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Gravity's Rainbow: Modernist Discourse  
Vineland: Postmodernist Discourse

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## Introduction

To locate Gravity's Rainbow as a postmodern text within modernist discourse is probably sort of an odd thing. Obviously, the book's thematic depictions of linguistic colonialism and discourse of control (capitalism), suggest the inscription of power relations into formulations of truth and rationality, and a postmodern analysis of discursive operations and hierarchies. Yet, I want to stress here the ways in which we have been orientated to access and reproduce the text through modernist discourse.

I do not mean to project a rigid categorization of these two postmodern texts, Gravity's Rainbow and Vineland, by seeing them situated within distinct discourses, "modern," and "postmodern." Yet, I do want to dramatize the different discursive contexts they emanated from as well as the type of criticism they anticipate and encourage. Gravity's Rainbow, I shall argue, preserves the modernist expectation of iconization, discontinuity, and difficulty that characterizes works such as Ulysses, retaining the spirit of high modernism even if transfiguring the form. Here is one illustration emblematic of the difference I see between the two texts: Gravity's Rainbow incorporates the use of cinematic media into the novel, for instance, yet always retains a meta-commentary--"it was difficult even for us, old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?)..."--that secures a critical and oppositional space for the text and the author. Vineland, in contrast, inundates itself

with cinematic and television images yet lacks the meta-lectures, becoming, ultimately, an odd replication of "daytime drama and political thriller" complete with Disney/Steven Spielberg ending. The critical space that Gravity's Rainbow clears for itself evaporates here, and instead of producing "subtexts" of the texts of modern culture, it denaturalizes them through playful reorientation.

Gravity's Rainbow may be a postmodern fiction. As Brian McHale suggests in Postmodern Fiction, its ontological dominant, the heterotopian mixing of previously distinct forms, is a slight shift from a modernist, epistemological dominant (McHale:1987). Yet, where is this definition of "postmodern" coming from? It is not my goal here to settle the question of the novel's categorization. Instead, I want to explore the origin and function of the terms and concepts used for categorization, the terms which manufacture stability and "meaning" for the text. My concern is not to demonstrate that the book is postmodern, but look at the way we are oriented and directed by discourse, by the organization of signs in an ongoing process, to view the book in certain ways.

I am proposing that, within the context of the academic discourse community, Gravity's Rainbow is ultimately the continuation of modernist discourse. In its parody of the style and strategy of high modernism, it still is written in the "spirit" of modernism. We can see similarities in the revolutionary politics of modernism and Gravity's Rainbow, as

Irving Howe suggests in The Idea of the Modern (1967):

The kind of literature called modern is almost always difficult to comprehend: That is the sign of its modernity. To the established guardians of culture, the modern writer seems wilfully inaccessible. He works with unfamiliar forms; he chooses subjects that disturb the audience and threaten its most cherished sentiments...Modern writers find that they begin to work at a moment when the culture is marked by a prevalent style of perception and feeling; and their modernity consists in a revolt against this prevalent style. But modernism does not establish a prevalent style of its own...This presents it with a dilemma which in principle may be beyond solution but in practice leads to formal inventiveness and resourceful dialectic--the dilemma that modernism must always struggle but never quite triumph, and then, after a time, must struggle in order not to triumph.<sup>1</sup>

Howe's expression of the modernism spirit of Yeats, Eliot, Kafka, and Joyce, the desire to be difficult, disturbing and continually revolutionary seems applicable to the way critics have articulated Gravity's Rainbow. Gravity's Rainbow and V. can be seen parodies of the distinctive styles modernist writers. But in this sense the text's revolt against the institutionalization of these works, the fact that they have become the normative standards to struggle against, preserves the expectations of modernist discourse. Ironically, because of its very drive toward nonconformity, it continues and legitimates the operations of the modernist critical discourse by preserving a model of literary history which is author-centered and elitist, which canonizes authorial genius as the subjective re-ordering of the world.

