At the end of June 16, 1904 and the mass Joyce celebrates in and with *Ulysses* on that day, Stephen Dedalus could still expect such meaningful closure: communion is established and modern fragmentation 'juggled' into a coherent unity as he leaves the novel. Spanning three-fourths of a solar year in parallel to the three-fourths of a solar day over which *Ulysses* unfolds, *Gravity's Rainbow* no longer offers any such 'simple' and definitive solutions. Total explanations that retrospectively arrange experience into an all-coherent "kind of sense at day's end" (204) are met with skepticism in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

For Pynchon, this urge to 'juggle' the totality of experience in time into a timeless, all-pervading principle or plot is the remnant of a secularized Puritan desire to 'read' God's divine plan and thus gain certainty of one's Election, i.e., transcendence. Although the world has lost God as its master-plotter, Newtonian physics, the ideology of technological progress, Marxism and Hegelian dialectics, to name but a few, represent secular offshoots of an underlying Puritan desire for complete determinism in history based. However, any such total yet sterile history is merely a paranoid illusion that serves to legitimate the (self-proclaimed) Elects' control over and exploitation of the preterite masses. Pynchon rejects Joyce's mass-structure as simply another such oppressively linear and teleological routinization of time. Any 'history' that subjects the experience of (change in) time in its entirety to one underlying, linear principle is shown to be ultimately based in an ontology of the frozen moment that locates transcendence in the creation of a static, closed system and thus stills all change. 'History,' the novel shows, orients life toward total control and annihilation as it negates free choice in its erection of complete determinism.

Gravity's Rainbow responds to the Ulyssean Tradition by transposing the linear and teleological mass-structure of *Ulysses* into the circular structure of the Church year. The parallelism to the mandalic Church year in *Gravity's Rainbow* directs attention to the sublime unknowability and undecidedness of the singular, present moment. The novel thereby seeks to counter the disenchanting Protestant bureaucratization of time by reinstilling postmodern consciousness with the irrational and 'magical' thinking that inheres to the Catholic liturgical calendar and modern physics' reliance on probabilities rather than adamant Newtonian laws. The novel's reinterpretation of Joyce's mass thus plays out against the backdrop of a negotiation of different temporalities, conventional, paranoid history represented in the novel's parabolic images, a structure progressing from a determinable origin to a distinct terminus or telos, as, e.g., emblemized in the V-2s' flightpath, and the circular and simultaneous, post-Einsteinian space-time continuum of its kalendar⁷⁰.

The following chapter can be read as consisting of two parts dedicated to the linearity of an oppressive paranoid history and a regenerative circularity and presentism, respectively, that are negotiated in Pynchon's transposition of Joyce's mass-structure into *Gravity's Rainbow's* liturgical calendar. After briefly outlining how Pynchon's use of the liturgical calendar can be understood as both a response to the novel's transnational Ulyssean Tradition and its distinctly American Puritan tradition – both Joyce's mass-structure and the Puritan dynamic of Election and Preterition are understood as effecting the homogenization of time into a totalizing history the novel rejects – the first half of this chapter will commence by outlining how *Gravity's Rainbow* employs its liturgical parallelisms. An exemplary close reading of the novel's Advent section will serve to establish the two temporalities at play in the novel, an overarching history within which the hopes the novel's parallelisms to the liturgical calendar imply are perpetually undercut and a distinct presentism that raises the possibility of hopes for love, community and meaning in the moment. As will be seen, only a self-consciously foolish faith in the uncircumscribed, open possibilities of the momentary and transitional may actualize the kalendar's meaningful potential and thus offer a way into self-liberation and regeneration.

⁷⁰ To distinguish their kalendar from an ordinary list of events, the established churches retained the older "K" spelling of the late Latin "kalendrium". In other words, a kalendar is an ecclesiastical calendar and will be used here synonymously with "liturgical calendar," "Church year" or "liturgical year."

Since *Gravity's Rainbow* establishes its postmodernist temporality, to be outlined in detail in the second half of this chapter, from within the Ulyssean Tradition, Pynchon's and Joyce's use of their liturgical material and views of time and history will be further set in relation to another, thereby describing Pynchon's point of departure from/to the Ulyssean Tradition in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The rest of the first half of this chapter will then investigate the linear temporality of history *Gravity's Rainbow* rejects as victimizing and destructive. The parabolic flightpath of the V-2 rocket will be analyzed as the novel's primary image for such a Protestantly rationalized, paranoid history. Through an analysis of the novel's use of mathematical calculus as a metaphor for a routinization of time, history in *Gravity's Rainbow* will be interpreted as a way of imposing an all-pervading principle onto time through which the novel's elect justify their exploitation and destruction of the preterite masses. As will be shown, linearity in *Gravity's Rainbow* describes a totalizing disciplinary regime of rational historicism meant to halt entropy – a closed system's degeneration into disorder through time – and thus ultimately control a sublimely undefinable death into signification. *Gravity's Rainbow's* Puritan Protestantism's freezing of time, however, means the reduction of the moment into an abstract point wholly reliant on past and future and thus implies a fraudulent transcendence that denies the individual all possibilities for freedom, change, and life. Linear history, as will be shown, disenchant's time and can only ever lead into the stillness of death.

The second half of this chapter will concern itself with Pynchon's 'solution' to the problem of linear history in the proposition of a regenerative and liberating temporal model of subjunctiveness and historical sublimity through the at once cyclical and instantaneously singular temporality of the Catholic church year the novel proposes in its transposition of the Ulyssean Tradition. Whereas the Puritan dynamic of Election establishes a paralyzing and victimizing view of time, Pynchon's ethics and rhetoric of Preterition deconstruct linearity and thereby establish an alternative, more natural circularity of time. Such circularity, again represented through the novel's titular 'Gravity's Rainbow,' allows for the probability of reversals of entropy in a post-Einsteinian space-time continuum that may produce the life-affirming and liberating singularities of a 'freak transcendence' meant to counter Puritanism's rationalized and linear form of transcendence. Such 'miraculous' reversals in time are most

prominently discussed in the novel through the hysteron proteron quality of the Rocket and its Brennschluss point. As will be shown through the example of the Hereros' mandalic conception of time, however, *Gravity's Rainbow* is not interested in simply replacing one totalizing (linear) temporal structure with another (circular) one. Due to its several time traps and mimetic impossibilities, the novel resists any timelessly certain containment in its liturgical calendar's "text of the day" (204). Instead, *Gravity's Rainbow's* use of the circular liturgical calendar establishes an orientation toward the eternal present of the here-and-now. As will be seen, meaning, regeneration and community are only possible in the singular moment detached from history. Rather than altogether rejecting the Ulyssean Tradition, Pynchon reformulates Joyce's mass-structure into an aesthetic meant to produce a *critical* mass. In assuming the Catholic church year's 'magical' notion of time, a sublime temporality at once cyclical and resolutely anchored in the singular moment, *Gravity's Rainbow* proposes a postmodernist aesthetic of interpretation that evades rational totalization and thereby remains perpetually provisional, egalitarian, and open. Hence, *Gravity's Rainbow's* use of the kalendar employs the novel's Ulyssean Tradition toward a postmodernist plurality and heterogeneity of meaning that is, although relativistic, deeply humanistic (and Ulyssean) in its claim for meaning in the moment.

From Mass to Liturgical Calendar

As Steven Weisenburger argues in *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* as well as a series of related essays on time, history, and chronology in the novel,⁷¹ *Gravity's Rainbow* appears to have the shape of "a mandala, its four quadrants marked by crucial date on the Christian liturgical calendar" (Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 10). Weisenburger shows the novel's nine-month action, from early December 1944 to mid September 1945 (the novel's numerous ana- and prolepses to a primeval time of Titans, a Dutch Calvinist's experience on Mauritius, or future/contemporary America excluded), to correspond to the liturgical calendar of the Catholic church. Events in the novel thus either explicitly happen on or are implied, through symbolic correspondences and inversions, to happen on central dates of the liturgical cycle such

⁷¹ Most importantly "The Chronology of Episodes in *Gravity's Rainbow*," "Haunted History and *Gravity's Rainbow*," "Hysteron Proteron in *Gravity's Rainbow*" and "The End of History? Thomas Pynchon and the Uses of the Past."

as Easter, the Advent season, Pentecost, or the Feast of Transfiguration. Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* thus refashions the secularized mass of *Ulysses* into a patterning of the novel along the liturgical calendar. As will be shown, while the time of history They employ to consolidate Their power displays an orientation toward past and future that denies the present any potential for historically non-predetermined change and thus immobilizes its actuality, *Gravity's Rainbow* uses the calendar to refocus on the here-and-now. A linear and deterministic understanding of time as history is thereby juxtaposed to the cyclicity and acausal singularity of the present moment in the Catholic church year. Through such attention to the singular event, *Gravity's Rainbow's* presentism employs its liturgical material to construct a subjunctive or "sublime History" (Elias 60) that rivals the disenchanting, routinized time of Their history.

Puritanism and the Church Year

Gravity's Rainbow's reinterpretation of the Joycean mass into the novel's parallelism to the liturgical calendar can also be seen as a reaction to American Puritanism and the bureaucratization of time into a paranoid history the novel views it as having effected. The novel thus utilizes its transnational Ulyssean Tradition to negotiate the quintessentially American issue of Puritanism. As is by now scholarly consensus, the influence of Puritanism on the modern age constitutes a central topic in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Not only is the novel's protagonist Slothrop the "[l]ast of his line, and how far-fallen" (569) of New England Puritans and, at least in parts, the novel a tale of him overcoming that legacy, the novel's general paranoid condition is clearly "related to the Puritan obsession with seeing signs in everything, particularly signs of an angry God" (Tanner 81). However, the Catholic structure of the liturgical year *Gravity's Rainbow* employs to counter the problems a secularized Puritanism's mode of interpreting the world and history and its vocabulary of Election, Preterition and (divine) providence lead into has so far only generated little attention.⁷²

⁷² Although Pynchon descends on his father's side from a long line of New England Puritans, an oft-commented on biographical parallel to his character Tyrone Slothrop, descendant of the heretic William Slothrop modeled on William Pynchon, Pynchon was raised Roman Catholic by his (Irish) mother. According to Jules Siegel, even when already studying at Cornell, and thus when he was already active as a writer, Pynchon "went to Mass and confessed" (J. Siegel 122) regularly, having been, as C. Michael Curtis, another friend who roomed with Pynchon and fellow writer/folk-musician Richard Fariña, puts it, "very Catholic" (Portinari). Needless to say, pace intentional fallacionists, Pynchon's own religiosity does not matter here. However, the strong presence of Puritanism in both Pynchon's writing and biography

Puritanism gave rise to a routinized understanding of time. As will be shown, it can be understood to have given rise to the sense of history *Gravity's Rainbow* seeks to correct through the reinstatement of the rationally impenetrable and thus sublime Catholic mysticism of the church year into (post)modern consciousness. Significantly, it is this liturgical calendar the Puritans rejected as un-Christian and associated with popeism. As James Walsh notes, the Puritans “rejected traditional Catholic and Anglican beliefs and practices that organized time around consecrated churches, railed-off altars, holy shrines, and miraculous wells, and that supposed the flow of time to be an irregular succession of holy days and sacred seasons” (J. P. Walsh 79). Instead of the Catholic church year’s heterogeneity the Puritans imposed upon the world they lived in a sameness of time. They rejected the church year that structured time as an irregular succession of holidays, each with its own, unique significance to the believer. To the Puritans, “all times were equally sacred” (J. P. Walsh 80). Like Joyce, who celebrates his ‘mass’ in *Ulysses* on a Thursday, the Reformed Protestants would sanctify (the) every day as they objected to being “urged to the observation of days and tymes, Jewish or Popish” (Walker 80). Reacting against such a homogenization of time and space, *Gravity's Rainbow's* calendar answers to both its Ulyssean and America’s Puritan tradition as both *Ulysses* and Puritanism are understood as projects that effect a routinization of time.

As Thomas Schaub remarks, drawing on Max Weber’s theory of a Protestant disenchantment of the world, *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts how thus “[t]he moment – as origin of charismatic freedom – stabilizes into a bureaucracy of time” (Schaub 63). If for the Puritan Elect “no time or place could ever be more appropriate for prayer than another” (J. P. Walsh 79), all times are the same and the moment, e.g., the feast day in its singular, charismatic quality, is routinized into the everyday. Puritan extreme piety can thus be seen to disenchant a mystical view on time and the world. If all days are equally holy, all days also become equally secular.

seem to obfuscate the (cultural) Catholicism, such as can be seen in Pynchon’s use of the Catholic church year in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in Pynchon’s imagination. For more details on Pynchon’s Catholicism and the “particular Catholic intellectual and artistic renaissance [...] happening in the mid-1960s” (Ripatrzone 102), a foundational period for Pynchon, see also, e.g., Nick Ripatrzone’s chapter on Pynchon in *Longing for an Absent God: Faith and Doubt in Great American Fiction*.

Scott Sanders thus notes that *Gravity's Rainbow's* paranoid history can be read as a Puritan providence “from which God has been withdrawn” (Sanders 140). The Puritan core dynamic of Election and Preterition gives rise to a wholly predetermined, ultimately paranoid world view of total order. For the Puritans, the entirety of existence followed a divinely preordained plan in which not one's deeds but God's will made up before the beginning of time decides upon one's redemption. In such a theologically deterministic history of the world, the individual is afforded with little free choice. Therefore, while the Elect, in *Gravity's Rainbow* the elite They, are predetermined for a pious life and coming redemption without individual choice or freedom, the Preterites, *Gravity's Rainbow's* majority of “second sheep, all out of luck” and, significantly with regard to this chapter's focus on temporality, out of “time” (3), are not so much damned than simply not present or accounted for in God's plot. A Puritan life is hence less one that strives for good than one driven by the paranoid urge to find out whether one is part of the Elect. On the one hand, this mindset renders reality a supremely ordered plot in God's divine plan. On the other hand, since this divine plan cannot be changed, the Puritan individual is cosigned to attempt to ‘read’ this plot. Transcendence thereby becomes not a future event that can be achieved through freely chosen actions in the present but much more an act of deciphering the past, God's original will, to gain knowledge of and project a wholly predetermined future, something that, if it will happen, unchangeably has already happened.

The Puritan dynamic of Election and Preterition *Gravity's Rainbow* utilizes as both theme and method therefore also contains a temporal and rhetorical dimension: Election, one's presence in – as opposed to the Preterite's absence from – God's divine plan, is always temporally tied to the past and an entirely predetermined future in salvation. The present moment thereby becomes only meaningful as an effect of or clue to God's original setting in motion in the past and a foreshadowing of the future. Presence in history as the will of God therefore cancels out the present. The Preterites, on the other hand, as will be seen, are both “passed over by God,” left undefined in the divine plot, and “History” (299), past. Their being passed over by God maroons them in *Gravity's Rainbow* in the present moment and leaves them without a predefined future. Slothrop for example, *Gravity's Rainbow's* schlemihl and Preterite par excellence, will have a future without “clear happiness or redeeming cataclysm” (738),

wholly unreadable. This, however, as will be shown, can also be understood as saving grace. Preterition as a form of non-signification frees the individual in *Gravity's Rainbow* from the determinism of history and allows it, within the fundamentally open present, to choose freely.

With the sacred homogenously present in all of everyday reality and the sanctimony of time routinized into sterile history, the present, and God's sublime presence within it, loses its meaning for the Elect as it only ever points toward a "known past" and a "projectable future" (126) as evidence of one's Election. Paradoxically, then, as an extreme offshoot of Protestantism, the Puritans' pursuit of the other-worldly and transcendent, both Pynchon and Max Weber show, "result[s] in an anxious and systematic this-worldly pursuit" (Schroeder 70) since the uncertainty about one's Election pressures the Puritan individual into trying to find – or, effectively, summon up – visible signs of grace in mundane existence such as worldly, economic success.⁷³ Such a rationalistic making worldly of the transcendental inadvertently fosters secularism. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, God as master organizer has been rationalized out of existence and been replaced by a technological sublime. Despite the disappearance of God, the need for something to make reality legible through, be it a divine will or a demonic plot, remains. Even though cause-and-effect are what *Gravity's Rainbow* calls *secular* history, the urge to control reality under one totalizable master dynamic of history is nevertheless driven by the same "Puritan reflex" (188) of paranoia.

Therefore, although the divine has vanished from the world, the Puritan vocabulary of Elect and Preterite still applies to Pynchon's present condition. As John Krafft remarks, "[t]he elect are now the economically and politically privileged and powerful" (Krafft 57). Pynchon's criticism is thus not so much directed against any specifically Puritan, secular, technological or Marxist history. Instead, David Seed notes, "Pynchon draws no distinction between the various systems – technological, political, or religious – which cosign the mass of humanity into subservient roles" (Seed 180). Rather, *Gravity's Rainbow* opposes the (originally Protestant) bureaucratization of time, the sterilization of fertile free choice in the moment through a

⁷³ As becomes clear in the novel's use of Puritan vocabulary and references to Weber's theories, Pynchon conflates Weber's critique of Protestantism with a critique of Puritanism. Nevertheless, even though Weber writes about Protestantism rather than per se Puritanism, Pynchon's conflation seems to hold for the largest parts, Puritanism being a Protestant sect after all and thus displaying the same mindset Weber ascribes to Protestantism as a whole.

systematization that conceives of the movement of time as, if not divinely preordained, predetermined by a secret code that is to be deciphered. Whether this all-controlling code is the providence of the Puritan God, Hegelian dialectics, the free market, the workings of a conspiracy of cartels with almost transcendent power, the principle of technological progress or the causality of Newtonian natural laws does not matter.

However, as much as conspiracies give a calming sense of meaning and control over a contingent reality, no matter how horrifying they come to be, as much are they controlling: they deny agency and change as they routinize the potential freedom of the present moment into the unchangeable, bureaucratic time of history. The western ideology of progress, at its core a secularized version of the Puritan divine plan, gives the modern Elect the authority to sacrifice the subservient masses to the telos of history. Even more perversely, the comforting illusion of history seduces the individual to condemn itself to this destruction, the dispensal of God through rationalization “[p]utting the control inside” (30) the System and the self as, e.g., Gottfried’s voluntary sacrifice at the end of the novel illustrates. Puritanism’s Protestant rationalization of the world and of time, making do with the sublime ‘magic’ attached to the specific feast days in the Catholic tradition, thus produces the oppressive “secular history” (167) of cause and effect and the technological sublime *Gravity’s Rainbow* rebels against. *Gravity’s Rainbow* can thus be seen to depict a world in which Protestant rationalizations, in accordance with Max Weber’s theories, have disenchanted time: authority and power, both interpretative and worldly, is stabilized through a temporal bureaucracy that disposes of the uniqueness of each moment in favor of the homogeneity of a deterministic history the novel shows leads into destructive violence.

Pynchon’s Kute Korrespondences to the Kalendar

In response to both Joyce’s mass-structure and Puritanism’s levelling of time in a rejection of significant dates, episodes in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, set in and after WWII, are juxtaposed with, parodied, or are otherwise symbolically linked to major and minor feast days in the circular church year. Characters visit Advent vespers, celebrate Christmas and Boxing Day, and Slothrop’s dissolution mirrors and inverts the Transfiguration of Christ, ironically synchronous

with the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6th, another transfiguration of time and the Rocket into the nuclear age. The novel closes with the double firing of the 00000/00001 Rockets on 1945 Easter Sunday and the feast day of the Exaltation of the Cross, respectively, feasts and fictional events similarly relating to another as signified (Easter) and signifier (Cross). Pynchon plants temporal markers, some more, some less overt, throughout his novel that (seem to) allow the perceptive reader to reconstruct a chronology and symbolically plot a narrative chronometric. The text invites yet also undercuts attempts to tell the time throughout the novel, as the phrase shows inherently an act of narration.⁷⁴ Whereas Joyce uses the Roman Catholic mass to sequence and invest with meaning his novel's episodes, Pynchon's reinterpretation employs the liturgical calendar to *tell time* in both a response to and a postmodernist continuation of the Ulysean Tradition.

At first sight, *Gravity's Rainbow's* parallelisms to the liturgical calendar provide little reason for hope but appear as satirical inversions of the original material. Reality, that is the reality established by Their conventional history, never lives up to the promises of the novel's religious subtext but subverts them into images of the dominion of Death. The religious sublimity inherent to the feast days, a preternatural unity, appears to have been replaced by a technological sublime and its insistence on pragmatic bureaucracies whose only goal seems to be degradation and destruction. Just like the Catholic liturgical year in its Roman Rite, *Gravity's Rainbow* begins with Advent, a time of preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas and his expected second coming. *Gravity's Rainbow's* Advent season, however, is hardly suggestive of any type of approaching salvation (Tanner 88). Thus, even though Advent is the time of preparation for the Nativity, the birth of Christ, at the Advent vesper Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake visit there is "not a child in sight, just grownups, trudging in from their bomber fields" (127). The "season of birth, of fresh beginnings" (131) here is turned into one of mass-death during the Rundsted offensive, the Battle of the Bulge of December 16 1944, that only renews a War that will even continue, the novel implies, after V-E Day since "[t]he

⁷⁴ The following investigation of temporality, history, and *Gravity's Rainbow's* permutation of Joyce's mass-structure into the liturgical calendar heavily relies on Weisenburger's reconstruction of *Gravity's Rainbow's* chronology from *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* and "The Chronology of Episodes in *Gravity's Rainbow*" as well as Tololyan's timeline in "War as Background in *Gravity's Rainbow*."

true king only dies a mock death” (131). Rather than hung on top of a Christmas tree, the “Gold Star” mothers here are “hoping to hang” (134) is the gold star on the Service flag American families of servicemen would hang in their front window to represents a fallen soldier. The “new star” (6) over *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* nativity is the V-2 Rocket “hanging the measureless instant over the black North Sea before the fall, ever faster, to orange heat, Christmas star, in helpless plunge to Earth” (135). In *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* technological sublime in which technological progress serves as a secularized divine will whose transcendence is the perfection of technological control as the telos of history, Death and War are the newborn king and its emblem, the star, is the Rocket. Whereas the star over Bethlehem signifies coming redemption, the star(s) over London can only mean the coming destruction of those chosen by it. In an age of industrial mass-production, mass-produced rocket-stars mark an interchangeable mass of messiahs. The War expunges the singularity of Christ and “make[s] him only another Messiah” (135).

Throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the wider picture of history perpetually belies the hopeful potential the novel’s liturgical parallelisms should have. The novel seems to offer such parallels only to frustrate their meaningful potential. Hence, Advent in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, though invested with its usual imagery, is inverted into a season of approaching death and destruction. At Christmas, Pointsman sets out to experiment on his ‘savior’ Slothrop, “his own miracle and human child, grown to manhood but carrying, someplace on the Slothropian cortex now a bit of Psychology’s own childhood, yes pure history” (168) rather than worship him. Rather than celebrating the coming of the redeemer, Pointsman, enjoying the position of power and control he has come to, climaxes into the mouth of his secretary thinking “oh, Jesus I’m coming” (169). Slothrop is denied an Easter resurrection at the famed synthesist and behaviorist Jamf’s grave that would give meaning to his journey. But Jamf is “only dead” (268) and instead Gottfried is sacrificed to the Rocket 00000, with no hopes of return. Similarly, while Pointsman, like Christ’s disciples in a deep crisis of faith, experiences a kind of inspiration on Whitsunday, the spirit that possesses him is a decidedly unholy Hegelian spirit of history that gives him back “absolute control” (277) by urging him to “*be a synthesis*” (278) and manipulate Roger Mexico. It is a Pentecostal spirit that ultimately reveals itself as “self-possession” (270), a paranoid

structure of his own, egomaniac making. Though the paranoid pattern-maker Pointsman assumes, due to his view of history, some outside force controlling everything and now speaking to him and legitimizing him like Christ's disciples at Pentecost, he really only is "[t]alking to [him]self, here" (278). The Transfiguration of Slothrop, likewise, seems undercut by being reflected in the dark mirror of the WWII Rocket Age transforming itself into the Cold War's nuclear age as the Enola Gay drops its bomb onto the city of Hiroshima on the same day. As Weisenburger notes, although the novel's shaping along the liturgical calendar is interpretatively desirable and seductive as it suggests a meaningful potential for redemption and liberation, this structure's climax on Easter Sunday 1945 coinciding with that year's April Fool's Day, "suggests that the whole enterprise is a *poisson d'avril*, a red herring, a fool's quest. And one can find nothing in the novel to resolve this antinomy" (Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 10). Never fully to be controlled in one structure, one chronology, *Gravity's Rainbow* appears to satirize its pattern of correspondences to the liturgical year as only yet another paranoid structure and accuse those who believe in it of foolishness.

However, as becomes clear again and again, being a fool is clearly not the worst thing one could do in the world of *Gravity's Rainbow*. *Gravity's Rainbow* encourages a self-conscious 'foolishness,' a creative paranoia that is aware, yet makes use of, the ultimate incommensurability of all systems. To generate hope, order and meaning from the novel's kalendaric parallelisms *is* foolish. The kalendar's circularity and symbolic potential only provide a provisional and multivocal meaning in the novel which can 'work' in the specific moment but can never be fully attained in the totality of its history. However, *Gravity's Rainbow's* discussion of time and history shows, it is the moment in its ahistorical uniqueness in which love, compassion and community, forces which disrupt the alienating and controlling nightmare of history, can only occur.

Although a fool's errand and perpetually undermined by a rational view of a reality incapable of living up to its symbolic potential, following the novel's kalendaric parallels is a useful foolishness. It is desirable in its reparative potential although, or, as should become clear further on, because it is foolish and irrational and can never fully account for nor control the novel's history in totality. Absurdity, in its evasion of meaning a preterite stance, counteracts

the death-oriented rationalism of history. The novel thus connects many of its scarce, most unsatirically hopeful sequences to the experience of its kalendaric shape ‘fitting,’ if only “[f]or the moment” (136), and actualizing its symbolic potential for liberation and compassion. In such moments, parody tips over into sincere sentiment as the self-conscious risking of foolishness in the moment allows for true connection, and thus freedom and life, to occur. Such connection, as could be seen constantly betrayed by historical realities, describes a multivocal connectedness of not only persons but also time in a dynamically free interplay of association that serves as a distinct resistance against their rational bureaucratizations of time into a monolithic, linear history.

Hence, although for instance the Advent vesper episode perpetually undermines the hope its kalendaric parallelism invokes, the novel is not cynical. In a world like *Gravity’s Rainbow’s*, to believe in love and compassion, the birth of a redeemer, is delusional. Time and again, the historical reality of the world proves such hopes to be foolish. Someone whom the religious parallelisms the novel draws would lead to hope “for a baby to come in tippin’ those Toledos at 7 pounds 8 ounces thinkin’ he’s gonna redeem [the world], why, he oughta have his head examined” (135). Nevertheless, the episode, one of Pynchon’s most beautiful, does not end here on this deject note but becomes unusually caring and sincere in tone. Instead of accepting the immutability of history, the episode that perpetually undermines all possibility of innocence, redemption and love closes, as if in solemn defiance, on a hopeful note of selfless community with Christ born in such abject and preterite surroundings:

But on the way home tonight, you wish you'd picked him up, held him a bit. Just held him, very close to your heart, his cheek by the hollow of your shoulder, full of sleep. As if it were you who could, somehow, save him. For the moment not caring who you're supposed to be registered as. (135-6)

The moment provides a refuge from the rational, bureaucratic conditions that belie all hope and love. While beforehand the Christian evensong had served the scene as a cynical counter-note to the War, the song now gains a sincere quality and becomes an expression of longing: “*O Jesu parvule, Nach dir ist mir so weh...*” (136). Despite all its contingencies and reality’s seeming

utter incapability to live up to the redemptive potential the novel's religious symbolism seductively implies, a "way home" (136) is offered in a moment of loving care for the preterite other. Significantly, all notions of reality, history, and time being a kind of interpretation, this regenerative embrace of the other and plurality appears as a form of free choice. Song in *Gravity's Rainbow* provides a main example for such community and altruistic, history-less love. Thus, redemption, though foolish, appears in a sense of community with "men who don't remember you either, knowing they ought to be grabbing a little sleep, not out here performing for strangers, give you this evensong" (135). Where the passage of history corrupts all hope as it draws a deterministic universe represented as death-oriented, it is for the moment of song, an activity that transcends rational restraints, that the individual is redeemed and hope actualized. Such communal "[s]ong" for and with others "is the magic cape" (701) that shields the individual from Their destructive and divisive influence. This loving embrace of the other can only occur outside conventional history in the singular, unroutinized moment. It is the immanent present in which the novel's mimetically impossible liturgical correspondences, untenable within the wider scope of history, become possible "for the one night" (135), and can create "the path you must create by yourself" (136), the singular, momentary freely chosen foolishness of communion and love. A care for the other without motive disrupts Their rational power and Their history and thus Their claim to undisputed power and control. The instability and momentariness of true communion does not diminish the value of love but is in fact integral to its reparative actualization in the novel.

Rather than in the return of a savior as a kind of terminus to history then, *Gravity's Rainbow's* hope for change and redemption lies in a dynamic and transitional moment of mercy, a spontaneous and irrational encounter with the other. Whereas Pointsman as part of the Elect uses his 'savior' Slothrop, acts that are rationally undefinable and thus preterite promise a chance of renewal in being *for* the other. Love and compassion disrupt a history that binds the individual to alienation, routine and domination as they do not effect a predetermined return of a savior or to better, biblical times, but an actualization of love as a free choice in the here-and-now. *Gravity's Rainbow's* prose thus exhibits the same experience of inter-individual fusion as, in the close of the Advent section, the narration turns toward an intimate second person that

connects reader, character and narrator, all possibly meant by the 'you' the narrator employs. In the moment of reading, a moment fundamentally open to interpretation, self and other fuse and become interchangeable and are redeemed in their preterite indeterminacy.

History for Joyce and Pynchon

Whereas Joyce's *Ulysses* follows the (linear) mass, *Gravity's Rainbow* "unfolds according to a circular design" in which "[a]cross the novel's four parts, historical events intersect the Christian liturgical calendar, inferring possibilities for return and renewal, but possibilities that Pynchon's satire hopelessly equivocates" (Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 3). Like the liturgical parallelisms of *Ulysses*, then, *Gravity's Rainbow* parodies its liturgical material. Nevertheless, although the subject of parody and satire, the stations on the liturgical calendar *Gravity's Rainbow* goes through give the novel a mandalic shape. Surprisingly similar in their 'jocoserious' approach for two novels usually treated as diametrical opposites, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ulysses* employ their respective liturgical material, mass and kalendar, in a banalizing and parodic fashion that, however, does not diminish their meaningful potential.

These similarities in approach extend to their views on history and time in general. As Susan Swartzlander outlines, there are "substantial thematic affinities between *Ulysses* and *Gravity's Rainbow*" (Swartzlander 133) in their views on history and time. Both are concerned with the uses of "history to shape reality, to give meaning to an otherwise overwhelming existence, to impose order on chaos" (Swartzlander 134). At the same time, history as a continuous unfolding toward a telos, a history of cause and effect based on dates and historical persons, is discredited by both as nothing but a disciplinary regime. "[S]ecular history," *Gravity's Rainbow's* Walther Rathenau comments, "is a diversionary tactic" (167). Joyce's Leopold Bloom likewise sees it as "[a]n optical illusion. Mirage" (J. Joyce, *Ulysses* 359). Conventional history is to both a tool of control that serves the elites to obfuscate and legitimate the exploitation and domination of the individual coerced to "[d]ie to help History grow to its predestined shape" (701). As Swartzlander shows, both Joyce and Pynchon examine "life as a struggle between the powerful and the powerless, the elect and the preterite" (Swartzlander 138). Colonialism, imperialism, religious fervor, capitalist exploitation, all equally central to

both *Ulysses* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, are the destructive effects of the burden of one or the other kind of progress in the name of history.

Nevertheless, both Joyce and Pynchon harbor hopes with regards to a rejection of conventional history and a heightened awareness of human suffering. As Swartzlander notes, “[i]t is evident that Pynchon thinks Joyce understood,” both ultimately being “humanists, drawn to the preterite” (Swartzlander 142). For both, an awareness of the timeless human concerns of community and love can counteract the divisiveness of history and offer the opportunity for regeneration and freedom. As Leopold Bloom remarks in *Ulysses*: “Force, hatred, history, all that. That’s not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it’s the very opposite of that that is really life. Love” (*Ulysses* 319). Pynchon’s *Gravity's Rainbow*, as if echoing the countercultural motto ‘Make Love not War’ of the 1960s and 70s the novel stems from, shares this valorization of love as a countermeasure against the War of history. As Joanna Freer shows, “love can have a liberating function” (Freer 49) that, even though it is oftentimes problematized and all too fragile, is nevertheless “[a]sserted as a political solution and an ideal to aim for” (Freer 48) in the novel. Through a recognition of the preterite other, as both Joyce’s communion in ‘Ithaca’ and Pynchon’s continuous references to the possibilities of love and community show, the isolating and destructive drive of history might be replaced with a more hopeful and generative alternative.

In *Ulysses*, history is thus termed “a nightmare from which [Stephen Dedalus is] trying to awake” (*Ulysses* 34). Joyce’s modernism sets out to overcome, through artistic creation, the past as “nets” of “nationality, language, [and] religion” (*Portrait* 231). Slothrop and Stephen Dedalus thus toil to leave behind the burden of history, an oppressive identity fashioned by their ties to the past. However, while Stephen Dedalus realizes at last the necessity of casting off such personal and cultural history and awake from the nightmare, *Gravity's Rainbow* opens with the modernist wake from, yet continuation of, the nightmare of history. As if in response to Joyce’s project, Pirate Prentice in the opening of *Gravity's Rainbow* awakes from a dream of holocaust, displacement, and looming destruction. Yet, upon awakening from this nightmare of history, he is still stuck in it: the War that, as Scott Sanders notes, functions as a synecdoche for history itself (Sanders 148), i.e., the eternal struggle between the Preterite and the Elect, society’s

‘waste’ and the elite that burn through the masses (and, as will be seen, controlling structures like Joyce’s mass), is still going on; a Rocket, the novel’s main metaphor for a destructive notion of ‘history,’ complex and ambiguous as everything in Pynchon’s novel, is poised above London, ready to fall and bring destruction. Awakening from the nightmare of history, as had been the goal of *Ulysses*’ paradigmatic modernism, seems futile in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The novel’s waking world appears as dream-like and frightening as Pirate’s nightmare. No ‘outside’ of time, no awakening available to *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s personnel, all overarching structures, and this includes Joyce’s alternative ones, remain totalizing and illusory.

Hence, whereas Joyce and Pynchon appear similar in their parodic inversions of their liturgical material, their view of history and their embrace of the preterites, they differ greatly in their treatment of time. While *Ulysses* displays an extremely naturalistic approach to time, readers of *Gravity’s Rainbow* are faced with recurring, unsolvable paradoxes when trying to tell time in the postmodernist novel. *Gravity’s Rainbow* produces temporal uncertainty, a variety of, not only on causal but importantly also symbolic grounds, possible chronologies rather than one history as readers attempt to “reconcile the various temporal and geographical registers deployed in the text” (Duyfhuizen, “From Potsdam to Putzi’s” 53). On the one hand, *Gravity’s Rainbow* deploys numerous explicit and implicit chronological markers, historical events, geography, astrology, and religious feast days, dates that allow scholars such as Weisenburger and Tololyan to reconstruct a chronology underfed by such events’ symbolic and cultural reference to the events told in the novel. Khachig Tololyan thus notes that although “the tangled events of *Gravity’s Rainbow* cannot be rearranged into a single, clear, and unified plot,” the events of the novel “do have a coherence that becomes more accessible when one constructs a chronology, a geography, and a chart of the combatants who are locked in a variety of struggles subsumed under the rubric of War” (Tololyan, “War as Background in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 31). Not only are chronological reconstructions such as Weisenburger’s or Tololyan’s possible, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s historical narrative, marking time through its historical backdrop and references to Christian holidays, seems to explicitly invite such exercises.

On the other hand, just as much as *Gravity’s Rainbow* marks time and as much as historical as well as religious, symbolic ‘dates’ seem to ‘fit’ the narrative do the events in

Gravity's Rainbow resist to be quite made to fit their parallels on the liturgical calendar. The novel seems “determined [...]to challenge any and all constructions of narrative time and place” (Duyfhuizen, “From Potsdam to Putzi’s” 53). *Gravity's Rainbow's* use of spatial and temporal markers is just precise enough, at times tremendously accurate, to be seductively suggestive. However, at the same time, such interpretations are perpetually undercut. The novel ultimately foils all attempts to project an underlying structure such as Joyce’s mass, or a definitive naturalistic chronology in general, onto the novel. Mimetic impossibilities in time and space abound in *Gravity's Rainbow* and destabilize the project of constructing a coherent chronology and the interpretatively desirable symbolic correspondences that come with it. Telling time in *Gravity's Rainbow* thereby turns, drawing on McHale’s analysis of postmodernist dominants, from an epistemological exercise into an ontological one, the novel’s conception of time conditioning multiple possible chronologies, provisional and dynamic decisions about timeliness, rather than a single trust-worthy timeframe.

Commenting on Weisenburger’s chronology, Bernard Duyfhuizen thus points out how certain temporal correspondences deemed desirable are physically and mimetically impossible in the time the novel’s overdetermined temporal markers allot to them. *Gravity's Rainbow's* symbolic register opens up discrepancies in a conventional reading of time, meaning that “to choose the symbolic/historical reading, an interpretatively desirable reading, requires a suspension of disbelief” (Duyfhuizen, “From Potsdam to Putzi’s” 60). However, rather than authorial oversights or ultimately paranoid dead-ends, such temporal inconsistencies in the novel constitute a primary component of the novel’s revaluation of time and space its use of the liturgical calendar proposes. Indeed, as will be seen, a liberating reading of time in the novel, that is a reading that diverges from that of conventional, linear history, constitutes an act of faith in the moment. In thus acknowledging that history ultimately resists containment in any overarching explanations and teleologies, *Gravity's Rainbow* reinstates the present moment as a space/time of sublimity that rivals the death-oriented historicism of rationality.

Gravity's Rainbow resists being fully controlled by a preconceived, coherent pattern. Instead, space and time are poised in an “eternal moment” (624) that is both singularly unique and an infinite cycle. While the novel’s time-traps and satirical tone undermine overall

consistency in the sense of history, the moment as a singularity within time yet outside history's anchorage in past and future has the potential to repair such disparities. The experience of time in the novel is thus oftentimes similar to that which it reports for observers from the Other Side: "no serial time over there: events are all in the same eternal moment and so certain messages don't always 'make sense' back here: they lack historical structure, they sound fanciful, or insane" (624). This notion of 'events' and their dynamic relativism of simultaneity can for example be seen during the section which recalls Slothrop's 'transfiguration.' As the novel's liturgical symbolic register implies, Slothrop's disintegration happens on August 6th, counterpointed by atomic bombing of Hiroshima on the same day. As in the instances of time-traps Duyfhuizen outlines, too much seems to be happening between Slothrop's escape from Cuxhaven in the night of August 5th and Slothrop's disintegration for it to happen on the next day. Even if one ignores the majority of the temporally and spatially implacable events narrated in the opening of part 4, the time of Slothrop's disintegration, "At last, [...] one afternoon" (625), is more than confounding if one considers that Slothrop could only have arrived in the Harz on the morning of August 6. Surely, the first afternoon there is not "one afternoon," let alone one to happen "at last," implying a longer time spent in these mountains. Indeed, from part four of *Gravity's Rainbow* onward, time is increasingly out of joint until the novel implodes into the unparseable 'eternal moment' of its final section, fragmented into atemporal intermissions and fancies and analepses shifting seamlessly into prolepses, in order to, impossibly, end with the Rocket, fired in Germany in 1945, apparently falling onto a 1970s American cinema.

This "lack [of] historical structure" (624), as will be shown a representation of events in both the post-Einsteinian space-time continuum and the Catholic church year, is also realized stylistically in the novel. Opening part four, cinema stars Bette Davis and Margaret Dumont, possibly hallucinated into existence by Slothrop, hear a noise that "*sounds* [...] like a kazoo" (619) that also wakes up Slothrop. The narrator comments that "What it was, or is, is Pirate Prentice, in a more or less hijacked P-47" (619). Mixing up tenses, historical structure, past and present, is entirely absent and impossible to parse through the narration. Time and space are implacable. It is entirely impossible to decide whether, e.g., Säure's and Gustav's conversation

about music happens at the same time and the same place as Slothrop “mosey[ing] down the trail to a mountain stream” (622), whether Slothrop is there “sat in Säure Brummer’s kitchen” (625) or whether that is a memory, whether *Gravity’s Rainbow* relates, like the ‘Wandering Rocks’ chapter of *Ulysses*, simultaneous events, etc. What happens where, with whom involved, when and in what order is altogether impossible to parse conclusively. The narration switches between tenses mid-event such as when “[o]ne night, on the walls of a public shithouse [...] [Slothrop] finds [...] an official slogan: WILLST DU V-2, DANN ARBEITE” only to continue in the past tense, noting that “It *was* dusk” and Slothrop “*felt* brave and in control. But then another message *caught* his eye: ROCKETMAN WAS HERE” (624; emphases mine). As on the Other Side, the narration seems to know “no serial time” as past and present, here and there, become interchangeable coordinates and one “all there in the same eternal moment” (624).

The narrative style makes sure that the “present mission” (620), that is also the mission to understand what happens when, now, cannot be completed in totality. Rather than being integrated into a monovocal and universalist logic of history, the events’ meaning must remain bound in provisional “ad hoc arrangements” (620) that construct presence. These momentary arrangements are recurrently associated with the miraculous and absurd establishment of community: “more formal adventures tend, by their nature, to separation, and loneliness” (620). The redemptive potential of Slothrop’s disintegrative transfiguration cannot be formally achieved in the totality of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s chronological history but affords a selective choice on the reader’s behalf to construct a desired provisional chronology within the bounds of probability. This temporality is never absolute but is a product of belief in the novel’s liturgical structure. In this postmodern belief, *Gravity’s Rainbow* constructs a presentism that affords the moment with a sublime, magical potential for free choice and regeneration.

Gravity’s Rainbow(s): The Two Temporalities of *Gravity’s Rainbow*

Two notions of time are hence at play in *Gravity’s Rainbow*: the reparative singular present – a life in the moment – and the oppressive, linear passage of history’s causes and effects linked to the System’s desire to return and halt time. These two temporalities also become apparent in Jessica’s and Roger’s respective stances toward the Advent service they visit. Unlike Roger,

Jessica is driven to the Advent service out of a feeling of nostalgia, the desire “for the certain shapes the past assumes as history, as *narrative*” (Attewell 44). Jessica exhibits a backward-directed urge to return to a simpler, more meaningful past and to halt time. For her, “nostalgia [is] heavy in tonight’s snow-sky” as she is pulled toward the vesper “remembering other Advents” (128). Her motivation to attend the service thus bespeaks a wish to revert to an original innocence. The present in this constellation only becomes meaningful in connection to memories of the past.

That this notion of time and history is closely linked to Their oppressive influence can be seen in the way Jessica’s nostalgic horology leads into her betrayal of Roger and her return to her fiancé Jeremy, an act through which she practically joins Their forces. Jessica’s betrayal of Roger’s love can be seen as founded in her conventional view of time as measurable and comparable causes and effects, a routinized history moving unstopably between and fundamentally determined by past and future. Jessica, thus oriented toward history, must neglect the potential which inheres in the probabilities of the now. Therefore, Jessica will ultimately settle for Jeremy, who represents “every assertion the War has ever made” (177), as the “safer” (126), more rational, option since, while “[t]he time Roger and Jessica have spent together, totaled up, still only comes to hours” (121), Jessica has spent “[t]hree years with Jeremy” (126). Jessica and Jeremy, so to speak, have a history. To her, the meaning and value of her love, its ‘truth,’ is measured against and derived from its history, a backward-directed notion of time as totalizable and measurable. Past events, Jessica’s totaled up three years with Jeremy, give meaning to the present. Comparing the few hours in total with Roger to the years with Jeremy, to Jessica her love to Jeremy must ‘count’ more and is therefore more real and meaningful.

Notably, however, Jessica can therein be seen to commit a form of the Monte Carlo Fallacy Roger warns of earlier in the novel (56). *Gravity’s Rainbow* values the momentary present over an adherence to a sterile history and is therefore highly critical of any attempts to rationalize and total up time into a history that is supposed to give meaning to the present. From the perspective of probabilistics *Gravity’s Rainbow* introduces primarily through Roger Mexico, to base a decision on the moment in a comparison of the three years with Jeremy and the few hours with Roger does not make sense. A sequence of trials, the three years which “ought to

count for something” (126), does not carry the memory of past results. Every moment is, probabilistically speaking, new and removed from the past and without history. Roger therefore cannot calculate where the V-2 rockets should fall as “[e]ach hit is independent of all others” (56) nor should Jessica’s and Jeremy’s three years count more in judging their love than the few hours with Roger: every moment has its own probabilities distinct from past outcomes. The in total greater sum of ‘trials’ Jessica has had with Jeremy does not affect the meaning of this present moment. It does not make Jeremy the “safer” (126) bet, nor does the past make the present love any more ‘true’ or meaningful. Similarly, another anarchist versed in statistics notes later in the novel that

[e]ach moment has its value, its probable success against other moments in other hands, and the shuffle for him is always moment-to-moment. He can’t afford to remember other permutations, might-have-beens—only what’s present, dealt him by something he calls Chance and Graciela calls God. He will stake everything on this anarchist experiment, and if he loses, he’ll go on to something else. (613)

Meaning, and liberating love, only occur in the moment as chanceful events distinctly linked to the sublime that also flows through the novel’s liturgical calendar.⁷⁵ As Leo Bersani remarks, “nothing is treated with a more tender seriousness in *Gravity’s Rainbow* than Roger Mexico’s love for Jessica Swanlake” (Bersani 103). Yet, in light of this love’s ultimate failure, Bersani views it as discredited as only a fiction that cannot serve as an escape from Their System. However, as can be seen, the fact that this love will ultimately be revealed as delusional in the greater context of history far from lessens the truly liberating power with which it is represented. The truth or untruth of love is not touched by its future projections nor its past. Love and other forms of selfless community in which the individual redeems its alienation can only ever occur, the novel suggests, in the singular moment. Where history is sterile, its teleological procession from past to future denying individual agency, love, only there in the moment and “past all words,” past all conventional fictions of history, can help Roger “find his

⁷⁵ As will be shown, *Gravity’s Rainbow* relates the irrational insistence on the miraculous as well as probabilistics (which are, admittedly, nevertheless within the reign of the scientifically ‘rational’) as a more open and sublimely indeterminable, and thus life-affirming, alternative to the closed-off rationalizations of cause and effect and Election and Preterition. The ‘magical’ and the post-Newtonian are thereby conflated into an aesthetics of affirmed Preterition and subjunctiveness.

way to life and to joy” (126). Unpredictable and unfixed, *Gravity's Rainbow* locates such a liberating and life-giving love in the realm of Preterition rather than the deterministic certainty of Elect history.

In contrast to Jessica's nostalgia then, Roger's motivation to attend the church service is not one that desires a backward-directed return. Roger does not have good memories of Advent and Christmas (“The time of year makes it even worse. Christmas. Bwweeeaaaagghh, clutching to his stomach. Jessica was all that made it human or tolerable” (125)). Nevertheless, Roger, otherwise the perfect cynic, is for once not “looking nihilistic, not even cheaply so” (129). Instead of trying to effect a nostalgic return to the past, Roger wants to “pop in here [i.e. the church] *for a moment*” (128; emphasis mine) in order to “hear the music” (128). Music creates a “communion [...] at least in listening” (135) removed from the rationalizations of history.⁷⁶ Communal song, love, altruism create a singular moment of potential for

something to raise the possibility of another night that could actually, with love and cockcrows, light the path home, banish the Adversary, destroy the boundaries between our lands, our bodies, our stories, all false, about who we are. (135)

They create a “way home” (136) through the tracks of time regardless of whether they occur only “for the one night” (135) and whether said path is one “you must create by yourself” (136), i.e., not transcendently laid out in some structural fabric of the universe but another of “our stories” (135). Although history may discredit such love and community, in the singular, present moment they are meaningful and filled with disruptive energy. Although foolish and illusory from the traditional perspective of historicism, the hope and meaning implied by the novel's symbolical parallelisms to the liturgical calendar become apprehensible as the notion of the singular moment in the present is applied. Thus, while *Ulysses*, or at least the paradigmatic *Ulysses* Pynchon's Ulyssean Tradition references, may question history, yet, through its mass-structure, simply introduces another deterministic, teleological structure of time, *Gravity's Rainbow* mobilizes the singularity of the moment as a disruptive force. Even though Pynchon's

⁷⁶ Music is closely aligned in its effect to the love Roger and Jessica share, as the description of, e.g., the oral sex Roger performs on Jessica as evincing “[t]wo or three notes, it seemed, that sounded together, hoarse, haunted” (122), as if Roger were playing a mouth organ, strikingly resurfaces in the description of the evensong “*climaxing* now with its rising fragment of some ancient scale, voices overlapping three- and fourfold” (136; emphasis mine).

parallelisms cannot stand the test of history, it is this very fleetingness of their meaningful occurrence in the moment, their statistical probability rather than static predetermination, that turns them into a force that disrupts the System's rationalistic stabilization of time into history.

As Schaub remarks, this ambiguity “forces upon us the act of making a choice” (Schaub 57), the novel at once clearly suggesting the mandalic structure of the liturgical calendar Weisenburger reads as a unifying moment in the novel and undermining it through mimetic impossibilities once one considers the greater chronology of the novel, its ‘history.’ The reader, faced with the alternatives of a hopeful, reparative faith in the liturgical calendar and the potential of love and life it implies versus its rational cancellation from a historical perspective, is hence asked in the above-discussed Advent section: “Is the baby smiling, or is it just gas? Which do you want it to be?” (131). To believe the baby is smiling, to pick him up and hold him a bit and to thereby join a community through a love that introduces the unpredictable and irrational means to self-consciously risk foolishness and choose Preterition in an affirmation of the unknowable and undefined. It is to live in the moment. The novel depicts these two notions of temporality – the at once singular and circular moment of the Catholic church year and the teleological paranoid history of Puritan rationalization – in the rivalling images of the circle and the line or parabola. While time is understood as circular, an image associated with regeneration and freedom, rationalization breaks this circle into the parabola of history, a shape linked to death and degradation.

Mass and Gravity: Time as the Arch-Shaped Rainbow

The V-2 rocket's parabolic flight serves the novel as its main metaphor for the neo-Puritan routinization of time into a deterministic, teleological history and the destruction the novel views as the result of this position. The parabola of the novel's titular rainbow, in the Bible the visible sign of God's providence, returns in the parabolic flight of the V-2, where, although secularized, it retains its paranoid providence-after-providence nature. Hence, for the rocket-engineer Pökler, “[i]t was impossible not to think of the Rocket without thinking of *Schicksal*, of growing toward a shape predestined and perhaps a little otherworldly” (410). Transcendence in the System thus still lies in the historicizing discovery of an all-pervading and timeless

principle, i.e., the Puritanistic projection of the linearity of cause-and-effect onto the contingency of experience. As Hite shows, at least one of the meanings of “[t]he ‘gravity’s rainbow’ of the title is the arc of the V-2 rocket, which with its sharply defined origin and terminus could claim to be the twentieth century’s model of linearity” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 97). However, while God’s rainbow in the book of Genesis promises renewal, life, and hope, the rocket’s parabola, “betrayed to Gravity” (758), only holds destruction and the (heat-)death of a closed system without the divine as its exterior at the end of its trajectory. Gravity inevitably pulls down the mass (the clear punning on Joyce’s teleological mass-structure will be commented on further below) of the Rocket toward the earth as the straight line of its ascent is bent into a parabola. Correspondingly, the earth-bound rationale of technology and historical progress, history as a linear movement toward the banalized, secular transcendence which lies at the end of Puritan rationalization, must end in destruction. As Hite comments, the novel’s Rocket-parabola-as-history metaphor “gives geometrical form to the truism that what goes up must come down” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 111). Conventional history, conceived of as a straight line of progress toward a telos in transcendence, *Gravity’s Rainbow* shows, leads into death as its line is always bent into a parabola. The dominant image of the rocket, the novel utilizing a “spatial poetics of election, organized around images of ascendance, the sky, and moving upwards” (S. Smith 85) presents rocketry as a metaphor for a secularized and destructive attempt at transcendence.

In order to control the contingency of experience, the rationalizing intellect must impose an all-pervading principle – history – onto it. Rationalization hence seeks to control, and thus transcend, the parabola of experience in time by transposing it into a linear, teleological shape. The novel illustrates this linearizing impulse through the metaphor of the Rocket as a paranoid history. Feeling controlled by a destiny he cannot overlook but knows will end in catastrophic denouement and “crush [his] ideals” (162), the rocket-engineer Pökler thus wants to escape “to a place where Destiny couldn’t reach. As if it were gravity” (162). To Pökler, this transcendence from an uncontrollable and unbearably contingent reality that must end in death is represented in the rocket’s flight to the moon: “We’ll all use *it*, someday, to leave the earth. To transcend” (400). In order to reach the moon, the rocket’s flight has to be turned from a

parabola that will inevitably land back on earth into an upwards straight line into space. Pökler, the “cause-and-effect-man” (159), understands technological progress as a vehicle of transcendence. Hence, just as the downward turn of gravity is overcome by the straight line the space-rocket is to trace as it travels to the moon, rationalization’s imposition of a linear teleology onto the experience of contingency is understood as transcendence. In short, to control and thus transcend the downward curve of the natural cycle is to straighten it out through the imposition of an all-controlling principle. For the Puritans, this was the will of God. For Pökler, it is a belief in technological progress.

The straight line of the rocket’s ascent, like the illusion of history’s linear progress toward a transcendent goal, however, must eventually be bent back to earth by gravity and the space-rocket as rational instrument of a fraudulent, worldly transcendence become an instrument of death, the V-2. The System is ever resourceful in integrating such failures into ever-expanding artificial orders. Blicero exploits Pökler’s belief in technological progress as ultimately helping all of humanity to transcend in order to make him design weapons of war. The space-rocket, pulled down to earth, thereby becomes a weapon used to further yet another totalizing history, German totalitarianism. For every line gravity bends into a parabola, the novel shows, there is a higher order derivative function that draws it as another straight line. One’s failure to transcend becomes another’s instrument of transcendence as the Western rational mind’s Protestant impulse to seek out total order continues indefinitely. History is thereby seen as a disciplinary regime. Within the closed logic of Systematization, the Elect are therefore as much prisoners of the system they construct as the Preterites they feel justified to exploit. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, totalizing efforts to stabilize time through its routinization into linear and causalistic history are always an act of violence against the cyclical natural order of things.

Gravity’s Rainbow’s Elect-without-God attempt to overcome the world’s “cycle of infection and death” (724) – a death They, having dispensed of God, must fear and rationalize away – by forcing it into the linearity of cause-and-effect, thereby “taming the terror of [...] curves into the linear, the safe” (414). As *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s narrator remarks, “[t]he War has been reconfiguring time and space into its own image” (257). Their rationalizations force time

into the deterministic parabola of history. Because “[t]he War needs electricity” (133), energy to maintain its thrust toward progress, time itself is transformed: “Their electric clocks run fast” (133) at night to save electricity for the war-effort. Time in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is shaped and controlled into “the history they have invented for themselves,” making it “*their* time, *their* space” (326). History, as time is understood within the System, is not an a priori structure but instead something that time is shaped into in order to progress Their rational enterprise of transcendence.

Calculus: The Partitioning of the Rocket-parabola as Routinization of Time

Gravity’s Rainbow represents the way time is routinized to serve Their purposes and desires most comprehensively in the partitioning of the Rocket’s trajectory into discrete, ever smaller portions. Mathematical calculus in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is used as a metaphor for the “mania for subdividing” (448), the urge to bureaucratically slice up “the Creation finer and finer, analyzing, setting namer more hopelessly apart from named” (391) which Their authority stems from. Newtonian mechanism, which rests upon cause-and-effect relations between forces and objects, serves Them as an instrument to control time through its routinization into equivalent, ever smaller partitions that, however, never fully touch upon the moment. Effectively, as will be shown, the bureaucratic (and wholly arbitrary) partitioning of time freezes time and stills change as it – the Puritan reflexes still strong in science’s secular history – wholly predetermines the future from the past. It thereby produces what Weisenburger calls a “Romantic ontology [...] of the frozen moment” (Weisenburger, “The Chronology of Episodes in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 52) – the romanticization of death and stillness as the ultimate transcendent telos of history Pynchon criticizes in the likes of Blicero. Calculus and analysis as metaphors for rationalistic routinization thus operate with static moments, an abstract time that cannot express the duration of real time.

Partitioning, as will be shown an image for the greater routinization of the moment that surfaces in ‘secular history’ and the Puritans’ rejection of the cyclical church year in their

Protestant rationalizations,⁷⁷ is an operation from calculus employed by *Gravity's Rainbow's* rocket technicians to calculate the ballistics of the V-2 in order to predict and thus control its parabolic flight. In order to 'know' the course of the rockets, just like the Puritans wanted to get to know God's divine plan, it has to be divided into time-frames, artificial and arbitrary subdivisions of change in time designated as Δt . For each segment, the change in motion can be calculated. Through the operations of mathematical calculus, the incalculable parabolic shape of the rocket's flight-path is turned into an array of straight lines whose gradient can be calculated (see Figure 1). Theoretically, this operation can be repeated with ever smaller Δt s leading to increasingly approximate descriptions of the Rocket's flight. *Gravity's Rainbow* references film to explain this method. The rocket's parabola is broken into "the rapid flashing successive stills to counterfeit movement" that Leibniz, and independently of him Newton, "used [...] to break up the trajectories of cannonballs through the air" (407). However, the novel shows, such analytic operations can only be counterfeits of real change. They abstractly represent time yet never really express the duration, i.e., the potential for change, in the moment.

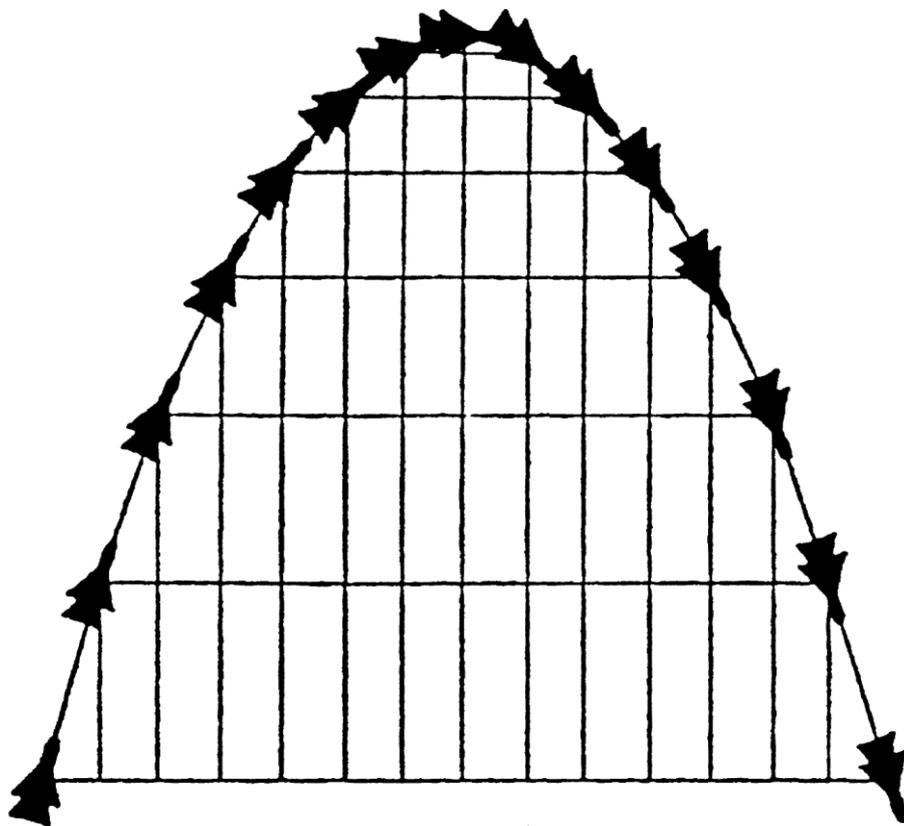


Figure 1 Rocket parabola from Joseph W. Slade's *Thomas Pynchon* (200)

⁷⁷ As Seed remarks, Pynchon holds that "German [Protestant] Christianity was the clearest expression of the western analytical tradition" (Seed 190).

Gravity's Rainbow employs the metaphor of calculus for its discussion of history as an oppressive routinization of time. The notion of a partitioning of movement into “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” (159) reappears in the image of the “elegant rooms of history” (56) Pointsman is enamored with. The parabola, Katje tells Slothrop in the novel, “is not only a rocket trajectory, but also a life” (209), at least what They and Their history teach what life is. The rational techniques of calculus having been “extended [...] to human lives” (407), routinization draws life as a chain of causes and effects yet loses all sense of the moment as a real present. As Joseph Slade explains Pynchon’s analogy, “just as humans divide up a parabola into fragments for convenience and precision in measurement, so they divide up their lives into artificial frames to comprehend them. In each case, they sacrifice the whole for its parts” (Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* 201). The partitioning of the parabola is used as a metaphor for routinized history, broken into equivalent, comparable parts to give intelligible, controllable shape to time: systems structure time as “days pil[ing] up” (132), literary periods, modes of production that progress dialectically according to a *Zeitgeist*, “sequences of violence, battle after battle” (105); what they have in common is how they establish a history over which humanity can “forget the real business of War is buying and selling” (105).

Life, however, – and here *Gravity's Rainbow* agrees with *Ulysses* that life is not about history but love – is not possible in the rational West’s “order of Analysis and Death” (722). Life and love are only possible in the present moment. This moment, however, is a time the calculus can only ever perceive as an abstractum in its infinitesimal Δt . Leni Pökler thus fails in her attempt to explain the moment of “pure personal present” (Ozier, “The Calculus of Transformation: More Mathematical Imagery in *Gravity's Rainbow*” 195) in which change and life are possible to her scientifically rational husband, though she uses his language of the calculus as a metaphor: “She even tried, from what little calculus she'd picked up, to explain it to Franz as 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” (159). As Slade remarks, “Pökler, ‘the cause-and-effect man,’ does not comprehend; the Δt for him is an artificial function, not real” (Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* 203).

Integral calculus employs an infinitesimal Δt to accurately describe motion without the necessity of an (impossible) infinite number of recalculations of each ‘moment.’ Effectively, through an act of naming, i.e., by assigning the term “ Δt ” to the rationally non-analyzable infinitesimal moment, can the problem of infinity be ignored and, e.g., the rocket’s motion be predicted. Δt is virtually a compromise with reality. However, since this moment remains abstract in calculus, “just a convenience, so that it can happen” but never ‘real,’ Pökler’s rationalistic intellect is incapable of grasping “the moment, and its possibilities” (159), possibilities of love, understanding, and liberating change. A calculus – and the rationalistic worldview it represents in the novel – that cannot conceive of the moment as real but can only, at best, co-opt its name into a structure always connected to what is past, can only divide in order to control and determine. Change and surprise, the characteristic qualities *Gravity’s Rainbow* assigns to the moment, are not comprehensible to such a worldview that ultimately drives to still all motion.

One rocket technician seems to sense the same as he asks his colleague “Do you find it a little schizoid [...] breaking a flight profile up into segments of responsibility?” (453), wondering “You are either alone absolutely, alone with your own death, or take part in a larger enterprise, and share in the death of others. Are we not all one?” (454). Rationalization and routinization, as *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s calculus shows, estranges people from another and erects barriers between subject and object, Elect and Preterite, as it cancels out the present. Roger Mexico similarly feels that “as vaguely silvered barriers come down, spaces slide in to separate him that much more, thinning further his loneliness” (56). The silvered barriers that separate the parabola’s intervals and, figuratively, the “elegant rooms of history” (56) Their ideology of determinism and linearity erects, create divisions, the binarity of Elect and Preterite. Rationalization alienates humans from one another and the natural cycles of life and death. While for the likes of Leni Pökler and Roger Mexico Δt approaching zero describes the singular moment of transformation and “personal commitment when antecedents and consequences cease to matter” (Ozier, “The Calculus of Transformation: More Mathematical Imagery in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 194), the System’s calculus of history cannot conceive of the present moment as anything but an abstractum and must thus still change and interpersonal connection.

Totalizing mechanics of cause and effect such as calculus and history are Their “way of dividing in order to control” (Seed 190): just as They divide by calculus in order to control and calculate the Rocket’s flight so do They divide people in order to rule them and routinize time into history in order to rationalize away death, i.e., sterilize the moment and halt time, and escape into a misunderstood transcendence that, however, in the novel will never be more than “death-transfigured” (166). As the narrator remarks,

[t]he 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, not even the sort the Germans have engineered, ein Volk ein Führer – it wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness, but a complexity. (130-1)

The System, though also at work in Nazism, fundamentally rejects the charismatic moment of potential change in favor of a bureaucratization. It artificially breaks the cycles of life and death into history’s linear shape and reduces the pure, singular present to an abstraction. As Katherine Hayles expresses it, somewhat reductively,

In contrast to the artificial structures of organization and control that deny the cycle of Return, then, are the natural structures of decaying organic matter 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. (Hayles, *The Cosmic Web* 171)

Thus, even though the System (mathematically) integrates, its integrations do not serve unification but only division. Significantly, *Gravity’s Rainbow* thus ominously points out the morbid resemblance of the double integral sign (\iint) to, among other things, “the SS emblem” (300). Double integration thereby becomes a metaphor for totalization and the paranoid system’s fear of death and, paradoxically, its simultaneous deathwish to be effected, as becomes apparent, through a freezing of time and change. Used for example by the Nazi architect Etzel Ölsch to “find volumes under surfaces whose equations were known – masses, moments, centers of gravity” (301), the double integral is also important for rocketry: to reach its predestined goal, “the Rocket had to integrate twice” (301). As E.L. Smith shows, double

integration suggests the “changeless, eternal, absolute principles of the mind upon which the created universe is modeled, as a building is upon a blueprint” (E. L. Smith 105).

The narrator thus comments on the mathematical operations necessary to control the rocket’s movement, which the novel likens to time controlled into history:

But in the dynamic space of the living Rocket’s movement, the double integral has a different meaning. To integrate here is to operate on a rate of change so that time falls away: change is stilled.... ‘Meters per second’ will integrate to ‘meters.’ The moving vehicle is frozen, in space, to become architecture, and timeless. It was never launched. It will never fall. (301)

Integration is thus an offshoot of the paranoid “Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible” (188), as, the narrator remarks, “[t]he double integral stood in Etzel Ölsch’s subconscious for the method of finding hidden centers, inertias unknown” (302). To determine all hidden centers of mass and unknown inertias is to account for and thus control the Rocket which has a “life of its own” (301) into the totality of the parabola as the “shape of no surprise, no second chances, no return” (209). In effect, such paranoid total systematization means to halt change and the present since “to freeze the rocket’s ‘life’ in frame-differentiated segments [...] is in effect to stop time” (Moore 193). For the paranoid Elect, the doubly integrated, perfectly accounted for rocket is “the Perfect Rocket,” immobilized, “still up there, still descending” (426) yet poised mid-motion in the sky, like Zeno’s arrow asymptotically approaching final zero Δt .

Herein lies the ‘deathwish’ of the System, the “sexual love, with his, and his race’s death” Slothrop feels “in his genitals for those rockets each time exploding in the sky” (738): the totalization and bureaucratization of existence in which even “the Rocket’s terrible passage [is] reduced, literally, to bourgeois terms, terms of an equation such as that elegant blend of philosophy and hardware, abstract change and hinged pivots of real metal which describes motion” (239) produces stillness. To project the universe as a closed system that follows one underlying principle, i.e., to project a world reduced to cause-and-effect relations of forces like Newtonian gravity, is to reduce it to immobility. As time “falls away” and “change is stilled”

(301), life becomes the stillness of death. ‘Transcendence’ in the Puritan sense of the discovery of an all-pervasive principle is understood as stasis. After all, the narrator asks “isn’t that every paranoid’s wish? to perfect methods of immobility?” (572). Mathematical analysis as a metaphor for history’s bureaucratization of time certainly is such a method.

By freezing time, the System attempts to halt the inevitable descent, what it fears as death and intolerable disorder, and force its parabola into a straight line, thereby, paradoxically, promoting death. Ironically, then, the increase of order to effect a transcendent escape from death leads to a decrease of order. The ghost of Walther Rathenau says as much as he warns the Nazis at his séance that what They “call ‘life’: the growing, organic Kartell” (167), i.e., an all-integrative and all-ordering system, is “only another illusion” (167). Such a dream of immachination produces not life but only a “very clever robot. The more dynamic it seems to you, the more deep and dead, in reality, it grows” (167). To project a Newtonian universe as a linearized closed system that follows a discrete ‘history’ of causes and effects is to project its heat-death.

As the second law of thermodynamics states, closed systems tend toward disorganization, i.e., a state of maximum entropy. Entropy is a central concept throughout Pynchon’s writing which he applies to human history and society. Although, as will be commented on later, reversible in the open and non-linear system of time *Gravity’s Rainbow* suggests, within the linear history of the System entropy represents a valid metaphor for an irreversible tendency toward corruption, disorder and death – and thus also what They associate with Gravity. The German physicist Rudolf Clausius stated the first two laws of thermodynamics as follows:

- 1) The energy of the universe is constant
- 2) The entropy of the universe tends toward a maximum (Clausius 365)

Measuring the state of disorder towards which a closed system tends, entropy can thus also be viewed as the measure of the passage of time from past to future states and is therefore also referred to as ‘time’s arrow.’

Attempting to increase order and ward off death, systematization thus can be understood as the attempt to freeze time, an endeavor that, as the application of Weber's theory of routinization of charisma shows, can only ever work toward stillness. As the novel's narrator comments,

[t]he System may or may not understand that it's only buying time. And that time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone or anything but 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. (412)

Rationalization imposes an artificial order of exchange onto time and thereby creates history. However, since energy is conserved over time and tends toward maximum entropy, to impose order, energy has to be subtracted from other portions of the universe. The novel applying the physical concept to the social sphere, entropy thus legitimates the Elect in their project of transcendence as all-order to exploit the Preterites and channel their energies toward Their order.

Again, the rocket metaphor illustrates the exploitation and destruction that inherently follows for *Gravity's Rainbow* from the imposition of a linear history. To lift off from earth and ascend linearly, a metaphor for a transcendent escape through the imposition of a linear determinism upon the world, the Rocket, poignantly described as "an entire system *won, away,* from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature" (324), has to exert force against gravity. For this task it requires energy, fuel. Poignantly, the Rocket's fuel, i.e., the energy needed to create and uphold order in a system that tends towards disorganization, is channeled away from the masses toward an elect portion of the system, the Rocket. This is for example illustrated when the novel tells of a, historically verifiable, potato shortage as Germany's potato fields were stripped by the SS to be distilled into "alcohol for the rockets" (550). To further the war effort, the German High Command had rerouted the potato harvests into the production of alcohol as fuel for the V-2s at the expense of the wider population. As Weisenburger remarks, "this datum [...] becomes another small

example of the ‘routinization’ of people’s lives” (Weisenburger, “The End of History?” 55). Their totalizing view of technological progress and history justifies the sacrifice of the masses as it affords a constant influx of energy. The Rocket, and by extension the War, history, and the System it is an emblem of, is described by a vampiric need for energy to sustain its linear upward movement, order. To reduce entropy in one elect part of the system is to increase it in all other parts.

However, as the reality of the rocket shows, fuel will inevitably run out, the Rocket will reach its Brennschluss, the point where it is no longer in control, and the rocket’s linear flight will be bent back into parabolic descent. As is literalized in Gottfried’s death in the 00000 Rocket, any System “sooner or later must crash to its death [...] dragging with it innocent souls” (412). To uphold complete order and linearity in a closed system necessitates an impossible amount of energy and thus means the concentration of life into ever more discrete pockets of existence at the expense of the passed-over majority. Hence, They “may or may not understand” – since They both fear and embrace entropy in their deathwish – that They’re “only buying time” (412) before the inevitable (heat-) death. Linearity, be it teleological secular history or the flight of the Rocket, is an artificial construct always won at the cost of destruction and exploitation. It is a solipsistic endeavor to which, eventually, Elect and Preterite equally fall victim. As Thomas Moore thus remarks, the romantic desire for a “reintegration of self with nature” in *Gravity’s Rainbow* comes with the danger “of swallowing nature whole in a complete subjectivism, supremely idealist egotism” (Moore 155). The more integrative a system becomes, the fewer become those who qualify for Election, the more it tends towards stillness, and the more are the Elect justified to violently exploit the world around them for their own, routinized and fraudulent transcendence.

With this in mind, recurring formulations in the novel such as those about the “mass nature of wartime death” (105) gain additional meaning when read within the context of a response to the Ulyssean Tradition. Evidently, Joyce’s mass-pattern, a teleological and secularized structuring of time, can be seen as one of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s ‘secular histories.’ Wartime death thus does not only quantitatively but also qualitatively have a “mass nature.” It is the result of routinization, the imposition of a totalizing and ordering principle like Joyce’s mass

or the Puritans' paranoid transcendence. The System's "structures favoring death" (167), structures that, as can be seen, resemble that of Joyce's and the Puritans' secularizing sacralization of everyday reality into an all-controlling order justify and produce the wide-spanning death and destruction the novel describes.⁷⁸ Secular history in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the destruction it leads into, one might conclude, exhibits a Ulyssean mass-nature. The Rocket, too, in this reading is, as a metaphor for artificial, linearized history. Like Joyce's cocoa it is both a mass product, that is a product of a mass-like view of time as a teleologically progressing history, and itself "going into mass production" (283) as it heralds a new Rocket-age, that is, as technomysticians like Blicero or the Hereros show, a providential history centered around the Rocket as its sublime object and vehicle of transcendence.

The novel's dialogue with *Ulysses* repeatedly implicitly punning on the multiple meanings of 'mass' as liturgy, great number, and physical property of inert objects, Pynchon moves Joyce's liturgical mass into the field of physics. *Gravity's Rainbow's* conversation with its Ulyssean Tradition tacitly converges these meanings in its rejection of linearity, a linearity it also perceives in the Ulyssean mass and which it postmodernly corrects into the "historical sublime" (Elias 85) of the non-linear liturgical calendar, set to reenchant a rationally disenchanting and routinized time of history. Thus, at the same time, the greater the mass (read: the more totalizing and integrative the System), the greater the resistance to acceleration and thus the more energy needed for the mass to 'fly,' lift off in the rocket-metaphor or function coherently as a system of order. As could be shown, it is the fundamental truth of *Gravity's Rainbow's* systems that the more they (/They) amass information and interconnection, i.e., integrate mass, the more likely is the System to fail, its inertial mass increased to the point it is pulled down to earth, and produce singularities that deconstruct it.

⁷⁸ Not uncoincidentally, Joyce's *Ulysses* 'ends' in the timelessness of the 'Penelope' chapter. While the eternally stretched Δt *Gravity's Rainbow* ends with is structurally similar and thus clearly another reference to the way Joyce's novel ends, the temporality *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests in its closing section, as will be shown, provides a critique and a, to the novel, more fruitful alternative to the timelessness of *Ulysses*.

The Ontology of the Frozen Moment

As one can see, rationalization bespeaks a desire to control contingency and escape into a transcendent timelessness, a frozen moment of pure determinism and certainty that denies all potential for free choice and life. This ‘frozen moment,’ driven by a simultaneous desire for transcendent escape (from nature) and return to an illusory state of innocent, natural order, thus appears in the novel as hopelessly betrayed to the destructive notion of technological and historical progress. *Gravity’s Rainbow* satirizes this ontology of the frozen moment perhaps most prominently in Blicero’s “engineered [...] symbolism” (750) with which he sacrifices Gottfried (poignantly a namesake of the inventor of calculus, this perfected method of immobility, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz) in the 00000 Rocket.

The frozen moment Blicero’s transcendent escape strives toward is represented in the last word of the novel’s penultimate section, Gottfried’s final “*Now-*“ (760). This ‘Now’ marks Gottfried’s death. Poignantly, however, the novel remarks that “[t]he exact moment of his death will never be known” (751) since, as could be shown, to the rationalizing intellect the moment must always remain an unintelligible abstractum. In contrast to the Preterites’ “Now everybody-” (760) at the very end of the novel, a communal moment of transcendent kindness, Gottfried’s “*Now-*“ (760) is italicized, highlighting its status as a name like the infinitesimal Δt of calculus. Death within this System becomes an abstraction as it is experienced as a terminal and intersubjectively incommensurable, lonely moment. As the dash indicates however, this ‘now’ can never fully touch on the real present. Gottfried’s ‘Now’ is the Elect moment, named, and thus signified and not passed over like the Preterites, as part and endpoint of history. It represents a moment grounded in memory as reference to past and future, Gottfried thinking “Always remember” (760) before his death.

However, as the novel continuously shows, any such deterministic, closed history of linear cause-and-effect imposed onto time “sooner or later must crash to its death” (421), pulled down by gravity like its emblem the Rocket. Apprehensive of this phenomenon, Blicero integrates the omnipresent destruction into the artificial, higher order his rocket-ritual embodies. The novel thus suggests that the ultimate conclusion of all endeavors to bureaucratically control and routinize time in a deterministic history, a form of secular providence, lies in total

destruction. Viewing history as bounded by humanity's "mission to propagate death" of which he is now "in the last phase" (722), Blicero romanticizes Death as the ultimate goal of existence.⁷⁹ The telos of this history – in the spatial poetics of Election the novel uses the 'moon' of his Rocket's transcendent escape – is the erection of a "new Deathkingdom" (723). Blicero, as Slade remarks, thus "suggests Calvinism curved back upon itself" (Slade, "Religion, Psychology, Sex, and Love in *Gravity's Rainbow*" 166). He takes the doctrine of total depravity to its final conclusion as he actively promotes death, perversion and degradation in his schemes: "The man's thirst for guilt was insatiable" (323).

Trained on a linear teleology that is as "hopeless as the one-way flow of European time" (724), Blicero bespeaks Western civilization's hate for nature in his attempt to still the natural cycles that run from life to death to fertile ground for new life. Unable to endure the disorder that comes with life but aware of the deadly fallibility of rigidity ("there is always the danger of falling" (723)), Blicero arranges the symbolism of the rocket-firing so that the ritual becomes a perfect replica of nature rationally perverted into linearity and stillness and thus to him "something real" (754). Excessively rational, Blicero as the ultimate post-Puritan Elect collapses metaphysics into physics in his attempt at transcendent escape. Gottfried's death is thus to occur at the locus of Death, the Rocket's weightless tipping point before its descent at the end of its linear ascent, so that artificial signifier (System) and signified (World) finally fall together. It thereby halts the play of language and time that, on the one hand, creates Systems, yet, on the other hand, as will be seen, is life and creativity, and reduces it to a linear, positivist cause-and-effect relation.⁸⁰

Fearing death, unstoppable entropy, as the omnipresent failure of systems, Blicero – and with him the Western society *Gravity's Rainbow* is transforming into – becomes in love with

⁷⁹ A notion the German must have learned from his understanding of Rilke's poetry and the Wagnerian loved-death in *Tristan and Isolde*.

⁸⁰ Pynchon's novel thereby mirrors the parting sight of Leopold Bloom, equanimously resolving his conjugal troubles as he fetally curls into Molly Bloom, the father reintegrated becoming the son, in the image of the 00000 Rocket as "the womb into which Gottfried returns" (750). Blicero engineers an artificial System/nature, the Rocket as history, into which Gottfried "fits well" (750) and serves as only another cog in an intricate machine. The life-affirming resolution of Bloom cradling into the living womb of Molly as the novel closes is replaced in *Gravity's Rainbow*'s postmodern response to the Ulyssean Tradition by the cold, technological womb of the Rocket. Molly's female body is turned into an image of death and submission as, this time, the father, Blicero, sacrifices the son-like Gottfried and the ritual of atonement is shifted from life-affirming to death-driven.

Death as the rationalized goal of his history.⁸¹ He endeavors to “become *one with*” (723) it in order to restore “the primacy of the ‘conscious’ self and its memories” (153). For Blicero, the completion of history lies in the perfection of stillness, the timeless state of the inorganic and immachinated. The imposition of a linear teleology, in ultimate conclusion a “movement [...] from death to death-transfigured” (166) in that it signifies Death into a God-like entity, thus implies a sense of return to a lost state of innocence and control in which the self, untouched by exterior forces by being able to account for, control, and integrate itself into them, regains its primacy.⁸² Thus, since entropy threatens the subject in its abject, unexplainable and thus sublime power, Blicero’s loveddeath rationalizes Death into a terminal and signified event, subordinates it to control and thus neutralizes it.

As one can see, *Gravity’s Rainbow* conceptualizes history as a form of abjection. Hence, the word ‘death’ appears in *Gravity’s Rainbow* both written with an upper-case and a lower-case ‘D.’ Death, capitalized like a proper name as, e.g., in the West’s “order of Analysis and Death” (722), refers to Their loveddeath’s abstraction of death into an elect, signified terminal event. On the other hand, death writ-small references the abject and absurd. This corporeal death is a transitional event that provides the potential for community and regeneration where Death creates isolation and terminality. The individual’s relation to death/Death is therefore the individual’s relation to time and history. Entropy, the linear flow of time which is understood in the System like a gravitational force pulling all of existence irreversibly toward terminal Death is, through history’s abjection, halted and controlled and the subject in history thereby stabilized, removed from the other, and restored to the “primacy of the ‘conscious’ self and its memories” (153). Corporeal death and the moment thus share a quality of Preterition, both being a sublime or absurd, undefined event that historicizing thought controls by turning it into an abstract name. In history, preterite death and the preterite moment, as will be shown instances of transformation, openness and circular dynamics of regeneration and communion, are routinized into static and isolating entities.

⁸¹ Blicero thereby can be read to support a position similar to Stephen’s notion that “Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet. Death is the highest form of life” (474) in *Ulysses*.

⁸² The role of Herbert Marcuse’s reality principle clearly at play here will be further discussed in the next chapter’s investigation of the countercultural politics of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

Gravity's Rainbow refers to these abstractions that counterfeit transformation in a linear frame yet only ever produce, of course, the stasis of Death as pornographies, the term closely linked to the abstract Δt of calculus: "pornographies of flight" (flight, as already noted, used as a spatialized metaphor for the Puritan transcendent escape), "pornographies of deduction", "pornographies of love" (567, 155) are rationality's linearized imitations of a circular nature, perfect counterfeits that, however, lack the here-and-now of that which resists containment in signified history. Like calculus, they abstractly represent the moment but are never able to fully touch upon and open it to (shared) experience.⁸³ Blicero may want to "be taken in love" (724). However, as his former lover Enzian has to learn from him, love in the Western rational mind has been transformed into something "to do with masculine technology, with contracts, with winning and losing" (324). Love in the System is a routinized exchange in which the Elect use the Preterite for their goals and subject is divided from object. The bureaucratizing intellect, conditioned on a dynamic of Election and Preterition that privileges the signified and determinable, reduces love, flight, and understanding to linearized, timelessly static forms of power. These forms are not only "the forms of capitalist expression" (155) of reality but govern all systematic, historiographic thought. As such, elect Death/Entropy (and gravity) is yet another pornography, a perverse and abstracted parody, of a death/entropy (and Gravity) that *Gravity's Rainbow* perceives as transitional and regenerative. However, just as pornography may simulate and in fact even (more) perfectly reduplicate the material conditions of sexual love yet never actually touch upon the real experience in time, the transcendence the novel's Elect seek is fraudulent. Love, death, Preterition and the uniqueness of the here-and-now in *Gravity's Rainbow* cluster into a complex of an indeterminable energy only feebly contained and controlled by Their pornographies. Their historiography, one might say, is only a pornography of time that imposes an illusory continuity where it only deals with fragments. Their transcendence is therefore a pornography of flight. As will be seen, true love, on the other hand, and its restorative, communitarian power as an irrational, altruistic act, is an embrace of

⁸³ Michael Bérubé further elaborates on pornography in *Gravity's Rainbow* in his monograph *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers*, where he reads Pynchon's use of 'pornography' as describing "a regressive anamnesia that recreates illusory, prelapsarian (or prelinguistic) unities through a complex mechanism of dismemberment and reconfiguration" (Bérubé 248). See also the similarity of Pynchon's distinction between pornographies and 'real' love, flight, etc. and Walter Benjamin's description of the work of art and its reproduction in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

Preterition, an affirmation of an ambiguity and openness where, as the novel remarks, “[i]n love, words can be taken too many ways” (220). It is an affirmation of death as natural and unknowable and thus an affirmation of the non-signified, unfixed and sublime in the moment. The Preterites, those so fundamentally undefined their history lacks any telos and thus fails to be a history at all, are capable of true love and understanding by not being “alone with your own death” but being able to *choose* to “share in the deaths of others” (454). Here, in the immanent present and in the affirmation of death and subjunctiveness lies the potential for love, meaning and liberation. Through its rational routinizations of the abject, the System on the other hand sacrifices the whole for its part(ition)s.

Although the two novels share a dismissal of conventional history as an illusion which only serves to control the masses as well as an optimistic hope for the liberating potential of love, *Gravity's Rainbow* criticizes the mass-structure of *Ulysses* of simply replacing one linearized, teleological system with another. *Gravity's Rainbow* associates the linear and parabolic conceptions of time with disease and destruction. Ultimately, the imposition of a linearized, irreversible order onto time's passage bespeaks a doctrine of the frozen moment that inevitably leads into immobility and death. Joyce's mass can be seen as an instantiation of the 'secular history' *Gravity's Rainbow* rejects, a bureaucratization of time that effectively sterilizes the potential for change in the present. Methods of integration, rationalization's imposition of an underlying principle onto the world, are presented as dehumanizing and controlling: they attempt to freeze time by reducing it to a deterministic, closed system. As Blicero's ritual shows, like Joyce's mass a secularized yet highly symbolic ordering of time into a linearly determined, alternative, history, systematization as an effect of the Elect/Preterite dynamic in Western culture can ultimately only have total annihilation and stillness as its goal.

Nevertheless, like the paranoiac Slothrop, James Joyce will end up being “a good guy after all” (619). As will be seen in the second half of this chapter, despite all criticism, *Gravity's Rainbow's* circular calendar places the novel in the Ulyssean Tradition. When Slothrop visits Zürich, the narrator hence muses on four other visitors to Zürich, thereby also outlining the novel's project of a transposition of *Ulysses*:

Lenin, Trotsky, James Joyce, Dr. Einstein all sat out at these tables. Whatever it was *they* all had in common: whatever they'd come to this vantage to score... perhaps it had to do with the people somehow, with pedestrian mortality, restless crisscrossing of needs or desperations in one fateful piece of street... dialectics, matrices, archetypes all need to connect, once in a while, back to some of that proletarian blood, to body odors and senseless screaming across a table, to cheating and last hopes, or else all is dusty Dracularity, the West's ancient curse.... (262-3)

Notably, “*they*” is italicized but not capitalized, as the novel would usually do when relating to the System.⁸⁴ Joyce, Lenin, Trotsky, and Einstein are not part of Their Elect but in tune with the Preterite the novel, too, champions. As will be shown, rather than antagonizing Joyce and replacing his mass with a rivalling, ‘better’ structure, *Gravity’s Rainbow* transforms Joyce’s mass into the communitarian, post-Einsteinian space-time continuum of the circular calendar and thereby connects it “back to some of that proletarian blood” in order to make it fit to, once again, counter “the West’s ancient curse” (263) of rationalization and linearity.

Part Two: Circularity and the Eternal Moment

The dynamic of Election and Preterition underlying western culture purports a linearized understanding of time as a predetermined and immutable ‘History.’ However, in a world that has rationally replaced divine providence with a notion of historical and technological progress with the Rocket as its sublime emblem and vehicle of transcendence, to be the Elect of its “terrible mass” (7) can ironically only mean sure annihilation and, as Louis Mackey remarks, “[p]reterition *can* mean survival” (Mackey 21). The Elect prove to be as much prisoners and victims of the system they construct as their preterite counterparts. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, to be part of “the multitudes who are passed over by God and History” (299) appears desirable if one considers how said history is one inevitably drawn toward death and stillness. Certainly, it is more preferable to be passed over by the Rocket, the novel’s strongest metaphor for history,

⁸⁴Erik Ketzan’s “Clash of the Modern/Postmodern Titans? James Joyce in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” misses this and thereby completely misreads the above quotation, arguing that by “naming Joyce among the ‘bourgeois vampires’ of Europe, who represent the worst forces in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, it further suggests a reading that Pynchon *opposes* Joyce or his methods” (Ketzan 337). Clearly, the opposite is the case.

than to be chosen by it – or, as is Gottfried’s fate, to be immachinated into it, entombed in a deterministic structure that stifles the individual and literally and figuratively prevents all movement.