Vineland, however, is located within postmodern discourse, and it is conformist in the sense that it does not promote itself

as a jutting, problematic icon on the literary landscape. It is more insoluble and resistant to modernist discourse because of a lack of the very revolutionary and oppositional stratagems that this criticism expects; it is a set of different assumptions about the function and nature of literature and criticism.

Vineland, I will argue, is not a deliberate frustration of normative reading strategies, nor a disruptive obscenity, but a playful appropriation of the tropes of a communication culture, foregrounding a denaturalization of the modes and images of pop fiction and television rather than resisting them.

Before I continue, an elaboration of what I mean by modernist and postmodernist discourse is essential to keep these terms from getting out of my hands. Still, I do not want to suggest that either is a unified or unproblematic term--We are, perhaps, only now beginning to generate the vocabulary adequate to discuss "discourse" from a postmodern perspective, and I want to stress the notion that these concepts are (at least from my understanding) in a degree of flux. In any event, by "modernist" discourse, I mean an emphasis on human subjectivity which allows the individual to withdraw from the (unnatural, chaotic) reality of modern industrial society: The ability for the human subject to order the world within an internal space of private coherence. Timothy Reiss, in The Discourse of Modernism (1982) traces the origins of analytico-referential discourse to the seventeenth century. For my purposes, it is adequate to consider this discourse to be the 1960 era evaluation of the

project of the modern period (i.e., its institutionalization); that is, Howe's evocation of modernism. Further, something like Fredric Jameson's description of modernist architecture seems adequate: Those "masterworks and monuments of high modernism" which insert "a different, a distinct, an elevated, a new utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign-system of the surrounding city..." (Jameson:1988,21) In this discourse, criticism functions to explicate, to draw out the meaning lurking in the text's critical/oppositional space. Finally, the author is still the origin of representation, preserving the subject/object dichotomy.

Postmodern discourse, in contrast, stresses the insolubility of aesthetic surfaces. Human subjectivity is never quite a distinct or discrete phenomenon, but part of an environment of surface images that constitute our "realities." Instead of individual acts of creation and explication, mechanical, cybernetic words such as "production," and "reproduction," become expressive of replication of interpretations from other interpretations and their subsequent genealogical accumulation. The activities of this discourse locate truth, in a Foucaultian sense, within an institutional framework; knowledge is governed by power relations, and "truth" is inextricably linked to institutional support. The intellectual, then, is not in a privileged position of autonomy outside the institutional matrix.

In attempting to repossess the categorization of these terms, modernism and postmodernism, I think we end up confronting the critical-historiographic apparatus which produces them. C. Barry Chabot, in his article "The Problem of the Postmodern," (New Literary History, 1988) suggests, I think, the notion that the postmodern is produced to satisfy certain desires:

I suspect that the term's currency has more to do with impatience than with actual conceptual shifts. Modernism has been with us for the better part of the century. Its own restless search for innovation in part informs efforts to move beyond it...In the end, as Frank Kermode has shown, there is considerable satisfaction in believing that one inhabits a cusp between eras, not the least of which is the belief that one is replicating the heroic phase of modernism. We might sympathize with such desires, but it seems to me that we should receive announcements of the postmodern's arrival as skeptically as we do commercials for other new products in the marketplace.<sup>2</sup>

What I want to do in this section is explore, in detail, some aspects of the critical historiography of Gravity's Rainbow to demonstrate that the academic discourse community which produces our understanding of Gravity's Rainbow does so in ways that mark a continuation of modernist discourse; a continuation of the need to believe that one inhabits "a cusp between eras," as Chabot suggests. These are: 1) The evolution of periodizing vocabulary of "modernism" and "postmodernism," based upon the modernist conception of an "oppositional space," and 2) The modernist continuity suggested by the conflation of the problematic and difficult reading experience with truth and new form. These will, I hope, suggest ways in which Gravity's Rainbow is a "postmodern" text--but one in which the production and access to



this term is seen through the lens of a largely continuous "modernist" discourse. My project is not to suggest easy answers or new re-classifications, but rather to problematize the convenience of these terms within the discursive context they originated in.

The Periodizing Vocabulary: Genealogy of the postmodern

Why did this new term, "postmodernism," circulate to describe the "new" art of the sixties and seventies? Looking, I think, at the specific critical response to Gravity's Rainbow will suggest that the production of this new term generally maintains the revolutionary and oppositional rhetoric that is characteristic of Howe's articulation of the modern. In other words, there is continuity in the dilemma that Howe articulated above:

But modernism does not establish a prevalent (institutionalized) style of its own...This presents it with a dilemma...that modernism must always struggle but never quite triumph, and then, after a while, must struggle in order not to triumph. (p.13)

Howe represents a 1960's interpretation of modernism and its cultural legacy; it is into this discursive environment that Pynchon's text emerges. The dilemma Howe articulates, the fear of losing the oppositional status that gives the modern purpose, I argue, is embodied in the circulation of the term "postmodern" with respect to Gravity's Rainbow. It suggests that literature has to develop and protect its own oppositional/critical space from institutionalization. This anxiety of being co-opted as a normative practice is heightened, and with good reason perhaps, in the historical context of the Nixon repression of the early

seventies. This underlying anxiety suggests an element of continuity in the program of aesthetic inaccessibility, disruption, and revolt that Howe attributes to the modernist period in The Idea of the Modern.

There is an immediate twist in this discussion of modernist assumptions: Gravity's Rainbow seems to call attention to the cycle of rupture and co-option as a fundamental characteristic of the oppositional text (i.e., one which breaks with aesthetic norms). While Howe's description of the dilemma of modernist discourse suggests the necessity of a continual, vigilant resistance to becoming the prevalent style, my reading of Gravity's Rainbow suggests that the text positions itself with respect to this process. For instance, the references to Weber's sociological concept of the bureaucratic rationalization of charisma (see pages 81.8-9, 464.30) from The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and The Theory of Social and Economic Organization indicates Pynchon's awareness that an oppositional stance is perhaps, at best, momentary. Edward Mendelson's description of Gravity's Rainbow in his article "Gravity's Encyclopedia" (1976) is representative of this position:

An encyclopedic narrative is a work of positive illegality, originating in moments of hierarchical strain and cultural distress. But some years after its author sends it out into the world...the book itself, now safely settled in the literary-historical past, becomes an element in a centripetal network of official cultural self-consciousness and the focus of an organized bureaucracy of textual and historical scholarship.<sup>3-5</sup>

Mendelson's argument in this article is significant, for it suggests that a fundamental development in the new aesthetic is the formal recognition of the normalization of "illegality." It is important to keep in mind, however, that Howe expressed a similar sentiment about modernism: "Weariness sets in...Through the brilliance and fervor of its straining, modernism begins to exhaust itself." (Howe:1963,22) Further, Mendelson articulates Gravity's Rainbow within an oppositional framework, such as describing Pynchon as "The emergence of a writer whose authority is comparable to Joyce's but who breaks radically with Joyce's assumptions..." Pynchon's critical/metafictional space within the text, as we shall see later, acts to reproduce the modernist spirit of opposition, though in a more limited and provisional way.

Yet, the recognition that Howe's dilemma is a losing proposition, that the oppositional space is reduced by entropic decline, is a significant transition. In the context of Vineland we see, I think, a text which presents itself as already naturalized and commodified; which does not construct a critical space apart from this process. What I want to conclude from this, finally, is that bending of the modernist aesthetic to incorporate its failure is still articulated under a framework of the disturbing, complex, even obscene nature of "new" art. That is, Gravity's Rainbow may be seen as a dialectically necessary step in the transformation of "modernist" discourse--the discourse of "conscious," subjective opposition and rupture--to

"postmodern" discourse--which does not separate institutional power from the production of knowledge.