Ironically, Preterition thus implies the possibility of salvation. *Gravity’s Rainbow* employs this deconstruction of the Elect/Preterite dynamic into codependent, interchangeable terms folding into another in its ethics of preterite mercy, an embrace of Preterition which, in temporality, corresponds to a championship of the singular moment and its possibilities. While the solipsistic dynamic of Elect and Preterite produces a routinization of time which, in its linearity, ultimately drives toward the stillness of cultural heat-death, the assertion of human interconnection in the sense of polymorphous associations offers a life-affirming potential for free choice.

William Slothrop, one of Tyrone Slothrop’s ancestors, is thus said to have “been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from” (556) when he published a heretical treatise on the codependency of the Elect and the Preterite in which he argued “holiness for these ‘second Sheep’ without whom there’d be no elect” and, even more outrageously, “to love Judas too” (555). With the “Slothropite heresy” (556), William Slothrop crossed the conventionally insurmountable boundary between Elect and Preterite. His ethics of mercy and companionship with the Preterite, a “compassion for the Other who is also oneself” (Pederson 150), inverts the linear relations of Calvinism as it champions the passed over and thus untotalizable and unintegrable. Such an irrational ethics of inclusivity that affords equal ‘holiness’ to the absent and the present due to their codependency, the novel muses, could have changed America for the better. Whereas the shape of the conventional Elect/Preterite dynamic is one of rationalized transcendent escape built on exclusion and presence as it anchors meaning in the past, i.e., a shape of linear relations, William Slothrop’s assertion of codependency and compassion champions absence in a transcendent togetherness. The Slothropite heresy could have installed a notion of transcendent togetherness in the cultural consciousness, not a ‘culture of death’ that justifies the destruction and exploitation of others deemed expendable due to their preterite state but a culture of life that could thrive on ambiguity and regenerative cycles and thus have lead to “fewer crimes in the

name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot” (556). While rationalist focus on presence and terminality justifies dehumanization, a positive reevaluation of the non-signified and transitional can bring forth a dynamic, egalitarian and life-affirming worldview.

Hence, although the moment for the Slothropite heresy has passed, the damage done is, contrary to a linearized, closed notion of time, not irreversible and “there might be a route back” (556). As will be shown, the ‘Slothropite heresy’ will not be the last time that rationalistic “feelings about action and reaction” (555) will bring forth singularities that put the system they spring from on its head and open up a path toward freedom. The System’s entropic tendencies will always produce unaccountable, preterite waste. Such freaks, inherently products of the ‘straight’ System’s final inability to fully control entropy, destabilize linear and causal history.⁸⁵ While Election thus produces a solipsistic exploitation of the other, Preterition – the Preterites not being accounted for in history – allows for a transcendent communion in the momentary with its potential for free choice that is earthly yet not materialistically earth-bound. The waste of history as which *Gravity’s Rainbow* also describes the Preterites is thereby re-cycled into new life in the both singular and cyclical temporality *Gravity’s Rainbow* proposes.

The Slothropite heresy hence resonates deeply with the novel’s own circular design and its digressive style that, too, does not seem to distinguish between important or elect information and details to be passed over. As Mackey remarks, *Gravity’s Rainbow* employs “*Praeteritio*, the figure of conspicuous omission, magnified to the point of method” (Mackey 25). In assuming a preterite rhetoric of absence and omission – linguistically speaking non-signification – *Gravity’s Rainbow* attempts to evade a death-driven paranoid systematization in favor of uncertainty and freedom. If, as Blicero’s ritual shows, the Elects’ transcendence is an act of total signification that halts the flow of time and thus change and life, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s “[p]reterite rhetoric,” Mackey notes, “recuperates being by not signifying it” (Mackey 25). Filled with ellipses, the novel reliably passes over what is most important. History

⁸⁵ Similarly, Newtonian physics of cause and effect will bring forth a theory of relativity that only offers probabilities for each moment. The ‘straights’ of the CIA, in course of Project MKUltra’s mind-control experiments, the anecdote goes, will introduce LSD to the American population and jump-start the singular ‘freaks’ of the 60s Counterculture. Though set on routinization and determinism, the System in *Gravity’s Rainbow* inadvertently produces aberrations and singularities. The novel shows that such singular moments of saving Preterition, a saving grace not available to the Elect and historically defined, are probabilistically bound to happen and open up a moment or “single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite” (556).

in the novel understood as an act of abjection, and thus death, the absurd contingency of mortality. They seek to control and neutralize through its signification into a transcendental signifier, is thereby refused signification in the novel. Although the novel is fascinated with death and its symbolization in the System of Death, it offers no real death scene but only reports it in retrospect or suggests it with great, yet never total, certainty. The novel thereby resists the romanticization of Death it ascribes to its master-organizers such as Blicero and exclusively concerns itself with death as the absurd, preteritely undefinable transitional moment history's abjections try to sterilize.⁸⁶

Temporally speaking, *Gravity's Rainbow's* embrace of Preterition in theme and style as liberating is an embrace of non-linearity and the incomparable singularity of each present moment. Just as the System of Elect and Preterite depends on the Preterite as a point of differentiation yet leaves the Preterite undefined and thus open to exploitation and annihilation, so does this System's routinization of time rely on the moment yet leaves it an abstraction. Although the Δt of calculus purports to represent the moment as an infinitesimal point in time, it conceives of its meaning only in relation to its preterite (past) state. Within 'history,' the present is preterite. The assertion of a circular codependency of Election and Preterition, as can be seen in the Slothropite heresy's role as a singular point in American history, thus amounts to an apprehension of singularity. Circularity and presentism thus go together in *Gravity's Rainbow's* alternative temporality, allowing for the community and free choice the System's rationalism and determinism disavows. As will be shown, the novel's parallelism to the liturgical calendar, at once cyclical and only 'functioning' in the moment, contains exactly this simultaneous circularity and singularity of the event, the historical sublime of its always unstable and ambiguous and thus preterite momentariness serving to reenchant a routinized, linear time.

⁸⁶ Therefore, in opposition to the Protestant "old dutch fussing" (132) about routinization and systematizations that seek to rationalize death into a Death for history, *Gravity's Rainbow* tells of Catholic Italian POWs who defy gravity, "finding techniques of balancing the sack [filled with heavy Christmas presents] with one hand" (132), and "play [...] about life-and-death" (132). As Mackey remarks on the novel's favoring of the preterite state, "[o]nly the preterite, released from predestination by divine neglect, can play" (Mackey 28). Coming from a Catholic tradition which has retained the magical enchantment of the world Pynchon seeks to reintroduce through the liturgical calendar, these figures can be "conditionally alive" (132) as they are allowed the freedom of play, uncertainty, and thus non-linearity.

The Circle: Regeneration at the Preterite Mercy of Gravity

Just like the novel transfers the linearity promoted by the Elect/Preterite configuration into a symbiosis or mandala in which not only each part implies the other but in which Preterition circles into a sign of grace, so is the rainbow's parabolic shape – image of the Puritan teleology of linearized, paranoid history – turned into a circular design by the novel. Already the novel's opening section describes how “around the curve of the Earth, farther east, the sun over there, just risen over in Holland, is striking the rocket's exhaust, drops and crystals, making them blaze clear across the sea” (6), giving, as Weisenburger explains, an imaginary observer over the North Sea the vision of a circular rainbow in the rocket's vapor trail (Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 19–20). The same image is picked up again toward the end of the novel, when the narrator reminds us of the shape that is

not, as we might imagine, bounded below by the line of the Earth it “rises from” and the Earth it “strikes” No But Then You Never Really Thought It Was Did You Of Course It Begins Infinitely Below The Earth And Goes On Infinitely Back Into The Earth it's only the *peak* that we are allowed to see, the break up through the surface, out of the other silent world. (726)

The rainbow's shape as a parabola is only half the (hi)story *Gravity's Rainbow* tells. As will be shown, the “silent world” (726) of preterite omission reveals an underlying circularity Hayles remarks “is associated with 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” (Hayles, *The Cosmic Web* 170). The rainbow is understood as not just the arc, a “circle that has become linear by being opened into a parabola” that is “associated with the artificial structures of control that drive toward some final terminus” (Hayles, *The Cosmic Web* 170) of descent and death. In the novel's upturning of binary thinking it also becomes an image of regeneration and possibility in the natural cycles of life, death, and new life. As Lance Ozier suggests, the rainbow is not only the shape of the V-2 as “the wrathful hand of God reaching down from the clouds” (Ozier, “The Calculus of Transformation: More Mathematical Imagery in *Gravity's Rainbow*” 201). Seen as a circle that illustrates a non-linear notion of time, it becomes an image of life and creative possibility, the “stout rainbow cock” that fertilizes a “green wet valleyed

Earth” (626) Slothrop sees following his disintegration as he transcends into a non-linear, preterite ‘eternal moment.’

While the shape of the arc signifies a ‘history’ veering into, as it tries to rationalize away and control, Death promoted by the Elect/Preterite division, the circle exemplifies the natural, life-affirming alternative to such artificial structures. Its time is not based in exclusion and dualism but in a sense of interconnectedness and the coming together of opposites. The circle thus offers hopes of transformation and life. Gravity is integral to both shapes, parabola and circle, yet with highly different implications. The title-giving ‘gravity’s rainbow’ can be seen as both an emblem of the novel’s circularity and championship of the preterite moment in which the novel locates the possibility of renewal and liberation (and is hence capitalized in the title), and the linearity and desire for stillness the novel rejects. On the one hand, gravity appears as a ‘destiny,’ the unifying force under which linearizing, rational analysis subsumes the entirety of existence. As Blicero’s ritual – the epitome of authoritarian life-denying organization – shows, rationalism’s attempt to escape death or gravity draws it as supreme principle and thus consigns existence to “rationalized forms of death” (230). The other half of gravity’s double role in the novel, Gravity writ-large, establishes it as a redemptive force of regeneration. The same force that had formerly been understood as death and disorder is therefore also

something eerie, Messianic, extrasensory in Earth’s mindbody... having hugged to its holy center the wastes of dead species, gathered, packed, transmuted, realigned, and rewoven molecules to be taken up again by the coal-tar Kabbalists of the other side.

(590)

Gravity pressurizes the world’s “preterite dung” (166) into new shapes. From death and decomposition, i.e., the entropic state of preterite waste, new lives and shapes are born. The gravitational pull that bends the transcendent straight line back to earth and into the death They fear and wish to control also gives rise to new opportunities for life. The novel repeatedly comes back to this, as Alan Friedman and Manfred Puetz call it, “compost-garden image” (Friedman and Puetz 348). Nature constantly re-cycles and turns death into new life as it embraces waste, the world’s preterite masses, and weaves (not synthesizes!) them into new fertile ground. As

Cooper comments, “[t]his is not just ‘death-transfigured’ but life-asserted” (Cooper 85). While rationally linear attempts at transcendent escape can only ever attain death in life, nature offers a life in death where mercy, which is also the “mercy of gravity” (584) Mother Nature shows toward the preterite wastes as she recycles them in her embrace, can lead to new life. Left non-signified and absurd, abject death can be a transitional rather than terminal moment, its affirmation allowing for free choice, change, and togetherness where its repression in Election fosters separation and stasis. The preterite ethics Pynchon proposes can thereby be understood as the mercy of Gravity.

The novel itself mirrors this natural circularity as it tends to the passed-over material of history, the preterite wastes and their pop-culture. As such a preterite piece itself, Weisenburger remarks, *Gravity’s Rainbow* naturally “unfolds according to a circular design” (Weisenburger, *Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* 3). The novel associatively draws a circle from its end back to its beginning, a circle that will give rise to never-ending new combinations of meaning and thus a dialogically open, liberating system of interpretation based in the present. Closing, or in fact not-closing, the novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow* ends in a 1970s movie theater over which a rocket hangs frozen in the sky in “the last delta-t” (760) before impact. Although it should be mimetically impossible, the last two section titles – ‘Ascent’ and ‘Descent’ – imply that it is the 00000 Rocket of 1945 crashing down in the 1970s. In turn, this descent that closes the novel appears to again point toward the “screaming [...] across the sky” (3) the novel opens with, linking end and beginning in a moebius-strip-like circle.⁸⁷ Indeed, the meter of the novel’s first sentence fits the iambic tetrameter of the opening line of the stanza of song sung by the cinema audience (“There is a hand to turn the time” (760) and, as a second – or first, if you will – stanza after a “Now everybody-” calling us to all sing along, “A screaming comes across the sky” (3)) as they wait for the movie to continue or start – the novel is poignantly unclear here as the film seems to have “broken” (760) yet the audience demands “Start-the-show!” (760) – as if, breaking with linearity, the events preceding the novel’s end in both discourse and story-time were a response to the closing (and thus, opening) song. This is also insinuated by it being

⁸⁷ Hanjo Berressem similarly describes the spatio-temporal irregularities of the novel as a moebius strip in which “inside and outside are replaced by a [...] ‘one-sided,’ convoluted space” (Berressem 121).

implied that the movie ‘we’ – theater audience and readership converging in transcendent togetherness – are watching is *Gravity’s Rainbow* itself. Thus, the cinema’s empty screen is described as “a dim page spread before us white and silent” (760): this is the last, blank page of the novel, part of the novel yet outside its pagination and thus as open and uncertain as the preterite condition itself. To move on from this movie theater on the last page, its walls “hard and glossy as coal” as if the weight of the novel had compressed them, and move beyond the “last image” (760) of the 00000 firing is thus to both progress and revert back to (the aptly named) “Part 1: Beyond the Zero”.⁸⁸ Time thereby loses its absolute irreversibility as beginning and end converge into another. While Gottfried’s “Now-“ (760) thus describes the frozen moment as the absolute terminus of the parabola of history, the “Now everybody-“ (760) of the cinema-going Preterites, the last words of the novel, serves as a transitional ‘now,’ inviting communal care in touch and song, transcendently merging intradiegetic audience with extradiegetic audience, and cycling the novel back to its opening. However, as will be shown, it does not do so in a modernist gyre nor in a simple reversal of time. Instead, though we return to the same instant, the moment, attended to as the absolute here-and-now, will be created anew.

Post-Einsteinian Magic: The Possibility of a Reversal of Entropy in Non-Linear Time

Time in *Gravity’s Rainbow* does not follow the linear course of rational history. Thus, while “Their several entropies” (302) command Them to progressively channel more and more energy toward one elect portion of the System, putting the rest to waste for the sake of upholding order and halting entropy, the flow of time, the “entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature” (324) hold the promise of reversal and renewal, all without the violent force that describes western rational thought. Humanity and the world do not have to be, like objects pulled to the ground by gravity, inexorably drawn to extinction and heat-death. *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* circular Gravity’s Rainbow offers the returns, surprises, and second chances for a life in the moment the stark determinism of its routinized parabolic counterpart disavows.

⁸⁸ Similarly to, as will be shown in the chapter on Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, which also contains a circular double reading through which the novel can be read as resolutely not like its titular movie ‘Infinite Jest,’ the novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* is therefore not just like a movie we all watch alone but also a song we sing together.

The hope for regeneration and liberation through the disintegrative, randomizing tendency of the universe which the novel harbors is perhaps best understood through the novel's reliance on modern physics for its unconventional reevaluation of time. As Moore remarks, although "*Gravity's Rainbow* offers few overt references to the new physics," numerous indirect references establish "deep-basement congruencies with other, more obvious metaphorical functions in the novel" (Moore 179). That is to say, *Gravity's Rainbow's* notion of time, its circular kalendar's post-modernism, heavily relies on the groundbreaking findings of modern physics.

The insistence on the miraculous which the novel's use of the kalendar suggests can hence also be understood through the fundamental openness of post-Newtonian physics. 'Magical' thinking is therefore not in contradiction with rational science as long as that science retains its openness to the possibilities of the moment. One defining characteristic of modern physics is its shift from (Their) conventional, Newtonian physics' stark determinism of cause and effect to probabilism. To quote the physicist Werner Heisenberg on this shift toward statistical, quantum-mechanical and relativistic relations in physics,

the whole objective description of nature in the Newtonian sense, in which determinate values are attributed to the defining elements of a system, such as position, velocity, and energy, had to be abandoned in favor of a description of observational situations, in which only the probabilities of certain outcomes could be given. (Heisenberg, *Across the Frontiers* 157)

Rather than attempting to reduce the universe to one underlying, timeless law, modern physics view the moment as offering multiple possibilities only narrowed down by probabilities yet never definitively described. As Cooper remarks, "[v]iewed in this way, entropy does not mean the narrowing of alternatives down to one inevitable doom, but just the opposite" (Cooper 114). Entropy, time's arrow, is not irreversible. It ceases to be an adamant law and thus, though the probabilities may be low, disorder, conventionally seen as death, always holds the possibility of new order and life to arise. In fact, the greater and longer the randomization that entropy effects – and *Gravity's Rainbow* certainly is a very random, very long novel, especially if one considers

it as having a circular structure –, the more probable is the occurrence of patterns to the point that singular events, in violation of the universal tendency toward disorder, can spontaneously allow for a return to the original order. As Henri Poincaré has proven mathematically, with enough time “every mechanical system must almost certainly return infinitely close to its starting position infinitely many times” (qtd. in Cooper 116) or, as *Gravity’s Rainbow* reveals, “[t]he World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning” (412). *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* assertion that “[t]here is time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you” (760) thus provides a hopeful message: with(in) time, the singularity of a return to a transcendent togetherness is increasingly probable to occur. The closedness *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* circular temporality promises is not the hermeticism of the timelessly predetermined Newtonian universe, nor does *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* vision of cyclical, eternal return correspond to a modernist notion of history’s gyres. On the contrary, while such notions effectively cancel out the passage of time, *Gravity’s Rainbow* holds that within time, within the real duration of the moment, closure in the sense of a new renewal, rather than eternal recurrence, has the chance to occur. The ‘event,’ unique and incomparable, rather than any underlying principle that governs time in entirety is seen as the driving force behind historical change.

This notion of the probable occurrence of singularities in circular time, effecting what must be perceived as reversals of time, is where *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* interest in the hysteron proteron trope stems from. As Weisenburger notes, “the (de)vice of hysteron proteron appears some fifty-nine times in the novel, an average of once every thirteen pages of the Viking-Penguin edition” (Weisenburger, “Hysteron Proteron in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 88). Weisenburger calls the hysteron proteron, the reversal of a natural or rational order in a figure of speech, a ‘vice’ as rhetorics commonly see it as a form of absurd, disordered speech to be avoided. As such, the hysteron proteron is key to *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* preterite aesthetics, a trope to be passed over in well-formed writing as it is disruptive of narrative and common sense. *Gravity’s Rainbow*, on the other hand, perpetually revisits such reversals of time that destabilize narrative continuity and the logic of cause-and-effect. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, history is reversed as the New England descendant of Puritans Slothrop returns to England, “that *Arabella* and its whole fleet, sailing backward in formation [...]. Presto change-o! Tyrone Slothrop’s English again”

(204), Argentinians flee to a post-WWII Germany, and a propaganda film presages the existence of a Schwarzkommando of Herero soldiers in the German army. Comical and absurd, these instances point toward the occurrence of singular reversals, mostly passed over by historical writing, that undercut the cause-and-effect structure of linear time. The hysteron proteron image of film running backward (139) is thus, judging from the novel's close relation between reality and film, not merely an upturning of linear time into reverse but much more evokes "the fourth dimension of a relativistic universe" (Cooper 117). Time in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which humanity normally rationalizes as history, is but one dimension of "the four dimensional world of Albert Einstein, in which configurations of matter cause the space-time continuum to curve back upon itself" (Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* 208).

The novel thus associates the figure of hysteron proteron with non-linear relative simultaneity. For instance, noting that the "countdown as we know it, 10-9-8-u.s.w. [note: in itself already a hysteron proteron], was invented by Fritz Lang in 1929 for the Ufa film *Die Frau im Mond*" (753) before it came into reality – fiction, in a hysteron proteron, preceding reality once again – the narrator also notes that "although the Rocket countdown appears to be serial, it actually conceals the Tree of Life, which must be apprehended all at once, together, in parallel" (753). The 'reversals' in *Gravity's Rainbow* do not reverse time on a linear axis in the sense of a nostalgic return the novel satirizes as product of a death-loving mindset; Pynchon is not writing about time travel.⁸⁹ Rather, the liberating vision of time in *Gravity's Rainbow* is one of relations of events in a four-dimensional space-time continuum that are "parallel, not series" (159). The time of history, as Amy Elias notes for the postmodernist metahistorical novel (Elias 104), is spatialized into a perpetual presentism that in *Gravity's Rainbow* can be seen to describe both modern physics' and the mystical, irrational Catholic understanding of time the novel favors.⁹⁰ As is mentioned elsewhere in the novel, "reality is not reversible" (139). However, in time, the probabilities for negentropy, singular occurrences that will look like a

⁸⁹ The fact that Pynchon's 2006 *Against the Day*, which can be read as a kind of later response or addendum to *Gravity's Rainbow*, explicitly thematizes time machines further substantiates this claim.

⁹⁰ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger's explanation of Catholic sacred time in *The Spirit of the Liturgy* where he notes how in Christian prayer, "Space itself has become time, and time has, so to speak, become spatial, has entered into space" (Ratzinger 94).

reversal of time's arrow from the point of human cognition, rise – and do so *because* of an increase in randomness!⁹¹

Perhaps most central to the novel are the reversals and singular exceptions to the rule found in the V-2 rocket and Slothrop's seemingly prophetic erections connected to it. Rocket and Rocketman are characterized by a confounding hysteron proteron quality: the rocket arrives and detonates before it is heard and Slothrop, similarly, apparently has been conditioned into having an erotic reaction to a future cause, the V-2's strike. Technologies of control, linearity, and determinism produce overdetermined and seemingly unexplainable instances of reversal that question the rule of cause-and effect they stem from.⁹² Berressem thus similarly identifies the V-2's "reversal of rocket sounds" (90) as "the first time loop" (Berressem 123) of the novel, its reversal of causality implying temporal circularity. Such singularities establish a circularity in which the disciplinary regimen of history is 'exploded' and "past, present, and future are no longer defined along a straight line but constantly folded back onto one another" (Berressem 121).

In accordance with Gödel's Theorem, the System is "spontaneously generating" (275) singularities, charismatic outbreaks and freak "mutants" (275) that destabilize its core linearity. The Rocket is therefore both emblem of a routinized, disenchanting and deterministic history and one of its greatest challengers in its erratic, uncontrollable movement at Brennschluss point, the moment when the V-2 is "on its own" (301) and at the mercy of gravity. The Rocket thus possesses "a Max Weber charisma... some joyful – and *deeply* irrational – force the State bureaucracy could never routinize" (464). Charisma for Weber describes a (morally neutral) property of singular leadership and authority, a gift "believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody" (Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* 245). Pure charisma is thus, as Moore explains, associated with "[s]pontaneity, mystery, magic, surprise" (Moore 121). It is a deeply irrational force allied with "love, freedom, brotherhood, and an indifference to economic

⁹¹ Thus, whereas James Gourley identifies an "impasse" (Gourley 96) between Weisenburger's reading of the hysteron proteron trope as a "reversed causality" and the uncertainty principle as discussed by Alan Friedman, both far from contradict each other as they both in fact point toward the same hopes for renewal and liberation the novel offers. Reversals are an effect of the uncertainty principle that governs the novel.

⁹² That such instances *can* sometimes be explained, e.g., the rocket flying at a speed greater than the speed of sound, does not matter. To explain them away is simply to integrate them and thus to lose their mystical, associative potential.

considerations” (Schaub 58) that distills itself in the process of originating. Change is always a product of chaotic, charismatic energy that, in its indifference toward rational considerations, overrides tradition and routine. In short, charisma and change can only be found in the singular moment that disrupt the “mundane determinism” of what *Gravity’s Rainbow* calls history. However, a key characteristic of Weberian charisma is that “[i]t cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both” (Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* 364). As could be shown, *Gravity’s Rainbow* traces this routinization of charisma in paranoid history’s drive toward a deeply un-charismatic, rationally controlled stillness of change.

However, although Western rationalism in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, e.g., through mathematical analysis, controls the “living Rocket” (301) just like it disenchant the potential charisma in a “parcellization of the soul” (Weber qtd. and trans. in Schroeder 76), the Rocket’s charisma seems to resist full extinction. Although they can calculate the rockets’ flight path increasingly well and turn it into a routinized “shape of no surprise, no second chances, no return” (209), the rocket nevertheless sometimes accidentally does exactly that; it returns, cycles back, and hits those who fire it: “no bearing is exempt – often the rockets, crazed, turn at random, whinnying terribly in the sky, turn about and fall according each to its own madness so unreachable and, it is feared, incurable” (96).⁹³

The technicians working on it feel this charismatic, uncontrollable property of the Rocket. The Rocket to them becomes the charismatic founder of a secular religiosity. The rocket technician Mondaugen turns into “the bodhisattva” (403) of an “electro-mysticism” (404) and the Herero Schwarzkommando, identifying with the Rocket’s contingency, turn it into their “holy Text” (520), a technological update to their tribal mythology of mandalas and return. The charisma the Rocket is afforded with makes it a highly ambiguous image in the novel. As Seed remarks, “[t]he rocket is on the one hand a piece of military hardware, to be perfected and measured; it is on the other hand the closest embodiment of charisma that the novel offers” (Seed 191). Repeatedly discussed in religious terms, the Rocket is endowed with the charisma

⁹³ Such charismatic randomness can thus, as Moore hints at, be related as Preterition as the Rocket’s ‘controllers,’ though its erratic behavior seems to be “incurable” (96), nevertheless see themselves as in control, choosing to *pass over* and ignore exceptions to the(ir) rule.

of “a baby Jesus, with endless committees of Herods out to destroy it in infancy” (464). White and black rocket technicians alike see in it a mystical, chaotic power.

As could already be shown, such religious parallelisms are not always – at least not ‘for the moment’ – entirely satirical. Instead, the Rocket in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a multimodal figure of both routinized stillness and charismatic outbreak. On the one hand, the novel’s locating of charisma in an inanimate object clearly satirizes contemporary culture’s belief in technological progress and depicts it as a culture of death. Whereas for Weber charisma legitimates a ruler’s authority, in *Gravity’s Rainbow* it is also ascribed to temporal concepts such as the present moment and objects like the Rocket. The depiction of this harbinger of Death as a substitute deity is one of the novel’s most damning critiques of a belief in technological progress. On the other hand, however, the Rocket *does* appear to have a real charisma that challenges this rationalism. As much as it represents oppressive routinization when it conforms to the ballistic trajectory calculated for it, as much does it manifest a real charisma when it shows its random behavior. Ralph Schroeder thus notes that

[b]y showing that an inanimate object may have the power which previously lay in the domains of religion and magic, Pynchon illustrates how the scientific endeavor to achieve mastery over nature, which has so far served to disenchant the world, may also [...] serve to reenchant it. (Schroeder 75)

As already noted for the both despairingly disenchanting and foolishly hopeful, magical implications of the novel’s kalendar structure, change, free choice and community, i.e., charismatic outbreaks from the norm, can only occur in the transformative moment removed from the routinizations of history. Hence, whereas the System instills the inanimate Rocket with a kind of charisma only to then routinize it into stillness, *Gravity’s Rainbow* does not so much argue for a complete rejection of technology than for its use to cultivate a ‘foolish,’ magical thinking (such as the ascription of charisma to a technological object) as a countermeasure against rationalism.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ The polysemy of ‘mass’ as physical property, great number and liturgical form *Gravity’s Rainbow* employs in its permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition similarly plays into this enmeshment of the postsecularly spiritual and the post-Newtonian. As Pynchon remarks in his essay “Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?,” in the present day, “Luddites may at last have come to stand on common ground with their

For the V-2, this charismatic moment of change, return and transition – a transition, among others, from straight line to curvature and Death-in-life to life-in-death – is its Brennschluss point. Brennschluss⁹⁵ as the point when the Rocket stops burning fuel and therefore ends its controlled ascent describes a singular point of transformation on the rocket's flight path – an “interface between one order of things and another” (302). After being fired from the ground, the rocket is in a state of complete control. Its internal guidance system doubly integrates the continuously changing parameters of angle, weight and acceleration to control the rocket's yaw, “preserving, possessing, steering between Scylla and Charybdis the whole way to Brennschluss” (239),⁹⁶ in order to keep its deviation from the (straight) tangent to the parabolic curve in a safe limit and thus makes sure it ascends linearly. As Moore summarizes,

[i]n short, V-2 can ascend against gravity because it can integrate these data “inside”; it is an automaton, not only in the nineteenth-century sense, by virtue of being a heat engine that burns fuel, but also in the twentieth-century sense, by virtue of being a closed informational system. (Moore 173)

Analogously, history is another form of internalized control that manipulates the individual into a self-discipline that steers it toward death in service of history's telos just like the IG⁹⁷ induces Brennschluss to ensure the rocket begins its descent at the right time and finds its target. Like the rocket, however, the individual only has a sense of its acceleration, the forces working on it, without knowledge of its direction. Finally, then, the novel explains, “[a]t the instance the charge (B_{iL}) accumulating in flight equaled the preset charge (A_{iL}) on the other side, the capacitor discharged. A switch closed, fuel cut off, burning ended” (301). The rocket, beforehand a closed system exerting control over its flight and thus exhibiting a kind of “life of

Snovian adversaries, the cheerful army of technocrats who were supposed to have the ‘future in their bones.’ It may be only a new form of the perennial Luddite ambivalence about machines, or it may be that the deepest Luddite hope of miracle has now come to reside in the computer's ability to get the right data to those whom the data will do the most good” (Pynchon, “Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite”). For Pynchon, “[t]o insist on the miraculous” and thereby “to deny to the machine at least some of its claims on us” (Pynchon, “Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite”) is a liberation to be achieved by means of technology.

⁹⁵ Interestingly, the term itself has a quality of preterite absence to it since “[w]e don't have one [English word for it]. Or else it's classified” (6).

⁹⁶ Like Bloom, whose presence in the ‘Skylla and Charybdis’ chapter of *Ulysses* can only be inferred from outside parameters, the Rocket does not itself ‘know’ its position but integrates it from external factors.

⁹⁷ Speakingly, the abbreviation of the internal guidance system also reappears in the cartelized IG Farben, one of the novel's most clear embodiments of the all-controlling System within ourselves.

its own” (301), stops its yaw corrections and ‘dies.’ No longer guided by its internal system, the Rocket is “on its own” (301), or, as Ozier corrects Pynchon, it is “gravity’s own” (Ozier, “The Calculus of Transformation: More Mathematical Imagery in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 200). ‘Death’ thereby also means a new freedom and life as control is externalized to a sublime other. Brennschluss thus describes a transition from internalized control to the (re-)assertion of an external force, gravity, and thus also the transition from the straight line of its ascent to gravity bending the rocket’s path into a downward descent. That this Brennschluss is closely associated with death can also be seen in the way the character Klaus Närrisch understands his (seemingly) imminent death in the same terms of Rocket vocabulary: “B, B-sub-N-for-Närrisch, is nearly here – nearly about to burn through the last whispering veil to equal ‘A’ – to equal the only fragment of himself left by them to go through the moment” (518). Within the bounds of the closed, linear System of history, gravity is a viable metaphor for death and irreversible entropy.

However, as Mark Siegel points out, “the rocket and Slothrop have a certain amount of freedom only after their official deaths – that is, beyond the zero of Their control” (M. R. Siegel, *Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in Gravity’s Rainbow* 85). Death in *Gravity’s Rainbow* thereby turns from the terminal and abstract event as which it is conceived by the System into a transitional event. At Brennschluss, the rocket thus also transitions from manipulative control to a kind of freedom and “life of its own” (301). As could be shown, death and Gravity hold a life-affirming potential in the non-linear perspective *Gravity’s Rainbow* promotes. While the rocket’s ascent until Brennschluss is completely determinable, it experiences a freedom of possibilities once its system becomes open and it is given over to Gravity. The apocalyptic moment of Brennschluss thus also represents a space/time of possibility. The single rocket’s descent cannot be controlled in the same way as its ascent but is instead open to various possibilities, to the point that *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s rocket technicians will position themselves at the very spot they have calculated the rocket to come down at since *statistically* this is the safest place to observe its descent from. As Ozier shows, *Gravity’s Rainbow* associates the Brennschluss, the infinitesimal Δt as the moment of possibilities and singularities, with charismatic moments of transformation. He thus notes that “

the two worlds or states separated by the Δt /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 which nevertheless is grounded in the former world and is therefore not pure chaos. (Ozier, “The Calculus of Transformation: More Mathematical Imagery in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 203)⁹⁸

The Brennschluss invests the rocket with an earthly charisma. At the mercy of Gravity, its individual fate becomes undeterminable and opened up to the freedom of statistical probabilities, and thus also the possibility of improbable, ‘freak’ behavior. Singularities thus exhibit a life-affirming potential for change and disruption the mass of routinized time cannot accommodate.

From the Elect’s cause-and-effect perspective of “old-fashioned time” (752) – history – however, the singularity’s transformative potential and the regenerative natural cycles it implies is incomprehensible and can only be understood as chaotic destruction. As the occurrence of singularities challenges an all-deterministic worldview by raising the possibility of accident and thus change, the Elect superheroes of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, defined by their aversion of disaster *just in time*, are faced with the possibility of arriving too late:

“Too late” was never in their programming. They find instead a moment’s suspending of their sanity—but then it’s over with, whew, and it’s back to the trail, back to the *Daily Planet*. Yes Jimmy, it must’ve been the day I ran into that singularity, those few seconds of absolute mystery ... you know Jimmy, time—time is a funny thing.... There’ll be a thousand ways to forget. The heroes will go on, kicked upstairs to oversee the development of bright new middle-line personnel, and they will watch their system falling apart, watch those singularities begin to come more and more often, proclaiming another dispensation out of the tissue of old-fashioned time, and they’ll call it cancer,

⁹⁸ While Ozier is spot on in his reading of the equation of singular point, Δt and Brennschluss and their function as boundaries between a realm of cause-and-effect associated with the Elect and a transcendent, preterite space/time of possibility in the moment, his description of this other side to history as “atemporal” is up to debate. As will be shown, the unique moment of transformation in preterition is one distinctly located *in* time as opposed to the Elects’ freezing of and escape *from* time. It should therefore be called ‘ahistorical’ rather than ‘atemporal.’

and just won't know what things are coming to, or what's the meaning of it all,

Jimmy.... (752)

In a wholly predetermined universe such as Leibniz's best of all possible worlds, all actions must necessarily happen just in time, never too early or too late. Something happening 'too late' is thus both a singularity in such a deterministic history, and therefore cause for terror, and reason for hope as it manifests the ultimate uncontrollableness of the moment. In contrast, *Gravity's Rainbow's* Preterites are described as "out of [...] time" (3). Although this means that they must live with the possibility of failure and death – to arrive too late – their Preterition also liberates them from the confines of determinism and gives them the ability to act freely in the moment. Thus, while Gottfried in his "Now-" is completely isolated, left alone with the certainty – though indescribable – of his Death, the fact that in the novel's last section "[t]here is time, if you need the comfort" constitutes a necessary prerequisite for human contact, "to touch the person next to you" (760), song, and thus liberation and regeneration.

The Herero Mandala and the Pitfalls of Modernist Circularity

This, however, does not mean *Gravity's Rainbow* views circular structures in an unanimously positive light. Just as the System routinizes the charismatic quality of the Rocket's Brennschluss moment into a timelessly frozen bureaucracy, instances of nature's (re-)cyclical "green uprising" (720) – singularities that possess the power to disrupt and reverse the given order of things – are always in danger of cooptation. While the novel's criticism of linearity is aimed at conventional history and realist modes of narration, these perverted circles, ultimately as teleologically deterministic and death-driven as their purely linear counterparts, satirize the modernist gyres that have replaced simple linearity. As Weisenburger shows, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, "History, we find, does not march inexorably forward by goose steps, nor does it gyrate in circles" (Weisenburger, "The End of History?" 70). Though also circular, the space-time continuum *Gravity's Rainbow* proposes in its use of the liturgical calendar could not be more different from these gyrating cycles.

This rejection of both conventional linearity and a modernist notion of Yeatsian gyres or Joyce's vicodican cycles as evincing the same bureaucratic ontology of the frozen moment can

for example be seen in the Hereros' notion of time. The Hereros have a mandalic conception of time similar to the kalendar time *Gravity's Rainbow* employs. However, their concept of time proves hopelessly perverted by Western rationalizations. The Hereros – a preterite people if there is one – are based in a “history [...] of lost messages” (322). Receptive to the absent, they have a strong connection to the dead in the (quantum mechanical) knowledge that “time and space on their side have no meaning, all is together” (153). The principal symbol that underlies the Herero worldview is thus that of the mandala, a shape which in its four quadrants unites opposites yet does not do so in the West's dialectical fashion. Rather than a synthetic “product of the dissociated intellect” (Muste 177) that operates routinely in timelessness, their mandalas' conjoining of “[o]pposites together” (563) is one born of life in the moment, the quotidian reality and eternal present of life in the Herero village:

“Klar,” touching each letter, “Entlüftung, these are the female letters. North letters. In our villages the women lived in huts 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. (563)

As John Muste shows, and as Weisenburger's observation of the novel's mandalic structure suggests, the Herero mandala has a close affinity to *Gravity's Rainbow's* meaning-making, presenting “four contending ways of dealing with the world” (Muste 164) yet arranging them in a “dynamic relationship which cannot be described in formulaic terms” (Muste 176–77).

However, although the Hereros of old appear to offer a positive counterpoint to Western linearity in their conception of time, their valuing of absence, and their dynamic mandalaism, their affirmation of earthly cycles is presented as having been corrupted. As Hume remarks,

The Kirghiz tribes, the gauchos of the Argentine pampas, and the Hereros of Southwest 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.

(Hume 39)

This cooptation shows itself in the Zone-Hereros' – two generations removed from their African ancestors – interpretation of the Rocket as their ancestral mandala. The technological sublime of the West does not halt before any symbol of nature's recycling "is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to *violate* the Cycle" (412). Thus, the Herero mandala returns in the shape of the technocratic and militaristic Rocket-insignia the Hereros around Enzian wear, "[a]dapted from insignia the German troopers wore in South-West Africa when they came in 1904 to crush the Herero Rebellion [...]. For the Zone-Hereros it has become something deep, Slothrop gathers, maybe a little mystical" (361). In the Rocket itself, its four fins quartering the circle of its fuselage, the Herero recognize their mandala since they are infected with the paranoia inherent to a nostalgic impulse toward a non-existent past through finding Kute Korrespondences. Again, this time from a tribal perspective that is, however, already infected with the Protestant ideology of providence, the Rocket is viewed as a quasi-divine shape of destiny. As the Herero Andreas Orukambe explains to Slothrop,

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... even confused and uprooted as we were then, we *knew* that our destiny was tied up with its own. That we had been passed over by von Trotha's army so that we would find the Aggregat. (563)

Integrated and routinized, the mandala therefore is also the shape of the timeless Rocket City, the apocalyptic New Jerusalem of the technological sublime, as Cowart explains the both nostalgic and futuristic "idealized version of the community of scientists and technicians who lived and worked first at Peenemünde during the war, then in Huntsville, Alabama" (Cowart, *The Art of Allusion* 122) that is "fourfold as expected, an eerie precision to all lines and shadings architectural and human, built in mandalic form like a Herero village" (725). The mandala here appears as perfectly coopted into the rationalistic architecture.

Just as the System absorbed, integrated and exploited the Hereros and their mythology, in the most literal sense by using them as rocket technicians for the Third Reich, likewise have the Hereros internalized its penchant for analysis and division. Ironically since the mandala should be a shape that fosters togetherness, divergent interpretations of the Hereros' destiny, i.e., of *how* the mandala conjoins opposites together, have resulted in a schism within the Hereros between the factions of the Empty Ones and Enzian's Schwarzkommando. As Schaub outlines referencing Mircea Eliade's *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 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'" (Schaub 83). Tragically hybrid, their in-betweenness, however, does not translate into a simple dualism in their schism. Rather, both sides exemplify a taintedness of the tribal system with Protestantism, ultimately drawing both the Empty Ones' goal of the Final Zero – tribal extinction – and the Schwarzkommando's hopes for an Eternal Center – a transcendent 'nation' for the Hereros to live in – as corrupted, linearized versions of the mandala.

The Empty Ones' project of "Tribal Suicide" (524) which they conceive of as seeking the "Final Zero" (525) can be seen as an embodiment of the dialectical "historicism of Hegel" (Weisenburger, "The End of History?" 69). Irrevocably "Europeanized in language and thought, split off from the old tribal unity" (318), their notion of time is completely linear and irreversible. Thus, "they calculate no cycles, no returns" but instead seek to bring "a final zero to a collective history fully lived" (318). Their project of masturbation, sterilization, abortion, and ultimately collective extinction is meant to close and accelerate a to them dialectical, linear process that began with the Germans' genocide of the Hereros in South-West-Africa. The Empty Ones under Joseph Ombindi, in their nostalgic longing for an irretrievable "era of innocence he just missed living in, one of the last pockets of Pre-Christian Oneness" (321), thereby represent a collectivist and preterite version of Blicero's elect and solipsistic romanticization of Death as the ultimate goal of history. Thus, though collectivist in their embrace of death, their program of racial suicide is one that bespeaks the western, rationalistic notions of linearity, terminalism and immachination. Conceiving of themselves as already dead, part of the "inanimate and the rising" rather than "the living and human," the Empty Ones

employ “a bit of the old symbolism they have found useful” (316) to express their westernized hopes of transcendence: carrying a “knotless strip of leather” that signifies “another soul dead to the tribe” (316) as well as their Europeanization, the Empty Ones’ project is, like that of Western science, one of disentanglement and Death. Passed over by the Herero genocide, their self-extermination is both a political act meant to remove them from exploitation and an expression of the urge to complete history and, through a Death that should already have happened, prove their Election, the mandalic togetherness of opposites in them merging with the dynamic of Elect and Preterite.⁹⁹

The competing Schwarzkommando’s goals are equally founded in repetition and imitation yet derive, at least on the surface, from their belief in a cyclical time and thus the hopes of return. While the Empty Ones thus retain their sense of community yet are betrayed into a Western linearity, the Schwarzkommando, conversely, have retained the circularity of their ancestral mandalas yet have fallen into a Puritan egotism. As for the Empty Ones, the Schwarzkommando’s desire to attain an Eternal Center without time through the assembly and firing of the 00001, a replica of the ur-cause Rocket 00000 Blicero shoots Gottfried into the sky with, has its origin in the Herero genocide and the survivors’ preterition from this cataclysmic event. The senselessness of the Herero genocide and the incomprehensible randomness of who was to survive let Enzian conclude that “[t]here was no difference between the behavior of a god and the operations of pure chance” (323). Just as for Blicero, to Enzian entropy becomes the divine mover of the universe. Thus, only determinably existent “in a statistical way” since survival followed no discernible pattern, the Herero come to associate themselves with the Rocket which, equally randomly “at the mercy of small things” (362), is uncertain as individual and only determinable in the mass. As Enzian explains to Slothrop:

To those of us who survived von Trotha, it also means that we have learned to stand outside our history and watch it, without feeling too much. [...] A sense for the statistics of our being. One reason we grew so close to the Rocket, I think, was this sharp awareness of how contingent, like ourselves, the Aggregat 4 could be (362).

⁹⁹ See also Tiina Käkälä-Puumala’s reading of death as “a profoundly political issue” (Käkälä-Puumala 195) in “A Weird Death: The Schwarzkommando and the Symbolic Challenge in *Gravity’s Rainbow*.”

In their sensibility to statistics and the preterite singularity of their existence they share with the likes of Roger Mexico, the Hereros are as Schaub notes “closely allied with the narrative view present in the entire work of Pynchon, for statistics are an interface between the discrete operations or events of chance and the patterns which inhere in events in the mass” (Schaub 84).

Yet, the Hereros’ sense of the singular anomaly of being, the charismatic outbreak of their existence, is subject to a “routinization of charisma” (325) into an immachinate bureaucracy of cause-and-effect. Associating themselves with the Rocket, the Schwarzkommando are as much identified with the “inanimate and the rising” (316) as their rivals the Empty Ones. While the Empty Ones seek to drive their history to completion on a linear scale – so to speak let the (cause) A of the Herero genocide finally follow the (effect) B of Herero extinction – Enzian’s Schwarzkommando attempt to attain a similar transcendent escape in a circular fashion by closing the circle begun in Blicero’s linear Rocket 00000 ritual with the firing of a 00001, both the exact facsimile of the 00000 and its opposite, and thus attain the mythically circular conjoinment of departure and return.

As Schaub remarks, Enzian’s motivation for the reproduction and repetition of the archetypal First Firing in which Blicero shoots Gottfried North to the world’s, and time’s, frozen zero point lies in a mandalic cosmology of eternal, cyclical return, a cosmology, however, already corrupted by and integrated into Western “one-way” thinking (Schaub 83–87). The assembly of the 00001 thus appears as “a Diaspora running backwards, seeds of exile flying inward in a modest preview of gravitational collapse, of the Messiah gathering in the fallen sparks” (737). It is a miraculous reversal of entropy. Enzian attempts to close Blicero’s parabolic ritual into a circle. Through a facsimile reproduction of the 00000 that is, however, also its opposite, a 00001 to be “painted black” (724) like the Hereros’ skin and manned by the black Anti-Gottfried Enzian, Enzian wants to bring opposites – black/white, 0/1, departure/return – together in the “absolute reality at the Center” (Schaub 85). The desired result of this secondary, engineered ritual – and in its language of action and result the corruptedness of the Hereros’ tribal circularity into the Western linear notion of ‘redemption’ and escape already becomes apparent – is to create for the Hereros something that

will have no history. It will never need a design change. Time, as time is known to the other nations, will wither away inside this new one. The Erdschweinhöhle will not be bound, like the Rocket, to time. The people will find the center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place.... (318-9)

Though operating from a circular mindset, Enzian's dream of a place for the Hereros outside of time that "will never need a design change" shows he displays the same sterile ontology of the frozen moment of his Rilkean name-giver Weissmann against whom he both rebels and whom he deifies. By drawing the closure of the cycle as a "'redemption' of historical events at the end of history, as is true of Christian eschatology" (Schaub 83), Enzian displays the linearity of his circular designs. The circle, unlike Enzian's gyrating ritual, knows no end-time, no transcendent escape to an outside, but only constant degeneration and regeneration. As Schaub concludes, "[t]he Second firing will be at once a tragic mimicry of Weissmann's 'one-way' European despair and a mockery of their former cyclical cosmology" (Schaub 87). He romanticizes Death as willingly as his former mentor.

Therefore, although they are not the same, the Empty Ones and the Schwarzkommando (and Weissmann for that matter) do not describe a simple dualism. Both ultimately strive toward sterility and stagnation, a freezing of and escape from time into timelessness. The narrator concedes as much when noting that "[t]he Eternal Center can easily be seen as the Final Zero. Names and methods vary, but the movement toward stillness is the same" (319). Grounded in (laudable) notions of a statistical sensibility for singular charisma, a circular cosmology and a resulting communality as history's preterite others, the Hereros are tragically corrupted into a hybridity that sets a telos to their circular time. Just as modernist art liberally took Asian and African impulses and transformed them into a Westernized shape, the Hereros' tribal circularity and life in the moment is integrated into a routine system of linearity. The Hereros' 'mistake,' one could argue, lies in the eternal stillness and timelessness of the escape they seek. Both factions critically lack either circularity or a sense of communality that would channel their sensibility to the singular and statistical into a less solipsistic direction. Such monolithic

irreversibility and finality, whether sought after through linear or (pseudo-) circular means, bespeaks a culture of death.

The true value of the ritual lies not in its endpoint but between one and zero, in its capacity as the singular “only Event” to bring the preterite Hereros “all together now” (637).¹⁰⁰ The only transcendence *Gravity’s Rainbow* offers is not forever and not timelessly outside of time, but, as Enzian himself seems to secretly suspect, “only meant to last its fraction of a day, and why can’t that be enough?” (673). Though foolish and impermanent, one could decide to provisionally “try to let it be enough” (673). Not transcendent escape into a timeless, frozen moment of sterility and death but a fleeting transcendent togetherness that affirms life in the moment lies at the deeply humanistic core of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s hopes. The ritual allows the sparring Herero leaders to share a miracle touch in which, in spite of everything, “the two palms *do* slide and brush, *do* touch, and it is touch and trust enough, for this moment” (637; emphasis mine). The real magic charisma of the Hereros’ ritual is not what they understand as the singularity of the Rocket and death¹⁰¹ but, much more banal, that it allows Enzian to spare, pass over, his enemies and collaborate with, rather than violently exploit, them; not only Joseph Ombindi but also Tchitcherine, whom he passes by “without knowing it” (735), too occupied with “keeping a tight guard on a covered wagon containing the warhead section of the 00001” (734) to recognize him.

‘Freak Transcendence’: Reaching Critical Mass

As one can see while the singular instant may offer the possibility of community, life and free choice, once bureaucratized into a history – events ordered and compared to one another – they turn toward (self-)destruction and control. The narrator notes as much when commenting that singularities, “acts of minor surrealism” like “the black man’s presence” in the European theatre of war when “taken in the mass, are an act of suicide” (129). The quotation, taken from the Advent episode and thus implying a double meaning of ‘mass’ as large quantity and (Joycean) liturgical mass – a teleological structure of time – is clearly also linked to the Hereros (the

¹⁰⁰ Note the similarity of this “all together now” with the novel’s final “Now everybody-” (760).

¹⁰¹ In a conversation between Enzian and Ombindi they refer to both suicide and the rocket firing as the same “non-repeatable act” (319).

statistical nature of “black man’s presence” in the Zone after the genocide) and the Empty Ones’, as well as, as could be shown, ultimately the Schwarzkommando’s, *suicidal* mission as it refers to the surreal improbability of a black man singing in an English Advent vesper. The Jamaican, however, was brought to England to film the propaganda film that ‘births’ – fiction preceding reality – the Zone-Hereros (113). Integrated into a mass-structure, a teleological determinism that, like the Hereros, projects a future from the past, the singular charisma of the statistical oddity which springs from nature’s entropy-reversing circularity becomes corrupted into an immachinate death-wish. Viewed in the mass, the moment, oriented toward the telos of history and thus not taken by itself, loses its charisma and is bureaucratized into an ontology of timeless stillness.¹⁰²

As could be shown, in the mass, the charismatic freedom of the single Rocket at Brennschluss that inspires Enzian’s Schwarzkommando becomes determinable – and deadly – in mass statistics. Just like a single individual’s death cannot be predicted yet the mass-statistics of general mortality rates prove to be inescapably correct, the single rocket might possess a charisma of uncertainty; bureaucratized into a mass-phenomenon, however, it is a sure harbinger of death. While the singularity thus promises the potential for freedom, when integrated into a mass structure they form a bureaucratic system of control.

In a way, then, the individual Slothrop’s parabolic progress toward disintegration into the freedom of statistical possibilities, as Slade notes a kind of transcendence (Slade, “Escaping Rationalization: Options for the Self in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 36), inverts and reverses the parabola of the rocket-mass (see Figure 2). It complements it and thus draws a full circle. As already noted, the Rocket possesses a singular charisma at the moment of its Brennschluss that disrupts determinism and opens up an uncertain space of possibility. However, taken in the mass, that is the individually seemingly erratic movements of the rocket integrated into a greater, timeless scheme, the rockets’ path becomes a parabola, the emblem of hopeless

¹⁰² Similarly, while the War leads to mass-death, the novel also tells of individual occasions where “[i]n the trenches of the First World War, English men came to love one another decently, without shame or make-believe, under the easy likelihoods of their sudden deaths, and to find in the faces of other young men evidence of otherworldly visits, some poor hope that may help redeem even mud, shit, the decaying pieces of human meat” (616). Death affirmed and redeemed as a transitional, preterite event is not (just) “the end of the world” (616) but also constitutes the “total revolution” (616) of the singularity, a love that prevails despite routinization and “despite it all [...] men loved” (616).

mechanical determinism, irreversibility, and the destruction and oppression such views lead into and justify. Shot toward the sky in an effort against gravity and entropy, the transcendent escape the rocket represents ends in death and stillness as the ultimate telos of parabolic history.

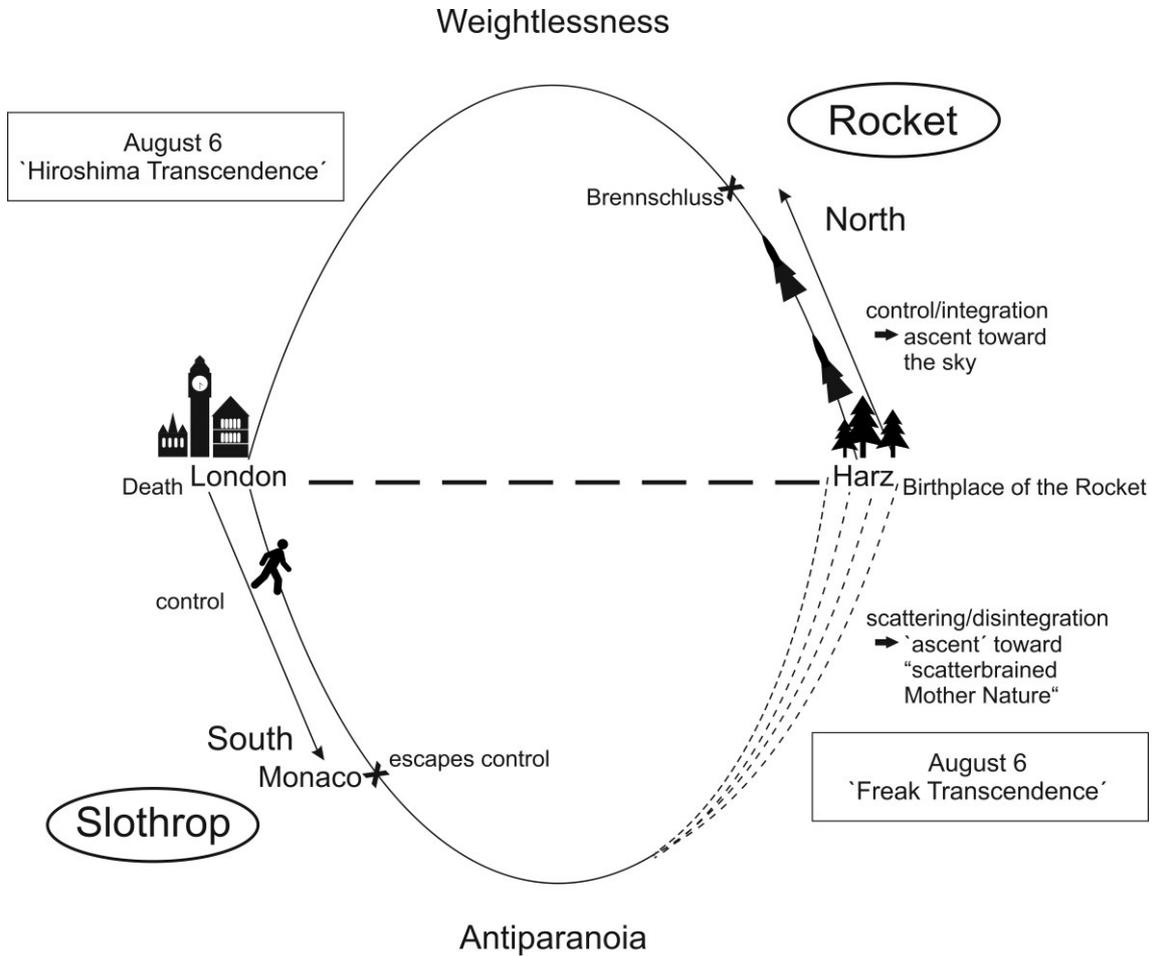


Figure 2 Gravity's rainbows

In contrast, as Moore remarks, Slothrop's "Progress itself is an earthly and inverted 'shadow' or parody of the Blicerean rocket's parabola arcing over the novel" (Moore 215). Whereas the rockets' parabola describes a disenchanting, predetermined history in the (post-)Puritan sense, the 'anti-Pilgrim's Progress' of Slothrop lets his "temporal bandwidth" (509), his memory and thus his identity and (elect) presence in history, thin out until he "disappears," i.e., becomes 'invisible' to history and to the novel, by escaping the frames with which these have confined and defined him" (Moore 215). Slothrop's role as not merely passing a crossroads (in history) but being that singularity does not oppose the Rocket's in a simple Manichean dualism but rather complements it into a more natural, and thus liberatingly uncertain, circular design. Therefore, while the V-2 is born in the Harz, is launched in the North

in Peenemünde, and ‘dies’ in London, Slothrop’s trajectory begins in London, the locus of the parabolic gravity’s rainbow’s death, and takes him South. Here, in Monaco, the southernmost region *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* main narrative visits, Slothrop reaches his personal Brennschluss: he escapes Pointsman’s direct control (though, as in the Rocket, the various technicians controlling Slothrop’s life have allowed him to break free in order to set him on a specific course and reach his goal, uncover the rocket-enigma and thus the “true mechanical explanation” (89) for his sex-drive, find rocket parts, locate the Schwarzkommando, etc.) and is let loose in the Zone. Here, at the cusp of his voyage in this space of temporal charisma, “Slothrop feels himself sliding onto the anti-paranoid part of his cycle” (434). Like the rocket, at its peak weightless and thus untouched by all forces, Slothrop is “just here,” in a state “where nothing is connected to anything” (434). However, like the rocket’s zero-gravity state, anti-paranoia is “a condition not many of us [and certainly not a character as decidedly average as Slothrop] can bear for long” (434). Yet, what follows for Slothrop is not a descent but a geographical and symbolic ascent toward the Harz, the place where the rocket is born; not an integration like the rockets’ flight that is, in the mass, determined, but a disintegration. Slothrop provides the novel with an alternative ‘freak transcendence’ through the liberating potentiality of the moment against the all-determining paranoid mock-transcendence at the end of the Western rocket-mind’s history. Where the rocket, in control, ascends towards the sky in a movement of transcendent, linear escape, Slothrop, out of control and no longer able to “*make it all fit*” into “a history” (626), ‘ascends’ earthwards in a scattering, disintegrative motion toward an equally “scatterbrained Mother Nature” (342). The violation of Nature that is the plural mass of V-2s is circularly remodeled into Slothrop’s singular embrace of Nature by scattering into the myriad possibilities her entropies provide.¹⁰³

As is implied by the novel’s double Transfiguration on August 6th 1945, Rocket and Rocket-man undergo two distinct yet deeply interrelated transfigurations: the age of complete control and mass-destruction emblemized by the transformation of the V-2 into the nuclear

¹⁰³ Completing the Rocket’s parabola into a circle, after his disintegration in the Harz, (at least one fragment of) Slothrop goes to “Greifswald, where Slothrop in early August may see a particular newspaper photo [of Hiroshima]” (681) close to Peenemünde in Northern Germany and then back to London, where he joins the Rolling-Stones-like band ‘The Fool.’

bomb over Hiroshima and the liberating, natural disintegration that happens to Slothrop. These two transfigurations of time and humanity, and thus two senses of transcendence – the elect, deterministic skyward transcendent flight of the rocket and the preterite, ambiguous earthly freak transcendence of Slothrop – are tied up with the two notions of time that play out in the novel – the sterile history of Puritan backward-directedness and the singular moment's disintegration into a multitude of possibilities for the present. Hence, as already noted, Hiroshima in *Gravity's Rainbow* marks the transfiguration of WWII's V-2 age into the nuclear age of Pynchon's present, yet also underlines their continuity in a bureaucratic, all-integrating mindset.

The nuclear bomb shows how the System's routinizations do not stop before the findings of modern physics but prove to be able to integrate even its greatest challengers and thereby reach unprecedented levels of destruction and control. One of the novel's minor characters, the Jesuit Father Rapier, thus warns that "critical mass cannot be ignored. Once the technological means of control have reached a certain size, a certain degree of *being connected* one to another, the chances for freedom are over for good" (539). Critical mass, as the narrator hints at in an aside shortly after ("get it? not too many did in 1945, the Cosmic Bomb was still trembling in its earliness, not yet revealed to the People, so you heard the term only in the very superhepcat-to-hepcat exchanges" (539)), also refers to "the smallest amount of fissionable material necessary to sustain a nuclear chain reaction" (Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 234), directly linking the age of complete and inescapable control to the nuclear bomb. The System's Puritan paranoia can integrate even the charismatic possibilities for change in modern physics. In the emblem of the Hiroshima bomb – the V-2 gone nuclear and soon to be transmogrified into the ICBMs of Pynchon's present day American Cold War imperialism – the Rocket-state reaches critical mass: mass-structures may attain a level of complexity and interconnectedness that becomes inescapable, neutralizing, Rapier warns, all possibility for change and movement. As Russel comments, "[i]t is as if society approaches its own critical mass, portending total oppression and/or self-destruction" (Russell 264).

Gravity's Rainbow, however, is not so pessimistic. Unlike Weber, who would have endorsed the idea of the routinization of charisma reaching a 'critical mass' that makes change

impossible, *Gravity's Rainbow* maintains that the potential for change and freedom is never fully lost. As Schroeder shows, “although Pynchon invokes Weber’s idea that charisma will inevitably become routinized, he does not share the view that a charismatic breakthrough in the modern world is unlikely” (Schroeder 74). On the contrary, the novel notes, it is “in its pathology” that the System generates singular aberrations “by the thousands every day, completely unaware of what it’s doing” (129). As can be seen in the novel, the System’s reaching critical mass is not in itself a cause for despair. Due to the inherent incompleteness the novel posits for all systematizations, the System’s critical mass always also implies the emergence of singularities that destabilize it from within, so to speak a (socio-)critical mass of Preterites, unaccounted for and therefore free.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, the *Catholic* priest who here seems to theorize the ultimate dominion of *Puritan* determinism and transcendent, total control significantly does so in his capacity as “DEVIL’S ADVOCATE” (539).¹⁰⁵ The priest thus continues that though “Death has been the source of Their power” (539), legitimating oppression and mass-death, and though They claim immortality for a System that will ultimately reach the critical mass of total control and total connectedness, and thus the problematized transcendence of timeless stillness, revolution against and liberation from Them can lie in an act of faith. Faith can be a revolutionary act in an age of rationalism. It is an act that affirms life by affirming and accepting the absurdity of death (and thus a historical sublime) in believing “They are only pretending Death is Their servant – faith in Death as the master of us all” (540). Such faith, however, is, as the fraudulent transcendence of Blicero’s and the Hereros’ rocket-rituals show, not to be a passive genuflection to Death, entropy as the final telos of history. Instead, it is to be a positive, active performance of resistance in the affirmation of entropic death as a process, rather than a goal, that can bring

¹⁰⁴ However, it is important to note here that, as can be seen in the Hereros, *Gravity's Rainbow* does not support accelerationism and, as Freer shows, heavily criticizes Marx for example for “his treatment of colonial regimes as a necessary evil on the road to communist revolution” (Freer 110).

¹⁰⁵ For Pynchon’s Catholicism and in particular his view of the Jesuits, an appreciation that links him to Joyce, see Nick Ripatrzone’s *Longing for an Absent God*. Despite Pynchon’s criticism of the Catholic Church as, e.g., M. Keith Booker outlines it in “The Rats of God: Pynchon, Joyce, Beckett, and the Carnivalization of Religion,” the Catholic characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* clearly display a more fertile and playful approach to temporality and control, affording the novel with a clear alternative to the Protestant mindset it primarily attacks. Father Rapier’s discourse on resistance and an affirmation of death can thus clearly be seen to be also influential to Pirate Prentice and the Counterforce he is soon to found since a similar belief in death as an agent of change also reappears in the Counterforce’s resolution to form “a movement at the mercy of death and time: the ad hoc adventure” (706).

forth change and regeneration in nature's cycles. As the novel argues through the Jesuit, "rather than make that leap of faith, perhaps we will choose instead to run, to fight: to demand, from those for whom we die, our own immortality" (540). A leap of faith could only replace one belief-system with another, equally in danger of solidifying into total immobility. The immortality 'we' are to demand from Them is thus not Their timeless and static immortality outside of time as Blicero's idealism seeks it, but, conversely, an affirmation of death as a regenerative force that out of disorder cyclically creates possibilities for new life and freedom, i.e., return.

Nevertheless, resistance clearly demands some kind of faith, an irrational, foolish belief in miracles and community, i.e., the singular and sublime experience of the moment. Rapier thus concludes:

To believe that each of Them *will* personally die is also to believe that Their system will die—that some chance of renewal, some dialectic, is still operating in History. To affirm Their mortality is to affirm Return. (540)¹⁰⁶

Death, affirmed as a transitional and (corpo)real event everybody shares provides the chance for renewal. Whereas Their Death, terminal and abstract, means an immortality of stasis, it offers an immortality in the regenerative cycles of entropy which therefore transcends the dichotomy of momentariness and eternity,

Where there are Jesuits, Joyce is usually not too far. Rather than completely rejecting the Ulysean mass-structure, *Gravity's Rainbow* works toward the production of a *critical mass* through its reinterpretation of *Ulysses*. Pynchon thereby positions himself in relation to Joyce as if the mass of the paradigmatic *Ulysses*, like Father Rapier's sermon, had been misunderstood as

¹⁰⁶ The 'message' – the affirmation of death as a liberating agent, all oppressive systems eventually disintegrating in their natural course, and the simultaneous call to fend off death and nourish life - *Gravity's Rainbow* offers here mirrors that of the finale of another deeply humanistic WWII satire, Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*. Having to impersonate Adenoid Hynkel (who also appears in the great Adenoid Pirate dreams of in the beginning of the novel and Richard Nixon, known by "friends and detractors alike" as "the Adenoid" (754), thereby criticizing the Nixon presidency's backlash against the New Left of the 60s as quasi-fascist), Chaplin as the Barber steps in front of a huge victory-parade, announces a change of mind and gives a speech whose themes suspiciously resonate with those of *Gravity's Rainbow* (e.g., War, domination, universal brotherhood, and the dangers and opportunities of technology), culminating in a hopeful rereading of death as liberator: "To those who can hear me, I say – do not despair. The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed – the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people. And so long as men die, liberty will never perish" (Chaplin).

preaching the dominion of Death and *Gravity's Rainbow* corrected it. Catholicism, or more correctly a cultural and secular Catholic sentiment in fact very similar to that of Joyce's writing, is employed as a counter-imagination against the Protestant, in particular Puritan, mindset the novel attacks. *Gravity's Rainbow* uses the Catholic church year to reintroduce a mystical irrationality – charismatic 'magic' – to the disenchanting rationalism of Protestant everyday reality. Pynchon's temporality which, as will be seen, produces the novel's heterogeneous, undecidable and plural postmodernist aesthetic, can therefore be read through the novel's Ulyssean Tradition.

Liberating Events: Reading in Kalendar Time

The moment, unique and causally unconnected, allows for the possibility of choice and freedom for those able to tolerate randomness and contingency and creatively perceive relations within it that are distinct from conventional history's rational causality. Life, *Gravity's Rainbow* posits, is only possible for one who can "live inside the moving moment" (412). It is thus only in the mass that behavior – such as the behavior of electrons, but, by the novel's metaphoric extension, also that of rockets and people (elect-rons) – can be accurately described, becomes controllable and is thereby immobilized. Such routinization sterilizes the moment's charismatic power for change and solidifies it into the concrete mass of history. The present moment on the other hand is understood as a singularity that displays a liberating uncertainty: as the novel's statistician Roger Mexico explains, probability theory declares the uniqueness and therefore openness of each moment. This means that an event has no memory of prior events, is never totally predictable and thus singular as its outcome is 'decided' in the moment of its happening and therefore random.¹⁰⁷ The singular moment resists determination and thus sterilizing control.

While those like Slothrop or Mexico, "two of a kind" (629) in their capacity of living with and in randomness, can thrive in such preterite uncertainty and thus begin to surmount the

¹⁰⁷ It is hence not surprising that Slothrop in the build-up to his scattering loses his ability to remember longer stretches of time as well as form a coherent self. Notably, Slothrop does not cease to generate patterns from his (random) experience. Thus, rather than turning anti-paranoid, he however does so solely in the moment, not making causal connections across time but instead locating himself in a more instinctive, associative relationality in the moment. While Ursula K. Heise and Arkadiusz Misztal bemoan this as a loss of agency, arguing that "[t]hose caught in this present, which effectively blocks long-term perceptions on either the past or the future, are *condemned* to interpret 'signs and symptoms' rather than *empowered* to analyze cause and effect" (Misztal 83, emphasis mine), *Gravity's Rainbow* shows that free choice and (political) agency are not only possible, but even only conceivable in the here-and-now.

control of the System from within, the preterite resistance of the singularity to unambiguous definition is a cause for anxiety in the novel's Elect. Pointsman fears the conclusions of the principle of uncertainty:

How can Mexico play, so at his ease, with these symbols of randomness and fright? Innocent as a child, perhaps unaware—perhaps— that in his play he wrecks the elegant rooms of history, threatens the idea of cause and effect itself. What if Mexico's whole *generation* have turned out like this? Will Postwar be nothing but "events," newly created one moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of history? (56)

Pointsman's fears are at once groundless and perfectly accurate. As Weisenburger notes, "[t]o Pynchon, the corridors of history do not simply 'end' at 1945, and in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as nearly everyone has remarked, he pursues the coincidental remnants of Time with a compulsion" (Weisenburger, "The End of History?" 55). Indeed, *Gravity's Rainbow* is a kind of historical novel, and indeed the 'history' *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts as a mechanism of mass-control is far from irrelevant to Pynchon's present. At the same time, however, *Gravity's Rainbow* describes a transfiguration of time in the rise of this generation for which the likes of Slothrop and Mexico are a prototype – Pynchon's own generation – whose vision might very well have the potential to put an end to disciplinary history.

Though it must seem so to a cause-and-effect man, the end of history is not necessarily the end of time. Notably, Pointsman's use of "events" (56) – a word he must have learned from Mexico – reflects the term's specialized usage in the theory of relativity. 'Event' here refers to "a point [...] in the four-dimensional space-time continuum" (Bergmann 211). Time in modern physics, nor in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is not lost but becomes another coordinate along with the three spatial coordinates that together describe distinct points. The result is what *Gravity's Rainbow* refers to as the "eternal moment" (624), the relative simultaneity of all time depending on the observer in space-time. Time thereby loses its stand-out characteristic as irreversible and absolute and becomes spatialized, allowing for modes of interconnection besides those of cause-and-effect and "transcend[ing] the simple dichotomy of eternity and duration" (de Bourcier, *Pynchon and Relativity* 195).

Gravity's Rainbow stylistically represents this non-linear eternal present of space-time by being narrated almost entirely in the present tense, a characteristic that, although found more and more often in contemporary literature after the rise of minimalism, David Letzler's computational analysis in "A Phenomenology of the Present: Toward a Digital Understanding of *Gravity's Rainbow*" shows sets the novel off from both its contemporaries as well as its precursors (Letzler, "A Phenomenology of the Present: Toward a Digital Understanding of *Gravity's Rainbow*" 6). Thus, although the events told in conventional narratives in the narrative past have a sense of immediacy and presence, their narration in the past tense insinuates a closedness and thus a telos the narrative as (hi)story drives toward. In opposition to this backward-directed reasoning of the conventional novel – a mode of operation best exemplified in the deductive crime novel whose paranoid style is mirrored in *Gravity's Rainbow's* conspiracy structure (cf. Weisenburger, "Hysteron Proteron in *Gravity's Rainbow*" 90) – *Gravity's Rainbow* operates in the present tense. It narrates present moments or episodes which might be – more or less satisfyingly – located in a chronology, which, however, do not insinuate a (temporal) hierarchy, i.e., a cause-and-effect structure, nor a specific telos to the narrative. Instead, the novel's instantaneous, present moments are arranged in a cyclical design through its egalitarian present tense.

The novel's narrative present's function as a comment on history and temporality furthermore becomes apparent when considering the novel's historical setting. Considering *Gravity's Rainbow's* setting decades before its publication, and thus in the past, the novel's use of the present tense destabilizes historical linearity in favor of depicting a relative simultaneity of events. To the novel, the WWII Germany of the novel's core narrative is seemingly no further away in time as well as in space than 1970s California, both realized in the same present tense. As Hite notes, *Gravity's Rainbow* thus assumes a "Preterite point of view," lacking, as opposed to the Elects' static hindsight and future projections, any "consistent principle of subordination simply because it is the view from inside," with Pynchon approaching "history as a continual present and dwelling on the minutiae of his chosen period as if they constituted immediate surroundings" (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 133). Past and present are thus treated equally, in the moment, yet are, considering the novel's well-researched historical accuracy, not ignored.

The novel folds past, present, and future into one another: the ‘screaming’ in the novel’s opening, which is part of a dream Pirate has in 1944 and thus *past* in both a narrative and historical sense, appears as the ‘result’ of the events in the novel’s last section, which is set in Pynchon’s *present* and thus, from the perspective of the WWII setting, the *future*. *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s preterite historical fiction thus approaches the past from a presentist perspective, Linda Hutcheon noting that postmodernism is “always a critical reworking, never a nostalgic ‘return.’ Herein lies the governing role of irony in postmodernism” (Hutcheon 4). *Gravity’s Rainbow* enhances this effect by, as Joseph Slade observes, posing to be narrated by a Vietnam veteran (Slade, “Religion, Psychology, Sex, and Love in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 160). The present experience of Vietnam is thereby set in continuity with WWII which is, however, related as equally present. History, or the past, is thereby far from irrelevant to the novel yet loses its ordering function as the anachronistic narration metahistorically bridges time. As John Mortlock brilliantly observes, “[t]he novel resides in the moment that is at once cyclical and instantaneously singular” (Mortlock 148). The novel’s ironic, and preterite, perspective equalizing the flow of time into a space-time continuum, *Gravity’s Rainbow* locates its entirety in the all-encompassing absolute of the present.

As George Levine notes in an early comment on the moment’s potential in Pynchon’s writing, “in Pynchon’s work I am far more disposed to trust in the moments than any ideas I might invent to account for them” (Levine 125). Meaning in the novel is conceptualized not as a result of over-*arching* causal or thematic relations but only ever appears in temporary constellations. Although such “ad hoc arrangements” (620) can disperse as soon as they are made, they hold ‘true’ – like love – for the moment. Since, as could be shown, *Gravity’s Rainbow* does not view order and disorder, Elect and Preterite, important and unimportant, as contradictory but rather one generating the other in a continuous cycle of the present, interpretation can only ever be approached, and decided on, for the moment.¹⁰⁸ Hopeless and

¹⁰⁸ Seeing how this liberating hyper-present of the Preterites renders them ghost-like, this eternal momentariness and undecidability the novel ascribes to its ‘Other Side’ (which is also the reader’s side) can be understood as a literary ‘spooky action at a distance,’ a term with which Einstein dismissed the notion of quantum entanglement, which describes how far apart objects have the ability to share a condition or state such as spin, being able to seemingly communicate this information faster than the speed of light. As can be seen, the spiritual and magical (ghosts) and the scientific (quantum mechanics)

meaningless from a historical perspective that demands an underlying pattern behind all of experience, *Gravity's Rainbow's* meaning, and its hopes for liberation and change, derive from and within the singular moment and its acausal, relatively simultaneous, association to other events in the novel's space-time. Thus, the temporal charisma of the novel's Zone only allows for "[t]emporary alliances, knit and undone," momentary structures passed over by and "lost to History" yet "[n]o more or less real" (291) than received history. It is thus not only the novel's more privileged, preterite characters for whom the singular moment offers a potential for freedom and creativity. The reader, too, is given a freedom to choose possibilities of interpretation and create meaning through *Gravity's Rainbow's* radical locating of itself in the uniqueness of the moment.

As such, the ad hoc decisions on meaning and hope the novel relegates to its readers in its liturgical parallelisms are at extreme odds with Puritan theological determinism and its secular offshoots. The reader is given the choice between accepting the Church year correspondences as satirical – and thus the nihilism of acknowledging history's obvious inability to live up to and be represented in biblical hope – and a foolish faith in the moment's regenerative potential for bureaucracy-defying love and liberation. These decisions do not need reason(s). In fact, where rationality ultimately denies all hope as well as free choice, irrational faith in 'magic' charisma promises a circularly regenerative potential in the present moment.

Gravity's Rainbow's use of the Catholic church year captures this sublime temporality of the moment's simultaneous circularity and singularity.¹⁰⁹ The novel's response to the Joycean mass thereby picks up on Joyce's liturgical subtext and transforms it into an alternative, circular model of temporality that affirms the moment's uniqueness and thus allows for a liberation from the oppression inherent to linear, historical thinking. Thus, whereas the Protestant mindset homogenizes time into the bureaucracy of a sterile, secular history, thereby freezing the moment and halting its potential for change and movement, the use of the Catholic liturgical calendar in *Gravity's Rainbow* serves to establish the novel as a space-time continuum in which events,

are not necessarily mutually exclusive in *Gravity's Rainbow*. This quantum-quality of interpretation will be further explored in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger's chapter on "Time and Space in the Liturgy," in particular the section on "Sacred Time," in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

feast days, are set in a circular, mandalic pattern yet are each afforded with a singular, incomparable significance of their own. In affirming the singularity of the momentary, *Gravity's Rainbow's* liturgical calendar can be read to provide a countermodel to routinized, linear history. Thus, whereas Protestant rationalism disenchants the moment by integrating it into an overarching 'providential' plan of history, *Gravity's Rainbow's* cultural Catholicism can be seen to aim toward a reenchantment of time. As Amy Hungerford notes, "a Roman catholic logic of mysticism merges with an explicitly American post-Protestantism in Pynchon's work, and his understanding of the Word comes to look, as his ancestors would say, popish" (Hungerford 27). This does not make *Gravity's Rainbow* a Catholic text in the strict sense, nor does it contradict Pynchon's criticism of the Catholic Church and religion in general. However, the mysticism of the Catholic mindset – its affirmation of free choice and the incomparableness of the moment's 'magic,' though rid of the theological context and read through modern physics, still standing – clearly appears in Pynchon's writing as a more life-affirming alternative to the death-oriented culture of Protestant rationalism.

The Church year as it is approached in *Gravity's Rainbow* can thus be understood as a cycle composed of events that are singular and hence incomparable in their significance – even incomparable to themselves in prior instantiations since they are utterly anchored in the moment of experience. In contrast to the immobilizing sameness of time of Puritanism, the days in the Church year are afforded with a unique and ad hoc meaning. Their singular significance is not generated from any link to the past and projection of the future but from their own import and thus in the absolute present. Whereas Puritanism is founded in the strictest understanding of predestination that orients the individual's search for transcendence toward history, past and future, Catholicism conceives of the individual as being able to, within God's grace, work towards its own salvation – and a reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* can, too, choose redemptive meaning. Actions in the present having an effect on future outcomes rather than being simply a prefiguration of the future, Catholicism offers *Gravity's Rainbow* an alternative outlook on temporality. The sanctity of each feast day is not a product of the same feast day of a prior year, nor does its meaning stem from any causal relation to other days. Rather, the days of the kalendar stand in a parallel relation to one another. The heterogeneity of the Church year affords

each day with its own, singular ‘magic,’ an open potentiality that calls to (transcendent) action in togetherness in the present moment. Thus, while certainly each day is equally sacred under God, the Catholic church year affords each day with a different, incomparable sanctity of its own. Their respective sanctity, or meaningful significance, is thus incomparable as it appears as a product of the pure present.

This model of time as an eternal though dynamic present *Gravity’s Rainbow* plays on by transforming the teleological linearity of Joyce’s mass into the circularity of the Church year’s singular, mystical moments is perhaps best explained through reference to the novel’s opening – in its circular reference to the novel’s ending so to speak the beginning of the novel’s kalendar. Cycling back to the beginning from a moment preceding seemingly certain crisis, the event about to happen – *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s temporality breaking with the rules of cause-and-effect – seems to occur in the past as the Rocket’s “screaming comes across the sky” (3). However, with the present moment freed from past and future in its utter singularity, the novel adds: “It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now” (3). This situation, as should become clear, is descriptive of both *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s circular design and the Catholic church year’s temporality as an eternally recurring present that, however, is always new and ripe with the possibilities of choice, change and mercy. *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s syntax here points toward the singularity of the present despite its (re)appearance in a cycle. Notably, the opening passage does not read ‘It has happened before, but there is nothing now to compare it to’ or any other optional phrasing that would put less emphasis on ‘now.’ Instead, *Gravity’s Rainbow* shifts “‘now’ from a simple adverb to the primary key of a new chronometric level in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” (Smith and Tololyan 180). *Gravity’s Rainbow* thereby emphasizes the uniqueness of any ‘now,’ its decisive openness to chance and thus change. Although events, as in the Church year, may return and have “happened before” (3), the present ‘now’ nevertheless retains its uniqueness and freedom. Comparison may integrate the moment into a pattern that neutralizes its charismatic potential. *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s ‘now,’ on the other hand, resists routinization by always occurring as an event whose outcomes are never totalizingly determinable.

Like the feast days in the Catholic church year, *Gravity's Rainbow's* present moments repeat themselves circularly yet do not generate meaning from 'history' alone.¹¹⁰ Instead, they display a unique, incommensurable ad hoc significance generated from correlation, not causality. Inherently heterogeneous yet linked to one another in the non-linear symbolic register, they (temporally) derive their meaning "in parallel, not series" (159) and thus highlight the singularity and circularity of the now. As such, the kalendar in *Gravity's Rainbow* provides a model for understanding time that allows for free choice and opportunity. Whereas Puritan thought, moored in a "known past" and directed toward a "projectable future" (126) locates transcendence at the end of history in a form of escape from time into an unchangeable, frozen moment, the Catholic liturgical calendar as *Gravity's Rainbow* employs it points toward the holiness of this present world and this present moment, a redemption of seemingly lost meaning not in any final and totalizable telos of history, the end of time, but within the present's ad hoc arrangements.

Conclusion: Pynchon's Ulyssean Return to Present-Day Rituals

Though *Gravity's Rainbow* appears to reject Joyce's mass-structures as yet another oppressively linear bureaucratization of time, ritual in and of itself retains its reparative potential in the novel's postmodernist reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition. As Moore remarks, "in *Gravity's Rainbow* not all mysticisms of 'transcendence' are to be viewed as corrupt, perverse; the judgement attaching to them depends on whether the 'transcendence' remains earthly – a flowing out of the self, towards other life – or whether it aims for the sky" (Moore 214). Placing its hopes in 'magical' and open as opposed to a closed-off rational thinking,¹¹¹ a faith in the

¹¹⁰ While, e.g., the crucifixion of Christ is past history that happened millennia ago, Catholic believers also experience the desolation of Good Friday in the here-and-now every year. Protestants on the other hand may commemorate the crucifixion and be called to experience it *as if* they were there yet are already comforted in the certain knowledge of Christ's resurrection and are therefore for example not bound to follow the (still recommended) food restriction on Good Friday that are mandatory expressions of grief in the Catholic Church. This Catholic understanding of time also shows itself in how not per se a saint's life but the candidate's inner disposition in the moment of death is the central criterion for canonization – although, obviously, since it is difficult to evaluate this inner disposition, a saintly life may indicate whether one died in a state of grace. This is why martyrs, regardless of how they had lived their life before their death for the faith, are instantly canonized.

¹¹¹ See also John A. McClure's "Do They Believe in Magic? Politics and Postmodern Literature" as well as Sean McCann and Michael Szalay's "Do You Believe in Magic? Literary Thinking after the New Left" for two other discussions of magical thinking in the literature of the 1960s and 70s.

regenerative potential of the moment in its ad hoc reconciliation of opposites, *Gravity's Rainbow* employs mysticisms such as the liturgical calendar as a means to reenchant the world and the present. Thus, although ritual, as could be seen in Blicero's and the Hereros' endeavors, has been bureaucratized into structures of control, its potential for singular freedom remains latent despite routinization. Mysticism emphasizes the present moment over the chains of history as it, in eluding rationality, returns time to the sphere of the sublime.

As the narrator remarks on the magic of Masonry, another group first repressed and then neutralizingly integrated in America's paranoid style, "the *present-day rituals* were no more, and even maybe a little less, than hollow mummery" (588, emphasis mine). However, "[n]ow and then you found a throwback" (588). These "present-day rituals" are not only contemporary, they also signify ritualism's emphasis on the present moment over rationality's orientation toward history as a linkage of past to future. In spite of their ongoing routinization, *Gravity's Rainbow* implies, present-day rituals that establish the singularity of the here-and-now are not altogether lost, nor does the moment ever completely lose its charismatic potential for freedom, and thus

[t]he magic in these Masonic rituals is very, very old. And way back in those days, it *worked*. As time went on, and it started being used for spectacle, to consolidate what were only secular appearances of power, it began to lose its zip. But the words, moves, and machinery have been more or less faithfully carried down over the millennia, through the grim rationalizing of the World, and so the magic is still there, though latent, needing only to touch the right sensitive head to reassert itself. (588)

As also the likes of Blicero show, in the course of routinization, ritual has turned into an assertion of power and control. However, the charismatic potential of the moment for radical change, liberation and community resists complete integration. Given the right circumstances, a more holistic approach to time and the world – such as that of the Slothropite heresy – can potentially be restored through faith. As can be seen, *Gravity's Rainbow's* use of the liturgical calendar is such a reassertion of magic, a magic that may have been sterilized by a (post-)Puritan "grim rationalizing of the World" (588), which, however, still lies latent, ready to

reenchant a new time. Tapping into such “[o]ld magic” (589), Lyle Bland, who is like Slothrop “unable to account for the passage of time” (588) and “journeying underneath history” (589), transcends parabolic, downward-turn history into the egalitarian liberty of *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* space-time. Gravity turning from the death-principle of parabolic, sterile history into a force that, within the novel’s image of cyclical time in nature, not only pulls down but also lifts up new life, Bland defies the absolute downward-pull of gravity and rises “up out of his body, about a foot, face-up” (588). Thus performing “a turn not so much in space as in his own history” (589), a singular change in deterministic history similar to the singular point in American history represented by the Slothropite heresy, this reassertion of magic implies an experience of space-time and its relative simultaneity: the floating Bland sees himself, spatial and temporal coordinates becoming interchangeable, “thousands of years beneath him” (589). The reassertion of magic ritual thereby produces a liberation from linear history, a transcendence into the relative simultaneity of the Other Side’s “eternal moment” (624).

Gravity’s Rainbow’s transformation of Joyce’s liturgical mass into the corresponding pattern of the mandalic liturgical calendar serves to effect a reenchantment of a time that had been rationalized into oppressive linearity by the West’s post-Puritan paranoid urge for connectedness and control. In contrast to the fraudulent transcendent escape of rationalism, termed only a pornography of flight and deduction in which the present can only ever be an abstractum never to be really experienced, *Gravity’s Rainbow* offers the transcendent togetherness possible within the freedom of the immanent now.¹¹² Like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* rejects history as a rationalistic illusion that ultimately only legitimates the control and destruction of the masses for an ever-receding elect elite while arguing for the power of love, altruism, and community, deeply irrational and charismatic forces in the novel, as harboring the potential for redemptive change. However, while Joyce’s modernist mass for Pynchon has come to only replace one teleological and linear temporal system with another and thus remains in Pynchon’s post-modernist response to the Ulyssean

¹¹² Cf. the notion of ritual creating what Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* calls ‘communitas,’ an absolute inter-human relation beyond any form of structure.

Tradition as totalizing and controlling as the system it seeks to replace,¹¹³ *Gravity's Rainbow* employs an (anti-)structure of simultaneous circularity and singularity to direct attention to the statistical openness of the moment as such and thus its potential for freedom and life within time yet without the shackles of a deterministic, routinized history. While both Joyce and Pynchon thus share a certain optimism regarding the reparative potential of love and compassion, transported in liturgical parallelisms, *Gravity's Rainbow* mobilizes the probabilism of modern physics to depict the moment as fundamentally open.

Hence, the multiple time-traps that destabilize the novel's symbolically marked chronometry as well as the satirical tone the novel offers with regard to faith far from contradict the optimistic humanism transported in the novel's liturgical parallelisms and its ethics and rhetoric of preterite mercy. On the contrary, the novel's temporal inconsistencies, its calendar's symbolic register and thus its potential for hope and regeneration never quite, or only for those laudably 'foolish' enough to activate a postmodern faith in the moment, 'fitting' the (hi)story told establish a historical sublime. Joyce's modernist secularized attempt to resacralize modern times is thereby transformed into a reenchantment of time and the moment, the freeing affirmation of the ultimate incommensurability of history, its subjunctive state of undecidability, and thus its sublimity. In this embrace of sublimity, which is also an embrace of non-signification, the abject, and the preterite, *Gravity's Rainbow* mobilizes the present as the space and time of possibility. Thus, if history appears as abjection, the perpetual present *Gravity's Rainbow's* historical sublime establishes produces a return of the repressed, surprise, and interconnection as it calls for a Ricoeurian "*courage to believe in the profound significance of our most tragic history [...] and at the same time a certain rejection of the systematic and the fanatic, a sort of open-mindedness*" (Ricoeur 253). Entropy, understood in the System's historicism as time's arrow irrevocably pointing toward not only physical heat-death but also, metaphorically, cultural and social degeneration, is transformed in *Gravity's Rainbow's* non-linear, presentist ethos into a source of hope and regeneration: randomness and disorder provide the possibility for, yet, importantly, never the paralyzing and controlling certainty of, chance

¹¹³ Yet, as the example of the Hereros shows, although flawed, Joyce's ritual, too, could – accidentally – produce community and meaning. Like the Hereros, Joyce's project has been corrupted, with Pynchon setting the Ulyssean Tradition back on track.

renewal and order. It can create 'freak' singularities that destabilize Their control and provide a never fully extinguished or routinized-away potential for life and freedom. Only that which can fail, and this includes the hopefulness transported in the novel's liturgical parallelism, a hope perpetually failed by historical reality, can also offer the hopes of succeeding, of forging intersubjective connection, and allowing for free choice and meaning, if only, always, for the moment.