In the late sixties and early seventies we see the emergence of the term "postmodern" to describe the art of this period. Ihab Hassan, in his article "POSTmodernISM" (New Literary History, Fall 1971), is perhaps emblematic of this early articulation. For instance, he suggests the existence of this new aesthetic based upon a transformation of seven prophetic modernist rubrics (urbanism, technologism, "dehumanization," primitivism, eroticism, antinomianism, and experimentalism). Although this manifesto stresses a continuity between the two aesthetics, it has recently been suggested that his separation is the product of glossing his catalogue of concerns and then "awards the primacy of vision to postmodernism..." (Chabot:1988,5) For instance, his suggestion that the modernist reaction to realism (Ortega y Gasset's "Dehumanization") really means elitism and the "aristocratic or crypto-fascism" of Rilke, Eliot, and d'Annunzio etc., seems to be what Howe calls one insoluble precipitation of modernism's obnoxiousness. (Howe:1963,21). We turn to Hassan's latter work, The Dismemberment of Orpheus (1982) to see a much more sophisticated analysis of the postmodern. However, it is symptomatic of the times that his 1971 "postmodern" exists only through deflating the complexities of the modern.

The term appears infrequently in early Pynchon criticism. Many texts avoid making direct periodizations but suggest a break

from high modernism. Newman's Understanding Thomas Pynchon (1986), Cowart's Thomas Pynchon (1980), and Stark's Pynchon's Fictions (1980) all offer provisional statements. Newman calls it "the most important novel to emerge during the postmodern period..." suggesting that the text is a parody of Joyce. Both Stark and Cowart illustrate Pynchon's references to the modernists Rilke and Eliot as well as the quest tradition, suggesting that he assimilates and modifies the "modern" tradition (Cowart:1980,132). Stark in particular seems to illustrate the modernist view of the single author's coherent aesthetic project:

Pynchon's conception of the mission of literature is distinctive. With great skill he manipulates the traditional elements of fiction in order to reveal the inadequacy of realistic literary conventions and commonsense epistemologies...<sup>4</sup>

Mendelson's two articles (1976,1978) break ground in describing Gravity's Rainbow as split from modernist and romantic traditions because of the political consciousness of Pynchon's use of language and the call to "confront the effects of interpretation in a world of ethics.." as the challenge criticism must face to escape the centripetal momentum of modernism (1978,15). This call for critical self-consciousness, I think, largely effects only cosmetic change in the critical discourse--evidence of the fact that the momentum of modernist discourse continues well into the text's historiography. For instance, Brian Mchale presents some sophisticated theoretical arguments about the schism between the culturally dominant modernism and nascent postmodernism of

Gravity's Rainbow in three texts (1979,-85,-87). Yet, they reproduce the modernist conflation of form with meaning: This is evident in his structuralist criticism in Postmodernist Fictions, where the shift from modernist to postmodernist literature is predicated upon the cataloguing of the formal textual devices used to promote a shift from epistemological to ontological poetics.

Mchale is emblematic of the continuation of "modernist" discourse in the circulation of the term postmodernism with respect to Gravity's Rainbow. Joel Black, in his critique of Mchale's book, "Postmodernist Fictions: A Review Essay" (1986), offers, I think, a number of illustrations of this continuity. First, he suggests Mchale's complicity in what I have termed "modernist" discourse:

For when fiction becomes so self-conscious and self-critical that it questions and plays with its own ontological status (what is it?) rather than bringing to the fore epistemological issues so congenial to criticism (what does it mean?), isn't the task of formulating a non- or meta-fictional critical discourse, or a "poetics"...itself rendered impossible or irrelevant? Hasn't postmodernist fiction, in other words, preempted criticism and beaten the critic at his own game?<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, Black claims that the Mchale's epistemological/ontological categorization may be adequate for short, controlled texts, but that for "ambitious and complex" works such as Finnegans Wake and Gravity's Rainbow, the "epistemolgical-ontological pendulum swings within their own fictional structure." (98) Further, he locates Mchale's progressive anti-realist reaction as a movement from the "soft

anti-realism of modernism to the hard anti-realism of postmodernism." That is, he is incapable of articulating the deeper implications of the postmodern transformation:

But as theorists like Huyssen and Lyotard have pointed out, postmodernism differs from modernism chiefly in the fact that it refuses, or is simply unable, to be anti-anything--anti-realism or even anti-modernism...Mchale loses sight of the far more important difference between modernism and postmodernism as cultural conditions: namely, modernism's adversarial stance that pits it not only against realism but against mass culture, and postmodernism's non-adversarial stance that allows it to play (along)...<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Black suggest that because Mchale's categorization of the postmodern is based upon the traditional reification of "literature" as a privileged fiction, he is confined and "actually more in the spirit of modernism--with its concern for the autonomy of the arts, and their seperatness from mass culture..." (102). I think, in conclusion, that McHale's epistemological/ontological division is a precipitate of the "modernist" discourse--i.e., based upon certain functions that criticism is supposed to preform--that he locates himself within. Mchale, then, is a representative of the modernist-structuralist re-production of the text in the critical discourse of Gravity's Rainbow. Judging from Mchale's influence within this community, we can suggest that his impact lends some legitimacy to the notion that our access to the text has been oriented by what I have termed "modernist" discourse.<sup>8</sup>

For instance, Molly Hite, in Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon (1983), describes the text as characteristic of

postmodern, which

...tends to attack, undermine, parody, or otherwise call into question certain characteristic assumptions of modernist fiction, just as modernist fiction called into question several of the characteristic assumptions of its precursors, realistic and naturalistic fiction.<sup>9</sup>

This vocabulary of "attack, undermine, and question," as I suggested earlier, has a lot in common with Howe's description of the modern. Further, she says "As Brian McHale has demonstrated recently, Pynchon...sabotages contemporary habits of mind that derive from certain of the assumptions of modernism." (5) I am not denying that Gravity's Rainbow does not do some of these things, but I want to make clear that both the text and the critical discourse that produces readings of the text (they are, in a sense, inseparable--how can you know the "real" text apart from the discourse community's "readings" of it?) orient a discussion of Gravity's Rainbow which is very much in the spirit of modernism. In conclusion, the circulation of such oppositional periodizing vocabulary is a natural operation of what I have called "modernist" discourse: It serves the purpose of establishing a set of distinctions, a notion of separateness, that I think is characteristic of early articulations of the postmodern. The construction of this oppositional relationship between modernism/postmodernism is reflected, I think, in the celebration of the "difficult reading experience," which I want to talk about next.

Difficult Reading and Form: modernist continuity?

Gravity's Rainbow begins with the phrase, "A screaming came



across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now." Reading Gravity's Rainbow is difficult-- i.e., a "screaming" across the literary sky. In 1973, Time Magazine called it, "funny, disturbing, exhausting...mind-fogging..." The New Yorker said that reading it was "like eating all of a thirty-six pound wheel of Vermont Cheddar cheese." The New Republic said the novel was "massive, mind-blowing, stomach-turning..." and claimed that "Pynchon is trying to conceive us anew, beget us out of wedlock."

Yet, in away it seems almost deliberately comparable. For instance, The New York Times of January 26, 1941 observes:

There is nothing in all literature really comparable to Ulysses, and certainly nothing--if it may be placed in that category--comparable to Finnegans Wake...One thing is certain--that along the lines of experimentation which Joyce followed it is impossible to carry further...One cannot conceive of the subjective method in fiction being pushed beyond the point to which he carried it in Ulysses.

The celebration of difficult reading and new form, I think, is a replication of what Robert Con Davis calls the modernist "rhetoric of loss, apocalypse, and new beginnings," (Davis: 1986,11) and what Kermode calls "a reaction against the crushing weight of an artistic past which cannot be surveyed any longer by one person." The sheer difficulty of reading the book and its experimentation fulfill the expectations of "modernist" discourse. We detect a different sort of response to Vineland. Salmon Rushdie, in the NYT book review (Jan. 14,1990) claims: "it isn't congested or stop-start or stiff; matter of fact, its free-flowing and light and funny..."