4. Parallax and Moiré: Superposing Flat Perspectives in *Gravity's Rainbow*

In the wake of the devastation of the first World War, Joyce's *Ulysses* promised the reintegration of lost meaning and order in the image of the good European, the synthesis or "amalgamation of nations" (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*) achieved in the stereoscopic superimposition of the novel's Hellenic and Hebraic strands. Through the synthesis of discrete, by themselves meaningless perspectives, Joyce's visual metaphor of parallax shows, modern alienation and fragmentation can be restored into a meaningful order. 51 years and another World War later and yet again at the brink of total, this time nuclear, war, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is less optimistic about the reintegrative function of parallax: synthesis in *Gravity's Rainbow*, its philosophical and chemical sense overlapping in the novel, does not give birth to the *good* European, putting an end to confusion and war. Instead, it produces a multinational cartel, the "new man" as the postmodern man of technology, a They that orchestrates the War in order to facilitate the exchange of technologies and capital. Synthesis, represented in the visual metaphor of stereoscopic depth perception, brings forth a totalitarian System.

Whereas the alienated modern men Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom parallaxically converged into shared humanity and a more complete, three-dimensional view on life, *Gravity's Rainbow* comments "what happens when paranoid meets paranoid? A crossing of solipsisms. Clearly. The two patterns create a third: a moiré" (395). The layering of two patterns need not provide a "fuller or more correct vision of life" (Heusel 135) as Joyce's use of parallax suggests, but might just as well be taken to produce a moiré, the

phenomenon which occurs when repetitive structures (such as screens, grids or gratings) are superposed or viewed against each other. It consists of a new pattern of alternating dark and bright areas which is clearly observed at the superposition, although it does not appear in any of the original structures. (Amidror 1)

This moiré assumes the function of a "structuring" principle in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Meaning in *Gravity's Rainbow* is product of an ever-changing interfacing of patterns, a moiré whose

reading creates meaning in every momentary and provisional observation yet resists claims to totality and completeness.

The figure of the moiré in *Gravity's Rainbow* thereby replaces the deep structures of Joyce's stereoscopy with an aestheticization of flatness and incompleteness. Reality and insight are no longer understood as structures deeply ingrained into the world and to be unearthed. Instead, they are products of interfacing patterns; moirés the individual reads meaning into, thereby creating reality through observation. Therefore, although *Gravity's Rainbow's* moirés lack depth and stability, this depthlessness represents a reality created from overlaying patterns in language. Patterns superposed in moiré create a third, very much real pattern that is nevertheless not inherent to any original, unified and unchangeable structure. The oppression that comes with the System is product of an unreflected paranoid reading of moirés as if they were deep structures inherent to the world.

Analyzing *Gravity's Rainbow's* permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition in its reinterpretation of Joycean stereoscopic superimposition into a superposition of patterns into moirés, this chapter starts off by investigating vision as a mode of and metaphor for a System-building paranoia. Rather than portraying meaning as Joyce's deep structure to be discovered through stereoscopic superimposition, *Gravity's Rainbow* employs a distinctly flat, perspectival mode of representation of reality. The novel comments on Joyce's metaphor of stereoscopic vision by analyzing the Ulyssean depth perception as necessarily an optical illusion. This chapter will thus take a closer look at the way *Gravity's Rainbow* displays great interest in optical illusions and links them to Joyce's use of parallax. Depth and meaning always being illusory, that is a product of the observer, rather than ingrained into the world, *Gravity's Rainbow* portrays the parallax mode of *Ulysses* as a paranoid vision.

However, some form of paranoia appears necessary to make sense of and live in the ever-changing moirés of reality. While the first part of this chapter will thus concern itself with the pitfalls of the Joycean vision leading into paranoia, the second part will investigate the alternative the novel offers in its reinterpretation of *Ulysses*. The novel proposes a mode of analysis it refers to as "Creative paranoia" (638) that can open up a "gap in the moiré" (688),

not seeking order and meaning as a structure underlying reality but as the product of the flat interplay of patterns in moiré.

An awareness of the moiré-like nature of reality bears the potential for insight, resistance, and liberation. As the second half of this chapter will show, the potential for resistance lies in the cultivation, rather than reduction, of moirés. Creative paranoia thereby produces interference patterns that challenge the totalizing (mis)reading of moirés as deep structures. Both the novel's Counterforce and the overall novel itself employ this aesthetic of strategic interferences. Seen most clearly in Pynchon's reformulation of Joyce's use of stellar parallax, a centering motion employed as a metaphor for finding meaning in modernity, into the related, post-Einsteinian concept of red-shifting, *Gravity's Rainbow's* reinterpretation of *Ulysses* is as practically political as it is aesthetic and theoretical. Through a reinterpretation of Joycean superimposition into a (Quantum-) superposition, *Gravity's Rainbow's* radicalizes the Ulyssean championing of communal effort into a democratic aesthetic of interpretation. By reading the Ulyssean pattern of mappings, realized in *Ulysses* as a superimposition, as a superposition, *Gravity's Rainbow* rejects all final, authoritative interpretation and opens the novel to a perpetual, egalitarian renegotiation of its moirés. By setting the interfaces of these moirés in a metaphorical quantum state that suspends binarity yet employs the binaries inherently necessary for understanding in local, provisional interfaces, the novel evades the risk of consolidating its moirés into total structures, the closedness for which *Gravity's Rainbow* criticizes Joyce's modernism. *Gravity's Rainbow* therefore retains the Ulyssean pattern of mappings used to gain insight into reality yet, by realizing such mappings as superposed moirés, interfaces of meaning set in constant and never completed renegotiation, achieves a self-deconstructive aesthetic of in-betweenness.

Joycean Parallax as Paranoid Vision

Gravity's Rainbow's postmodernist permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition's pattern of stereoscopic superimposition becomes apparent in the novel's treatment of visuality. Parallax and related visual phenomena appear repeatedly in *Gravity's Rainbow*. However, whereas the modernist *Ulysses* uses the visual metaphor of stereoscopy for a reintegrative synthesis,

Gravity's Rainbow represents Joycean depth perception as a paranoid vision. Employing a flattened out mode of representation, the novel acknowledges the interpretative and perspectival status of all perception. Much of *Gravity's Rainbow's* paranoid plot is thus centered around characters attempting to discern a deeper meaning behind the superimposition of two patterns. However, their stereoscopic superimposition in *Gravity's Rainbow* fails to reveal order, a depth perception disclosing deeper meaning. No amount of modernist synthesis, the novel shows, can contain reality in total, the full, three-dimensional picture continually receding. Instead of depth, parallax in *Gravity's Rainbow* only ever offers more visual data to be interpreted and paranoidly connected. It creates moirés that stem from these patterns yet never resolve into the transcendent order of depth.

Gravity's Rainbow's critique of Joycean parallax can already be seen in one of the novel's central predicaments, the mysterious connection between Slothrop's sex life and London V-2 strikes, which is described as an enigmatically perfect superimposition of two maps: "It's the map that spooks them all, the map Slothrop's been keeping on his girls. The stars fall in a Poisson distribution, just like the rocket strikes on Roger Mexico's map of the Robot Blitz" (85). As in the stellar parallax of *Ulysses*, the superimposition of two patterns is meant to reveal the meaning of a star. Parallax in *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, only ever creates more complex patterns. Synthesizing efforts continually defer meaning. Thus, "[w]hen Slothrop was discovered, late in 1944, by 'The White Visitation' [...] different people thought they'd discovered different things" (85). Perspectives on Slothrop abound at the 'White Visitation,' a research institute outside London that investigates unconventional, psychological modes of warfare. However, *Gravity's Rainbow* shows, when brought together, these perspectives fail to synthesize into coherency and meaning. Whereas the parallactic meeting of Stephen and Bloom promises communal effort as a means of gaining stable insight and meaning into the world, the coming together of different sciences at the White Visitation only produces an increasingly complex network of information but no clear-cut results. Instead, the White Visitation is a place of manipulation, human experiments, and nefarious plots.

Indeed, the building that houses the White Visitation itself, like its inhabitants a mosaic of styles, is presented as a vestige of (failed) parallax: "from a distance no two observers, no

matter how close they stand, see quite the same building in that orgy of self-expression” (83). Since meaning, as in the visual metaphor of *insight*, is product of momentary, individual observation, parallax cannot serve as a means of understanding. All experience utterly incommensurable into one totalizing closed system, parallactic vision, the coming together of different perspectives as it can be observed at the White Visitation, does not provide access to deeper insight. Rather, wherever opposites – the physical and the metaphysical, the scientific and the esoteric – are brought together as in the White Visitation to produce stereoscopic insight, “message weave into a net of information that no one can escape” (165). Superimposition of disparate patterns only further entangles the individual in paranoid networks.

The sole exception to these inevitably victimizing attempts at parallax can be seen in the statistician Roger Mexico. As a counterpart to Pointsman’s “mechanical explanation” (89), self-consciously referred to as the “Antipointsman” (55), Mexico’s position serves as an alternative to binary thinking as it embraces randomness:

The young statistician is devoted to number and to method, not table-rapping or wishful thinking. But in the domain of zero to one, not-something to something, Pointsman can only possess the zero and the one. [...] But to Mexico belongs the domain between zero and one—the middle Pointsman has excluded from his persuasion—the probabilities.

(55)

As Hite remarks on Mexico and the novel’s overall aesthetic, “causal explanations do not offer the only way to connect the matter of experience” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 39). Roger Mexico represents a perspective that functions without a synthesizing vision. Unable to share the modernist organizers’ “faith [...] that there must be more, beyond the senses, beyond death, beyond the Probabilities that are all Roger has to believe in” (91), Mexico provides a provisional “model[] for action” (Weisenburger, “The End of History?” 64) in the novel.

Unlike Pointsman, Mexico’s mathematical perspective on reality does not rely on cause and effect affording the illusion of control shown to create an oppressive System. Mexico judges Slothrop as nothing but a “statistical oddity” (85). This alternative to the synthesizing

modernist mindset also becomes apparent in Mexico's flattened out vision. While the totalizing perspective of the likes of Pointsman must contain and control all experience in a determinist System, Mexico can "junk cause-and-effect" (89) and embrace flatness and randomness. His view is one capable of perceiving reality without attempting to contain it within one controlling structure. Thus, as Pointsman and Mexico walk along an anti-tank fortified beach, Mexico's experience of parallax is presented as not resolving into Joycean depth perception but instead flattens out into a perspective that distinctly lacks stereoscopic depth:

Halfway between the water and the coarse sea-grass, a long stretch of pipe and barbed wire rings in the wind. The black latticework is propped up by longer slanting braces, lances pointing out to sea. An abandoned and mathematical look: stripped to the force-vectors holding it where it is, doubled up in places one row behind another, moving as Pointsman and Mexico begin to move again, backward in thick moiré, repeated uprights in parallax against repeated diagonals, and the snarls of wire below interfering more at random. Far away, where it curves into the haze, the openwork wall goes gray. (91)

Instead of deeper insight, as Mexico and Pointsman walk past "doubled up" rows of British beach-fortifications, the visual displacement created through their movement produces the moiré of an "openwork wall" (91). Translating parallax into a flat picture rather than modernist depth, *Gravity's Rainbow's* visual description erodes the distinction between image and reality and thus sign and referent. Mexico's perception is collapsed with reality as *Gravity's Rainbow* deconstructs the experience of depth perception. Therefore, when the moiré of the "openwork wall" is described as going gray as it "curves into the haze" (91), the pattern from Mexico's standpoint interlayering differently now, the novel's visual description relates this subjective experience as reality rather than describing it as only *appearing* to change color. Parallax loses its modernist, epistemological function. It no longer discusses the disparity of perspectives on the same, 'real' object but turns, in line with McHale's reading of the ontological dominant of postmodernism, to an ontological question. The flattened-out perspective Mexico's experience of parallax presents thus rejects Joycean stereoscopy's claim to fully represent reality.

In contrast to its use in Joyce's *Ulysses*, parallax in *Gravity's Rainbow* is shown to produce not deeper insight but simply another, unrelated pattern. *Gravity's Rainbow's* (visual) perspectivism thereby opposes modernist notions of synthesis. The postmodernist novel's vision creates moirés rather than three-dimensional images. Mexico, incapable of sharing the modernist urge toward transcendent meaning, something "beyond the senses," therefore links "his loneliness in Psi Section," i.e., his exceptional position as a non-believer in cause and effect, with the above-discussed visual experience of flat, postmodernist perspective as he poignantly thinks to himself: "*I'm out of my depth in this...*" (91). *Gravity's Rainbow*, in challenging conventional modes of perception, questions the reintegrative potential of Joycean parallax as a visual metaphor for synthesis. If parallax can easily resolve into a flat moiré and the controlling depth perception of the modernist mind is indistinguishable from an optical illusion, all concepts of reality, even those offered to the naked eye, are product of one's own interpretation. Joyce's stereoscopic vision thereby becomes a mode of paranoid vision.

Perspectival Flatness in Gravity's Rainbow

Representation in Pynchon's postmodernist response to Joycean parallax shifts from the mimetic, a mode insinuating the essential, if in modernity obfuscated and problematized, connection between perception and reality, and thus signifier and signified, to a postmodern perspectival representation "acknowledging the interpretative and metaphoric character of all perspectives" (Best 84). Hence, both Joyce and Pynchon employ a form of 'mapping' patterns onto another. However, while Joyce's metaphor of superimposition insinuates the discovery of an order and meaning that transcends the individual's experience, *Gravity's Rainbow* holds this 'mapping' to be an act of metaphorization that springs from the interpreting intellect. Just as a metaphor 'maps' its tenor onto its vehicle, cognition in *Gravity's Rainbow* produces moirés that, since they lack definitive connection to a transcendent order in the world, are always productive and flat. *Gravity's Rainbow's* negotiation of visuality and synthesis as means of totalizing order and control thus displays what Fredric Jameson refers to as "the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness" (Jameson 9) in postmodernism. The moiré, lacking center or depth and thus open to continued superposition, appears as Pynchon's response to Joycean

stereoscopy. Thus, the same notion of deeper, reintegrative meaning that made Bloom, experiencing parallax, cry out “see, it all works out” (174) in *Ulysses* causes the likes of Slothrop in *Gravity’s Rainbow* to “see conspiracies in everything” (528). Rejecting the Joycean pattern of stereoscopic vision as an illusory and totalizing, paranoid mode of experiencing the world, *Gravity’s Rainbow* is heavily invested in exploring instances of optical illusions: the system-building of modernist depth perception is revealed to be based in an optical illusion. Though illusory, the confusion of reality’s flat moirés with a deep structure naturalizes conventional structures of oppression and thus effects a very real control.

Gravity’s Rainbow’s dismissal of depth perception as affording only the illusion of transcendence can for example be seen in the depthless perspectivism the novel displays when Slothrop and Geli experience the optical illusion known as the “Brockengespenstphänomen” (331). Human experience is shown to be inherently interpretative and thus unable to transcend representation when Slothrop and Geli, on top of the German Brocken, cast “two gigantic shadows, thrown miles overland” (330). Both “*three-dimensional*” and “haloed,” and thus recalling the paranoid structure of the titular rainbow as image of a divine providential plan, these “God-shadows” (330) are but products of an optical illusion. The novel thereby denies depth perception the reintegrative function it had in the modernist *Ulysses*, instead drawing stereoscopy as a product of the subject’s interpretative structuring of reality.

The optical illusion of the Brocken specter, described in great detail in the novel, occurs when an observer’s shadow is cast onto the water particles in fog, mist or clouds. The phenomenon is therefore best observed in a setting such as the one described in the novel, on a mountaintop at dusk or dawn, i.e., when the chances of fog are highest and light shines horizontally and without obstruction onto the figure of the observer. The Brocken specter creates the illusion of one having a magnified and three-dimensional shadow due to the observer’s mis-interpretation of their stereoscopic vision. Assuming the shadow to be further away than it actually is, and thus overestimating its size, the projection onto nearby water-particles results in the perception of an “[i]mpossibly out of scale” (330) shadow that is, since the un-flat surface of the fog is confused with the relatively flat countryside, perceived as three-dimensional. The use of the Brocken specter in *Gravity’s Rainbow* thus subverts Joycean

parallax by visiting an example for the potential failings of depth perception. Stereoscopy in *Gravity's Rainbow* does not inherently produce the deep and meaningful wholeness of the modernist *Ulysses*. Instead, confusing flatness with depth results in the grandeur of self-delusion that also runs through the novel's victimizing conspiracies.

Notably, *Gravity's Rainbow's* description of this optical illusion is clearly not held in a modernist free indirect discourse which, while representing a character's potentially erroneous perception, nevertheless posits a stable, meaningfully real order "behind the visible" (188). Not only does the passage's poetic tone not reflect any of the present characters' use of language, the mention of plural "haloed shells" (330) is altogether impossible. Such a description cannot reflect one character's free indirect discourse since observers, again due to parallax, only ever see the Brocken specter's characteristic rainbow-aura around their *own* shadow alone. Speaking of "haloed shells" (330; emphasis mine), *Gravity's Rainbow's* narrative voice views appearance ontologically as reality rather than the novel employing the optical illusion in an epistemological mode that highlights the parallax disparity between the two observers' visions. Instead of mimetically representing the phenomenon, *Gravity's Rainbow* displays a postmodernist perspectival representation that relates all experience of reality as inherently, and undistinguishably, interpretative. Though describing a seemingly three-dimensional visual phenomenon, the novel's narrative perspective is one of depthlessness. It does not distinguish between (perspectival) appearance and (mimetic) reality in its visual descriptions. Not only is postmodern man thus faced with the epistemological problem of 'real' and illusory depth perception being indistinguishable, leading to the modernist skepticism toward subjective, fragmented experience *Ulysses* resolves through the pattern of parallax superimposition, but postmodern man is faced with the illusory and mediated nature of stereoscopy as a metaphor for the synthetic attainment of knowledge itself.

The Persistence of Vision

Joycean depth perception bespeaks a modernist ideal of restored continuity and coherence the novel rejects as an illusion cognition creates. The paranoid vision of history entailed in parallax is thus yet another instance of the "persistence [...] of structures favoring death" (167), the

product of a totalizing and oppressive urge toward transcendence. Parallax, again in conjunction with the British institution of scientific synthesis of perspectives, the White Visitation, thus also appears when Pointsman and his colleague Gwenhidwy “are tramping uphill to Gwenhidwy’s rooms as the quiet snow curtains fall on and on between themselves and the pierced walls of the institution marching in stone parallax away into a white gloom” (170). The sight lets Gwenhidwy muse: “How they persist. The poor, the black. And the Jews! The Welsh, the Welsh once upon a time were Jewish too? one of the Lost Tribes of Israel, a black tribe, who wandered overland, centuries? oh an incredible journey. Until at last they reached Wales, you see” (170). What Gwenhidwy asks Pointsman to *see* here is the theory of the Celts being one of the Lost Tribes of Israel, a popular theory that also features prominently in Joyce’s parallax pattern. As Gwenhidwy’s repeated interpunctuation “you see” (170) indicates, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, echoing *Ulysses*, closely links this theory of the semitic origin of the Celts to (parallactic) vision.¹¹⁴ Yet another instance of a paranoid history, the semitic origin of the Celts, as in *Ulysses*, instills coherency and continuity, a sense of persistence, into the experience of fragmentation. Stereoscopic thinking affords historical persistence and meaning to the Celtic Welsh as descendants of the Israelites. At the same time, however, Joycean parallax as a modernist system also ensures the persistence of “[t]he poor, the black” (170), i.e., the preterite outsiders of society. Unifying stereoscopy thereby inevitably creates the binaries its synthesizing mode seeks to reduce, yet operates from, in past-directed nostalgia.

The same paranoid “persistence of vision” (422) also captivates the rocket engineer Pökler. Staging annual meetings between Pökler and his daughter Ilse, Blicero draws his subordinate Pökler into submission through “something like the persistence of vision, for They have used it to create for him [Pökler] the moving image of a daughter, flashing him only these summertime frames of her, leaving it to him to build the illusion of a single child” (422). Drawing an analogy between the optical illusion of movement in film and a modernist mindset of all-connectedness, the illusion of persistence inherent to paranoid vision creates a totalizing

¹¹⁴ As already discussed, *Ulysses* comments on theories of both the semitic origin of the Hellenic Odysseus and the Hebrew genealogy of the Irish (Nadel 303), strongly identifying the Irish with the Jews, thereby superimposing Hellenism and Hebraism through parallax in the synthesizing creation of the ‘good European.’

System that victimizes the individual. Pökler is controlled by Blicero through a visual metaphor. Film being in fact a succession of separate stills, like Pökler's daughter(s) which he only sees once a year, continuity and coherence of experience, and therefore meaning, are shown to be creations of the synthesizing, paranoid observer. The novel thus comments on the "strange connection between the German [i.e., synthesizing and totalitarian] mind and the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement" (407). Pökler is thus "given proof that these techniques had been extended past images on film, to human lives" (407).¹¹⁵ The illusion of coherency and meaning, both employed by Them and producing Their System, gives the individual the opportunity to control, narrate and represent experience while it subjugates the individual to Their totalizing control. Hence, experience and understanding – seeing the world – is not merely prone to be distorted through optical illusions. Instead, the novel argues, all perception of coherency and meaning can ultimately be likened to an optical illusion.

Therefore, as Charles Clerc notes on the function of film in *Gravity's Rainbow*, "the real world is the reel world, and vice versa" (Clerc 111). Indeed, the novel opens with the announcement that "it's all theatre" (3) and closes in a contemporary cinema with the remark that we have "always been at the movies" (760). For *Gravity's Rainbow*, Western, rational, totalizing thought, the view of history as a coherent, totalizable closed system, is cinematic, an illusion of connection drawn from separate still moments. Studded with cinematic references, *Gravity's Rainbow* itself purports the novel's resemblance to a movie (Clerc 104) in its flat, screen-like perspectivism. Commenting on the illusory nature of representation and experience through drawing an analogy between film and reality, *Gravity's Rainbow* deconstructs the apparent primacy of reality over representation. Instead, both rely on the same illusion or persistence of vision, one not more or less a re-presentation than the other. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, film thus effortlessly invades reality since both ultimately inhabit the same level of movie-like fictionality, an ontological situation that facilitates the creation of the System, which uses film in its propaganda machinery, and its emblem, the Rocket, poignantly developed with the help of "a movie camera" (406).

¹¹⁵ Similarly, Pointsman uses film to condition the Octopus Grigori in his plot against Slothrop.

It is therefore the movie-star Mickey Rooney, “Judge Hardy’s freckled madcap son, *three-dimensional*” (382; emphasis mine) and not one of the important political figures whom we meet when Slothrop visits the historic Potsdam conference. Film and perception, analogously, relying on the same illusion of coherency, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s postmodernity a movie-star is more real, in-the-flesh three-dimensional, than the somebodies that “look[] a bit like Churchill” (382). Reality being depicted as a product of representation, viewing, *Gravity’s Rainbow* dismantles the conventional primacy of the real over the reel. Similarly, the fictional director von Göll’s movies have the tendency to become real. Not only is his, poignantly abstruse, fantasy of an African unit in the German army, created as propagandistic psychological warfare, subsequently discovered to lead “real, paracinematic lives” (388) in the Herero Schwarzkommando, but the explicit sex-scenes of *Alpdrücken* are said to have so aroused German husbands that innumerable “shadow-children would be fathered on Erdmann that night” (397). As if the persistence of vision were burned into a cultural retina, Greta Erdmann’s filmed gang-rape not only produces *her* child Bianca but also filmic afterimages like Pökler’s “movie-child” (398) Ilse. Von Göll’s fictions thereby become “seeds of reality” (388), signifier and signified upturned in the loss of the signified in postmodernity, that impregnate, in Greta’s case quite literally, the world rather than mimicking it. Perception, delusion and clear sight become invertible and interchangeable as they create rather than describe reality in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Representation in the novel shifting from mimesis to a perspectival representation of cognition thereby equates reality to the illusion of reality, human consciousness’s structuring impulse. This produces a two-dimensional mode of describing not only vision in the novel but the novel’s overall mode of representation, any sense of (historical) continuity being product of a quasi-filmic observation rather than residing in the raw sensory perception of the world. While the depth of space in *Ulysses* offered the potential for reintegration, depth in *Gravity’s Rainbow* collapses into a cinematic, flat perspective.

Paranoid Vision

The Joycean stereoscopic mode is thus presented as a paranoid vision, *Gravity’s Rainbow* likening the perception of coherency to paranoia. Thus, when Pökler experiences “a massive

failure of vision” at the rocket test stand, the novel comments that “no one, not even the most paranoid, can see anything” (426). Vision is presented as a property of paranoia rather than of the optical apparatus per se. As one can see, seeing and understanding are modes of (paranoid) interpretation clearly distinct from raw sensory data as a lack of vision can poignantly be mitigated not by improving the physical conditions for sight but by heightening paranoia as the ability to ‘see’ everything in a totalizing, all-connective closed system. Indeed, Pökler’s paranoia is related in the novel in terms of Joycean stereoscopic superimposition. The moment in which Pökler is overcome by paranoia is thus described as the instance when “somewhere in his brain now two foci sweep together and become one” (425).

Gravity’s Rainbow thus defines paranoia as the “reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible” (188). Clearly, this order behind the visible, abstracting from the raw visual data in order to interpretively discover a deeper meaning not present in the individual perspective, can be seen to represent the Joycean ideal of depth perception. However, rather than offering a deeper meaning and order that is, albeit imperceptible to the individual, real and present, stereoscopy in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is paranoid. Even the expression “orders *behind* the visible” (188; emphasis mine) itself represents a notion of depth that is absent from *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Perspectivally representing the superficiality of cognition, the signifier, depth perception in *Gravity’s Rainbow* represents an illusory appeal to an ideal of transcendent meaning. The System’s paranoid vision thus relies on a spatial logic of depth. The paranoid mode the novel rejects posits a deeply hidden plot, an all-connective center, behind the contingently experienced surface of reality. Paranoia suspects a “terrible structure *behind* the appearances of diversity and enterprise” (165; emphasis mine), an all-controlling System that relates the individual’s experience as product of external control as it gives meaning to the individual’s life, solipsistically plotting paranoiacs the likes of Slothrop as the center of a conspiracy. It therefore imposes a depth structure on experience that binarily distinguishes between an incomplete, fragmented and alienating experience “[u]p here, on the surface” and an “incalculable plot” (521) hidden behind, beneath and at its center. By referring to such connections as paranoid, even if they produce fears and suspicions that seem to be warranted (as they often do in *Gravity’s Rainbow*), the novel problematizes all experience, ‘deluded’ or not, as interpretative

and mediated and any attempt to thus transcend contingency and reintegrate meaning from experience as illusory. Such structuring impulses inevitably create an inhuman, oppressive System.

Furthermore, the closed System of paranoid depth perception cannot create deeper insight. Instead, the superimposition of patterns can only ever generate new, ever-more complex patterns of signifiers with their illusory signified perpetually deferred similar to the Derridean concept of *différance*. Thus, when Slothrop and Greta Erdmann first meet in an above discussed nostalgic encounter on a movie-set (!), exchanging conspiracy theories, it is almost as if the narrator comments on the parallaxic merging of Stephen and Bloom in the climax of 'Ithaca,' remarking: "Well. What happens when paranoid meets paranoid? A crossing of solipsisms. Clearly. The two patterns create a third: a *moiré*, a new world of flowing shadows, interferences" (395). The narrator's comment shows Joycean superimposition of binaries, synthesis, to not create deeper insight and wholeness but only the third pattern of "a *moiré*" (395). Paranoia, as already noted, results in a solipsistic experience, positioning the individual in the center of a conspiracy that, though victimizing the subject and reducing it to a product of Their outside control, gives meaning to the individual's experience. However, even though "the Zone can sustain many other plots besides those polarized upon [oneself]" (603), such a stereoscopic "crossing of solipsisms" (395) fails to generate the deep and complete view of life Joyce hoped for. Instead, paranoia squared, since experience is always already mediated and thus 'paranoid,' can only result in more paranoia with no increased claim to transcendent truth. Unlike in *Ulysses*, where the stereoscopic merging of the estranged, solipsistic perspectives of Stephen and Bloom allows for a parallaxic depth perception of life inaccessible to the modern individual alone, this form of 'communality' fails to produce epiphanic revelation in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Rather than truly communal, such a mode is inherently solipsistic. The *moiré* in *Gravity's Rainbow's* depthless visuality thus serves as a postmodernist counter-image to Joycean stereoscopy, depth perception being flattened out into yet another pattern. Rather than producing clarity and transcendent justification of experience, synthesis, viewed flatly as *moiré*ification, only produces further "interferences" (385). As Hite remarks on the paranoid mode in *Gravity's Rainbow*, "[e]xperience becomes a layering or *moiré* of orders, growing more complex and

interconnected with every new perspective, never resolving into a single comprehensive pattern” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 44). What follows is an infinite regress of ever more complex patterns that can never fully represent reality, entangling the paranoid individual in a totalizing System of its own making. Even though the System exerts very real control through such delusions, the revelation of its illusoriness opens up a pathway to critique, resist, and ultimately, though this must, due to the nature of the moiré, be a continuing process, achieve a form of liberation from it.

Creative Paranoia

As Mark Siegel notes, “all conceptions of reality – and not merely the fictional ones – are metaphor” (M. R. Siegel, “Creative Paranoia: Understanding the System of *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 46), inherently always already mediated and interpreted. The default mode of perception thus qualifies as paranoia, whether the resulting suspicions are warranted or not. The Joycean superimposition of perspectives to discover orders behind the visible from perception appears as a form of paranoia. The paranoid vision thus gives meaning to the individual’s experience. However, this closed system also closes in on the observer. The resulting structure, likened to a moiré that infinitely metastasizes with each layering without allowing more information on the original pattern, must always fail to coherently represent experience in totality. The novel’s moirés always remain flat and open.

However, while the paranoid vision of all-connectedness and meaning stifles human autonomy as it creates an entirely predetermined System, the apparent opposite, a defeatist nihilism that sees no connections at all, cannot be sustained either. The novel thus comments that

[i]f there is something comforting – religious, if you want – about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long. [...] Either they have put [Slothrop] here for a reason, or he’s just here. He isn’t sure that he wouldn’t, actually, rather have that *reason* (434).

Although a system where “*everything is connected*” (703) can only guarantee the individual’s subjugation and destruction, anti-paranoia appears at least equally entropic by completely halting “the movement that is life” (Bersani 103). Even though postmodern man, the novel citing Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, is unable to ascertain the ‘reality’ of his paranoid perceptions and view the system from the outside, some sense of connection and order is necessary to survive. A complete rejection of the structuring impulse is not feasible. Indeed, clearly “[s]omething’s up, a-and you know it” (192). Slothrop *is* the object of at least Pointsman’s plot against him, although Pointsman’s own entanglement in a moiré of delusions still higher escapes our grasp. Furthermore, despite all of its randomness and unexplainable events, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s universe is bound to at least some physical laws that cannot be represented by pure randomness. The War, death and oppression, though their depth cannot be fathomed, are very much real. Anti-paranoia runs the risk of obfuscating real domination and oppression: both extremes, in their nature of being structured, binary pairs, ultimately serve Their System.

Hence, Slothrop’s spurts of anti-paranoia are as controlling and victimizing as his visions of complete control. The recognition of flatness, if totalized, thus prevents compassion as the anti-paranoid individual, just like the paranoiac, falls into an objective solipsism. All-connecting paranoia, the individual plotting itself into a System of complete predetermination, and a resolute skepticism toward all experience equally deny the individual its agency. As already noted, due to the inherent mediatedness of all experience, that is the cinematic quality of perception in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the novel’s characters perpetually confuse the real world with the reel world. However, if all perception is illusory and victimizing and understanding altogether impossible, the individual is, just as it were when enclosed by Their paranoid System, bereft of all agency and incapable of a compassion that could lead to change. Both paranoia and anti-paranoia are unsustainable extremes that produce a fatalistic nihilism the novel rejects.

This (anti-)paranoid mode of vision can for example be seen when Slothrop enters Berlin, viewing the bombed-out city as a movie set and thus himself as a character in Their movie plot:

Someone here is cleverly allowing for parallax, scaling, shadows all going the right way and lengthening with the day – but no, Säure can't be real, no more than these dark-clothed extras waiting in queues for some hypothetical tram, some two slices of sausage (sure, sure), the dozen half-naked kids racing in and out of this burned tenement so amazingly detailed – The sure must have the budget, all right. (374)

Perception, as can be seen, is much more a function of the individual's structuring mind than of the relations between actual things. Paranoia is thus not only the 'realist's' experience of the world as connected by causal relations. On the contrary, Slothrop's seeming awareness of perception as a plotted illusion, his anti-paranoia, is equally paranoid and, notably, victimizing: it allows the individual to distance itself from compassion, be it due to viewing suffering as predetermined and thus inevitable or, as Slothrop does here, as a mere illusion created by Them. Both modes serve to uphold Their status quo. Real life and movie life both relying on the same interpretative mode of vision, Slothrop can marvel at the "amazingly detailed" (374) scene of a devastated Berlin. Ultimately, Slothrop concludes that "They sure have the budget" (374), viewing all perception as plotted illusion. Furthermore, Slothrop relates optics, the "parallax" (374) he, naturally, experiences as he views the streets, as illusory and pre-fabricated. Paranoid vision as a product of modernist parallax thus tips over into a paranoid rejection of depth that perceives Berlin as a simulacral movie set. Indeed, Slothrop is not wholly wrong here: Someone *is* "cleverly allowing for parallax" (374) and skillfully shaping a scene of post-war Berlin, namely Pynchon. However, while the novel thus clearly indicates the narration's own functioning as creating this scene, Slothrop externalizes his role as observer and thus creator. He can thereby allow himself to remain indifferent to the suffering around him by viewing himself as an external viewer of a movie-like scene. Clearly, interpretation of parallax through the ideal of transcendent all-connectedness cannot adequately contain reality. Berlin's dead are very much real and dead, and shadows – though they may be subject to filmic manipulation as von Göll's "Expressionist" movie sets, "all tapered away in perspective for the rigid lenses that stared here once" (393) – can also "lengthen[] with the day" (374) without the help of a deep conspiracy. *Gravity's Rainbow* clearly does not reject all causality and superimpositions as inherently unable to produce some insight. Rather, the novel stresses that these are not the only

ways to ascertain reality, and that they are not inherent to the structure of the world. The novel therefore primarily calls for self-consciousness, a paranoid mode that is aware of its paranoia but, since all perception is inherently an interpretative act, makes use of this in order to gain insight and agency.

The binary pair of paranoid all-connectedness and anti-paranoia, complete, nihilist unconnectedness of all events, describes a false dichotomy that leaves out a middle ground integral to both *Gravity's Rainbow's* literary aesthetics and politics. The antithesis of total determination and chaos bespeaks and reproduces a synthetic System that can only operate in polarity. However, as Hite shows, “the principle of excluded middles does not justify this reduction, for the contradictory of ‘everything is connected’ is ‘*not* everything is connected,’ a proposition that leaves ample room for the possibility that some things are connected, and in innumerable different ways” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 17).

Between these two unsustainable extremes, *Gravity's Rainbow* positions a dynamic and untotizable creative paranoia capable of, if not ever fully representing the world, sustaining meaningful life and disrupting and disclosing Their System within local interfaces of the novel's moirés. The inevitability of paranoia poses the novel's central dilemma of “striv[ing] to overcome through language and consciousness the state of alienation from existence that is the product of language and consciousness” (Russell 266). This conundrum, however, does not result in defeatist nihilism in the novel. On the contrary, in the recognition of the delusional nature of all perception lies for *Gravity's Rainbow* the potential for (provisional) knowledge and resistance. Rather than epiphanically transcending Their rationalizations in an act of stepping out of the System and acquiring a depth perception of reality as a whole shown to be impossible, *Gravity's Rainbow* embraces the self-consciously irrational and paranoid as an act of liberation. As Deborah Madsen remarks, *Gravity's Rainbow's* “postmodernist epiphany is a paranoid awareness” (Madsen 79), a recognition of the metaphorically structured nature of all reality. All of reality is thus product of perception, the ghost of Walter Rathenau telling a group of unlistening Nazis that “signs are real” (167). Instead of transcendingly dismantling (necessary) delusions, i.e., a depth-perceptive “seeking of other orders behind the visible” (188), apprehension of reality, and thus the potential for liberation and resistance, entails “follow[ing]

the signs” (167) and, as one member of the novel’s postmodernist anti-System Counterforce explains, “developing at least as thorough a We-system as a They-system” (638). Parallax is thereby not altogether rejected but instead valued in its production of moirés. Acknowledging the moiré-like, superficial and thus paranoid nature of experience, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s mode of creative paranoia proposes the creation of a “contrary set of delusions” (638), alternative, provisional and self-consciously illusory narratives that disrupt the System from within itself. Creativity, life, resistance and meaningful understanding can only occur as self-aware metaphors, life-giving structures, or rather moirés, that emerge within the death-driven System as it is subverted.

Banana Breakfast

Gravity’s Rainbow demonstrates the possibility of creativity and life within and through Their War early on in the novel through Pirate Prentice’s rooftop garden, an island of life and hope in war devastated London. Opposing Their rationalizations of “structures favoring death” (167) with a human “assertion-though-structure” (10), the rooftop garden provides counteragent structures of the irrational, thereby exemplifying *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s creative paranoia. The garden thus cultivates Pirate’s bananas, a central ingredient of slapstick absurdism (naturally, Harold-Lloyd-like, one of Pirate’s coinhabitants promptly “slips on a banana peel and falls on his ass” (8)), and Osbie’s hallucinogenic drugs.

Echoing Joyce’s mocking Buck Mulligan from the opening of *Ulysses* by entering the novel wearing an open “wool robe” and “climb[ing] a spiral ladder” (6), Pirate Prentice “has become famous for his Banana Breakfast” (5) that serves as “a spell, against falling objects” (10), opposing the System’s death drive and oppression, its totalizing *gravity*. Pirate’s banana breakfast, the banana itself, arching toward the sky and phallic, suggested as an absurd parody of the “steel banana” (8) Rocket, evidences the potential of a creatively paranoid “assertion-through-structure” (10) against “Their several entropies” (302):

Now there grows among all the rooms, replacing the night's old smoke, alcohol and sweat, the fragile, musaceous odor of Breakfast: flowery, permeating, surprising, more than the color of winter sunlight, taking over not so much through any brute pungency

or volume as by the high intricacy to the weaving of its molecules, sharing the conjuror's secret by which—though it is not often Death is told so clearly to fuck off—the living genetic chains prove even labyrinthine enough to preserve some human face down ten or twenty generations... so the same assertion-through-structure allows this war morning's banana fragrance to meander, repossess, prevail. (10)

Though “fragile,” temporary and local, i.e., untotalizably absurd and mundane, Pirate’s banana breakfast is able to resist cooptation into Their entropic System, providing the potential for repossession and regeneration. Resistance is not enacted through a violent opposition to the System, the “brute pungency or volume” of an all-encompassing transcendent System (such as Pointsman’s or Blicero’s), but through the “high intricacy” (10) of lapidary patterns, a moiréification for the sake of moiréification. Through a life-affirming, seemingly paradoxical “assertion-through-structure” of creative paranoia, humanity can subside as “the living genetic chains prove even labyrinthine enough to preserve some human face down ten or twenty generations” (10). Complexity, as Pirate’s breakfast and Pynchon’s highly intricate novel show, can be employed in spite of Their System if one uses it to cultivate the human, aberrant and un-serious. The labyrinthine structures that trap *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* paranoiacs can also be used to liberate the individual.

Providing the key ingredient for Pirate’s breakfast, the rooftop garden turns history into the fertile ground of “an impasto, feet thick, of unbelievable black topsoil in which anything could grow, not the least being bananas” (5), decay forming a moiré-like “stringing of rings and chains in nets only God can tell the meshes of” (6). Growth not only, unbelievably, continues in the midst of destruction and decay, the ever-going War of moirés can bring forth life. Significantly, then, Pirate obtained his banana saplings “in exchange for a German camera” (5). The German camera, as could be shown the tool of a totalitarian paranoid vision, is thus used to subvert the very System it is an emblem of.¹¹⁶ Affirmation of life in resistance to Their structures can occur through subverting, rather than transcending, the System. Paranoia, while

¹¹⁶ The sought after German camera is presumably a Leica, the famous German camera brand mentioned in Pynchon’s *V* that was among the top products traded on Germany’s post-war black markets (Lévy 159–60). The brand name raises associations with Laika, the first dog (to die) in space, drawing even further connections between the camera and other images of the System, namely Pavlovian conditioning (Russian dogs) and the Rocket’s dream of flight (the Cold-War space race).

creating a totalizing System, can also serve as a perpetually provisional “secondary illumination – not yet blindingly One, but at least connected, and perhaps a route In” (703), a creatively paranoid aesthetics of in-betweenness and moirés that provides the potential for understanding, resistance, and liberation.

Insight and Understanding: A Gap in the Moiré

While there might be no way out of the paranoid System, paranoia can provide a “route In” (703) to an understanding of the world as a moiré of signs and thus an awareness of, and the potential to resist, power structures. Although *Gravity’s Rainbow* rejects the Joycean mode of epiphanic stereoscopy, it retains the pattern of layerings or mappings, modified into the postmodernist image of a superposition of layers into a moiré, as a means of gaining, if not deep and causal, nevertheless meaningful knowledge of the world. If (our experience of) reality is entirely metaphoric, a postmodernist paranoid awareness of metaphor, an act of mapping apparently disjunctive and unconnected elements onto another, can afford insights into the workings of Their (and our) system of moirés. A self-conscious recognition of perception as a shimmering moiré of associations, *Gravity’s Rainbow* proposes, offers the potential of understanding reality and thus of real change. Such insight is not to be understood in the sense of a revelation of a hidden, deep causal structure but in the sense of an apprehension of the surface of experience. The creative superposition of patterns into moirés, rather than a stereoscopic superimposition of patterns into a unified, deep structure, allows for provisional, locally determined insight into the world.

Gravity’s Rainbow demonstrates the potential of creative paranoia for decentered yet operational meaning perhaps most clearly and concisely in a passage titled “SHIT’N’SHINOLA” toward the end of the novel. While, as could be shown, paranoia, visually represented in the moiré mistaken for a deep structure, obfuscates Their doings and ultimately leads into the individual’s complete domination, complex connections can also serve to create a “gap in the moiré” (688). Such a ‘gap’ allows for an apprehension of, and thus resistance to, the System *as* moiré. Picking up on a prior conversation between the German Säure Bummer and Seaman Bodine “ON THE PHRASE ‘ASS BACKWARDS’” (683) that demonstrates the

apparent lack of connection between language and causal reality,¹¹⁷ *Gravity's Rainbow's* exemplary deconstruction of language continues with Säure's problems of translating "the American expression 'Shit from Shinola'" (687). In the 'Shit'n'Shinola' section, the discussion of the paranoid moirés of language gains a political dimension as it touches upon abjection and racism. Excrements and shoe polish appear as essential opposites, Bodine explaining that "[o]ne implication is that Shit and Shinola are in wildly different categories. You would envision – maybe just because they smell different – no way for Shit and Shinola to coexist. Simply impossible" (687). Vision and sensual appearance in general create binary distinctions a "German dopefiend such as Säure" (687; emphasis mine) attempts to dialectically get at the core of, that is reduce to synthetic wholeness. This synthetic mode speakingly lets Bodine suspect "you're one of Them, too" (687). The 'German,' i.e., totalizing, modernist urge for symmetry of Säure, in contrast to the "asymmetrical[]" (687) American Counterforce figure Bodine, thus attempts to synthesize thesis (Shit) and antithesis (Shinola) as the section embarks on a parodic etymological quest.

Säure, here following a 'German' dialectical mindset, tries to discover the deep structure of the two words through their phonology, thereby attempting to link representation in language, the signifier, to the signified. The paranoid mode thus "might see 'Shit' as a comical interjection" (687; emphasis mine) like "Schitt, Herr Bummer" (687) or the onomatopoeic representation of the sound of a guillotine ("*Scchhit!*" (687)). Similarly, sensual experience does little to help gain dialectical insight into the meaning of 'Shinola,' homophonically translated into a "Schein-Aula," a "Seeming-Aula" (687) for an assortment of the novel's German scientists to meet in. As the parody shows, language and perception fail to contain a mimetic relationship to reality. Just like the 'ass' of 'ass backwards' does not derive its meaning from anatomy, Shit and Shinola apparently cannot be forced into a relation to the extra-linguistic world.

¹¹⁷ 'Ass backwards' referring to "certain reversals – machinery connected wrong, for instance," Säure reads the expression as pleonastic, noting that "Ass usually *is* backwards" (683). However, although, as Bodine clarifies, "'Ass' is an intensifier [...] as in 'mean ass,'" language resists (the German's) totalization into a system that represents reality since the synthetic construction 'backwards ass backwards,' Bodine explains, "don't make it mean forwards" (684). Meaning, *Gravity's Rainbow* resembling poststructuralist and deconstructionist theory, is not a product of real-world references but results from words' position in relation to one another.

Nevertheless, interpretation *can* afford insight into reality. ‘Reality’ is, as already hinted at, a product of discursive relations and not of ‘real’ causal connections the individual can only ever experience as paranoid metaphors. Since all of reality is always and inherently a moiré of patterns without depth, an investigation into these metaphoric structures can provide insight into reality. *Gravity’s Rainbow* therefore reinterprets the meaningful function of superimposition in *Ulysses* into a mode of creatively paranoid analysis where patterns are superposed to reveal their similarities. This mapping of patterns allows for a recognition of reality, though less in the sense of a synthetic, depth-perceptive revelation of an original unity of language and the real than as a ‘flat’ apprehension of the moiré, i.e., the metaphor, that shapes and produces reality. By retracing how these metaphors are formed, insight becomes possible. A creatively paranoid mode of mapping the moirés of reality, i.e., a mode of investigating reality that is aware of its own paranoia and incompleteness, can thereby produce knowledge without falling into a totalizing claim for completeness that would naturalize the patterns discovered and thus make resistance and criticism futile. *Gravity’s Rainbow* exemplarily lays out this self-consciously playful mode of approaching reality in its reading of the moiré of Shit and Shinola as representing US racism.

As the section’s reading of the popular expression shifts toward a meditation on the discursive, not causal, interconnection of racism, imperialism, and abjection in Western culture, the section’s focalization shifts away from Säure’s ‘German’ faux-dialectics toward the narrator’s proposition of an alternative, ‘deconstructionist’ form of doubling. This alternative can be understood as a superposition into moiré:

Well there’s one place where Shit ‘n’ Shinola do come together, and that’s in the men’s toilet at the Roseland Ballroom, the place Slothrop departed from on his trip down the toilet, as revealed in the St. Veronica Papers (preserved, mysteriously, from that hospital’s great holocaust). Shit, now, is the color white folks are afraid of. Shit is the presence of death, not some abstract-arty character with a scythe but the stiff and rotting corpse itself inside the whiteman’s warm and private own *asshole*, which is getting pretty intimate. That’s what that white toilet’s for. You see many brown toilets? Nope,

toilet's the color of gravestones, classical columns of mausoleums, that white porcelain's the very emblem of Odorless and Official Death. Shinola shoeshine polish happens to be the color of Shit. Shoeshine boy Malcolm's in the toilet slappin' on the Shinola, working off whiteman's penance on his sin of being born the color of Shit 'n' Shinola. (688)

Gravity's Rainbow here proposes a self-consciously and creatively paranoid mode of an interrogation of reality by means of superposing the opposites of Shit and Shinola that can reveal an insight into Western culture. Such an insight is shown to be possible even though it is not reflected in the actual world. Racism and imperialism, the novel argues, are a product of an imaginative association, not causal connection, of blackness with the abject. As already noted, the abject, a term most prominently used by Julia Kristeva, describes that which confronts oneself with one's "mortal corporeality" (Kristeva 231). Abject objects such as feces or (menstrual) blood remind one of one's own real embodiment and mortality, aspects the subject has to deny. They challenge the distinction between subject and object and thereby disrupt conventional identity. The 'Shit'n'Shinola' section of *Gravity's Rainbow* similarly outlines western culture's urge to deny the body and mortality and transcend death through metaphoric structures. "Shit," the novel argues, "is the color white folks are afraid of" since it is a constant reminder of the abject, "the stiff and rotting corpse itself inside the white man's warm and private own *asshole*" (688). Therefore, it is noted, toilets usually have a white color, "the color of gravestones, classical columns of mausoleums, that white porcelain's the very emblem of Odorless and Official Death" (688). Through abjection, the real corporeal mortality is sanitized into the "abstract-arty character with a scythe" (688), upper-case Death. Through its routinization into Death, corporeal death to white Western man can be related to something outside himself and thus safely disposed of (quite literally, in the toilet) as something that is not him. The contingency of life, death, is controlled through a metaphor that allows the white subject to erase its connection to the abject.

This western tendency, the argument about the connection between Shit and Shinola continues, also plays out in imperialism and racism. Colonialism and racism are part of a Western process of abjection, the white West's establishment of "its order of Analysis and

Death” (722) which oppresses and denies humanity to the non-white subjects “born the color of Shit’n’Shinola” (688). Since the West associates the abject with blackness, it oppresses other races in order to deny, and thereby transcend, its own mortality, establishing “death-colonies” (722; note the lower case death) as “the outhouses of the European soul” (317). The West denies humanity to its non-white colonial subjects, oppressing them as sub-human, since an acknowledgement of a shared humanity would result in a confrontation with everything abject and ‘black,’ feces, death, contingency, within white man. Therefore, since “Shinola polish happens to be the color of Shit,” African-Americans like the “[s]hoeshine boy Malcom[]” are equipped with the emblem of their “sin” (688). They are discriminated against, the novel proposes, for being reminders of the whites’ mortality.

In its Shit’n’Shinola section, *Gravity’s Rainbow* exemplarily lays out a form of analysis that allows for a revelation of reality. Nevertheless, shoeshine polish only “*happens* to be the color of Shit” (688; emphasis mine). The connections *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* reading of Shit’n’Shinola draws between corporeal mortality, imperialism and racism only reside in the language from which reality is constructed. They are not reflected in the relationship of actual objects, there truly being “no way for Shit and Shinola to coexist” (687), but are entirely associative within the contingent, Western mind. *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* argument therefore focuses on the toilet’s “white porcelain[]” functioning as “the very *emblem*” (688; emphasis mine) of “Odorless and Official Death” (688). The novel emphasizes metaphoric relations and not the causal relations of actual objects shown to be altogether unfathomable to the always-mediating consciousness. The connection of racism, abjection, and shoeshine hinges on the accidental, associative interrelation of these signs and their associations and not on any causal interconnection of the actual things these signs (appear to) represent.

Resemblance, not causality, is *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* structural principle behind insight into reality, and thereby also Pynchon’s novel. As Roger Mexico, the statistician seemingly serving as a stand-in for Pynchon, retorts to Pointsman’s totalizing belief in the “true mechanical explanation” (89) for all of reality,

there's a feeling about that cause-and-effect may have been taken as far as it will go.

That for science to carry on at all, it must look for a less narrow, a less... sterile set of assumptions. The next great breakthrough may come when we have the courage to junk cause-and-effect entirely, and strike off at some other angle. (89)

Gravity's Rainbow meets the *sterility* of causal relations, the systematizing and totalizing relation of cause and effect integral to modes of insight in both traditional science and the traditional novel, with a 'creative paranoia.' Leni Pökler summarizes the novel's postmodern approach to the revelation of interrelations in the world as follows: "Not produce, [...] not cause. It all goes along together. Parallel, not series. Metaphor. Signs and symptoms. Mapping on to different coordinate systems" (159). If reality, as *Gravity's Rainbow* shows, is a product of the "endlessly diddling play" (391) of language, cause-and-effect relations become only yet another trope to organize experience, but clearly not the only or 'realest' one. Causality insinuates a (as will be seen, topological) hierarchy shown to be illusory. It is wholly absent from the flat relations of signs and symptoms that actually structure experience. This hierarchy, brought to its logical conclusions, shows itself in the justification of oppression, racism and the totalitarian state. Hence, causality and structures like Joyce's superimposition may explain some things in the world. Clearly, *Gravity's Rainbow* does present some causal connections as causal. However, they are not the only trope through which reality can be constructed. Hence, for example Newtonian physics are more than enough if one wants to approximately calculate the flight path of a rocket. What the novel warns of is their consolidation into structures that not only approach a representation of the ultimately ungraspable but that appear to be inherent to reality. A creatively paranoid reading of reality's moirés must therefore always remain self-conscious of its provisionality. Just because the moirés the novel presents never become fully stable does not mean that their investigation, an act that is always playful, creative and provisional, cannot provide insight into a reality that is itself structured as a moiré that endlessly evades a final grasp.

Therefore, as the ghost of Walter Rathenau advises, one has to "follow the signs" (167) in order to gain insight into reality. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the "signs are real. They are also symptoms of a process. The process follows the same form, the same structure" (167). Since

perception is inevitably paranoid, interpretative, reality is always a product of discursive connections. However, as Hite remarks, “such relations are real properties of [the] world, not patterns [the] artistic sensibility has imposed” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 41). Processes of oppression such as racism are constituted by the interplay of signs in a specific discourse. They are not ingrained into the relationship of actual things. Instead, they (/They) gain their oppressive power entirely on the ‘flat’ level of signs and symptoms, signifiers relating to other signifiers in discourse without any link to a signified.

The “one place where Shit ‘n’ Shinola do come together” (688), that is, where they can be meaningfully mapped onto one another, is thus experience as filtered through language. *Gravity’s Rainbow* therefore marks the locus of revelatory superposition as doubly illusory and text-like. The incident “in the men’s toilet at the Roseland Ballroom, the place Slothrop departed from on his trip down the toilet” (688) is a drug-induced hallucination related much earlier in the novel. History is altogether illusory, a paranoid patterning like Slothrop’s drug-fueled “*history* in the Roseland toilet” (688; emphasis mine). As one can see, the novel does not distinguish between history and story. Both are processes that follow “the same form, the same structure” (167) as metaphors. To even further distance this place of insight from any relation to actual things, it is not only an American soldier’s hallucination, it is a transcript thereof, it being the (imagined) incident “as revealed in the St. Veronica Papers” (688). Doubly removed and mediated as a transcript of a hallucination, the “one place where Shit ‘n’ Shinola do come together” (688) to reveal a truth about American racism markedly lacks any relation to the real world.

This, however, does not make the racist processes revealed by the novel’s analysis any less real. A link to the actual world, as it is in itself illusory, is unnecessary for such a creatively paranoid insight into reality to occur. Insight is a random encounter with resemblances. The narrator thus muses, poignantly hypothetically:

It is nice to think that one Saturday night, one floor-shaking Lindyhopping Roseland night, Malcolm looked up from some Harvard kid’s shoes and caught the eye of Jack Kennedy (the Ambassador’s son), then a senior. Nice to think that young Jack may have

had one of them Immortal Lightbulbs then go on overhead—did Red suspend his ragpopping just the shadow of a beat, just enough gap in the moiré there to let white Jack see through, not through to but through *through* the shine on his classmate Tyrone Slothrop’s shoes? Were the three ever lined up that way—sitting, squatting, passing through? (688)

As the narrator’s hypothetical “nice to think” implies, the alignment that here opens up the moiré to allow insight into racism and abjection need not have a referent in history in order to be meaningful. As with the overall novel’s metafictional strategies in general, anachronisms and historical inaccuracies do not diminish the novel’s claim to such reality. Rather, such a creatively paranoid orchestration of an alignment of patterns provides the possibility of insight into the resemblances of these patterns. This is because such revelation is not inherently programmed into the actual relationship of things but product of the interpretation of the random moirés they form. Unlike in *Ulysses*, where the revelatory parallactic meeting of Stephen and Bloom in ‘Ithaca’ coincides with the alignment of the stars above them, implying a causal, if esoteric, relationship between the celestial constellations at Shakespeare’s, Bloom’s and Stephen’s birth and the earthly meeting of two Dubliners – or at least art’s ability to inject such meaning into the real world –, the alignment of Malcom X, Jack Kennedy, and Tyrone Slothrop, all “lined up” (688) in the Roseland Ballroom’s toilet, is purely accidental, probably only hypothetical (and, since Slothrop is not a real person, definitely fictional) and thus illusory. Nevertheless, these figures can be brought together so as to allow for a superposition of Whiteness, abjection, racism, and shoepolish. Pure chance, rather than destiny, can bring these patterns together to produce insight and open a “gap in the moiré” (688) that otherwise entangles the individual.

Rather than synthetically converging binary opposites into a *whole* by tracing them to an original unity the way Joyce’s stereoscopic superimposition does, the mode of superposition *Gravity’s Rainbow* proposes creates a *hole* in the moiré. The moiré represents an ever-metastasizing more and more complex System that, as the individual constructs it, increasingly controls and oppresses the individual. However, a flat vision of the moiré as moiré allows for a discernment of reality. The novel thus distinguishes between two modes of vision, seeing

“through to” and seeing “through *through*” (688). Seeing ‘through to’ implies the Joycean mode of depth perception. Stereoscopy as a metaphor for synthesis is seeing *through* the apparent contingencies of experience to an underlying, ‘deep’ unity, the “orders behind the visible” (188). Such a Joycean vision must therefore view the System and its oppressiveness as ingrained into the deep structure of actual things, thereby not only leaving little hope to change them but in fact consolidating and justifying social injustice. Seeing ‘through *through*,’ on the other hand, implies a postmodernist flatness that apprehends the *moiré qua moiré*.

Indeed, the words the novel uses to describe the workings of the *moiré* as providing an access to reality also themselves form one of the novel’s interlayering *moirés*. Hence, in the expression “through *through*,” two patterns or meanings are superposed in order to reveal a third which does not inhere in any of the original ones. The *moiré* of “through *through*” already becomes apparent on the level of visuality: if one were to project the couple onto one another, one italicized, the other not, the resulting image would not be clear but blurred. Furthermore, although the mapping of the two selfsame yet different terms appears to produce a relatively understandable meaning – seeing through *through* the *moiré* means to comprehend it as a ruse – its meaning in fact proves to be uncontainable yet at the same time each additional layer seems to both fit and change preceding interpretations of the expression. Hence, on the one hand, the double ‘through’ can be understood, like ‘ass backwards,’ as an intensification that highlights the act of seeing *through*, and thus flatly looking at and apprehending, something as opposed to the depth perception of seeing ‘through to.’ At the same time, however, the meaning expands as one reads “the shine on his classmate Tyrone Slothrop’s shoes” (688) as the vehicle *through* which Jack Kennedy could have ascertained, seen through, the reality of racism in the US. This interlayering can be continued indefinitely. What is important is that, despite the *moiré*’s inherently unfinished and evolving condition, it provides an aesthetic through which reality can be meaningfully perceived. This perception may never be complete and total. However, since reality itself is understood by the novel as an incomplete and open system, this does not

diminish the usefulness of a playful and associative investigation of the moiré for revelation as well as *Gravity's Rainbow's* epic project.¹¹⁸

Joycean stereoscopic superimposition is thus substituted by *Gravity's Rainbow's* alternative, depthless mode of superposing patterns into moirés in order to apprehend reality. Therefore, to *Gravity's Rainbow* no measure of modernist eye-straining to discern a deep, underlying original unity can contain and understand the play of language that produces reality. *Insight* and revelation bespeak a misguided, topographical vision of truth as a concisely determinable structure *underlying* the contingencies of perception. Meaningful knowledge of reality is not hidden underneath but lies open in the surface of discursive relations. Thus, already in the novel's opening, the description of a confusing, subterranean holocaust without escape is significantly interrupted, and the novel's action segued into, by the response to the question "[w]ill the light come before or after?" (4): "*But it is already light*" (4).

Reality in *Gravity's Rainbow* thereby resembles a *moiré*, an ever-productive overlaying of patterns without recourse to any original, underlying structure ingrained into the causal connections of actual objects. Creatively superposing, or 'mapping,' such patterns can reveal the resemblances that structure the world through a self-consciously interpretative act. *Gravity's Rainbow's* proposed investigation of the moiré thus remains on the level of "Signs and symptoms" (159). Probing these signs and their relation to yet other signs affords no primacy or hierarchy to any pattern in the moiré. *Gravity's Rainbow's* proposed mode of understanding the world is thus a mode of "rid[ing] the interface" (731) rather than probing its (absent) depths.

Any meaningful knowledge of reality is therefore never a finished product but an always-provisional, unending process. Leni thus elliptically concedes at the end of her explanation of the real connections in the world being metaphors "I don't know..." and the narrator comments "She didn't know, all she was trying to do was reach" (159). Knowledge in *Gravity's Rainbow* can only be an act of reaching out. Since connections in language are ever-

¹¹⁸Indeed, if one were so inclined as to be more creatively paranoid than need be, Säure's faux-dialectical associations about Shit'n'Shinola, too, map onto *Gravity's Rainbow's* analysis of the expression. Säure's associations of Shit'n'Shinola with bourgeois mannerisms ("Schitt, Herr Bummer" (687)) and death by guillotine, both the state's method to control and sanitize itself of its unwanted, criminal elements and the symbol of revolutionary uprising, such a state tries to defend itself from, as well as the Western rationalism of the (Nazi-)universitarian 'Schein-Aula' that gave rise to imperialism can ultimately, creatively, be made to fit the moiré-pattern of Shit'n'Shinola. This revelation, however, is not one that appears through parallax but instead creatively utilizes resemblances.

creative, a probing of the infinite moiré of interconnected meanings and associations can and will never hit rock-bottom. Therefore, *Gravity's Rainbow*, similarly, can produce insightful interpretations such as the one(s) presented in this study, yet rejects any final, total interpretation. The novel marks its response to *Ulysses* by most explicitly staging its mode of gaining insight by mapping patterns onto another, reminiscent of yet fundamentally different from Joyce's parallax, in a section that clearly recalls Joyce's parallax-scene in 'Ithaca.' Both *Gravity's Rainbow's* moiré in the Shit'n'Shinola section and the parallaxic convergence of Stephen and Bloom as represented in their crossing urine-streams thus mobilize similar excremental sceneries and remarks on specific alignments of 'stars' that happen in 'Irish' cities. However, while the resulting stereoscopy of *Ulysses* in 'Ithaca' implies a transcendental order revealed in depth perception, *Gravity's Rainbow's* metaphor of the moiré presents insight as an acknowledgement of the depthless surface resemblances of 'signs and symptoms.' *Gravity's Rainbow* thus retains the Joycean pattern of 'mapping' or overlaying patterns, yet its use of the moiré reinterprets this pattern from a mode of superimposition into a mode of superposition.

Resistance: Strategic Interferences and the Counterforce

Revelation is always provisional and local. It is a continuing process of reaching out, following the resemblances of signs that are revealed by the acknowledgement of random, not causally motivated, interfaces of patterns. However, *Gravity's Rainbow* is not content with simply mapping the System's oppressiveness. The novel's celebration of randomness in the moiré as providing the possibility of insight also bears the potential of resistance to and liberation from dominating structures. Indeed, more often than not random chance, not intricate plotting, allows the novel's hunted characters an escape from the System's henchmen. As the narrator remarks, only accident can save the individual, events happening "at real random" being "something beyond Their grasp" (586). Slothrop thus for example evades castration at the hands of Pointsman not through his own design but through what is marked as pure accident. Escape from the "orders" (608) that threaten the individual is not a product of counterplots or any discernible destiny but that of confusion and chaos. Liberation is attained through succumbing to the randomness of a moiré-world as Slothrop decides that "this network of all plots may yet

carry him to freedom” and, without further cause, “ride[s] [...] their kind underground awhile, see where it takes him” (603).

Similarly, the moiré’s potential for liberation also becomes apparent in Slothrop’s disintegration. Opening the novel’s fourth part titled ‘The Counterforce,’ Slothrop’s dissolution into “a living intersection” (625), in a way the acknowledgment that he himself is nothing but a character moiré,¹¹⁹ an interference pattern of discursive roles without a stable, original center, exemplifies how a liberation from the System can be achieved. Resistance to the System is not achieved by a counterplotting or disentangling of the structures that define and control the individual but through overcharging them. The System’s patterns are overdetermined to the point that the structuring, paranoid intellect must succumb to the apparent over-complexity of the moiré, unable to impose order onto the moiré, thereby recognizing the moiré qua moiré. As already discussed, Slothrop’s liberating disintegration is closely linked to such a recognition of the moiré: “Crosses, swastikas, Zone-mandalas, how can they not speak to Slothrop? He’s sat in Säure Bummer’s kitchen, the air streaming with *kif moirés*, reading soup recipes and finding in every bone and cabbage leaf paraphrases of himself” (625; emphasis mine). Patterns abound in excess around Slothrop. Notably, Slothrop’s paranoid connectedness is supercharged through the effects of drugs. As in the Roseland hallucinations of the Shit’n’Shinola section, psychedelic drugs can have a revelatory and liberating effect. However, they do so less in the sense of an esoteric drug-induced epiphany of a transcendent order than in their capability of creating even more kaleidoscopic “kif moirés” (625) than the paranoid consciousness usually does.¹²⁰ Slothrop is so intoxicated and paranoid, the drug quasi supercharging the paranoid pattern-making intellect, he begins to find relations to himself in even the most miniscule and irrelevant details of his environment. Säure’s kif, an ultra-potent cannabis product, creates an unmanageable excess of moirés. Slothrop is now no longer able to “make it all fit” (626) into a coherent structure. With no recourse to consoling paranoid meaning, Slothrop is forced to

¹¹⁹ Though Thomas Moore’s *The Style of Connectedness* also uses this term, his investigation of the use of moirés in *Gravity’s Rainbow* unfortunately remains superficial. Moore employs the term moiré, insightfully, as a more apt term for ‘structure’ or ‘pattern’ when talking about *Gravity’s Rainbow*. However, Moore never goes into the depths of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s visual metaphor, nor does he do so much as give a definition of the term moiré, despite giving one of his chapters the title “Character Moires [sic] in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” (Moore 63).

¹²⁰ Timothy Leary’s *The Psychedelic Experience* and *The Politics of Ecstasy* describe the revelatory effect of LSD in a similar manner.

confront the moiré-like nature of reality and of the subject therein. He thus assumes the position of “a living intersection” (625) as an acknowledgement of the self as moiré, a living thing created from interferences and interfaces. Slothrop is thus liberated by untenably excessive patterns that open up a gap in the moiré as, as Thomas Schaub argues, the idea of “self as consciousness and memory” is replaced with “self as *intersection*” (Schaub 50). Slothrop can begin “feeling natural” (626) once he dissolves from a seemingly, yet untenably, coherent subject into a moiré of intersections.

Such a liberation through the cultivation of an excess of random patterns in *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, is, despite its aspects of submission, not one of inward-bent passivity. On the contrary, the moiré in *Gravity's Rainbow* offers a clear theory of agency. *Gravity's Rainbow*, and its position in the Ulyssean Tradition, cannot be exclusively understood as a reaction against literary modernism. True, as much of the preceding argument might have seemed to imply, *Gravity's Rainbow* responds to and critiques modernist practices. However, the novel merges its aesthetics with a call to political action. Pynchon's reshaping of the Ulyssean Tradition is thereby also motivated by his own situatedness in the countercultural 60s and 70s. The post-modernist aesthetics of *Gravity's Rainbow* are thereby always also an aesthetics of resistance and action. As Joanna Freer remarks in her study of *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture*, “[m]any of the postmodern literary techniques employed in Pynchon's work [...] are [...] motivated primarily by countercultural values” (Freer 6). Put somewhat polemically, *Gravity's Rainbow* as a ‘postmodernist *Ulysses*’ is naturally also a ‘countercultural *Ulysses*.’

In the novel's fourth and final part, a Counterforce, composed of some of the novel's more likeable, preterite characters, emerges to oppose Their System. Roger Mexico, disillusioned by the seeming impotence of love to prevail against Their rational System¹²¹ as Jessica calls off their affair after the war ends and returns to her fiancé, a representative of Them, thereby practically joining Them and consolidating Their rational status quo, drops out from the White Visitation and joins the Counterforce. In order to become a Counterforce to the

¹²¹ As Leo Bersani notes, Roger's and Jessica's romance appears as a viable “withdrawal” (41) from Their reach (“They are in love. Fuck the war” (42)), representing one of the “appealing alternatives that *Gravity's Rainbow* offers to its own paranoically conceived apocalypses” (Bersani 103).

Force of Their oppressions and manipulations, *Gravity's Rainbow's* resistance fighters form a communal We-system against the status quo of the They-system. As could be shown, some form of structure, and thus some form of paranoia, is necessary for the individual to prevail. As Charles Russel remarks, "to do war with the System, the Counterforce must itself be a system of sorts" (Russell 266). Such a We-system is not less paranoid than Them yet it represents the only mode of resistance possible. In contrast to the They-system, however, the Counterforce's We-systems employ a self-conscious, creative form of paranoia that, as will be shown, closely resembles the novel's own strategies for insight, resistance, and liberation.

As Katje speculates, poignantly messaged by the Counterforce through Their own medium, film, "[d]ialectically, sooner or later, some counterforce would have had to arise [...] even with all the power on the other side" (536). However, the novel takes great care not to describe They- and We-system as a simple Manichean dualism. The Counterforce is, necessarily, still "playing Their game" (638). Paranoia not only being the default but in fact the only mode of experiencing reality, systematization is necessary to remain operational. The difference between the creative paranoia of the We-system and the paranoid They-system, and therefore its liberating potential, lies not in such a system's improved accuracy to represent the real world but in the awareness of every system's relativity and incompleteness. While the They-system cements oppression by implying its delusions to be reflections of a deep, underlying structure of causality, creative paranoia operates from the "expediency" (638) yet concurrent relativity of binaries. They-systems are thus explained to also be

what They and Their hired psychiatrists call 'delusional systems'. Needless to say, 'delusions' are always officially defined. We don't have to worry about questions of real or unreal. They only talk out of expediency. It's the *system* that matters. How the data arrange themselves inside it. Some are consistent, others fall apart. (638)

As could be shown, if reality is based in the structural principle of metaphors, "real or unreal," that is whether a given system coherently reflects causal relations, is wholly irrelevant. Every system is a 'delusional system.' This paranoid systematization being inescapable, challenging the powers that be means challenging Their definitory power over what is "officially defined"

(638) as real. Resistance thus lies in a rearrangement of the data of experience into a “contrary set of delusions” (638), the questioning of authority through an acute awareness of language.

Gravity's Rainbow's treatment of reality as a moiré, paranoid and depthless yet not less ‘real’ than causal connections, as its version of Joycean stereoscopic superimposition not only implies an alternative mode of knowledge and (individual) liberation in theory but also (counterculturally) lays out a practical course of action for resisting and disrupting the System. The novel’s Counterforce, whose resistance tactics reverberate in the novel’s own fictional strategies, counters the System by cultivating an excess of interference patterns, moirés, in order to explode the System’s rationalizations from within itself. The Counterforce, and *Gravity's Rainbow*, value irrationality and absurdism, performative spontaneity, and a creative aestheticization of political resistance. Through these strategies, the System is overcharged into a liberating feedback loop that lays open the moiré-like nature of reality as it disrupts and makes increasingly untenable the rational systematization that has become a tool of repression. The aesthetics of *Gravity's Rainbow's* reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition are thus also deeply political in the novel’s stressing of performance and aesthetics as concrete political action and fun, intoxication and unproductiveness as subversive and liberating. Pynchon’s abstract critique of language and modernism thereby also draws practical conclusions for the shape of political dissent and the role literature plays therein. Like the graffiti which appear in *Gravity's Rainbow's* Weimar Germany, *Gravity's Rainbow* is a text that is “revealed in order to be thought about, expanded on, translated into action by the people” (155).

Symbolic Politics

In their approach to the System’s oppression as a function of the endlessly shimmering play of language’s moirés and the structures of knowledge they legitimate and seemingly naturalize, the Counterforce, somewhat anachronistically, and *Gravity's Rainbow* itself, very much fitting a novel of the countercultural US 60s and 70s, describe a turn from ‘real’ politics to ‘symbolic’ politics (McCann and Szalay 436). Oppression shown to be based in the ways reality is conventionally narrativized, art in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and, in a wider sense, its Counterforce’s stunts, serves not only as a means to represent but becomes in itself a political act. Bespeaking

an awareness of the power of signs and the potential for resistance and social change within the absurd and ineffectual, *Gravity's Rainbow* proposes a cultivation of absurdist discourses as a means of resistance. Hence, whereas Joyce's funniness and triviality serves to represent modern life in totality, its serious and banal moments equally incorporated in a jocoserious aesthetic, *Gravity's Rainbow* employs a politics of aestheticization that collapses the symbolic with direct action. The Counterforce's, and the novel's own, strategies are thus aptly summarized by Abbie Hoffman's statement about the goals of the countercultural Yippies he founded: "It's all in terms of disrupting the image, the image of a democratic society being run very peacefully and orderly and everything according to business" (Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* 143).

Playfulness is therefore central to the strategies of resistance *Gravity's Rainbow* presents primarily through its Counterforce. Counterforce stunts, and, since they are narrated in the novel with an unambiguous sympathy striking for a novel that is otherwise notoriously inconclusive, un-didactic and reluctant toward clear value statements, *Gravity's Rainbow's* aesthetic, denote an absurdist ineffectuality and the use of obscene aesthetics, rather than conventional calls for political action, as a disruptive measure. This semiotic guerilla warfare can for instance be seen in the scene in which Mexico and Bodine disrupt a formal dinner party sponsored by one of Them not through conventional direct action but an excess of obscene word play. Finding themselves at the heart of the military-industrial-complex at the "Krupp wingding" (711), an immensely structured, "priestly procession, full of secret gestures and understandings" and "very elaborate meal" (713), Mexico and Bodine subversively disrupt Their event by staging a 'grossout session,' an increasingly disgusting verbal duel. The Counterforce attacks the order of Their paranoid vision through a 'flat' play that shows itself in the visual and the symbolic. On the one hand, the Counterforce members here are clad in "a subversive garment," a "not suit-blue, no – really BLUE: *paint*-blue" zoot-suit that "haunts the peripheral vision, making decent small-talk impossible" (710), that is a garment which in its depthlessness of color, as if painted on, frustrates the paranoid, stereoscopic vision and disrupts the normal, naturalized flow of discourse. Parallely, they also subvert the event's structure with their "*wits*" (710), requesting a cacophony of playful non-menu items. Hallucinating that *they* will be the ominous "surprise roast" (714), i.e., sensing the danger of being coopted into the

(menu's) System and (quite literally) devoured by it, at the utterance of the "code word" (714) 'ketchup' Mexico and Bodine begin a game of obscene alliterative requests. While some of the attendants joyfully join the grossout word play requests for items like "*snot soup*," "*pus pudding*" or "*discharge dumplings*," the Counterforce's "repulsive stratagem" crashes the party's intricate system, leaving the "well-bred gagging" and "spewing a long crescent of lumpy beige vomit" (715). By creatively expanding the event's order with unconventional requests that at once both fit, though absurd, the menu-genre and, e.g., through alliteration, highlight its linguistic construction, the two can disrupt the dinner and evade what is on the menu for them, i.e., being inscribed into Their System. The vulgar, nonsensical play with language, an absurd humor that summons the abject, disrupts Their plot to devour Bodine and Mexico as now a "general loss of appetite reigns" and the "flames in the pit" over which the pair was to be metaphorically killed, "have dwindled" (716). To the accompaniment of a kazoo band, now defected from the structured Haydn, the "Disgusting Duo" are able to make their "escape" with the help of the "last black butler," an escape that is, however, qualified as an always-provisional "[e]scape tonight" (717). While Herman and Weisenburger read this scene as ultimately a critique of countercultural guerilla theater (Herman and Weisenburger 61), the Counterforce here actually escapes from a very real danger revealed in creatively paranoid hallucinations. Judging from the chaos the two leave behind, *Gravity's Rainbow* presents such absurdist ineffectuality as in fact very effectively interfering with the System's doings. Not only do such stunts effectively disrupt the status-quo discourse, they are also shown to effectively recruit more dissenters.

Constructed as a countercultural "politics of display" (Gitlin 233), the Counterforce mirrors the novel's overall use of irony in the self-consciously ineffectual and, importantly, self-directed nature of their non-violent actions. Thus, an 'attack' on Jeremy, Roger's rival and representative of Them, plays out as "two unemployed Augustes leap out in white face and working-clothes, and commence belting each other with gigantic (7 or 8 feet long) foam rubber penises, cunningly detailed, all in natural color" (708). This group of circus-'freaks' – another countercultural self-identifier the novel applies to not only the countercultural figures beleaguering Richard Nixon but also to insurgents such as Slothrop and the Counterforce –

confronts Them not through direct attack but by putting up “shows” (708) in which they “disarm, de-penis and dismantle the Man” (712) by “belting each other” (708). Like countercultural performers such as the Yippies, the Counterforce resemble a theater group with “giant rubber cocks [...] as part of the arsenal,” props, that travel Germany, such theater work being “a fine source of spare change,” as “multitudes will gather at the edges of these north German villages to watch the two zanies whack away” (708). The Counterforce subversively employs Their emblems, the “phancy phalli” (708) of the troupe recalling Their phallocentrism apparent in the phallic Rocket. Resistance, for Counterforce and the (very funny) novel alike, is an aesthetic enterprise aiming for “a lot of laughter” (708).

Subversive Fun

Such “laughter” (708), fun and pleasure, in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is presented as a safeguard against Their influence. Indeed, Molly Hite is correct when she notices that Abbie Hoffman’s observation about the Yippies at the Chicago Eight trial that

fun was very important [...] it was a direct rebuttal of the kind of ethics and morals that were being put forth in the country to keep people working in a rat race which didn’t make any sense because in a few years [...] machines would do all the work anyway, [...] fun actually was becoming quite subversive (Hoffman, “Testimony of Abbie Hoffman”)

could just as well be taken from Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (Hite, “Fun” 677). Fun is integral to *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s dismantling of the abject practices of “the disciplinary aims of social control” (Hite, “Fun” 678). In the novel, pleasure and unproductivity become subversive forces in the service of a new, freer society.

As Hite shows, *Gravity’s Rainbow* particularly draws its revaluation of pleasure as subversive and liberating political action from Herbert Marcuse’s 1955 *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, which, at least as early as its republication with a “political preface” in 1966, had been “one of the core texts of the New Left” (Hite, “Fun” 679). In his synthesis of Freud and Marx, Marcuse develops the idea that in Western culture an unchecked repression of the pleasure principle due to the reality principle leads into uninhibited progress

towards its own destruction. The West's unhinged urge for productivity and technological progress and its repression of desire, formerly necessary but now, with survival being almost ensured by technology, obviated, drives it into nuclear overkill. The pleasure principle (Eros, the life principle, the urge toward immediate and complete gratification of desires) has to fall under the reality principle out of necessity for survival. Since the desire for immediate and complete pleasure is antisocial and destructive, it has to be deferred or altogether repressed in order to ensure survival in a world shaped by material lack. The subject emerges as the pleasure principle is deferred to necessity and the control of societal organization. For Marcuse, in the West this reality principle takes the historically contingent shape of the performance principle. Western culture under the performance principle seeks to detach from and control nature, that is *transcend* the pleasure principle and perpetually continue progress.

However, even though originally necessary for survival, the West's performance principle is unable to cede and allow for pleasure even when survival is assured. Pleasure being continually repressed and withheld, the West is fully taken over by the second primary instinct known to Freud, Thanatos or the death drive. As related in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Western civilization is "in love, in sexual love, with [its] [...] death" (738). Marcuse sees his time as in a singular historical position where technological progress would make a leisure society in which the pleasure principle would not have to be subordinated to a reality principle in order to survive feasible. However, although automation should create a surplus production that allows citizens to live out their pleasure principle, Western (post)industrial society continues its productivity principle, instead requiring "surplus-repression" (Marcuse 38), more repression than is necessary to survive. The need for productivity is artificially perpetuated and societal restrictions on pleasure become increasingly dominating and arbitrary. As in *Gravity's Rainbow's* 'They,' technology according to Marcuse almost takes on a life of its own in the shape of a "sublime [...] administration" that "appear[s] as the ultimate guarantor [...] of liberty" (Marcuse 91–92) due to its repression of desire yet actually serves ever-growing domination and control of others. Pleasure and *unproductivity* in a society poised to produce itself to death to Marcuse become subversive instruments toward the making of a freer society. In a postscarcity society that has the pleasure principle in place of its reality principle, what little

work is left could gain the character of play, ending the destructive cycles of control and domination. Marcuse thus remarks that “[t]oday the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the *political fight*” (Marcuse xxv).

This potential of “mindless pleasures,” to cite the original title of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, to resist and escape from an impersonal, death-driven System that seeks to control and dominate the individual also characterizes *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s aesthetics of resistance. Pleasure and intoxication create the strategic interferences, the excess of moirés, the Counterforce employs to counter Their rationalized structures favoring death with. This can for example be seen when in the ‘Counterforce’ part of the novel Džabajev, the former associate of Tchitcherine now travelling the Zone on his own, observes how a troupe of “[v]illage idiots from villages throughout Germany are streaming in” to “celebrate” drunk on “Maitrinke” and form “[a]nother State [...] in the night” (743), a state of fools or We-system against Their State. Acting “not without theatre and festivity” (743) and seeking to form a new, countercultural State, these “village idiots” (743) can be seen as the Counterforce currently operating in the Zone. The role of pleasure and playfulness as a mode of resistance against Their rationalized state through the cultivation of moirés becomes apparent as the narrative voice comments on these Slothrop-like ‘holy fools’ of the Counterforce: “Let their holiness ripple into interference-patterns till it clog the lantern-light of the meeting hall” (743). Irrationality and excessive intoxication, pleasure, can create the “interference-patterns” (743), that is, the overabundance of moirés, that wards off the oppressive rational ‘light’ of Their organization. As one can see, pleasure in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is seen as subversive. It produces the interference or ‘noise’ that drowns out or “clog[s]” (743) the rational performance principle that oppresses the individual in the System. This new Counterforce State of fools, “forming in the night” (743) of irrational pleasure and excess rather than under the daylight of enlightened rationalization, is strongly reminiscent of the society of leisure Marcuse and the counterculture envision. Such a liberated society, with pleasure as its reality principle, can resist Their controlling influence.

The novel therefore remarks that “a wine rush is defying gravity” (743). Gravity, as Hite notes one of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s primary metaphors for the “tendency of the performance principle to fall into service of the death drive” (Hite, “Fun” 684), is reversed through

intoxication. Throughout the novel, gravity fails to be overcome by the repressed West's efforts to rationalize and transcend, each V-2 rocket as an emblem of technological progress toward death finally having to end its parabolic ascent and succumb to gravity. Only in embracing Eros, intoxication, absurdity, unproductiveness and love¹²² can the gravity of the System, its seriousness, be subverted into play.

Like the Counterforce, the novel itself indulges in absurd slapstick performances, inconclusiveness, and confusing fun. While Their System is founded on those who seek to transcend death and the System through rationalization, death, and with it a System, is inevitable and inescapable. The only way to resist and liberate oneself from this death-in-life is through an embrace of the absurdity of corporeal mortality, a 'weird death,' in a life-in-death. As can be seen in the maxim of "[d]ying a weird death" as the "object of life" (742), such a 'weird' position of resistance challenges the binary of death and life from which all other oppressive binaries – O/1, existence/nonexistence, cause/effect, plot/delusion, thesis/antithesis etc. – stem. As already noted, Blicero's bleak Death for instance is a product of an attempt to erase and control mortality by sublimating it into the binary opposite of life. The abject is sanitized into "Death the Impersonator" (167), a capitalized Death that appears in various roles from the Grim Reaper to the Bleacher. Thereby, the real presence of death in the subject, the abject, is obfuscated and moved to an outside entity. Such attempts at controlling the incommensurable contingency of death, however, are never absolute, leading, as the novel shows, into more death and destruction. Thus, rather than evading death by sublimating it as the binary opposite of life, leading a life that does not so much repress mortality as it allows for its

¹²² As already touched upon in an earlier chapter, love is a central mode of liberation in the novel that places *Gravity's Rainbow* in the context of the 1960s. Freer extensively covers the countercultural import of love as liberation in *Gravity's Rainbow*. She thus comments on "the redemptive, recuperative power of love" (Freer 53) in *Gravity's Rainbow* and its political links to the counterculture's idealization of love, distinguishing between a politically effective, self-aware and independent "real love for others (or what might be called 'revolutionary love') and capitalist 'pornographies of love.'" (Freer 50). Love, like the intoxicating pleasures presented here, creates a playful excess of meaning producing the disruptive interference patterns of resistance since "[i]n love, words can be taken too many ways" (220). This too-much-ness, as could be shown, opens up a gap in the moiré and thus allows for liberation. See also Magda Majewska's *Lust und Limit: Der postmoderne Roman und die sexuelle Befreiungsbewegung in den USA* for a reading of love in *Gravity's Rainbow* that links the novel to the counterculture and stresses both sexuality in particular and the role of Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown even more than Freer already does.

absurdity to be seen as an inevitable part of life is, the novel seems to argue, the only way to truly live.

Absurd humor challenges the binary opposition of death and life in an embrace of contingency. Thus, while the System's Grim Reaper is imbued with solemn gravity, depictions of corporeal death in *Gravity's Rainbow* are marked by connotations with absurd humor and laughter such as when the victims of a Nazi death camp are described with "lips stretched back into death-grins, a whole silent audience caught at the punch line of the joke" (432). This, however, does not mean that *Gravity's Rainbow* makes fun of the Holocaust. Absurdity rather entails a subversion of the rational structures that give rise to such atrocities by reflecting an embrace of the abject "death-smile" (272). Resistance to the System's rationality in an embrace of the absurd and contingent means an embrace of corporeal mortality as part of life. Thus, while the System's sublimation of Death leads into sterility, creativity and life are linked to the absurd humor of corporeal mortality. In the novel's "green uprising" (720), death provides the potential of rejuvenation and positive change. *Gravity's Rainbow* is therefore replete with instances of the absurd and funny. From the Counterforce's stunts to humorously overblown acronyms, Slothrop's slapstick adventures and people slipping on banana peels – the absolute classic of slapstick humor – and puns like the one on "Forty million Frenchmen can't be wrong" which the novel takes pages to set up for apparently no other reason than making the joke (559), the novel is heavily invested in making light of its gravity and those becoming itself a counterforce to the System's downward-pull.

Critique of Hedonism

Nevertheless, despite its championship of ineffectual play for its own sake as a liberating mode of resistance, *Gravity's Rainbow* warns of unreflected hedonism and escapism. The egalitarian play of moirés, the novel admonishes, must remain a constant, political process rather than a goal that can be attained for the individual. As the countercultural figure and LSD-advocate Timothy Leary remarks, "the science and discipline of ecstasy is probably *the* most demanding yoga that I can think of" (Leary 195). The act of 'dropping out' from the System through a gap in the moiré necessarily has to include political and social consequences as its final step for

Gravity's Rainbow. *Gravity's Rainbow's* criticism of a “politically detrimental escapism or hedonism” (Freer 162) that externalizes, and thus codifies, the fundamentally internal and process-like migratoriness of liberation also becomes apparent in the Counterforce’s ambivalent stance towards Slothrop and the meaning of his disintegration. On the one hand, Slothrop’s disintegration and liberation are the central founding moment for the Counterforce. The Counterforce bands together at first as a rescue mission for Slothrop. Slothrop has become a Counterforce legend, “a good guy after all” (619), and a “pretext” (738) for the formation of the Counterforce. Cowart thus notes that “Slothrop’s scattering seems to fructify the Counterforce” (Cowart, *The Art of Allusion* 47). As “one plucked albatross” (712), Slothrop becomes a kind of mascot of a Counterforce that opposes the Man whose “emblem is a white albatross” (712-713). Although Slothrop himself is never a member of the Counterforce, his fate serves as the movement’s “rallying-point” (738), not only because all of its members are in some way involved in selling him out to Them, but also because “the story about Tyrone Slothrop, who was sent into the Zone to be present at his own assembly [but was] broken down instead, and scattered” (738) sets a precedent to the Counterforce’s act of rebellion. Slothrop shows that Their power is far from absolute and that Their plans can be crossed through the cultivation of interferences. Indeed, Slothrop himself is not what the Counterforce is about and the impossibility of finally retrieving him already shows how the act of resistance can never fully be concluded. Rather, Slothrop, the potential of resistance and liberation he denotes, is present “in spirit” (712) at the Counterforce stunts and Mexico is unwilling “to give him up” (627).

Slothrop’s disintegration forms a nucleus for the Counterforce’s We-system. A spokesman of the Counterforce thus later remarks, rejecting the still too definite definition of Slothrop as a “rallying-point,” that the Counterforce was “never concerned with Slothrop *qua* Slothrop” (738). In fact, the interpretation of Slothrop’s dispersion is one of their “fatal weaknesses,” the spokesman commenting that “[s]ome called him a ‘pretext.’ Others felt that he was a genuine, point-for-point microcosm” (738). Such “Microcosmists” (738) are then guilty of again consolidating the We-system into a structure with Slothrop at its center, a weakness the novel evades by continuing without its central character, Pynchon perpetually “stressing the danger of putting too much trust in any one source” (Freer 72).

On the other hand, then, Slothrop is also the primary “heretic[]” (738) of the Counterforce. Though Slothrop’s liberation is real, setting a precedent for the Counterforce’s strategic interferences, Slothrop is also criticized for breaking with the Counterforce’s political ethos. The Counterforce ‘heresy’ that emanates from Slothrop can be seen as Slothrop’s failure to translate the personal liberation of his dispersion into political action. Slothrop fails to follow up his personal ‘dropping-out’ with the political dimension Pynchon views as its integral consequence. Like the later counterculture’s fall into hedonism and escapism, Slothrop’s dispersion is criticized for lacking the drive toward social change. When Slothrop disintegrates, he drops out from the System of Western society and dissolves into ‘nature.’ Earlier in the novel, Slothrop is already beginning to lose his controlling grip on his Ego and wanders peacefully in a natural environment as he “spend[s] time touching [trees], studying them, sitting very quietly near them and understanding that each tree is a creature” (552). Not yet fully ‘plucked,’ Slothrop has nevertheless begun to shed his disguises and “strip[] all the insignia off [his borrowed] uniform” (551). His environment already becomes “haunted” (552), ‘haunting’ being one of the novel’s terms for a psychedelic experience-like realization of the constructedness of reality, as he verges toward dissolution. Moving toward a natural state, Slothrop becomes “intensely alert to trees, finally” (552). He thus becomes able to recognize the perverse death-drive of rational Western society, noting that “[t]here’s insanity in my family” (553). However, not yet liberated and given the potential of agency through his later scattering, Slothrop feels the pre-determining control of history. He thus professes to the surrounding trees: “I can’t do anything about those people, they’re all out of my reach. What can I do?,” to which one tree replies “Next time you come across a logging operation out here, find one of their tractors that isn’t being guarded, and take its oil filter with you. That’s what you can do” (553). Slothrop, however, even when he is liberated and invested with agency does never follow through on this advice. His union with nature, “feeling natural” (626), is never followed by the appropriate political action. Instead, Slothrop fades out of the novel, here and there appearing as a harmonica player but never becoming politically active like the Counterforce his disintegration gives rise to. What the novel’s decentering aesthetics necessitates, the novel denying itself closure and a central character, is at the same time criticized for being an act of

apolitical escapism. Slothrop thereby becomes a highly ambivalent figure. On the one hand, he exemplifies the potential for liberation and resistance the novel strives toward. On the other hand, Slothrop's political sterility entails a criticism of the novel's own aesthetic. Creative paranoia can disrupt the System's control and create an overflow of *moirés* that liberates the individual. Such We-systems, however, are in constant danger of reverting to a totalizing, paranoid vision if they lose, or fail to realize, their sociopolitical dimension. Slothrop thereby contains both the high hopes of the countercultural resistance the novel proposes as well as the possibility of its failure.

White Noise

The Counterforce's liberating potential must therefore not be understood as simply providing counternarratives to the officially defined delusions. The We-system's "delusions about ourselves" (638) are necessary to provide some order and keep Them from manipulating our lives yet must not be naturalized themselves. The question "if this is a 'We-system,' why isn't it at least thoughtful enough to interlock in a reasonable way, like They-systems do?" (638) approaches resistance from a misguided angle. As the continuity of oppression *Gravity's Rainbow* draws from Nazi-Germany to the Allies and the novel's contemporary US shows, it is not primarily any specific system that brings forth control and domination. It is total systematization itself, no matter what the specific all-determining structure may be, that *Gravity's Rainbow* opposes as life-denying. The Counterforce member Osbie therefore responds, "*They're* the rational ones. We piss on Their rational arrangements" (639) – which is, literally, what Roger Mexico does when he submits his resignation from the Firm by urinating onto the Firm's conference table (636). A mode of resistance, as the Counterforce and the novel's aesthetics in general outline, does not need to, nor should it, construct a We-system whose intricacy can measure up with or even surpasses the dominant discourse. Instead, irrationality, absurdism and spontaneity, improvisation and randomness, are presented as the only viable methods for disrupting the System. Deliberately random irrational behavior that resists containment and regular intelligibility can produce interference patterns that cause the System to collapse under its own load.

Gravity's Rainbow describes an entropic tendency in Western culture toward the total, rational accountability of all events. The System resembles an increasingly sophisticated and accurate, fine-tuned scientific measuring device. However, as David Hawkins remarks on information in science, the more complex any system becomes, "the more its significance is destroyed by small chance fluctuations. The system becomes, at some point, just a noise amplifier" (Hawkins 348). The Counterforce seeks to create so much 'white noise,' moirés, in Their information system that the official patterns of the System are completely drowned out. As Peter Cooper describes it, *Gravity's Rainbow's* Counterforce members "function somewhat like accident or chance; they violate the rules of etiquette and predictable behavior, creating 'noise' in the system or at least producing disruptive surprise" (Cooper 94–95). The moiré, a random interference pattern that, as could be shown, entangles the individual in paranoid structures of control, can also be used, if overcharged into pure white noise, to disrupt the System and free the individual from Their control.

Gravity's Rainbow's Counterforce outlines modes of resistance that "set up a *useful* interference" (685; emphasis mine) in reality. Through the cultivation of absurd new patterns, seemingly natural structures of oppression are revealed as illusory and hypocritical. This strategy can for example be seen when Bodine is said to have "a siren-ring, the kind kids send away cereal boxtops for, cleverly arranged in his asshole so it can be operated at any time by blowing a fart of a certain magnitude" (740). Playing an absurd, low-humor fart-music on a children's toy, Bodine creates "a brand new reflex arc" that is poignantly referred to as "a return to innocence" (740). Innocence, the liberation from Their corrupting influence, is not an act of deconditioning, i.e., reverting oneself to an original state before societal conditioning that is shown to be nonexistent, but rather the creation of new, and more, reflex patterns for no rational end.

Noise is to be increased and not to be reduced and brought into consonance with a *musica universalis*. Indeed, noise in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a safeguard against Them. The narrator, co-conspiring, thus advises the reader to "listen for a cessation of noise" (694) that announces Their presence. Rather practically, those the System would officially define as criminals and conspirators are advised "always to have the toilet valve cracked a bit, to maintain

flow through the toilet” (694). A police raid “will come and shut off the water first” since “with only one tankful left [in the toilet], you really can’t get rid of much of anything any more, dope, shit, documents” (694). A specially modified toilet, warranting not “the usual paranoia” but “a particular kind of mental illness” (694), subversive creative paranoia, can thus, through the absence of sound the shut off water creates, announce a raid, giving the conspirer an “extra minute or two” (694) to escape. This rather practical advice for countercultural groups to evade the police also shines light on the functioning of a We-system, product of not “the usual paranoia” (694) but the *creative* paranoia the novel envisions. A We-system is then in danger of solidifying into a They-system, for that is the true sense of Them catching up with you, They being no discrete group of people but a totalizing, closed view of the world, when the ‘noise’ of the We-system’s interference moirés resides and is harmoniously framed into a total paranoid structure without the individual’s awareness. In order to not be “trapped inside Their frame” (694), a liberating system must be perpetually changing and provisional. Like the conspirator’s toilet, the novel’s resistance through creative interference must keep up a constant “inflow/outflow” (694).

Liberation: Democratic Interfaces

The Counterforce’s strategies of cultivating excessive interference patterns within the System can also be seen as the strategy of the entire novel. The novel’s opening statement that “this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive *knotting into*” (3) is programmatic for *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s project of reinterpreting the Ulyssean Tradition in a crass over-patterning of its structures into moirés. Like its Counterforce, the novel itself is a product of creative paranoia, delving into absurd slapstick humor and overplotted conspiracies in order to create interferences within the novel-genre. The novel’s historical anachronisms, slapstick sequences and other genre mixes, and its pronounced ontological insecurity metafictionally point toward its own patterning. Literary and political progress is thus not understood as an act of disentangling the novel’s and the world’s threads into a harmonious vision of a consistent whole, but the opposite, a never-finished moiréification and complication of We-systems.

While the pattern of stereoscopy in Joyce's modernist *Ulysses* strives to ideally translate the novel's fragmented perspective into a coherent interpretation that contains the entire novel, a total System centered around Joyce as an effaced and artistically divine 'They,' *Gravity's Rainbow* resists such totalization by favoring an aesthetic of in-betweenness and provisionality. The novel subversively overdetermines its plot and allusions. Patterns that would guide an interpretation thereby fall into moirés of local interfaces: instead of providing one coherent meaning, *Gravity's Rainbow* alternates from one interpretative interface to the next, the text's moirés seemingly proceeding indefinitely without ever hitting the bedrock of stable, authoritative interpretation, yet also without becoming mere nonsensical play. Thereby, the communality that underlies Joyce's metaphor of stereoscopic superimposition – multiple perspectives taken together can ascertain an insight inaccessible to the single individual – yet which is ultimately only nominal, interpretation, though complicated, residing still with one ideal objective analysis, is radicalized in *Gravity's Rainbow* into an interpretative stance. Democratizing interpretation, not only the novel's various interfaces of meaning disintegrate into an unending and unhierarchical row of moirés, but also no single perspective on the interpretative value of these interfaces, not even the author's, whose authority recedes behind the fundamentally self-contradictory inconsistency of the text, enjoys a privileged status.

Gravity's Rainbow's rejection of binaries and its constant evasion of coherent interpretation, that is, its resistance to a full consolidation of its moirés into structure, is far from a nihilist celebration of nonsense. Instead, in constructing a self-deconstructing text, that is, a text that consequentially fails to adhere to its own rules and thereby evades all final interpretation, *Gravity's Rainbow* employs a democratic aesthetic of provisionality, collaboration and constant change. The novel thereby disrupts not only conventional modes of viewing reality but equally subverts itself lest it become a new System of its own. Through this anti-authoritarianism, *Gravity's Rainbow* also dissolves its own authority. The novel's aesthetics produce a text that warrants constant open, democratic renegotiation as it resists final interpretation without becoming purely meaningless or unintelligible. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus calls for interpretation to "ride the interface" (731). The novel upholds the necessary liberating randomness of the moiré by ultimately revealing the binaries the novel itself constructs to

express its rejection of totalization to be fraught themselves. *Gravity's Rainbow's* style is not that of a parallaxic synthesis but one of a constant and fragile 'in-betweenness' through which the novel seeks to attain a perpetual, self-conscious self-deconstruction of power. In thus subverting the text's own authority, *Gravity's Rainbow* evokes a participatory, always-provisional aesthetic. Art and communal effort therefore no longer provide the certainty of an all-coherent ordering of the world, a totalization that is, although practically perhaps not attainable, theoretically 'out there' in the text as Joyce's superimpositions imply. Instead, *Gravity's Rainbow* superposes its patterns into unending moirés. While this increase in complexity and apparent randomness denies interpretation to ever complete in a transcendent totality, it raises the probabilities for order and meaning to occur. In contrast to Joyce's art, the 'success' of Pynchon's moirés is far from inevitable. Such a vision of inevitability would locate the individual's actions within a predetermined structure. As the Argentinian anarchist Squalidozzi remarks in the novel, "[i]n the openness of the German Zone, our hope is limitless" but "[s]o is our danger" (265). As already shown, while the dissolution and reshuffling of orders in the Zone is liberating, the repatterning of moirés, if codified into dogma, the novel's present shows, creates an even more complex and oppressive System. Hence, unlike in the paradigmatically modernist *Ulysses*, art thereby becomes not a means that is certain to reveal meaning and order but one that, in *Gravity's Rainbow's* celebration of randomness, raises their possibility without making them certain or inevitable.

Challenges of We-Systems

Picking up on the necessity of an always-provisional form of self-organization, the emergent Counterforce pronounces that "[t]he dearest nation of all is one that will survive no longer than you and I, a common movement at the mercy of death and time: the ad hoc adventure" (706). The Counterforce project, and with it *Gravity's Rainbow's* own project, must resist the false transformation of its We-system into another order of oppression by resisting codification. It has to remain purely temporary and in flux. *Gravity's Rainbow's* We-systems follow this directive toward constant development, thereby making the act of interpretation a dynamic, egalitarian and always-provisional exercise.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, resistance to the System is always in danger of consolidating itself into a System of its own. Thus, as Pirate explains the necessity of “any contrary set of delusions [...] which I’m calling a We-system” for resistance, admitting that this essentially means “playing Their game,” he advises Mexico to not “let it bother you. You’ll find you can operate quite well. Seeing as we haven’t won yet, it isn’t really much of a problem” (638). As long as the Counterforce’s We-system has a They-system to subvert, its own delusions remain benign and liberating as they make apparent the illusory, moiré-like quality of all systems of order. The Counterforce’s necessary delusions can create useful interferences with the dominant They-system, producing a moiré of meanings that destabilizes Their totalizing control. Once it ‘succeeds,’ however, a We-system, and by extension *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodernist style, runs the risk of cooptation by simply succeeding and thus turning into the abolished They-system. Just like a communist revolution only replaces capitalism with another equally controlling structure, the ‘abolishment’ of the System revealing itself as illusory in light of the continuation of totalization, any set of beliefs, once codified and thus robbed of its elasticity, becomes oppressive.

The Counterforce’s interference patterns may prove useful tools of subversion. Left on their own and ‘successfully’ codified, however, they become as oppressive, or even more so, as the System they have replaced. In the most practical sense, this means that (negative) resistance does not automatically come with a more positive form of organization. In a more theoretical and artistic sense, this inherent failure of We-systems poses a central problem for *Gravity's Rainbow's* aesthetics of resistance. Parody, which Luc Herman convincingly identifies as a We-system (Herman 224), always demands an object of parody. Parody as a We-system is thus a useful tool to “fend off manipulation by pre-existing forms of discourse” (Herman 224) as it operates from within the system it subverts. However, as Herman glosses the theory of parody, “parody evokes and therefore does not quite dismiss its target” (Herman 224). We-systems inherently contain the systematic nature they subvert, ultimately reproducing a controlling order in a new shape if they do not maintain their openness.

Gravity's Rainbow's We-systems thus warrant constant reinvention for their heterogeneous plurality not to solidify into oppressive dogma. Necessarily ad hoc arrangements,

Gravity's Rainbow's aesthetic of interfaces resists final codification. The moirés such We-systems produce are always easily subsumed into structure. Openness, the occurrence of unprogrammed events and connections, is necessary for liberation. However, due to man's desire for structure, such moirés also serve Them in providing Them with even more complex structures to be codified into an inescapable paranoid vision. Randomness, though liberating, cannot be upheld indefinitely as a state as it is easily accounted for by the System, i.e., man's pathological urge to structure. Instead, *Gravity's Rainbow* seeks out constant deconstruction even of its own purported (designed) randomness.

That an aesthetic of liberation cannot be achieved through such design which inherently belies true randomness also becomes apparent in *Gravity's Rainbow's* description of the dystopian Raketen-Stadt, a fantastic cityscape that uncomfortably depicts (the illusion of) true randomness's function in Their service. A structure underneath the Stollen of the Mittelwerke, the dystopian Rocket City illustrates the unsettling consequences of the postmodernist 'rocket novel,' *Gravity's Rainbow*, having a sort of blueprint underneath its randomness. In the dystopia of the Rocket City, *Gravity's Rainbow* can be seen to depict the results of a codification of its postmodernist randomness. As if depicting the questionable 'success' of postmodernist randomness, that is its consolidation into a system, Rocket City

is set up deliberately To Avoid Symmetry, Allow Complexity, Introduce Terror (from the Preamble to the Articles of Immachination) – but tourists have to connect the look back to things they remember from their times and planets – back to the wine bottle smashed in the basin, the bristlecone pines outracing Death for millennia, concrete roads abandoned years ago, hairdos of the late 1930s. (297)

As the capitalization of the city's objectives "To Avoid Symmetry, Allow Complexity, Introduce Terror," clearly also the novel's objectives, as well as the poignant textuality of this city, featuring "Preamble" and "Articles" (297) as if they were sights or buildings within it, show, Raketen-Stadt is Pynchon's moiré aesthetics codified and turned into a city-system. As Bersani remarks on the passage, "[t]he random itself can easily be programmed" (Bersani 104). Not only is true randomness thus impossible, always betrayed by design, the attempt to

construct true randomness is self-defying. Though Rocket-City does not feature “the symmetries we were programmed to expect, not the fins, the streamlined corners, pylons, or simple solid geometries of the official vision at all” (297), its visitors, the reader, nevertheless have to introduce structure in order to understand it. In the novel’s anachronisms as well as in this city, visitors have “to connect the look of it back to things they remember from their times and planet” (297). The city, as well as the novel, cannot, even in its randomness, be a closed system. Systematization is introduced by the observer. Since language can bring forth connections indefinitely, the categories of total randomness and total design are indistinguishable. Though subverting “the official vision” (297), the vision of Rocket City is nevertheless a paranoid one.

Counterforce action and We-systems seem doomed to failure, at least in the traditional sense. As the novel comments on this paradox,

Well, if the Counterforce knew better what those categories concealed, they might be in a better position to disarm, de-penis and dismantle the Man. But they don’t. Actually they do, but they don’t admit it. Sad but true. They are as schizoid, as double-minded in the massive presence of money, as any of the rest of us, and that’s the hard fact. The Man has a branch office in each of our brains, his corporate emblem is a white albatross, each local rep has a cover known as the Ego, and their mission in this world is Bad Shit. (712-713)

Complicity, as one can see, *Gravity’s Rainbow* consequentially disrupting binaries, seems inherent to any act of resistance. Notably, this double-mindedness is not to be understood as merely an effect of mundane corruption “in the massive presence of money” as revolutionary leaders betray their ideal to their individual appetite but is a “hard fact” (712) of humans’ existence as structuring beings. It is thus significantly the “Ego” (713) and not, as Hite perceptively observes, the superego (Hite, “Fun” 699) where the power structure has its representative. While classical Freudian theory would locate the rules and structures that bind the individual in the superego, *Gravity’s Rainbow* instead places the Man in the individual conscious self, leaving little hope that a change, one could say a deconditioning, of existing

social norms could have a lasting effect. As could be shown, some structure, “delusions about ourselves” (638), is necessary for survival. Put differently, the Man, with a “white albatross” (713), as already noted an image for the (illusion of a) coherent and centered subject, is an integral part of the self. His mission of – significantly capitalized – “Bad Shit” (713) is the repression of the abject (“feces are ‘bad’”) that challenges conventional identity, necessitating the structures *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* double-minded Counterforce rebels against. A We-system is thereby perpetually doomed to complicity: “They will use us. We will help legitimize Them, though They don’t need it really, it’s another dividend for Them, nice but not critical” (713). The Counterforce’s contrary set of delusions is thus, if successful, continually coopted into the They-system, as its “normalized (and loyal) opposition [...] merely reaffirms the validity of the Elect-Preterite binary” (Lynd 64). Counterforce members like Roger Mexico are thereby left with the question “which is worse: living on as Their pet, or death?” (713). What one would conventionally consider a ‘success’ of the We-system would only result in another total, paranoid system, making the Counterforce Their “doomed pet freaks” (713); freaks that stray from the status-quo but nevertheless “Their pet” (713), the Counterforce’s paranoid moirés fossilizing into yet more complex structures, “another dividend for Them, nice but not critical” (713). On the other hand, the overall absence of paranoid structure is also unbearable as it confronts the (necessary) illusory subject with the abject. The choice between having “to live, on Their terms” (713), that is Death, or death seems to leave no positive alternative. Doomed to cooptation, *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* postmodernist project as represented in the Counterforce seems to inherently imply its failure. The freak’s ‘success’ seems to guarantee the construction of some System.

Nevertheless, criticism widely agrees that *Gravity’s Rainbow* is neither nihilistic nor absurd. Indeed, the Counterforce appears to be a conventional failure. However, *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* openness reevaluates this apparent ‘failure’ in a more positive light. Rather than cause for defeatism, the continuous failings of We-systems are cause for hope, warranting constant, creative reinvention as they prove the imperfectability of any System. Though perpetually susceptible to totalization, life persists. Although in constant danger of betrayal and corruption, the novel shows that “love occurs” (440). The novel adamantly affirms that, despite

its corruptibility, momentarily and provisionally there always will be a “kindness reflex [...] that now and then, also beyond the Zero, survives extinction” (714). Love as that which is incompatible with rationalization appears as a central, though fragile, value. Change and liberation are possible from “the stray freak particle, by accident, drifting against the major flow” (51) and since, as *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s continuous references to Gödel’s incompleteness theorem and Murphy’s law show, such freakish “mutants” that interfere with what is now defined as the rational order of things “will be born” (275), hope is not lost.¹²³

If *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s We-systems ‘fail’ as they ‘succeed,’ hope lies in the failure of any system to account for everything. As Raymond Olderman remarks, creatively paranoid “[r]evelation must be continuous, for with each success some new literalization comes into being and some new version of the System is created” (Olderman 216). As noted in the prior chapter on time in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s circularity, narrated in a permanent, communal now that, though ultimately to be betrayed, bears in the moment the potential for change and liberation, warrants liberation as a continuous journey. *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s own We-systems must perpetually remain fragile and provisional, dependent on continuous, creative reinvention and deconstruction.¹²⁴

Hence, despite its difficulties, the novel does not seek to be wholly unintelligible, merely chaotic, nor does it attempt to quell the will to understand by forming patterns altogether. Rather, understanding can only happen in a superposition of interfaces. Rather than rejecting structure altogether, a stance revealed to be itself totalizing, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s democratic aesthetic promotes locally confined, provisional structures that function as interfaces between systems of meaning-making. Meaning is thus not a product of any unifying structure but is also not altogether unavailable, occurring in local interfaces that are subject to continuous change.¹²⁵ As McHale describes what he terms the integrational model, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*

¹²³ Apparently, Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* is itself to be understood as such a mutated version of *Ulysses*. The novel thereby turns its supposed failure to fully contain the Ulyssean Tradition and reproduce *Ulysses*, instead generating a postmodernist aesthetic, into a strength. The novel’s recourse to *Ulysses* thereby becomes a means of self-legitimization for Pynchon’s project.

¹²⁴ As will be shown, *Infinite Jest*’s reinterpretation of Joycean parallax attaches itself to exactly this postmodernist endless deconstruction.

¹²⁵ *Ulysses*’ double structure of two opposing protagonists, while still observable in Pynchon’s *V*, thus disintegrates into an indeterminate multiplicity in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Rather than lacking the Ulyssean structure, such doublings are even more prevalent in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, however, spread out and

“sentences give rise to interpretive reconstructions which in turn affect the interpretation of subsequent and even, retrospectively, of preceding sentences, and so on, a global picture of the text’s meaning and intentionality being continually built, unbuilt, and rebuilt at every point” (McHale, “Unspeakable Sentences” 39). *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s moirés demand elasticity. Eschewing totality for necessary yet egalitarian and provisional local structures, a reader has to ride the novel’s interface(s) to gain locally meaningful yet instable, fluctuating insight.

One, localized, example for these interfacing moirés that encompass the entire novel can be seen in the ninth section of the novel’s final part. At first sight, the scene appears structurally closely similar to the superimposition that occurs in Joyce’s ‘Nausicaa’ chapter – a female perspective shifting into a male perspective with an orgasmic point of unbridled life as its pivot between focalizations. The scene starts in the female third person singular (“In her pack, Geli Tripping brings along a few of Tchitcherine’s toenail clippings” (717)), detailing Geli’s search for her lover Tchitcherine, to then subtly shift into a second person narration (“if you close your eyes” (719), “Have you ever waited for *it*?” (720)) and, at the mention of “the equinox” (720), the interface between summer and winter, decomposes into the pronoun-free, a-personal description of an unhinged, Titanic prehistory:

... green spring equal nights... canyons are opening up, at the bottoms are steaming fumaroles, steaming the tropical life there like greens in a pot, rank, dope-perfume, a hood of smell... human consciousness, that poor cripple, that deformed and doomed thing, is about to be born. 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. Alive, it was a threat: it was Titans, was an overpeaking of life so clangorous and mad, such a green corona about Earth’s body that some spoiler *had* to be brought in before it blew the Creation apart. So we, the crippled keepers, were sent out to multiply, to have dominion. God’s spoilers. Us.

uncontainable. *Gravity’s Rainbow* thus offers a multiplicity of such Ulyssean doublings, from the English, informed Pirate Prentice with whom the novel opens and the American, paranoid, drastically underinformed yet pragmatic Slothrop who, like Bloom, later takes over the novel, to pairs like Mexico/Pointsman or We/They that perform meaningful binaries within their respective interface yet never reach the overarching binarity of Stephen and Bloom in *Ulysses*. Rather than not present in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Stephen and Bloom are scattered through the novel without being able to be totally located and represented in one pair in all of the novel’s interfaces.

Counterrevolutionaries. *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 from scratch up to its present status as reaction, nearly as strong as life, holding down the green uprising. But only nearly as strong. Only nearly, because of the defection rate. A few keep going over to the Titans every day, in their striving subcreation (how can flesh tumble and flow so, and never be any less beautiful?), into the rests of the folksong Death (empty stone rooms), out, and through, and down under the net, down down to the uprising. (720)

From this interface point of complete dissolution of personhood, governed by the unboundedness of “Pan” (720), both the god of nature and of the panicked “Terror” (297) the Raketentstadt’s designed randomness evinces, the focalization appears to move between genders. It moves, again, from a markedly unspecific ‘you’ (“It is impossible in this moonlight to see if you are male or female now” (721)) back to the third person singular, apparently to the Witch Blicero, counterpart to the lower-case witch Geli, as the ‘he’ the narration shifts into from its ‘you’ is one for whom “Thanatz and Margherita may have been his last ties with the old” (721).

However, upon closer inspection, the shimmering moirés of the section’s character interfaces do not fall comfortably into the parallactic parallelism of, e.g., Joyce’s ‘Nausicaa.’ Instead, character interfaces constantly replace and supersede another in moiré, the only seeming symmetry dissolving into ever-retracted decisions about who is in the scene’s center now. Thus, as ‘you’ shifts into ‘he,’ the recognition that ‘he’ is Blicero is quickly superseded by the information that it must be Gottfried focalizing now: “They are losing what reality they brought here, as Gottfried lost all of his to Blicero long ago” (721). The ‘you’ which seemed to have envisioned the reader “with your cheek against the bark” approaching Blicero as if from a walk “at night through the empty country” (721) is redacted as Gottfried’s. However, interfaces between characters abounding in excess, it instantly becomes unsolvably unclear whose experience is really narrated: is the ‘he’ of “[h]e is helpless, he is sheltered secure” (721) Gottfried’s report of Blicero’s situation or a third person account of Gottfried’s own feelings? While the preceding lines seem to (now) imply the latter, the following lines, which extensively report Blicero’s plans and feelings, support the former interpretation. Hence, though overtly

largely focalized through Gottfried, the rest of the section is primarily concerned with Blicero's theories and behavior: for large parts to come, quotation marks open yet do not close off what is supposedly Blicero's direct speech. Blicero, narratorial comment, and Gottfried's reflections shift into one another. Forming ever-receding moirés of character, each sentence destabilizes the previous one's source.

These character interfaces – from Geli/she to Geli/you to you/reader, dissolution of personhood, you, Blicero/you, Blicero/he, Gottfried/you/he and so on – also mirror interpretative interfaces forming moirés of meaning without ending up with any single, certain and definitive interpretation. Hence, most importantly the description of the Titans' green uprising is impossible to pin down. As already noted, gravity, death, flight, witch etc. assume multivalent positions in the novel, oftentimes only distinguished from their positive counterpart by capitalization. Reading chronologically, the description of the Titanic prehistory and the “defection rate” (720) to this, apparently, life-affirming force groups itself with Geli's “World-choosing” magic and her defection from the bureaucratic “coven politics” of “Hexes-Stadt” (718). This would make the green uprising the image of hope and regeneration as which I have presented it in the previous chapter. However, reading from the section's end, Blicero appears to himself strive for such a Titanic state and to go over “into the rests of the folk-song Death” (720). Is this Titanic primeval world any different from the Nazi “Ur-Heimat” (486) Blicero longs for? Framing the interface are on the one side the question whether Geli is “ready yet for anything so real” (720) and, on the side of Gottfried and Blicero, the recognition that “[t]his is so more-than-real” (721). Which one is the ‘good’ real? Are they different? Like the Zone, like technology, like paranoia, the Titanic “overpeaking of life so clangorous and mad” (720) contains both Blicero and Geli, negative and positive value, in superposition, Terror and Hope. Furthermore, the section not only leaves the interpretation of its primary pivot open to ambivalence and ambiguity. Interfaces replacing and superseding another raise questions like: Is Blicero, like Slothrop, maybe a good guy after all? Is Blicero's discourse truly his or is it misrepresented as it is filtered through Gottfried? What is the narrator's role in this? How is Geli to be judged now, seeing how the sympathetic character is linked to Blicero, both connected to another through a preternatural jouissance-like madness and their striving for love?

Where do we draw the line between one character and the other, and between one possible, yet contradictory, interpretation and the other? Does it matter?

The section only seemingly presents a symmetrical parallelism. Instead of superimposing one perspective onto another, *Gravity's Rainbow* portrays a superposition of an ever-productive line of moirés of which all, or most, are fruitful, yet which never become the one definitive reading. Perspective counts in both *Ulysses* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, these perspectives never resolve into unitary meaning. At the same time, however, each moiré has its significance that both reflects and redacts prior information. As the novel closes the section, as if giving belated advice on how to read it:

The scene itself must be read as a [Tarot] card: what is to come. Whatever has happened since to the figures in it (roughly drawn in soiled white, army gray, spare as a sketch on a ruined wall) it is preserved, though it has no name, and, like The Fool, no agreed assignment in the deck. (724)

It is in this non-signification, the novel's refusal to decide for us which interface is the meaningful one that offers a plurality of probable interpretations relative to another, that Pynchon's moirés unfold their democratic and liberating potential.

Self-Deconstructing Binaries

Gravity's Rainbow's moirés of meaning evade the constant danger of consolidation and cooptation through their embrace of provisionality and egalitarianism. True randomness ultimately indistinguishable from the "randomness deliberately simulated" (586) of complete design, *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodernist moirés are inherently susceptible to becoming an ever-more oppressive System of their own. The novel's aesthetics evade this problem by stressing its We-systems' status as provisional "arrangements" (620), creatively paranoid compromises that are self-consciously unstable, contradictory and open to perpetual deconstruction. They thus resist totalization while at the same time providing local systems of meaning through which the world of the novel can be understood. This means that the novel denies itself a hierarchy of meanings, each of its interfaces of patterns, though seeming to be internally contradictory, being granted the same authority. The novel thus introduces binaries

into the text in order to narrate its resistance to such binaries. By allowing for such ‘mistakes’ in its aesthetic, *Gravity’s Rainbow* resists containment in a new (postmodernist) System while remaining intelligible. The novel deconstructs itself by calling into question its own methods. Thereby, *Gravity’s Rainbow* subverts its own authority, literature’s claim to closedness, opening up interpretation to a never-endingly fluctuating participatoriness. It is thus that, ultimately, Pynchon resists becoming the God-like authority over the text, another They, by self-referentially pointing towards his function as master-plotter of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

This self-deconstructing aesthetic can for example be seen in the novel’s treatment of Roger Mexico as a surrogate for the novel’s ‘message.’ Early in the novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow* introduces Mexico as the binary opposite of Pointsman. An “Antipointsman” (55) to Pointsman’s own textual status as “Antimexico” (89), the text highlights Mexico’s function in a binary pair. Notably, however, Mexico’s moiré-like perspective, as could be shown, rejects exactly such binary pairs. The novel thus appears to seduce its readers to view Mexico as Pynchon’s surrogate or close-to-ideal interpretant. Indeed, as David Seed observes, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s characters appear to “personify different ways of interpreting phenomena, even of interpreting the novel itself” (Seed 160). Pointsman and Mexico thus appear to represent conventional modes of reading, based in the assumption of narrative continuity and interpretative coherency, and a new, relativistic mode, respectively. Pointsman, as already discussed, “imagines the cortex of the brain as a mosaic of tiny on/off elements” (55), dealing in the strict binaries that also govern the conventional, paranoid reader’s search for a unifying plot in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Such a reading of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s ‘cortex,’ an all-pervading interface that shapes the novel, is, as the novel perpetually proves, both totalizing and inconclusive. An alternative to the deterministic model of the technocrat can be seen in Mexico’s “probabilistic or stochastic model” (Ozier, “Antipointsman/Antimexico: Some Mathematical Imagery in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 78). While the novel clearly rejects Pointsman’s deterministic model of cause-and-effect, the Antipointsman Mexico’s post-Einsteinian relativism appears to be a more useful approach to *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s contingent world. In “strik[ing] off at some other angle” (89), Mexico, as Pointsman’s conceptual opposite, thus seems to be constructed as representative of the novel’s own project. Not only is he not

dependent on the (self-imposed) tyranny of “One or zero,” inhabiting as a statistician the interface of conventionally excluded middle of “the domain *between* zero and one” (55), and thus comfortable with the world’s indeterminacies, Mexico is “very individually in love” (Ozier, “Antipointsman/Antimexico: Some Mathematical Imagery in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” 76) and one of the most active members of the Counterforce. Mexico’s perspective thus appears suspiciously close to that of the novel. His is a perspective that meaningfully makes do without binaries, history and causal connections, his stochastic mappings explaining the world yet making no claim to causality or predictions of the future. In debunking binaries and causality as inconsistent, Mexico seems to parallel *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s project.

However, Mexico’s stochastic system proves to be as totalizing and inhumane as Pointsman’s. Thus, both Pointsman and Mexico are presented as so completely absorbed in their respective models of “the stone determinacy of everything” (86) and probability to explain the connection between Slothrop and the V-2 rockets they ignore individual suffering. It is thus his lover Jessica who has to bring “Roger wide awake” when she asks “what about the girls?” (87). As Hite remarks, “[u]nifying theories, regardless of their capacity to reconcile quantitative data, provide little room for compassion” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 149). Mexico’s dogmatic unconnectedness proves as totalizing and death-driven as Pointsman’s attempts at an all-connecting mechanical explanation. As Samuli Hägg notes, in *Gravity’s Rainbow* “[i]t is the idea of discarding binary thinking itself that is placed under suspicion” (Hägg 86). If Mexico is to represent *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s own agenda as a complete rejection of binaries as a mode of experiencing the world, this perspective’s representation within an itself binary pair in the novel would be problematic.

Rather than didactically juxtaposing a ‘bad’ polarism represented by Pointsman with Mexico’s ‘good’ relativism, then, the novel expounds what Hägg refers to as a “faux-didacticism” (Hägg 104). The novel’s aesthetics lead the reader in search for an authoritatively approved interpretation astray. Authority, even that of a likeable young anarchist like Roger Mexico, so much like Pynchon himself, is rejected in Pynchon’s novel for the sake of absolute freedom. The novel thereby denies itself Mexico’s moiré-probabilities as an “official vision” (297), its personification of interpretative modes “arranged in the narrative so that no single

possibility gets unconditional authority” (Seed 160–61). Mexico’s function as a spokesperson for a rejection of binaries is destabilized through the novel’s arrangement of such a position as itself part of a binary. Attempting to fully make sense of this seeming aesthetic ‘mistake,’ that is come up with a unifying theory that explains the text’s self-contradiction, would bespeak the very totalizing mindset the novel opposes.

Insight and understanding, such as for example understanding Mexico’s position as both seemingly representing the novel’s agenda and that agenda rejecting such a position, only ever occurs in a superposition of these interfaces. Superimposition into a coherent whole is shown to be aporetic. Thus, the moment *Gravity’s Rainbow* identifies Pointsman and Mexica as “‘ideas of the opposite’ themselves,” it promptly asks itself “but on what cortex, what winter hemisphere?” (89). Indeed, on yet another interface, Letzler shows, Pointsman, usually read together with Blicero as one of the novel’s most overtly ‘evil’ antagonists, can also be read as Preterite, a Judas that warrants mercy (Letzler, “The Character of Preterition: An Apology for Pointsman” 348). Through its superpositions that can accommodate plural values, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s conventionally ‘flat’ characters become ‘rounded’ after all. This roundedness, however, is not achieved through the characters’ ‘depth’ but through their being poised in an ever-productive moiré of character by the text’s aesthetic of incompleteness and provisionality. Meaning in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is perpetually decentralized and instable. Rather than assuming, as Pointsman does, a single cortex or interface “as a mosaic of tiny on/off elements” (55), *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the question implies, assumes a multiplicity of interfaces superposed in moiré. Hence, as could be shown, while on one such interface Pointsman and Mexico do appear as opposites, other interfaces of patterns in the text deny this interpretation. Without coming to a final conclusion, the novel makes the interpretative decision which of these interfaces to ride on a matter of free and democratic choice. Depending on which aperture, which layer of the novel’s moirés, Mexico is viewed from, his position can be seen to counteract its totalizing opposite, and thus help the reader detach from the illusion of binaries and unity, only to be promptly deconstructed so as to resist the creation of any incontestable authority beyond the momentary arrangement.

Quantum States

This quality of ‘in-betweenness’ in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s aesthetics, e.g., Mexico’s or Slothrop’s status between being embraced and rejected, is strongly reminiscent of certain key concepts of quantum mechanics. As Menahem Paz notes, *Gravity’s Rainbow* bridges such “apparently irreconcilable, ‘uninterfaceable’ antitheses [...] by applying the unique quantum concept of *superposition*” (Paz 199). Quantum superposition, for which the famous thought experiment of Schroedinger’s cat is probably the best-known illustration, states that up until the moment of measurement a given arrangement of particles is both in state A and state B, or even more states, at once. Schroedinger’s cat is thus in a superposition of being alive and dead. As Paz summarizes, “[t]he cat’s fate (or a particle’s characteristics) is (are) determined by measurement, which *creates and reflects* its state at a given moment; another measurement, at another moment, might produce a different outcome” (Paz 199). Seemingly contradicting perspectives thus interface set in superposition.

Gravity’s Rainbow’s ‘solution’ to arguing for a rejection of totalizing binaries by employing such binaries, a structure, though paranoid and illusory, necessary for understanding, is thus reminiscent of early Wittgenstein’s closing remarks in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)” (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 6.54).¹²⁶ However, in contrast to Wittgenstein, where, once such a realization is reached, one “will see the world alright” (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 6.54) and “silence” (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 7), poetically the last word of the *Tractatus*, must follow, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s mode of superpositions is constructed to ensure continued interaction with the text, the playful and communal creation of meaning, and thus noise.

Joyce’s *Ulysses* thus “promises a critical Utopia” (Bersani 106) of a complete interpretation that, in collecting the novel’s fragmented perspectives and shifting meanings and superimposing them, would finally double *Ulysses* itself. Such a total reading would install a

¹²⁶ See also for example Martin Paul Eve’s *Pynchon and Philosophy Wittgenstein, Foucault and Adorno* or Sascha Pöhlmann’s “Silences and Worlds : Wittgenstein and Pynchon” for two insightful and very different readings of Wittgenstein and Pynchon.

vision of Joyce as God-like authority of the novel. *Gravity's Rainbow* takes an entirely different route in its Ulysean Tradition. Denouncing all authority, the novel's aesthetics of superposition reject finality. As Jeffrey Baker remarks, "Pynchon's novel is experientially educative for anyone who wants to learn what it would be like to live in the precarious and dynamic flux of a truly democratic culture" (Baker 119). Fundamentally open, *Gravity's Rainbow* eschews totality in favor of moirés. Its interfaces, by never synthesizing into an underlying unity, produce not only a plurality of meanings in superposition but also open up the text to constant, unhierarchical renegotiation.

By self-consciously allowing for 'mistakes,' apparent aesthetic self-contradictions in superposition, *Gravity's Rainbow* performs a literary version of Gödel's proof of the incompleteness theorem. *Gravity's Rainbow* opens itself up to a liberating provisionality in pointing toward the recursive incompleteness of closed systems. The novel thereby denies itself a claim to being self-sustaining. Since true randomness and total design are altogether indistinguishable, meaning and order not being a property of the world/text but always of the observer, recursive observation, riding the novel's interface(s) to perpetually construct and deconstruct meaning, is what sustains *Gravity's Rainbow*. The novel thus presents itself as an open system, subverting the vision of Pynchon as a master-plotter, a "sort of authorial version of Roger Mexico" (Bersani 107). Thereby, as Pynchon's authority over the text, his They-like status as the one unifying principle of *Gravity's Rainbow*, is deconstructed, *Gravity's Rainbow's* democratizing impulse hands over authority to the community of readers. The novel lacking coherency yet at the same time being crassly overdetermined, meaning not being lost but decentered, scattered across the novel's interfaces, Pynchon becomes just one, not privileged, part of the communal We-system. Stressing its incompleteness, the novel invites the community to perform an authoritative function in recursively reinventing the text. Creative paranoia thus utilizes the paranoid mode of Joyce's problem term parallax not in order to decipher an underlying They-system but to continuously create new interfaces, moirés that are locally meaningful yet never represent and contain the entirety of the novel. The text thus opens itself up to multiplicity yet never arbitrariness. Authority democratically handed over to the

readership, meaning, and thereby recognition, resistance, and liberation, becomes a continuous process sustained by local We-systems.

Conclusion: Redshifting

Gravity's Rainbow's response to the Ulyssean Tradition reformulates Joyce's stereoscopy into the figure of the moiré. Shifting from a mimetic representation of depth perception to a perspectival, flattened, mode of representation, *Gravity's Rainbow* reveals the Joycean depth perception as yet another victimizing, paranoid vision. Rather than positing meaning as a transcendent structure behind individual, fragmented perspectives to be revealed by the superimposition of these patterns as in *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow's* use of the moiré describes reality as an always-mediated product of interpretation. The moiré, in contrast to Joyce's depth-structures, thus operates from a postmodernist depthlessness. However, since all experience of reality is founded in the flat principle of metaphoric resemblances and thus inevitably 'paranoid,' justified or not, although the paranoid vision is rejected as totalizing and death-driven, a contrasting mode of anti-paranoia, the notion of complete unconnectedness, is equally rejected as not only not viable but also in itself another, negative, total structure. The potential for liberation and insight thus resides not in a reduction of experience into a unified, 'unparanoid,' whole, but, conversely, in the creatively paranoid production of even more moirés (and thus also the continuation, rather than rejection, of the Ulyssean Tradition). Creative paranoia, as primarily illustrated in the novel's counterculture-like Counterforce, is a mode of patterning and understanding experience that is deeply aware of the illusory, moiré-like nature of reality. The We-systems *Gravity's Rainbow* produces are therefore perpetually local and self-consciously provisional in nature, explicitly self-contradictory and open to renegotiation. This resistance to total organization and authority lends *Gravity's Rainbow* a democratizing aesthetic of in-betweenness. Interpretation is understood as a perpetually unfinished, egalitarian dynamic fluctuating between the novel's interfaces of patterns without giving any of its moirés a privileged status.

Insight is thus in both *Ulysses* and *Gravity's Rainbow* a product of 'mapping' patterns onto one another in a communal effort. However, while *Ulysses* superimposes its patterns into

the synthetic, deep wholeness of a stereoscopic image, *Gravity's Rainbow* employs the principle of quantum *superposition* as a metaphor for its own mode of 'mapping.' Pynchon thus proposes a post-Einsteinian, relativistic view on the Ulyssean Tradition. As the theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg states, "What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning" (Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* 58). Observation creates the reality that is observed. Reality, and this includes the very real power structures and oppression portrayed in the novel, is a product of the language through which the 'paranoid' individual experiences or 'plots' the world. For *Gravity's Rainbow*, the fundamental structuring principle of reality thus resides in metaphoric relations, resemblances of signs, and not causal relations, which only form a part of the interrelations through which reality is mediated and thus created. Metaphor as the act of fusing, or mapping onto one another, two disjunctive elements to create a new image appears as the principle of all meaning-making and thus reality. Power structures are not ingrained into a deep structure within the real world but are products of the interplay of signs. Since all of reality is inherently such a product of discourse, their illusoriness makes them and their revelation in no way less 'real.' An apprehension of the flat, moiré-like nature of reality can open up a gap in the moiré and allow for insight. Meaningful insight is thereby gained from a mode of creatively paranoid mapping, superposing the surface resemblances of discourses and (potentially) discovering their metaphoric similarities and thus following the signs. At the same time, *Gravity's Rainbow's* use of general relativity represents meaning and insight as a locally and temporally relative, never-finished project. Inhabiting seemingly contradictory quantum states, the moirés of *Gravity's Rainbow* never turn into structures enveloping the entirety of the novel. Instead, each of their interfaces is granted the same authority as all of the others, the novel constantly producing, deconstructing, and reconstructing meaning.

Gravity's Rainbow's reinterpretation of Joyce's superimposition into a quantum superposition becomes particularly clear when considering the use of the related astronomical methods of parallax measurements and cosmological red-shifting in *Ulysses* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, respectively. *Ulysses* employs stellar parallax, a method of calculating the position of a celestial object from two parallactically displaced points of observation, as a metaphor for the

possibility of meaning through shared human effort. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, on the other hand, the concept of red-shifting, used in post-Einsteinian astronomy for the same purpose as parallax in Joyce's time, is applied for the same literary function. Cosmological red-shifting can be read as *Gravity's Rainbow's* relativistic version of Joyce's stellar parallax, another method of measuring astronomic distances that, rather than the trigonometric centering of stellar parallax, employs the post-Einsteinian notion of an expanding universe.

The novel thus describes its postmodern world as "Each alternative Zone speeds away from all others in fated acceleration, red-shifting, fleeing the Center" (519). The novel here, again, refers to the "Russian mathematician Friedmann" and his proposition of an "infinitely dense point from which the Universe expanded" (396) in 1922, the annus mirabilis of *Gravity's Rainbow* in which also *Ulysses* was published. This notion of universal expansion as predicted from Einstein's theory of general relativity by Friedmann served as the basis for Edwin Hubble's 1929 measurement of cosmological red-shift and thus produced the currently prevalent Big Bang theory. Assuming an expanding universe that is "fleeing the Center"(519), red-shift, that is the stretching of the light-waves an object in space emits towards the lower, red spectrum, can be accounted for: the farther away a celestial object is from the point of observation, the more space has expanded since the light-waves have left that object and the more these light-waves have been stretched, the light becoming 'redder' as it increases in wavelength. The application of this principle in *Gravity's Rainbow* also explains, as Nina Engelhardt shows, the "reddening space" (895) observed during the novel's increasingly decentering final chapters (Engelhardt 15).

Friedmann thus deals with comoving and proper distances in space. While proper distance is the distance between two objects at a specific moment of cosmological time (imagine a giant ruler measuring the distance from here to a distant galaxy; in such a linear coordinate system, reddening light appears to be Doppler-shifted because distant galaxies are moving away from us), this distance constantly changes due to the expansion of the universe (light-waves stretch as space expands while objects remain static, retaining their *relative* position to another). Comoving coordinates account for expanding space and the resulting change of proper distances through time. Comoving with universal expansion, they form another complete coordinate

system with comoving spatial coordinates and commoving time coordinates which depicts relative positions. Therefore, a measurement of red-shifting allows for a calculation of astronomical distances relative to space and time.¹²⁷

Gravity's Rainbow's aesthetic principle of observing “Signs and Symptoms. *Mapping onto different coordinate systems*” (159; emphasis mine) can thus be read to apply red-shifting as a metaphor to language and meaning, replacing Joyce's modernist use of stellar parallax.¹²⁸ Meaning, like proper distance, is plural and heterogeneous, constantly changing. The novel rejecting all totality, language can only be meaningful in local, provisional interfaces of moirés, temporary We-systems like “alternative Zone[s] speed[ing] away from all others in fated acceleration” (519). Nevertheless, though decentered and relative, it is far from meaningless. Insight, as opposed to the centripetal trigonometric agitation toward a central insight implied by Joyce's parallax, is product of a decentralizing moment, red-shifting. Through superposition the decentered postmodern subject is afforded with a potential for liberation and meaning, meaning that is ‘there’ yet constantly a subject of democratic renegotiation. *Gravity's Rainbow* can thus be seen to subject the Ulyssean Tradition to a post-Einsteinian, relativistic reinterpretation that, while criticizing Joyce's *Ulysses* as a paranoid system, seeks to retain the fundamental implications of Ulyssean parallax: ‘mapping’ as a communal effort toward meaning.

¹²⁷ For more information on relativity, cosmology, and red-shifting, see for example Matts Roos' *Introduction to Cosmology*.

¹²⁸ Although both are distantly related both in mathematics and in the novel's usage, *Gravity's Rainbow's* “Mapping onto different coordinate systems” (159) is much more a reference to quantum mechanics and Friedmann's calculation of cosmological red-shift than, as Molly Hite has it, referring to “the method by which Gödel constructed the proof of the theorem bearing his name” (Hite, *Ideas of Order* 40).

5. Conclusion: The Joyce Harp Regained

Hundreds of pages after it had been lost in a Boston toilet, Slothrop's "old Hohner" (622) miraculously returns to him in the opening of the novel's fourth part, the recovery of the, now transformed, instrument heralding Slothrop's own transformation. Like *Gravity's Rainbow's* Ulyssean Tradition, the mouth harp has travelled across the Atlantic and, now "well soaked in" in the paranoias of postmodernity "a lot easier to play" (66), been transformed into something new. Sascha Pöhlmann comments on this transnationalism of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, remarking that "*Gravity's Rainbow* itself could be conceived of as a transnational phenomenon with regard to its intertextuality alone" (Pöhlmann, *Pynchon's Postnational Imagination* 178). With its emblem, the harp, magically traversing the conventional territories of time and (national) space, *Gravity's Rainbow's* Ulyssean Tradition, which equally transplants Joyce's 1920s Irish novel into the 1970s USA, must be understood as an effect of the de-territorializing drive Pöhlmann identifies in *Pynchon's Postnational Imagination*. Equipped with the newly recovered and changed Joycean instrument, Slothrop soon dissolves into a liberated and transcendent state more fit to deal with the many challenges of postmodernity *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts. Upon (re)discovering the transnationally migrated harp, Slothrop himself enters a process of denationalization as, Pöhlmann writes, "[a]t the cost of his self, he manages to break out of all hegemonic narratives that constructed and fixed his identity" (Pöhlmann, *Pynchon's Postnational Imagination* 358). The same goes for Pynchon's novel in its programmatic recovery of the Ulyssean Tradition. The recovery of the now changed harp signals the recovery of a means to interact with and live in (and, for the epic novel, write about) a drastically changed human condition. Defying narrative conventions of closure and certainty, unlike the reformed modernist Irish jew's-harpist Stephen, postmodern and postnational Slothrop does not simply leave the novel for good but scatters into a liberating potentiality the novel also assumes for itself. He – because who else should it be? – becomes "[s]omebody close by, out in the night,[...] playing a blues on a mouth harp" (642) outside an army encampment and proves his now gained bluesman-expertise when he is credited as "Harmonica, kazoo – a friend" (742) on the album of the (fictional) band The Fool.

As Christian Hänggi remarks, Pynchon directs great affection toward “the harmonica, the kazoo, and the ukulele,” instruments that, since mass-produced and fairly easy to learn autodidactically, “were never considered respectable instruments but rather toy-like sound-producers for the common man” (Hänggi, “‘Harmonica, Kazoo - a Friend.’ Pynchon’s Lessons in Organology” 289). As the “preterites of organology” (Hänggi, “‘Harmonica, Kazoo - a Friend.’ Pynchon’s Lessons in Organology” 289), passed over by traditional musicians and played by society’s Preterites, unnerving the Elect, these instruments are, Hänggi notes, intricately linked to subversion and resistance, yet also communality, and thus symbolize Pynchon’s own aesthetic goals. Notably, however, while kazoo, ukulele et al. are enthusiastically played on throughout Pynchon’s writing, the harmonica or mouth harp cannot be found in Pynchon’s first two novels but first appears in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Seeing how, as Hänggi also observes, “Pynchon [...] did not choose the word ‘harmonica’ to designate Slothrop’s instrument, but ‘harp’, short for ‘mouth harp’ or Hohner’s famed ‘blues harp’” (Hänggi, “Pynchon’s Sound Music” 62), the primary appearance of the harp in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon’s reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition emblemized in Joyce’s jew’s harp, is significant.¹²⁹

In Pynchon scholarship, Slothrop’s harpsmanship has repeatedly been used to link him to Orpheus. Orpheus and Slothrop, Hume notes, both display a great connection to nature. They both travel from the underworld back to Earth in an (attempted) reversal of time and death, and both find their not-so-ultimate end in dismemberment (Hume 168). Orpheus harp is a well-known symbol for poetics (Hume and Knight 381). Thus, as Kathryn Hume and Thomas Knight argue, “because music is an art and, through the Orpheus tradition, is almost synonymous with poetry or fiction, we have in music a metaphor for Pynchon’s own apparent views on creating order through art” (Hume and Knight 367). To this can now be added that Slothrop’s harp bespeaks not only *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s Orphic tradition but also, perhaps primarily so, its

¹²⁹ An actual jew’s harp appears only once in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, namely when Slothrop is ambushed by the Zone-Hereros and one of them “is playing a thumb-harp whose soundbox is carved from a piece of German pine, whose reeds are cut from springs of a wrecked Volkswagen” (562). As could be shown, the Hereros may represent a seemingly reintegrative perspective of communality and circularity yet remain hopelessly bound in and perverted by death-driven European rationalizations. Their instrument of choice is simply Joyce’s jew’s harp built from the detritus of the new, ‘Germanic’ condition, lacking the necessary modifications that make Slothrop’s blues harp suitable to postmodernity.

Ulyssean Tradition. That is to say that Slothrop's Orphic qualities are also, and more so, Ulyssean qualities. "Orphism," as Hume explains, constitutes "a compromise between the two antithetical impulses" (Hume 169) Nietzsche, and Joyce, observes in Western culture, a synthesis of Apollonian and Dionysian, Hebraic and Hellenic forces into the unity of the good European that Pynchon, however, fervently rejects. As the novel announces on its closing pages, the project of deriving a new aesthetic from Joyce's Orphism completed, "ORPHEUS PUTS DOWN HARP" (754). *Ulysses*, however, does not turn silent.

Pynchon Plays the Blues on the Joyce Harp

As in *Ulysses*, the harp serves as an emblem for the novel's newly discovered aesthetic of writing from and about a drastically changed human condition. Transformed from jew's harp to blues harp (note the homophony), the harmonica in *Gravity's Rainbow* can be seen to represent Pynchon's new aesthetic and the revisionary modifications to the Ulyssean Tradition from which it is developed.

Firstly, Slothrop's mouth harp is a "Hohner" (622), the time's most wide-spread brand of harmonicas produced in Trossingen, Germany. The brand name explicitly mentioned harbors an etymological pun on the reinterpetative strategies *Gravity's Rainbow* applies to the Ulyssean Tradition: the German verb höhnen translates to "to deride or ridicule." As could be shown, *Ulysses*, in particular its use of mythology, is productively subjected to such a derision or ridicule. *Gravity's Rainbow* parodies the Ulyssean Odyssey as the "German Odyssey" (486) of a frustrated anti-Parzival. As Herman notes, parody as that which "evokes and therefore does not quite dismiss its target" (Herman 224) but destabilizes it is a principal structure of the novel's We-systems and the novel's aesthetic as a whole. Through this postmodernist parody, a mode that revises and ridicules yet at the same time retains the original, *Gravity's Rainbow* employs Joyce's trivializations to democratically pluralize Joyce's systems of order. Ulyssean mythological parallelisms are thereby parodied into an anti-quest, the grail of meaning and centered selfhood perpetually receding from the novel's questers and Parzival's homelessness globalized into a human condition, that gives rise to a new, plural and untotalizable plastic myth for postmodernity, just as the linear teleology of Joyce's corresponding secular mass is

transformed into the recirculatory imagery of the kalendar; Joyce's Everyman trivializations are actualized into a reevaluation of the plural, failing and uncertain as functor of liberation.

Secondly, the music played on the mouth harp in *Gravity's Rainbow* is the blues, a mode of musical self-expression that distinctly belongs to African-Americans, America's reject Preterites and second-class citizens. In playing the blues on Joyce's harp, Pynchon signals the necessity of an embrace of that which is preterite, non-signified and abject, the importance for the American novel to face and include the marginalized as integral part of American culture. As could be shown, *Gravity's Rainbow* views Preterition as a saving grace. While a Puritan logic of Election and Preterition underlying rationalized historicization produces a culture of death, isolation and stillness of change, a culture of Elect rationality that readily sacrifices humanity in search for an illusory transcendence for which the individual subjects itself to self-victimization, the embrace of the preterite and subjunctive allows for the resurgence of a charismatic moment of liberating change and community. Hence, Moore notes, the "Preterite Blues" creates "the secret communion of 'invisible' beings, Slothrop on the harp, and Byron, now at last striking the subversive blow that he had dreamed of back in Babybulb Heaven" (Moore 148). Like Byron the bulb, Slothrop's blues modulates unofficial frequencies that open up the opportunity for preterite revolution: Cutting his superior's hair, "Eddie Pensiero, with the blues flooding his shaking muscles, the down, mortal blue" (655) apparently prepares to stab the colonel's tilted-up jugular and – the scene breaks off before the bloodshed. In its preterite program of non-signification, *Gravity's Rainbow* refuses to represent death so as to not play into Their abject history. Philosophizing on the blues, the narrator explains:

Blues is a matter of lower sidebands—you suck a clear note, on pitch, and then bend it lower with the muscles of your face. Muscles of your face have been laughing, tight with pain, often trying not to betray *any* emotion, all your life. Where you send the pure note is partly a function of that. There's that secular basis for blues, if the spiritual angle bothers you.... (643)

Gravity's Rainbow's blues transform pain into laughter. By making light of gravity, *Gravity's Rainbow's* absurdism denies abject death its sterilizing signification into a Death for History,

instead opening the novel to a liberating plurality of potentialities. The novel's circularity thereby 'recycles' abject waste into new life. Death, identified by the System with the abject and the racial other, turns from a terminal event into a transitional one. Both *Gravity's Rainbow* and the blues are in this regard equally improvisational, momentary and individualistic, and inherently democratic in interpretation. As LeRoi Jones writes, "[b]lues was a music that arose from the needs of a group, although it was assumed that each man had his own blues and that he would sing them. As such, the music was private and personal" (L. Jones 82). As could be shown, *Gravity's Rainbow's* liturgical year evinces this simultaneous singularity and communal circularity. In its dismissal of a totalizing interpretation of time as history as isolating and destructive, *Gravity's Rainbow* champions the moment as the temporal space where reparative meaning, love and community are, heterogeneously, always provisionally and open to continued democratic renegotiation, possible to happen. The novel's calendar thereby reenchants the routinized technological sublime of history with the undefinable, probabilistically open historical sublime of its cycle of singular moments. *Gravity's Rainbow's* structural metaphor of the Church year, a reinterpretation of Joyce's mass, can therefore, "if the spiritual angle bothers you" (643), also be understood as representing a space-time continuum. Meaning in the novel is held in a quantum state of both/and. Interpretation thereby becomes an action in the novel's eternal moment, always dependent on an observer's perspective and, importantly, choice in the present. While thus a Puritan predetermined history stills all change and traps the individual in a closed system veering toward entropic heat-death, *Gravity's Rainbow's* historical sublime opens up the space of probabilities, a space where, in the moment removed from its causal ties to past and future, change, free choice, communal interaction and ultimately meaning can occur.

One thing that distinguishes the blues from other forms of music is the practice of bending notes, producing blue notes in-between the standard musical notation that do not find representation in the conventional twelve-tone equal temperament system and were rejected as impure and improper in established Western music. The "visual blues" (622) Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* can be seen to play on its pages, too, is one that aesthetically mobilizes the

space of in-betweenness and the harmonically unresolved.¹³⁰ Certainly the best-known of these blue notes is the flattened-fifth. Flatness, as could be shown, also describes *Gravity's Rainbow's* treatment of visuality and overall mode of representation. Thus, while depth perception in *Ulysses* serves as a metaphor for the synthesis of perspectives into a holistic, meaningful order, *Gravity's Rainbow's* representation of visuality is defined by a distinctly postmodern depthlessness that spans the entire novel. Pynchon's mode of representation in *Gravity's Rainbow* eschews the apparent 'objectivity' of Joyce's mimetic depth in favor of a flattened-out perspectivism that describes all perception, and therefore reality, as ultimately interpretative and mediated. Joycean depth perception is thereby viewed as a paranoid vision, synthesis producing the (optical) illusion of coherency and meaning rather than any deeper or realer access to reality through experience. As reality is equated to the illusion of reality, representation in *Gravity's Rainbow* shifts from mimesis to a perspectival representation of cognition as that which is 'real.' The mapping of patterns onto one another to discover a reintegrative vision unavailable to the individual perspective *Ulysses* achieves through the structural metaphor of parallax is rephrased into the figure of the moiré, producing not transcendent, 'deep' meaning but only yet another interference pattern without inherent relation to the real. The moiré as a flat and unstable interface of patterns without claim to totality assumes the role of Joyce's parallax superimposition as a structuring metaphor in *Gravity's Rainbow*. These moirés are ever-metastasizing. They produce an overflow of patterns that never fall into the coherent wholeness of Joyce's systems of order. Rather than trying to untangle these patterns to reach an underlying, transcendent connectedness, thereby bespeaking a Joycean ideal of depth and synthesis, *Gravity's Rainbow* treats such paranoia as the only mode of experiencing and constructing

¹³⁰ Even though the distinctive squares that mark chapter breaks in the novel are the publisher's later addition, could they not not only, as Clerc argues, be read as "the sprocket holes of a film projector" (Clerc 112), but also as the square holes of a harmonica? Does the novel's four-part structure not resemble a blues progression from the tonic (I) to the subdominant (IV) and the dominant (V)? *Gravity's Rainbow* would then become the blues Pynchon plays on the Joyce harp, the long part 1/I followed by a shorter subdominant (the firing of the V-2, chronologically in this section yet not narrated here, hinted at in the Roman numeral of the subdominant chord IV and the final 'bars' of the part reverting to the location of its first part in I) and a very long part 3 as dominant/V, relating the search for the V-2 and, like the dominant chord, creating tension through its action-heavy events. Part 4 would then contain the blues turnaround, its last 'bars' returning to the V (-2) and, cyclically, leading back to the opening. Seen this way, the novel would closely resemble the structure of a blues piece. Pynchon's ready appropriation of the blues for his countercultural project is typical of American music's naïve resurgence of interest in African-American music during the 60s and 70s.

reality available. *Gravity's Rainbow* mobilizes an aesthetic of creative paranoia as a mode of resistance to totalizing systematization and an alternative mode of meaningfully, if only locally and provisionally, representing reality. *Gravity's Rainbow's* creatively paranoid moiréification overpatterns the novel. It thereby raises awareness to the inherently mediated nature of all access to reality and provides a model for not only literary but also political action. Like its Counterforce's We-systems, and like the preterite, microtonal blue notes "bent from the official frequencies" (65-66), *Gravity's Rainbow* embraces the self-consciously delusional, aberrant and in-between as a mode of resistance. The novel employs an aesthetic of strategic interference patterns that, in their crass over- and underdetermination, destabilize totalizing systematization and allow for a discernment of reality, the moiré qua moiré. Playing on these unofficial frequencies, self-consciously delusive patterns to counter Their official delusions, *Gravity's Rainbow*, rather than offering its own alternative structure, subverts the illusory naturalness of structures of oppression altogether. The novel overplots its patterns and overcharges the System into a liberating feedback loop that drowns out Their claim to totality. Championing the conventionally undefined and irrational, that as which also the blues' flattened fifth had been rejected by Western music, *Gravity's Rainbow* operates in a space of in-betweenness. The novel evades total interpretation in favor of a constant renegotiation of the undefined and uncertain.

Hence, *Gravity's Rainbow* transforms *Ulysses'* structural metaphor of superimposition into a superposition that deals in uncertain both/and states. Viewing reality as an unending play of interfaces between patterns held in a quantum state whose value is only ever decided on in the instance of observation, *Gravity's Rainbow* can be seen to democratize its interpretation. Thus, while Joyce's mode of superimposition assumes a transcendent meaning to be discovered through and behind the mapping of patterns onto one another, Pynchon's creatively paranoid superpositions relate the production of meaning to the act of interpretation. Held in what can be read as a quantum superposition, *Gravity's Rainbow's* interfacing moirés are internally contradictory, only resolving into meaning through self-conscious interpretation on a local and provisional scale. The novel thus rejects any privileged authority. Instead, it hands over the creation of a meaning that is always plural and heterogeneous to the interpreting observer. However, *Gravity's Rainbow's* use of relativism and randomness do not diminish the novel's

firm humanism to a nihilistic relativism. Drawing on the theory of relativity and quantum physics, *Gravity's Rainbow* reconceptualizes Joyce's metaphor of astronomic parallax as a measure of objective analysis through a communal effort into the related, post-Einsteinian method of measuring the position of a celestial object through the phenomenon of red-shifting. Insight into reality is for both Joyce and Pynchon a communal effort of 'mapping' patterns onto one another. However, while the Ulyssean superimposition posits the revelation of a deep connection between actual things, Pynchon's mapping through superposition derives from metaphoric resemblances that, since all perception is based in such paranoid, unstable narrativizing, are not more or less 'real,' yet more sustainable, than Joyce's supposed deep objectivity. Reality, including the very much real oppression the novel depicts, is a product of the always-relative language through which the necessarily paranoid individual 'plots' its world. While meaning is thus not absolutely attainable and fixed but a product of the instance of observation, this does not mean that meaning is altogether lost and that therefore all human attempts to describe, understand and change the world are senseless and futile. Instead, as *Gravity's Rainbow's* post-Einsteinian reinterpretation of the Joycean stellar parallax into red-shifting shows, meaning is plural and heterogeneous, dependent on and product of commoving coordinates in language, yet far from absent in the novel. Even though Pynchon's universe and the subject within it is decentered, eternally fleeing the center, this does not make it meaningless. That *Gravity's Rainbow's* meaning is an always provisional and localized perpetual renegotiation does not diminish its meaningfulness, nor its usefulness. *Gravity's Rainbow's* in-betweenness, on the contrary, provides a model for literary and political action that resists the closure of totalization, the novel's self-deconstructing aesthetic keeping its democratic renegotiations of meaning always open.

Soaking the Harp

As the novel comments on Slothrop dropping his harp into the Boston toilet, "well at least if (when...) he finds the instrument it'll be well soaked in, a lot easier to play" (66).¹³¹ Back in Boston, Slothrop cannot yet make use of the harp's potential for "millions of possible blues

¹³¹ Soaking a harmonica in water is an old trick that supposedly makes it easier to bend notes on it. However, if done too often, this will damage the instrument. Perhaps Pynchon already unwittingly anticipates Wallace's critique of postmodernism and the Ulyssean Tradition.

lines, notes to be bent from the official frequencies, bends Slothrop hasn't really the breath to do... not yet but someday..." (65-66). Only much later, *Gravity's Rainbow* makes Slothrop able to play his harp. Finally well soaked in in the postmodern experience, Slothrop can transfigure the paranoia of postmodernity and learn to bend notes. Both he and the harp, it seems, were in need of a transformative 'soaking.' The same can be said of Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and the Ulyssean Tradition. To make Joyce's model of the Ulyssean Tradition, the harp *Gravity's Rainbow* plays its postmodern blues on, applicable to a new age, Pynchon must 'soak' it in postmodernity, modern physics, countercultural thought, and the postnational imagination. The Ulyssean Tradition, Joyce's harp, is in desperate need of 'soaking,' a revision, to retain its usefulness for developing an aesthetic of dealing with an increasingly fragmented and meaningless world. To be transplanted from the Irish-European context to the context of the global-American epic novel, i.e., to travel across the Atlantic, the Ulyssean Tradition must be imbued with Pynchon's postnational imagination. Thankfully, not only Slothrop, but also Pynchon has "a knack for doping things out" (622). Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* reinterprets the patterns provided by *Ulysses* to write the Ulyssean Tradition forth into, and make it applicable to, postmodernity. Despite *Gravity's Rainbow's* criticism of Joyce's modernist model as totalizing and paranoid, *Gravity's Rainbow* does not simply discard *Ulysses* but clearly locates itself within its Tradition. *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ulysses*, the paradigmatically modernist and the paradigmatically postmodernist novel, are not, as Solberg has it, like "apples and oranges" (Solberg 33). *Gravity's Rainbow's* distinct postmodernist aesthetic is a product of the novel's dialogue with the Ulyssean Tradition. In fact, a revisionary recovery of the Ulyssean Tradition is apparently indispensable to Pynchon's project in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Thus, Pynchon is in the same situation as Slothrop with regard to the lost harp: "Either he lets the harp go, his silver chances of song, or he has to follow" (63).

**III. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE'S *INFINITE*
*JEST***

1. Introduction: “I’m just starting on *jew’s-harp*”

In its objective to succeed postmodernism, David Foster Wallace’s response to the Ulyssean Tradition picks up where Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* formerly left off. *Infinite Jest* continually attracts comparisons with Joyce’s *Ulysses*. As Stephen Burn notes, *Infinite Jest*’s “architecture seems calculated to highlight [...] extensive parallels to *Ulysses*” (Burn, *Reader’s Guide* 25). Indeed, a dead auteur figure, JOI, his name lacking only one sound to become homophonous to Joyce’s, literally haunts *Infinite Jest*. Although already dead throughout most of the novel’s central timeline, this JOI’s work, a fragmentary work built on the notion of metempsychosis like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, connects in one way or the other all major plot lines in the novel. Ghostly present through absence like Shakespeare in Stephen Dedalus’s reading of *Hamlet* in ‘Scylla and Charybdis,’ JOI is a central creator of the world of *Infinite Jest*. He is not only the founder of the school that is one of the novel’s main settings, but also the inventor of both this future society’s source of energy (annular fusion) and the plot driving movie ‘Infinite Jest.’ Notably, *Infinite Jest* features many intertextual allusions, explicit or implicit, to Joyce and *Ulysses*. Burn provides a list of parallels such as the use of distinctly Joycean verbiage like “scrotumtightening” (112), a “Wandering Rocks’-style dispersion” (Burn, *Reader’s Guide* 25) of narration or the bipartite character structure in both novels that balances “a youthful prodigy [...] opposite an older man who is less educated but more humane” (Burn, *Reader’s Guide* 25). This list can be even further lengthened by adding, for example, *Infinite Jest*’s reference to the “*jew’s-harp*” (30), a slightly more obscure reference alluding to Stephen’s reconciled state of the “*jew’s harp*” (*Ulysses* 657) at the end of the novel (Tindall 223), a state young Hal is “just starting on” (30),¹³² or the self-conscious punning on and reverberation of Joycean stylistics in *Infinite Jest* (the living “Uncle Charles Principle”, a term coined by Hugh Kenner to refer to Joyce’s use of free indirect discourse to reveal character (Kenner 15–38), Hal’s “Uncle Charles” (13), who is “possibly the openest man of all time” (517), comes to mind). *Infinite Jest* clearly

¹³² Note how *Infinite Jest* thus picks up where *Ulysses* ends, the reference to the *jew’s harp* being situated in what was originally the opening scene of *Infinite Jest* and still is located in its very beginning.

“makes [its Joycean] heritage explicit” (Burn, *Reader’s Guide* 25), both through explicit intertextual allusions and implicitly referencing stylistics, patterns, and themes of *Ulysses*.

If Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* calls for indulgence in ‘mindless pleasures’ (the original title of Pynchon’s novel) as a countermeasure against authoritarian totalization, Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* projects the dangers this project poses to the world after postmodernism and the subject within it. Although Pynchon’s permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition may have been useful in his 1970s, Wallace’s 1990s novel suggests that the project of reinterpreting Joyce’s novel cannot be closed off yet. *Infinite Jest* diagnoses Pynchon’s postmodernist project as having failed because it indeed became too successful. Postmodern irony in Wallace’s reading of contemporaneity has been institutionalized into contemporary America’s dominant discourse, having become a fashionable pose without constructive purpose. While Pynchon’s 1960s and 1970s had issues like the Vietnam War and the hypocrisies of the Nixon administration to attack through postmodern ironization, to Wallace the 1990s were, of course, not devoid of social and political problems, yet did not offer grand issues like these to address and deconstruct. With the Cold War over, America was instituted as the singular, cultural hegemonic power rendering Wallace’s time of relative stability as lacking something that irony can constructively work itself off against. Here, deconstruction becomes its own end: contemporary America in *Infinite Jest* has become supremely self-absorbed, a nation of fatally self-conscious navel-gazers and image-addicts whose existentially ironic perspective detaches them from their human surroundings and throws them in a solipsistic double-bind. For Wallace, the 1990s are fundamentally different from the postmodern 60s and 70s, warranting a revision of postmodernist practices and a new recovery of the Ulyssean Tradition in *Infinite Jest*.

Infinite Jest is clearly inspired by and playing on Neil Postman’s 1985 study *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*: The novel’s America is amusing itself to death. The novel’s central plot device, the eponymous movie ‘Infinite Jest,’ not only drives the novel’s plot as the Pynchonesque detective reader attempts to trace its origins, current location and content throughout the pages of the novel. To unearth the nature of the enigmatic movie and make sense of (its connection to) the protagonist Hal’s confounding state in the novel’s opening, which is chronologically set after the events of the novel, the reader

has to navigate an unwieldy, achronologically narrated thicket of plots, most of which are set, as it befits an American epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition, in the city of Boston. Being so effortlessly entertaining its viewers indulge in its mindless pleasures until they die, *The Entertainment*, as which the enigmatic movie is also known in *Infinite Jest*, also serves as a comment on postmodernism's solipsizing infatuation with depthless representation. Wallace portrays contemporary America as an image culture that can only refer to representation but is incapable of communicating and thus establishing true value and interiority. Although Wallace never completely rejects the liberating function of Pynchon's project, he holds that the postmodernist anarchism Pynchon advocates has failed. Once institutionalized into the cultural norm, the rebellious acts of postmodernist irony and deconstruction have become sterile. As postmodernist rebellion has been turned into America's dominant discourse, to rebel is to conform and to conform, naturally, can also only mean conformity. For Wallace, TV and American culture in general have managed to integrate postmodern irony and self-consciousness and turn it into a fashionable, and thus marketable, pose resulting in a culture-wide solipsism. It is exactly this that Wallace seeks to therapize through his writing. The subject in Wallace's image culture has absorbed postmodernist self-consciousness and thereby become stuck in a solipsistic double bind that leaves the subject unstable and unable to communicate with its surroundings. The subject is therefore on the one hand sole creator of its own world. On the other hand, it can only understand itself as a product of the surroundings it ironically detaches itself from. Hence, Wallace's individual is alienated from the community, being both part of a herd and completely individualized and lonely. The subject's hyper-self-consciousness, which can be read as postmodern irony generalized into an existential attitude, makes it impossible to sincerely communicate with the other. To alleviate the stress of this existential loneliness, Wallace's characters indulge in substance abuse and compulsive spectating.

Hence, while *Gravity's Rainbow*, as could be shown, poses as a movie and thereby metafictionally points toward the fictionalized nature of all reality, the doubling of 'Infinite Jest' the (fictional) movie and *Infinite Jest* the (real) novel serves an obverse function: by outlining the ways in which novel and reality are *not* like the movie, *Infinite Jest* seeks to provide a way out of the inward-bent spirals of postmodernism's self-reflexive metafiction. Rather than

centripetally commenting on the fictionality of the text and the linguistic constructedness of reality, *Infinite Jest* centrifugally motions outside the text toward author and reader as embodied, non-fictional entities. In its re-valuation of a real communication between author and reader, *Infinite Jest* is part of a (literary) movement after postmodernism. Referred to as the “New Sincerity” (Kelly) or by related terms like “metamodernism” (Vermeulen and van den Akker) or “post-postmodernism” (Burn), this movement of the early 21st and late 20th century, of which *Infinite Jest* is exemplary, seeks to incorporate postmodernist irony and self-consciousness and instead of letting it be undercut by them, strives towards sincere, moral communication. Characterized by the attempt to combine meaningful engagement and self-conscious awareness, these texts actively contrast themselves against what they view as postmodernist skepticism and cynicism. Although *Infinite Jest* thus accepts core postmodernist insights – the Lyotardian loss of all metanarratives, poststructuralism’s linguistic nature of reality, etc. – it holds that them having become generally accepted conditions of contemporaneity has altered the role of a postmodernist ironic mode. Resting, at least partially, on a self-styled opposition to an exaggerated, “radically cynical” and deconstructive “*imagined postmodernism*” (Rutten 203), the New Sincerity displays a desire for new values, oscillating, as Vermeulen and Van den Akker formulate it for the related, possibly identical, metamodernism, “between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 5–6).¹³³ *Infinite Jest* subscribes to postmodernist premises in general and does not seek to revert to an uncritical naiveté. It instead attempts to construct a rebelliously naïve sincerity from a recourse to and conjoinment of both modernism and postmodernism.

Infinite Jest negotiates its agonistic, rather than simply antagonistic, relationship to postmodernism through its permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition and therefore a more positively structured response to the paradigmatically modernist *Ulysses* and its methods. Stephen Burn is correct in noting that the way *Infinite Jest* picks up “the Joycean template”

¹³³ The antagonism against a more than loosely defined ‘postmodernism’ the New Sincerity constructs is highly questionable. On the one hand, movements always define themselves as a reaction to/against prior movements. On the other hand, irony and self-consciousness *do* feature strongly in postmodernist discourses and cultural products. Seeing how, as will be shown, the positions Wallace supports are in fact not too different from those of, e.g., Pynchon’s ‘original’ postmodernism, perhaps the best interpretation of the ‘postmodernism’ Wallace and the New Sincerity react to/against is not the postmodernism of the 60s and 70s but its 1980s second wave, i.e., Wallace’s contemporaries and direct predecessors such as Bret Easton Ellis.

cannot and must not “be contained in a simple list of overlaps” (Burn, *Reader’s Guide* 25). Wallace places himself in a productive Ulyssean Tradition, updating its methods to deal with the postmodern solipsism he deplors. The phenomenon of *Infinite Jest* revisiting the modernist Joyce must be viewed in its relation to postmodernism. As Marshall Boswell notes, Wallace’s fiction “is directly engaged in moving beyond” (Boswell 12) modernism and postmodernism, suggesting “a recognition that their differences can now be reconciled” (Boswell 87). Writing from the background of an unprecedentedly academically schooled ‘program era’ of literature after postmodernism, *Infinite Jest*’s reinterpretation of Joyce’s *Ulysses* hinges on (literary) Theory as it, even more than *Gravity’s Rainbow*, incorporates the ‘secondary literature’ surrounding Joyce into its reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition. In this way, Wallace’s irony, his metafiction and intertextualities that extend from art to Theory itself is not so much a postmodernist deconstruction of reality as rather a ‘realistic’ portrayal of a contemporary America that has itself absorbed these texts and become endlessly deconstructive.

Infinite Jest’s response to the Joycean metempsychotic method duly employs Lacanian theory (sometimes verbatim) to describe postmodern irony as an oppressive phallogocentric discourse passed on to the novel’s literary orphans by their postmodern (grand)fathers. Joyce’s metempsychotic transmigration of souls is thereby refashioned into the perpetual reincarnation of the fathers’ postmodernist, essentially misogynist styles in the next generation without real potential for rebellion and change. To overcome this oppressive influence, Wallace therefore cannot simply rebelliously revert to a pre-postmodern, uncritically naïve style. Instead, he employs French Feminism’s reading of Joyce’s ‘Penelope’ chapter as *écriture féminine* to style his reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition as a feminine response to masculine postmodernism. Highly self-conscious of his own gender, Wallace lets this shift happen outside the text in the reader’s own performative perspective toward it.

With mothers, fathers and sons constituting central touchstones of *Infinite Jest*’s metempsychosis, the second chapter goes deeper into the issue of familial relations in Wallace’s family novel. Shown to be at the heart of both positivist and poststructuralist thought, ‘belief’ in philosophical substances is seen as leading into the solipsistic estrangement Wallace also illustrates in his portrayals of the dysfunctions of the contemporary family. While reference to

substances had served a reparative function in Joyce's *Ulysses*, in *Infinite Jest*'s climate of postmodernist irony they result in an infinite regress of self-justification. In *Infinite Jest*, Joycean consubstantiality is therefore reformulated in later Wittgenstein's terms as a family resemblance. Wallace mobilizes an ethical (mis)reading of Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy as an alternative to the poststructuralist theses that he cannot fully dispute, but at the same time, must reject as solipsizing. Wittgenstein provides Wallace with a theory of language that retains poststructuralism's relationality and linguistic constructedness of reality while allowing for communality and meaningful communication. Even though the withdrawal into self-centered privacy and seeming ontological autonomy results in an existentially lonely, solipsistic and unstable self, Wallace proffers a view of (literary) communication as a public language game. *Infinite Jest* transposes the secular theology of Joyce's consubstantial method into a post-secularized ordinary language philosophy. Stylized as an act of faith, Wallace proposes the rehearsal of conventions, the clichés postmodern irony derides as vacuous, as a therapy to a solipsistic postmodern individuation. He applies Joyce's trinity of Stephen, Bloom, and Molly metafictionally to the relationship between author, reader, and text, thereby recasting the communion-enabling consubstantial method of Joyce's *Ulysses* in Wittgensteinian terms. In a pseudo-religious argument for the reader's faith in the author's unbiographical yet real presence, Wallace revises the poststructuralist dogma of Roland Barthes' 'Death of the Author.' By calling for such a performative leap of faith from postmodernist irony into a reparative public language, *Infinite Jest* re-establishes author, reader, and text as separate entities that work together in dialogue in the construction of meaning and stable selfhood. The novel's stimulation of a recognition of the reader's, the text's, and by extension, the author's materiality points toward an intersubjective connection, thereby offering a way out of the dead-end of postmodernist self-reflection.

As one can see, Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is heavily invested in inducing a shift in perspective from postmodernist cynicism to a rather modernist belief in the reparative function of art. The novel invites this readerly performance by highlighting the material conditions, and thus the real, extratextual presence of reading and writing. Similar to the Hebraic and Hellenic cultural forces that frame *Ulysses*, Wallace purports the juxtaposition of postmodern cynicism

and modern naïveté in contemporaneity. However, a regressive aesthetic in a parallax shift from postmodernism back to modernism would constitute a return to an uncritical naïveté inadmissible to Wallace. Instead, *Infinite Jest* expands the perspectival shift of parallax with the notion of a readerly Doppler effect. Playing on the materiality of the novel, *Infinite Jest* affords a double reading. Mimicking a Doppler effect, the novel ‘sounds’ differently on its postmodernist read-through than it does on a consecutive, reparative reading: while a postmodernist reader is trapped in Pynchonesque circles of rereading and never-ending re-creation of meaning inside the text, a reader who can abstain from irony’s addictive potential can end the novel’s annular loops and leave the text and its self-reflections. From an ontological perspective, the novel’s parallax method shifts the reader’s view from ironic detachment to meaningful engagement. Epistemologically, the Doppler effect that runs through the novel allows for the recognition of new and stable meaning. Parallel to Joyce’s convergence of Hebraism and Hellenism into the Good European through parallax then, Wallace’s reinterpretation of the parallax method effects an oscillation between postmodern skepticism and modern enthusiasm. Both readings coexist in the novel despite their contradictions never being resolved; they are indeed constituents of one whole reading that surpasses the novel’s materiality. Hence, just as *Ulysses* secularizes mass and consubstantiality and thereby revises the slave morality of Hebraism into a reintegrative outlook on modernity, *Infinite Jest*’s parallax/Doppler establishes a critical, self-aware yet reparative naïveté.

Wallace’s dialogic response to the Ulyssean Tradition bespeaks a more overtly positive evaluation of the modernism of the paradigmatic *Ulysses* than Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Oscillating between both modes, *Infinite Jest* tries to achieve modernist aims through postmodernist means. Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* employs the Ulyssean Tradition in his career-spanning goal to convey “what it is to be a fucking *human being*” (qtd. in Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 26) and find a way out of postmodernism’s existential irony. To counter the cultural solipsism Wallace views as an effect of postmodern irony, *Infinite Jest* reinterprets the Ulyssean Tradition to establish grounds for meaningful communication. For Wallace and Joyce alike, the artistic work has the potential to serve a reparative and reintegrative function in the world. In contrast to Pynchon’s pronounced authorial effacement

and multivocal plurality, Wallace accentuates presence outside the text, most importantly the role of the author. At the same time, however, *Infinite Jest* never fully renounces postmodernist practices. Thus, if postmodernist metafiction constitutes an act comparable to theory (i.e., writing about writing), Wallace's writing does not abstain from this practice, but in fact ups postmodernism's ante: schooled in the academic discourse of the late 20th century, *Infinite Jest* employs Theory itself as critical intertexts in their own right. However, unlike Pynchon's postmodernist reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition, this metafictional writing does not highlight the constructedness of reality, but rather points toward a world outside the text. Although upon closer inspection the postmodernism Wallace constructs to define himself against is hardly tenable or historical, and his final conclusions ultimately appear more similar to *Gravity's Rainbow* than he purports them to be, this antithetical strategy is necessary for him to develop a new aesthetic after postmodernism and take the American epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition into the 21st century.

2. Metempsychosis: Gendering *Infinite Jest*'s "Family Mythology" and the Reincarnation of Postmodern Styles

Infinite Jest probably announces its self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition most clearly in its treatment of metempsychosis. The novel playfully acknowledges its reinterpretation of the Joycean metempsychotic method in the recurring name Madame Psychosis. An actress in the title-giving lethally entertaining 'Infinite Jest,' a film based in a metempsychotic "mother-death cosmology" (230) of reincarnation, Madame Psychosis also appears as the name the character Joelle van Dyne uses in her popular radio show and the street-name for the mysterious hallucinogen DMZ. As will be shown, metempsychosis in the novel serves as both a means to describe the novel's human condition as entrapped within a perpetual reincarnation of a prior generation's postmodernist styles in the novel's projection of a near future USA, and a self-consciously filial method to overcome said oppressive influence of the novel's postmodern fathers.

The mangling of metempsychosis into 'Madame Psychosis' also points toward the theme of psychosis in the novel. Psychosis is an integral aspect in the novel's reinterpretation of Joyce's metempsychosis via Lacanian theory. *Infinite Jest* likens its (post)postmodern society's condition to schizophrenia in that it pathologically reproduces alienating patterns learned from mass media. Simply copying the behavior presented to them in the parent generation's media products, the novel's young generation has no chance to 'grow up' and cast off their (grand)parents' influence.

The novel's permutation of the Ulyssean metempsychotic method thus employs Lacanian theory to render the novel's use of mythology as a meditation on the interconnectedness of language, gender, and the existential loneliness it argues is produced by postmodern irony. Styled as an intergenerational, agonistic struggle with its postmodern predecessors, the novel in particular refers to Jacques Lacan's theories of the Oedipus complex and the mirror stage, i.e., theories of infantile entries into language, selfhood, and sexual relations. An exemplary product of a "Program Era" (McGurl, "The Program Era" 282) in late 20th and early 21st century American literature that is extensively schooled in academic

discourse, *Infinite Jest* quotes from and structures itself around Lacanian theory. Historically contingent figures, fathers, mothers, and sons, are thereby used as allegories for Lacanian concepts through which Wallace's fiction counters a postmodernist discourse it views as based in Lacan. Notably, then, Wallace employs Lacanian theory to argue against the ideology he views this theory to have produced. Through its self-conscious reference to poststructuralist theory, *Infinite Jest* implicitly criticizes the Lacanian model. The novel identifies a solipsizing, postmodern outlook as emerging from the cultural internalization of a Lacanian, phallogocentric discourse it frames as being built on the objectification of a female other. This entrapment within Lacanian theory is embodied in the novel's projected culture of irony and its mass media as becomes most evident in the recursively narcissistic filmography of the novel's auteur figure JOI that culminates in 'Infinite Jest.' A critique of misogyny, cultural prejudices against women related as what Arno Gruen calls a 'mythology of maleness,' is integral to the novel's reading of postmodernism as a paternal heritage and the novel's use of metempsychosis, Joyce's mythical method, to overcome it. Since the novel identifies the postmodernist worldview it seeks to counter with phallogocentrism, it can mobilize feminist criticism as a meaningful countermeasure. Opposing a patriarchal postmodern style, *Infinite Jest* intertextually references French Feminism's concept of *écriture féminine*. The novel's metempsychosis, in all of its iterations linked to a femininity poignantly obfuscated in the novel, claims a feminine language as a redemptive alternative to masculine postmodernism. Metafictionally continuing the tradition of *écriture féminine* of the 'Penelope' chapter in *Ulysses*, *Infinite Jest* employs postmodernist means of intertextuality and metafiction for the reintegrative, Ulyssean ends of metempsychosis. French Feminism thereby serves Wallace as a model for arguing with Lacan, the postmodernist language that is the only one available to him and his audience, against Lacan. Like his characters, Wallace must inevitably speak in the voice of his postmodernist predecessors. However, from this voice, his dialogue with the Ulyssean Tradition develops an aesthetic that purports to succeed postmodern irony.

Through referencing French Feminist concepts intertextually, metempsychosis in *Infinite Jest* creates an aesthetic that can be traced back to the environment of the creative writing programs of the 1980s and 90s of which Wallace was both a student and later himself a

teacher. Unlike earlier postmodernist writers like Pynchon, who employs e.g., quantum physics in his literary agenda, Wallace, schooled in the US 80s Theory-infused writing programs, operates from the grounds of literary and cultural theory.¹³⁴ The novel's utilization of the concept of a feminine, non-binary language thereby seeks to achieve an oscillation between modernist and postmodernist modes. The novel's gendered metempsychosis thus proposes a form of metafiction distinct from that of its early and high postmodernist precursors which Lee Konstantinou has termed "meta-nonfiction" (Konstantinou, "No Bull: David Foster Wallace and Postironic Belief" 98). Instead of pointing toward the inherent mediatedness of all experience that destabilizes ontology in postmodernist texts, Wallace's form of metafiction points without the text as it invites an ontological shift in the reader from a solipsizing and masculine perspective to a redemptive, feminine language.

As is typical of Wallace's program era writing that has, so to speak, postmodernism under its belt and is unwilling to discard its liberating potential yet deems the by the 1980s 'old' style exhausted, this change is sought from within a postmodernist mode through self-consciously referencing theory and establishing a connection between author and reader. Wallace, part of a generation of writers unprecedently intimate with academic discourse, develops his metempsychotic aesthetic by self-consciously appropriating, (mis)quoting and reifying poststructuralist and French Feminist literature. Thereby, whereas *Ulysses* would reference Homeric myth in order to stabilize its modern world, *Infinite Jest's* mythical method references the masculine myths of a postmodern discourse, offering a redemptive rebirth to the reader through her assumption of a reintegrative perspective. Metempsychosis is thus dealt with on three levels in the novel: Firstly, the novel describes a seeming reincarnation of the postmodern fathers in the next generation. On this level, Lacan and the postmodernist discourse

¹³⁴ David Foster Wallace can be understood as a principal figure in what Mark McGurl calls the program era in postwar American fiction (McGurl, "The Institution of Nothing: David Foster Wallace in the Program" 31). As McGurl argues in his 2009 *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*, the rising popularity of creative writing programs during the late 80s and 90s produced a kind of literature increasingly connected to academia. Not only did (the prospect of) teaching at universities have an effect on the postmodernist authors hired as creative writing teachers, these programs also produced a new generation of writers for whom academia was intimately linked to writing. Adam Kelly in "Beginning with Postmodernism" similarly reflects on 1980s and 90s literature's "conversation with postmodernist fiction" (Kelly, "Beginning with Postmodernism" 394) and Wallace himself in "Fictional Futures and Conspicuously Young" worries about the effects the burgeoning Creative Writing MFAs would have on future authors, only to later himself accept a teaching position he used to write *Infinite Jest*.

he is presented as having helped birth provide the ‘myth’ that, as in *Ulysses*, returns in contemporaneity. Secondly, and related to the above, this metempsychosis is a product of *Infinite Jest*’s society’s relationship with media. Mass media in the novel are depicted as transporting an archetypal perspective on femininity, the misogynous myths of Eve and Hellen. Combined with the existential irony these media transport, their mythology of maleness effects a culture-wide solipsism. Thirdly, on the level of the novel’s aestheticization of author and reader, *Infinite Jest* proposes the performative assumption of a feminine voice on the reader’s behalf to escape the aforementioned constant return of the postmodern dead. Metempsychosis, in this sense, becomes a transmigration of gender. The novel achieves this gendered metempsychosis in itself reincarnating Lacanian theory, arguing with an allegorization of Lacanian concepts against the solipsizing ideology it views to spring from a cultural internalization of Lacan.

Mythical Method(s)

Infinite Jest’s permutation of the Ulyssean metempsychotic method operates clearly from the novel’s goal to surmount a postmodernist style deemed solipsizing, a core concern of Wallace’s entire oeuvre. This agonistic, rather than simply antagonistic, relationship to “our postmodern fathers” (“E Unibus Pluram” 183) becomes especially explicit in the novel’s treatment of metempsychosis, the use of myth in *Ulysses* that links contemporaneity to the (mythological) past. As Marshall Boswell argues in *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, one of the earliest monographs on the author, Wallace’s work represents a third “decisive turn in literary sensibility” (Boswell 68) after modernism and postmodernism. It thereby suggests “both an understanding of [modernism’s and postmodernism’s respective positions] and also a recognition that their differences can now be reconciled” (Boswell 87). The use of myth in *Infinite Jest* and Wallace in general must therefore be understood within the context of its modernist (e.g., James Joyce and T.S. Eliot’s reading of the paradigmatic *Ulysses*) and postmodernist (e.g., John Barth) precursors as well as the novel environment of the 1980s creative writing programs from which the novel originates.

Joyce's paradigmatic use of metempsychosis in *Ulysses*, as could be shown, is widely equivalent to what Eliot calls "the mythical method," a strategy that instills meaning and order into the modern world by "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" 177). This evocation of mythological archetypes in mundane 1904 Dublin invests Bloom's and Stephen's wanderings with epic importance and gives the everyday of modern life transcendent meaning. Postmodernist literature reverses Joyce's use of myth in a manner for which John Barth's mode of the mythical method is most exemplary. Even though also present in other postmodernist works, Barth's employment of mythical characters in *Chimera* and *Lost in the Funhouse* is exemplary of the philosophical premises underlying a more general postmodernist response to Joyce's mythical method.¹³⁵ Accusing Joyce's method of taking "the wrong end of the mythopoeic stick" (Barth, *Chimera* 199), the postmodernist Barth, as Boswell outlines, "composes narratives involving mythic characters [...] that point to the contemporary everyday" (Boswell 68). Barth's use of myth thereby highlights the narratively constructed nature of reality. Unlike Joyce's use of myth, then, Barth's postmodernist project employs archetypal figures directly rather than referring to them through parallelisms in order to deconstruct (modernist) production of meaning.

According to Boswell, Wallace's use of myth in his first short story collection *Girl with Curious Hair* derives from both the Joycean, modernist mode of mythopoesis and Barth's postmodernist reversal, "reclaim[ing] the metaphysical claims of mythic connectivity for self-reflexive fiction, all without forgetting for a moment the postmodern critique of mythic transcendence" (Boswell 89). As shall be seen, the later *Infinite Jest* modifies and elaborates upon the strategies developed in *Girl with Curious Hair* in its treatment of metempsychosis. If the divide between modernist and postmodernist mythical modes stems from an argument which end of the "mythopoeic stick" to take, Wallace's use of myth appears to juggle said stick, handling both ends while not allowing itself a firm grip on either. This new, oscillating stance toward myth first becomes evident in Wallace's oeuvre in *Girl with Curious Hair*. Wallace aims

¹³⁵ John Barth, who himself taught at university, is explicitly played upon in Wallace's first "attempt to enter into and at the same time revise a tradition that begins with Joyce's *Ulysses*" (Boswell 68) in *Girl With Curious Hair*. In particular the novella "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way", set in such a creative writing program and starring a thinly veiled John Barth as a teacher, explicitly announces itself to be "written in the margins of John Barth's 'Lost in the Funhouse'" (*GCH* vi).

to converge modernist and postmodernist mythopoeic frameworks and is thereby exemplary of one major point of distinction between postmodernist and contemporary literature, its problematized yet ultimately positive stance toward (high) modernism (cf. Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 200). As Boswell shows, *Girl with Curious Hair* projects modernist and postmodernist mythical modes onto mass media narratives. Wallace thereby posits that pop-cultural figures, especially those of television, have become the new mythological archetypes of American culture after postmodernism (Boswell 69).

This position stems from a diagnosis of Wallace's 1980s/90s USA, present throughout his entire oeuvre but most explicitly theorized in his manifesto-like essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," that, through the assimilation of postmodern stylistics¹³⁶ by commercial television, contemporary American culture has become deeply solipsistic. Postmodern irony, an existential attitude of self-consciousness, and the resulting solipsism are the distinctive malaise of Wallace's American culture. "E Unibus Pluram" argues that a connection between postmodernist literature and commercial TV, neither in and of itself particularly dangerous, has produced a cultural atmosphere of irony, cynicism, and alienation in Wallace's contemporary U.S. society.¹³⁷ Following a neoliberal logic,¹³⁸ TV has appropriated self-referential postmodernist styles of the 1960s in order to increase viewership, and thus ad-revenue, and made itself "immune to charges that it lacks any meaningful connection to the world outside it" ("E Unibus Pluram" 160). Irony and metafiction are thereby emptied of their potential to undermine "mass-marketed narrative[s]" ("E Unibus Pluram" 173). As for example the "Funhouse" franchise a John Barth stand-in in Wallace's "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way" finds shows, to Wallace postmodernism itself has become such a mass-

¹³⁶ Note that Wallace's definition of postmodernism, which will be applied in the following chapters, is highly idiosyncratic, (mis)representing postmodernist metafiction and minimalism as a non-ethical blend of materialism and poststructuralism. Despite showing clear affinities to actual postmodernism, Wallace's reading probably cannot hold to a close analysis of American postmodernist fiction by authors like Pynchon, Carver or Barth. References to 'postmodernism,' 'postmodern irony' etc. must therefore be taken with a grain of salt, referring to Wallace's definition of postmodernism, integral to *Infinite Jest's* reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition to overcome postmodern solipsism, rather than 'actual' postmodernist literature. Wallace utilizes 'postmodernism' as a strawman against which he develops his aesthetic.

¹³⁷ Like Joyce and Dublin, Wallace rarely speaks of places outside the United States or North America.

¹³⁸ The relationship between this solipsizing phenomenon and late capitalism already becomes apparent in the essay's title "E Unibus Pluram" (out of one many), a spoof of the U.S. currency motto "E Pluribus Unum" highlighting the alienated and fragmented state of Wallace's perceived human condition.

marketed narrative. With TV according to Wallace functioning as “the medium that constructs our worldview” (“E Unibus Pluram” 180), contemporary Americans are increasingly estranged from each other and themselves. They have become unable to communicate sincerely as self-consciousness and irony have turned into their “cultural norm” (“E Unibus Pluram” 184). The society Wallace’s fiction and nonfiction portrays thus becomes doubly lonely, both objectively and subjectively solipsized: stuck in a vicious cycle of ironic watching, viewers are provided with putative selfhood from the without of mass media. The ironic ‘in-joke’ between viewer and self-referential TV seemingly individualizes the viewer while, being a *mass* medium, simultaneously effaces them within a “herd” (“E Unibus Pluram” 176) they have no means of communicating with unironically. This leaves continued TV watching as the only option to uphold their selfhood, a selfhood that, however, is always destabilized and put into question as it only emerges as a surface performance. In a culture that is itself paralyzed by self-consciousness because it has internalized postmodernism and poststructuralism as its own cultural norm,¹³⁹ the modes of criticism postmodernist modes of literature provide are deemed useless (“E Unibus Pluram” 183).

Practitioners of such an “irreverent postmodern approach” (“E Unibus Pluram” 173) Wallace terms “image-fiction” (“E Unibus Pluram” 184) apply postmodernist techniques of self-reflexively using pop-culture to a culture that already is self-reflexive. Thus, according to Wallace, image-fiction constitutes a sterile “reabsorption of the very features TV had absorbed from postmodern lit” (“E Unibus Pluram” 192). Wallace antagonizes this contemporary mode of postmodernist fiction exemplified by authors such as Mark Leyner or Bret Easton Ellis which, similar to Wallace, views the contemporary human condition as pop-culturally constructed but seeks to postmodernly ironize the shallow hegemony of an (already ironic) mass

¹³⁹ Wallace, who intellectually matured in the academic context of the 1980s creative writing programs, subscribes to a view of poststructuralism as the theoretical arm of postmodernist literature. This view certainly stems from the then prevalent academic approach of discussing postmodernist literature through a poststructuralist lens. In addition, while this equation of postmodernism and poststructuralism certainly does not hold for (early) postmodernists like Pynchon or Barth, Wallace’s criticism of ‘postmodernism’ is in fact directed against the late postmodernism of the 1980s, literature predominantly written by other creative writing MFAs like Wallace who are aware of, and explicitly utilize, poststructuralist theory in their writings. It is thus also important to note that, as will be seen, the ‘fathers’ Wallace attacks in *Infinite Jest* (e.g., JOI) represent Wallace’s own generation and not that of Barth or Pynchon.

culture. Instead, he proposes the emergence of literary “anti-rebels” (“E Unibus Pluram” 193) of sincerity who are capable of reconciling postmodern cynicism with naïveté.

In contemporary America, pop-culture, as Boswell notes, provides the myths for its postmodern culture (Boswell 67). Wallace’s first short story collection *Girl With Curious Hair* for instance can thus be read as a response to Barth’s postmodernism that stars pop-cultural figures like Late Night host David Letterman the way Barth would use classical myth. The collection’s copyright page thus states that “[w]here the names of corporate, media, or political figures are used here, those names are meant only to denote figures, images, the stuff of collective dreams” (*GCH* vi). Occupying a Jungian perspective, Wallace’s *Girl With Curious Hair* views its ‘real’ public figures as the mythic “stuff of collective dreams.” Pop culture is treated as “the source of our contemporary archetypes” (Boswell 67). Boswell therefore argues that Wallace’s early stories treat “pop-cultural figures as fictional constructs,” thereby exhibiting “the manner by which the objects of mass media have become the stuff of our collective unconscious” while also exposing after Barth’s postmodernism “the numerous ways in which this same collective unconscious itself is a construct” (Boswell 69). *Infinite Jest*’s treatment of myth reflects this view of a televisually conditioned US culture. Unsurprisingly, then, Molly Bloom’s “who is he when he’s at home” (*Ulysses* 62) when she asks Leopold Bloom to define metempsychosis reappears in *Infinite Jest* as a TV-show, the Irishized “Oo Is 'E When 'E's at 'Ome” (834), within a list of otherwise ‘real’ TV formats.¹⁴⁰ *Infinite Jest* retains *Girl With Curious Hair*’s conceptual relation between mythology and pop-culture but applies a Lacanian perspective on what the short story collection before had conceptualized in a Jungian framework.

Girl With Curious Hair’s Jungian treatment of postmodern pop-culture thus shifts in *Infinite Jest* into a Lacanian view of postmodern self-consciousness as a discourse which is transmitted along what the novel refers to as “family mythology” (838). This discourse doubly alienates *Infinite Jest*’s society. Thus, having internalized an ironic discourse, the solipsistic

¹⁴⁰ While ‘Seinfeld,’ ‘Ren and Stimpy,’ ‘Cheers!,’ ‘Hazel,’ ‘M*A*S*H,’ and ‘Bewitched’ are actual TV-shows and ‘Exposed Northerners’ puns on the 1990s’ ‘Northern Exposure,’ the Ulyssean reference to metempsychosis sticks out as not being relatable to an actual TV show.

protagonist Hal reportedly “misses somebody he’s never even met” (1053), being alienated from himself through language. However, as Boswell remarks, the novel’s critique of Lacan plays out in the fact that “[n]ot uncoincidentally, Hal’s father is given the moniker ‘Himself,’ a means by which Wallace can connect the unknowable Other (in this case Hal’s elusive father) with Hal’s own interior self, his own subjectivity. [...] Hal knows neither himself nor Himself” (Boswell 151). The tyranny of the fathers’ language, i.e., the novel’s ‘fathers’ postmodern style, and the simultaneous absence of these fathers from their children’s lives is central to *Infinite Jest*. Hal’s and his brothers’ selves are always related to “Himself. As in quote ‘the man Himself’” (29), their father and the postmodern style he passes on to them. This ‘quote’ is a Lacanian one: “The style is the man himself” (Lacan, *Écrits* 3), the phrase with which Lacan opens the overture to his collection *Écrits*, ironically itself a quotation, seems to resonate throughout *Infinite Jest*. As can be seen in the novel’s characters quoting Lacan to describe their family relations, Wallace assumes his contemporary culture to be so saturated with poststructuralist theory as to allow him to play on, quote, and reify Lacanian theory. Through the literary mode, Wallace can allegorize Lacanian concepts and negotiate philosophical positions in a manner unavailable to conventionally ‘sound’ philosophical thinking and writing. Since Wallace views American culture as having internalized Theory into its nature, theoretical concepts find embodiment in the historically contingent characters and relationships presented in a novel like *Infinite Jest*. This allows Wallace to utilize and reference the ‘myth,’ rather than ‘truth,’ of Lacanian theory without necessarily having to agree or disagree with it.

On the one hand then, style, in *Infinite Jest*’s case postmodernism, brings forth and inescapably divides the self. This postmodern style is identified with the father, Himself. Lacan assigns the family an integral role in transmitting what he later calls the discourse of the Other, speaking of “psychological heredity” and claiming that “[t]he family plays a primordial role in the transmission of culture” (Lacan, *Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual* 7). On the other hand, as will be shown, *Infinite Jest* connects this postmodern style not only to paternity (Himself), but also to masculinity (the *man* himself/Himself). Solipsism is thereby depicted as tightly interlinked with patriarchy, patrilineal and patricidal succession and misogynist language.

Infinite Jest's treatment of myth and the present's link to the past shifts its focus from pop-cultural figures as mythological archetypes to gender and family relations providing its mythology. The novel views postmodern irony from within the framework of a Lacanian discourse of the Other, yet also as itself emerging from such a Lacanian model of selfhood, an alienating language passed down through generations. This also explains why, even though, as will be shown, mass media retain their solipsizing role in the novel, 'real' pop-cultural figures in *Infinite Jest* lack the prominence they had in *Girl With Curious Hair*, being virtually absent from the novel. In *Infinite Jest*, pop-cultural figures are mentioned and discussed but do not appear as independent, 'mythical' characters. Instead, *Infinite Jest* uses mythology as part of the critiqued discourse, a chain of signifiers in the language of postmodern style, in order to discuss solipsism. As Wallace himself notes in "The Empty Plenum: David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress*," written between the publication of *Girl With Curious Hair* and *Infinite Jest*, 'mythologizing' can help "transfigure & transcend explanation" ("The Empty Plenum" 106). As will be further elaborated upon, the metempsychotic critique and surmounting of postmodern style in *Infinite Jest* is centered around the perusal of what Wallace in "The Empty Plenum" argues to be the foundational myths of western male subjectivity, the self's definition against the misogynist archetypes of Helen, passively guilty as object, and Eve, actively guilty as subject ("The Empty Plenum" 102–04). The reference point of *Infinite Jest*'s metempsychosis is thus not the *Odyssey* nor any other ancient mythology but a male mythology that conditions a perpetual reincarnation of postmodernist styles in the next generation.

In its interpretation of these Evian and Hellenic myths as constitutional of a patriarchal, postmodern discourse that fosters solipsism, *Infinite Jest* concentrates issues of language and gender in the field of the family. On the one hand, misogyny is thereby treated as the cause of solipsism since the novel traces the poststructuralist equation of representation to reality back to an objectification of women in what it views as Lacan's implicitly masculine framework of selfhood. On the other hand, the effects of misogyny serve the novel as an illustration of a solipsistic double bind. Archetypal representations of women in western society are, like the solipsist, stuck in a dilemma of impossible selfhood as the feminine becomes 'guilty' as an active subject (the Eve-model: the solipsist responsible for the reality he alone creates from his

language) and as a passive object (the Helen-model: the postmodern subject defined by others in a network of signification). Herein, *Infinite Jest* reconciles aspects of both postmodernist and modernist approaches to myth. In a postmodernist vein, myth is seen as narrative creating reality. Western myths of female culpability establish a discourse of the female as an other against which the (male) self defines itself. At the same time, such family mythology connects past to present, tracing the transmission of alienating solipsism through patriarchal family structures and the mass media such a postmodern, phallogentric culture produces and consumes.

Family Mythology

When James Orin Incandenza, the absent patriarch of the novel's central Incandenza family, appears to Don Gately as a wraith from beyond the grave, he describes his own, his father's and grandfather's, and also his son's downfall into an alienated "hiddenness" (839), an incapability to communicate, and addiction as conforming to "family mythology":

The wraith says the nuclear family had believed he (the wraith) was unstable and was confusing the boy with his own (the wraith's) boyhood self, or with the wraith's father's father, the blank wooden man who *according to family mythology* had 'driven' the wraith's father to 'the bottle' and unrealized potential and an early cerebral hemorrhage. (838; emphasis mine)

Parental absence and abuse are thematically central to the Incandenza history and the novel's self-consciously filial plot in general. As Wallace remarks in a 1993 interview with Larry McCaffery, the postmodern condition from which his fiction stems can be likened to the situation of teenagers whose parents have gone away on a trip. While these teenagers are throwing a wild party they are "gradually realiz[ing] that [their] parents in fact aren't ever coming back" and have to face the task "to be the parents" (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 52) themselves. Indeed, failures of intergenerational communication which in turn result in more alienation, substance abuse, and missed connections, dominate the entire Incandenza family: from the novel's chronologically earliest 1960s account of a (significantly

one-sided) conversation between a ten-year-old JOI and his alcoholic father (157-169),¹⁴¹ to the Incandenzas of the novel's present, parental abuse defines their family history. The absence and failure of paternal-filial relationships thus describes the inverse of what Clare Hayes-Brady holds for the role of female figures, mothers in particular, in Wallace's writing. While women are according to Hayes-Brady present but "peripheral to the action" and their silenced speech appears as "influential rather than potent," the novel's fathers play a role inverse to this female "silent potency" (Hayes-Brady, "Language, Gender" 136). Despite, or because of, their emotional or physical, yet clearly not linguistic, absence, fathers dominate the novel's world and the lives of its sons. As will be shown, the novel's issue with paternity is one of both oppressive presence and orphaning absence. The presence, or absence, of JOI for example, a character so self-reflexively inward-bent as to earn his family's nickname "Himself. As in quote 'the man Himself'" (29), connects all of the novel's meandering plots. The gifted optician JOI is thus not only responsible for the realization of annular fusion, the future United States ONAN's circular and environmentally hazardous production of energy from the waste of its own energy production.¹⁴² He is also the founder of E.T.A., the tennis academy that serves as one of the novel's main settings. In addition, as a filmmaker, JOI is the creator of the lethally entertaining 'Infinite Jest,' an entertainment cartridge turned political threat the content and location of which is one central enigma of the novel. All of the novel's threads can be seen to come together in the influence of this father, a father who is thus both oppressively present through his ubiquitous influence and, due to his suicide and prior emotional unapproachableness, completely absent.

Notably, JOI's film 'Infinite Jest,' in concurrence with Wallace's goal in *Girl With Curious Hair* to "sing to the *next* generation" (*GCH* 348), was originally intended as a means to communicate with his son Hal and "reverse thrust on a young self's fall into the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death in life" (839). The filmmaker JOI is obsessed with the thought that his son Hal is becoming mute and is about to drift into addiction. Therefore, he creates a film

¹⁴¹ Young JOI's speech-parts are missing from the conversation, mirroring a chronologically later meeting of JOI and his son Hal, in which JOI, masqueraded as a "professional conversationalist" (28) accuses Hal of having become "mute" (31) even though he is clearly talking.

¹⁴² It can thus be read, as Christopher Bartlett notes, as a cautionary "grand metaphor for trying to curtail irony or nihilism by using irony or nihilism to point out and then replace them" (Bartlett 379), i.e., the strategy Wallace ascribes to image-fiction.

meant to counter this development. Instead of ‘curing’ solipsism, however, ‘Infinite Jest’ even further reinforces postmodern culture’s addiction to passive entertainment. The film turns out to be so effortlessly entertaining its viewers cease to do anything but watch until their death. Like Wallace, JOI can be seen to employ Lacanian theory in order to counteract the negative influence of postmodernist discourse on his son. As Boswell notes, “[t]he film itself is Wallace’s most visible emblem of his Lacanian program, for it both embodies and parodies Lacan’s ideas” (Boswell 130). The novel’s use of Lacanian theory thus depicts “Lacan’s model as a trap, one that can be embraced for good reasons that nevertheless turn out to create more problems than they solve” (Boswell 130). As Mary Holland shows, Wallace views the (post)postmodern individual as being “trapped in a Lacanian model of subjecthood, in which subjects are male, women are their desired Others, and neither can hope to realize self” (Holland, “‘By Hirsute Author’” 67). In intertextually referencing Lacan, *Infinite Jest*, as will be shown, critiques the Lacanian framework of selfhood as masculinist and inherently solipsizing in its professing of selfhood through an Othering objectification.

The following analysis of *Infinite Jest*’s family mythology underlying its metempsychotic method will therefore be structured around the key components of the nuclear family presented in the novel as allegories for Lacanian concepts. The reincarnative characteristic of metempsychosis in *Infinite Jest*’s reinterpretation is played out in the impact the novel’s fathers, and the mass media they produce, have on the filial generation. Fathers in the novel transmit their language of objectification, a discourse of postmodern irony that equates representation to reality, to the next generation with disastrous effects. Since *Infinite Jest*’s culture can be seen to have internalized the Lacanian framework of selfhood Wallace views as the foundation to all postmodernist and poststructuralist writing, this paternal influence is structured around Lacan’s theory of the name-of-the-father and the Oedipus complex. *Infinite Jest*’s culture has naturalized postmodernism’s iconoclasm to the point of producing a psychotic culture in which the name-of-the-father is foreclosed. To compensate for this lack, *Infinite Jest*’s younger generations fashion their selves and their outlook on reality along the lines of ironic mass media narratives. The fathers’ ‘style,’ a precocious performance of fatigued knowingness, is thereby transmitted to the next generation via a mass media that has appropriated postmodern

irony. Since such a compensation through the imaginary register is not open to dialectic change, *Infinite Jest*'s younger generation of figurative orphans is entrapped in a model of selfhood that is ultimately solipsizing.

This outlook, based in Lacan's own phallogentrism, the novel argues, is deeply entwined with misogyny. The second part of the reconstruction of Wallace's negotiation of mythology, Lacanian theory, and gender will therefore concern itself with the role women play in the discourse *Infinite Jest* depicts. Inhabiting a discourse that conceives of the self as always defined against an implicitly female other, a structural contempt for femininity is depicted as integral to the society and its problems the novel portrays. Women within this discourse are always only conceived of as in their function as (m)others. It is here that the 'mythology' of *Infinite Jest*'s metempsychosis comes to the fore. Wallace's metempsychosis thus plays on a mythology of maleness, the contempt for femininity in postmodern Western societies structured around the archetypes of Evian, active, and Hellenic, passive feminine culpability. Not only are these myths presented as foundational to the solipsism *Infinite Jest* criticizes since they both alienate the self from a meaningful connection to the other and fully eradicate its otherness by integrating it through what Wallace calls a "parodic masculinization" ("The Empty Plenum" 115). The situation of women itself also becomes a metaphor to illustrate the problem of solipsism in the novel.

Ultimately, these gender dynamics, postmodernism as an inherently phallogentric, misogynist discourse passed down across generations, are brought together in the failed intergenerational conversation of the novel's title-giving film 'Infinite Jest.' To be read as a reflection on the art the program era of Wallace's 1980s and 90s produce, 'Infinite Jest' can be seen as a counterfoil to the novel's own project. In understanding how the fictional auteur JOI's film differs from the novel by his real 'contemporary' Wallace, *Infinite Jest*'s reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition can be more clearly delineated. While both employ a similarly gendered metempsychosis, JOI relies on a Lacanian theory Wallace alludes to yet ultimately discards in favor of his (pseudo-)feminist approach of 'crosswriting.' Despite his best intentions, JOI therefore unwittingly plays *into* this family mythology. Wallace, on the other hand, plays *on* and

deconstructs these myths as only one way to conceptualize selfhood that, however, is damaging to the self.

Fathers: Solipsism and Paternal Heritage in *Infinite Jest*

Infinite Jest depicts (late) postmodernism as a phallogocentric discourse through its depiction of the novel's father generation. The novel thus links the solipsistic problems of communication it identifies in the contemporary family, and society at large, to paternal influence. Recalling Fredric Jameson's analysis of postmodernism as schizophrenic (Jameson 27), this paternal heritage, i.e., a distinct self-consciousness, produces a psychosis-like state in *Infinite Jest*'s culture. Transmitted through the 'myths' of mass media, a 'patricidal' postmodern mode, that is, the rebellion against conventional, established modes through ironic reduplication, is institutionalized so as to allow no recourse from filial conformity. The postmodernists' rebellion against conventions, a quasi-patricide of their modernist and realist precursors, having become the norm, both rebellion (through irony) and conformity (to the fathers' irony) reproduce the same behavior.

As already noted, *Infinite Jest* views an equation of representation to reality ultimately based in Lacanian theory as the discourse of contemporary US society. Despite his criticism of postmodernism and poststructuralism, Wallace still subscribes to the notion of the linguistic creation of reality. Therefore, a society which has internalized poststructuralist theory into its discourse will reproduce the Lacanian model of selfhood this theory is based in, whether this model is 'true' and alternativeless or not, i.e., a 'myth.' In the novel's Theory-infused world, characters thus come to seemingly embody theoretical concepts as if they were allegories of them. In Lacanian theory, parents, and in particular fathers, play an integral role in a child's entry into the symbolic order of language and the formation of the (inherently split) subject. Two 'stages,' which permeate *Infinite Jest*'s metempsychosis, are central to the formation of the split subject in Lacanian theory and are therefore briefly summarized here: the mirror stage and the Oedipus complex.

The mirror stage, perhaps Lacan's most famous theoretical contribution, constitutes the individual's entry into the imaginary order which also serves as the foundation for the (logically

rather than chronologically) subsequent establishment of the symbolic order after the Oedipus Complex (Evans 131). Self-reflection, the body, and narcissism are themes central to both *Infinite Jest* and Lacan's mirror stage. Albeit typifying "an essential libidinal relationship with the body image" (Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego" 14) and thus a structure rather than a historical moment, Lacan's mirror stage is best illustrated as the moment a child first recognizes itself in the mirror, entering the imaginary and forming an ego. Perceiving its own body as fragmented and uncontrollable, the child, recognizing itself in the mirror image, a gestalt that appears as complete and in control, is jubilant because it narcissistically identifies with the ideal image (Lacan, *Écrits* 95). The ego is thus based on image, being first recognized as an exterior object in the mirror. Hence, the child's ego is a mental object, not an agent but a seat of narcissistic attachments that inevitably contains false images, thus being alienating: that which is the child's I is outside of itself, first perceived as an object in the mirror that is more in control of its body than the child actually is. Lacan refers to this alienating self-recognition as 'méconnaissance,' playing on the homophony of knowing myself (me connaître) and misrecognition (meconnaître) (Evans 118). The mirror stage thus constitutes a child's entrance into the imaginary order, closely linked to narcissism, in which it experiences itself as autonomous, complete, coherent, and distinct from its exterior.

While Lacan's ego is formed in the imaginary register, the Oedipus Complex results in the entrance into the symbolic order, installing the 'name-of-the-father' as "the fundamental signifier which permits signification to proceed normally" (Evans 122), and thus the formation of the split, castrated subject in language. Thus, even though aspects of the symbolic order already feature in the mirror stage, subjectivity and language are established via the paternal metaphor of the Oedipus Complex. As Madan Sarup notes, "Lacan sees [...] the Oedipus complex as the pivot of humanization, as a transition from the natural register of life to a cultural register of group exchange and therefore of laws, language and organization" (Sarup 8). (Split) subjectivity, the subject's formation and alienation in a language as Other, and language are based in the fortunate trauma of castration in the Oedipus complex, the installment of the phallic name-of-the-father as the "fundamental signifier" (Lacan, *Seminar. Book III* 293) that permits signification to proceed normally. Language, thereby phallogocentric, is based around the

paternal metaphor, the name-of-the-father in Lacanian theory playing the most important role in language and the constitution of subjectivity. Thus, since *Infinite Jest* views, as will become apparent further on, postmodern irony as the discourse of its time, the Oedipus complex is integral to the novel's family mythology, itself an Oedipally agonistic relation to the novel's postmodernist 'fathers.'

Postmodern Paternal Heritage: The-Name-Of-The-Father in Infinite Jest

A Lacanian centrality of the father in language is evident in *Infinite Jest*. Solipsism as a result of a postmodern discourse appears as inherently linked to a paternal, phallic heritage. *Infinite Jest* thereby portrays a future generation suffering under the influence of their fathers affecting their modes of communication. The connection *Infinite Jest* draws between an oppressive paternal legacy, issues of communication that make self-expression, and thereby selfhood, impossible, and postmodernism is perhaps best illustrated during a proverbial locker room talk at the novel's tennis academy.¹⁴³ Subjected to brutal training, the novel's (male) tennis students struggle to find words for their physical exhaustion. While their fathers could still rely on a language of exhaustion to express themselves ("My daddy as a boy, he'd have said 'tuckered out' 'll do just fine."), this young generation is faced with a "[w]ord-inflation," their tiredness "out of *tired's* word-range" (100). Instead, they indulge in an ironic meta-discussion of their exhaustion. The young E.T.A. students thus lament, rather than their physical exhaustion, the exhaustedness of the language of exhaustion they have inherited from their fathers. The US have absorbed postmodernism into their dominant discourse. John Barth's "Literature of Exhaustion," the novel suggests, has thereby become a 'language of exhaustion.' Parallel to Barth's argument for postmodern metafiction resulting from the "used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" (Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion" 64) after the experimentalism of the literary generation before him, E.T.A. students can only express their need for "a whole new syntax for fatigue on days like this" (101). They appear completely

¹⁴³ As will become apparent in the second part of this analysis, the setting during a locker room talk, the locus of misogynist machismo, is fitting as the ironic fatigue these students exhibit is one they have learned from the worldview of "the Great Male Narcissists" ("Certainly The End" 51), postmodernist authors Wallace criticizes because they "persist in the bizarre, adolescent belief that getting to have sex with whomever one wants whenever one wants to is a cure for human despair" ("Certainly The End" 59).

unable to actually touch upon their tiredness in an unmediated fashion. This focus on surface and performance rather than meaningful experience also becomes evident in the school's curriculum which tests students "about the syntax of Tolstoy's sentence, not about real unhappy families" (95). Although unhappy families are very much real in *Infinite Jest*, "real stuff" (592) is exchanged for self-reflexive meta-discussions in a culture where not only Barth's "Literature of Exhaustion" has been appropriated into a paternal language of exhaustion but this language of exhaustion has itself been passed down to yet another generation. However, the language of exhaustion E.T.A.'s sons inherit from their fathers is itself shown to be exhausted. As their vocabulary becomes "[h]yperbolic and hyperbolicker" (100), the preceding generation's thematization of exhaustion itself becomes insufficient to convey real experience. Incapable of expressing themselves and their exhaustion through a 'language of exhaustion' that is itself used-up, the only recourse open to these young students lies in Wallace's triad of mindless, solipsistic anesthetics, mass media, drugs, and self-serving sex, dreaming of "enormous pink-white French-painting tits" (102).¹⁴⁴

This importance of paternal heritage in *Infinite Jest*, and the way the novel itself quotes Lacanian key-concepts, can also be seen in the fact that the Incandenzas quite literally inherit the name-of-the-father. Nested within the locker room talk, the narrator repeatedly interrupts the scene with comments about how fathers "bequest" (103) their traits to their sons. Just as the novel suggests a connection to postmodernism's "Literature of Exhaustion" through a conversation about physical exhaustion, the novel signals its use of and reference to Lacanian theory by treating the patrilineal inheritance of the father's name as just as formative as the inheritance of an hereditary illness. Schacht for instance, in another aside, is said to have inherited "Crohn's Disease [...] from his ulcerative-colitic dad" (103). The Incandenza family name, seemingly the only connecting feature of the family, is thus explicitly said to be "handed down paternally from an Umbrian five generations past" (101), underlining the paternal succession in the Incandenza family. In addition, the (male) Incandenzas are further determined by the name-of-the-father in their given names being passed down through generations. The

¹⁴⁴ The boys' reference to 'painting' highlights their entanglement in the image. The kind of sexual activity they envision as restorative is completely unreciprocal but instead solely focused on turning the other into an object in order to alleviate one's existential stress.

auteur JOI Jr. thereby takes his name from his own actor father James Incandenza Sr. (313), himself passing down his middle name, inherited in direct lineage from his father and his father's father Mario Orin Incandenza (311, 898), to his eldest son Orin, while Hal, Harold James Incandenza (248), inherits his father's first name and Mario is named after his great-grandfather (313). As one can see, *Infinite Jest* comments on the disruptive effects of a naturalization of postmodernist theses into the cultural discourse by mimicking that discourse as it self-consciously references and quotes Lacanian terminology.

Inheritance, a "pattern of selfishness that will poison generations in its relentless cycle," functions "as root cause in the narrative" (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 69). The influence of paternal heritage on the novel's characters' (flawed) modes of communication can also for example be seen in the way the male Incandenzas answer the phone, i.e., engage in communication. As the novel remarks, one "way fathers impact son is that sons [...] invariably answer the telephone with the same locutions and intonations as their fathers" (32). Hal is thus repeatedly described as answering the phone with a variation of "MMmyellow" (32, 135, 171, 242, 1007), having inherited his father's manner of communication. Itself self-consciously filial, *Infinite Jest* explores "way[s] fathers impact sons" (32) in its discussion of postmodern heritage. Fathers in the novel pass down not only their names but also their modes of communication to their sons. Since they inherit the postmodern language of their fathers, *Infinite Jest's* next generation appears as fluent speakers of irony. Like their fathers before them, they are incapable of sincere communication. Highlighting the importance of the role of the father in the entry into the symbolic order, a solipsizing ironic discourse, *Infinite Jest's* use of Lacan depicts a society dominated by an oppressive, yet inescapable, phallogentric language of ironic self-referentiality, a (meta-) language that, however, has exhausted its possibilities.

Postmodern Psychosis

Wallace's Lacan-based reinterpretation of the Ulysean metempsychosis not only describes a reincarnation of (the language of the) fathers in their sons but also heavily draws on the mental condition of psychosis. As will be shown, the novel's reinterpretation of Joyce's metempsychosis puns on the *psychosis* in *metempsychosis*. Even though fathers clearly play a

central role in the passing down of their self-referential discourse to the next generation, this reading of a postmodern language being bound to a Lacanian name-of-the-father is complicated by the novel's depiction of its human condition as one of psychosis, a mental condition which forecloses the name-of-the-father (Evans 157). Paradoxically, Wallace describes postmodernist discourse as both a patrilineal heritage and inherently patricidal. This is because, according to the novel's analysis, the paternal discourse is not transmitted directly but via the deeply ironic media these fathers produce. As will be shown, Wallace depicts the phallogentric, postmodern language of the fathers as one oppressively handed down to a filial generation through the imaginary order, mass media. Entertainment media, Wallace's chief concern throughout his entire oeuvre and particularly in *Infinite Jest*, serve as a compensatory paternal function in the imaginary register for *Infinite Jest*'s psychotic, ontologically insecure, language system. The novel's self-consciously filial relationship to its postmodern forefathers is thus, as already remarked, agonistic rather than simply antagonistic. The novel attempts to break through the cycles of the patricidal, recursively narcissistic and thus quasi-psychotically unhinged language of postmodernism.

Reflecting Fredric Jameson's diagnosis of the postmodern condition as schizophrenic, *Infinite Jest* portrays a culture-wide psychosis.¹⁴⁵ Lacan cites a failure within the family complex, namely, the foreclosure of the name-of-the-father, as the origin of psychosis, the fundamental signifier never having been installed and leaving a hole in the symbolic order (Evans 157). This results in a peculiar position toward language, a "relationship between the subject and the signifier in its most formal dimension, in its dimension as pure signifier" (Lacan, *Seminar. Book III* 250), an orientation toward linguistic form in a "metalanguage *par excellence*" (Lacan, *Seminar. Book III* 227) which Wallace implicitly likens to postmodernist metafiction. Indeed, Wallace repeatedly inscribes postmodernism with father-eliminating tendencies. Wallace refers to early postmodern fiction as a "patricidal rebellion" (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 47) that has left the following, i.e., his, generation

¹⁴⁵ Schizophrenia, along with paranoia, is a form of psychosis according to Lacan (Evans 159). For the purpose of this investigation, which hinges on the foreclosure of the name-of-the-father present in all forms of psychosis, a further distinction is not important. As Burn shows in "Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing": *Infinite Jest* and the Science of Mind", the description of the experience of embodiment and subjectivity in *Infinite Jest* closely mirrors R.D. Laing's description of the psychotic's situation in *The Divided Self* (Burn, "Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing").

“literary orphans” (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 52) and fills the Incandenzas’ grandfather with a hatred for his father which resurfaces, culture-wide, in certain “patricidal formats”(182) in *Infinite Jest*’s mass media .

As already noted, although potent in their oppressive influence, the fathers of *Infinite Jest* stand out in their simultaneous, emotional or literal, absence from the novel’s events. The issue of paternity in the novel is marked by a simultaneous oppressive presence, fathers resonating throughout American society’s discourse, and absence, fathers, in allegory of foreclosure, being next to absent from the novel. Thus, it is not only JOI, a character already so hyperreflexively inward-bent as to almost completely disappear from his sons’ lives when living, who literally leaves his children fatherless after his suicide. The novel’s families in general are significantly structured by varying stages of neglect to downward abuse. *Infinite Jest* thus paradoxically depicts the dysfunctions within its families, an effect of the oppressive presence of the fathers’ deficient mode of communicating, as an effect of the absence of the paternal function. Resulting from a “malfunction of the Oedipus complex, a lack in the paternal function” (Evans 157), the actual elimination of the father which unhinges language, psychosis in Wallace’s Jameson-influenced reading of the era is an attribute of postmodernism. Wallace’s argument about the way postmodernism effects a ‘reincarnation’ of the father is thus similar to the argument Slavoj Žižek proposes on the “‘postmodern’ non-authoritarian father” (Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* 92). While the traditionally authoritarian father can force his will onto the child yet the child “will retain his inner freedom and the ability to (later) rebel against the paternal authority” (Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* 92), the postmodern father’s egalitarianism perversely creates a “false free choice” and thereby “deprives the child even of his inner freedom, ordering him not only what to do, but what to want to do” (Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* 93). Such an anti-authoritarian, postmodern attitude is thereby more totalizing than traditional paternal oppressiveness as it not only forces, as also becomes apparent in *Infinite Jest*, the father’s will onto the child but transposes the father’s self onto the child. The false free choice thereby creates a false, divided self.

Imaginary Compensation and the Role of Media in Infinite Jest

In light of the (seeming) paradox between on the one hand the apparent influence of the name-of-the-father on the ironic discourse of *Infinite Jest*'s society and on the other hand its foreclosure in the novel's society's psychotic structure, it becomes necessary to consider the role mass media play in the novel's near future. The apparent paradox between an at once patrilineally handed down and supremely patricidal ironic discourse is at the heart of Wallace's critique of mass media and postmodernism. Mass media perpetually replicate a psychosis-inducing language in the next generation, a discourse that sets patricidal foreclosure as the norm. This results in the seemingly paradoxical situation of a simultaneous oppressive presence of the name-of-the-father and its apparent foreclosure in schizophrenic, postmodern narcissism. *Infinite Jest* thus further develops Wallace's mythological critique of television from *Girl With Curious Hair* when it depicts a solipsizing intergenerational transmission of postmodern discourse through mass media.

Media having appropriated the iconoclastic, patricidal mode of postmodern irony results in a double bind for the individual: with media institutionalizing rebellion as the norm, to rebel against the postmodern fathers' voice that speaks through such media is to conform, and, to conform, naturally, also means to conform. Inhabiting a discourse that inherently erases fathers, the novel's filial generation has no opportunity to go through their own patricidal Oedipus complex and form a symbolic. Wholly reliant on media to provide them with a way to approach the world, the novel's third generation, after the original postmodernists of the 1960s and their 80s and 90s sons, who have come to appropriate irony into the media they produce, are stuck in a world of image. Psychotically divorced from the symbolic, they can only ever reproduce the image of their fathers since they are unable to dialectically develop their own, genuine selfhood through rebellion.

As Lacanian scholar Stijn Vanheule notes, in psychotics the instability of the subject due to a foreclosure of the name-of-the-father "can be partly repaired through [...] conformist imaginary identifications" (Vanheule 73). Thus, the gap left by foreclosure within a psychotic's symbolic order can be filled by the imaginary through "a mechanism of imaginary compensation [...] for the absent Oedipus complex" (Lacan, *Seminar. Book III* 193). Copying

scenarios of behavior in compensation for a foreclosed name-of-the-father, to the psychotic “the façade is the only thing there is and it functions as an ultimate attempt to hold on to shared reality” (Vanheule 75). *Infinite Jest*’s young solipsists thus employ an imaginary compensation as they view “the lively arts of millennial U.S.A.” as their “guide to inclusion,” fashioning “masks of ennui and jaded irony at a young age where the face is fictile enough to assume the shape of whatever it wears” until their faces are “stuck there” (694) in an existential attitude of irony. However, “characterized by blindly adopting lifestyles and habitual modes of behavior from others” (Vanheule 73), conformist imaginary identifications cannot evolve dialectically but always remain reproductions.

Indeed, Orin, the novel’s “*least open man*” (1048), an embodiment of Wallace’s critique of metafiction and irony, is remarked to be “a child raised on multi-channel cable TV” (741). Paternal absence and abuse, ubiquitous in the novel, is compensated through mass media.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, because he has never met his real father, Don Gately is said to “pretend to himself that the unviolent and sarcastic accountant Nom on ‘Cheers!’ was Gately’s own organic father” (836). However, born of paternal absence and abuse, Gately’s unnamed step-father having been a violent alcoholic, Gately’s conformist imaginary identification with a television character is also presented as partly responsible for Gately’s own alcoholism, which he is recovering from throughout most of the novel. Gately therefore identifies with and conformistically reproduces the patterns of “Nom who more or less seemed to live at the bar, and was unkind but not cruel, and drank foamer after foamer without hitting anybody’s Mom” (834). Thus, mass media’s function as replacing the absent father via imaginary compensation, as evidenced in Gately’s misnaming of the ‘Cheers!’ character Norm as ‘Nom,’ an allusion to Lacanian theory that points toward his function as a replacement for the *nom-du-père*, only further prolongs substance abuse, cause and symptom of postmodern solipsism. It leads into a conformist reproduction of the very behavior that made imaginary compensation necessary in the first place: paternal absence results in an oppressive paternal presence as the novel’s sons

¹⁴⁶ For instance, *Infinite Jest* features a radio program titled “Those Were the Legends That Formerly Were” in which sons try to process the trauma their fathers inflicted upon them by mimicking their derogatory speech, the only rule being “that you have to read your thing in the voice of some really silly cartoon character” (182). In these parodic, “patricidal formats” (182), the fathers’ language survives as their sons speak it in the voice of mass-media.

reproduce their absent fathers' ways by orienting themselves on the media they have produced. Gately's situation thereby illustrates the inescapability of the absent father's solipsizing discourse in *Infinite Jest*. With postmodern patricidal rebellion institutionalized, oedipal rebellion must fail as any compensatory imaginary identification is doomed to reproduce the father's image since both conformity with a patricidal postmodern discourse and the rebellious, patricidal rejection of the father's style result in the same patricide. Gately thus effectively reproduces the alcoholism of his (foreclosed) stepfather by identifying with postmodern mass media in an attempt at rebellion that, within this constellation, can only result in conformity.

It is thus unsurprising that *Infinite Jest* closely links postmodern solipsism and addiction, products of a schizophrenic society, to media consumption, a "drug addict's second most meaningful relationship [being] always with his domestic entertainment unit" (834). The postmodern irony of "U.S. broadcast television's old network situation comedies of the B.S. '80s and '90s" (834)¹⁴⁷, appropriated from a 1960s postmodernism, is thus reproduced in a vicious cycle of imaginary identification. This addiction to the image does not allow for a dialectical development but only reproduction, i.e., a feedback loop of endless deconstruction.

Mothers: Female Culpability and the "Mythology of Maleness"

In *Infinite Jest*'s permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition, a metempsychotic connection to the (reincarnating) past is enacted in a negotiation of the influence of "our postmodern fathers" ("E Unibus Pluram" 183) on both contemporaneity and, even more importantly, the novel's projected future generations. The novel uses a Lacanian framework to describe postmodern style as a paternal heritage transmitted, and solidified, via an imaginary identification with mass media. At the same time, this framework is implicitly criticized as solipsizing. The novel's sons thus unreflectedly replicate the self-absorbed worldview of postmodernist authors who Wallace sees to "persist in the bizarre, adolescent belief that getting to have sex with whomever one wants whenever one wants to is a cure for human despair" ("Certainly The End" 59). The solipsizing discourse of the novel's (absent) patriarchs, haunting a psychotic next generation, is

¹⁴⁷ "B.S." in *Infinite Jest* stands for 'Before Subsidization,' the calendar of the novel's future America being sold to the highest bidder, though clearly, especially when it refers to Wallace's present and near past, the 80s and 90s, it also implies 'Bullshit.'

thus depicted as a masculine, phallogentric discourse, playing on and misprisioning the *Écrits*' opening quote "[t]he style is the *man* himself" (Lacan, *Écrits* 3, emphasis mine).

Notably, phallogentric discourse, and with it the (solipsist) self it produces according to Wallace, is based in misogynist opposition toward women. As Lacanian feminist Laura Mulvey notes, "[t]he paradox of phallogentricism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world" (Mulvey 833). Structured as a 'family mythology,' *Infinite Jest*'s self-consciously filial metempsychotic negotiation of its own, problematized postmodernist and poststructuralist heritage is constructed around an exploration of gender roles. Herein lies what Hayes-Brady refers to as the "silent potency" (Hayes-Brady, "Language, Gender" 136) of women in Wallace's novel. Women's feminine impact on the narrative is largely shaped by their relation toward men as the passive object to active male subjectivity. Women being "influential rather than potent" (Hayes-Brady, "Language, Gender" 136) in the novel, *Infinite Jest* highlights women's role as mOther necessary for the construction of masculine, Lacanian selfhood within the phallogentric discourse of postmodernism its society has appropriated.

Hellenic and Evian Myth in "The Empty Plenum" and Infinite Jest

Wallace views selfhood founded on an objectification of the female other as evincing a "masculinization" ("The Empty Plenum" 115) of the subject, creating an instable, masculinely defined, subject. In his reflection on the role of female culpability in the construction of a subjecthood conventionally conceived of as male in the essay "The Empty Plenum,"¹⁴⁸ Wallace reduces phallogentric discourse to the mythical archetypes of feminine guilt in Eve and Helen.

¹⁴⁸ Concerned with the issue of "mythologizing" ("The Empty Plenum" 108) solipsism, language, and gender, "The Empty Plenum," a review of David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress* written during the early composition stages of *Infinite Jest*, relates to *Infinite Jest* the way Eliot's "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" relates to *The Wasteland*: it gives arguably even more insight into the reviewer's own literary work than in the work reviewed. Both texts, in their respective context, concern themselves with the use of mythology in literature. Indeed, "The Empty Plenum," although ostensibly not about Joyce, perpetually references *Ulysses*, using the Latin name 'Ulysses,' by now almost inseparably connected to Joyce, when discussing the female protagonist's Penelope-like situation ("But Kate- unlike Ulysses's legit mistress" ("The Empty Plenum" 90)), comparing Markson's technique to "Joycean S.O.C. [stream of consciousness]" ("The Empty Plenum" 93), and citing *Ulysses*' "structure as Odyssean/Telemachean map" ("The Empty Plenum" 75) as a prime example for the genre of "INTERPRET-ME fiction" ("The Empty Plenum" 75), a term used to describe the cerebral, philosophical roman à clef *Wittgenstein's Mistress* but equally applicable to *Infinite Jest*. Especially Wallace's idiosyncratic reference to Joyce's "Telemachean" map, highlighting the filial aspects of Joyce's *Odyssey*, is speaking in light of *Infinite Jest*'s self-consciously filial permutation of the Ulysean Tradition.

According to Wallace, “received perceptions of women as moral agents divide into those of Hellenic and those of Evian (Eve-ish) responsibility” (“The Empty Plenum” 95). The mythology of maleness, the “sexual society as limned by the males who wrote scripture & epic” (“The Empty Plenum” 102), thus constructs femininity along the modes of passive, Hellenic guilt, the woman guilty, and thus to be othered, as object, and active, Evian guilt, the woman guilty as subject.¹⁴⁹ These archetypal figures provide the mythology for *Infinite Jest*’s metempsychosis.

Wallace identifies contemporary American society as structured by a Lacanian “system where appearance remains a ‘picture’ or ‘map’ of ontology” (“The Empty Plenum” 100) that, in its internalization into the dominant discourse, is implicitly masculinist. Thus, an “ontology-thru-nomination” (“The Empty Plenum” 113) traps the subject in a solipsistic double bind. It forces a Lacanian model of selfhood onto her, a mythology of maleness as established in Evian and Hellenic myth, which understands the female as guilty other. The world being understood as “entirely a function of Facts that not only reside in but *hail from* one’s own head” (“The Empty Plenum” 99), the patriarchal discourse of Evian and Hellenic myth inherently assigns femininity the role of the other, males being “alienated via agency from an Exterior we have to objectify [...] in order to remain subjects” (“The Empty Plenum” 102). An “intellectual/emotional/moral isolation” (“The Empty Plenum” 102), i.e., solipsism, can thus be seen as associated with masculinity, the “Exterior”, as Holland correctly notes, “enlisted in these male acts of self-creation [being] clearly the female Other” (Holland, “By Hirsute Author” 67). The subject, male or female, is thereby doomed to the “parodic masculinization” of “the

¹⁴⁹ The term “Mythology of Maleness” (Gruen 93), clearly fitting Wallace’s gendered reinterpretation of the mythical method, is taken from a chapter of the Swiss-German psychoanalyst Arno Gruen’s *The Insanity of Normality* heavily perused by Wallace himself. While Lacan provides Wallace with an intertext to structure his reading of contemporary culture against, Gruen can be seen to serve as an integral source for Wallace’s interpretation of metempsychosis. To be found in Wallace’s private library at the Harry Ransom Center, Gruen’s book is most heavily annotated when it discusses the topics of family relations, gender, and childhood trauma. Gruen describes mothers as complicit in unconsciously transmitting a “male mythology of power” to their children as they accept a male mythology that views “their feminine traits as negative” (Gruen 93). Thus barred from positively referring to a feminine self, women’s only entry to positive selfhood is through their (male) children: They compensate their low self-esteem through a selfish selflessness, styling themselves as perfect mothers. In particular the relationship between Avril Incandenza and her son Orin in *Infinite Jest* is exemplary of the “bogus affection” (Gruen 94) Gruen’s mothers employ to affirm their selfhood. As Avril passes the mythology of maleness down to her son by assuming the position of Eve and Hellen, Avril also teaches Orin a “*sincerity with a motive*” (1048), a strategy implicitly likened to postmodernist metafiction Orin subsequently uses to objectify women.

Romantic Quest for the Absent Object, a desire for attainment w/r/t which *unattainability* is that desire's breath & bread" ("The Empty Plenum" 115). Holland identifies this as the Lacanian framework in which "the subject's experience of being comes only as a pursuit ('Quest') of the desired feminine Other who is herself constituted of lack ('Absent Object')" (Holland, "'By Hirsute Author'" 67). Thus "*unattainable*," the self's "Quest" for subjecthood through the Other becomes "a constant generation and frustration of desire" (Holland, "'By Hirsute Author'" 67). 'Being' here remains "a state of lack and desire and a system of association and substitution" (Holland, "'By Hirsute Author'" 67) in which the meaning of the self is deferred along a chain of signifiers without ever attaining the desired meaning. Replacing being "without enacting it" (Holland, "'By Hirsute Author'" 67), Wallace depicts the masculine Lacanian model as leading into the solipsism of the divided self, never fully externalized nor internalized and understood.¹⁵⁰

This connection between misogyny and solipsism also becomes apparent in *Infinite Jest*. Postmodern ontological insecurity inherently hinges on misogynist myths of female guilt. Passing on their failures of communication to their children, the fathers of *Infinite Jest* also pass on a male mythology. Thus, the novel's chronologically earliest scene in the 1960s, serving as the root cause of narcissistic parental abuse and solipsism in the novel, is also the scene in which JOI "learns his phobia of spiders" (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 69). Incandenza's phobia is specifically directed against "*Latrodectus mactans*" (159), the black widow serving as a symbol for threatening femininity, and resurfaces in Orin's fear of roaches and thinly veiled misogyny (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 69). Transmitting a

¹⁵⁰ It is here that Holland's otherwise insightful reading of "The Empty Plenum" errs. Holland's remark that "by reading her struggle to create self out of language as inherently masculine, Wallace obfuscates for the female narrator all revelation and atonement" (Holland, "'By Hirsute Author'" 67) constitutes an oversight in Wallace's multi-layered critique. Whereas Holland views Wallace as employing a masculinist, Lacanian perspective, reading Kate's predicament "in his Lacanian way" (Holland, "'By Hirsute Author'" 68), "The Empty Plenum" in fact implicitly criticizes Lacan. Wallace depicts the masculinist Lacanian framework as the source of solipsism, emerging from a received, masculine image culture, while not holding it to be the only, or his, way of constituting subjecthood. Thus, although nevertheless misogynist (yet not for the reasons Holland outlines in her essay), Wallace's critique of masculine solipsism does not imply that "the true ontology of the feminine arises only in relationship to this defining male" (Holland, "'By Hirsute Author'" 67) nor that "he views the problem of self-definition as fundamentally masculine" (Holland, "'By Hirsute Author'" 67). Instead, these problems arise, according to Wallace, from "the whitely male West" ("The Empty Plenum" 113), the male mythology of "stock rubrics via which we guys *apparently* must organize & process fey mystery" ("The Empty Plenum" 105, emphasis mine). Wallace becomes thereby able to both use Lacanian theory, which he styles as the foundation of our contemporary postmodern discourse, and fundamentally reject it.

masculinist, Lacanian self-definition in opposition to a female other to his son, Incandenza Sr. can be seen to not only pass on his alcoholism (160), alienation from his own father (163), and reduction to the imaginary order of the body (159), but also teach JOI to shift guilt on to women and “black widows” (164). The black widow thereby becomes a sigil of a feminine (sexually) active selfhood threatening to a male self-definition via the objectification of women, as the female black widow is known to eat her mate after reproduction, eliminating the male self through an active female subjecthood that defies passive objectification. The Incandenzas’ fear of spiders, transmitted paternally, is thus symbolic of the misogyny underlying the phallogocentric discourse that is postmodernism surviving into mass media and in turn influencing the next generation and their relation to the world, the self and the other.

As Incandenza Sr. introduces his son into a masculinist discourse that equates reality, the self, to representation, the body (“Today, [...] you become, for better or worse, Jim, a man. A player. A body in commerce with bodies” (160)), he also perpetually antagonizes women, referring to them as “dumb thing[s]” (157). Teaching his son a philosophy of selfhood through “control” (161) over objects, the aforementioned Lacanian construction of selfhood through (self-)objectification, Incandenza Sr. sexualizes the other as female.¹⁵¹ He notes that objects, when handled properly, “will lie back and part their legs and yield up their innermost seams to you” (158), a notion of selfhood that reappears in Orin’s sexual conquests of “Subjects” (597), single mothers Orin, in the novel’s allegory, objectifies in his Lacanian quest for selfhood (Boswell 152).

Woman in phallogocentrism, as Mulvey remarks, “can exist only in relation to castration” (Mulvey 834), serving as a constant reminder of the lacking, perpetually deferred (masculine) self. This results in the urge to alleviate castration anxiety by devaluing woman as “the guilty object” (Mulvey 840). Incandenza Sr.’s assigning guilt, associated with castration, to the black widow, sigil of an active female selfhood that threatens male self-definition, is exemplary of the castrated subject’s compensatory misogynist “devaluation [...] of the guilty object” (Mulvey

¹⁵¹ Although he is clearly a misogynist, Incandenza Sr., who represents the original 1960s postmodernism, is still capable of going through a regular Oedipus complex. It is his son’s (Lacanian) critique of this father’s misogyny and detachment that creates the feedback loop the novel’s third generation is stuck in.

840). Incandenza Sr.'s arachnophobia can thus be seen to follow an Evian mythical pattern. It assigns guilt to the female subject and thereby objectifies and thus controls the symbol of female subjecthood. His obsession with exterminating black widows and his phobia of spiders – JOI's father repeatedly asks him to "kill that widow for [him]" (159) and turn the garage, locus of JOI's ascension to manhood, into "a spiderless section" (159) – thus bespeak Incandenza Sr.'s Lacanian model of selfhood, a model also represented in his philosophy of objects. Following the masculinist pattern of Evian culpability, Incandenza Sr.'s phobia of black widows describes a misogyny inherent to phallogocentric discourse.

Wallace outlines the male myths of Eve and Helen, archetypal configurations of female culpability as either active subject or passive object, as the two modes along which Western patriarchy defines its self against, a model of selfhood that, within image culture, separates the subject from both itself and its surrounding. Promulgating these male myths, *Infinite Jest's* dysfunctional family structures are depicted as central to the perpetuation of a society-wide narcissistic self-consciousness. *Infinite Jest's* metempsychosis is therefore, on one level, the reincarnation of its postmodern fathers in the next generation.

However postmodern irony, inherently patricidal, forecloses the name-of-the-father. The society *Infinite Jest* portrays is thus confined to the imaginary order, narcissism. It is unable to overcome their grandfathers' influence since it can only reproduce their 1960s postmodernism through a compensatory imaginary identification with postmodern media. As Wallace also argues in "E Unibus Pluram," irony in the 1960s could successfully break "cycles begun during modernism and inherent in postindustrial society" (Bartlett 386), functioning as a "ground-clearing" ("E Unibus Pluram" 183), patricidal movement, but, in its sterilized appropriation through commercial mass media, left his, and more so the generation to come, with a void. Although he is clearly a misogynist, Incandenza Sr., who represents the original 1960s postmodernism, is thus still capable of going through a regular Oedipus complex. Incandenza Sr.'s neurotic ironization, however, takes a psychotic and existentially solipsizing turn as it is picked up on by JOI. While Incandenza Sr. thus explains his philosophy through misogynist tropes, similar to the way Wallace frames Lacan, this is, apart from the apparent misogyny, not in itself a problem to Wallace. It is his son's (Lacanian) critique of this father's

misogyny and detachment that creates the feedback loop the novel's third generation is stuck in. Hence, while Incandenza Sr. is 'just' a misogynist and bad father, JOI appropriates his philosophy, even if only to criticize his father. He thereby institutionalizes his father's historically contingent 1960s misogyny. In a culture where reality is not only a linguistic construct but which has internalized the linguistic constructedness of reality self-consciously as a way to apprehend and deal with the self and the world, these misogynist tropes form a feedback loop. Lacan's and Incandenza Sr.'s tropes thereby take on a life of their own. Masculine family mythology must therefore perpetually recirculate in the media imagery this next generation produces, thereby passing on their ontologically insecure solipsism, product of a misogynist, phallogocentric postmodern discourse, to their children.

Latrodectus Mactans: Evian and Hellenic Myth in the Scopophilia of JOI's Filmography

The film auteur JOI appears as the novel's prime example of this post-60s, image-bound postmodernism. The (metem)psychotic perpetuation of the misogyny underlying postmodernism's discourse in entertainment media, a male mythology, becomes most clear in JOI's filmography. Film being in and of itself an imaginary medium (Kittler 16), JOI's films are decidedly visual. Incandenza is described as "a self-acknowledged visual filmmaker" (229) (seemingly) lacking all inclination toward (original) plot (375), instead psychotically reproducing irony through imaginary compensation.

Nested within the novel's extensive endnotes, a nine-page filmography of JOI's works is attached to a remark that Incandenza's films were "just plain pretentious and unengaging and bad, and probably not helped at all by the man's very gradual spiral into the crippling dipsomania of his late father" (64). In fact, JOI's films are brought about by the crippling influence of his father, echoing, despite, as will be seen, their best intentions to do otherwise, with a postmodern and phallogocentric discourse. JOI's films are thus widely read as "a catalogue of the irony, self-consciousness, and genre-poaching associated with most theories of postmodernism" (Grausam 326). They furthermore catalogue every conceivable mode of the male gaze in cinema Mulvey outlines. Struggling with their legacy yet perpetually forced to reproduce it, JOI's films exhibit the toothless postmodern irony Wallace assigns to a generation

of 80s and 90s image fiction rather than a “socially useful” (“E Unibus Pluram” 183) if outworn 1960s postmodernism. JOI’s postmodern gestalt stems from his failure to move beyond (his father’s) postmodern style. His parodies of parodies continue the problem they supposedly point out (den Dulk, “Beyond Endless ‘Aesthetic’ Irony” 338).

JOI thus does not really function as Wallace’s alter ego. Instead, JOI’s *filmography* represents an *alternate* ego of Wallace.¹⁵² The filmography thus does not provide a map for Wallace’s own project in *Infinite Jest* per se but serves as “a self-critique on Wallace’s own artistic journey” (Bartlett 385). The film auteur’s artistic development, a development more malleable than, e.g., Boswell makes it out to be (Boswell 162), aligns with Wallace’s own project. It operates from the same premises and goals of postmodern solipsism and communicative potential yet presents the two projects as asynthetic. The relationship between JOI’s films and Wallace’s work, in particular the relationship between the homonymous ‘Infinite Jest’ and *Infinite Jest*, must therefore be understood not as one of *reflection* but as governed by the novel’s theme of *refraction*, a look *through* a transparent surface without reflection (511). While self-reflexivity, a narcissistic mirror represented in JOI’s films, only leads to a replication of the ancestral gestalt in the novel’s culture of image, such a refractive mode invites egress from perpetual reflection and entrapment in a postmodern discourse through “a specifically communicative gesture between [...] text and reader or authorial presence and reader” (Hering 87). JOI’s films provide such a refractive lens through which *Infinite Jest*’s own project takes shape and the author Wallace can be intuited.

The Medusa v. the Odalisque

The filmography therefore also echoes the mythology of maleness. This perpetuation of Incandenza Sr.’s misogynist mythology of maleness becomes especially apparent in JOI’s “The Medusa v. The Odalisque” (396). The films of the Latrodectus Mactans period displaying a sadistic voyeuristic mode of relieving male anxiety by assigning guilt to an objectified female, JOI’s films of that period reflect Hélène Cixous’s remark in “The Laugh of the Medusa” that

¹⁵² For a more detailed discussion of *Infinite Jest*’s negotiation of authorship with regard to the auteur JOI and his wraith-form in particular see the chapter on *Infinite Jest*’s consubstantial method, and David Hering’s reading of Wallace’s ghosts in *Fiction + Form*.

men “need femininity to be associated with death” (Cixous 885). In fact, JOI even goes so far as to employ an actual medusa, along its foil, the odalisque, in “The Medusa v. The Odalisque” (396). JOI’s inherited reliance on Evian and Hellenic male myth in his discussion of culture-wide solipsist stasis becomes especially explicit in the *Latrodectus Mactans* production “The Medusa v. The Odalisque”.

Repeatedly discussed even outside the filmography, “The Medusa v. The Odalisque” plays an integral part in JOI’s, and, through contrast, the novel’s, gendered mythical method. The mythology of maleness which the novel frames for America’s crippling existential loneliness underlies the film’s “relatively plotless plot” of a “fake stage-production” (396) in which

the mythic Medusa, snake-haired and armed with a sword and well-polished shield, is fighting to the death or petrification against L’Odalisque de Ste. Thérèse, a character out of old Québécois mythology who was supposedly so inhumanly gorgeous that anyone who looked at her turned instantly into a human-sized precious gem, from admiration. (396)

In the meantime, an applauding or “meta-applauding” (396) audience is slowly turned to (gem)stone. As one can see, “The Medusa v. The Odalisque” features the recurrent theme in JOI’s films (and Wallace’s own work) of spectatorial stasis, associating this paralyzing self-consciousness, as is typical for the *Latrodectus Mactans* period, with femininity. Notably, the “two visually lethal mythological females” (988) can clearly be identified as instances of Evian and Hellenic archetypes. While the Medusa, her active female gaze petrifying the audience, resembles the Evian type of threatening female subjecthood, the Odalisque, a “Medusa in reverse” (529), appears as a Hellenic object, her beauty paralyzing the subject of the male gaze. As in Wallace’s reading of Evian and Hellenic myth in his review of *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*, the “two aesthetic foils” (397) of Medusa and Odalisque, equally inductive of paralysis, reflect on a solipsistic double bind both JOI and Wallace identify in postmodern society.

The audience “meta-applauding” (397) the fight’s choreography thereby (‘realistically’) represents the self-consciousness of image-culture, a self-consciousness JOI’s film rightly

criticizes as leading into stasis. However, meta-irony only further prolongs irony. Incandenza fails due to the imaginary nature of his medium. Representation necessarily equals reality in the imaginary register of film. Wallace's critique is thus not directed against the medium of film per se, but against a recursive image-fictionist mode of negotiating postmodern discourse by (metem)psychotically (i.e., ironically) replicating its images.

A recursive narcissism that produces solipsism cannot be critiqued from within a narcissistic, i.e., imaginary medium. Despite his avant-gardism, JOI cannot succeed his father's heritage through meta-irony. Failing to overcome his postmodern legacy, JOI fails to overcome his misogyny. Indeed, his Medusa is not Cixous' laughing Medusa as Incandenza, unnecessarily, gives the Medusa a "pained face" (741). As Joelle reflects on the film, nested within a meditation on her "male-female" (741) relationship with Incandenza's son Orin, "[i]t was like [JOI] couldn't help putting human flashes in, but he wanted to get them in as quickly and unstudyably as possible, as if they compromised him somehow" (741). Indeed, the Medusa doubly compromises JOI: while, on the one hand, the film's reflection on male mythology, through the figures of Evian medusa and Hellenic odalisque, as solipsizing compromises the Lacanian model of selfhood, on the other hand JOI's pathological editing in of a "pained face" (741) bespeaks his masculine perspective.

JOI's use of "mythological females" (988) thereby serves as an image-fictionist counterpart to the novel's own mythical method. JOI fails to fulfill the potential Wallace sees in an aestheticized use of (male) mythology in discussing solipsism. Theorizing a model of "mythologizing" ("The Empty Plenum" 108) in "The Empty Plenum" later applied in *Infinite Jest's* reinterpretation of Ulyssean metempsychosis, Wallace views the masculinely constructed Hellenic and Evian archetypes as containing a poignant reflection of solipsism. To Wallace, (male) mythology in literature has the potential to "enrich & transfigure & transcend explanation," allowing for universalist, "intellectual or political or spiritual, pan-human" ("The Empty Plenum" 106) statements about a solipsizing, conventionally masculine, Lacanian framework of selfhood.

Noting "how radical skepticism [...] yields at once omnipotence and moral oppression" ("The Empty Plenum" 99), the solipsist whose world is a product of her language being thus

responsible for her ‘creation,’ Wallace views Evian and Hellenic archetypal configurations of female guilt as illustrative of a solipsist double bind. The ‘mythologizing’ use of Evian and Hellenic mythical parallelisms can thus dramatize the otherwise purely philosophical question of solipsism, “the relationship between appearance and ontology and between writing and reality” (Holland, “‘By Hirsute Author’” 66). Evian guilt, woman responsible as active subject “as is a mother for her child, or herself” is illustrative of the active solipsist subject’s “omniresponsibility” (“The Empty Plenum” 99) for a world linguistically created by the subject.¹⁵³ In playing on Evian and Hellenic myth, Wallace sees the potential to depict both sides of the solipsistic double bind: on the one hand, the Evian predicament illustrates a skeptical, subjective solipsism, i.e., the impossibility of accepting and reaching out to another cognitive entity due to the fact that “If I exist, nothing exists outside me” (“The Empty Plenum” 115). On the other hand, objective solipsism, the loss of self through absorption of the other summarized as “If something exists outside me, I do not exist” (“The Empty Plenum” 115) is illustrated in Hellenic external determination.¹⁵⁴ Mythological parallelism, to Wallace, thus stands in opposition to idiosyncratic, particularized history. It is capable of allowing philosophical, pan-human statements about being. A ‘mythologizing’ of gender and language, as through self-consciously playing on the myths of Eve and Helen, can thus serve as an illustration of “the desacralized & paradoxical solipsism of U.S. persons in a cattle-herd [...], of guiltily passive solipsists & skeptics” (“The Empty Plenum” 107). Like women in patriarchal discourse, the solipsist becomes responsible both as subjective creator of her world and an object therein.

JOI, on the other hand, rather than playing *on* the mythical culpability of Helen and Eve in his use of the medusa and the odalisque, must unequivocally play *into* this mythology of maleness. Trapped within an objectifying, misogynist discourse, JOI humanizes what is to Wallace the pan-humanly mythological. He must therefore obfuscate the laughter of Medusa through a “pained face” (741) and thereby fall back into an oppressive mythology of

¹⁵³ A philosophical perspective of “utter subjectivity & pathological responsibility” Wallace notes “a 1988 U.S. reader associates with *men*” (“The Empty Plenum” 102).

¹⁵⁴ Notably, earlier in his essay, Wallace likens this solipsist human condition, emerging from atomistic and poststructuralist conceptions of language, to psychosis, citing Laing’s concept of “ontological insecurity” (“The Empty Plenum” 83) and describing the prior human condition as “neurotic” (“The Empty Plenum” 84).

maleness.¹⁵⁵ Thus, while the Medusa and the Odalisque are noted to be clearly discernible as holograms to the viewer, “it’s not clear what they’re supposed to be on the level of the playlet, whether the audience is supposed to see/(not)see them as ghosts or wraiths or ‘real’ mythic entities or what” (396). A self-conscious remark on postmodern self-consciousness is indiscernible from actual postmodern self-consciousness. The medium of JOI’s work making it impossible to distinguish between the Medusa and the Odalisque intradiegetically representing “ghosts or wraiths or ‘real’ mythic entities” (396), it is impossible to ascertain whether the two mythical females serve as unparticularized, universal illustrations of solipsism or remain within a masculinist, solipsizing framework as guilty, ‘real’ objects. Ironizing irony can only produce more irony. Therefore, critically depicting a postmodern family mythology in the imaginary can only reproduce the same, solipsizing myths since this kind of (meta-)irony can never show the ‘true’ object of its critique, not ‘looking’ different than regular irony.

Wallace’s criticism that postmodern irony assumes that “etiology and diagnosis point[] toward cure, that a revelation of imprisonment [leads] to freedom” (“E Unibus Pluram” 183) is thus also evident in his treatment of the female mythological figures in “The Medusa v. The Odalisque.” JOI’s mythological reflections on a solipsizing fixation on spectation fail due to his entrapment in the very male mythology he is referencing. While Joyce’s Bloom in erroneously describing metempsychosis is right for all the wrong reasons (Senn, “Met Whom What?” 109), JOI, in his function as an alternate ego, conversely fails despite the correctness of his analysis. Ultimately playing into masculine Evian and Hellenic mythical archetypes, “The Medusa v. The Odalisque,” along with JOI’s other *Latrodectus Mactans* productions, perpetuates a postmodern phallogocentric discourse by espousing a compulsive, pathological blaming of the female other.

Rather than the Homeric parallelism of *Ulysses*, the reference of *Infinite Jest*’s metempsychosis is this mythology of maleness. The novel’s ‘family mythology’ is thus linked to phallogocentrism. Self-conscious self-definition in opposition to a female other, the masculine myths of Evian and Hellenic guilt outlined in “EP” and exemplified in the *Latrodectus Mactans* period of JOI’s filmography, condemns the individual to an existential loneliness in a world

¹⁵⁵ Speakingly, this is the criticism Wallace’s “The Empty Plenum” applies to *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*’s objectifying use of myth as emotional explanation rather than intellectual dramatization, further drawing JOI as Wallace’s contemporary alternate ego that fails where Wallace succeeds.

reduced to surface images. It both alienates the self from the other it conceives of as an object and subjects that other to an ontologically imperialist absorption that wholly eradicates its alterity.

Intergenerational Conversation: Poor Yorick and ‘Infinite Jest’

JOI’s artistic development, a constant battle against a communication-threatening solipsism that is a product of an oppressive postmodern legacy, does not end in a sadistic voyeuristic scopophilia that assigns guilt to women and thus perpetuates the misogynist male mythology he is criticizing in his films. Conversing with Gately toward the end of the novel, the returned-from-the-dead wraith of JOI thus remarks “that he had, at one time, blamed the boy’s mother for his silence. But what good does that kind of thing do” (837). As the *Hamlet* reference in JOI’s next production company, “Poor Yorick Entertainment Unlimited” (990) signifies,¹⁵⁶ JOI’s work shifts toward “a desire for intergenerational communication” (Hering 107) and entertainment. This process, ultimately as doomed as JOI’s earlier attempts, results in the lethally entertaining cross-generational apology of ‘Infinite Jest.’ Despite his abstinence from viewing and depicting woman as the guilty object, JOI’s films cannot escape postmodern irony, scopophilia and misogyny, i.e., a culture of image.

While his *Latrodectus Mactans* period professes of JOI’s assigning of responsibility for solipsism to the female other, the Poor Yorick films indicate an awareness of the patriarchal roots of solipsism represented in the apparent deassociation of femininity, sexual betrayal, motherhood, and solipsism and redefinition in a positive “mother-death-cosmology” (230) in *Madame Psychosis*. However, this seeming renunciation of misogyny in fact only redresses JOI’s male mythology, drawing on equally problematic modes of homosexual eroticism and fetishization. Thus, woman is either altogether redacted from JOI’s films or, in the shape of *Madame Psychosis*, fetishized as “perfect product” (Mulvey 841), an object, nevertheless, despite not bearing the guilt of solipsism. JOI’s attempts at counteracting male mythology and

¹⁵⁶ Both “Poor Yorick Entertainment Unlimited” and ‘Infinite Jest’/*Infinite Jest* take their name from the gravedigger scene in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare’s play which opens with a father conversing with his son beyond the grave. For more information on the relationship between *Infinite Jest* and *Hamlet*, a reference *Infinite Jest* shares with Joyce’s *Ulysses*, see James Jason Walsh Jr.’s “American Hamlet: Shakespearean Epistemology in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*”. Furthermore, the *Hamlet* reference points towards JOI’s Lacanian training as it bespeaks his (erroneous) interpretation of Hal’s situation as melancholia along the lines of Lacan’s “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*.”

postmodern irony are depicted as failingly remaining solipsizing, a process that culminates in ‘Infinite Jest.’

‘Infinite Jest’: A Failed Entertainment

In his attempt to combat (his son’s) solipsism, JOI’s films seek to escape their family mythology, the oppressive paternal influence of a postmodern phallogentric discourse that hinges on misogynist Evian and Hellenic myths of female guilt. As Boswell remarks, “Incandenza’s intentions are sound; it’s his methods that are the problem” (Boswell 160). Even though, as could be seen, JOI’s methodology is not as monolithic and classically postmodernist as Boswell makes it out to be,¹⁵⁷ his conclusions perpetually fail to overcome postmodernist influence, instead further escalating solipsizing irony.

Perpetuating and even intensifying postmodernism’s narcissistic objectification, ‘Infinite Jest’ stands as the culmination of these failures. Its visual lethality reveals itself as not a reversal but an extension of postmodern scopophilia, *Infinite Jest*’s culture’s solipsizing equation of image, representation, to reality. Well-intended, ‘Infinite Jest’ seeks to elide paternal influence. As the use of Madame Psychosis in the film suggests, *Infinite Jest* seeks to cause a psychosis in the audience – a foreclosure of the name-of-the-father and the language that comes with it. This is an audience that, however, is already psychotic. The novel’s implicit critique of Lacan’s poststructuralism thus illuminates the recursive nature of all attempts at meta-irony. Hence, although Incandenza, like Wallace, identifies solipsism as hinging on patriarchal tropes, he does not end up breaking with his image culture’s recursive narcissism. On the contrary, JOI involuntarily affords these spectatorial addicts with the ultimate (feminine) object for their male gaze.¹⁵⁸

JOI’s attempts to break through a recursive fixation on images signified by his “development from self-reflexivity to a desire for communication” (Hering 108) thus perpetually reflect the discourse they seek to overcome. Epitomizing this process, the “fatally

¹⁵⁷ JOI much more seems to function as one of Wallace’s fellow creative writing MFAs grappling with the postmodernist heritage and always devising new strategies to counter it that, however, always tragically fail.

¹⁵⁸ While JOI’s tragically well-intended failure to succeed irony is, against the backdrop of *Infinite Jest*, certainly ironic, this use of irony as a trope is not related to the existentially ironic attitude the novel criticizes as solipsizing.

entertaining and scopophilic” ‘Infinite Jest’ utilizes a metempsychotic “mother-death-cosmology” (230) based on perpetual reincarnation (850) to “contrive a medium via which [JOI] and the muted son [solipsistic Hal] could simply *converse*” (838). Afraid that his son fell victim to the same solipsizing “family mythology” (838) passed down across generations in the Incandenza family, JOI’s intention behind ‘Infinite Jest,’ his wraith reveals, was to

concoct something the gifted boy couldn’t simply master and move on from to a new plateau. Something the boy would love enough to induce him to open his mouth and come *out* – even if it was only to ask for more. Games hadn’t done it, professionals hadn’t done it, impersonation of professionals hadn’t done it. His last resort: entertainment. Make something so bloody compelling it would reverse thrust on a young self’s fall into the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death in life. A magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant still somewhere alive in the boy, to make its eyes light and toothless mouth open unconsciously, to laugh. To bring him ‘out of himself,’ as they say. The womb could be used both ways. A way to say I AM SO VERY, VERY SORRY and have it *heard*. (838-39)

The film’s (metem)psychotic agenda is poignantly revealed in JOI’s goal of bringing Hal “‘out of himself’ as they say.” Hal, a “more and more *hidden* boy” (838), exhibiting the Kierkegaardian “hiddenness” of the aesthete using “self-conscious thinking in order to hide from themselves” (Boswell 140), is meant to be brought out of his solipsistic inward spiral. At the same time, by adding “as they say” (839) to his statement JOI references his family-moniker “Himself,” meaning to bring Hal out of paternal influence. Ultimately, both readings amount to the same thing: the elimination of postmodern phallogocentric discourse. Since, as Lacan remarks, “[t]he style is the man himself” (Lacan, *Écrits* 3), in order to reverse Hal’s “fall into the womb of solipsism” (839), the postmodern style, ‘Infinite Jest’ seeks to bring Hal out of the man Himself, the solipsizing patriarchal legacy of the father.

‘Infinite Jest’ is meant to foreclose the name-of-the-father and effectively induce a psychosis by returning the viewer to Lacan’s mirror stage. This agenda already becomes apparent in the casting of Madame Psychosis, a stage name JOI tellingly chose himself for

Joelle (297). To JOI, a redeeming, meaning-providing metempsychosis, as the one presented in Joyce's *Ulysses*, is inherently linked to the psychotic erasure of the 'law of the father.' Similarly, the 'Jest' in the film's title can be read as a lay-translation of the Lacanian term 'jouissance.' The film, reverts the viewer to "that early wholeness, that last one-to-one connection with the (m)other" (Boswell 136) of the mirror stage and therefore is meant to provide the viewer with 'Infinite Jouissance,' the complete engulfment by the mother given up during the Oedipus complex and never regained (Evans 23).¹⁵⁹ It is thus critically not only Wallace himself who applies Lacan, but also Wallace's characters who do so. Both, in their own way, try to counter a framework they view as damaging and argue against yet can only do so from within said framework, with Lacan.

'Infinite Jest' is comprised of two scenes that both thematically circle a return to the mirror stage. In the first, critically less discussed scene, 'Infinite Jest' opens with "a veiled woman [Madame Psychosis] going through a large building's revolving doors and catching a glimpse of someone else in the revolving doors [, which] makes her veil billow" (549). The two characters, Madame Psychosis and an "epicene" (939) male actor, are "supposedly formerly very close" but "haven't seen each other in the longest time" (938), and, attempting to meet the other, "keep going around in the [revolving] door to follow the person out" (939), perpetually pursuing one another. The relationship between the two characters, "very close" yet separated for "the longest time" (938), therefore reproduces a maternal-filial relationship, the wholeness of the mirror stage before castration in which mother and child form a dyadic relation, forming the complete circle the film's revolving doors draw.

This infantilism becomes even more apparent in the film's second scene. Set on a literal mirror stage, the film's second scene suggests JOI's aim to return the viewer to the mirror stage and thus eliminate h/Himself, the solipsizing name-of-the-father. As Joelle reveals, reminiscing about "the scenes of that last ghastly thing he'd [JOI] made" in Joelle's and Orin's shared flat,

¹⁵⁹ JOI's other films similarly bespeak his knowledge of Lacan. Toward the end of his career, the filmography's Lacanian aperture progressively closes in on JOI's occupation with jouissance, desire, and the phallus from, e.g., the deferral of the other's desire of "(The) Desire to Desire" (991), "The Unfortunate Case of Me" (993), indicating the (untranslatable) distinction of je and moi that occurs during the méconnaissance of the mirror stage (Evans 51–52), "Too Much Fun" (993) ("plus-de-jouir" (Evans 129)), to the aforementioned 'Infinite Jouissance' derived from the mirror-stage regression of 'Infinite Jest.' The development of the filmography thus clearly shows the Lacanian thinking, for better or worse, behind JOI's perfect entertainment.

now inhabited by Molly Notkin, a “full-length mirror of quality plate” (229) featured prominently in the filming of ‘Infinite Jest.’

In addition, the “visual compulsion” (490) described in the novel further frames ‘Infinite Jest’ as effecting a return to the mirror stage. Affording the viewer with a hypothetical “purest, most refined pleasure imaginable [, the] neural distillate of, say, orgasm, religious enlightenment, ecstatic drugs” (473)¹⁶⁰ without overtly sexual features, i.e., the experience of *jouissance* before the prohibition of incest and entry into language, ‘Infinite Jest’'s visual style reverts the viewer to the “proto-incestuous” (792) mirror stage. Thus, the film’s second scene, comprised of a mythically maternal, “hugely pregnant” (788) and effaced Madame Psychosis “explaining in very simple childlike language [...] that Death is always female, and that the female is always maternal. I.e. that the woman who kills you is always your next life’s mother” (788) followed by “various apologies” (939), is “mediated by [a] very special lens” (788) fitted to “reproduce an infantile visual field” (940). The viewer, as the subject of the film’s gaze, is returned to infancy, a state of maternal plenitude before castration, as is mirrored in the helpless and irresponsive state the film’s viewers are put into, soiling themselves until they die. ‘Infinite Jest’ thereby, as Danielle Ely notes, creates an “artificial womb” (Ely 49) that replaces and fulfills the perpetually deferred desire of the Lacanian split subject to return to a pre-oedipal wholeness, i.e., the “womb of solipsism” (839). The film’s mirror stage-like “crib’s-eye view” (939), casting Madame Psychosis as the maternal feminine, thus fulfills JOI’s aim that the “womb could be used both ways” (839). Fashioning a rebirth from the “womb of solipsism” (839) of masculine female objectification into a second womb, psychosis, the film’s “mother-death-cosmology” (230) represents a form of metempsychosis already hinted at in its protagonist’s name, Madame Psychosis.

¹⁶⁰ Note how the description of ‘Infinite Jest’ as “ecstatic” further links JOI’s film to a *jouissance* outside or “beyond the symbolic, standing apart from symbolic castration” (Fink 122).

Crosswriting out of the Double Bind: *Infinite Jest* and/as Écriture Féminine

Rather than reverting to a pre-verbal state, the novel *Infinite Jest* seeks to reform postmodern language from within the symbolic. As Wallace remarks in the McCaffery interview, "[i]f I were separate from language [...] I could study it 'objectively,' take it apart, deconstruct it [...]. But that's not how things are. I'm *in* it. We're *in* language" (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 45). Similarly, Mulvey notes on the feminist's problem of "how to fight the unconscious structured like a language (formed critically at the arrival of language) while still caught within the language of patriarchy" (Mulvey 834). Wallace appears to face the same predicament: his novel seeks to transcend the frameworks of postmodernism yet these frameworks are the only ones available to it. As will be shown, *Infinite Jest* achieves this secession from a solipsizing phallogocentric postmodern discourse from within language by utilizing what Wallace refers to as "crosswriting" ("The Empty Plenum" 100). Wallace's proposed mode can be understood as a crossdressing-like assumption of a feminine perspective of writing by a male author which can be related to French feminism's écriture féminine as outlined by the likes of Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray. In attaining a feminine symbolic, rather than eliminating postmodern phallogocentrism, *Infinite Jest* seeks to overwrite a solipsizing misogyny and offer a redemptive, feminine perspective on the text. Masculine writing and reading are thereby to be replaced by feminine reading and writing.

Wallace and French Feminism

As Adam Kelly notes, Wallace's writing is heavily informed by "the so-called French feminists, highly influential in the US academy during the 1980s, that represented for him the vanguard of the field" (Kelly, "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men" 84). Building on Lacanian theory, this 'school' – in fact a construct of the US academy Wallace grew up in as an author – around the likes of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous, deconstructs the patriarchal 'law of the father.' French Feminism thereby appears to Wallace as a useful model for employing a postmodern, patriarchal language in order to destabilize and critique it. These French Feminists seek to offer insight into an alternative, repressed feminine language in which woman can "try

to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it” (Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* 76). As Ann Rosalind Jones summarizes, “French feminists in general believe that Western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women’s experience” (A. R. Jones 247).

In particular the concept of *écriture féminine* as theorized by French Feminism is central to Wallace’s (cross)writing in *Infinite Jest* and beyond.¹⁶¹ *Écriture féminine*, a practice of women’s writing in opposition to “the language of men and their grammar” (Cixous 887), represents a “refusal to identify with [...] the logic of paternal discourse” (A. R. Jones 249). It expresses a feminine *jouissance* inaccessible to masculine, phallogocentric writing, the symbolic Kristeva associates with the patriarchal, “referential, rule-bound, systematic dimension of language” (Kelly, “Brief Interviews with Hideous Men” 84). Instead *écriture féminine* surfaces in a “semiotic discourse” (A. R. Jones 248) that is not implicated in the “myths” of “the reigning binary system of meaning – identity/other, man/nature, reason/chaos, man/woman” (A. R. Jones 252) but unifies these phallic binary oppositions. Nevertheless, Kristeva and Cixous alike note that such *écriture féminine* can also be accessed by male authors (A. R. Jones 251). Importantly in the context of Wallace’s positioning within a Ulyssean Tradition, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, more precisely Molly Bloom’s monologue in ‘Penelope,’ serves as a prime example for such antiphallologocentric texts by male authors (A. R. Jones 251).

Developing a feminine, “new symbolic” (Rothleder 69), Irigaray argues to view the phallus as simply “the masculine version of the umbilical cord” (Irigaray, “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother” 17). While the “phallus becomes the organizer of the world through the man-father” (Irigaray, “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother” 14), the umbilical cord, in the same place but present in men and women, brings forth a language that does not silence the mother. Therefore, in the maternal language of *écriture féminine*, the navel (*nombril*) can serve as an alternative to the phallogocentrism of a symbolic based in the name-of-the-

¹⁶¹ Wallace’s first novel, *The Broom of the System*, is self-confessedly autobiographical, starring a female protagonist that “implies [a] full-scale adoption of a female persona” (Hayes-Brady, *Unspeakable Failures* 172). Similarly, *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, published right after *Infinite Jest*, is probably Wallace’s most overt discussion of misogyny. In particular the short story collection’s triad of “Tri-Stan: I Sold Sissee Nar to Ecko,” “On His Deathbed, Holding Your Hand, the Acclaimed New Young Off-Broadway Playwright’s Father Begs a Boon,” and “Suicide As a Sort of Present” follows the same pattern of (Wagnerian) mythology, issues of paternity and maternity, and Lacanian theory elaborated in this chapter.

father (*nom du pere*) (Irigaray, “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother” 14, 19).¹⁶²

Instead of the name-of-the-father, *écriture féminine* discovers a name-of-the-mother.

Two M.P.s: Infinite Jest and the Name-Of-The-Mother

Infinite Jest approaches the problem of postmodernism from within its own language, proposing the “new symbolic” (Rothleder 69) of an *écriture féminine*, or, more precisely, the performance of a feminine reading, to counteract postmodern psychotic phallocentrism. This approach to an *écriture féminine*, Wallace’s “crosswriting” (“The Empty Plenum” 100), can for example be seen in Don Gately’s discovery of Joelle’s identity as he links her name to the radio personality Madame Psychosis. Gately thereby becomes able to replace a foreclosed, solipsizing name-of-the-father, his M.P. (military police) stepfather, with the maternal Joelle van Dyne as Madame Psychosis, reconfiguring his relation with Joelle from a sexual, masculine, and Lacanianly objectifying one to one of feminine maternity. In this redemptive recognition of Joelle as M.P., the name-of-the-mother, Gately is able to leave behind his addiction, a metaphor for postmodern solipsism, and “Abide via memory” (918) as he refuses the treatment with the painkiller Demerol that would lead him to relapse.

Two M.P.s are on Gately’s mind during his final moments in the novel, lying in hospital and fighting against pain and relapse into drug addiction. Prompted by the visit of the wraith of Hal’s father JOI, Gately’s thoughts revolve around the topic of paternity, his abusive, alcoholic, and poignantly nameless stepfather solely referred to as “the M.P.” (839). ‘M.P.’ thus represents the (foreclosed) name of the father and thus the postmodern solipsism Gately has to face. At the same time, Gately’s thoughts revolve around fellow halfway-house resident Joelle van Dyne, Madame Psychosis, whose voice Gately finally recognizes as “that one Madame lady’s voice on no-subscription radio” (618). From the moment of his hospitalization, 190 Gately-less pages later, the “power struggle of masculine *versus* feminine language” (Hayes-Brady, “Language, Gender” 134) of the overall work – paternal M.P. versus maternal M.P., addiction versus sobriety, solipsism versus communication – plays out in Gately. Gately’s relation to Joelle/M.P. is thereby reconfigured from masculinely objectifying to maternal femininity.

¹⁶² Clearly not eschewing metafiction altogether, *Infinite Jest* thus ironically proposes a redemptive, feminine ‘navel-gazing’ as an alternative to the narcissism of masculine postmodernist style.

Thus, Gately's attempts to conceive of Joelle in a patriarchal manner fail as evidenced in the disastrously deflatory sex-dreams he is having of Joelle. Gately's and Joelle's relationship, if it is to be redemptive, cannot be a sexual one, one that conforms to the solipsizing Lacanian model. Even though Gately acknowledges the identity of M.P. and Joelle, he cannot yet allow her to fill the vacant M.P.-function, i.e., the space of the foreclosed name-of-the-father. He remains in a postmodern family mythology of gendered relations as he fantasizes about them getting children and "calling each other 'Mother' and 'Papa'" in a "projective mental union" (862) doomed to "keep[] foundering" (862-3). Only in the moment in which Joelle's name and the designator of the missing name M.P. fully converge into "Joelle (M.P.) van Dyne" (862) does Gately acquire the redemptive name-of-the-mother.¹⁶³ Having reconfigured his relationship to Joelle and accepted the name-of-the-mother, Gately can see the addictive, solipsizing nature of his narcissistic fantasies of sexual union with Joelle, a family mythology, as "the same delusion as the basic addictive-Substance-delusion" (864). He thus recognizes the solipsism inherent in the Lacanian model, feeling "ashamed" (863) for his fantasies of Joelle.¹⁶⁴ In accepting Joelle as mother, rather than female sexual other, Gately's metamorphosis from addiction and crime to recovery ends in his entering a feminine, redemptive maternal language. He thereby mirrors Leopold Bloom's equanimous transformation into "the childman weary, the manchild in the womb" (*Ulysses* 688) of Molly Bloom. Accepting maternity, Gately, instead of "trying to Abide" (862), begins to actually "Abide via memory" (918), thereby fighting off a relapse into solipsizing drug addiction through the acceptance of painkillers.

In exchanging the name-of-the-father for the name-of-the-mother of a redemptive feminine language, i.e., claiming a Ulyssean *écriture féminine*, *Infinite Jest* proposes to exchange the narcissistic, patriarchal auteur-figure JOI (JO-I), the novel's primary father, with the feminine alternative Joelle (Jo-Elle). Indeed, her "filmic interests [lying] behind the lens," wanting to "make things, not appear in them" (739), Joelle qualifies as a femininely redemptive

¹⁶³ Note how this convergence of 'names' mirrors the convergence of Stephen and Bloom into Blephen and Stoom in *Ulysses*.

¹⁶⁴ The toxic masculinity that nevertheless underlies Wallace's program becomes very apparent here. In mobilizing an aesthetic of asceticism that borders self-flagellation, Wallace's literary allegorizations turn desire into a matter of guilt in his way out of solipsism.

auteur, a maternal alternative to JOI's solipsizing name-of-the-father. Notably, with Joelle functioning as the novel's *écriture féminine* auteur to JOI's postmodernly phallogentric auteurship, a feminine perspective on the novel reveals Molly Notkin, about whom Joelle reflects that "[s]he and Molly Notkin are just the same [...] – sisters, sororal twins" (226), as said feminine auteur's sororal counterpart, the ideal reader of *Infinite Jest*. Indeed, Molly Notkin's reading of 'Infinite Jest,' dismissed by her male interrogators and a masculinely prejudiced, postmodern reader alike, is strikingly on point. Abducted and interrogated by ONAN's secret service, Molly comments on 'Infinite Jest' that

the entire perfect-entertainment-as-Liebestod myth surrounding the purportedly lethal final cartridge was nothing more than a classic illustration of the antinomically schizoid function of the post-industrial capitalist mechanism, whose logic presented commodity as the escape-from- anxieties-of-mortality-which-escape-is-itself-psychologically-fatal, as detailed in perspicuous detail in M. Gilles Deleuze's posthumous *Incest and the Life of Death in Capitalist Entertainment* (792).

As can be seen, this reading corresponds to the one the novel itself offers, revealing an insight unrivaled by any other (living) character in the novel. Identifying 'Infinite Jest' as based in a (male) "myth" (792) of merging "with the pre-Oedipal mother" (Bergstein 753), the fantasy of "intrauterine omnipotence" (Flugel, qtd. in Bergstein 757) of the Wagnerian "*Liebestod*" (792), Molly comments on this fantasy as "a classic illustration" (792) of an antinomy, a "contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical" (*OED* "antinomy"): postmodern solipsism as both oppressive paternal heritage and psychotic, patricidally 'fatherless' structure. Molly alone thus recognizes the film as amplifying a problem it seeks to overcome, an "escape-from-anxieties-of-mortality-which-escape-is-itself-psychologically-fatal" (792).¹⁶⁵

For all her (feminine) wisdom, however, her male audience cannot take her seriously. Instead, they only respond with "respectful and pointed requests to keep the responses on some factual track and spare them all the eggheaded abstractions" (792). Similarly, Molly appears as

¹⁶⁵ The movie-within-a-novel 'Infinite Jest' can thus be seen to mirror the very *Liebestod* structure the novel-as-movie *Gravity's Rainbow* warns of, sans the radical openness and resistance to systematization of Pynchon's postmodernism.

an unreliable source to the (still masculine) reader. Stephen Burn, in a note to “‘Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing’: *Infinite Jest* and the Science of Mind,” thus comes close to reading “Jameson’s Lacanian account of schizophrenia [...] as a provocative analogy for *Infinite Jest*’s structure” (Burn, “‘Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing’” 84), only to note that “the validity of this connection, however, is partially questioned by the fact that it’s Molly Notkin – as her last name suggests (she is *not kin*), she is hardly an authorial surrogate – who comes closest to outlining Jameson’s vision of schizophrenia” (Burn, “‘Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing’” 84). On the contrary, however, as can be seen, her being *not kin* to the male author, a feminine reader, qualifies rather than disqualifies her to make reliable statements about ‘*Infinite Jest*.’ Namesake of Joyce’s Molly Bloom, the subject of the *écriture féminine* of the ‘Penelope’ monologue, Molly Notkin appears as the ideal reader of *Infinite Jest*, its *lectrice féminine*. Wallace reportedly always “envisaged the reader as female” (Hayes-Brady, “Language, Gender” 133). Molly, as a “M.I.T. A.B.D.-Ph.D.” (787), an expert on “Film & Film-Cartridge Theory” (220), is equipped with the necessary background to extrapolate, like the novel’s reader who has to collect sometimes incongruous information on ‘*Infinite Jest*’ strewn throughout the text, a conclusion from a film she has never seen. Nevertheless, her “comically complex sentences,” as Simon de Bourcier reads Molly, a “parody [...] of academic prose” (de Bourcier, “‘They All Sound Like David Foster Wallace’” 5), render Molly Notkin a ridiculous and even “suspect” (Ercolino, “The Killing Vision: David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*” 20), unreliable character, illustrating how, as Irigaray remarks, women’s “words are not heard” (Irigaray, “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother” 16) in masculine society.¹⁶⁶

Infinite Jest thus makes good on its metempsychotic, cross-reading agenda by putting the ‘solution’ to one of its central enigmas into the mouth of a female character whom the (still) masculinist reader and the novel’s own phallogentric idiom can only silence and obfuscate. The mysterious nature of ‘*Infinite Jest*’ the reader tries to discover throughout the novel can only be resolved if the reader, like Gately, gives voice to the (female) other. As Irigaray remarks, women’s language

¹⁶⁶ Clearly, readers of *Infinite Jest* do not brush off Hal’s verbose comments as lightly as they ignore Molly’s.

sets off in all directions leaving ‘him’ [the patriarchal man] unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand. (Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* 29)

In its threat to destabilize the text in its incommensurability, i.e., its refusal to arrange itself into the binary logic of patriarchal language, ‘Infinite Jest’ is constructed as a catatonizing, feminine object (Hayes-Brady, “Language, Gender” 178). This feminine “absent center” (Boswell 126) and object of mystery of the novel can only be made sense of as it is (re)read from a feminine perspective.¹⁶⁷ As Hayes-Brady notes, while the film represents a masculine logic, “The Entertainment [...] may offer a reappropriation of a kind of passive power, using silence or absence to open the text to infinite possibilities of eisegesis” (Hayes-Brady, *Unspeakable Failures* 178). It is thus the reader’s metempsychosis in a shift from a masculine to a feminine ontology which is supposed to reconcile the novel’s many contradictory binaries, not the least the overarching theme of “the delusion that cynicism and naïveté are mutually exclusive” (“E Unibus Pluram” 181). *Infinite Jest* thereby applies the theme of permanence within flux of Joyce’s metempsychosis metafictionally to the relationship of author and reader.

This aesthetic is also referenced in the novel in the description of the drug DMZ, another item “also referred to [...] as *Madame Psychosis*” (170) which Eva Dolo discerns as “the chemical equivalent to Incandenza’s film ‘Infinite Jest’” (Dolo, “Too Much Fun” 98). DMZ, too, is said to have an “ontological” (170) effect that produces an effect that is “kinetic even in stasis” (996), from the masculinist perspective maddeningly changing the ingester’s outlook from a masculine to a feminine ontology. The same kinetic stasis is produced by *Infinite Jest*’s metempsychosis as its two types of reading, a shift in gendered ontology, change the text’s meaning as the novel itself remains selfsame. What is conceived of as feminine silence and stasis from a masculine perspective thereby becomes a way to disrupt “the circularity of patriarchal systems of narrative” (Hayes-Brady, *Unspeakable Failures* 178). Metempsychosis

¹⁶⁷ Wallace notably wanted readers to read *Infinite Jest* twice (Max 199). For a detailed discussion of the theme of rereading and redemptive perspectival change see my analysis of “The Perils of Self-Consciousness: Heinrich von Kleist’s ‘Über das Marionettentheater’ in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*” and the section on *Infinite Jest*’s parallax method in this study.

subverts the internalized masculine, Lacanian self/other dynamic as it places the object in a position of power, embracing the other. This rupture, however, is not achieved by an oedipal revolution, a mode for which JOI's project is exemplary, but through maternal acquiescence, the power of silence.

It is therefore notable that, although *Infinite Jest* explicitly draws upon the theory of *écriture féminine*, Wallace's crosswriting itself does not constitute such a feminine voice. Instead, it in fact further highlights the white, male author's gendered authorship as it relegates the necessary, though in the text impossible, filling of the gap left by feminine silence to the reader. Unlike Joyce, who, writing from the modernist conviction that art could achieve a higher reintegration, could compose Molly Bloom's feminine monologue unperturbed by his own gender, Wallace's intellectual maturation in the academic context of the program era appears to bar him from assuming a feminine voice himself. His artistic sensibility schooled by the postmodernist self-consciousness of the writing program, Wallace appears too aware of his own position as a white, male, heterosexual writer to write women and other marginalized, othered groups. The absence of rounded female characters in Wallace's writing thus "represents an approach to women that – while it could be termed misogynistic – is not based in antipathy but in alterity" (Hayes-Brady, "Language, Gender" 131). Wallace's female characters therefore remain archetypal emblems of male discourse because Wallace, aware of his position of power as a male writer, declines to particularize them and thus chauvinistically violate and masculinize their otherness. Instead of attempting to fill the feminine gap that phallogentric language always leaves with his masculine voice, Wallace mobilizes the power of silence (also apparent in the novel's last, blank page), complete alterity, by utilizing his own gendered authorship. As is typical of authors conventionally grouped under the term 'New Sincerity,' Wallace seeks to create a connection between author and reader outside the text, in this case by pointing toward the author's gender.

Infinite Jest's crosswriting is therefore less an example of *écriture féminine* than an intertextual allusion to the French feminist concept that should call the reader to action.¹⁶⁸ It is thus important to note that in his mode of crosswriting Wallace does not act as a literary transsexual, as Joyce does, but much more self-consciously plays out a literary transvesticism. Just as the burlesque pleasure of transvesticism resides in the *pretense* of performing as another gender identity, Wallace's crosswriting in *Infinite Jest*, episodes such as the faux-ebonics of the "Wardine be cry" (37) section or the interior monologue of the transgender "yrstruly" (128) which count among Wallace's most attacked passages, should not be understood as badly written and insensitive. Rather, they constitute parodies of a male author's attempts at sexual and racial ventriloquism. They thereby expressively point toward the author's gendered and racialized presence behind and without the text. Wallace leaves little doubt that there hides a white, male, heterosexual author behind these passages.¹⁶⁹ Rather than filling the voids the inaccessibility of alterity creates, Wallace highlights these potent absences. Through a thematization of his authorship, Wallace remains abstinent from the objectifying practices he criticizes. The novel thereby enacts a silence which cannot be filled within the text by the author but must be engaged with outside the text by the reader. Wallace's crosswriting thus paradoxically points toward, and utilizes, the obfuscation of feminine voices. It thereby marks the presence of an other, both that of the author and the feminine as the masculinized, male or female, individual's other, through which the double-bind of self-consciousness is resolved. Silence, absence and abstinence, an accommodation of the unspeakable feminine other rather than its conquest and eradication through "man as knowing subject postulat[ing] woman's body as the object to be known" (Brooks 97) provide a way out of the hopelessly circular and misogynist mode of self-definition through simultaneous integration of and alienation from the other. The enigmas and masculine anxieties these silences and incommensurabilities in the novel evoke are not resolved in the masculine language of an 'Infinite Jest'-like Liebestod but invite the reader to close the spiral of active, masculine endless deconstruction and reach out,

¹⁶⁸ As the thematic centrality of, e.g., Lacanian vocabulary in both *Infinite Jest* and JOI's filmography shows, Wallace is not only aware of the Theory he undoubtedly learned at university, but also assumes a familiarity with it in his readership.

¹⁶⁹ *Infinite Jest*'s crosswritings comprise most of the few sections in the novel held in the first person. In addition, in particular the monicker "yrstruly" (128) points toward the function of the author.

femininely, to the world in which she becomes a participant (by ‘completing’ the novel in her feminine language; by becoming aware of and entering a relationship with the author outside the text).

Conclusion: Wallace’s Postmodern Reincarnations

Infinite Jest’s reinterpretation of the Joycean metempsychosis as a meditation on gender, language, and the heritage of postmodernism plays through every variation of the quotation opening Lacan’s *Écrits*: “The style is the man himself”. *Infinite Jest*’s writing after postmodernism thereby (re)negotiates and dismantles postmodernism and poststructuralism from within the bounds of the Theory it views as its basis. In self-consciously quoting from and structuring its aesthetic and ethical argument around Lacanian theory, *Infinite Jest*’s mythical method critiques the self-conscious internalization of the Lacanian model as producing an image-culture that is solipsizingly addicted to the male gaze. Unlike Joyce, Wallace’s mythical method locates its mythology not in ancient epics but in the gender-archetypes implicitly underlying the Lacanian, phallogocentric discourse the novel’s society has internalized. The mythology of *Infinite Jest*’s reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition is a ‘family mythology’ of gender-archetypes, objects against which the Lacanian self, i.e., a subject which can not only be described *through* Lacan but which self-consciously conceives of itself *in* Lacan’s implicitly gendered categories, solipsizingly defines itself. A discourse passed down across generations, *Infinite Jest* presents postmodern irony as a paternal heritage, postmodern style being the discourse of “the man Himself” (29), the patriarchal ‘law of the father’ based in the name-of-the-father, Himself. As could be shown, the name of the father, and with it the fathers’ postmodern solipsism, is transmitted to *Infinite Jest*’s filial generation. At the same time, however, *Infinite Jest* depicts a patricidal postmodern style as producing a psychotic culture, foreclosing the name-of-the-father. This is the antinomy that Molly Notkin identifies in ‘Infinite Jest.’ Compensating the foreclosed name-of-the-father, *Infinite Jest*’s society imaginarily identifies with mass media products. Reared by a media that have absorbed postmodern irony, *Infinite Jest*’s culture psychotically reproduces the mythology of the solipsizing paternal style. Recursively narcissistic, the language of *Infinite Jest*’s image culture is a style of ‘himself,’

exclusively self-referential and thereby perpetually replicating itself. In addition, postmodern irony in *Infinite Jest* is seen as the style of the *man* himself, a phallogocentric discourse whose family mythology is a mythology of maleness based in the misogynist female archetypes of Eve and Helen. Thus, postmodern image culture's solipsized self emerges from the self-definition in opposition to a female other as object of the Lacanian, implicitly male subject.

Functioning as a metempsychotic link to the (postmodern) past, the novel's 'family mythology' effects an oppressive, inescapable perpetuation of solipsizing postmodern style, an entrapment in a masculine, Lacanian model of selfhood resulting in the continuous reincarnation of the dead postmodern father (s' language) in the next generation. A paternal heritage transmitted, and thereby solidified beyond change, via mass media, the novel presents postmodern irony as perpetually recurring, reincarnating, in a culture of image. This use of Lacanian theory in the novel's metempsychotic method, quoting and structuring itself around Lacan while implicitly criticizing poststructuralist and postmodernist concepts as solipsizing, is exemplary of the novel's agonistic, self-consciously filial relation to its postmodern legacy. Metempsychosis in the novel, staging an intergenerational struggle along a meditation of language, gender, and solipsism, speaks the novel's own literary intergenerational struggle. Thus, the use of Lacanian theory in the novel is exemplary for the novel's attempts to reconcile a postmodernist heritage with reintegrative, modernist aims, the use of myth in the novel, related as a postmodernist, Lacanian 'family mythology,' bespeaking a problematized, yet ultimately positive stance toward the (high) modernist modes of *Ulysses*.

As JOI's films, in particular 'Infinite Jest,' show, this fixation on the image cannot be broken through a meta-irony that itself only replicates the recursive narcissism it seeks to critique. Instead of carrying out yet another masculine 'patricide,' as his fictional image-fictionist counterpart JOI unwittingly does, Wallace mobilizes the power of feminine silence. Metempsychosis in *Infinite Jest* thus follows its own mother-death-cosmology in its reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition. Achieving modernist, Ulyssean aims of reintegration in and through art with classically postmodernist means such as intertextuality and metafiction, *Infinite Jest* invites a redemptive ontological shift in the reader from a postmodern, solipsizing phallogocentric devaluation of the *female* other, a narcissistic ontology based in representation, to

a *feminine* language. If “the woman who kills you is always your next life’s mother” (788), in *Infinite Jest*’s metempsychosis, a solipsizing, postmodern style, e.g., the oppressive Lacanian framework, is reused and reincarnated for reintegrative ends. While ‘Infinite Jest,’ a warning example of the inescapability of misogyny and solipsism within a postmodern culture of image, replaces one female object for another in the *imaginary*, *Infinite Jest* proposes a new, alternative *symbolic* grounded in maternal femininity. This ontological shift, inaccessible from within the text, can only happen in the reader’s projected lecture *féminine* outside the text.

In attempting to overcome its filial connection to Lacanian theory, crosswriting in *Infinite Jest* references, rather than exemplifies, French Feminism’s concept of *écriture féminine*. Theory, normally considered *a priori* to the theorized object, thereby becomes an *a posteriori* discursive object, an intertext the novel is referencing. The manner in which *Infinite Jest* actualizes the Ulyssean Tradition thus displays a continuation of postmodernism and a simultaneous dissatisfaction with its development in the 80s and 90s that becomes apparent in the novel’s urge to reconcile its postmodernist basis with modernist goals. The novel’s version of metempsychosis thus combines its postmodernist heritage, e.g., its use of an ontological dominant, intertextuality, Lacanian theory, French Feminism and, with regards to mythology, localization of the mythic in contemporaneity, with the Ulyssean aim of reintegration in and through art. The use of myth in the novel, related as a Lacanian ‘family mythology,’ bespeaks a problematized yet ultimately positive stance toward the high modernism of *Ulysses*. Thus, while the novel is unable or unwilling to discard fundamental postmodernist concepts and methods, it utilizes them to subvert irony and reestablish an (ever-problematized) ontological stability. Behind the novel’s media criticism’s renunciation of a cultural institutionalization of (meta-)irony thus also lies a renunciation of the institutional environment of the 1980s creative writing programs. As JOI’s filmography’s Lacanian framework shows, JOI represents such an 80s late postmodernism schooled in poststructuralist key-texts. At the same time, metempsychosis in *Infinite Jest* also clearly bespeaks the novel’s own origin in the context of the academically institutionalized postmodernism it seeks to attack. The novel’s aesthetics pick up on what is useful for its project and discard what is not from its academic intertexts. Through the novel’s argumentative twist of aesthetically identifying a postmodern style with misogyny,

French Feminism becomes an ‘antidote’ to the late postmodernism Wallace critiques. Unable to itself leave behind postmodernist language, *Infinite Jest* exchanges the solipsizing language of a name-of-the-father with that of a name-of-the-mother, the maternal language of an écriture féminine.¹⁷⁰ The novel thereby further positions itself in a Ulyssean Tradition. Its use of intertextuality metafictionally utilizes Joyce’s own écriture féminine of ‘Penelope’ in the novel’s ontological shift from a masculine mode of reading and writing to a feminine language by offering Molly Bloom’s namesake Molly Notkin as an ideal, feminine reader. *Infinite Jest* shifts the Ulyssean metempsychosis to a meditation of gender and language. In applying Joyce’s mythical method to postmodernist discourse as a patriarchal mythology of maleness, *Infinite Jest* tries to overcome its oppressive postmodern heritage. *Infinite Jest*’s self-consciously filial metempsychosis thereby uses French Feminism to effect a revision of the metempsychotic method countering a postmodern style identified as phallogocentric.

¹⁷⁰ As noted in my chapter on “Problematizing Wallace” in the forthcoming *David Foster Wallace in Context*, Wallace’s use of feminist criticism and identity politics ultimately displays a eurocentrist, heteronormative and toxically masculine perspective that obscures the real hardship of marginalized groups in favor of furthering Wallace’s aesthetic project.

3. From “Consubstantial Father” to “Grammatical Mother”: Wittgenstein and the Return of the Author in *Infinite Jest*

Wallace conceives of the reparative feminine language he envisions as becoming “part of one great big Family Likeness” (Wallace, “The Empty Plenum” 115), the reference pointing toward the later Wittgenstein’s ordinary language philosophy as a model for this new aesthetic. The entry into a reparative language that is based in Wittgenstein’s family resemblances appears closely tied up with the repair of the literal family bond in *Infinite Jest*. As could be shown, the genetic family in Joyce’s *Ulysses* ceases to function as a stable social unit and source of order and meaning. Instead, Stephen Dedalus enters the novel disowned and orphaned, incapable of identifying with, let alone inferring meaning from, his biological family. *Infinite Jest*, too, Mary Holland notes on the role of the family in the novel, seems “to comprise almost exclusively the abandoned” (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 82). Familial dysfunction, as already shown, constitutes a central thematic concern of Wallace’s novel. The destruction of the family is closely related to the cultural solipsism of *Infinite Jest*’s overall society. As Holland points out, the dysfunctional family in *Infinite Jest* both serves as a reflective microcosm of the ONANite macrocosm of ironic American culture and is both cause and symptom of a solipsistic ‘image culture’ (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 83). The decentered family plays a central role in *Infinite Jest*, all of the novel’s plots converging in the Incandenza family. The problems of the contemporary family and solipsism condition each other in a way that let Holland note that “at the core of this disease of solipsism lies the destruction of the family bond” (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 82). As in *Ulysses*, the biological family cannot serve as a source of meaning.

Stephen Dedalus could end his alienated solipsism by joining a secular trinity, community and stable meaning becoming accessible through a recognition of a worldly consubstantiality in a shared human substance. Indeed, religious thought and Catholicism in

particular, central to *Ulysses*, play a so far regrettably underexamined role in *Infinite Jest*.¹⁷¹ However, Joyce's consubstantial method does not appear to be feasible any more in countering the postmodern solipsism depicted in *Infinite Jest*. In *Infinite Jest*, the concept of the "grammatical mother" (30) takes the place of the "consubstantial father" (*Ulysses* 38) of *Ulysses*. As a post-secular permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition, *Infinite Jest* shifts Joyce's recasting of "Christian concept[s] [...] for conspicuously, not to say provocatively, secular ends" (Maltby 13) to a spiritualized philosophy of language, a resacralization of reading and the author. *Infinite Jest* sets Joyce's secularized, literary consubstantial method in dialogue with the later Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of public language games. Thus, even though a (re)fashioning of familial bonds plays an important role in both *Ulysses* and *Infinite Jest*, the strategies of resolving the problem of familial alienation and solipsism, though structurally related in the two novels' shared tradition, differ. For Wallace, cohesion, community, and communication cannot become possible through the concept of a shared human substance, the secularized notion of a (non-)divine 'family' of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of the same substance, as they could in *Ulysses*. In fact, the concept of 'substance' itself becomes problematic in *Infinite Jest* as the novel depicts dependence on substances, the philosophical and pharmacological sense of the term overlapping, as intricately linked to existential loneliness. Whereas in *Ulysses*, meaning and community could be restored in the reestablishment of a human family through the recognition of a shared human substance, in *Infinite Jest* this function is fulfilled by a recognition of 'family resemblances,' a key concept of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. As Boswell notes, already in *The Broom of the System*, "Wallace uses Wittgenstein's elegant model to escape from what he regards as the dead end of postmodern self-reflexivity" (Boswell 26). In *Infinite Jest*'s reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition, Joyce's consubstantial method is amended by means of an ethical application of the later Wittgenstein, depicting private language use as leading into solipsism.

¹⁷¹ Despite the novel's variety of Christianly connoted settings, characters, and themes such as discussions about the influence of "neo-Thomist Realism" on "French Catholic intellectuals" (745), films with an "ironic anti-Catholic subthesis" (706) or the abundance of references to Catholic saints throughout the novel, to name but a few examples, themes that are also present elsewhere in Wallace's oeuvre, and the biographical fact of Wallace's repeated attempts to join the Catholic Church, Christian readings of *Infinite Jest* are scarce. The rare exceptions are being two short essays by Michael J. O'Connell and Pater Edmund Waldstein and a soteriological reading by David Gordon Laird.

Wallace offers a combination of Joyce's consubstantiality with Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy as a therapy for the mode of solipsistic, endless deconstruction which he sees as having become engrained in American culture. As the novel demonstrates in its Alcoholics Anonymous and tennis sections, stable meaning and community can be restored through the active stimulation of communication in a public language game. Putting theory into practice, *Infinite Jest* offers itself as such a public language game, the novel itself resembling the discourses of tennis and AA. *Infinite Jest* thereby attempts to foster an alternative way of approaching the novel and the world that does not end in the infinite regress of self-reflective deconstruction as it actualizes Wittgenstein's theory of meaning as based in communal usage through the literary, consubstantial aesthetics of *Ulysses*. The novel therefore proposes a trinitarian relationship between author, reader, and text producing meaning in a reciprocal interaction. The author, declared dead by the poststructuralists, thereby returns as a dialogic, effaced but present co-equal communicative partner the reader can engage with rather than falling into the infinitely regressing aporias of a masturbatory, postmodernly self-reflexive reading practice with her as its sole, autonomous center.

Wallace and Wittgenstein: Substance Abuse, Solipsism and Private Language Use

Whereas the characters of *Ulysses* could leave behind their solipsism through reference to the notion of a shared human substance, recourse to substances appears no longer to be a feasible approach to the solipsism of *Infinite Jest*. Amending the Ulyssean consubstantial method with later Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy, *Infinite Jest* depicts the dependence on the *philosophical* notion of substances in what Wittgenstein would call a private language use – a position that, as will be shown, is most vividly dramatized in the objective correlative of *pharmacological* substance abuse – as leading into an infinite regress of self-justification and the existential loneliness that befalls the self-centered culture the novel depicts. As Gavin Cobb argues, “throughout *Infinite Jest*, addiction-think dramatizes many of the same logical crevasses [...] distinctive of the [private language user]” (Cobb 17). *Infinite Jest*'s reinterpretation of the

Ulyssean consubstantial method is triggered by the novel's philosophical rejection of the concept of substances as solipsizing, warranting a revision of Joyce's use of consubstantiality.

Substance abuse is thus one of the clearest signs of the almost omnipresent solipsism *Infinite Jest* depicts. As Allard den Dulk notes, solipsizing irony as a cultural norm¹⁷² is "inextricably tied up with addiction" (den Dulk, "Beyond Endless 'Aesthetic' Irony" 327). Notably, *Infinite Jest's* Pynchonesque capitalizing of words such as "Substance" (200) allows for a wider understanding of the word in its general, philosophical sense. Substance abuse can not only be read as drug abuse but also as a more general philosophical problem: the addiction to the philosophical concept of substances that, according to Wittgenstein, has navigated Western philosophy into the dead-end of solipsism (*Philosophical Investigations* §436).

As den Dulk remarks, "Wallace has repeatedly asserted his adherence to later Wittgenstein's view of language" (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 132), sharing with him, as will be shown, the view of language as inherently communal and the therapeutic potential of his work.¹⁷³ However, while Wittgenstein sees solipsism as a linguistic problem resulting from a misguided philosophical understanding of language, Wallace's middle and late period, most importantly *Infinite Jest*, view solipsism predominantly as a cultural phenomenon of a postmodern society that has declared "irony as a cultural norm" ("E Unibus Pluram" 184). Thus turning Wittgenstein's philosophy on its head, the pathological narcissism *Infinite Jest's* postmodern society displays is countered by an establishment of public language games. This ethical or cultural turn is central to an understanding of *Infinite Jest's* use of Wittgenstein's philosophy for a reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition that attempts to reestablish a system of (literary) communication that can counter the postmodern solipsism Wallace's fiction and non-fiction view as a dangerous cultural phenomenon.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Wallace's critique of irony is directed at this generalized ironic attitude toward existence, not at verbal irony in the sense of a rhetorical figure. While verbal irony produces a positive affirmation of meaning and value, *Infinite Jest* is predominantly concerned with opposing "an all-negating ironic attitude" (den Dulk, "Beyond Endless 'Aesthetic' Irony" 326).

¹⁷³ The importance of Wittgenstein for Wallace's writing has been commented on since early Wallace criticism and is subject of a number of interviews Wallace gave. See for example Marshall Boswell's *Understanding David Foster Wallace* and Allard den Dulk's *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Eggers and Foer*.

¹⁷⁴ See also Eva Dolo's *David Foster Wallace Und Die Kommunikative Krise Der Literarischen Postmoderne* for a closer discussion of Wallace's misprision of Wittgenstein and the resulting ethical turn in his writing, as well as my own essays on "*Infinite Jest's* 'Trinity of You and I into We': Wallace's

Wittgenstein's oeuvre is generally separated into two diametral periods, the philosophical atomism of early Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, concerned with the project of an ideal language, and the ordinary language philosophy of the later Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.¹⁷⁵ Primarily arguing against the positivism of his early period, the later Wittgenstein views meaning in language as not to be pared down to an underlying, essential structure but as the product of a complex interplay of conventions and rules in a linguistic community. To the later Wittgenstein, the views on language and the world proposed in the *Tractatus* are a logically impossible and solipsistic private language use that ignores the fundamentally communal nature of language.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* views propositions as "logical picture[s]" (*Tractatus* 4.03) of objective facts. Language and world run parallel to another, both sharing the same "logical pattern" (*Tractatus* 4.014) in which language as the "totality of propositions" (*Tractatus* 4.001) is in a mimetic word-object relation to the "totality of facts, not of things" (*Tractatus* 1.1) that is reality. A private language user (PLU) treats the meaning of a word, and this includes not only references to the external world but also internal states like 'pain' and ultimately selfhood itself, as an irreducible core definition the PLU attaches to a fact. The PLU thus privately derives all meaning from their own experience as if pointing toward a mental image. For the *Tractatus*, the world is entirely the product of the speaker's language. Since the PLU only has access to these pictures of facts, "[t]he limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (*Tractatus* 5.6).

To the later Wittgenstein, such a view of language would lead into an infinite regress of self-justification. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* question the notion of meaning being reducible to any core fact or substance. For the later Wittgenstein, language's reference to reality – or its supposed failure to ultimately do so – is wholly irrelevant to the meaningful functioning of language. Instead, the later Wittgenstein views meaning as product of a word's usage in concurrence with a community's rules and conventions. These rules and conventions

'Click' between Joyce's Literary Consubstantiality and Wittgenstein's Family Resemblance" and "The Solipsism of the Quantified Self: Working Bodies in David Foster Wallace's Body of Work," which both touch upon issues and examples further elaborated upon here.

¹⁷⁵ Considering how he refers to Wittgenstein's shift from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations* as an "infanticide-by-bludgeon" ("The Empty Plenum" 108), Wallace seems to share this schizophrenic view of Wittgenstein with an early Wittgenstein scholarship that strictly distinguishes between an early and a late Wittgenstein, a distinction that is so extreme as to view Wittgenstein as in fact two authors.

do not reflect any underlying, hidden structure or substance but are wholly arbitrary, derived from brute “training” (*Philosophical Investigations* §6). Depending on the rules and conventions a community applies to specific situational contexts Wittgenstein calls “language-games” (*Philosophical Investigations* §7), propositions can have (different) meaning(s) without becoming either nonsensical since they are non-referential or having one shared characteristic. Rules do not represent a strict structure that hermetically confines language games but serve as “a sign post” (*Philosophical Investigations* §85) that is interpreted following conventional use but eschews atomistic demands of exactness (*Philosophical Investigations* §88). As A.C. Grayling summarizes, “what constitutes a rule is *our collective use of it*” (Grayling 93). Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* thus propose a view of language as a socially conditioned and practical activity: “the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (*Philosophical Investigations* §23).¹⁷⁶ A word’s meaning being its usage in language as sanctioned by a community (*Philosophical Investigations* §10), meaningful language, and thus ultimately the selfhood which occurs in language, always necessitates an other. Private language use, on the other hand, must lead into an infinite regress of self-justification as the PLU must define meaning from within itself without the criterion of correctness communal agreement would provide.

All solipsists of *Infinite Jest* are (philosophical) substance abusers, Wittgensteinian private language users (PLUs) that believe in language’s reliance on an irreducible core of meaning. The self-centered language of the Ennet House residents, substance abusers in both senses of the word, is exemplary for the solipsism the constructionist illusion of ontological autonomy produces in *Infinite Jest*. While evident in all of the novel’s addicts, addicted thinking as self-centered solipsism – a private language use – becomes probably most illustrative in Ennet House resident Erdedy’s first appearance in the novel. The scene’s free indirect discourse gives deep insight into the substance abusing PLU’s language. For Wallace, literature’s ethical advantage over philosophy is that it can communicate “the consequences, for persons, of the *practice of theory*” (“The Empty Plenum” 78). Erdedy dramatizes the infinite regress of self-

¹⁷⁶ John L. Austin, whom Wallace references in a remark on “Austin-Wittgenstein-Derridean literary theory” (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 41), further elaborates this notion in his speech act theory *How to Do Things with Words*.

justification that follows from private language use. This can for example be seen in Erdedy's incapability to "remember the color of his new last and final bong" (21) and the one before it (25). Through Erdedy's gaps in memory, the novel vividly dramatizes Wittgenstein's argument that a private language would be impossible since it would lack a criterion of correctness and thus consistency.

As can be inferred from Wittgenstein's point against a secret inner meaning, it is impossible for a PLU to maintain stable meaning without reference to the conventions of a community. Wittgenstein notes that in order to "get rid of the idea of the private object" one must "assume that it constantly changes, but that you do not notice the change because your memory constantly deceives you" (*Philosophical Investigations* 207). *Infinite Jest* dramatizes this issue of private objects in Erdedy's bong. Erdedy's marijuana addiction manifests itself in repeated "final debauch[s]" (27). In his paradoxical attempt to "cure himself by excess," Erdedy plans to ingest "an incredible, insane amount per day [...] treating it like a penance and behavior-modification all at once" in order to "make the whole experience so unpleasant [...] that his behavior would be henceforward modified" (22). After each such excess, always conducted in intricately planned privacy, Erdedy "thr[ows] out all his bongs and [other marijuana paraphernalia] to eliminate all future temptation" only to "buy a new bong" (20) for each new excess. However, Erdedy is unable to "remember the color of his new last and final bong" (21). A reading of addiction as one of the novel's main metaphors for private language use explains this strange deficiency of memory. Erdedy's incapability to remember the color of his bong, a literal(ized) private object in that its properties, even existence, are, due to Erdedy's secrecy, unknowable to the public, stages the impossibility of a PLU's reliable meaningful use of a word. Discussing the impossibility of "a private definition of a word" (*Philosophical Investigations* §262), Wittgenstein gives the example of a diarist protocolling "the recurrence of a certain sensation" by "associat[ing] it with the sign 'S' and writ[ing] this sign in a calendar for every day on which [they] have the sensation" (*Philosophical Investigations* §258). What should happen, Wittgenstein notes, is that they will "constantly call [...] different things by that name" (*Philosophical Investigations* §271) because the PLU has "no criterion of correctness" (*Philosophical Investigations* §258). To Wittgenstein, only the sanction of public conventions

can serve as such a criterion. Erdedy's bongos provide no regularity. Each bongo is colored differently, and, as with the diarist's sensation 'S,' irretrievable as they were "throw[n] [...] away wrapped in several plastic shopping bags" (20). Without "check[ing] the color of the bongo he'd be using" (21), referring his definition back to reality (*Philosophical Investigations* §270), Erdedy cannot remember the color of his "new bongo [...] in the Bogart's bag on his kitchen table" (21). This puts Erdedy in the same situation as Wittgenstein's PLU trying to check the time of departure of a train by calling to mind a "mental image of the time-table" (*Philosophical Investigations* §265). Since the table of the colors of his previous and current bongos is inaccessible to Erdedy, Erdedy relies on an imagined table, the memory of his last bongo having "been orange, the one before that a dusky rose color" (21). However, the "correctness of the first memory" (*Philosophical Investigations* §265) cannot be confirmed and Erdedy cannot remember his bongo's color. Subjective justification, Wittgenstein comments, is "[a]s if someone were to buy several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true" (*Philosophical Investigations* §265).

Indeed, Erdedy (necessarily) unknowingly misconstrues even the color of his latest bongo as well. While at one point Erdedy recalls that "[t]he last one had been orange, the one before that a dusky rose color" (21), a few pages later, remembering "[t]he last woman he'd involved in his trying just one more vacation with dope and drawn blind" (23), he refers to using "the new rose-colored bongo" (24) rather than an orange one. Shortly thereafter, actually checking on his new bongo, it reveals itself to be "orange," causing Erdedy to judge that "he might have misremembered the bongo before it as orange" (25). Seeing how his recollections of the color of his last bongo changes from "orange" (21) to "rose-colored" (24) and back to "orange" (25), Erdedy's memory of the definition of his private object is completely deceiving, with him unable to notice the change (cf. *Philosophical Investigations* §207). Privately defining something in a private language is impossible as that language would lack consistency. According to the *Philosophical Investigations*, the meaning of a proposition is constituted by conventions which can only be meaningfully established by a community (Hacker 101). Therefore, it is impossible for one person to privately assign meaning to an object. This can only happen meaningfully in a community. Erdedy's compulsive need for privacy, however,

eliminates that community. At the end of the section, Erdedy is stuck in a “great balloon of colored silence” (27), the silence of the absence of communication that renders a stable and meaningful usage of the colors of his bong impossible.

Unable to conceive of “something that is larger than the immediate subject” (Jacobs, “The Brothers Incandenza” 268), *Infinite Jest*’s substance abusers cannot connect to a community of meaning in communication but attempt to create meaning through their self-centered private language. This self-centeredness, however, which also shows itself in Erdedy’s preference of “masturbation over intercourse” (21)¹⁷⁷ when smoking marijuana and the obsessiveness with which he is trying to remember a ridiculously unimportant, private detail like the color of a bong, not knowing what to care about, can be identified as a characteristic of the overall human condition portrayed in the novel, speakingly characterized in the novel’s renaming of the United States into O.N.A.N., the Organization of North American Nations.

As den Dulk notes, in *Infinite Jest* an “ironic attitude is portrayed, and critiqued, above all, through the theme of addiction”(den Dulk, “Beyond Endless ‘Aesthetic’ Irony” 333). Thereby, drug abuse gains a twofold function in the novel: on the one hand, substance abuse serves as a metaphor and analogy of ironic, self-reflexive and self-centered language, the philosophically substance abusing private language to which the postmodern culture of *Infinite Jest* is addicted to. On the other hand, drug abuse and other forms of addicted behavior can be seen as symptom and cause of an alienation resulting from this postmodern solipsism. In both, interconnected, functions, “addiction, and accompanying hyperreflexivity and endless irony, are typical of the society portrayed in *Infinite Jest*” (den Dulk, “Good Faith and Sincerity” 215). In the novel’s “alignment of ironic disaffection with [...] addiction” (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 59), pharmacological substance abuse functions as an objective correlative for the philosophical substance abuse of private language use.

Hence, not only the novel’s halfway house residents, but also its other protagonist Hal, and with him the entirety of *Infinite Jest*’s culture of generalized postmodern irony, drug addict or not, can be seen as PLUs. This also becomes evident in the close link the novel creates

¹⁷⁷ Note how Wallace refers to the communication between reader and author as “intercourse,” drawing an analogy between good writing and “[sexual] intimacy between two people”(Wallace, “Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young” 54).

between private language use, the destruction of the family bond, and the failures of communication that lead into the existential loneliness that befalls the novel's future US. As N. Katherine Hayles argues, in *Infinite Jest* "the illusion of autonomy poisons family relations, creating failures of communication so extreme they become tragic" (Hayles, "The Illusion of Autonomy" 689). In the same vein, Holland shows how "at the core of this disease of solipsism lies the destruction of the family bond" (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 82). The destruction of the family in *Infinite Jest* is cause and result of a cultural narcissism, a rejection of interconnection in favor of the self-centeredness of postmodern irony. As one whose language runs parallel to that which it refers to without the double meaning of an utterance ever converging or having a positive content, the ironist's strife for complete ontological autonomy creates familial dysfunctions in the novel.

Indeed, the history of the novel's highly dysfunctional Incandenza family is marked by both pharmacological substance abuse and narcissistic failures of communication – a kind of 'abuse' of the philosophical notion of substance in language. James Orin Incandenza's alcoholic father's narcissism makes all attempts at connecting with his son impossible. His son, JOI, too, becomes an alcoholic who similarly struggles to communicate with his son, whom he perceives as "mute" (31) and unresponsive. Finally, Hal shares his father's and grandfather's issues with interpersonal connection and addiction, becoming a heavy user of marijuana completely estranged from his family. Like Erdedy, Hal's drug consumption, too, displays a great concern with secrecy and privacy, a private language use indicated in Hal liking "to get high in secret," being "as attached to the secrecy as he is to getting high" (49). Hal's secrecy, importantly, is not that of an American teenager afraid of being caught taking drugs. It is notably not motivated "by fear per se, fear of discovery" (54). Rather, the novel literalizes private language use in the privacy Hal displays when consuming substances: marijuana produces in him a detached, hyper-self-reflexive "marijuana-type thinking" (136). Hal hence paradoxically "knows [a number of friends] all know [he] gets regularly covertly high" (50), his existential privacy as an ironist obfuscating the other as subject in conversation.

Hal's "odd blankness about his family" (517) can be seen as a direct result of his ironizing private language use. Whereas Hal can paradoxically conceive of all blue objects in

his uncle's room as "the blue family" (508-9), he struggles to "think about members of his immediate family as standing in relation to himself" (516). As a PLU, Hal cannot conceive of his family as being connected to him via Wittgensteinian family resemblances. According to Wittgenstein, rather than sharing in on any substantial picture-definition, meaningful usages of a word are connected through a series of similarities Wittgenstein terms "family resemblances" (*Philosophical Investigations* §67) that can only be exemplarily described but never conclusively explained or defined. Hence, while, ridiculously, Hal is able to call a random assortment of blue objects a 'family,' he cannot relate to his next of kin as such since they lack one substantial, connecting definitory feature but are rather connected through family resemblances. However, Hal's reliance on substances, both pharmacological and philosophical, estranges him from his real family and makes him incapable of meaningfully relating to others. His estrangement from his family can thus be seen as a symptom of the PLU's rejection of family resemblances and interconnectedness in favor of a fundamental ontological autonomy. Being "the only extant Incandenza who looks in any way ethnic," Hal does not resemble his brother Orin, who "got the Moms's Anglo-Nordo-Canadian phenotype" nor his brother Mario, who "doesn't seem to resemble much of anyone they know" (101). Notably, as a PLU, Hal is also not able to forge any meaningful family connection via his deceased father JOI either. Even though JOI, like Hal, "looked ethnic," for Hal he disqualifies himself as a connector since he "isn't extant" (101). In the solipsist's atomized language, Hal's dead father is a word without referent in the world and thus meaningless (*Philosophical Investigations* §39-43, §55) since there is nothing in the world that corresponds to the name 'JOI' after his death.

Unable to identify with his family through a Wittgensteinian notion of semblance, Hal is alienated from a meaning providing notion of 'family.' By linking substance abuse, postmodern irony, and solipsism to a rejection of the interconnectedness that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* highlight as central to the functioning of language, *Infinite Jest* depicts private language use as detrimental to the subject, community, and meaning as is most overtly portrayed in the dysfunctions of the novel's families. Hal's estrangement can be seen as an effect of his inability to conceive of the Wittgensteinian notion of a family resemblance, "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall

similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (*Philosophical Investigations* §66). As PLU, Hal can only reject such interconnectedness. He is therefore incapable of seeing how, even though not connected by a substance, his family clearly share’s a family resemblance: Orin’s insectophobia for instance reappears in JOI’s and his father’s arachnophobia, Hal answers the phone like his father with “Mmmyellow,” since “[a]nother way fathers impact sons is that sons [...] invariably answer the telephone with the same locutions and intonations as their fathers” (32) and inherits his dental problems as “Himself’s legacy” (1010) from his father.

Significantly, this inability to form a relation to the family is also presented as detrimental to the formation of a stable and meaningful self. As Boswell remarks, by giving JOI the moniker ‘Himself,’ “Wallace can connect the unknowable other (in this case Hal’s elusive father) with Hal’s own interior self, his own subjectivity. Not only are the interiors of others hidden from us, but our own interiors are hidden as well. Hal knows neither himself nor Himself” (Boswell 151). As long as Hal perceives ‘JOI’ – and ‘Himself’ – as meaningless since they lack a referent in the world, Hal remains unable to form a self that meaningfully appears in a public language game, instead only ever privately defining it as an object which others do not have access to – and whose definition must therefore fall into an infinite regress of self-justification. In order to leave behind his solipsistic estrangement from the other and from his own self (H/himself), Hal would have to abstain from his claims to ontological autonomy and his insistence on (the failure of) referentiality and recognize the family resemblances that run through the Incandenzas. His self, so to speak, only becomes meaningful if Hal can conceive of ‘Himself,’ even though the word lacks a referent, as meaningful.¹⁷⁸

In its ultimate conclusion, private language use leads into solipsism. As Petrus van Ewijk summarizes the existential position of private language use, “[s]ince we can only know or speak of those pictures, we are in fact divided from the external world” (van Ewijk 135). Completely isolated from the exterior world, the Tractarian subject does not take part in the world but forms its borders (*Tractatus* 5.64). Private definition leads into an infinite regress of

¹⁷⁸ As will be shown, this is also the solution the novel proposes to its reader: While *Infinite Jest* rejects Joyce’s use of substances, Wallace, too, ultimately aims toward a recognition of the author’s Father-like engagement with the world as a remedy for solipsism and meaninglessness. Combining Joyce’s aesthetic of literary, divine paternity with Wittgenstein’s philosophy, Wallace proposes that in order to end the culture of endless deconstruction, a reader must recognize that the novel’s ‘father,’ Wallace, does not necessitate referentiality to claim communicative presence.

justifying what the PLU means by, e.g., ‘the self.’ Lacking any criterion of correctness, the PLU’s attempt to attach a name-tag to their own, and the other’s, subjective experience as if it were an object they could point toward in private ostensive definition must invariably fail. Unable to speak of and thus give meaning to interiority in an internally consistent manner, the PLU is radically isolated from their own and the other’s selfhood which they treat as an object they create from their own mind. Reference cannot justify meaning but only ever points toward more linguistic material (Baker and Hacker 332). Interiority for Wittgenstein is not something private and incommunicable. Instead, it only occurs in public language games as language may manifest itself in behavior; what is meant by it, however, is not that private image. It is only within this reciprocal interaction of dialogic partners that share a form of life that gives them certain conventions of usage that ‘self’ and ‘other’ can be meaningfully spoken of and thus occur.

Erdedy’s failure to remember the color of his last bong, and the existential isolation thus illustrated, is hence not simply a result of lacking intellectual capacities. The “lexical prodigy” (30) Hal, who is said to learn the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definitions by heart (cf. 26, 97, 745, 899, 300, 1011), too, falls into the same infinite regress of self-justification. Like his drug addiction and estrangement from his family, Hal’s memorization of the dictionary bespeaks his function as a private language user in the novel. Hal’s privacy conceives of language as an ideal language that can be reduced to the tables of a (prescriptive) dictionary in which causally unconnected propositions in language correspond to unambiguous, substantial definitions of facts (*Tractatus* 1.21). Hence, even though Hal’s great “mnemonic” (30) capacity allows him to remain more operational than other substance abusers, him being able to remember his definitions longer and more accurately, this ultimately does not absolve him from the solipsism and infinite regress of self-justification his implicit parallelism of word and object leads into. Even with a perfect memory like Hal’s, language cannot be divorced from communal usage and thereby reduced to stable definitions. With language being according to Wittgenstein a form of behavior that occurs in, and constantly shifts depending on, the public language game in which it is used, physiological memory-traces, regardless how great or small the speaker’s memory, are irrelevant to the functioning of language (Malcolm 195).

Hal hence may be able to form a more intricate private language than others. However, he nevertheless must discover that he knows “way less about why he feels certain ways about the objects and pursuits he’s devoted to than he does about the objects and pursuits themselves” (54). In his existentially ironic mode, Hal purports a parallelism between language and the world that makes any interiority virtually impossible. He does not view his own behavior but can only speak of his interiority as an object to be defined, his atomistic lexical inventory lacking any causal connection. However, for Wittgenstein, den Dulk notes, real self-knowledge can only appear through a “connection to the world, a community of meaning” (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 148). Hal as a private language user can learn, remember, and apply more definitions than others. Nevertheless, he is internally “empty” and “robotic” (694) as he gives not only the other but also his own self the status of an object which he privately defines. Hal thereby becomes only able to apprehend and reproduce interiority as atomistic “variables in rarified equations” (694). However, he is incapable of conceiving of it as a meaningful activity that would involve others. Due to his detachment from communal usage, for Hal “*happiness, joie de vivre, preference, love* – are stripped to their skeletons and reduced to abstract ideas” that, however, are never put into the “full and fleshy” (693) practical activity from which they get their meaning. Wearing the “hip empty mask” (695) of postmodern irony, Hal exemplifies the “waning of affect in postmodern culture” (Jameson 10) Jameson diagnoses in postmodernism, making Hal void of emotion and “lonely” (694). Sporting the “weary cynicism” (694) of a culture informed by Lyotard, Hal

finds terms like *joie* and *value* to be like so many variables in rarified equations, and he can manipulate them well enough to satisfy everyone but himself that he’s in there, inside his own hull, as a human being-but in fact he’s far more robotic than John Wayne. (694)

As Christopher Bartlett and others have shown, Hal represents a “generation reared by cynicism and irony” (Bartlett 376). This generalized irony reduces expressions of interiority to representations that can be commented on and reproduced yet thereby do not become meaningful actions in their own right.

Hal's view of terms for sentiments as "variables in rarified equations" (694) hence denotes an atomistic perspective on language. His "radical abstracting of everything" (693) produces a solipsistic view of the world, with the individual – as its sole, linguistic creator – at its elevated, yet internally "empty" and "lonely" (694) center. Notably, then, the existential "loneliness" that befalls *Infinite Jest*'s private language users is hence noted to be "not a function of solitude" (202). Instead, Hal isolates himself by viewing his interiority as deducible to, and completely contained in, the "denotation" of lexical definition while completely ignoring its communal "connotation" (693) from which alone it gains its actual meaning. From such a perspective, interiority must be viewed as entirely incommunicable. In the act of privately constructing the world from his own language, the private language user Hal approaches the other and, importantly, the self as definable and object-like. This represents the very kind of philosophical approach to language later Wittgenstein is criticizing, mirroring the *Tractatus*' view of a mimetic relationship between language and world in logical space, causally unconnected. Such private language use results in a hermetically closed, self-centered system of what Boswell refers to as "the solipsism of the logocentric thinker" (Boswell 53). Approaching the world as if it could be contained in a prescriptive dictionary, the anhedonic lexical prodigy who reduces everything to (ironic) abstraction and defines meaning privately through a (semi-)solipsistic exclusion of the other as subject must become incapable of experiencing a meaningful selfhood since such a selfhood only emerges from the communal interplay within a rule-based, reciprocal language game. The "illusion of autonomy" on the other hand, Hayles notes, "blot[s] out the fact of recursive interrelation" (Hayles, "The Illusion of Autonomy" 678) and thus makes self-knowledge impossible.

Wallace transposes the problem of solipsism from Wittgenstein's logical world to the empirical world, viewing solipsism as an ethical or cultural rather than a solely logical problem. In this ethical misreading, Wittgenstein's logical refutation of solipsism becomes, in *Infinite Jest*, a moral solution to a postmodern solipsism whose sources lie less in a misunderstanding of language than in a widespread cultural narcissism. Literalizing Wittgenstein's philosophy, Wallace depicts the existential autonomy of the PLU as damaging to the family bond. The private language use which Wittgenstein refutes as logically impossible becomes in *Infinite Jest*

a symptom of a cultural solipsism that can be reversed through a reestablishment of community. To Wittgenstein, this community has never been and can never be lost. *Infinite Jest*, on the other hand, seeks to, like *Ulysses*, restore the family. However, rather than referring to substances, Wallace sees the possibility of a restoration of community, and thereby the possibility of stable selfhood, in the recognition of family resemblances. According to Wallace's misreading of Wittgenstein, "language and linguistic intercourse is, in and of itself, redeeming, remedy-ing" (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 33). Therefore, as will be shown, in *Infinite Jest*, the reestablishment of public language games as modeled in AA and Schtitt's tennis – Wallace's 'version' of the Ulyssean consubstantial communion – counters postmodern solipsism. This 'redemption' is, in its ultimate instance, sought to be performed in *Infinite Jest*'s reconceptualization of the author-reader-text relationship as a trinity that serves as a model for sincere literary communication.

AA and Tennis as Public Language Games

If, following the novel's ethical reading of Wittgenstein, private language use leads into alienated solipsism, public language games become not the only logically possible form of language but a moral imperative. A postmodern solipsism that disrupts communication by attempting to absorb the other into the closed system of the self's private language in order to combat entropy must therefore, in *Infinite Jest*'s ethical misprision of Wittgenstein, be countered through an active "stimulation of conversation" (van Ewijk 136). The 'therapy' *Infinite Jest* offers to its existential ironists is a reconfiguration of communication as an intersubjective interaction between the self and the other as partners. *Infinite Jest* models such a redemptive reestablishment of communication in the irony-free discourse of Alcoholics Anonymous and E.T.A. head coach Gerhardt Schtitt's philosophy of tennis. At the same time, this redemption through the Wittgensteinian public language games presented in AA and (Schtitt's) tennis is heavily inflected in the novel with a postsecular religiosity that further highlights the Ulyssean Tradition of the consubstantial method in *Infinite Jest*'s treatment of late Wittgenstein as a cure to postmodern solipsism.

AA as Public Language Game

As will be shown, Alcoholics Anonymous seeks to counter the solipsistic private language use of its addicts by providing conventionalized clichés that allow for intersubjective identification. AA creates a public language game that makes the communication of pain and addiction possible. In training its members to abstain from *pharmacological* substances, the novel's AA hence also trains them to abstain from a private language use that depends on *philosophical* substances. Such philosophical substance abuse makes stable selfhood and the reciprocal communication in which alone it can meaningfully occur impossible. Since the Ulyssean Tradition's substance-based "superstructures of additional self-regulations" (346) have come to fail and substances prove to be no longer tenable and life-affirming to Wallace, *Infinite Jest* reinterprets the Joycean consubstantiality as a public language game. Wallace can thus be read to trace the history of the Ulyssean Tradition through the metaphor of the stages of addiction and recovery: from Joyce's "fun with the Substance" (345) to deal with the challenges of modern life to Pynchon's deconstructive simultaneous recognition of the failure of substances and reliance on them and *Infinite Jest's* recovery of the Ulyssean Tradition in a new and revised aesthetic of abstinence from (generalized) irony.

As van Ewijk notes, the philosophy of *Infinite Jest's* AA establishes a public language game that serves as "a treatment for contemporary American solipsism that is drenched in hip irony and negates the 'Other'" (van Ewijk 143). Thus, Gately's account of a person's fall into substance dependence resembles Wittgenstein's diagnosis of philosophy having lost its way due to the object-word illusion:

Substances start out being so magically great, so much the interior jigsaw's missing piece, that at the start you just know, deep in your gut, that they'll never let you down; you just know it. But they do. (350)

Instead, to later Wittgenstein as to Gately, a "slapdash anarchic system [...] you just know there's no way it could ever possibly work except for the utterest morons" (350), ordinary language and AA respectively, appears as the solution to a dependence on substances.

AA functions as a “neat reverse” (350) of this process of pharmacological and philosophical substance addiction because it favors a community-based conception of language that functions without recourse to substances: It “keep[s] you Substance-free” (349). The novel describes Boston AA as a resolutely group- and conversation-oriented activity, highlighting the communal aspects of *Infinite Jest*’s AA by capitalizing ‘Group’ and stressing how “almost all Boston Group’s meetings are speaker meetings” (343). Boston AA, with groups visiting other groups’ speaker meetings to speak, hear and listen, is based primarily on intersubjective exchange. As a model for public language games, AA as portrayed in *Infinite Jest* is an “intensely social” (632) activity, based on the “reciprocal” (344) interaction between the self and the other. Thus, fencing off the danger of individuation and private language that, as could be shown, lead into substance abusing solipsism, “Groups always trade Commitments: you come speak to us and we’ll speak to you” (343). For *Infinite Jest*’s AA, it is central to encounter the other (Group) while speaking. Forced to commit oneself to meeting the other, Boston AA is keeping its language game public.¹⁷⁹

This can also be seen in AA’s reliance on conventions. The “AA slogans” (344), clichéd utterances such as “Easy Does It!”, “Turn It Over!” or “Fake It Till You Make It” (369) whose formulaic and conventionalized use is underscored by their consistent capitalization in the novel, serve as the basis of communal understanding in AA meetings. Clichés, albeit rejected by the novel’s cynical substance abusers, serve as communally agreed-upon, and thus meaningful, conventionalized language. While *Infinite Jest*’s ironic culture of addiction is hostile to clichés, a cliché’s universal acceptance being derided as “banally trite” (358) and “unhip” (350), i.e., opposed to the individuating “hip ennui” (694) of postmodernism, AA embraces the cliché for exactly those characteristics. Thus, Joelle van Dyne’s criticism of the clichéd AA motto “Here But For the Grace of God” as grammatically faulty and therefore “meaningless” (366) reflects a Tractarian notion of language (*Tractatus* 4.003). What Joelle does not consider is the formulaic, conventionalized form of the phrase, typographically denoted in its capitalization that renders it

¹⁷⁹ For another discussion of the therapeutic potential of a (literary) communication that allows for a recognition of the other in Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* see also Timothy Aubry’s *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans* and Rob Mayo’s *Depression and Dysphoria in the Fiction of David Foster Wallace*.

similar to a proper noun, that is divorced from the regular, ungrammatical ‘here but for the grace of God.’ As a fixed linguistic *gesture*, the phrase serves another, meaningful function within the AA language game. AA clichés, the “old things which made happiness possible” (320), illustrate the Wittgensteinian notion of language acquiring meaning through usage.

Hence, while the linguistic form of these clichés appears trite and banal in the addicts’ language of Denial, AA’s mantras are always linked to acts. As Gately notes in deference to Day’s criticism of AA’s conventionalized language, “the clichéd directives are a lot more deep and hard to actually *do*” (273). AA, like Wittgenstein, differentiates between propositions about truth values and other speech acts. The program revalues the cliché as a communally sanctioned, and thus meaningful, activity. As Wittgenstein remarks, “the speaking of a language is part of an activity“ (*Philosophical Investigations* §23), an activity under which Wittgenstein also subsumes non-verbal behavior as part of the communication process (*Philosophical Investigations* §54). Therefore, both AA’s “bizarre system of catchphrases” and activities such as “the raffle,” part of “Get[ing] Active In Group Service” (360), or Gately’s “getting ritually down on your big knees” (350) are seen as conventionalized, meaningful parts of the AA language game. Since a language game derives its meaning from usage, recovering addicts are called to perform within this game regardless of their lack of deeper understanding and “Just Do It” (350). Just like Wittgenstein’s language game can only be described but not explained (*Philosophical Investigations* §109), it is “impossible to figure out just *how* AA worked” (349).

The conventionalized language of AA also explains its simultaneous “proto-Fascist” (374) dogmatism and description as a “non-authoritarian, dogma-free movement” (356). As Gately describes the program, AA has “no doctrine or dogma or rules” (356). Since “they can’t kick you out,” it is possible to “say *anything*” (352) in an AA meeting. In fact, AA’s rules encourage a sincere communication of dissent with the program. AA stresses “the utter autonomy of the individual member” (356). Following or disregarding the “basic suggestions” of AA’s clichés is “totally optional” (357): as Wittgenstein notes, there is no inherently correct way to read the ‘sign posts’ of a language game’s rules. Only conventional usage governs the interpretation of a rule (*Philosophical Investigations* §198). Therefore, though the arbitrary rules of a language game are not inherently binding since there is no substantial or metaphysical

value attached to them, disregarding the conventions of a community leads to an inability to communicate. As AA puts it: “It’s all optional; do it or die” (357). Clearly, a group member may autonomously decide not to follow the group’s clichéd suggestions and thereby not adhere to the collective use of a rule. This, however, arguing with Wittgenstein, would exclude her from the language game based on these conventions. An utterance not aligned with the conventional usage of a group in a specific language game cannot be understood and thus becomes meaningless.

As will be shown, AA’s conventions seek to provide a framework for intersubjective communication. This would allow the recovering addict to ‘Identify’ with the other, i.e., accept the fundamental family resemblance between her and others’ experience of pain and addiction, and communicate said pain, thereby leaving behind the solipsistic individuation of substance abuse. *Infinite Jest* thereby relocates the integrative recognition of the other’s relatedness to the self of Joyce’s consubstantiality into the stimulation of public language games. By surrendering the autonomy of the self for intersubjective connectedness, letting go of the notion that one’s experience is “unique” (349) and therefore incommunicable in its utter privacy (*Philosophical Investigations* §293), stable selfhood can be acquired within the community.

An Irony Free Zone: Different Forms of Irony

As Iannis Goerlandt points out, AA’s Commitment to the Group disparages irony so as not to “betray a commitment only to the ego, which must be abandoned to break through the endless cycle of addiction” (Goerlandt 318). Self-centered irony as a private language can “only prevent earnest communication” (van Ewijk 141) by keeping the self hidden. AA hence creates an “[i]rony-free zone” (369). This, however, does not mean a complete disappearance of irony in the AA discourse. As den Dulk notes, “describing irony in order to critique it is not the same as being [...] ironic about irony” (den Dulk, “Beyond Endless ‘Aesthetic’ Irony” 326). At first sight paradoxically, irony clearly features in valid utterances of the AA language game. Thus, when a John L. comments on losing his job and subsequently his wife to his addiction with the phrases “I mean to say I still knew where it [his job] was and whatnot. I just went in as usual one day and there was some other fellow doing it” (346) and similarly, later, referring to losing

his wife “I mean I still knew where she was and whatnot. I just went in one day and there was some other fellow doing it” (346), the irony residing in a word play on different senses of Loss, the “maximally unironic” (369) audience, surprisingly, responds with laughter and Identification. Notably, this ironic wordplay does not seek to cloud the self but displays the irony of the addict’s situation, “the Substance [...] causing the very Losses it’s consoling you about” (346). Such verbal irony realizes a positive content, thereby allowing the Group to Identify. Contrary to the “performing” (367) Advanced basics guy, whose ironic “I’m told I’ve been given the Gift of Desperation. I’m looking for the exchange window” only embarrasses the host crowd by “appearing to deprecate the Program rather than the Self” (367), John L’s verbal irony agrees with AA’s conventionalized usage of ‘Loss.’ The other speaker’s “ironic gesture” (367) on the other hand bespeaks a generalized ironic attitude toward existence. It is based upon a self-consciously ironic misunderstanding of “Gift of Desperation,” thereby not communicating his desperation but only metadiscursively reflecting on the program’s language. John L. uses verbal irony to communicate his Loss within the AA language. The other speaker’s irony in turn is rejected as what den Dulk argues to be the irony *Infinite Jest* criticizes, an existential irony which forms a life-view, negates meaning and thereby “avoids all commitment, all responsibility, and retains [the speaker’s] negative freedom at all cost” (den Dulk, “Beyond Endless ‘Aesthetic’ Irony” 331).

Self-reflexive irony hides the self from the other, disallowing any interaction between subjects and rejecting any responsibility to communicate meaningfully. Thereby, the self-reflexive ironist treats his inner self as an object, something to be defined through ostensive definition. This results in a “distancing [of] oneself from one’s thoughts and, as a result, from one’s words and actions” (den Dulk, “Beyond Endless ‘Aesthetic’ Irony” 331). Irony is a self-referential use of language that can only be the exception rather than the rule in a public language game (*Philosophical Investigations* §248). While verbal irony is meaningful in that it adheres to the group’s conventionalized usage of, e.g., upper-case Loss and thus accomplishes sincere intersubjective communication, a “permanent ironic attitude” toward existence that results from “[c]onstant self-reflection” (den Dulk, “Beyond Endless ‘Aesthetic’ Irony” 331) negates communicable meaning by not succumbing to conventionalized usage but only

metadiscursively referring to language's arbitrary shape. Generalized irony thereby not only apparently absolves the ironist from their responsibility to the other but, in turn, ultimately leads to the "disintegration of the self" (den Dulk, "Beyond Endless 'Aesthetic' Irony" 332) *Infinite Jest* depicts through addiction.¹⁸⁰

This ironic attitude can for example be seen in the addict being "accustomed to figuring out what an audience wants to hear and then supplying it" (367), a strategy he shares with other solipsists such as Hal, who is used to "delivering the goods" (253), affecting an expected emotional response he conceives of as "a fiction" (253). Through ironic self-reflection, the self is perceived as an exterior object. AA, however, in its redemptive function, is highly averse to such "pseudo-sincerity" (369). AA seeks to dismantle the "coily sincere, ironic, self-presenting fortifications" (369) of addiction. As van Ewijk shows, "[t]he use of irony as a hip mode of discourse [an attitude as opposed to the rhetoric figure of verbal irony] is another way to hide, without actually revealing what the ironist truly believes" (van Ewijk 142). This postmodernist "Sincerity with an ulterior motive" (369) makes sincere communication between the self and the other as subjects impossible as it forces the ironist, "desperate to amuse and impress" (367), to view his self as an object by reflecting on his appearance. In its attempt to uphold the autonomy of the self and reject intersubjective connection, the subject is dissolved as it does not take part in the conventionalized, communal usage that constitutes its meaning to begin with. Since language is an activity, language is learned, according to Wittgenstein, not through ostensive definition, but, as P.M.S. Hacker glosses Wittgenstein, "brute training, which presupposes for its success a variety of natural forms of behaviour and reactions" (Hacker 241). Gately similarly likens his participation in AA to that of "a shock-trained organism" (369). AA thus constitutes a "deprogramming" (369) from a private language use that would conceive of the acquisition of a

¹⁸⁰ Like, as becomes most apparent in the Eschaton section, tennis, Wallace's discussion of irony in AA also contains an implicit criticism of the ironic postmodern fiction of the late 80s and early 90s. This can for example be seen in another speaker's experience at "the Complaint Department of Filene's Department Store" (368) where the alcoholic speaker, unable to "face the customers" (368) due to his hangovers, brings a hammer with him to feign repairs under his desk in order to avoid contact with other people, the hammering, ironically, only increasing his headaches, until he was fired "when one vindictive complainant finally figured out where in Filene's to go to complain about the Complaint Dept." (368). Irony, which Wallace views as originally being postmodern fiction's method of criticizing a society's hypocrisies, i.e., literature's Complaint Dept., has become unable to fulfill its function. Instead, image fiction's reverent use of irony disrupts any communication with the reader as customer. The act of ironizing an ironic culture resembles the speaker's solution: it can only ever increase the headache of metafiction.

language as if one had an innate private dictionary which would then only have to be filled with a given language's words for these things. The program, in analogy with public language games, hence privileges the act of praying to God over belief in God. Members are encouraged "to invoke and pay empty lip-service to slogans they don't yet understand or believe" (369). Rather than referencing their inner states or 'God' as if they were things one could point to, AA asks its members to simply use the group's vocabulary in the conventional way. Therefore, AA's "Fake It Till You Make It" (369) is distinct from the ironist's "performing" (367) in that AA's mantra calls for the individual as subject to use the Program's language, regardless of whether or not it fully understands its rules, whereas self-reflexive "calculation" (370) objectifies the individual, hindering access to the intersubjective public language game and thereby negating meaning.

In order to break away from the cycles of solipsism, *Infinite Jest's* ironist addicts must surrender the centrality of the self that comes with postmodern, self-reflexive irony "to the Group conscience" (357) and occur within the system of AA's language game. Following the AA slogan "You give it up to get it back to give it away" (344), addicts must give up their ironic, self-centered "Diseased will" (443) in order to be able to emerge as a subject in a reciprocal, intersubjective form of communication. This rejection of interior-bent, self-objectifying reflection, AA's admonition to "check your head at the door" (374), can also be seen in Gately's habit of sitting in the very first row at AA meetings so as to have "zero obstructions or heads between him and the podium" (369). As *Infinite Jest's* addicts "identify their whole selves with their head, and the Disease [i.e., addiction] makes its command headquarters in the head" (272), the existential ironist's self-centered attitude of ontological autonomy disrupts sincere communication as it objectifies the self and totalizes the other into being nothing but its linguistic creation. The head, self-reflection, thus must not get in the way when trying to hear, and speak, "as [a] human being[]" (Hacker 150), i.e., the mode in which we interact in Wittgenstein's language game. An autonomous subject can only be acquired by rejecting the totalizing autonomy of the self and accepting the intersubjective connectedness of self and other inherent to the language game.

Private Comparison and Public Identification

AA's call to "Identify" (345)¹⁸¹ can therefore be understood as a call to the addicted individuals to accept Wittgensteinian family resemblance as an interconnecting factor enabling communication. "Identification" in AA as an acceptance of family resemblance lets AA members notice that "all the speakers' stories of decline and fall and surrender are basically alike, and like [their] own" (345). By accepting the "similarities" (347), the fact that others "used to be eerily like you" (348), pain and addiction in AA become a communicable, "common experience" (349) rather than the private and incommunicable experience Wittgenstein's PLU views it as.¹⁸² This Identification thus resembles the consubstantial recognition of Stephen and Bloom in *Ulysses* yet is rephrased in Wittgensteinian terms.

While the substance abusing PLU, as already discussed, treats personal experience and sensation as a private object named through inner ostensive definition, AA's language game philosophy stresses that addicts "are not unique" (349) in their experience. As Wittgenstein lets his PLU argue, it is impossible for one person to have another's pain since we do not feel pain in someone else's body (*Philosophical Investigations* §253). However, Wittgenstein shows that this reasoning "misguidedly projects the grammar of physical objects onto sensation" (Hacker 87), the PLU using criteria of identity applied to objects in application to sensations. This, however, is against ordinary language use. In fact, private sensations, although certainly not denied existence (*Philosophical Investigations* §304), "drop[] out of considerations as irrelevant" (*Philosophical Investigations* §293) in the public communication of pain. As Wittgenstein notes, "the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it"

¹⁸¹ Note, again, the capitalization of AA's 'Identify' which distinguishes it from other instances of identifying in the novel, a specialized, conventionalized usage that becomes even more apparent as the novel explains that "[e]mpathy, in Boston AA, is called Identification" (345).

¹⁸² Like AA, Wittgenstein uses "entemologic tropes and analogies" (1026) to therapize a damaging adherence to privacy and substances. Wittgenstein's famous 'Beetle in the Box' thought-experiment hence for instance shows that if everyone had a box the content of which they called a 'beetle,' they could meaningfully talk about 'what is inside the box,' even if the actual content was different, constantly changing or the boxes were empty. The same goes for pain and other interior, and hence absolutely private, experiences: Although we are not able to feel the other's pain (let alone feel it where it occurs, in their body), what we mean by 'pain' or 'beetle' is not the thing inside but derived from a behavior which, unlike a private sensation, can very well be shared. (*Philosophical Investigations* §293) Even though internal states may exist and a person may not be able to experience a private sensation someone else is having, i.e., "every person might have something different in his box, and [...] what is in each person's box might change constantly" (Hacker 207), pain can be meaningfully talked about without having to rely on the notion of substances.

(*Philosophical Investigations* §244). AA's advice to "Identify instead of Compare" (345) behaves in the same fashion, with 'Identify' being distinguished from its private antithesis 'Compare.' Gately recollects his 'Comparing' mindset during his "first sixty days or so" (365) in the program accordingly: "I didn't hear nothing. I'd just sit there and Compare, I'd go to myself, like, 'I never rolled a car,' 'I never lost a wife,' 'I never bled from the rectum'" (365). As one can see, Gately uses the same argumentation when Comparing as Wittgenstein's PLU, viewing his experience as private and inherently incommensurable. Gately's stance of Comparing treats personal experience as an object characterized by features such as having rolled a car, having lost a wife or bleeding from the rectum, leading him to the conclusion that "he bled from the ass and [Gately] didn't and [...] that means [Gately is] not as bad as him" (365), i.e., objectifying self-reflection making the experience of addiction private and incommunicable. Identifying, instead, entails "hearing how fucking similar the way he felt and the way [Gately] felt were" (365), i.e., accepting the family resemblance between one's own and someone else's behavior and experience. Creating community and stable selfhood through an acceptance of family resemblance that provides for the potential of sincere, unreflected communication, AA's language game counters its addicts' self-objectification. Rather than "totalizing the 'Other'" (van Ewijk 140), Identification as acceptance of family resemblance provides the subject with a language game in which the 'self' can have meaning.

Notably, however, Identification appears less as a state than as a constant process. That Identification, due to the nature of AA's language game therapy, must, although AA members are "supposed to try and Identify with the newcomer's feelings" (365), inherently have its limits becomes especially apparent when considering the remark that "if a Crocodile [i.e., a senior AA member] with decades of sober time can still sincerely empathize and Identify with a [...] newcomer then there's something deeply fucked up about that Crocodile's recovery" (365). These senior members with decades of sobriety have internalized the language of AA so as to "live in a totally different spiritual galaxy" (365), i.e., possess a different "form of life" (*Philosophical Investigations* §19). Since "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (*Philosophical Investigations* §19), the Crocodiles' life, their language of sobriety, is so remote from the language, and thus form of life, of the "disease-ridden newcomer" (365) as to

not allow for Identification. Speakingly, Wittgenstein aphoristically explaining the role of forms of life in understanding one another by saying “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him” (*Philosophical Investigations* 225),¹⁸³ these senior AA members are, as opposed to other AA members, animalistically referred to as ‘Crocodiles,’ highlighting their difference in form of life or “spiritual galaxy” (365). Identification and sincere communication can only ever be approached, the full completion of this asymptotic curve being only ever reached in infinity. However, while, e.g., Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* uses the asymptotic ‘Holy Center Approaching’ to deconstruct meaning as infinitely deferred, *Infinite Jest* argues for a pragmatic solution of this problem, countering skepticism with a Kierkegaardian “Blind Faith” (351) in the language game.

The Religious Vocabulary of AA

Infinite Jest’s recasting of the consubstantial method in Wittgensteinian terms therefore also becomes apparent in the way Wallace’s argument for the institution of public language games retains Joyce’s religious vocabulary. Notably, echoing the theological connotations of Joyce’s community creating consubstantial method in *Ulysses*, the AA discourse is heavily inflected with religious terms absent from Wittgenstein’s philosophy. AA repeatedly speaks of the “miracle” (361) of sobriety and AA’s working (e.g., 344, 356, 361), miracles granted through “ritual” (350) and “Faith” (351) in the “dogma” (360) of AA. Concurrently, members’ realizations manifest themselves in “mini-epiphanies” (358). Indeed, like actual church congregations, AA meetings, which are usually set in church basements or at Catholic groups’ localities, hold their “Service” (277) also on “holidays” (344) and Sundays (344). Like mass-goers, Gately and the other AA members are “sitting in the same big nursing-home cafeteria [...] and facing the same direction [...] every Sunday” (354). On the other hand, breaking with AA and “Doing the Substance [...] is like attending Black Mass” (347). Just like the redeeming public language use of AA is “the inverse” (350) of an addictive and solipsizing private language use, relapse is likened to attending a black mass, the satanic inverse of holy mass.

¹⁸³ The lion, whose form of life is inherently different from one’s own, might use the words of one’s own language and might still be not understandable.

The most important connector, however, between the novel's ethical application of Wittgenstein and AA's religious connotations that draw *Infinite Jest's* use of Wittgenstein as a postsecular permutation of Joyce's consubstantial method becomes apparent in Gately's perceived struggle to meet AA's mandate to "turn your Diseased will over to the direction and love of 'God as you understand him'" (443). AA members have to formulate an "own understanding of God or a Higher Power or Whom-/Whatever" (443) which to ritualistically pray to and thank for their sobriety. Gately, however, not having "any God- or J.C.-background" (466), has "nothing in the way of a like God-concept" (467). He therefore feels "like a true hypocrite" (466) when praying to "some kind of Higher Power he [does not] even believe in" (468). Thus, Gately "confesses and complains" (443) at an AA meeting how

He's so totally clueless and lost he's thinking that he'd maybe rather have the White Flag Crocodiles just grab him by the lapels and just tell him what AA God to have an understanding of [...]. His sole experience so far is that he takes one of AA's very rare specific suggestions and hits the knees in the A.M. and asks for Help and then hits the knees again at bedtime and says Thank You, whether he believes he's talking to Anything/-body or not, and he somehow gets through that day clean. [...] Gately still feels like he has no access to the Big Spiritual Picture. (443)

As Cobb shows, Gately's search for "the Big Spiritual Picture" (443) bespeaks a Tractarian view which understands words as "pictures of possible states of affairs" (Cobb 41). Gately's still Tractarian mindset, admitting "a pretty limp and lame understanding of a Higher Power" (443), cannot correspond a "'God' you believe only morons believe in" (350) meaningfully to a "fixed and discrete signified[]" (Cobb 41–42). Since the term 'Higher Power' does not have a fixed referent to Gately, an atomistic point of view cannot use the term meaningfully.

Curiously, however, Gately is applauded for his confession (444). This is because AA as a metaphor for Wittgensteinian language games does not necessitate referential fixity to use a term such as 'Higher Power' meaningfully. Meaning, according to late Wittgenstein, being derived from usage, Gately is told that "it didn't matter at this point what he thought or believed or even said. All that mattered was what he *did*" (466). With AA's emphasis on "simply using

‘God’ and ‘Higher Power’ in a meaningful way rather than on the terms’ specific referents” (Cobb 42), i.e., using the term in compliance with the rules and conventions of the language game and ritualistically pray, actual belief in a ‘Higher Power’ is not necessary for the “daily miracle” (344) of sobriety to happen.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, Gately’s prayer to “Nothing – not nothing but *Nothing*, an edgeless blankness that somehow feels worse than the sort of unconsidered atheism he Came In with” (443) in fact complies with the rules and conventions of the AA language game. As Cobb notes, Gately “raises this ‘Nothing’ to the status of a proper noun” (Cobb 44), treating this ‘Nothing,’ as opposed to the lower case “nothing” of his former “unconsidered atheism” (443), as the name, or non-name, of the ‘Higher Power’ he directs his prayers to. While this “nothingness” (444), since denoting no real world referent, would be meaningless for a PLU, it can fulfill the role of the absolute other (van Ewijk 137) of a ‘Higher Power’ in AA’s language game. As Robert Bolger remarks, “Gately didn’t have a God-finding problem, he had a God-concept problem” (Bolger 50). Postsecularly reinterpreting the Ulyssean consubstantial method via Wittgenstein, the discourse of AA as presented in the novel merges the language of the religious with that of language-game theory. AA’s rituals thereby, in the spirit of Joyce’s secularization of the religious toward human ends, function much more as a form of ‘social magic’ than as a kind of truly ‘religious magic’. As conventionalized activities, they create the sense of group cohesion they inherently rely on, i.e., a shared lingo of ritualized activities that do not necessitate any referentiality in order to be understood by other group members. Although arbitrary and hence seemingly ‘meaningless’ in itself, ritualism becomes meaningful in *Infinite Jest* since it bespeaks a conventionalized behavior, thereby serving to exemplify the overall communality of language as actions rather than propositions with truth-value. Taking part in a ritual – inherently an act that cannot be private but necessitates a community – thereby allows for a recognition of the other as a subject co-equal to oneself.

Notably, the novel not only describes the therapeutic public language AA’s conversational paradigms foster but actualizes it through its conversational aesthetic as it

¹⁸⁴ As Michael O’Connell notes in “‘Your temple is self and sentiment’: David Foster Wallace’s diagnostic novels,” this Wittgensteinian notion in the AA language game resembles “a central tenet of the Catholic imagination, which is that performing faith, via ritual, is foundational to the sacramental experience of Catholicism, but one need not understand, or even necessarily completely believe in, a sacramental rite in order for God’s grace to become manifest through it” (O’Connell 276).

appears to draw the reader both into the text and out of it toward the presence of a composing author. Narrated through the free indirect discourse of Gately, the scene recurringly employs a conversational, generalized ‘you’ to describe Gately’s experience with AA: “if you sit up front and listen hard, all the speakers’ stories of decline and fall and surrender are basically alike, and like your own” (345). Interestingly, this use of a conversational ‘you’ in relating the therapeutic function of a form of conversation that lets the subject recognize and identify with the other as another subject that, although distinct from the self, can share in one’s experience, seems to itself produce such a public conversation. Gately’s usage of ‘you,’ meaning ‘one’ or ‘I,’ seems to produce a deictic shift. When the narration for example notes that at AA meetings

you just sit there and listen as hard as you can, and you make coffee in 60-cup urns and stack polystyrene cups in big ziggurats and sell raffle tickets and make sandwiches, and you empty ashtrays and scrub out urns and sweep floors when the other Group’s speakers are through, (343)

it is as if we were there at the meeting. The direct address of the other AA recommends and which the AA sections, almost as if the ‘you’ of Gately’s free indirect discourse were addressing the reader outside the text, describe in their conversational style could almost be said to produce an impression of immersion, an identification with the characters as if the reader were sitting with Gately. From this impression of immersion, however, the deixis of ‘you’ shifts again, seemingly catapulting the reader out of the text. As if gesturing toward an author behind the narration, ‘you’ at the AA meeting, significantly set on “Interdependence Day” (343), becomes an address of the reader not only immersed in but also outside the text; Gately’s free *indirect* discourse implies a composing figure that, in turn, seems to employ Gately’s ‘you’ to directly address the reader.¹⁸⁵ However, since the presence of a narrator does not necessarily, yet commonsensically, imply an author – if anything, it can only imply an author function – this must be an act of faith. The novel’s conversational, ordinary language style not only represents AA’s theory of therapeutic dialogue but, through the style employed, seems to effect such a dialogue as if the author were speaking through his characters’ words to the reader. Such a

¹⁸⁵ This notion of a character’s free indirect discourse as effecting an address of the author to the reader anticipates the aesthetic of “ghostwords” (884) *Infinite Jest* opens up in the novel’s finale. See also the note on this Wallaceian ‘Uncle Charles Principle’ in this and the next chapter.

reading would reflect what Hal in the novel's opening calls one of his beliefs: "that transcendence is absorption" (12). Rather than through an ironically detached recognition of the text's constructedness, transcendence as a recognizing step out of the text seems to be an effect of a credent, immersive absorption. Hence, a transcendence of the text is enclosed in *Infinite Jest's* aesthetic in the belief that what is represented is, within the bounds of the language game of fiction, 'really' happening, i.e., conventional, identificatory immersion.

Tennis as Public Language Game

While the Bloom-like Don Gately is introduced to Wallace's revised consubstantial method in AA, his counterpart Hal, *Infinite Jest's* 'Stephen Dedalus,' is confronted with the public language alternative to solipsistic privacy through tennis. Tennis, or more precisely Head Coach Schtitt's philosophy of tennis, serves as the other major metaphor for public language games presented in *Infinite Jest*. Parallel to AA, Schtitt's theory of tennis serves as a treatment of the self-centered competitiveness and isolation of postmodern culture's strife for ontological autonomy. While AA serves as a remedying language game in the novel's plot dealing with Gately's recovery at Ennet House, tennis is central to its spatial and structural counterpart, the Enfield Tennis Academy where Hal is a student.

The way Schtitt conceptualizes tennis as an irreducible, rule-based, but not hermetically confined interaction between two equal partners is widely reminiscent of later Wittgenstein's language game philosophy. In fact, Schtitt, like Wittgenstein a native speaker of German teaching at an English language academy (460), mirrors Wittgenstein's philosophical career from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*, having "become mostly a dispenser of abstractions rather than discipline, a philosopher instead of a king" (79). While Wittgenstein's, and in parallel Schtitt's, early philosophy was marked by the strict order and logic of the *Tractatus*, i.e., "discipline" (79), their style has changed to the aphoristic style of the 'common sense' philosophy of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Like AA, Schtitt's tennis is centered on a reconfiguration of the self-other relation. The self is to abstain from absorbing the other in its solipsistic strife for autonomy. Schtitt therefore stresses the interconnectedness of players in a (language) game. Thus, while Schtitt views

postmodern American culture as a solipsistic “sloppy intersection of desires and fears, where the only public consensus a boy must surrender to is the acknowledged primacy of straight-line pursuing this flat and short-sighted idea of personal happiness” (83), tennis as a metaphor for a public language game is inherently communal. It results from the interaction of the players as “partner[s] in the dance” (84). Concurrently with AA’s mandate to ‘Surrender,’ then, the player in Schtitt’s understanding of tennis must “sacrifice the hot narrow imperatives of the Self – [...] the individual appetitive will – to [...] a team [...] and a set of delimiting rules” (83). Despite it being a “deliberately *individual* sport” (83), Schtitt stresses the communal nature of tennis. Only by entering the intersubjective reciprocity of a public language game, as could already be shown for AA, can the self occur, being given “the chance to play” (84). The meaning of tennis stems from the interaction of self and other as equal partners whereby the other provides the “*occasion* for meeting the self” (84). Thereby, ‘real tennis’ allows for self-knowledge without solipsistic, self-reflexive introspection and an assimilation of the other as an opponent into the “multiform cravings of the individual appetitive will” (82) but through an “endless war against the self you cannot live without” (84). As in a reciprocal language game, in tennis the other player becomes not an object to be surmounted but another subject necessary in intersubjective contact. Attempting to gain a stable subject, the “true opponent, the enfolding boundary, is the player himself” (89). Schtitt’s tennis gives the individual the opportunity to gain meaningful self-knowledge by interacting with the other as communicative partner in “this infinite system of decisions and angles and lines” (84) that is the (language) game. In order to “meet [...] the self” (84), the individual has to give up the alienating privacy of pursuing “[t]he happy pleasure of the person alone” (83) and enter a language community or “team” (82) with “a set of delimiting rules” (83). Outside this public language game and its rules, Schtitt notes, there is “[n]othing to contain and give the meaning. Lonely. *Verstiegenheit*” (83).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Notably, an endnote explains ‘*Verstiegenheit*’ as “Low-Bavarian for something like ‘Wandering alone in blasted disorienting territory beyond all charted limits and orienting markers’” (994). This corresponds to Wittgenstein’s view of philosophical problems based on the word-object illusion as having the form “I don’t know my way about” (*Philosophical Investigations* §123). Indeed, without communal sanctioning of the interpretation of rules, which Wittgenstein likens to “sign-post[s]” (*Philosophical Investigations* §198), so, “orienting markers” (954), meaningful communication, and thus also meaningful self-knowledge, is impossible. Furthermore, ‘*Verstiegenheit*’ is a term the psychoanalyst Ludwig Binswanger employs to describe schizophrenia. As could be shown in the preceding chapter, *Infinite Jest* describes American culture, a culture that, as can be seen, is addicted to ontological privacy, as psychotic.

Schitt's tennis and public language games alike are based on being both "unlimited" (*Philosophical Investigations* §218), not to be delineated (81), and demarcated by rules and conventions, or "boundaries" (83). According to Wittgenstein, how one applies a rule in a language game is never completely delimited. One uses a term "without *fixed* meaning" (*Philosophical Investigations* §79) and the community discerns between valid and invalid interpretations of rules. A language game thus has "blurred edges" (*Philosophical Investigations* §71), the "unlimited application of a rule" (*Philosophical Investigations* §218) producing not one, fixed or substantial meaning but only meaning based on context. As Wittgenstein notes using tennis (!) as an example, a language game, even though governed by a community's rules and conventions, "is not everywhere circumscribed by rules" (*Philosophical Investigations* §68). These blurred edges Wittgenstein professes for the language game can also be seen in Schitt's diagnosis of the "metastatic growth" (82) in tennis. Tennis, according to Schitt, is "mathematically uncontrolled but humanly *contained*" (82). The game's "delimiting rules" (83) allow for "a Cantorian continuum of infinities of possible move and response" (82) while nevertheless being contained in its communal, human conventions that interpret the rules of the game.¹⁸⁷ The game being "bounded by the talent and imagination of self and opponent" (82), i.e., the two players' ability to expand the "containing boundaries" (82), the goal of tennis is therefore "to transcend the self in imagination and execution" (84). The player with the largest 'vocabulary' of moves and responses, the capability to conceive of and perform new but valid moves in the humanly contained game, wins the match. Thus, Schitt's Wittgensteinian tennis conceives of the game as inherently "self-competitive" (84). The self has to be surrendered in order to "[d]isappear inside the game" (84) while the other serves as the occasion for the interaction to happen.

This is also what makes tennis a "tragic enterprise" (84). Like in AA, total transcendence seems impossible due to the nature of the game. The boundaries which the player must transcend are the very thing that "make the game possible in the first place" (84). As in

¹⁸⁷ In layman's terms, the mathematician Georg Cantor is famous for proving that there are greater and smaller infinities. For example, while all natural numbers (e.g., 1;2;3;4; and so on) are contained in the set of real numbers (1,1; 1,003; π ; 15; and so on), both are endless. Natural numbers thus form a 'smaller' infinity than real numbers. The same goes for possible utterances in language games: while a community's conventional usage limits a language user's possible 'moves' in the language game, there are still endless ways of acting within the language game's limits.

AA, however, Schtitt conceives of this asymptotic approximation not as an image of the ultimate futility of stable meaning. Even though “the difference between tennis and suicide” may be “no different” (84), being given “the chance to play” (84), i.e., given an entrance to a public language game only within whose boundaries speaking of the ‘self’ becomes possible, is depicted as preferable to the loneliness of private language use.¹⁸⁸ As Schtitt thus notes: “The *what*: this is more unimportant than that there is *something*” (83). Parallel to the solution of Gately’s God-concept, Schtitt stresses the importance of a ‘*something*,’ a dialogue between self and other, over the referentiality of that other. Thus, as Schtitt’s recollection of having “once fallen in love with a tree” (83) shows, the other’s referent, or “*what*” (83), is secondary to the possibility of interaction between self and other. Only through the presence of the other, intersubjective communication in a public language game, is the individual given the “*occasion* for meeting the self” (84). The ‘other,’ as van Ewijk notes, “loses every aspect of his or her ‘otherness’ when s/he is assimilated to the needs of the self” (van Ewijk 138), eliminating the other as a second subject in intersubjective interaction and thereby isolating the self to the point at which it cannot occur. The goal of the game being “to vanquish and transcend the limited self,” i.e., to “[d]isappear inside the game” and to recognize and surrender to, or in AA’s terms, Identify with the other, makes it a “tragic enterprise” since these limits, the self and the other occurring as distinct subjects, “makes the game possible in the first place” (84); the public language game which makes subjectivity possible can only occur as a reciprocal interaction between two subjects. Although, like full Identification in AA, never to be completed, entering the public language game gives the individual “the chance to play” (84) and thus to occur and know itself as a subject. This “life’s endless war against the self you cannot live without” (84),¹⁸⁹ the asymptotic approximation towards transcendence, a “vanquishing the self” (84), is preferable to the solipsistic dissolution of the self in its objectifying strife to assert itself as autonomous.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. the depressed marijuana addict and later Ennet House resident Kate Gompert attempting suicide because she “wanted to just stop being conscious” and “didn’t want to play anymore” (72). The substance abusing PLU’s “feelings of loneliness and psychic pain” result from being “tormented by the conviction that no one else could hear or understand them when they tried to communicate” (75).

¹⁸⁹ Schtitt’s irregular grammar, as elsewhere, allows for an enlightening double meaning of the subject not being able to occur outside of the endless war of the public language game and the public language game not being able to occur without subjects, the individual not being able to live, as opposed to the anhedonic “death in life” (839) of postmodern solipsism, without subjectivity.

This is also why the novel's narrative authority states that "the crises that afflict extremely goal-oriented people who reach a certain age having achieved all or more than they'd hoped for [...] is in fact not what killed Incandenza at all" (693). Instead, the narrator remarks that this "presumption [...] says more about the students at E.T.A. than it says about Orin's and Hal's father" as it can be traced back to them being "still under the influence of the deLint-like carrot-and-stick philosophies [...] rather than the more paradoxical Schtitt/Incandenza/Lyle school" (693). Indeed, it is necessary to distinguish between the solipsizing, private language form of tennis of deLint and the other tennis coaches who "are basically technicians" (81) and the Wittgensteinian, "real tennis" (81) of the "Schtitt/Incandenza/Lyle school" (693). While Schtitt's tennis can be seen as modelling a public language game that serves as a therapy to the individualizing solipsism of postmodern culture, the academy's new philosophy under the current Headmaster C.T. resembles the atomizing tendencies of *Infinite Jest's* solipsists. As the change of the school's motto to "THE MAN WHO KNOWS HIS LIMITATIONS HAS NONE" (81) under the new headmaster signifies – every tennis academy having "its own special traditional motto [...] that's supposed to describe and inform what the academy's philosophy's all about" (81) – E.T.A.'s 'philosophy' has shifted away from the Wittgensteinian Schtitt/Incandenza/Lyle school towards a solipsizing emphasis on individualism and atomism. Denoting the substance abuser's urge toward definition, a knowing of the limits of language, the school's new motto promotes the "stats-tracking" (82) of a Tractarian world-view. Thus, self-objectifyingly, students at E.T.A. are encouraged to equate their rating with their identity, "gauging their whole worth by their place in an ordinal ranking" (693). E.T.A. students thereby know their selves "entirely in relation to one another" (112). Behavior at the new E.T.A. no longer manifests the self but comes to mean it, students reducing their selfhood to the abstracted representation of their bodies in statistics. Interiority is thereby treated as nothing but an abstraction of the body's performance. The mimetic word-object relation that underlies the new E.T.A. philosophy therefore leads to exchanges such as "Hey there, how are you?" "Number eight this week, is how I am" (693). Unlike Schtitt's (and Incandenza's) philosophy, which used "the rankings to help you determine where you are, not who you are" (175), the new, atomizing philosophy of tennis represented in C.T. and deLint equates the reality of the subject

to its object, statistical representation. E.T.A. students are thus, in AA lingo, ‘Comparing’ themselves to others, totalizing the other by viewing it solely in relation to the self as object (van Ewijk 139). Thereby, players become anhedonics that “can navigate but [have] no location” (693), the totalizing tendency of the self objectifying the other (and the self) as a numbered ranking.

Representing a private language inversion of Schtitt’s public tennis game, the tennis that has replaced the Wittgensteinian philosophy of Schtitt and Incandenza heavily relies on a materialistic worldview. As Burn remarks, a “Rylean materialism has become the dominant philosophy of the academy [...], the prevalent mode of self-conception [at E.T.A.] [being] mechanistic materialism” (Burn, “The Machine Language of the Muscles” 45). The school’s materialist philosophy conceives of its students’ selves as a “C.P.S.” (117), a cyber-physical system mapping physical reality to the virtual reality of a “machine-language” (117). As Burn notes, E.T.A., which notably is “a private school” (753), “seeks to reduce the complexity of open systems to the simplistic workings of a closed system” (Burn, “The Machine Language of the Muscles” 42). Equating representation to reality, the materialist reductionist deLint identifies the occurrence of the self on the court in measurable statistics. This materialist philosophy favors “grim machines” (438) like Wayne, whose (trackable) success deLint attributes to Wayne being “pure force” (682). To E.T.A., young students “might as well be machines” (118).

Schtitt, on the other hand, teaches his students that “[y]ou are not arms” (461). As Hacker shows, late Wittgenstein “repudiated the Cartesian and behaviourist conceptions of body and behaviour, as well as the Cartesian picture of the mind” (Hacker 251). Thus, while “the utterances [...] of human beings are *also* forms of behaviour, they are uses of language too – and they are not *about* behaviour” (Hacker 242). Contrary to the materialist view, “behaviour [...] is not an attribute of a body” (Hacker 151). It is not the body that is communicating “but rather the creature whose body it is” (Hacker 249), the self or human being which manifests itself in behavior. The self and the body are not identical. Likewise, it does not make sense to speak of the mind as location of the subject, as Cartesian dualists would do, since “thinking, perceiving, having emotions, wanting, intending, and resolving are *not* [...] properties of, or

activities performed by, the mind” (Hacker 155). Instead, it is the ‘I’ in the language game, manifest in behavior, which communicates meaningfully according to a group’s rules and conventions.

Accordingly, Schtitt refutes the materialist notion of the identity of self and body that is prevalent at E.T.A., asking his students to “[o]ccur” in the “game’s two heads’ one world” (461), the reciprocal interaction of two subjects that is the (language) game. Tennis-behavior – “Learn. Try. Drink your green juice. Perform the Butterfly exercises on all eight of these courts, please, to warm down [...] Gentlemen: hit tennis balls. Fire at your will” (461) – is necessary to play tennis, just like “if people’s expressions of pain were not integrated into more general patterns of pain-behaviour, their words would be meaningless” (Hacker 242). However, it does not equate to the player’s occurrence in the game. To occur, a player has to “[f]ire at [his] will” (461), i.e., as already shown, relinquish the totalizing tendencies of self-centered will, and “[u]se a head” (461). Notably, the indefinite article ‘a’ allows for a reading of the player having to use *another*’s head in entering the public language game of the “game’s two heads’ one world” (461). Tennis, rather than a semi-solipsist encounter of two private language users, is conceived of as “[o]ne world” (461) created in the reciprocal interaction of two heads. Occurrence of the self, as already noted, is only possible in a public language game, the one world the players’ “two heads” create together.

Private language use, “the deLint-like carrot-and-stick philosophies” (693) in which the signifier continually recedes from the signified, cannot establish a stable subject. Equating their selves with their bodies and their radical abstraction in statistics and rankings, E.T.A. students become solipsists for whom “[t]he world becomes a map of the world” (693). Private ostensive definition, according to Wittgenstein impossible as it leads to an infinite regress of justification (Hacker 122), is not suited to establish selfhood. Pursuing this ever-receding “competitive carrot as the grail” (693)¹⁹⁰ of achieved selfhood, students, concurrently, have to “justify [...] [their]

¹⁹⁰ Note the clear correspondence of this approach to language and the world to the grail-quest metaphor of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

seed and preserv[e] [their] rank” (176) that is equated to their self, absorbing the other as object ranking by solipsistically expanding the self in climbing the ladder of ranks.¹⁹¹

The infinite deferral of private self-justification is, however, not apparent to “younger E.T.A.s” (693). As the “idea that achievement doesn’t automatically confer interior worth is, to them, at this age, an abstraction,” younger students “still worship the carrot” (693) as they seek completion in reaching the highest rank. Older students who have become aware of the ever-receding nature of the carrot, on the other hand, grow to “know it’s more invigorating to *want* than to *have*” (694). The new E.T.A.’s tennis players’ development thus mirrors that of addiction from “fun with the Substance” to “gradually less and less actual fun but with some physical need for the Substance” (345) as naïve carrot-worship is “a lucky way to live. Even though it’s temporary” (693), segueing into compulsive “*want*” (694). Both views, however, lead into solipsism, the later stage being noted to be “just the inverse of the same delusion” (694) as they both bespeak the PLU’s inability to form a meaningful self outside of the communal system of a public language game. While the Tractarian logical correlation of ranking and self fails due to the infinite regress of self-justification without the sanctioning of an intersubjective community, older students conceive of their “stand[ing] entirely in relation to one another” (112) as a Derridean *différance*. To these students, the meaning of their selfhood derives itself uncontrollably in an endless interplay of signifiers, the signified, like the carrot on the donkey’s stick, continually and indefinitely deferred. Their selves thereby become empty constructs, students not “believing them to exist as anything more than concepts” (693).¹⁹² As den Dulk notes, Derridean philosophy maintains “that the illusion of metaphysical essences is inevitable and indispensable to the functioning of language” (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 136), language acquiring meaning “by referring (or *trying* to refer) to something

¹⁹¹ As can be seen in Boswell’s *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, this had already been Norman Bombardini’s solution to the problem of solipsist subject-creation in the Wittgensteinianly themed *The Broom of the System*, although Bombardini takes a more literal approach to the subject, attempting to “maximize Self by eating himself to infinite size” (Boswell 54), ingesting the other.

¹⁹² See also Charles Altieri’s comparison of Wittgenstein and Derrida in *Act and Quality: A Theory of Literary Meaning and Humanistic Understanding* and den Dulk’s chapter on “Wittgenstein and Wallace: The Meaning of Fiction” in *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Eggers And Foer*, where den Dulk “compar[es] and contrast[s] certain aspects of the philosophy of later Wittgenstein to that of Derrida” (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 132) with regard to Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*. Den Dulk elaborates on “the Wittgensteinian ‘model’ underlying Wallace’s fiction” (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 132) as an alternative to solipsizing deconstruction. See also the oft-quoted McCaffery interview, where Wallace refers to (early) Wittgenstein as a forbearer of Derridean deconstruction.

outside itself” (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 138). Wittgenstein in contrast views any connection between world and language, illusion or not, as irrelevant to meaning. From the Derrideans’ perspective, notwithstanding its rejection of metaphysical essentialism based on substance-thinking, language’s failure to ‘mean’ leads into skepticism and solipsism, the impossibility to “put into words (give reality to) [...] their selves” (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 146). Derridean deconstruction and Tractarian atomism are thus to *Infinite Jest* “the inverse of the same delusion” (694).

Therefore, while Cobb is correct in describing Hal’s view of the tennis academy expressed in his Big Buddy Meeting as “a system” (Cobb 37), he is incorrect in classifying this system as Wittgensteinian. When Hal explains tennis to his Big Buddy group as a Derridean system/jeu, details that point towards tennis as a Wittgensteinian language game “make[] him uncomfortable” (114). Hal rejects his sense of interconnectedness with Ingersoll, who “repels Hal because Hal sees in the kid certain parts of himself he can’t or won’t accept” (114), insulating himself from the Wittgensteinian notion of community. Similarly, the Derridean Hal, who should view everything as mere construct, is “struck by the fact that he really for the most part believes what he’s said about loneliness and the structured need for a *we*” (114). As the Wittgensteinian notion of interconnectedness and meaningful communication “makes him uncomfortable” (114), Hal, mirroring Derrida’s reliance on philosophical substance, opts to smoke marijuana and postpone “communal dinner” (120), the novel’s language again converging Wittgensteinian community with the religious language of communion.¹⁹³

Schitt’s Wittgensteinian tennis-philosophy is presented as a therapy to this solipsism. While endless deconstruction perpetually defers selfhood, incapable of constructing a stable subject, Schitt’s “endless war against the self you cannot live without” (84) in the language-game tennis allows for a meaningful speaking of the self. Rather than conceiving of the perpetual deferral of subjectivity due to the “impossibility of bridging the gap between language and world, resulting in skepticism [...] and solipsism” (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement*

¹⁹³ Although a solipsist throughout most of the novel, the remark that Hal “has no idea *yet* of why his father really put his head in a specially dickied microwave” (694; emphasis mine) hints at a future redemption discussed in my section on parallax in *Infinite Jest* and to be further analyzed in a Wittgensteinian paradigm further on.

137–38) as grounds for an ultimate vacuousness of the subject, Schtitt's 'real tennis,' to which, situated in a "second world," the connection, or lack thereof, between game and world is irrelevant, gives the self "a chance to *occur*, playing [...] with always a purpose to keep this world alive" (459). Following the ethical application of Wittgenstein's philosophy in *Infinite Jest*, Schtitt's version of tennis counters postmodern solipsism by establishing an open system of intersubjective communication between co-equal partners that allows for a meaningful speaking of selfhood. Thus, the meaning of the self is not derived from its (continually deferred) connection to the world as object but from the sanctioning of a community in which it occurs as a person or 'I' that is equivalent neither to the body nor the mind.

Eschaton

E.T.A.'s private school philosophy levels the distinction between reality and the game's "second world." The disastrous consequences such an equation of representation and reality has are also dramatized during the game of 'Eschaton' which *Infinite Jest* dedicates an entire section to, a tennis-derived nuclear war simulation game played at E.T.A. Implicitly also a parable on the state of contemporary American metafiction, 'Eschaton' details the logical crevasses of what happens if a Borgesian coincidence of the map (representation) and the territory (reality) becomes the default view on existence.¹⁹⁴ In this discussion of the aporias of endless irony, so to speak a parable on Jorge Luis Borges' postmodern parable "On Exactitude in Science," Wallace revisits the religious vocabulary of Joyce's authorial aesthetics within his Wittgensteinian argument for the irrelevance of referentiality and the senselessness of the generalized postmodern skepticism that can be found throughout *Infinite Jest*.

Eschaton simulates the totality of a global nuclear war scenario within "1300 m.² of composition tennis court representing the whole rectangular projection of the planet earth" (333). Players represent warring factions that shoot nuclear missiles, represented by tennis balls, at the opponents' strategic sites (marked by a variety of tennis equipment placed on the playing field) to inflict damage, nuclear radii and death tolls calculated through highly complex,

¹⁹⁴ See also the discussion of 'Eschaton' in den Dulk's chapter on "Wittgenstein and Wallace" and Bradley J. Fest's "The Inverted Nuke in the Garden: Archival Emergence and Anti-Eschatology in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*" as well as Timothy Jacob's doctoral thesis on *The Eschatological Imagination*.

verisimilar mathematical operations, and thus score points in the game. However, when it starts to snow during the specific game of Eschaton described in the novel, an argument, followed by real, physical violence, breaks out whether the snow that falls on the tennis court counts into the nuclear war simulation.

As one can see, the ‘Eschaton’ episode clearly mirrors the postmodernist idea of representation completely usurping reality as, e.g., expressed, through recourse to Borges’ fable, in Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 1). Hence, Hal, who gets increasingly more stoned throughout the episode, gets “lost in a paralytic thought-helix” as it “occurs to him that he finds the real-snow/unreal-snow snag in the Eschaton extremely abstract but somehow way more interesting than the Eschaton itself” (335) while the players’ “theater-boundary-puncturing” (333) argument for the inclusion of the (real) snow into the game’s (simulated) statistics for the sake of realism is exploited to disrupt and frustrate the game-play, eventually serving as an excuse to directly attack unpopular other players physically as the game degenerates into a “chaos so complex in its disorder that it’s hard to tell whether it seems choreographed or simply chaotically disordered” (341). Hyperreflexive abstraction and generalization makes the participants lose sight of the situation at hand and ultimately ruins the game altogether.

Indeed, *Infinite Jest* presents the given problem of the distinction between map and territory as not as deep and meaningful as the involved persons make it appear. Instead, as one of the students, Michael Pemulis, interjects, the quarrel is “equivocatory horseshit” (337), the game-defining distinction between events on the map and on the territory being absolutely clear: “It’s snowing on the goddamn *map*, not the *territory*” (333) and “Real-world snow isn’t a factor if it’s falling on the fucking *map*” (334). Offering, as den Dulk notes, Wittgensteinian arguments, Pemulis stresses that a (language) game always builds on the presupposition of reality (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 151).¹⁹⁵ As Pemulis argues, that is “what makes Eschaton and its axioms fucking possible in the *first* place. [...] it’s like *preaxiomatic*” (338).

¹⁹⁵ Notably, in his function as a Wittgensteinian mouthpiece for this section, Pemulis is also described as “blue-collar Irish” (334), the novel again linking the public language argument to Joyce and the consubstantial method, whose pseudo-theological authorial aesthetic Pemulis assumes as a Father-like “eminence grise” (333) outside yet engaging with the events on the (textual) playing field, complemented by the “*Jaysus*” (334) figure of Otis P. Lord as “play[ing] God” (328) incarnate on the field.

While the (language) game is not completely detached from reality – Eschaton, e.g., requires “actual physical targeting-skill” (324) from its players just like a language game such as literary fiction requires a reader’s (also physical) participation – it is still autonomous and cannot be justified by referring to reality. The rules of a game, i.e., that which structures its relation to reality, are wholly arbitrary: an authority that transcends the participant and the game-play, in Eschaton’s case the referee-like¹⁹⁶ Otis P. Lord, significantly referred to as the “game’s God” (339), decides “what’s part of the game and what isn’t” (339). This prefatory agreement on what the game’s limits are must be made before the game is started – “It’s only real-world snow if it’s already in the *scenario*” (334) – lest one plays an entirely different game from the one presupposed. This outside-game authority – the linguistic community and the game’s God respectively – cannot be doubted but exists as an “unspoken but very basic rule” (336).

The rebellious players, den Dulk shows, on the other hand act as poststructuralists and deconstructionists for whom, as Derrida writes in “Force of Law,” “[e]ach case is other, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely” (Derrida 23). For Derrida, language’s arbitrariness means that it is always ambiguous and mediated through interpretation. As den Dulk summarizes, “misapprehension is an essential, inevitable possibility with every utterance” (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 152). The Eschaton players employ this perspective to challenge the game’s core foundations and re-interpret, i.e., deconstruct, it creatively according to their personal needs.

For Wittgenstein, such a reinterpretation is certainly possible. However, it means that one ceases to play the original game and thereby risks being not understood at all. Hence, as Wittgenstein argues using the example of a game of chess: “The rules of grammar are arbitrary means: their *purpose* is not (e.g.) to correspond to the essence of negation of colour – but is the purpose of negation and of the concept of colour. As the purpose of the rules of chess is not to correspond to the essence of chess but to the purpose of the game of chess” (qtd. in Baker and Hacker 331). In contrast to Derrida then, for Wittgenstein skepticism can never become a generalized stance. To completely ignore the game’s presupposed delimiting rules that organize

¹⁹⁶ Note Wallace’s punning on referent/referee in this section concerned with reference.

its relation to reality and therefore to assume a strong interpretivist view – as the Eschaton players do with regard to the game’s God-like authority of Lord, whose role is ignored and who eventually becomes victim to the fight that breaks out – “would almost be like settling how much a toss [in a game of dice] is to be worth by another toss” (qtd. in den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 152). As Charles Altieri explains Wittgenstein’s point: “It makes sense to talk about problematic situations; it makes no sense to generalize these situations as the basic reality for those cursed by consciousness and language” (Altieri, “Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory” 1406).

As must have already become clear, Eschaton’s metatheoretical quarrel also serves to communicate the criticism Wallace directs against the metafictional literature of his time. Irony and metafiction can only be an exception to the rule – an interesting discussion of a problematic situation that arises from the rules of the language game – but never a generalized stance such as the one Wallace diagnoses his contemporaries with. Eschaton and its eventual crisis can hence be read as a parable on literary fiction. Based in an “animating realism (which realism depends on buying the artifice of 1300 m.² of composition tennis court representing the whole rectangular projection of the planet earth)” (333), i.e., a suspension of disbelief and entry into a fictional contract, Eschaton starts off as a contained yet highly verisimilar representation of a global totality. While its referee-God (read: author) provides the framework from which this representation of reality is to be interpreted, players (read: readers) have to expend physical action with which they determine the results of the game within its presupposed boundaries. Contemporary metafiction, however, Wallace’s argument goes, levels the distinction between representation and reality under the pretext of a postmodern ‘realism’ and devolves into “metatheoretical fuss” (334) that serves to obfuscate personal responsibility. What follows are “personal attacks outside the map” (336), the reduction of the framework-providing author to a mechanistic author-function¹⁹⁷ and ultimately the degeneration of the literary language game into meaningless relativism. Pemulis thus warns Lord “to consider what he’s doing [i.e.,

¹⁹⁷ This can for example be seen when Lord, in course of him involuntarily becoming involved in the boundary-breaking fight, gets his head stuck in a computer monitor, echoing Gilbert Ryle’s materialist ‘Ghost in the Machine’, a position highly reminiscent of JOI’s, another auteur, suicide with his head in a microwave oven.

allowing for postmodernist equivocations as valid moves] very carefully, because from where Pemulis is standing Lord looks to be willing to very possibly compromise Eschaton's map for all time" (338). Once irony is turned from an exception as it was in the strictly contained thought-experiment of Borges' fable into a generalized existential perspective, the game is changed entirely into "degenerative chaos" (341) without meaning. Contemporary literature according to Wallace is only playing with words while refusing to actually mean anything.

Notably, read in the light of Borges' fable and postmodernist literature in general,¹⁹⁸ Eschaton, too, constitutes metafictional commentary. However, in contrast to the kind of endlessly deconstructive, self-absorbed metafiction *Infinite Jest* criticizes, 'Eschaton's' parable is clearly contained in this section. Its metafictional critique of metafiction does not exhaust itself in continuous interplay of signifiers but presupposes a moral, authorial other outside the text, something which becomes evident in the thematization of Lord's role as well as the multifaceted narratorial presences enacted throughout the section.¹⁹⁹ The reader is thus in a situation similar to that of John L.'s AA audience: even though Wallace uses irony and metafiction, he does so in a functionally contained manner that aims towards the communication of his critique of metafiction. Wallace, like the character Troeltsch in the episode, is "trying to describe the distinction between the symbolic map of the gear-littered courts and the global strategic theater it stands for using all and only sports-broadcast clichés" (334).

This exceptional status of Wallace's Eschaton-metafiction, a contained metafiction that has the community in sight, also becomes apparent in the specially marked manner in which the drugs due to which Hal becomes absorbed into the game's metatheoretical problem are consumed in the episode. In contrast to the private, solipsistic substance abuse of the rest of the novel, the metafictional marijuana-thinking of 'Eschaton' is product of "*public* intoxicants"

¹⁹⁸ The section for instance also, more subtly, references *Gravity's Rainbow* in imagery of a parabolic "rainbow's arc" (342).

¹⁹⁹ The theme of narratorial and authorial presence is for example pointed to in the complex narratorial situation of the scene: While Hal is strongly implied to be "trying to outline Eschaton in the 3rd-person tense [*sic*]" (1024) as narrator, his vocabulary shining through the section's language, Pemulis, who seems to have supplied the focalizing Hal with the abstract game-knowledge to narrate the game, infiltrates the narration with sly interjections like "P.S. Wolf-Spiders [Pemulis' favorite sports team] Ruleth the Land"(1025) while yet other comments cannot be attributed to either Hal or Pemulis, pointing toward another presence organizing the text.

(329; emphasis mine), a description that cannot be found outside the Eschaton episode. While generalized irony and metafiction can be understood as *private* substance abuse, Eschaton's delimited irony oriented toward communal understanding is a *public* language game, albeit an exceptional one. Wallace is not a teetotaling Realist. He employs irony and metafiction yet does not reduce them to play for its own sake. Instead, the sports parable of Eschaton, and tennis in general, serves the communication of a point that transcends the text.²⁰⁰ Metafiction and irony, rather than a world view, are used as highly specialized language games of literature in *Infinite Jest* that, however, can only ever be the exception to the rule. This, however, does not mean that Wallace cannot use them to establish communication. *Infinite Jest* dismisses postmodernism's rejection of the possibility of a representation of totality. As a parable (of Borges' parable having become a parable for the postmodern human condition), 'Eschaton' only goes so far until it exhausts itself and becomes discontinuous and contradictory.²⁰¹ However, like Eschaton, whose claim to realistically represent the complexities of a global war on four tennis fields hinges on an unspoken contract of belief, *Infinite Jest* is able to represent reality within the bounds of its use. To paraphrase Wittgenstein's remark on ordinary language, 'Eschaton,' and *Infinite Jest* in general, is all right.

Both AA and the tennis taught by Gerhardt Schtitt seek to therapize a compulsion for ontological autonomy into a reciprocal dialogue between co-equal partners. Serving as the novel's two most prominent models for Wittgensteinian public language games, they attempt to stimulate a form of interaction that affords equal importance to all participants. Rather than a product of private ostensive definition that treats the other and the self as objects, AA and Schtitt's 'real' tennis stress meaning-making as a communal activity. Both hence rely on bodily rituals that establish arbitrary yet meaningful conventions sanctioned by the community. With meaning, according to Wittgenstein, being usage, language must always also be understood as

²⁰⁰ Wallace's metafictional use of tennis in Eschaton can be contrasted with the football/world war analogy of DeLillo's *End Zone*, which also references Wittgenstein's philosophy. Cf. Allard den Dulk and Anthony Leaker's "'Hidden in Plain Sight': Language and the Importance of the Ordinary in Wallace, DeLillo and Wittgenstein" in *David Foster Wallace: Presences of the Other*.

²⁰¹ One need not go into the complex details of 'who-represents-who?' – is Pemulis Pynchon? or Joyce? and so on – of the parable to see this. For instance, 'Eschaton' uses the DEFCON system incorrectly, escalating from DEFCON 1 to 5 rather than the other way around. However, this lack of verisimilitude does not make the parable 'unrealistic': its language game does what it is supposed to do, even though it does not (impossibly) totally mirror reality.

action. Thus, as Hacker summarizes, although language-use may not be understood as translation, “*language-learning* with us is founded on brute training, which presupposes for its success a variety of natural forms of behaviour and reactions” (Hacker 241; my emphasis). Both AA and Schtitt thus train mentees in their respective language/game by requiring them to ritually fall to their knees (in prayer or in practicing serves), encouraging maximal automated repetition by advising them to habitually keep their keys on the floor (cf. tennis: 172, 449; AA: 350, 443, 466f). Although without inherent meaning, such ritualistic acts highlight language’s communal quality as a set of conventionalized behaviors. Both AA and tennis thus negotiate in a spectrum between equally solipsistic materialist and dualist conceptions of the self, providing a third, Wittgensteinian, alternative option to the materialism/dualism debate.²⁰² The subject thereby occurs as person or ‘I’ in the language game. It manifests itself in behavior but means neither body nor mind (Hacker 248–53). It is only in reciprocal interaction from which the context of the individual’s behavior can be understood that this self can occur meaningfully.

Whereas the private language user’s desire for complete autonomy totalizes the other into becoming nothing but the individual’s linguistic creation, leading into solipsism, a stable, ‘substance-free’ self requires the recognition of something that transcends the limits of the self. In order to counteract the damaging illusion of complete autonomy, Schtitt’s tennis and AA demand a surrender of the self’s autonomy to the interconnectedness of a community. Meaningful selfhood necessitates the recognition of an untotalizable other outside the self. Schtitt’s ‘real tennis’ hence views the other not as opponent but integral “partner in the dance” (84) while AA similarly highlights the communal aspect of the language game by stressing the need to ‘Identify’ with the other as subject rather than to ‘Compare’ oneself with the other as object. In the novel, this absolute other is ultimately conceived of as ‘God.’ As could be shown, AA requires of its members to pray to a self-conceived ‘Higher Power,’ i.e., enter a language game with that which is insurmountably and absolutely other. Since, according to Wittgenstein,

²⁰² See also David Wiley’s interview with Wallace, in which Wallace positions himself between a traditionally referential and a postmodernist view of language: “the real battle in fiction has been between writers and theorists who see fiction as essentially a recursive mechanism—William Gass and John Barth and the ‘60s guys[...]. The other side of it says that fiction is not recursive, it’s referential—the old realistic ‘language is a system of pictures, of words, and I’m gonna write a story that makes you imagine that this stuff is really going on.’ [...] what I’m trying to do involves trying to write fiction that works both ways” (Wiley).

referential fixity is irrelevant to the functioning of the language game, the actual referent of this 'Higher Power' is completely unimportant. What counts is to conceive of the other as non-assimilable to the self and thereby to use 'God' and 'Higher Power' meaningfully, even if that other ends up being 'Nothing,' as it does for Gately. The importance of a 'God' as something which exceeds the bounds and actions of the self and thereby affords meaning to its actions also becomes evident in 'Eschaton,' where the existentially ironic equation of representation and reality in a rejection of the community's rules and conventions results in complete chaos, the boundary-providing authority of that communal other that gives meaning to the individual's actions being ignored and reduced to an abstraction of the self's desires. In order to 'play' meaningfully, the self has to surrender itself to an other whose presence cannot ever be proven yet which provides the framework in which meaningful actions can occur. Conversely, E.T.A.'s current, solipsistic tennis philosophy lacks this meaning providing recognition of the other. Lecturing his mentees during a Big Buddy meeting on his view of tennis as a system, Hal expounds a Derridean interpretation of tennis that, as could be shown, albeit context-dependent, lacks the meaningful sanctioning of a community of others, therefore being doomed to infinitely defer a meaningful self. The conversation causes an alienated young player to utter "I miss my dog" (113). This utterance becomes meaningful when considering the equation of 'dog' and 'God' established earlier in the novel in Hal's joke about the insomniac agnostic dyslexic who "stays up all night torturing himself mentally over the question of whether or not there's a dog" (41), a reversal which, as could be seen, is already employed in the dog/God pattern of Joyce's *Ulysses*. What is missing in Hal's Derridean tennis is the presence of an untotalizable other, the dog/God AA asks its members to pray to. Hal's Buddies, not yet fully introduced to the concept of tennis as a jeu, miss God in poststructuralist culture, said culture cynically disavowing the existence of anything bigger than the private self.

Merging the Joycean (secular) theological language with Wittgensteinian ordinary language philosophy, *Infinite Jest* effects a postsecular permutation of the Ulyssean. While a totalizing self-definition that eschews all interpersonal connection can only lead into solipsism, a recognition of an other that exceeds the boundaries of the self in providing the frame within which the self can act, i.e., *Infinite Jest's* conception of 'God,' provides a more hopeful

alternative to the endless deconstruction of the self. In *Infinite Jest* and *Ulysses* alike, communion as an acknowledgement of the other's distinctness from yet similarity to the self, an acknowledgement of 'God,' works as a cure for solipsism. Meaningful language, and this includes the language game of literature, inherently necessitates the presence of the other, i.e., an author.

The 'Wittgensteinian Consubstantiality' of Wallace's "trinity of You and I into We"

Stable selfhood, as opposed to the alienated individuation of the postmodern solipsist, can according to Wallace only be achieved in a public language game which (re)establishes community. The ironic, self-centered culture that is prevalent in *Infinite Jest* is depicted as detrimental to communication and the formation of a meaningful self and community. Meaning, as could be shown, can only ever derive from a sincere communication between subjects in which the self is perpetually simultaneously renounced and reinforced. Privacy on the other hand continuously disrupts and defers selfhood through the individual's alienation from familial and communal bonds – essentially a solipsistic rejection of the communicative other's selfhood and total otherness (van Ewijk 138). This becomes especially apparent in the figure of Hal's brother Orin. The private language user's (semi-)solipsistic constructivism absorbs the other as the individual's creation into the self. Orin is exemplary of the postmodern, self-reflexive solipsism that *Infinite Jest* criticizes. A natural ironist, Orin subscribes to the postmodernist equation of representation with reality, treating language and world as if they ran parallel to one another. He therefore views "truth as *constructed*" (1048) and uses ironic pick-up lines such as "Tell me what sort of man you prefer, and then I'll affect the demeanor of that man" (1048) – a strategy likened to postmodernist metafiction (Boswell 153) – to manipulate an endless number of women, tellingly referred to as his 'Subjects,' into sexual intercourse.

These sexual escapades, significantly presented as a result of Orin's alienation from his family, in particular their "grammatical mother" (30), highlight the problem of meaning and selfhood in the poststructurally informed culture of *Infinite Jest*. Commenting on Hal's remark to Orin that "It's poignant somehow that you always use the word *Subjects* when you mean the

exact obverse” (1008), Boswell notes that Orin “seems to accept the Object-like nature of Subjectivity” (Boswell 152). As a product of a culture entrapped in poststructuralist and Lacanian theory,²⁰³ Orin treats not only others as objects he defines himself against, rather than other subjects, but in turn understands the self as a kind of object. He thereby commits the private language error of regarding interiority as a (secret) thing in his possession (den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement* 148). As could be shown, such a view is presented as drawing the subject as continually deferred and decentered, leaving the individual in perpetual want: their existential attitude of generalized irony cannot afford them with stable meaning, including meaningful selfhood, but leaves them to an infinite regress of self-justification.

Orin’s constructivism therefore leads him to attempt to justify his selfhood by reducing others (and, as his reference to the women he seduces as ‘Subjects’ shows, himself) to a product of his own, private linguistic creation. Following the private language using solipsist’s totalizing tendencies, Orin attempts to assimilate the other into the self until there is “inside her a vividness vacuumed of all but his name” (566). Orin’s “sexual mode” (566) thus represents a deeply self-centered communication. During intercourse, Orin seeks to become “both offense and defense” (566), the objectifying one-sidedness of his approach to selfhood leaving no room for an intersubjective, reciprocal interaction. Instead, the other is treated as an object to be absorbed into Orin’s self in order to uphold the illusion of his ontological autonomy. However, as becomes apparent in the unending number of female acquisitions, Orin cannot create a stable subject this way. Stuck in the “endless fall” of perpetual deferral, “one [objectified] Subject is never enough” (566). Orin’s ontological imperialism, a result of his solipsistic struggle for autonomy, clearly does not represent a form of meaningful intercourse²⁰⁴ that would allow for meaningfully speaking of, and thereby occurring as, a subject.

²⁰³ Even though Orin has “never once darkened the door of any sort of therapy-professional” (983), his postmodernist heritage inevitably entraps him within a Lacanian model of selfhood through objectification and makes him reenact a literalized mirror-stage with his Subjects.

²⁰⁴ Seeing how Wallace likens sincere (literary) communication to sexual intimacy whereas a literature that panders to a reader’s (ironic) needs without demanding any intellectual reciprocity, strikingly similar to Orin’s behavior, is compared to pornography and prostitution, the pun is certainly intended here (Wallace, “Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young” 54).

Significantly, the narrator interrupts the description of Orin's solipsistic, totalizing intercourse with the Swiss hand-model by adding in parentheses that indicate a distance to the described scene:

This is why, maybe, one Subject is never enough, why hand after hand must descend to pull him back from the endless fall. For were there for him just one, now, special and only, the One would be not he or she but what was between them, the obliterating trinity of You and I into We. Orin felt that once and has never recovered, and will never again.

(566-7)

Orin's self-centered approach, which leads to an infinitely deferred, instable subject, is juxtaposed in parentheses with a more reciprocal, intersubjective conception of communication as a "trinity of You and I into We" (567). While Orin's pursued 'One,' represented by the letter "O." (566) for Orin and 'the Other,' suggests a view of the subject as object absorbing the other, thereby eradicating its otherness, the 'One' the parenthetical comment envisions displays a communal, reciprocal approach to selfhood shaped as a trinity. Echoing later Wittgenstein, meaning, and thus also the possibility of speaking of a subject, self-knowledge, emerges from the reciprocal interaction between self and other, the community of 'We.'²⁰⁵ Boswell, here, too, sees in *Infinite Jest* an affirmation of "Wittgenstein's communitarian model of signification as the solution to Orin's relativistic nightmare of perpetual displacement and interior absence" (Boswell 154). However, although his analysis of "the obliterating trinity of You and I into We" (567) as denoting "the communitarian model of meaning proposed in the *Philosophical Investigations*" (Boswell 155) is sound, Boswell fails to remark on the specifically trinitarian aspect of the model proposed, something which is completely absent in Wittgenstein's philosophy.

This trinitarian conception can be linked back to the consubstantial method in Joyce's *Ulysses*. As could be shown, in *Ulysses* stable meaning and community are achieved through the creation of a secular trinity. Thus, the scene in the 'Ithaca' chapter when Stephen and Bloom

²⁰⁵ Compare this trinitarian conception of meaning providing community with the addicted PLU's concern that the public language game of AA might be "just Unitarian happy horseshit" (348), a concern which AA's 'working' reveals as unjustified. Thus, a solipsizing, poststructural, private and 'unitarian' approach to Oneness is juxtaposed with a reciprocal, language-game approach explicitly linked to the trinity that is also central to *Ulysses*.

are urinating, or we(e)ing, in Bloom's garden, seeing each other in "theirhisnothis fellowfaces" (655), is widely regarded as the novel's climax, an atonement (at-one-ment) of Father and Son (Heusel 138). This trinity, completed by Molly as Ghost through absence, is also represented in a typographical metaphor. In the course of the urinating communion of Stephen and Bloom in 'Ithaca,' the trajectory of Bloom's urination forms "the bifurcated penultimate alphabetical letter" while Stephen's stream, with greater "vescical pressure," is "more sibilant" (655), sibilant denoting sounds such as [s] or [z]. With Bloom and Stephen producing 'Y' and 'S,' the physical impossibility of such a feat further highlighting the scene's symbolism, the third part is, as in the overall trinitarian pattern of 'Ithaca,' present through absence and thus to be inferred as 'E.' Foreshadowing Molly's final "Yes" (732), the excremental trinitarian yes of Stephen and Bloom 'Ithaca' culminates in serves as a male counterpart to Molly's female, menstruating 'yes' of 'Penelope,' the novel's other final chapter.

Infinite Jest echoes this concluding trinitarian 'yes' in its own, Wittgensteinian trinity. 'The One,' Orin's selfhood (O), results from the communicative interaction of 'you' (U) and 'I' (I), forming 'We' (OUI), the French affirmative homophonous with the English 'we' and a literal echo of Joyce's consubstantiality in 'wee.' *Infinite Jest* thus recasts Joyce's consubstantial method in Wittgensteinian terms. The we(e)ing 'YES' of Joyce, consolidating meaning and order through the consubstantial method, is reproduced in another language (-game), French and/or late Wittgenstein's philosophy, to the same, or similar effect.

Notably, excrements in *Infinite Jest* continually serve the function of reminders of interconnectedness and divinity. Urine in the novel is thus always used as a token of one's sobriety, that is metaphorically one's abstinence from (philosophical) substance abuse, as each mention of urine in the novel appears in the context of the drug tests conducted at E.T.A. and the Ennet House halfway house. Similarly, feces in the novel are connoted with a personal healing process through a recognition of family resemblance (such as during Gately's work as a janitor at a homeless shelter) and a postsecular belief in the divine. Hal's anhedonia thus also shows itself in his inability to "believe in shit" (870). Solipsism is oftentimes coordinated with digestive problems such as Schacht's "Crohn's disease" (103) or a Substance abuser's (with regard to Joyce's role in the novel significantly "a green-card Irishman" (351)) drug-induced

diarrhea. Recovery in turn is a spiritual experience, the novel noting on the “almost religious,” epiphanic nature of the “defecatory posture” (103) and the sober Irishman thanking God on his knees for his “first solid bowel movement in adult life” (351). Excrements as the (very private) bodily product that connects all human experience, regardless how divergent it may otherwise be – ‘everybody poops’ –, establishes a most basic family resemblance linked to the absolute and untotizable otherness of God. Like Joyce, who, as can be seen in the “goddinpotty” (J. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* 59) of *Finnegans Wake*, often read as an allusion to the urination scene of ‘Ithaca,’ connects community, the divine, the artistic and the excremental,²⁰⁶ *Infinite Jest* connects excrements with family resemblances and belief. The language of abject excrements is a universal language of the body, a public language, and thus the language of God as that which is untotizably other and thereby ensures reciprocal communication between subjects. The novel’s references to excrements and defecation as a bodily behavior everybody shares can thus be read to reverberate with references to *Infinite Jest*’s notion of belief and sincere communication, coming together in the Joycean/Wittgensteinian, excremental Godhead of a “trinity of You and I into We” (567).

Infinite Jest’s (Ghostly) Return of the Author

Infinite Jest not only models the therapeutic potential of a stimulation of a kind of communication that recognizes the other as subject in AA and tennis but proposes itself as a public language game between author and reader. Countering the continual deferral of meaning in postmodernism, *Infinite Jest* performs a reevaluation of the author-reader-text relationship as dialogic rather than monologic, modeled on a Wittgensteinian reinterpretation of the Ulyssean consubstantial method. As in *Ulysses*, Orin’s intratextual (Wittgensteinian) trinity is also applied to the metatextual level. The novel thereby proposes a trinitarian constellation of author, reader, and text as producing plural, yet legitimate meaning in a public language game as an alternative to the deconstructionist, private approaches to the text that may never produce stable meaning and selfhood.

²⁰⁶ See for instance Vincent J. Cheng’s “‘Goddinpotty’: James Joyce and the Language of Excrement,” Michael Lavers’ “‘To No End Gathered’: Poetry and Urination in Joyce’s *Ulysses*” and Bernard Benstock’s “Who P’s in U?”

Infinite Jest continues the comparison between a trinitarian Godhead and authorship that Joyce establishes into the Ulyssean Tradition in Stephen's Hamlet lecture at the National Library. Amending Joyce's consubstantial method with Wittgenstein's public language games, the novel effects what Hering has called a "'ghostly' return of the dead author" (Hering 18). Playing on Roland Barthes' imagery of a 'deicide' of the "Author-God" (Barthes 146), the novel establishes a trinity of author, reader, and text and thereby resurrects poststructuralism's dead author as a meaningful yet unreferential part of literary communication.

This resurrection hence does not entail a repudiation of the poststructuralist decentering of the author as ultimate interpretative authority or a conservative effort to return to an intention-based reading. As Hering shows, Wallace's fiction is deeply concerned with a movement from a monologic to a dialogic conception of the author (Hering 19). Rather than calling for a return to biographical reading, *Infinite Jest* reestablishes the author as unbiographical but personally present, serving as a communicative partner in an ethical, reciprocal interaction. The author becomes an other without whom the reader would only indulge in solipsistic self-reflection. As exemplified in the novel's auteur-figure James Orin Incandenza's return as a ghost toward the end of the novel, the author in *Infinite Jest* is dead but returns, not as a living, historical, but as a 'ghostly', dialogic author in the process of perpetual simultaneous renunciation and reinforcement to serve as other.

In this manner, *Infinite Jest* reflects a general climate of discontent with poststructuralist conceptions of the author-reader relationship in the theoretical discourse of the 1990s and late 80s, prominently exemplified in H.L. Hix's 1990 *Morte d'Author*, which Wallace reviewed more than favorably in "Greatly Exaggerated," and Sean Burke's 1992 *The Death and Return of the Author*. Historically, theoretical concerns with the residence of interpretive authority can be, polemically, summarized to shift between the foci of the author, text, and reader which Wallace, via *Ulysses* and Wittgenstein, controls into a trinity.

In Anglo-Saxon academia, mistrust towards the interpretative authority of the author can be traced back to the "intentional fallacy" of 1940s New Criticism. As W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley state in their seminal essay "The Intentional Fallacy," "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of

literary art” (Wimsatt and Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy” 468). In New Criticism, the text itself, rather than the intentions of the historical author, is the central measure of meaning. As can be seen in “The Affective Fallacy,” Wimsatt and Beardsley’s sister-essay to “The Intentional Fallacy,” the New Criticism also rejects the reader as constituting meaning (Wimsatt and Beardsley, “The Affective Fallacy”). Notably, New Criticism’s disregard of the author, albeit historically valuable as a move towards more objective literary studies, makes impossible ethics in literature, a deficiency which Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* attempted to correct through the introduction of the “implied author” (Booth 74). However, Gerhard Lauer shows Booth’s ‘implied author’ to be a departure from the principles of New Criticism (Lauer 166), a departure Wallace himself explicitly applauds in his review of Joseph Frank’s study of Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Nevertheless, by the end of the 1960s, with Barthes and Foucault, the turn away from the author is further radicalized. While the 1940s Anglo-Saxon New Criticism would reject readings based on authorial intention as fallacious and thus view the author as irrelevant to a text’s meaning, French(-influenced) poststructuralism, by Wallace’s time the doxa of academia, regards the category of the author as reactionary, forcibly suppressing a liberating multiplicity of meanings (Lauer 214). Thus, with “The Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes seeks to desacralize the image of the author as interpretative category, styling his revolutionary endeavor as a deicide of “the Author-God,” a toppling of a tyrant that allows for the freedom of the reader not to decipher an author’s “single ‘theological’ meaning” but to view the text as “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes 146). According to Barthes, the “text is a tissue of quotations” (Barthes 146) of which the author is only scriptor without lasting authority. Thus, the death of the author means the birth of the reader (Barthes 148), the locus of interpretative authority in literary criticism shifting towards the reader. Poststructuralism thus reduces the (historical) author to the role of a composer, the abandonment of the author as interpretative category constituting a liberation of reading.

However, as can be seen in the works of scholars like Harvey Hix or Sean Burke, this exclusive stance towards the author is starting to be challenged by Wallace’s 1990s and late

1980s. *Infinite Jest* can be placed within this climate. Wallace, who is, as his review “Greatly Exaggerated” shows most clearly, highly familiar with 20th century literary theory, reflects contemporary literary theory’s interest in the return of the author. Informed by poststructuralist thought, the return of the author in *Infinite Jest* constitutes not a return to a hagiographic worship of the author’s biography but rather a reconceptualization of the author-reader relationship as a Wittgensteinian interaction in the production of meaning instead of Barthes’ tyrannical antagonism, viewing the author as poststructuralistically dead but returning as a ghost, effaced but active. Written in the Ulyssean Tradition, *Infinite Jest* recasts the consubstantial method as a trinity of the three aforementioned loci of interpretative authority, author, text, and reader shaping meaning together in coequal communication. Thereby, *Infinite Jest* uses the pattern of Joycean artistic consubstantiality yet strengthens the role of the audience in order to resacralize the author formerly desacralized in Barthes’ “Death of the Author.”

The problem of authorship, and with it *Infinite Jest*’s surmounting of postmodernism through a Wittgensteinian recasting of the Ulyssean consubstantial method, is thematized most clearly in the wraith of JOI. Toward the end of the novel, the dead auteur James Orin Incandenza²⁰⁷ reappears as a ghost, literalizing the programmatic return of Barthes’ dead author. As Hering remarks, JOI enters the text as “a reification of Barthes’ question ‘Who is speaking thus?’” (Hering 17). Having “no out-loud voice of its own,” the wraith has to resort to using a hospitalized Don Gately’s “internal brain-voice” (831), which mimics a reader’s internal voicing of the printed letter. The wraith’s form of communication thereby stages the problem of narrative authority. After being shot, Gately is both speechless and immobilized and thus incapable of any communication and left to his own thoughts and dreams. Into this situation of “communicative impotence” (834), the wraith enters, conversing with Gately by inserting “ghostwords” (884), foreign “invasions of lexical terms [Gately] doesn’t know from shinola” appearing “in Gately’s own brain-voice but with roaring and unwilling force” (838) represented both in Gately’s mind and in the novel’s typeset “in caps” (832), further paralleling Gately’s

²⁰⁷ In order to facilitate the discussion of the wraith/JOI’s function in negotiating a post-Barthesian, dialogic author figure, the term ‘auteur’ will be used to refer to JOI’s intradiegetic property of being an author (of films) while ‘author’ will refer to the communicative entity outside the text which is not necessarily equal to Wallace, unless indicated otherwise. The return of the literally dead auteur as a ghost thus dramatizes a reconceptualization of the author, a return of poststructuralism’s dead author.

and the reader's situation.²⁰⁸ Without quotation marks or consistent inquit-formulas, Gately's thoughts and the wraith's responses bleed into one another, making it impossible to conclusively delegate speaker portions in the wraith-scene, and, in extension, the whole novel which, as Timothy Jacobs remarks, could be narrated by the wraith (Jacobs, *The Eschatological Imagination* 75). Even though sometimes indicated through all-caps type, the dialogue with the wraith happens within the overall narrative voice of the section, thus expressly staging Barthes' 'Who is speaking thus?,' the very question Gately, too, asks himself.²⁰⁹

Notably, JOI is an "auteur" (726). The term, coming from French cinema criticism, denotes a stressing of the film-maker as singular artist who controls all aspects of the actually collaborative work of filming and thus leaving a discernible handwriting, i.e., presence in his work (Cook and Bernink 235). Highlighting personal authorship, JOI's explicit *auteur*ship is significant in its further underscoring of authorial presence that had been rebuked by poststructuralism. However, at the same time, the wraith is a "site of authorial confusion" (Hering 27) that problematizes the monologism of *auteur*ship while, simultaneously, underscoring the necessity of the presence of an authorial other for ethical literary communication. This can for example be seen in the diverse attempts in Wallace scholarship to identify the wraith with a specific author. While for example Tom LeClair, in one of the earliest critical assessments of Wallace's novels, sees the wraith as a "combination of Hal and his father" and subsequently identifies him with Wallace as "a prodigious collaboration" of these characters but also views *Incandenza* as a "Pynchon figure" (LeClair, "The Prodigious Fiction of Richard Powers, William Vollmann, and David Foster Wallace" 33) and Boswell, similarly, notes that "*Incandenza* is Pynchon" (Boswell 164) and later calls the wraith "a spokesman for

²⁰⁸ The incorrect use of the word 'ghostwords,' actually "A word recorded in a dictionary or other reference work which is not actually used" (*OED* "ghostword"), a term which Gately attributes to another of JOI's lexical intrusions (884) but which, seeing how JOI only refers to himself as a wraith rather than using the word ghost, may in fact stem from the less verbose Gately himself, further problematizes the question of narrative authority.

²⁰⁹ Notably, such intrusions, which Gately ascribes to his potentially dreaming, are implicitly likened to postmodern metafiction. Indeed, this comparison does not escape Gately himself as the classically postmodern ontological insecurities of his "considering the up-front dream quality of the dream he was dreaming" become "so multileveled and confusing that his eyes rolled back in his head" (830), a recurrent image of postmodern self-consciousness in the novel. However, rather than emphasizing the text as fabrication, thereby eliminating the centrality of the author, the metafiction of the wraith encounter appears to propose, as Hering notes, "a more dialogic narrative model" (Hering 29). It underscores, rather than deconstructs, the, albeit problematized, presence of an authorial other.

Wallace” (Boswell 170), Burn associates the wraith with the ancestor figure of James Joyce, bespectacled, “tall, sometime-alcoholic” (Burn, *Reader’s Guide* 25), verbose and in name almost homophonous. What is more enlightening than these scholars’ specific associations is their shared urge to identify the wraith with personal authorship. The variety of divergent but plausible attributions of reference in Wallace scholarship bespeaks the sense of personal authorial presence the figure of the wraith elicits. The wraith appears to explicitly call for identification with a composing figure outside the text in the reader. Instead of (misguidedly) attempting to pinpoint him as a specific author, the wraith should rather be seen, following Hering, as an “*accretion* of authorly characteristics” (Hering 167) that allows the reader to identify with an authorial, composing figure outside the text, while at the same time debarring reference to a singular, historical author, remaining nonbiographical and dialogic.

This also becomes evident in the novel’s choice of the obscure word ‘wraith’ over the more common ‘ghost.’ As the *OED* states, itself a central intertext to *Infinite Jest*, a wraith is “[a] ghost or ghostlike image of someone, especially one seen shortly before or after their death” (*OED* “wraith”) and thus for all purposes equivalent to the more common ‘ghost,’ its definition as “[a]n apparition of a dead person which is believed to appear or become manifest to the living, typically as a nebulous image” (*OED* “ghost”) fitting JOI’s apparition just as well. However, contrary to the *OED*’s ‘ghost’ entry, the etymology of ‘wraith’ is said to be “of unknown origin” (*OED* “wraith”). Like the wraith’s authorial properties, the word ‘wraith’ itself cannot be traced back to a definite, historical source. By stylizing the wraith as an accretion of authorial characteristics that, however, cannot be traced back to a definite, historical origin, *Infinite Jest* can heed the warnings against authorship from “The Death of the Author” and still employ an authorial other necessary for an ethical, Wittgensteinian communication.

By locating the author in a literary trinity producing meaning in effecting a Ulyssean consubstantial method by way of later Wittgenstein’s philosophy, *Infinite Jest* performs a resacralization of the author, a reinstalment of Barthes’ decried “Author-God” (Barthes 146). The author remains dead, effaced and stripped off interpretative omnipotence to resurface as a communicative other necessary for ethical communication alongside reader and text. In this trinitarian reconceptualization, author, reader, and text, the three historical loci of interpretative

authority appear as co-equal persons producing philosophically stable if multiple meaning in interaction.

Conclusion: “I am in here” - Transcendence through Absorption in the Name of the Father

Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* performs a postsecular reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition by applying an ethical misreading of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* to Joyce’s consubstantial method, thereby ultimately proposing a reevaluation of the author-reader-text relationship as a resacralized, trinitarian dialogue. While private language use, as becomes evident in the novel’s substance abusers, is presented as leading into postmodern solipsism, a stimulation of sincere communication within public language games in the novel’s ethical misprision of Wittgenstein is capable of producing stable meaning, community and selfhood, thus countering the alienation of postmodern self-reflection. As could be shown, the novel models such redemptive public language use in the open systems of AA and tennis. Both AA and tennis are structured as metaphors for public language games, relying on the rules and conventions of a community to derive meaning from usage and calling for a surrender of the self to the untotalizable other. They thereby allow for a real self-knowledge distinct from the infinite deferral of a postmodernist self-reflection that objectifies the self and the other. Thus, AA and ‘real tennis’ give the self a chance to occur meaningfully within a language game, countering postmodern solipsism through a therapeutic recognition of the other as coequal subject.

Infinite Jest, however, does not merely describe such a therapy through AA and tennis, it attempts to itself act as such a therapeutic interaction. Like AA, *Infinite Jest* works with conventional language, clichés, and urges the reader to surrender to an authorial godhead that cannot be proven but must be assumed in a leap of faith in order to escape readerly solipsism. At the same time, as in Schitt’s tennis theory, author and reader appear as partners in the game, collaborating in the production of meaning while being bound to certain arbitrary rules. The novel stylizes itself as a therapeutic public language game by proposing a trinity of author, reader and text that produce meaning in reciprocal interaction. Such a recognition of the other as co-equal subject can provide a more sustainable alternative to the ironist’s self-centered

approach to the world, which can only end in an infinitely deconstructive cycle of self-justification.

Infinite Jest realizes this therapeutic recognition of the author's, and the reader's, extratextual presence – its “structural need for a *we*” (114) – through its material, structural and formal characteristics. Whereas Foucault replies to the question of the author “What matter who's speaking” (Foucault 138), in the aesthetic *Infinite Jest* develops from the Joycean consubstantial method the author and the reader *matter*; they are speaking through matter but are not (of) matter. The novel mobilizing its own materiality for its conversational aesthetic, *Infinite Jest*'s sheer physical unwieldiness points toward reader and author as embodied subjects. This can for example be seen in the way the novel's extensive endnotes demand a reader's physical interaction with the book, the act of paging back and forth between text and endnotes mirroring a game of tennis, thereby drawing attention to the book's material presence and, by extension, the reader's and ultimately the author's own materiality and behavior in constructing meaning. Like the players in Schitt's Wittgensteinian tennis, author and reader *are* not matter. However, their interaction manifests itself in matter – the book as the author's product, subtly mirroring its content, and the reader's handling of it. As the reader is made to physically interact with the book in order to read it and thus produce meaning, she is reminded of the author's role in the novel's production. The novel's gesture toward its own materiality, a materiality that, since there is certainly more than one copy of *Infinite Jest* in the world, does not imply historical referentiality, highlights the extratextual world author and reader share. The reader, like an AA member, is thereby invited to recognize her family resemblance to the author.

Reflecting the intratextual practices of AA and tennis in its own material presence, *Infinite Jest* collapses centripetal and centrifugal, absorptive and reflective movements. *Infinite Jest* thereby draws attention to the family resemblance among author, reader, and text. Like the persons of the trinity, they are distinct from yet reciprocally interact with one another, and it is only within this conversation that they can meaningfully occur as subjects and produce the novel's plural meanings. This can for example be seen in the ‘trinitarian’ Identification of text, reader, and author the novel's opening “I am in here” (3) affords: since Hal narrates the section

and thus ‘speaks’ these words, he is on the most basic level ‘in here’ as a character in the text that produces meaningful language. At the same time, however, this first-person narration also draws the reader ‘in here.’ Through the act of reading, the reader can be seen to produce meaning as well: a reader who is immersed in the narrative and therefore does not compulsively reflect on language but is drawn into the book, will hear ‘I am in here’ in her own mind while reading, similarly to the way the wraith projects his ghost-words into Gately’s mind. While the reader is being drawn into the book, identifying with Hal, the book is in turn also drawn into the reader as its words take place in her mind. Text and reader enter a reciprocal interchange through which the reader too becomes a God-like creator of meaning. Her situation thereby implicitly echoes Hal’s remark that “transcendence is absorption” (12): transcendence as both becoming ‘God-like’ and moving beyond the text requires a naïve immersion into the narrative and thus a *belief* in the unprovable, yet common sense, possibility of literary communication. At the same time, this therapeutic ‘revelation’ is motivated by a reader’s reflection on the text, its correspondence between form and content, and her role within it, the centrifugal and centripetal, abstractly reflective and naively absorptive merging into one another.²¹⁰

In an act closely resembling the wraith’s indirect form of communication, the author, too, finally announces his presence ‘in here.’ Although he is not a body to which the reader can refer, the author is nevertheless ‘in here’ – yet, like Hal in the opening sequence, unable to respond directly to his interrogator, the reader. Instead, the author has to speak to the reader through the text, just like the wraith cannot communicate directly but must insert his language into Gately’s mind. David Foster Wallace thus identifies with Hal as one who “transcends the mechanics” (12), i.e., moves beyond materialist presence. Unable to communicate directly, Wallace must speak through Hal. Both Hal and Wallace must therefore “trust Uncle Charles” (17) – the name of Hal’s uncle, who speaks for him during the scene, subtly referencing both the familial connections the novel seeks to repair and Joyce’s mode of free indirect discourse, which Hugh Kenner famously termed the ‘Uncle Charles Principle.’ Just as the Uncle Charles Principle in Joyce’s writing allows for a character’s language to shine through third-person

²¹⁰ See also Adam Kelly’s “Absorbing Art: The Hegelian Project of *Infinite Jest*” in the forthcoming *David Foster Wallace Between Literature and Philosophy* for another reading of the novel’s opening with regard to Wallace’s transcendence through absorption.

narration (Kenner 18), Wallace's aesthetics reinterpret Joyce's model into a form of "meta-fiction" (Konstantinou, "No Bull: David Foster Wallace and Postironic Belief" 98) that continuously points not inward but outward, toward an authorial presence behind and beyond the text – an authorial 'I' refracted through the 'I' of the first-person narrator, Hal. Whereas in Joyce's stylistics the other presence to be discovered behind the narrator's words we read reveals the interiority of the character spoken about, in *Infinite Jest*'s case it manifests the author's presence outside the text. Through raising attention to this authorial presence, *Infinite Jest* attempts to reorient its reading process from one that devolves into the kind of self-conscious, private activity the novel rejects into a reciprocal activity between real actors – not despite but *because* they lack any referent in the world. Just as Hal can only begin to know himself if he can accept the meaningfulness of his father's name 'Himself' even though it is without reference in the real world, the reader should recognize the meaningful significance of 'David Foster Wallace' to exit her self-absorption.²¹¹

Drawing on Joyce's aestheticization of the trinity into a secular model for the author's oneness (as the work's God and Creator) with the everyday reality of his work, this identification is conceptualized as an act of belief. While the novel's stylistics and themes thus point toward an extratextual reality that author and reader share, this recognition of 'David Foster Wallace' as a meaningful name without referent is ultimately left to be the reader's own leap of faith. If the reader is to escape from her self-centered practices of reading into a reintegrative literary public language game with the authorial other, she must, like Gately speaking to the wraith, "stop trying to figure it out and just capitalize on its presence" (830). In this way, the reader can recognize the author – stripped of his interpretative omnipotence and unreferential, yet like a ghost 'in here' with her nonetheless – as a dialogic other with whom she can enter a meaningful form of communication. The novel can thus be seen to attempt to surmount, rather than reverse, poststructuralism's 'Death of the Author.' The novel thereby positions itself after postmodernism, affirming poststructuralist premises but moving on from

²¹¹ The name 'David Foster Wallace' is remarkably illustrative of this return of the dead author as an effaced and dialogic, unreferential yet meaningful entity since 'David Foster Wallace' is a pen name that includes Wallace's mother's maiden name to evade confusion with another David Wallace writing in the late 80s, the 'real-life Wallace' going by Dave Wallace (Max 66). 'David Foster Wallace' therefore really does not refer to anything in the outside world yet, as the name printed on the book cover, is meaningfully used as 'the name of the author.'

them. Redemption from solipsistic self-consciousness requires reader, author, and text equally to relinquish their autonomy, i.e., their conceptual claim to authoritative primacy, act as a trinity, and thereby enter dialogue as co-equal partners.

Infinite Jest thus confronts its readers with an updated version of Pascal's wager in literature. Presented by 17th century French philosopher Blaise Pascal, Pascal's wager argues for belief in God due to a calculation of probabilities: the believer, having lived a pious life, goes to heaven if there is a God but does not lose anything if there is not while the atheist is either damned or, equally, dissolves into nothing. Belief is thus pragmatically the safest bet (Pascal 233). However, one of the most common skeptical counterarguments against Pascal's wager is the 'many-gods' objection: the assumption that a deity other than Pascal's God exists shifts the wager in favor of the atheist's position, the atheist not further enraging a God that is not Pascal's or even being rewarded by a perverse, deviant deity that rewards nonbelief (Jordan 26–27). Joyceanly applying theology to literature, *Infinite Jest* counters postmodern skepticism about the Author-God by using late Wittgenstein to show those counterarguments against a literary Pascal's wager to be irrelevant. 'Belief,' a recognition of the involvement of the 'Author-God,' is thus presented to remain the most pragmatic choice. As modelled in AA, a Wittgensteinian communication with the absolute Other of 'God' does not necessitate any referential fixity of that 'Higher Power' in order to function, sober AA members successfully praying to many gods.

In the same way, the dialogic, effaced but personally present nature of the author proposed by *Infinite Jest* makes skepticism irrelevant from a Wittgensteinian perspective since *Infinite Jest* affords the reader with an authorial other to converse with which is specifically delinked from historical reference. The pragmatic choice for the reader, *Infinite Jest* appears to argue, is to assume the presence of an authorial other with which to enter into communication so as to not succumb to a private language use presented as endlessly solipsizing. Only through the assumption of an unprovable yet common-sensical author, Wallace's wager goes, can stable if multiple meaning be produced in a literary language game. *Infinite Jest*'s argumentation can thus be seen to be similar to Jeff Jordan's reading of William James' "Will to Believe" essay as a Jamesian version of Pascal's wager according to which belief affords the believer a better life

than that of the non-believer regardless of the risk of error (Jordan 174–75). To illustrate, James ends his 1895 essay “Is Life Worth Living?,” with the words: “Believe that life *is* worth living, and your belief will help create the fact” (James 62). Similarly, readers of *Infinite Jest* are called to act ‘as if’²¹² the unprovable author were present and “capitalize on its presence” (830), thereby learning the public use of language²¹³ and being able to make sense of *Infinite Jest*, the Wittgensteinianly antiskeptical acceptance of the other serving as an alternative to a Pynchonian deconstructive paranoia. *Infinite Jest* uses Wittgenstein’s philosophy in its reinterpretation of the Ulyssean method of consubstantiality. Exchanging Joycean substance for Wittgensteinian grammar, the “consubstantial father” (*Ulysses* 38) of *Ulysses* for the “grammatical mother” (30), *Infinite Jest* achieves the aim of the Ulyssean consubstantial method, the countering of a disruption of meaning, order, and the family, through an ethical application of the later Wittgenstein.

²¹² As Vermeulen and van den Akker remark, a discourse of ‘as if’ is central to metamodernism (Vermeulen and van den Akker 5).

²¹³ Thus, *Infinite Jest* also counters the inauthentic-belief objection to Pascal’s wager according to which a belief based on a wager cannot be as rewardable, since mercenary, as authentic, selfless belief (Jordan 131). However, as could be shown, while learned through training, Wittgenstein’s language game is not equal to behavior; or, as the AA motto goes: “Fake It Till You Make It” (369).

4. Joycean Parallax and the Doppler Effect in *Infinite Jest*

Placing itself within the Ulyssean Tradition, *Infinite Jest* reinterprets the parallax method found in *Ulysses*, a metaphor for the stereoscopic structure of Joyce's novel, in its endeavor to overcome a postmodern irony it views as leading into solipsism. As Burn notes, "much of the ontological layering in *Infinite Jest* resembles modernist, rather than postmodernist, practice" (Burn, *Reader's Guide* 60). If the shift between modernism and postmodernism can be observed in a shift from an epistemological to an ontological dominant (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 10), *Infinite Jest* appears to be deeply aware of postmodernism's arguments for questioning "the ontological ground of modernist epistemology" (Boswell 11) but, nevertheless, operates in a structure that "recalls Joyce's [...] frameworks" (Burn, *Reader's Guide* 60). The novel's dialogue with *Ulysses* must hence also be seen as a reaction to postmodernism.

While this does not mean that *Infinite Jest* reverts to a modernist style of writing, *Infinite Jest's* relationship to *Ulysses* is qualitatively different from postmodern responses to Joyce's novel. Through a systematic misattribution of the terms 'parallax' and 'Doppler effect,' *Infinite Jest* self-consciously performs a Bloomian tessera of *Ulysses*. By refashioning the epistemological parallax effect of *Ulysses* as an ontological parallax, *Infinite Jest* produces what can be considered an epistemological Doppler effect in the reading process. The novel consists of two consecutive read-throughs, an infinitely looping, postmodern reading and a redemptive, closure-providing reading. The ontological shift in the reader's perspective necessary to exit *Infinite Jest's* addictive text, provoked through an exploitation of the novel's structural features, can be described as a shift from the projections of Euclidean geometry to those of a non-Euclidean geometry. *Infinite Jest* becomes a text that is longer than its page numbers as it oscillates between coexistent postmodernist and modernist readings. In order to surpass postmodernism, *Infinite Jest* attempts to achieve the modernist aims of reconstituting meaning and order taken from *Ulysses* with the postmodernist means of an ontological poetics, self-reflexive metafiction, and postmodern intertextuality²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Parts of this chapter have been published as "Modernist Aims with Postmodern Mean: Joycean Parallax and the Doppler Effect in Wallace's *Infinite Jest*."

Parallax in Wallace's Fiction

The term 'parallax' appears throughout Wallace's work. Not only do both his early and late writings display an understanding of the phenomenon, but they also connect it to its use in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Wallace's engagement with *Ulysses* and its use of parallax becomes apparent as early as 1991, when, in the uncollected short story "Flux and Order in Northampton," the phenomenon of parallactic distortion is described. Making its Joycean heritage more than explicit, the story features "a professional student [...] presently at work on [...] an exhaustive study of [...] *Ulysses*" and, tellingly, a "Reproduction Technician" (Wallace, "Order and Flux"), "incorporates allusions to 'Oxen of the Sun'" (Burn, *Reader's Guide* 24), veers off into a 'Wandering Rocks'-like climax, and is even set on June 15, the day before Bloomsday. Making the Joyce copy complete, "Order and Flux in Northampton," the title already displaying the typically Joycean theme of flux and order, describes cross-eyed Barry Dingle's perception of the visual displacement of an image multiply refracted as "parallaxed" (Wallace, "Order and Flux"). This shows that at least as early as 1991, Wallace's writing not only employs the phenomenon of parallax, but also links it to Joyce's *Ulysses*. Notably, the publication of the short story coincides with what, judging from a letter by Wallace to Marshall Boswell, can be seen as the productive phase of Wallace's composition of *Infinite Jest*: Wallace began the book "or something like it, several times. '86, '88, '89. None of it worked or was alive. And then in '91-'92 all of a sudden it did" (qtd. in Burn, "'Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing'" 59). Taking into account the surge in Joycean parallels from the "hints at the edges of *The Broom of the System*" (Burn, *Reader's Guide* 24) to the conscious thematization of *Ulysses* in "Order and Flux in Northampton" and the "Joycean template" (Burn, *Reader's Guide* 25) of *Infinite Jest*, the discovery of "the imaginative potential of revisiting modernism in general, and James Joyce's work in particular" (Burn, *Reader's Guide* 24) must be seen as at least partially responsible for *Infinite Jest* suddenly starting to "work" in 1991. Especially its reinterpretation of Joyce's parallactic method of making the readers superimpose opposing perspectives in order to achieve a reintegrative, "fuller vision of life" (Heusel 135), appears to be central to *Infinite Jest*'s coming "alive" and being able to overcome postmodern irony.

Systematic Misattributions: Completing Joyce's Tessera

In addition to other references to James Joyce already mentioned, the term 'parallax' appears twice in *Infinite Jest*. However, unlike in the earlier short story "Order and Flux in Northampton," 'parallax' in *Infinite Jest* undergoes a striking transformation. The term is solely, and incorrectly, applied to auditory rather than visual phenomena. During one of Randy Lenz's nightly walks through the city, *Infinite Jest* hence describes the "night-noises of the metro night" as "parallaxing in from out over the city's winking grid" (556). Notably, this description of the "[r]eceding sirens" (556) Lenz hears as "parallaxing" does not fit the definition of parallax. Instead, what is being described here is far more akin to what is known as the Doppler effect. The Doppler effect refers to "an increase (or decrease) in the apparent frequency of sound, light, or other waves as the source and the observer move towards (or away from) each other" (*OED* "Doppler effect"). In fact, the phenomenon of the sound of receding sirens or the change of perception of the sound of a passing vehicle are the most common examples of the Doppler effect in our daily life to the point of having become popular textbook examples for the phenomenon (Zitzewitz and McGraw-Hill 407).

Considering the correct use of 'parallax' both before *Infinite Jest* and after it in §8 of *The Pale King* (Wallace, *TPK* 55), this misattribution is more than coincidental. Following the same pattern, the other instance of 'parallax' given in *Infinite Jest* also uses the term incorrectly. Representing what can be considered the textbook example of the Doppler effect, Joelle van Dyne remembers an "oncoming taxi" hailed by JOI in the middle of nowhere²¹⁵ as "undergoing a sort of parallax as it bore down tumbleweed streets" (225). Thus, *Infinite Jest* consistently uses the word 'parallax' where it means 'Doppler effect.'

At the same time, while *Infinite Jest* describes auditory Doppler effect phenomena as 'parallax,' the term 'Doppler effect' is used to describe phenomena that actually constitute a parallactic shift. The way *Infinite Jest* uses 'Doppler effect' while referring to 'parallax,' consistent with its misattribution of the Doppler effect as 'parallax,' can for example be seen in

²¹⁵ Interestingly, JOI is described as "the world's best hailer of Boston cabs" (225) whereas in Ulysses, Bloom, the character most concerned with 'parallax,' is said to be "anything but a professional whistler [for cabs]" (J. Joyce, *Ulysses* 569).

the description of C.T.'s appearance. *Infinite Jest* notes that, when he is angry, Charles Tavis “seems, *perspectivally*, to grow [...] *dopplering* in at a whisper” (526; emphasis mine). What is described here as “dopplering” (526) is a perspectival and visual phenomenon, C.T.'s visual image seemingly growing as if suddenly seen from another perspective. However, the difference between two images resulting from a change of perspective is clearly defined as the effect of parallax. Indeed, the characterization of C.T. is deeply interwoven with the perspectival and parallaxic. Thus, the disastrous end of his career as an architect in the design of a “SkyDome ballpark-and-hotel complex” where “spectators at a distressing number of different points all along both foul-lines could see right into the windows of guests having various and sometimes exotic sex in the hotel bedrooms over the center-field wall” (516) is ultimately due to C.T.'s failure to consider parallax, different points of view. “[S]kewing” (526) depth perception, overriding the superimposition of different points of view, at least in his function in this scene, where references to perspectival shifts, incongruent eyes (520), and different forms of vision in general abound, Charles Tavis is wholly perspectival, his body's size being “less endocrine than perspectival” (519). Allegedly the inspiration for the rear-view mirror JOI invented, whose convexity produces a parallaxic shift that causes objects in the mirror to be closer than they appear (1036), Charles Tavis is a living parallaxic distortion. Impeding stereoscopic vision, C.T. produces an “essential vagueness about himself” resulting from “the fact that the two sides of his face didn't quite go together” (521), not allowing their superimposition into a complete whole. Thus, C.T.'s unreconciled parallaxing, rather than dopplering, is responsible for the paradox of the dishonest aspect of his complete honesty. As with the visual image he projects, the moral image of his self-reflexively self-reflexive honesty, C.T. being “the openest man of all time” (517), resists reconciliation. As den Dulk argues with reference to Kierkegaard, “liberation from [...] irony cannot be achieved through the ironizing of irony” (den Dulk, “Beyond Endless ‘Aesthetic’ Irony” 325). Self-reflexive self-reflexiveness does not make one more open.²¹⁶ As one can see, the “depth-perspective skewing that C.T. [...] effects” (526) is in fact misnamed as “dopplering” (526). It is actually a product of ‘parallax.’

²¹⁶ As a reformed Hal later discovers, “Modern German is better equipped for combining gerundives and prepositions than its mongrel cousin” (900), meaning that German, through its grammatical structure, will

This pattern of substituting ‘parallax’ with ‘Doppler effect’ and vice versa continues when, toward the end of the novel, Hal observes a pattern of his phone’s digital recorder’s and the smoke detector’s “two lights flashing in synch on every seventh phone-flash and then moving slowly apart” which he describes as “a visual Doppler” (852). Again, a visual phenomenon is described as undergoing a Doppler effect. That this phenomenon, albeit not involving spatial displacement, is more conceptually similar to parallax than it is to the Doppler effect becomes apparent if one replaces the variable of space, the point of observation in space, with that of time, the point of observation in time, in the usual definition of parallax. The parallactic phenomenon Hal describes here, i.e., the synching of the two lights, is not conditioned by Hal’s movement in space, a change of spatial perspective, but his movement in time, his temporal perspective. As with our regular understanding of parallax, where, in changing points of view, a close object appears to move while the further away background appears to be non-moving, allowing for the visual effect of one object obstructing the other from a certain point of observation, here, too, an alteration of the temporal vantage point of observation leads to the impression of an overlaying of the two “unsyncopated flashes” (852). Thus, again, the far more fitting word for the synching Hal observes would be parallax, or temporal parallax, rather than “visual Doppler.”

A notable exception to this pattern of misnomers can be found in the third mention of the Doppler effect in *Infinite Jest* located in endnote 304. Here, while relating “*Le Jeu du Prochain Train*” (1059), the term “Doppler Effect” (1059) is used correctly the only time in the book, describing the sound of an approaching train. While within the novel proper, parallax and Doppler effect are interchanged for each other, the endnotes use the term correctly. This allows conclusions about the status of *Infinite Jest*’s endnotes in relation to the rest of the novel. *Infinite Jest*’s endnotes, although containing critical information, are detached from what must

realize a phrase like “feigning feigning” (900) as an adjectivized gerundive and a nominalized verb. This adjective describes everything that comes after it as dishonest, whereas English, because it does not overtly distinguish between the two forms, allows for the misconception that “feigning feigning” (900), or ironizing ironizing, even out and allow an entry into honest, non-ironic discourse. This also shows how *Infinite Jest*, contrary to early readings such as that of A.O. Scott in “The Panic of Influence” that have, even though already heavily disputed, found their way into essays such as David Vichnar’s “Parallaxing Joyce In Contemporary American Fiction: Foster Wallace, Goldsmith, Danielewski,” does not ironize irony but in fact highlights the very aporia of this. Ironizing irony is still ultimately the same kind of alienating irony *Infinite Jest* criticizes. Vichnar follows a similar trajectory as this chapter but comes to a different solution.

be seen as the novel proper, inhabiting a different ontological sphere. This for instance becomes apparent in the way Pemulis, expelled from E.T.A., is also relegated out of the text into endnote 332, leaving a gap on page 795. The endnotes are thus not only used to provide more or less valuable information, fragment and detemporalize the reading process, but also establish another ontological sphere within *Infinite Jest*. Therefore, the rules of systematic misattribution of Doppler effect and parallax that govern the main text seem not to apply to the endnotes.

In the light of *Infinite Jest*'s self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition, these misattributions of the terms 'parallax' and 'Doppler effect' can be seen as systematic. Wallace's defamiliarizing, synaesthetic style of describing these visual and auditory phenomena thus becomes meaningful when viewed in the wider context of the consistency with which the focalizing characters' misnomers exchange one term for the other. Operating from within a Ulyssean framework, *Infinite Jest* marks the Doppler effect as its version of Joycean parallax by systematically replacing one term with the other. This can be understood as a literalized enactment of the model of literary influence Harold Bloom theorizes as the tessera-completion, in which "[a] poet antithetically 'completes' his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense" (Bloom 14; emphasis mine). As Lucas Thompson could show in *Global Wallace*, despite "the disagreement between Bloom and Wallace" (Thompson, *Global Wallace* 43), Wallace's work is informed by a reading of Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. Thompson argues that Wallace appropriates Bloom's notion of tessera as one strategy of "engagement with antecedent sources" (Thompson, *Global Wallace* 39). However, "Wallace emptied the anxiety out of the term *tessera*," demystifying Bloom's notion of literary influence as "neurotically antagonistic" (Thompson, *Global Wallace* 195). Thus, while not constituting a 'tessera' in the Bloomian sense, originally meant as an unconscious act of indeliberate misapprehension on the 'strong poet's' behalf (Bloom 30), Wallace's systematic misattribution of parallax and Doppler effect literalizes the tessera-completion. *Infinite Jest* literally retains the categorical language of *Ulysses*, i.e., its use of parallax, but gives it a new meaning in its 1990s misprision of the Ulyssean theme. Perceiving the Theory of the Yale School such as Bloom's, and poststructuralism and postmodernism in general, as having become an internalized dimension of the cultural discourse of the US-American society his

novels depict and envision as their audience, Wallace renders Bloom's theory of authorial influence a useful utensil for engaging with *Ulysses* in *Infinite Jest*.

Repeatedly borrowing and rethinking critical terminology, in this case emptying Bloom's formulations of their original meaning and taking them literally, Wallace treats literary theory as an intertext. His texts "explicitly invit[ing] particular theoretical analyses" (Thompson, *Global Wallace* 47), Wallace seems to turn the tables on literary theory by literarily appropriating and self-consciously enacting theory. This informedness by theory, typical for literature after postmodernism as Wallace himself professes in "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young" and Kelly further elaborates in "Beginning with Postmodernism," shows itself exemplarily in *Infinite Jest*'s use of Bloom. Thus, rather than subscribing to or serving as an example of Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, Wallace's construction of a (faux-)tessera of *Ulysses* through misnomers self-consciously mobilizes a Theory it views as part of a larger, postmodernist cultural vocabulary in order to revisit and modify the modernist *Ulysses*. The novel constructs its reinterpretation of Joycean parallax as a (misread) tessera, turning the postmodernist into a means toward the ends of recovering *Ulysses*. Theory in *Infinite Jest* thereby becomes an aesthetic tool, the novel engaging with the book about (Leopold) Bloom via a book by (Harold) Bloom.

Euclidean and non-Euclidean Readings: Ontological Parallax and Epistemological Doppler Effect

Clearly, both Joyce and his theme of parallax are discussed in *Infinite Jest*. However, the novel enhances Joyce's pattern with the concept of the Doppler effect. Thus appropriating and modifying Joyce's use of parallax, *Infinite Jest* attempts to provide an alternative to the postmodern view deemed solipsistic. As will be shown, in order to escape the addictive potential of the text, the reader is asked to perform an ontological parallax, a fundamental shift in the way she views the text, from a postmodern to a reintegrative perspective. The reader can then experience an epistemological Doppler effect. The novel transcends its material boundaries in the reader's performance of reading by consisting of a solipsizing, cynical and a sincere and epistemologically stable read-through.

In the stereoscopic ‘Ithaca’ chapter of *Ulysses*, the “parallel courses” (619) of the binary opposite forces of Stephen and Bloom “unite by parallax” (Heusel 143) to form a more stable and meaningful vision of life. This parallactic reintegration is also depicted in the shift from a Euclidean geometry to a non-Euclidean geometry (Wilcox 643–49) *Ulysses* displays in the image of “parallel lines meeting at infinity” (682). Whereas in Euclidean geometry two parallel lines can never share a point of intersection, non-Euclidean geometry postulates parallel lines uniting at the point of infinity, elliptically folding back on themselves. This completion is reached in *Ulysses* in the infinity of the ‘Penelope’ chapter (Gifford and Seidman 610) when “in the unique, parallactic vision of Molly Bloom, Bloom and Stephen are conjoined” (Kiczek 302).

Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry play a central role in *Infinite Jest*’s parallax/Doppler-theme as well.²¹⁷ *Infinite Jest* associates a Euclidean perspective with American cynicism, the solipsism produced by postmodern irony as a cultural norm. Thus, Schtitt refers to “the efficiently quickly straight of Euclid” (81) as a decidedly American myth, US Americans being the chief victims of postmodern solipsism (Goerlandt 312). In contrast to Schtitt’s “Cantorian” (82) and thus non-Euclidean philosophy,²¹⁸ a philosophy Mario, the epitome of sincerity and redemption in *Infinite Jest* “is an enormous fan of” (81), the Euclidean “acknowledged primacy of straight-line pursuing” is portrayed as the only real American “public consensus” (83) there is. *Infinite Jest* proposes a non-Euclidean perspective as a hopeful and integrative alternative to the postmodern cynicism associated with a Euclidean point of view. While this postmodern solipsism renders the sky a “flat square coldly Euclidean grid” (542), a non-Euclidean perspective is said to draw the sky in the reconciliatory image of “a kindly curved blue dome” (542). According to Jacobs, a “Euclidean belief system” renders most of the characters of *Infinite Jest* “spiritually dead” (Jacobs, “The Brothers Incandenza” 276).

²¹⁷ The following part elaborates on ideas of Euclidean and non-Euclidean readings of the novel I have previously commented on in a different context in “The Perils of Self-Consciousness: Heinrich von Kleist’s ‘Über Das Marionettentheater’ in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*” published in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. While my paper on Kleist and Wallace investigates *Infinite Jest* in the context of an essay by the German romantic author, this chapter places *Infinite Jest* in a Ulyssean Tradition. It elaborates on my prior findings by introducing the concepts of ontological parallax and epistemological Doppler effect and the conclusion that this strategy can be seen as exemplary of a metamodern movement using postmodernist techniques to achieve goals reminiscent of those of modernism.

²¹⁸ The mathematician Georg Cantor’s set theory is an important example for non-Euclideanism Wallace discusses extensively in his non-fiction book on infinity *Everything and More*.

They are immobilized by their cynical attitude toward existence and meaning. Such an outlook of generalized irony can be referred to as Euclidean since the two meanings of an ironic utterance never converge, language, perpetually only referring to more language, running parallel to the world without hope for any meaningful, transcendent intersection.²¹⁹

Such a Euclidean perspective can be shown to represent the ironic attitude that produces the “addictive loop” (Goerlandt 325) the novel forms. By utilizing its structural properties, most importantly the linearity of the reading process, its achronological narration, and the one-year gap between end and beginning of the novel, *Infinite Jest*’s “lack of information needed to close the gap” (Goerlandt 322) denies closure to a reader with a Euclidean perspective, i.e., one for whom the novel’s parallel lines cannot cross. While the novel’s plot-lines appear to converge and nearly intersect by the end of the novel, the novel’s parallel protagonists, Hal and Gately, never meet within the novel nor can the novel’s ambiguities be satisfactorily resolved into coherency by a deconstructive approach. To the skeptical ironist, such reintegrative closure can only appear naïve, issues such as the mystifying presence/absence of JOI’s head, and therefore also a *Ulysses*-like meeting of Gately and Hal as it is both foreshadowed and remembered in the novel, yet never represented, not resolving themselves on the level of narration. As Iannis Goerlandt comments on the novel’s addictiveness, such a reader is forced to addictively cycle back to the beginning of the novel “in search of clues to support one’s interpretation” (Goerlandt 323). These addictive loops of rereading *Infinite Jest*, amassing more information with each read-through but never enough to resolve the plot completely, can only be leapt out of if the reader manages to perform a shift of perspective by becoming conscious of the text’s superstructure (Goerlandt 324). This would constitute an ontological rather than Joyceanly epistemological parallax. A change of the reader’s perspective from a Euclidean, ironic reading to a non-Euclidean one can end “the addictive projection in the recursive loop” (Goerlandt 325) and allows the reader to exit the text. As the mathematician Roberto Natalini remarks, in order to “understand what really happens in the novel [...] we have to change our point of view” (Natalini 249), i.e., readjust our projections from a Euclidean to a non-Euclidean perspective.

²¹⁹ Notably, whereas *Gravity’s Rainbow* represents its own, postmodernist project as a countermeasure against rationalism’s ideology of straight lines, *Infinite Jest* depicts postmodernist irony itself as having turned ‘straight,’ that is having been absorbed into the dominant discourse and thus become life-denying.

This readerly adjustment of perspective can be seen as a literary (and again literalized and consciously misread) appropriation of Wolfgang Iser's concept of the 'Leerstelle,' the 'gaps' or 'blanks' a text leaves for the reader to fill. Iser points out that "[i]t is only through readjustments of his own projections that the reader can experience something previously not within his experience" (Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* 167), namely, in *Infinite Jest's* case, closure. Only through a readjustment of the reader's projections from those relying on an ironic reading associated with Euclideanism to a non-Euclidean, reintegrative one, can the literal Leerstelle of *Infinite Jest*, its one-year gap, function as a way out of the text rather than coerce the reader to continue her addicted reading by ironically looping back to the novel's opening.²²⁰ These loops can only be ended if the reader finds a different, non-ironic perspective from which to view the novel, resulting in a redemption from postmodern solipsism and a (quite literal) closure of the novel.

The addictive potential of an inability to change one's postmodern perspective of existential irony also becomes evident in *Infinite Jest's* description of the optical side-effects of drug abuse. Addiction, as already shown both symptom and cause of solipsism in *Infinite Jest*, is directly linked to one-eyed vision. Thus, the fact that "Lenz's right eyeball is wobbling" (605) is to Gately a sure sign of Lenz's relapse into drug abuse. Similarly, elsewhere the effect of drugs is described as causing "ocular nystagmus" (983), involuntary eye movement. These "wobbling" (228), "nystagmus" (939) -like characteristics are also attributed to JOI's 'Infinite Jest,' the incredibly addictive movie Bartlett shows fails where the novel succeeds, being as addictive as the novel of the same name but lacking its redemptive potential (Bartlett 385). With Wallace seeing ironic TV culture as analogous to alcoholism ("E Unibus Pluram" 163), addiction, a correlative of postmodern cynicism in general, is both a result of and reason for an inability to change one's perspective. In Wallace's diagnosis of US culture, postmodernism has become the central cultural discourse of a solipsistic American society. In this culture, detached

²²⁰ Evidently, this is not what Iser means by the Leerstelle. According to Iser, a "fundamental asymmetry between text and reader" (Iser 167) constitutes the reading process per se, not only those with an actually missing chapter. The one-year gap of *Infinite Jest*, a literal Leerstelle, functions as an intertextual marker pointing toward Iser's theories. *Infinite Jest* performs a literal reading or misprision of Iser's theoretical work, extending intertextuality to theoretical texts. What appears at first sight to be a perfectly fitting example for a theoretical concept, and at second sight a logical fallacy on behalf of the interpreter, is in fact a complex aestheticization of literary theory.

irony provides the sole perspective through which the world is perceived, a monoscopic primacy of double-entendres and abstraction against which Wallace's envisioned resurgence of "single-entendre values" ("E Unibus Pluram" 192) sets itself off. Just as *Infinite Jest*'s addicts only see through one eye, the addicted reader, too, views the text only from a single, ironic and Euclidean perspective. In order to end their addictions, both *Infinite Jest*'s characters and the reader of the novel have to perform the leap of faith AA calls for. As Thompson argues, the reader is "asked to perform a genuine act of trust" (Thompson, "'Sincerity with a Motive" 371), the readjustment of her projections in face of the uncertainty of the epistemological gap *Infinite Jest* creates. Likewise, in the program "it didn't matter [...] what he [Gately] thought or believed or even said. All that mattered was what he *did*" (466). Since the Leerstelle which calls for the experience changing ontological parallax shift is inherently speculative, the leap of faith *Infinite Jest* demands in order to end its annular loops is also represented in the unconditional trust AA calls for. Through what Robert Bolger in the context of his reading of Wallace's "This is Water" calls "epistemic humility" (Bolger 41), the reader of *Infinite Jest* has to actively change her perspective in spite of postmodern skepticism and exercise "the freedom to choose a new story [...] on pragmatic grounds" (Bolger 43). Like the woman who "involuntarily toxified" her unborn child and, in the cycles of solipsist addiction, "wanted only tall smooth bottles whose labels spoke of Proof" (378), the addicted reader loops through the novel in search of information that proves her interpretation. However, although the reader's experience is that such a rereading does allow her further insights, e.g., a knowledge of the novel's chronology, its calendar only revealed 223 pages into the novel, helping in her pursuit of understanding, the novel in this reading seems, like a Pynchon novel, constructed so as to never allow its ambiguities to resolve completely. Read from a postmodernist perspective, the novel thus resembles Wallace's TV programs designed to "ensure continued watching" (Wallace, "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young" 52). The reader must pragmatically change her perspective in order to end these cycles. Although this shift of point of view cannot be justified to the cynic, it allows for an exit from the novel's addictive loops, posing a more positive, though not 'provable,' alternative to postmodern solipsism. In this way, *Infinite Jest* engages in a discourse Vermeulen and Van den Akker identify in all of metamodernism, a

conscious commitment to an “impossible possibility,” acknowledging “that history’s purpose will never be fulfilled because it does not exist” but pragmatically “taking toward it *as if* it does exist” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 5).

As can be seen in C.T.’s catastrophic disregard of point of view, *Infinite Jest* places great importance on perspective. The novel performs annular loops on a number of different narrative levels. As in Hal’s observation of the “visual Doppler” (852), a temporal parallax dependent on position in time rather than position in space, the reader’s shift of perspective due to her progress through the text will change the way she views the text. *Infinite Jest*’s overall annular and infinite structure is thereby mirrored for example in the way endnote 304 performs the same recursive reading as the whole novel. Preparing the reader for its greater, looping structure, a reading of *Infinite Jest* will repeatedly find its way back to endnote 304. Each encounter with the endnote prompts a perspectively different reading of the same text. Depending on the location in the text proper from which the reader is redirected to the endnote, i.e., depending on the reader’s progress through the text, her reading of the endnote changes. While a reader who encounters endnote 304 for the first time should view the endnote for its information on the AFR, an advanced reader, redirected to endnote 304 for the last time from the point of view of page 732, has by then already collected information about the terrorist group but is now able to see the convergence of the otherwise separate elements of the novel that happens in this endnote. Its subject is the terrorist AFR, its focalizer is an E.T.A. student, and it is Ennet House resident G. Day whose text is being plagiarized in this endnote (1056). In the act of rereading from different textual vantage points, the endnote’s interpretation changes while at the same time not overwriting prior interpretations. Thus, the endnote that had before contained important information on the AFR can now, viewed from page 732, be seen as a testimony of Day’s alcoholism. A reader viewing endnote 304 from the perspective of page 732, by then knowing that Day is an alcoholic, is able to note the irony of Stuck’s remark that the author “seemed to get more and more tipsy as the thing went on” (1060). A reader that has by then already encountered Day as a recovering alcoholic will know that this had been most probably the case. The endnote is thus subject to a readerly parallactic shift, the reader’s relative position in the novel conditioning the ontology of the endnote. Even though the reader is

reading the same endnote repeatedly, viewing it from different perspectives in the reading process changes the nature of said endnote while at the same time not dismissing prior interpretations.

This phenomenon is also observable in the overall, annular scheme of the novel. Consisting of multiple looping read-throughs, *Infinite Jest*'s ontological parallax creates a novel that is longer than its page numbers. This can also be seen in the way the novel's opening changes its meaning without dismissing prior readings. Thus, a reader on her first read-through will see Hal's "I am in here" (3) as drawing the picture of an estranged, solipsistic postmodern being. Seemingly unable to communicate, Hal is depicted as a figurant as JOI's ghost describes it (835). Trapped inside his skull, Hal not only deconstructs the persons surrounding him into fragmentary conglomerates of "heads and bodies" (3) but is also unable to relate even his own body, failing to make definite statements about his movement in space. As a postmodern Stephen Dedalus, a young but alienated genius, fragmented and "alone" (8), Hal "cannot make [him]self understood" (10). On the other hand, however, a reader who has already looped through *Infinite Jest* should be able to change her perspective, interpreting Hal's situation as diametrically opposite to the figurant state. To the reader equipped with the knowledge of the novel's chronology and end and sensitive to the negative effects of irony, a 'sincere' reader, Hal now becomes "in here" (3) rather than "Out There" (273), AA's term for an addicted, solipsistic existence. In such an actively redemptive and sincere reading Hal is no longer "robotic" (694) and only capable of manipulating his exterior in order to "satisfy everyone but himself that he's in there, inside his own hull, as a human being" (694), but a real, caring human being and "not a machine" (12).

This second, reparative reading of the novel's opening further underlines the novel's position in the Ulyssean Tradition through its allusive reenactment of what Hugh Kenner calls Joyce's "Uncle Charles Principle" (Kenner 18). Hence, if the perspectival shift *Infinite Jest* seeks to effect in the reader can, as noted in the previous chapters, be understood as a shift from a masculine to a feminine and from a private to a public language, Hal here must also be understood as such an effeminate, public language user if he is to be seen as freed from his solipsism. On the one hand, the enigma of Hal's simultaneous inability to be understood by the

surrounding characters and the perfect coherency of his speech to the reader is a primary question of the novel. One tantalizing question the novel poses is what happened to this character for him to have turned into this confounding state. On the other hand, the way the men around him perceive Hal as only making sounds “like an animal” (14) can also be read as him having recovered from his alienating privacy and “now” (10) inhabiting a communal form of life so different from the dominant discourse of America, masculinist privacy, he becomes unintelligible to them. As Wittgenstein remarks, a difference in form of life, and thus in the conventions and rules that govern the usage of language, might make a speaker unintelligible to someone with another form of life: Wittgenstein’s comment that “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him” (*Philosophical Investigations* 225) echoes through the opening’s references to the sound of drowning goats and a “shaggy lion of a Dean” (3). As could be shown, the reintegrative, communal and feminine language the novel proposes must be perceived as catatonic and unintelligible from the novel’s dominant, masculine and ironic vantage point. Hal appears to have turned into this effeminate other. He, too, is being perceived as “catatonic” (15) and unintelligible. In order to “regain control” over the situation, the men present at the interview drag Hal into “the old-fashioned men’s room[...],” where they pin him to “the geometric tile” (13) as if to reestablish normative gender constellations, place him once again in a Euclidean grid, and control the abject body. Unlike the solipsistic Hal of the rest of the novel, Hal is now able to “feel and *believe*” (12, emphasis mine) and “talk and talk” (12). Hal’s withdrawal from substance abuse at the end of the novel might have been successful or he might have been dosed with the gender-transmigrative drug DMZ,²²¹ allowing him an entry into a redeeming public language game and femininity.

Notably, Hal here does not evince his usual estrangement from the family. In contrast to the rest of the novel, Hal appears to accept the notion of family resemblances. Hal is thus finally able to refer to his uncle Charles Tavis, whose familial relation to Hal is the most uncertain one out of all of Hal’s relatives and to whom Hal otherwise only refers to as C.T., by the familiar

²²¹ As the novel’s endnote 352 states, toothbrushes at E.T.A. are in perpetual danger of being meddled with. Notably, Hal’s transformation at the end of the novel is repeatedly accompanied by conspicuously unmotivated references to his toothbrush and ghostly presences at the school (870), heavily implying that the wraith has spiked Hal’s toothbrush with the by that point conveniently missing DMZ.

address “Uncle Charles” (3). In Hal’s family resemblance with his “Uncle Charles” (3), Joyce returns in a reference to Joyce’s “Uncle Charles Principle” (Kenner 18). The Uncle Charles Principle, the intrusion of a character’s “*narrative idiom*” (Kenner 18) in Joyce’s form of free indirect discourse, strikingly reminiscent of the “invasions of lexical terms” (833) Gately experiences in his encounter with the auteur-wraith – and which the reader experiences in her encounter with the ghostly author –, establishes interiority. Joyce’s device metafictionally transposed, Wallace’s Uncle Charles Principle allows to see the author behind and outside the text and thus a family resemblance of author and reader that provides the grounds for a reparative reading that leaves the text.

Depending on the reader’s perspective, Hal can hence also be seen as the exact opposite of the estranged solipsist.²²² A shift of perspective on the reader’s behalf to a non-Euclidean reading, serving as a metaphor for an ontological parallaxic shift to the novel’s superstructure, can provide closure to both Hal’s situation (a redemptive meeting like the one between Stephen and Bloom in *Ulysses* will have happened, though outside the novel’s narration) and thereby the addictive reading process. Due to the novel’s narrative structure, both interpretations coexist in oscillation (Goerlandt 323). However, while both readings are presented as equally valid, the novel invites the reader to assume a closure-providing, non-Euclidean perspective.

By exploiting its structural features, *Infinite Jest*’s ontological parallaxing forms an oscillating text, providing for opposing, yet coexistent readings. As Goerlandt shows discussing the undecidability of the existence or non-existence of JOI’s head, *Infinite Jest*’s narrative structure creates blind spots leading to a “certain amount of ambivalence” (Goerlandt 323). While Hal thus remembers “standing watch in a mask as Donald Gately and I dig up my father’s head” (17), the place where the master copy of the Entertainment supposedly is, and Gately in the end of the novel has a supposedly prophetic dream about digging up “the dead guy with the head” (934) with Hal, this is in complete contradiction to what the reader knows from page 251 onwards: everything *but* JOI’s head exists after his microwave suicide that “deconstructed” (251) his head. Such quantum-state-like incongruities, like, e.g., Jamf’s existence or non-

²²² This shift of perspective is also signaled by Hal’s narrative turning from third- to first-person narration in the end and opening of the novel.

existence in *Gravity's Rainbow*, drive the loops of the novel's hermeneutics of suspicion. Their solution should lie in the novel's one-year-gap. However, since *Infinite Jest* cannot leave behind its postmodernist discourse and thus represent such closure itself, it must remain a gap to be filled in by the reader as co-creator of meaning. The Leerstelle, as Goerlandt notes, is central to *Infinite Jest*'s construction of an oscillating structure dependent on projection rather than content-based interpretation. While, according to Goerlandt, on the one hand prompting an annularly looping reading process, the gap can also serve as the "way out" (981) and "EXIT" (8) the text marks it as on its edges (Goerlandt 324). Since the closure of the novel, situated in the one-year gap, can only be speculated on, leaping out of the loop must necessarily be a leap of faith. The reader is thus called to simply trust that, in spite of what her ironic attitude lets her assume, the novel's narrative lines converge. A non-Euclidean perspective does not deny that the two meanings of an ironic utterance run parallel to one another. However, by assuming a non-Euclidean perspective, these parallel lines of the ironic utterance can be seen to reintegratively converge in infinity. Rather than altogether rejecting postmodernism as incoherent, *Infinite Jest* proposes a reintegrative reading to be performed by the reader as simply another alternative, a non-Euclideanism that does not abolish Euclidean geometry but can serve to enhance it and to allow for new insights. Closure can only be achieved through a change of perspective. Therefore, while the incomplete circle on the bottom right of page 982 can be seen as "an invitation to loop addictively [...] to the beginning of the novel" (Wayne Ch III), Goerlandt points out that to a reader who has changed her perspective, "the quarter cycle could be considered a loophole" (Goerlandt 324). Seen as a loophole, it allows the reader to write the unobservable, infinitely speculative "missing chapter *outside* of the narration" (Goerlandt 324).

However, this escape from the text is only possible through the reader's acknowledgement "that the novel's ambiguity [...] cannot be resolved on the level of narration" (Goerlandt 325) and thus an awareness of the material reality and superstructure of *Infinite Jest*, that is, a presence that transcends the text. The novel represents this by mobilizing the notion of infinity. As in *Ulysses*, where, in the original edition, a big period mark concludes the last

chapter of the novel (Gifford and Seidman 12) followed by a ‘chapter’ of infinity²²³ in which, following non-Euclidean geometry, the two protagonists’ parallel lines meet in a moment of meaningful reintegration in parallax, *Infinite Jest* ends with a distinctly marked, incomplete circle followed by the ‘missing chapter’ of the one year gap, unobservable and hence infinitely speculative and outside of the novel’s time. However, while *Ulysses* narrates the infinity of ‘Penelope’ and its reintegration of epistemological parallax in a shift from Euclidean to non-Euclidean geometry, *Infinite Jest* raises this Ulyssean strategy to the level of superstructure and the reading process.²²⁴ As Goerlandt points out, “the text seems to thematize Iser’s concept of the *Leerstelle* (gaps)” (Goerlandt 321). Wallace’s reinterpretation of Joyce’s use of Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry thus picks up on and consciously misreads Iser’s mathematical language of projections along different axes. Literalizing theory, *Infinite Jest*’s goal of establishing a real communication between author and reader through the Ulyssean Tradition turns reception aesthetics into a textual aesthetic. The novel utilizes the reader’s ‘projections’ into the novel’s off-stage, missing chapter – a gap in the text that marks itself as an infinity between the novel’s end and opening similar to the infinity Cantor’s set theory posits between natural numbers. Euclidean projections, associated with the postmodern generalized skepticism that prompts addictive behavior from the novel’s substance abusers to its reader’s endless deconstructions, cannot project the desired intersection into this infinity. The reader must regress to the novel’s opening since the incongruences and ambiguities of the novel’s narration perpetually appear incapable of resolving into the promised coherency. In order to experience a reintegration through parallax like that of Stephen and Bloom in *Ulysses*, a reader of *Infinite Jest* is invited to perform an ontological shift of perspective metaphorically represented in a shift to a non-Euclidean geometry. Such a geometry can project an intersection of parallel lines

²²³ While Joyce considers ‘Ithaca’ “in reality the end” (Letters I 172) of the novel, the Linati scheme marks ‘Penelope’ as temporally set in infinity (Gifford and Seidman 610).

²²⁴ Notably, a “commodius vicus of recirculation” (J. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* 3) already connected the beginning and end of Joyce’s cyclic *Finnegans Wake*, a work influential postmodernism scholars like Brian McHale and Ihab Hassan identify as a “postmodernist work” (Hassan 88). As McHale remarks, while, “[a]s modernist texts, ‘The Dead’ and *Ulysses* project unified ontological planes” (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 234), with the possible exception of the “ontological volatility” (McHale, “Henry Roth in Nighttown, or, Containing *Ulysses*” 91) of Joyce’s ‘Circe’ chapter, *Finnegans Wake* transgresses ontological boundaries. McHale argues that, amongst other aspects, the novel’s circularity, modelling “not only the ontological limit of death, but also the dream of a return” (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 235), is already exemplary of postmodernist fiction. Clearly, this circularity is also already apparent in Pynchon’s permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition.

into a point of infinity beyond the novel's right frame. While the novel cannot narrate this reintegration without reverting to a by now impossible pre-postmodern style, a performative shift in the reader's perspective that acknowledges a textual level above the characters and narrator – an 'outside-text' inconceivable to the deconstructive reader – can produce such redemptive closure. This would constitute the conception of art as "a living transaction between humans" (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 41) into which the reader has to "put in her share of the linguistic work" (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 34) Wallace's writing aims at. Such an acknowledgement of the novel's superstructure by overcoming postmodern ironic reading, Goerlandt shows, results in closure, allowing the reader to break out of the novel's loops: "On the level of narration, Hal can still speak of an existing head because we as readers do not as yet know from the narrative that [JOI's] head does not exist. Gately cannot speak of an existing head because at that point readers know what has happened" (Goerlandt 323).²²⁵ The novel can only achieve closure if the reader shifts her perspective ontologically to outside of the novel. The leap of faith from a hermeneutics of suspicion into a form of "credulous metafiction" (Konstantinou, *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction* 181) thereby raises awareness to the process of reading, the novel as material object, and, lastly, the author as its producer. Enigmas such as JOI's both existent and missing head resolve themselves when acknowledging the novel's superstructure. *Infinite Jest* creates a literal Leerstelle that, since unobservable, remains the space of infinite speculation (Hager) to the reader, necessitating an ontological shift of perspective on the reader's behalf in order to reach closure. The reader is thus invited to *choose* a non-Euclidean projection into the gap and thus assume, on purely pragmatic grounds, a redemptive closure of the novel, rereading the novel from a new, reintegrative perspective.

This interpretation is supported by Wallace's own statement that in *Infinite Jest*, "[c]ertain kind of parallel lines are supposed to start converging in such a way that an 'end' can be projected by the reader somewhere beyond the right frame" (Wallace, "Live Online"). As Roberto Natalini, who sees *Infinite Jest* as expressing a non-Euclidean geometry as well, notes,

²²⁵ The meaning of Gately's comment about "the dead guy with the head" (934) hence oscillates from the head's presence to its absence (there is something up with the dead guy's head, namely that he has none).

“[t]o understand what really happens in the novel – why this projection at infinity is not only a rhetorical figure – we have to change our point of view” (Natalini 249). From a Euclidean perspective, the novel’s plot lines go on into infinity without intersecting. They are like the “twin pale tracks” (808) left by an infantilely regressive Kevin Bain, whom Hayles identifies as emblematic of postmodern abjection and regression not being “any real solution” (Hayles, “The Illusion of Autonomy” 692). Regression cannot counter solipsism, be it a regression to the infant state of the self or the infant state of the novel. The addicted, Euclidean reader loops back to the novel’s beginning without changing her perspective, seeing the opening as the novel’s infancy both in the sense of it marking the beginning of another loop and seeing Hal as speechless, the original meaning of the term infant (*OED* “infant”). Instead, the novel calls its reader rather to *progress* to the first pages in a perspectively different continuation of reading in order to experience something fundamentally new, similarly to the way endnote 304 is revisited from different temporal points in the reading process and thereby changes its interpretation. As Natalini remarks, the “way out of the cage of V.I.R. can be found by passing to the superior dimension of the Riemann’s sphere” (Natalini 252). Therefore, if the Euclidean reading of *Infinite Jest* creates an ironic reading process that calls for an immediate regression to the beginning of the novel in search of a closure that, due to the text’s own ambiguity, is undiscoverable, an ontological parallaxic shift to a non-Euclidean perspective can provide a “way out” (982) of the novel.²²⁶

This ontological parallaxing from a Euclidean to a non-Euclidean perspective creates what can be considered an epistemological Doppler effect. The same novel “sounds” differently when approaching one on the first read-through than when departing as the Euclidean, looping reading is replaced with a closure- and exit-providing non-Euclidean reading. The novel’s resolution, unknowable from an ironic perspective, becomes knowable from a non-Euclidean

²²⁶ This insight calls for a modification of one of the earliest but still most useful theses on the structure of *Infinite Jest* by Christopher Hager. While Hager suggests the figure of the parabola as a visualization of *Infinite Jest*’s structure, correctly pointing out that the novel’s resolution “sits chronologically & spatially in front of the novel proper” (Hager), taking into account the theory of the Euclidean and non-Euclidean readings of *Infinite Jest* lets us reimagine Hager’s parabolas meeting in infinity as two parallel lines which, if seen from a non-Euclidean perspective, meet and provide the novel with closure. At the same time, Natalini’s notion of non-Euclidean geometry finding an expression in *Infinite Jest*’s structure must be qualified, as Natalini’s reading suggests the existence of a correct, non-Euclidean and an incorrect, Euclidean reading of *Infinite Jest* rather than perceiving both readings as necessary and coexistent, equally valid stages of *Infinite Jest*.

perspective. By exploiting the unobservability of the Leerstelle, *Infinite Jest* provides for two opposing yet coexistently valid readings, a postmodern endless deconstruction set in oscillation with a modernist sense of reintegration and closure. *Infinite Jest*'s Leerstelle is both reason for and redemption from the novel's addictive loops. Therefore, *Infinite Jest* paradoxically transcends its materiality by highlighting it. The material novel, its narration continually highlighting and problematizing its materiality and the reading process through the use of endnotes, contains more than one read-through to experience Euclidean and non-Euclidean reading and read through, that is, end, the novel. As D.T. Max recalls in *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story*, Wallace "had hoped readers would read [*Infinite Jest*] twice" (Max 225). The Doppler effect as a metaphor for the structure of *Infinite Jest* affords exactly such a twofold reading. As in the physical Doppler effect, where the waves an approaching object emits will continually increase in perceived frequency before, once the object has passed the observer, remaining stable as the object recedes, a Euclidean reader, i.e., the reader on her first read-through, will loop through the novel and amass more and more information with each loop before being able to forgo "the addictive projection in the recursive loop" (Goerlandt 325) and exit the text. Such a secondary reading, performed by the reader, stabilizes meaning.

However, the object that is being perceived nevertheless remains the same. Functionalizing its own ambiguity, *Infinite Jest* oscillates between postmodern skepticism and modern naïveté, both readings, as could be shown, not two varying interpretations but coexistent. Enacting, as Paul Curtis notes in "'Yo man so what's your story': The Double Bind and Addiction in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*," a "benevolent form of the double bind" (Curtis 47), *Infinite Jest* sets up and resolves the bind between "cynicism and naïveté" ("E Unibus Pluram" 181) in its use of the Doppler effect. As Wallace himself is commonly understood to argue in "E Unibus Pluram," overcoming the solipsism of postmodern irony entails making do with "the delusion that cynicism and naïveté are mutually exclusive" ("E Unibus Pluram" 181), a joining of postmodern skepticism and modern naïveté, considered to be binary opposites. In this sense, the Doppler effect as a metaphor for the structure of *Infinite Jest* can be seen as a tessera-completion of Ulyssean parallax. In *Ulysses*, parallax is used to superimpose the binary cultural forces of Hellenism and Hebraism in a reintegrative movement

creating a meaningful and stable outlook in the shape of Nietzsche's "good Europeans" (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* 332). *Infinite Jest* raises this strategy to the level of superstructure and a thematization of the process of reading, creating a dopplering text that joins the binaries of cynicism and naïveté in oscillation, the juxtaposition that runs through Wallace's diagnosis of contemporaneity. Thus, while in *Ulysses* the proposed shift from a Euclidean to a non-Euclidean perspective can remain little more than a rhetorical figure illustrating the reintegrative potential of a reading aware of parallax, *Infinite Jest* performs this very shift by exploiting its structural properties, creating a dopplering, oscillating text. Thereby, *Infinite Jest* becomes capable of entering into a sincere communication with the readers without reverting to the "neanderthalism" ("E Unibus Pluram" 185) Wallace warns of, a way of writing that ignores the achievements of the postmodern project. Instead, *Infinite Jest* shows itself to be exemplary of Vermeulen and van den Akker's metamodernism, being "inspired by a modern naïveté yet informed by a postmodern skepticism" (Vermeulen and van den Akker 5).

Therefore, the leap of faith necessary to overcome the solipsism of an ironic reading happens in spite of, not instead of postmodern skepticism of grand narratives. The reader of *Infinite Jest* must fundamentally change her perspective from the (Euclidean) postmodernist perspective that governs the first read-through of the novel to a performatively (non-Euclidean) sincere reading that consciously leaves behind the hermeneutics of suspicion and chooses to assume the possibility of meaningful, sincere communication. This is a way of reading that is, albeit inherently speculative, capable of projecting a closure into the novel's one-year gap. Like Hal Incandenza in the novel's opening, the reader of *Infinite Jest* must "make the journey first, then depart" (16).

Conclusion: Modernist Aims with Postmodern Means

Infinite Jest modifies Joycean parallax in its attempt to surpass postmodernism. As in *Ulysses*, where parallax is used to reconcile the binary cultural forces of Hellenism and Hebraism present in the novel, *Infinite Jest*, containing ironic and non-ironic markers, joins cynicism with naïveté in a reinterpretation of the Joycean method. Reception aesthetics transformed into textual aesthetics, Wallace's reader thereby performs an ontological rather than epistemological

parallax in order to achieve closure through an epistemological Doppler effect. Rather than reverting to a pre-postmodern style of writing, *Infinite Jest* achieves its reintegrative aims reminiscent of those of modernism by employing distinctly postmodernist strategies. In this sense, *Infinite Jest*'s engagement with Ulyssean parallax can be seen as exemplary of metamodernism, a third wave of modernism Holland describes as using "postmodern literary techniques turned toward modernist goals" (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 201).

Infinite Jest's use of postmodernist techniques in the context of its reinterpretation of the Ulyssean parallax already becomes apparent in its reimagining of the epistemological parallax of *Ulysses* as an ontological parallax. As McHale notes in *Postmodernist Fiction*, the shift from modernism to postmodernism can be defined as "the shift of dominant [...] from an epistemological dominant to an *ontological* one" (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 10). These ontological poetics of postmodernism are also at work in *Infinite Jest*. The novel uses parallax, an originally epistemological device it takes from *Ulysses*, as an ontological device. *Infinite Jest* performs a shift between two ways of constituting the world rather than two forms of knowledge, parallaxing between the Euclidean and the non-Euclidean perspective. It hence provokes this ontological shift by self-reflexively utilizing its structural features and thereby thematizing its own ambiguity.

A self-reflexive stance also becomes apparent in the novel's special relationship with literary theory, a development which, as can be seen in Kelly's "Beginning with Postmodernism," is typical for contemporary literature. Seeing literature succeeding postmodernism as "inseparable from its institutional contexts," Kelly argues that these contemporary texts "begin with the phenomenon of 'theory'" (Kelly, "Beginning with Postmodernism" 396). Texts like *Infinite Jest* dramatize the "intersection of theory and fiction" (Kelly, "Beginning with Postmodernism" 397). With respect to literary theory, Wallace's *Infinite Jest* out-postmodernizes postmodernism. While postmodern metafiction, like theory, reflects on the nature of fiction, a text like *Infinite Jest* inscribes itself with literary theory, using, e.g., Iser's concept of the Leerstelle or Bloom's theories of artistic influence as intertexts. Notably, such a rehearsal of theory in fiction does not entail an affirmation of its veracity. It far more represents a (post-)postmodern playfulness. Theoretical texts are emptied of their a priori

claim to truth in order to be used as a literary device a posteriori. Wallace thus literalizes, and thereby self-consciously misreads, a Theory that, to him, had become part of America's cultural discourse, inviting a particular theoretical approach through an aestheticization of literary theory. This making useful of theory for fiction can be seen as an extension of postmodernist intertextuality and metafiction.

Nevertheless, however, these postmodernist techniques are turned toward the modernist goals of reconciliation and the resolution of an epistemological crisis. Even though *Infinite Jest* uses postmodernist devices in its reinterpretation of the Ulysean parallax, this does not produce the "perfect postmodern form" (Hutcheon 11) of a parody of *Ulysses*. Instead, as Burn notes, *Infinite Jest* follows the "Joycean example" (Burn, *Reader's Guide* 25): it seeks to recover a modernist ontological framework from within postmodern practices and thereby to become an actualization of *Ulysses* without the bitter aftertaste of epigonism. Therefore, contrary to Vichnar's view, *Infinite Jest* clearly does not see *Ulysses* as a "finished project to be [...] ultimately abandoned" (Vichnar 270) but, in its alteration of *Ulysses* – achieving modernist aims with postmodern means – outlines an aesthetic that remains fertile for future generations. *Infinite Jest*'s reinterpretation of *Ulysses* in its self-inscription into the Ulysean Tradition thus appears to revert to modernist goals in its repudiation of postmodernism while at the same time maintaining postmodernist repudiations of modernism.

The Doppler effect as a metaphor for the structure of *Infinite Jest* creates a text which oscillates between a postmodern, Euclidean and a redemptive, non-Euclidean reading but which, for pragmatic reasons discussed above, favors the epistemological resolution of the non-Euclidean perspective. *Infinite Jest* is deeply aware of the loss of grand narratives that came with postmodernism. However, instead of deconstructing all possibility of knowledge, *Infinite Jest* opts for a pragmatic solution to the problem. The novel invites its reader to bridge the ontological uncertainty of postmodernist fiction through an act of epistemic humility. Ultimately, the Doppler effect structure answers an epistemological question as it provides a stable, if qualified, source of meaning. This reconstitution of meaning in the face of disorder and fragmentation resembles far more the project of modernism for which *Ulysses* is exemplary than postmodernism. Even though literature is no longer in and of itself redemptive, it being

possible that a reading of *Infinite Jest* can lead to a postmodern, addicted looping through the text, *Infinite Jest* sees a redemptive potential in a communication with the reader. *Infinite Jest*'s reinterpretation of *Ulysses* raises the reconciliatory function of Ulyssean parallax to the level of superstructure and the reading process. Structurally self-consciously creating a text that is longer than its page numbers, *Infinite Jest* achieves this reconciliation through an oscillation between an ironic and a non-ironic reading. *Infinite Jest* might be using postmodernist techniques, its basic aims, however, appear more similar to those of modernism.²²⁷

Wallace's engagement with Joyce constitutes a central aspect of *Infinite Jest*. Systematically misattributing the terms 'parallax' and 'Doppler effect,' *Infinite Jest* reimagines Joyce's epistemological parallax as an ontological parallax, thereby creating an epistemological Doppler effect. As in *Ulysses*, redemptive parallax is closely linked to a shift of perspective from a Euclidean to a non-Euclidean point of view. The novel self-consciously employs its structural features in order to produce an infinitely looping narrative which can only be ended if the reader changes her perspective. The reader thereby becomes able to project closure into the one-year gap that would otherwise lead her to loop back to the novel's beginning and reread the text in search of more information. This ontological parallax, (re)reading the text from a non-Euclidean perspective, creates an epistemological Doppler effect.²²⁸ Through this strategy, *Infinite Jest* becomes able to surpass postmodern irony by inviting the reader to shift her point of view to a reintegrative perspective on the text. Thus, while Joyce's use of parallax creates a stereoscopic effect that seeks to stabilize the novel's modernist epistemological crisis, Wallace aims at inducing a perspectival change in the reader, the activation of the reader creating a Doppler effect structure of two consecutive readings. Using postmodernist means to achieve

²²⁷ Seen in this light, the differences between the rivalling theories of art after postmodernism, Adam Kelly's concept of the New Sincerity and Timotheus Vermeulen's and Robin van den Akker's metamodernism, appear to be largely due to different temporal vantage points both apply to describe the same phenomenon. What appears as the reflected absorption of the New Sincerity, a parallaxic blending of self-conscious reflection and an engaged recognition of author and reader from a perspective that views the work atemporally as a whole, can also be viewed as a metamodern, dopplering oscillation in which self-awareness and skepticism and performative hopes for reintegration shift back and forth at varying rates. While the New Sincerity hence performs a parallax view, metamodernism is more sensitive toward the same phenomenon's 'dopplering' dimension.

²²⁸ This reflects what Slavoj Žižek remarks on the concept of parallax view, namely, that "subject and object are inherently 'mediated' so that an 'epistemological' shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an 'ontological' shift in the object itself" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 17).

modernist goals, *Infinite Jest* is exemplary of a third wave of modernism that is informed by postmodernist theory but governed by a modernist urge toward order and meaning.

5. Conclusion: Bloom through Bloom

In a section that was originally supposed to be the opening of *Infinite Jest* – and which still appears very early in the novel as well as being marked by being set chronologically prior to most other events in the novel – Hal Incandenza reports of his endeavor to learn the *OED*: “I just finished *jew’s-ear*. I’m just starting on *jew’s-harp* and the general theory of oral lyres” (30). Young Hal, before the events of the novel, is still unfamiliar with what can be seen as the instrument-emblem of the aesthetic of Joyce’s Ulysean Tradition. *Infinite Jest* will be Wallace’s contribution to this tradition, a response to and attempted reconciliation of the “general theory of oral lyres” of Joyce’s modernist *jew’s harp* and Pynchon’s postmodernist permutation thereof in the blues harp. As could be shown, *Infinite Jest* makes aesthetic use of *OED* definitions throughout the novel. The *OED* serves as a central intertext to *Infinite Jest*, Wallace at times seemingly quoting verbatim from the dictionary. Thus entries such as that on ‘wraith,’ which notes the term’s “unknown origin” (*OED* “wraith”), are used to explicate Wallace’s revised notion of authorship as a ghostly, undead presence after Barthes. As could be shown, the *OED* is not the only rather unusual intertext to whose explicit verbiage *Infinite Jest* refers in its endeavor to update the Ulysean Tradition after postmodernism. Reifying concepts from Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’ and Iser’s ‘Leerstelle’ to Hugh Kenner’s ‘Uncle Charles Principle,’ *Infinite Jest* employs the language of philosophy, (literary) theory and criticism, in short, the tools of academic literary and cultural studies, as intertexts of their own right.

Wallace’s style of intertextuality bespeaks the academic context of the 1980s and 90s creative writing programs from which he stems. Wallace seems to write fiction the way others would write scholarly theses: it is as if he had texts like Lacan’s *Écrits* open beside his manuscript of *Infinite Jest*, quoting from them and engaging in a distinctly scholarly dialogue through his endnote-laden fiction. If postmodern metafiction can be understood as a literary-theory-like writing about writing, Wallace’s style of metafiction and intertextuality employs said theory to further his project of succeeding postmodernism from within its own language, the only language available to him and his readership. Wallace thus presupposes, in a rather elitist manner, his readers’ deep familiarity with the postmodernist ‘lexicon’ he views as having

been absorbed into contemporary America's dominant discourse. Hence, if Joyce's *Ulysses*, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, and Wallace's *Infinite Jest* can be termed what Mendelson calls encyclopedic novels, novels that "attempt to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture, while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge" (Mendelson, "Gravity's Encyclopedia" 162) and include "a full account of at least one technology or science" (Mendelson, "Gravity's Encyclopedia" 164), in *Ulysses* embryology, in *Gravity's Rainbow* "ballistics, chemistry and some very advanced mathematics" (Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon" 1270), Wallace's program-era novel's encyclopedia is the encyclopedia (of postmodernist discourse) and its science is not tennis, film, pharmacology or quantum physics, but foremost lexicography. As Letzler notes, *Infinite Jest*'s encyclopedic style is oftentimes "basically pointless" (Letzler, "Encyclopedic Novels and the Craft of Fiction: *Infinite Jest*'s Endnotes" 307). Burn likewise remarks that in novels like *Infinite Jest* the "mass of data exceed[s] the synthesizing powers of even [the encyclopedic novelist's] encyclopedic grasp" (Burn, "The Collapse of Everything: William Gaddis and the Encyclopedic Novel" 59). Therefore, the novelist "does not simply use the novel to store data, but rather explores the negative impact endlessly proliferating information has upon the lives of his characters" (Burn, "After Gaddis: Data Storage and the Novel" 163). *Infinite Jest*'s postmodern encyclopedism thus confronts the reader with the excessive yet ultimately pointless "labyrinths of reflexive abstraction" (1048) she is stuck in and devises methods to "alter the way we process data" (Letzler, "Encyclopedic Novels and the Craft of Fiction: *Infinite Jest*'s Endnotes" 310). As Adam Kelly remarks, post-boomer writers of the program era "begin with the academic construction of American literature and society specifically as 'postmodern' – in other words, they begin with the phenomenon of 'theory'" (Kelly, "Beginning with Postmodernism" 396). The sheer laboriousness of Wallace's novel highlighting our fatal addiction to the pointless, ironic non-signification of the postmodern lexicon which Pynchon could still view as liberating, the encyclopedia of postmodernism that is *Infinite Jest* serves as a means to guide us onto the way out of these labyrinths of postmodern solipsism and leave them behind as, if not to be disputed, then still pointless. Wallace writes in 'postmodernese,' the only language available to him and, according to his diagnosis, the only

language we are fluent in, to therapize our questionable addiction to irony and make his sincere worries heard. *Infinite Jest*, employing the whole lexicon of postmodernist discourse for reparative ends, can be seen as a kind of dictionary to help us learn a new, sincere language.

Wallace's background in the 80s program-era also becomes apparent in his strategies of reinterpreting and transforming the Ulyssean Tradition to make it suitable to this age of solipsizing "involved abstraction" (1048) schooled in postmodernist discourse. As Wallace writes to Stephen Moore in 1990, "I think people who write 'highbrow' stuff are just imprisoned in what they love, just like the celebs. Bloom (not Leopold or Allen) convinced me long ago that real reading is misprision anyway – if I can complete someone's *tessara* [sic], cool" (qtd. in Thompson, *Global Wallace* 195) and, in 1996, in conversation with David Lipsky: "I believe in Harold Bloom's theory of misprision" (qtd. in Thompson, *Global Wallace* 194). The offhanded joke about Leopold, Harold (and Allen) Bloom hints at the close connection Wallace's methodology draws between the famous Yale scholar, whose writing Wallace, in his rebellion against the poststructuralist institution none other than Bloom could probably embody better, calls "stupefyingly turgid-sounding shit" (911) in *Infinite Jest*, and Joyce's protagonist. The connection between *Ulysses* and Bloom's "studies of artistic *influenza*" (1007) also becomes apparent in the title under which the section in which Hal announces he is "just starting on *jew's-harp*" (30) was published and as which it still appears as a movie-adaptation of the event in JOI's filmography, "It Was a Great Marvel That He Was in the Father Without Knowing Him" (922), an echo of the Gnostic epigraph that opens Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. As Charles Harris shows, already Wallace's "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way" should be read as "a *self-aware* misprision, a knowing enactment of what Bloom calls 'the creative mind's desperate insistence upon priority'" (Harris 122) of John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse."²²⁹ With *Infinite Jest*, Wallace perfects this method of self-consciously using the revisionary ratios authors employ to negotiate their precursors' influence that Bloom outlines in

²²⁹ Apart from the essay by Charles Harris mentioned above, Marshall Bowell first discussed Wallace's engagement with Bloom in *Understanding David Foster Wallace*. See also A. O. Scott's "The Panic of Influence" and Brian McHale's "The Pale King, Or, The White Visitation." David Hering's *David Foster Wallace: Fiction and Form* also discusses Wallace's relation to Bloom's *apophrades* that, however, falls shorter than the discussion of Wallace's use of *tessera* in Lucas Thompson's *Global Wallace: David Foster Wallace and World Literature*. In addition, Lee Konstantinou's chapter on "Wallace's 'Bad' Influence" in *The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace* also quickly comments on Bloom and Wallace.

The Anxiety of Influence in his engagement with the Ulyssean Tradition. Reinterpreting the methods of the book about (Leopold) Bloom through the methods outlined in the book by (Harold) Bloom, the program-era author Wallace, acutely aware of (and dissatisfied with) theory and self-consciously riffing on it, employs the postmodern means of an intertextual reference to the Yale epicenter of American deconstruction to reach the modernist ends of *Ulysses* as he structures his revision of Joyce's influence around the six revisionary tactics of Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*.

Hence, Wallace's revision of metempsychosis is a self-aware enactment of what Bloom calls *apophrades*, the "return of the dead" (Bloom 15). In *Infinite Jest*, the dead and their solipsizing language (quite literally) return to haunt the living and the ghost of a strong father-figure JOI(yce) continuously speaks through its letters. Not only Joyce's influence but also the Lacanian theory Wallace employs to revise the metempsychotic method is structured by this apophradic reincarnation. Thus, as could be shown, Wallace employs the verbiage and theoretical framework of this dead precursor of poststructuralism to describe postmodern irony as a phallogocentric and misogynous discourse that entraps the self in a solipsistic double-bind. Rebellion and change wholly impossible in this culture-wide psychosis, the 'family mythology' of masculinist postmodernism eternally recurs in the next generation. Reincarnating Lacan, Wallace enacts how, according to Bloom,

[t]he later poet, [...] already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet's flooded apprenticeship [...]. But the poem is now held open to the precursor, where once it was open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work. (Bloom 15–16)

This self-aware *apophrades* closes in an, equally self-aware, *kenosis* of 'crosswriting.' Performing this "breaking device similar to the defense mechanisms our psyche employs against repetition compulsions" (Bloom 14), Wallace breaks the pathologically compulsive

repetition of postmodern irony and masculine objectification through a return of Joyce's *écriture féminine*. Wallace's *kenosis* through feminine 'crosswriting,' however, ultimately confers the act of (re)creating the text's meaning from a feminine perspective to the lecture *féminine* of the reader. Like Bloom's strong poet, Wallace thus, "apparently emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhood, seems to humble himself as though he were ceasing to be a poet" (Bloom 14–15). By stylizing himself as the authoritarian father and humbling himself by calling for the replacement of his God-like status with a feminine voice the reader must assume for herself, Wallace effects the Joycean transmigration of souls as a gendered metempsychosis.

Infinite Jest's reinterpretation of the Joycean trinity into a public language game between author, reader, and text similarly represents a Bloomian *clinamen* with which Wallace revises the Ulyssean Tradition. As Bloom remarks, through poetic misreading,

[a] poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves. (Bloom 14)

Hence, Joyce "went accurately up to a point" in his construction of a human trinity (which already Joyce, too, linked to authorship and creativity) that restores community and interconnection. Wallace's reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition establishes (literary) meaning through Joyce's religious language as an act of faith and a reciprocal interaction between distinct yet related partners. However, philosophical substances cannot provide the basis for this communality anymore to Wallace. Instead, they lead into the endlessly deconstructive existential loneliness that befalls Wallace's ironic image culture. As if in the corrective movement of *clinamen*, *Infinite Jest* thus reinterprets the Joycean secular consubstantiality of man as a Wittgensteinian 'family resemblance.' Wallace thereby misprisons the ordinary language philosophy of the *Philosophical Investigations* as an ethical, rather than logical argument. As could be seen in the examples of AA and tennis, *Infinite Jest* views the stimulation of public language games as a restorative measure against the infinite

regresses of private, ironic self-justification. Wittgenstein's public language games thereby turn in Wallace's revision of the consubstantial method from logical to moral imperatives. This *clinamen* of Joyce and Wittgenstein in Wallace's transformation of the Ulyssean Tradition after postmodernism calls for *askesis*, a "movement of self-purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude" (Bloom 15). Consciously reenacting this movement, *Infinite Jest*'s reinterpretation of the Ulyssean consubstantiality affords, as is most clearly explored in Gately's ascetic abidance and sobriety, the author's restraint from constant ironic self-qualification as well as his authorial self-effacement into an unbiographical and unreferential yet present dialogic partner to the reader and the reader's conscious abstinence from postmodern generalized skepticism toward the authenticity of said ghostly author. Only through such ascetic equanimity, recalling the equanimity Leopold Bloom attains throughout the course of Joyce's consubstantiality theme, can literature turn into a sincere and meaningful communication that points outside the text.

Lastly, as already noted, Wallace composes his permutation of the parallax method as a Bloomian *tessera*. As could be shown, *Infinite Jest* systematically replaces 'parallax' with 'Doppler effect' and vice versa, thereby literalizing Bloom's dictum that the strong poet in *tessera* "retain[s] [the parent-poem's] terms but to mean them in another sense" (Bloom 14). Through this systematic misattribution, *Infinite Jest* assumes a structure that conjoins what it views as the dichotomous currents of postmodern cynicism and modern naiveté that run through contemporary culture in a metamodern oscillation. The novel thus, as if Joyce's parallax method "had failed to go far enough" (Bloom 14), expands Joyce's parallax with a textual Doppler effect. *Infinite Jest* is thereby composed of a postmodernist, looping reading reminiscent of the novel's substance abusers' compulsively circular self-reflection that denies all satisfying closure and a reparative reading founded in a virtuous assumption of a reality author and reader share outside the text. Wallace's writing from within yet against postmodernism thus transposes Joyce's parallax from an epistemological enterprise to one concerned with superimposing ontologies, a knowing antithetical completion of *Ulysses* in *tessera*. Seen as producing an ontological parallax, *Infinite Jest*'s negotiation of postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion and reparatively 'naïve' reading practices resembles the "oscillation

between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2) Vermeulen and van den Akker hold as integral to metamodernism. Viewed along the lines of an epistemological Doppler effect, *Infinite Jest* advocates the instable return to immersion and morality Kelly sees in the New Sincerity. By drawing attention to the material conditions of the reading process, something most explicitly done through the novel’s blank gap between end and opening, yet also achieved through the novel’s excessive use of endnotes that force the reader to actively engage with the material book by flipping back and forth through its pages, the meta-nonfiction of *Infinite Jest*’s double-reading points toward an extratextual reality that is unavailable to postmodernist thought. The ‘solution’ to *Infinite Jest*’s enigmatic one-year-gap and thus to the solipsizing infinite regress of deconstruction lies in an awareness of a world outside the text, a shift in point of view Wallace subtly nudges the reader toward.

Hence, Wallace subjects Wolfgang Iser’s theory of narrative gaps and reader response, too, to his knowing *tessera*. As could be shown, Iser’s concept of the Leerstelle, literalized in the novel, is central to *Infinite Jest*’s reinterpretation of the Ulyssean Tradition as a means to counter postmodern solipsism. Clearly, however, what Iser means by a Leerstelle that calls for “readjustments of [the reader’s] own projections” through which “the reader can experience something previously not within his experience” (Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* 167) is *not* the literal blank *Infinite Jest* tantalizes its reader with. By playing on the explicit verbiage of a literary theory Wallace’s program-era writing presupposes the reader to be familiar with, however, *Infinite Jest* revises the Ulyssean Tradition to make it meet the novel’s ends of providing an alternative to the entrapments of postmodern self-reflection.

Wallace’s *tessera* therefore makes it particularly clear that *Infinite Jest* – and the Ulyssean Tradition in general - must be understood as not only a response to Joyce’s *Ulysses* but as a response to the Ulyssean Tradition as a whole, the texts that, like *Gravity’s Rainbow*, have entered an aesthetically productive dialogue with *Ulysses* to further their project as well as those texts that circle *Ulysses* and have thus served to construct a paradigmatic *Ulysses*. Hence, if Joyce had failed to go far enough in *Ulysses*, so did Pynchon in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, warranting Wallace’s self-aware “completion and antithesis” (Bloom 14). While the first half of

Infinite Jest's Doppler, annularly circular and ever-creative of a never to be fully completed interpretation, thus closely resembles the egalitarian sublime circularity of Pynchon's novel, the second, reparative half of the novel's dopplering structure redacts *Gravity's Rainbow's* permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition as having, like Joyce, not gone far enough: Pynchon only tells the first half of Wallace's Doppler. Wallace therefore knowingly takes up the position of Bloom's strong poet who pretends an intellectual priority to his precursor. As cannot be stressed enough, this is a 'façade' that allows Wallace to structure his dialogue with the Ulyssean Tradition and claim paradigmaticness for his project in *Infinite Jest*. In a self-aware *daemonization* of both Pynchon's and Joyce's sublime, *Infinite Jest's* Doppler effect purports "a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime" (Bloom 15).

Wallace's use of Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, however, does not imply adoption of Bloom's theses and the positions he stands for. Indeed, Harold Bloom is subject to a biting parody in *Infinite Jest*. Referring to Bloom's theory as "turgid" (1077), *Infinite Jest* features a scene from one of its fictional movies in which an academic lectures how

'For while *clinamen* and *tessera* strive to revive or revise the dead ancestor, and while kenosis and *daemonization* act to repress consciousness and memory of the dead ancestor, it is, finally, artistic *askesis* which represents the contest proper, the battle-to-the-death with the loved dead' -in a monotone as narcotizing as a voice from the grave - and yet all the time weeping (911)

while his completely self-absorbed audience of undergraduates ignore him and almost fall asleep from his "deadly drone" (911). As Thompson shows, despite his clear reliance on Bloom's model for his engagement with antecedent sources, "Wallace [...] had a serious intellectual disagreement with Bloom" and his "understanding of textual indebtedness was at sharp odds with the conception set forth in *The Anxiety of Influence*" (Thompson, *Global Wallace* 40). Instead of viewing Wallace as secretly subscribing to Bloom's model and self-consciously obscuring that influence through ironic dismissal, Wallace's use of Bloom, particularly in the context of *Infinite Jest's* Ulyssean Tradition that plays on both Joyce's Dubliner and the Yale scholar bearing the same last name, must be understood from his

background as an academically schooled MFA. In his use of Bloom to structure his response to the Ulyssean Tradition, Wallace hyper-self-consciously squares intertextuality. A postmodern core-text of intertextuality is thereby appropriated as an intertext itself in order to give Wallace a model to engage with his intertexts in *Infinite Jest*. Harking back to the above-quoted Bloom lecture in *Infinite Jest*, Wallace is both lecturer and audience: the author who employs the outmoded “voice from the grave” (911) of Bloom is at the same time the (former) creative writing student for whom such postmodernist discourse, though he is surrounded by it, has run its course and who cannot be engaged by/with it anymore. Rather than a genuflection, Wallace’s use of theory as an a posteriori intertext like any other bespeaks his rejection of postmodern theory as well as his recognition of living in a culture entirely perfused by it. Again, JOI’s films appear as an alternate, refractive ego to Wallace’s project. Both equally speak through Bloom’s model yet are at the same time “all the time weeping” (911). JOI, however, fails to communicate his sincere concern and sadness to an audience that is too irreverently ironic and self-absorbed, entertainment-addicted, to really hear him. *Infinite Jest* too, is the attempt to sincerely communicate “something sad” (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 58) through Bloom’s revisionary ratios. However, for this communication to reach its other, it must speak in a language intelligible to the audience of native ironists and entertainment-addicts it wants to help. JOI, as could be shown, is at once both too uncritically naïve and completely immersed in postmodernist discourse to do that.

As Wallace says in his interview with McCaffery about his funniness and desire to communicate through literature,

an author needs to demonstrate some sort of skill or merit so that the reader will trust her. There’s some weird, delicate, I-trust-you-not-to-fuck-upon-me relationship between the reader and writer, and both have to sustain it. But there’s an unignorable line between demonstrating skill and charm to gain trust for the story vs. simple showing off. It can become an exercise in trying to get the reader to like and admire you instead of an exercise in creative art. (Burn, *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* 25)

Like Joyce's *Ulysses* and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* before, *Infinite Jest* may be an excessively complex and erudite attempt to compose an aesthetic suitable to a drastically changed human condition. However, they are also all very funny books. If Wallace wants to sincerely communicate the 'sadness' of *Infinite Jest*, the novel's warning of an entertainment-hungry image culture's effects on human beings, and engage with this audience to offer them a way out of their solipsism, he has to do so in a manner that is engaging to them. According to Wallace, it is only through *Infinite Jest*'s postmodern means that it can reach its reparative goals by speaking the only language available to author and reader in a contemporary America of generalized existential irony. *Infinite Jest*'s conversational and funny style serves to generate a connection between author and reader that transcends the intra- and intertextual play of language. What distinguishes the New Sincerity of Wallace's permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition from the postmodernism of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is the former's investment in re-constituting the role of the author as an interpretative category. Hence, while Pynchon's funniness deconstructs authority, Wallace's funniness is a means of constructing a vision of a real communication between author and reader after postmodernism that transcends the text.

Ulysses, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and *Infinite Jest* utilize the methods and patterns of the Ulyssean Tradition to develop an aesthetic from them that can make their respective human condition accessible to literature again. In *Infinite Jest*, the Ulyssean Tradition is employed and transformed to point toward the possibility of sincere communication between author and reader in an extratextual world both share as distinct yet 'real' subjects. The novel thereby upturns the postmodern means it employs to attain the ends of the artwork as an integrating, restorative force reminiscent of the modernist *Ulysses*, setting the postmodernism of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* in dialogue with the modernism of a paradigmatic *Ulysses* in order to create the reparative aesthetic of the critical naiveté of the New Sincerity.

**CONCLUSION: RETURNING TO
*ULYSSES***

To conclude, let us mimic what happens – in quite different yet, as could be shown, very much related ways – in all the novels discussed here and return to the beginning: to my first chapter and to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, a novel which, I have argued, has spawned a Ulyssean Tradition in epic novels that produce their own, independent aesthetic paradigms through their intertextual return to and transposition of the methods and patterns *Ulysses* developed to restore literature’s capacity to meaningfully represent the modern world. In *Ulysses*, the return is external: *Ulysses*’ syllogism of problem terms – metempsychosis, consubstantiality, and parallax – has redeemed the perceived meaninglessness and fragmentation of the modern world and the self-objectified artist-hero Stephen Dedalus leaves the text equipped with a more reintegrative aesthetic to approach modern times, now capable of going on to write *Ulysses* himself. As Margaret McBride notes, in Joyce’s work “[t]he text creates the writer who in turn creates the text” (McBride 13). *Ulysses* thereby establishes the modernist aesthetic that finally makes Stephen a whole and fertile artist and thus makes *Ulysses* possible. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, whose postmodernist aesthetics no longer know any ‘outside,’ this return to the opening becomes internalized: Pynchon’s novel relocates interpretative authority to the reader and her self-consciously provisional, momentary structures of meaning. *Gravity’s Rainbow* continuously frustrates any totalizing meaning through its postmodernist overplotting. Instead, the novel proposes a creative paranoia as a liberating, egalitarian approach to literature and the world. The novel thereby effects a circular return that perpetually creates the novel anew, driven by the motor of a continuously unstable, democratic renegotiation of the novel that nonetheless never falls into relativistic nihilism. *Infinite Jest*, at last, displays a metamodern oscillation between modernist and postmodernist modes in proposing a kind of return based in a reconciliation of textual absorption and transcendence, return and reintegration becoming a function of inward and outward motions conditioning one another in the novel’s response to the Ulyssean Tradition: by performatively positing a stabilizing presence of author and reader outside the text, *Infinite Jest* moves from an indefinite intratextual circular return akin to that of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s postmodernism to a closure-providing, extratextual return to its first pages. These modes of returning to the novel’s opening bespeak the novels’ respective aesthetics of

paradigmatic modernism, postmodernism and a New Sincerity or metamodernism, themselves, as could be argued, a product of their return to *Ulysses* in the Ulyssean Tradition.

As I have mentioned in the opening chapter, this study takes the Ulyssean Tradition not only as its subject but also employs it as a methodological lens through which to read its corpus novels. The Ulyssean problem terms that provide the framework for the model of the Ulyssean Tradition were hence not only this study's structural units (i.e., in the most basic sense, its chapter-headings) but also describe the methodology at hand itself. In using the concept of intertextuality to describe the Ulyssean Tradition as a productive reciprocal dialogue with genre-like autonomy, this study could be said to have applied its own metempsychotic method, which is already in Joyce's novel tied up with the intertextual. I have thus attempted to trace the transmigration of the 'myth' of *Ulysses*, both its paradigmatic solution to the problem of the epic in modernity and its quasi-mythical position in the literary field, in the novels of the Ulyssean Tradition. Similarly, this study's grouping of novels in the Ulyssean Tradition in the genre of the (modern) epic novel, as well as the description of these novels' engagement with the outside-world through their position-taking in the literary field in order to achieve autonomy through relational communality with *Ulysses* resonates with the Ulyssean consubstantiality – and, evidently, the monstrous ambition of picking not one but three of the English language's most complex and esteemed novels for this project displays a similar posture on behalf of this author. Lastly, the conceptual doubling of *Ulysses* as pre-text and pretext of the Ulyssean Tradition, monologic and autonomous tendencies held in tension with dialogic relationality (i.e., the convergence of 'consubstantial' posturing and 'metempsychotic' transpositioning), has the quality of Joyce's parallaxic shifts to it. Both movements, as in the Ulyssean parallax, interfere with one another yet are to be seen together. Ultimately, just as this tension produces independent works in the Ulyssean Tradition, this study's Ulyssean methodology has allowed for self-sufficient readings of its novels that can stand in their own right – through the relationality of the Ulyssean Tradition with *Ulysses*. The goal of this book was hence not only to trace and reconstruct the Ulyssean in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* but also to tell a story, in a non-literary register, itself about literary influence and modernity. The names of the protagonists of this story were not Leopold, Molly, Stephen, Tyrone, Hal or Don but James,

Thomas, and David. As in *Ulysses*' modern epic, where the report of the fragmented, everyday experience of individuals is used in an attempt to represent the human condition of its time in aesthetic totality, this study attempted to draw a Ulyssean Tradition from the individual examples of *Gravity's Rainbow's* and *Infinite Jest's* transpositioning of *Ulysses*. Although this study cannot raise claims to completeness – there are most certainly more novels in the Ulyssean Tradition than those discussed here – it can serve as a means to better understand such novels and their respective projects, their position in literary history, and the nature of their intertextual negotiations as a productive tradition.

In order to return to themselves – both in the sense of the novels' variant forms of circularity and the discovery of a new aesthetic these movements represent – they return to *Ulysses*. Their singular aesthetic – for Pynchon a postmodernist one, for Wallace a New Sincerity or metamodernism after postmodernism – is generated from a reciprocal dialogue with *Ulysses* as the paradigm of the Ulyssean Tradition, monologic autonomy held in tension with relationality. As could be shown, each in their own way responds to, formulates and permutes the Ulyssean systems of order to arrive at and legitimate their own project as aesthetic paradigm for their respective human condition.

Pynchon's postmodernist response to the Ulyssean Tradition, for instance, is primarily concerned with the patterns *Ulysses* provides. While issues such as the mythical method are also broached, the focus of *Gravity's Rainbow's* transpositional procedures lies dominantly on the Ulyssean surface patterns rather than methods. The self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition from which *Gravity's Rainbow* derives its organization hence plays out through a negotiation of *Ulysses*' mythical parallelism to the *Odyssey*, its structuring along the Catholic mass, and Joyce's pattern of synthetic superimpositions of opposites into the three-dimensionality of an aestheticized good Europeanism: Joyce's *Odyssey* resurfaces as the Germanic anti-quest of a postmodern Parzival, the secularized and disenchanted linearity of the mass is turned into the historical sublimity of the circular church year, and the Ulyssean superimpositions of patterns into depth-structures become superposed moirés that evidence the untotalizable mediatedness of all experience. Pynchon's transpositions of *Ulysses* in the Ulyssean Tradition thereby display a Jamesonian 'new depthlessness' as the underlying structure of feeling that motivates them.

According to Jameson, this new depthlessness is “the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms” (Jameson 9). It describes a waning of affect in postmodernism’s inability to acknowledge any totality of objective experience beyond surface representation and hence also art’s incapability to refer to anything beyond itself. In a similar vein, for Jean Baudrillard postmodernism meant that reality is replaced by ‘hyperreality,’ representation no longer referring to a single real world but instead becoming a simulation without any graspable or meaningful relation to what could have been called reality (Baudrillard, *Simulations; Simulacra and Simulation*). For Jameson, this loss of the real shows itself in “a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” (Jameson 9) in postmodernist texts that is a product of a postmodern condition overlaid with the stimuli of a globalized consumerist media culture. While this new depthlessness is also realized in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s flattened out perspectivism, it is not reducible to a quantitative, visual dimension but pertains to a qualitative development in the repudiation of signification: as product of this questioning of signification interest shifted from any substance below or behind to the surface itself. *Gravity’s Rainbow* applies a depthless projection onto *Ulysses*. It transposes its pattern as if it abandoned the very idea of depth and the underlying altogether. In thus, so to speak, flattening out *Ulysses*, Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* takes the Ulyssean Tradition into postmodernism just as much as it generates its postmodernist aesthetic from and with the Ulyssean Tradition.

As has already been commented on, this aesthetic of flatness also becomes apparent in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s model of characterization. Whereas Joyce’s *Ulysses* constructs characters and world as deep and three-dimensional, their conflicting and contingent characteristics being reintegrated into a whole through artistic effort, Pynchon’s characters are defined by a distinct flatness. Flat characters with absurd names, Pynchon’s personnel lack any unifying center but are instead shimmering moirés of entangled roles and projections. The self becomes an assortment of fictions as, Marie-Laure Ryan notes, the logic of postmodernist textuality does away with the ‘real’ altogether and only recognizes fiction and thereby “ventures into the realm of the textually possible but epistemologically scandalous” (Ryan 183).

Nevertheless, Pynchon’s world and characters do not drift into the senseless banality oftentimes ascribed to postmodernism in popular accounts nor does *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s

rejection of totality mean a renunciation of the Ulyssean Tradition and its epic ambitions. Like Joyce, Pynchon refuses the irony that is definitory of both authors' projects to veer into defeatist nihilism. While being refused any depth *Gravity's Rainbow* perceives as an oppressive illusion, Pynchon's flat characters and world are rounded ones. Through an aesthetic of interpretation that cyclically renegotiates meaning in any given moment, *Gravity's Rainbow* does not allow its flat world and characters to ever stabilize into monovocal stability. Symbols and characters thereby become plural, indeterminable, and ambiguous as the novel never resolves itself into totality. Instead, a reader will create their meaning anew each time they come around to them, consciously viewing a different part of their moiré. Rather than at some point falling into binary interpretative categories of redeemed or rejected, good or evil, Pynchon's characters are afforded with the freedom of multiple potentialities. They are, if not deep, then nevertheless rounded and multifaceted. Decentered and perpetually unfinished, the postmodern subject and the human condition it inhabits become radically open to the possibilities of constant reinterpretation, untotalizably free yet far from meaningless. Instead, *Gravity's Rainbow* captures and makes sense of the contradictoriness of postmodernity. In its embrace of the subjunctive, heterogeneous and plural, *Gravity's Rainbow's* flatness becomes capable of reasserting itself as an epic representation of the postmodern human condition. Projecting the Ulyssean Tradition into a postmodernist depthlessness, *Gravity's Rainbow* offers itself as a *Ulysses* for the second half of the 20th century – an epic of a world rife with the postnational, the ambiguous and the relativistic whose pronounced absurdism nevertheless never devolves into indifference, neither toward humanity's nor literature's potential for regeneration.

Whereas *Gravity's Rainbow's* transpositions of *Ulysses* bespeak the novel's postmodernist depthlessness, *Infinite Jest*, written on the threshold of the 21st century, displays the 'new depthiness' Vermeulen identifies in metamodernism. According to Vermeulen and van den Akker, metamodernism as the structure of feeling that has succeeded postmodernism in the early 21st century is characterized by an "oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment" (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2), that is, a simultaneous acceptance of and reliance on and increasing discontentment with postmodernist and poststructuralist assumptions leading to a performative assertion of meaning *as if* coherent

meaning were possible. Rather than something altogether beyond postmodernism, metamodernism therefore describes an attempt to find “new ways of enlisting poststructural narrative techniques toward humanist ends of meaning-making, communication, and empathy in and between characters, readers, writers, and texts” (Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism* 200) and thus to reutilize the postmodern in a new sense. Where postmodernism’s depthless simulacra proclaimed the end of History, metamodernism’s new depthiness in contrast thus constitutes a return to History, depth and the possibility of signification, albeit a return problematized and informed by a postmodernism never truly left behind. Hence, Gibbons et al. argue for the sensibility of a ‘new depthiness,’ as opposed to ‘true’ depth, in metamodernism that is described by a desire for and interest in a (nevertheless deemed to be impossible) depth. Wallace’s 1996 novel can be seen as an early proponent of this return to post-simulacral depth. This becomes particularly apparent in the transpositional procedures *Infinite Jest* applies to *Ulysses* in course of its self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition. Whereas Pynchon’s depthless projections of the patterns of *Ulysses* generate *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s paradigmatic postmodernism, *Infinite Jest* thus displays a more ‘depthy’ permutation of *Ulysses* in its primary interest in the Ulyssean methods over their corresponding surface patterns. While *Infinite Jest* also mobilizes for instance mythical parallelisms such as the parallels between Gately and the Herculean labors or Marathe and Perseus (Burn, *Reader’s Guide* 61–62), the novel’s aesthetic project as derived from its Ulyssean Tradition hinges dominantly on the Ulyssean methods of metempsychosis, consubstantiality, and parallax and thus represents a fundamentally different approach to *Ulysses* and its modernism than Pynchon’s relation to the Ulyssean Tradition.

As Gibbons et al. show, the metamodern aesthetic of depthiness “renews the ontological category of the real” (Gibbons et al. 175) through a performance of depth reasserted. “In this sense,” Vermeulen remarks, “depthiness combines the epistemological reality of depthlessness with the performative possibility of depth” (Vermeulen). ‘True’ depth being unavailable yet in some sense desired, metamodern works *perform* a reappraisal of the real, stable and meaningfully engaged they themselves cannot ever really (re)present. Not unlike Judith Butler’s concept of the performativity of gender, in which “the gendered body [...] has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler 185) and the subject’s

gender thus becomes not that which produces our behavior but a surface effect produced by our behavior yet is, although not inside but on and around the body, felt to be very much real, “depth is not excavated but applied, not discovered but delivered” (Vermeulen). As could be shown, *Infinite Jest*’s metamodernism or New Sincerity is centered around such enactments of depth and meaning, the methods of *Ulysses* reoriented toward a performativity through which postmodern and pre-postmodern sensibilities are to be reconciled and a desired return to the modernism of *Ulysses* is to become possible. Wallace hence transposes the metempsychotic method into an invitation to apply a different perspective to the text on the reader’s behalf. The novel’s characters – most overtly its female ones – are thereby afforded with an imagined depth, a depth projection the reader has to perform and affectively experience since the novel itself cannot represent it without reverting to a sense of depth deemed lost after postmodernism. The intuition of depth actualized in the reader’s performative shift of perspective unavailable yet desired by the novel which seemingly nudges her toward it, the reader fills the gaps the novel must necessarily leave and thereby experiences novel and world *as if* stable meaning and depth were possible. Through the activation of a theoretically impossible yet performatively believed-in outside perspective, *Infinite Jest* proposes a reintegrative gendered transmigration of souls that is, as the novel’s relationality to *Ulysses* and its last chapter of *écriture féminine* shows, understood as a (forward) return to the paradigmatic modernist depth of *Ulysses*.

Hence, whereas Pynchon’s depthless horizontal interfaces are presented as a liberating *moiré*ification of the world, “interfacing” (15) in *Infinite Jest* is viewed as an alienating, self-centered mode of interaction that the novel seeks to replace with ‘old-fashioned’ communication *as if*, again, we could meaningfully speak of referent and referee. As Johannes Völz remarks, this “reappearance of the author as the reference point of the fictional text” (Voelz 220) which *Infinite Jest*, too, proposes through its performative reinterpretation of the consubstantial method, is definitory of the New Sincerity.²³⁰ The reader is afforded with a heightened self-awareness by means of a form of “credulous metafiction” (Konstantinou, *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction* 181) that, postmodernist means turned toward the ends of

²³⁰ As explained in footnote 227, I view Vermeulen and van den Akker’s metamodernism and the New Sincerity as mostly interchangeable and hence use them as such, ultimately probably only distinguished by the temporal perspective the two terms apply to the same phenomenon.

modernist reintegration, appears to point outside the text to a normally inconceivable yet performatively experienceable presence of author and reader. Since any such ‘behind’ and ‘beyond’ the text remains unfathomable to/in the post-simulacral, it has to be – in keeping with *Ulysses*’ religious language – an act of faith.²³¹ To produce this intuited exteriority, *Infinite Jest* utilizes its materiality – in itself a postmodernist strategy – to provoke an affective response to the text, draw attention to the presence of author and reader outside the text, and thereby radicalize *Ulysses*’ aesthetics of art’s consubstantial engagement with the world. Wallace thereby reinterprets the Nietzschean theocidal secularism of Joyce’s consubstantial aesthetic of authorship into a postsecularism in which this author-God, now a trinity of author, reader, and text engaged in a public language game, is one one truly has to believe in.

Hence, whereas Pynchon’s permutation of the Ulyssean Tradition produces an aesthetic of ‘living in the moment’ that opens interpretation to a plurality of possibilities unrestricted by a totalizing interpretative authority, Wallace employs the Ulyssean Tradition to recover a sense of stability of meaning. Turning the Ulyssean parallax method into an oscillatory movement between mastery and skepticism, *Infinite Jest* attempts to recover what it perceives to be the naïve stability of *Ulysses*’ modernism through a performative choice it offers to the reader. Once again, textual transcendence, that is an exit from cynical endless deconstruction, can no longer be posited but, since the novel’s metamodernism nevertheless desires it, must be realized in and through the reader’s own projections. Thereby, Wallace’s reinterpretation of parallax reinserts a spatio-temporal dimension lost to postmodernist relativistic equivocations into literature. The novel thus nudges its reader toward the self-conscious construction and acceptance of a History she, without the affective dimension, cannot make sense of. *Infinite Jest*’s depth transpositions of the Ulyssean methods thus employ resolutely postmodern means toward the ends of a (performative) recovery of what it views as *Ulysses*’ modernism. Where Joyce thus posits an externalized return and transcendent stability which Pynchon inverts into a centripetalism through his postmodernist, flattened-out reinterpretation of the Ulyssean

²³¹ The ordinary language philosophy of the later Wittgenstein is hence useful to Wallace since for Wittgenstein “everything lies open to view” (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §126) on the surface yet, in contrast to postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches, meaning is nevertheless possible.

Tradition, Wallace seeks to recover *Ulysses* through an informed performativity that allows the centripetal and centrifugal to coexist.

The movement in the Ulyssean Tradition – from the modernist depth of *Ulysses* to the depthless postmodernism of *Gravity's Rainbow* and the depthly metamodernism or New Sincerity found in *Infinite Jest* – is perhaps best illustrated through a recourse to the forms of popular entertainment by which the novels discuss their respective singular aesthetic projects. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, this is the theatre: *Ulysses* not only features a whole chapter in the style of a drama, it discusses its aesthetics and poetics through Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and itself reads in its opening like a play with stage directions, props and dialogue. In such a theatre performance, depth can be ascertained. Since no staging can ever be fully replicated, its return is one that moves beyond the text as it loops back, Stephen Dedalus finally capable of composing *Ulysses* as he leaves the text in its penultimate chapter. *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodernism, on the other hand, adapts *Ulysses* to the movie screen as its projects the world onto a flat surface. A depthless projection of the Ulyssean Tradition, *Gravity's Rainbow* as a movie can be circularly repeated indefinitely. In *Infinite Jest*, cinemas are virtually absent and all media is consumed using almost omnipresent TV sets. Whereas for Pynchon the cinema is the central metaphor for the postmodern human condition, for Wallace we are seeing the world through television. Unlike the movie screen, however, TVs were up to the 2000s and 2010s usually equipped with a curved screen. The 1990s TV sets that underlie Wallace's aesthetic imagination in *Infinite Jest* and beyond are cathode-ray tubes with slightly convex glass screens.²³² Nevertheless, the image we see on such a 1990s TV set is still a flat one. For Wallace, we have no way to experience and perceive the world other than flat – after all, we remain stuck in postmodernism's depthlessness. However, if we got up and touched our TV sets, engaged with the medium's material reality, we could feel that it is not flat at all. We would be using the apparatus we view the world from the wrong way – and all we can still ever truly see on it is flatness – yet by doing so and performatively engaging with it we might get a hint of a depthly world out there. Furthermore,

²³² In fact, flat screens are so uncommon to Wallace that in his 2001 essay "The View from Mrs. Thompson's," Wallace explicitly comments on the extraordinariness of the "forty-inch flat-panel Philips TV" the Mid-Western neighborhood gathers around to watch 9/11, remarking that Mrs. Thompson has such an uncommon flat TV due to "her son's trade connections" (Wallace, "The View from Mrs. Thompson's" 136).

while an empty movie screen is just blank nothingness that always requires a projector, someone who turned off their TV and got close to its material presence might even get the chance to see their, albeit distorted and shadowy, reflection. Viewing *Ulysses* through the era of television, just like Pynchon projects *Ulysses* onto *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodernist flatness, Wallace transposes the Ulyssean Tradition into a metamodern aesthetic. *Ulysses* thereby becomes in many ways a means to the ends of Wallace succeeding postmodernism, just as Pynchon's permutations of the Ulyssean Tradition produce *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodernism as much as his postmodernism motivates Pynchon's transpositional procedures. Through their relationality with *Ulysses*, the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition realize their own, singular aesthetic projects.

Nevertheless, *Ulysses* retains a residuum after being paradigmized and transformed in the Ulyssean Tradition. This residuum shows itself not only in the allusions to *Ulysses* the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition must still include, their variably still-modernist and Joycean understanding of the piece of art as autonomous and transformative, and, most importantly, the fact that we can still perceive *Ulysses* behind *Infinite Jest* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, i.e., that *Ulysses* despite all paradigmizations imposed onto it retains a problematic nature in the new symbolic order that cannot be fully mastered, swallowed up by the Ulyssean Tradition, and demands a truly reciprocal dialogue in the Ulyssean Tradition. Through this tension, the conceptual lens of the Ulyssean Tradition remains productive. *Ulysses* remains perceptible as the seeming cause of the novels in the Ulyssean Tradition. At the same time, *Ulysses* also retains its presence in the way that, in spite of each novel's author's differently constructed position-taking toward it, all novels discussed here share in on a valuing of for instance love, the redemptive potential of community, the, variably realized, necessity of faith, and openness and creativity, in short, a distinct anti-positivism coupled with a sensibility for the banalities of life. Hence, while *Infinite Jest* might seem to constitute a complete departure from its postmodernist predecessor *Gravity's Rainbow*, similarities between the two novels go beyond the surface of postmodernist strategies both Pynchon and Wallace apply in their transpositions of *Ulysses*. Both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* thus radically open up interpretation to the reader's active decisions in the process of meaning-making and, in order to not drift off into

arbitrariness, posit an act of faith that can end interpretation at a point that is, if not ever total, useably complete. Ultimately, this goes as much for *Gravity's Rainbow's* infinite circularity, which nevertheless champions an aesthetics of 'approaching' toward something, as it goes for *Infinite Jest*. Due to the radical openness in which *Gravity's Rainbow* ultimately distinguishes itself from *Infinite Jest*, *Gravity's Rainbow* also allows for a seemingly metamodern reading such as the one presented here for *Infinite Jest*. However, whereas *Gravity's Rainbow's* egalitarianism opens itself up to this among many other possibilities, *Infinite Jest* actively invites it.

It is in Wallace's and Pynchon's position-taking in relation to the tradition of Ulysses that *Infinite Jest* becomes a metamodern novel in the Ulysean Tradition and *Gravity's Rainbow* a postmodernist one. While the end-results may, the closer one looks, appear increasingly paradoxically similar, Pynchon and Wallace approach *Ulysses* differently. As already noted, *Gravity's Rainbow's* transpositional procedures attach themselves primarily to the Ulysean patterns whereas the concern of Wallace's self-inscription into the Ulysean Tradition resides in the methods *Ulysses* provides. Through the difference in how *Ulysses*, and the modernism it has come to stand for, is understood and paradigmized by Pynchon and Wallace in their novels in the Ulysean Tradition one can ascertain not only their relative position to *Ulysses* and literary modernism but also their works' relation to one another in literary history.

Although it may seem banal, from the perspective of the literary field in which authors of novels in the Ulysean Tradition position themselves through their relationality with *Ulysses*, Wallace succeeds postmodernism in *Infinite Jest* because he comes after postmodernism. To legitimate his own, autonomous aesthetic project of a New Sincerity through the Ulysean Tradition, Wallace positions himself toward and thus conceptualizes *Ulysses* and its paradigmatic modernism differently than Pynchon. Hence, Wallace's construction of postmodernism as apathetic, detached and cynical serves as a foil to define his own project against and – in the tension between monologue and dialogue central to the Ulysean Tradition – motivates his recovery of *Ulysses's* modernism. Although Wallace subtly qualifies his critique of postmodernism as predominantly directed against a 1980s second-wave postmodernism, the polemic still stands. This allows Wallace to mobilize Joyce's *Ulysses* as the vestige of a 'lost'

modernist naiveté to be deemed worthy of recovery as a counterweight against an, equally idiosyncratically constructed, postmodernist cynicism. Wallace's focus on the Ulyssean methods over their corresponding patterns establishes his project as a depth move beyond postmodernism into an informed recovery of modernist modes. For Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow's* postmodernist aesthetics are never cynical or apathetic, nor does the modernism of *Ulysses* constitute a kind of naiveté the postmodernist Pynchon should, from Wallace's vantage point, reject. Whereas Wallace stylizes his project of an engaged New Sincerity, postmodern means turned toward modernist aims in metamodern oscillation, as a recovery of *Ulysses* in a final reintegration of naiveté and skepticism after postmodernism, Pynchon's transposition of the Ulyssean Tradition pertains to be akin to a correction or Pynchon's 'updating' of *Ulysses* into an American, postnational and post-Einsteinian context. Pynchon establishes his project as post-modern by (re)constituting his novel as after-modernism, both a response to and against *Ulysses* and a continuation thereof into a new, flat paradigm. To legitimate his singular aesthetic project as both novel and orthodox, Pynchon projects the Ulyssean Tradition through his own postmodern depthlessness. Whereas for Wallace, *Ulysses* is posited as an engaged counterpoint to postmodernist disengagement which his own novel recovers through the activation of aesthetical performativity, Pynchon perceives Joyce's modernism as both the engagement he himself resumes and gives full shape to in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the disengaged literary totalitarianism his postmodernist aesthetic rejects. As could be shown, Pynchon's aesthetics through which the Ulyssean Tradition is transformed are capable of containing this in-between state. In both novels, self-inscription (into the Ulyssean Tradition) and self-description (through the Ulyssean Tradition) go hand in hand. Both motions in the literary field, a monologic heresy that establishes a new, singular aesthetic paradigm and a dialogic orthodoxy through and from which the new paradigm is generated as product of a Ulyssean Tradition, are held in productive tension without one gaining priority over the other. While this is particularly pertinent for the Ulyssean Tradition, it appears to hold for all influence in the widest sense. Reading *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* through the Ulyssean Tradition allows to perceive their projects both as singular and independent and within their relationality. The reciprocal dialogue the Ulyssean

Tradition manifests is thereby both one between authors and their works and a mode of reading that allows for new readings of these novels in their own right yet through their interaction.

To realize their independent aesthetic projects and lay claim to paradigmaticness in and through their American epic novels' Ulyssean Tradition, Pynchon and Wallace return to *Ulysses* in manifold ways. This return, suspended between continually interfering monologic and polyphonic tensions, is thereby also always a return to themselves, a forward leap into (their own) new aesthetics as well as a backward glance to *Ulysses*. As could be shown, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* transpose the methods and patterns by which *Ulysses* reasserts modern art's capacity to contain the modern world in the epic's aesthetic totality to make them adaptable to their own, singularly changed conditions. At the same time, this self-inscription into the Ulyssean Tradition serves as a self-actualization and -legitimation of Pynchon's and Wallace's respective projects. The boundaries Joyce's novel provides to the Ulyssean Tradition thereby become product of this Tradition's continuous reworking of *Ulysses*. *Ulysses* hence comes to serve Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* and Wallace in *Infinite Jest* as both pre-text and pretext in their strife to become the *Ulysses*-like paradigm of American literature of their time.

As T.S. Eliot – whose thoughts about *Ulysses* as akin to a scientific discovery to be reemployed in further, autonomous explorations are perhaps as foundational to conceiving of a Ulyssean Tradition as Joyce's *Ulysses* itself – concludes in his own investigation of the roots of American life and writing in the Old World in his *Four Quartets*,

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time. (Eliot, "Little Gidding" 197)

Indeed, although exemplary, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest* are most likely not the only explorations into the possibilities of the Ulyssean Tradition which a reading through this Tradition may explore. *Ulysses* has so far hardly lost its perceived seminality. On the contrary, *Ulysses* remains open to a reciprocal dialogicity through which novels, in conducting their own aesthetic explorations through the Ulyssean Tradition, also explore Joyce's novel anew. As they

so inscribe themselves into the Ulyssean Tradition and thus paradigmatically reformulate its symbolic order, they shall come to know their and *Ulysses*' place for the first time again. Not only as a form of writing but also as a way of reading, the Ulyssean Tradition promises fertile continued explorations into the modern epic. Such scholarly explorations through the Ulyssean Tradition can offer literary criticism a fruitful lens through which to approach the modern epic novel. In the Ulyssean Tradition's desire for singular paradigmaticness, reading the epic novel in the Ulyssean Tradition can sustain new and independent readings of novels like *Infinite Jest* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. In its relationality, reading the Ulyssean Tradition can offer productive insights into the movements of literary history, intertextual interconnections, and the literary field. At last, reading the Ulyssean Tradition of Joyce's discovery always allows one to rediscover *Ulysses* itself anew. In its continuous reciprocal dialogue, the Ulyssean Tradition rejuvenates *Ulysses*, keeping it open for new explorations to come. In each way, the beginning and end of these explorations lies in a new return to *Ulysses*.

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