I want to emphasize a transition in the postmodernism of these two texts. Gravity's Rainbow emerges into a time and discourse which valorizes the disturbance, complexity, and "newness" of a text. Now every book jacket is covered with critic's superlatives. The 1989 printing of E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime, for instance, advertises itself: "There has never been a novel quite like Ragtime..a chronicle of the shimmering, shattering forces from all walks of American life...etc." The exaggerated, commodified use of these words, within our (more) postmodern culture--to describe every new movie, Stephen King novel, Bud Bowl, and Gillete razor--develops into a societal jadedness. Again, this transition, from modernist to postmodernist culture, is partially evident in the language used to describe Gravity's Rainbow in contrast to the more sober reserve of Joyce's epitaph. Yet, within the text's critical discourse I think we can catch the sense that the complexity of form and difficulty of reading experience is not a depthless advertisement, but a meaningful grasp at "truth."

There are three rather distinct reactions to the text's "newness" of form and reading strategy. The first one to emerge is a continuation of the modernist celebration of novelty and experimentation, for whom the net effect of the text is a breaking down of old norms. The significant characteristic of this criticism is to attribute a didacticism to Pynchon's difficult text and not apply any sort of questioning deconstruction to his motives--Pynchon's subjective position.

John Stark, for instance, claims that Pynchon's skill is in balancing his erudition with complete aesthetic control, and because of this "Gravity's Rainbow teaches us how to understand our world." (1980,174) Dennis Brown groups Pynchon as part of the American continuation of the modernist experimental tradition. Newmann (1986,134) describes the reading experience as producing "something akin to a mind in shock, reeling obsessively into incomprehension." Plater's The Grim Phoenix begins his study stressing the intense reading experience of the text, "Even readers toughened by the random fiction of Joyce or Becket are tempted by the clues for order." (1978,14) Plater goes on to lionize the experimental uncertainty of Gravity's Rainbow towards the end of his book, suggesting that the sheer variety in Pynchon's grim phoenix offers hope in the face of apocalypse. I think, here, this school of thought seeing hope in the chaotic proliferation of the text is an emerging one.

Lawrence C. Wolfley, in "Repression's Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon's Big Novel," for instance, claims that a tension between aesthetic determination and deconstructive uncertainty is "the miracle of language itself--language, an irreducibly intuitive symbolic process." (1978,887) Schaub (1981), McHale (1979,85), Clerc (1983), and Hume (1987) all arrive at similar positive conclusions. I think this is justifiable, for the original title of the book was Mindless Pleasures, suggesting as manichean allegory between Apollonian order/repression and Dionysian anarchy/pleasure. (see

Mchale:1987,143)

My reading of this community of critics, those who see affirmation in the text's "newness," suggests that they reproduce the spirit of modernism, of the Howe's dilemma of opposition which "in practice leads to formal inventiveness and resourceful dialectic..." Further, in the cataloguing of the formal complexity of Pynchon's new style, in producing a new, "postmodern" aesthetic, they maintain the privileged, didactic position of high literature by incorporating Pynchon within the cannon, as I think Mendelson does in his article "Gravity's Encyclopedia." These critics' expression of the text's encyclopedic traversing of cultural proliferation, from high culture to "the sludge of pop culture," still preserves the great work as the site for the miracle of language.

In the late eighties, possibly as the result of the text's reabsorption within the discourse community after the passing of the initial fad of imported deconstructive/poststructuralist criticism, we see the emergence of a good deal of mythopoetic criticism of the text. Books by Hohmann, Hume, Moore, and Weisenberger suggest positive mythic and religious structures in Gravity's Rainbow. Hume's book, Pynchon's Mythography (1987), makes the legitimate claim that after the first, difficult, "postmodern," reading of the book, internal mythic structure and coherence begins to emerge. Her criticism effectively incorporates Pynchon within the modernist program that constructs a private space of internal cohesion from a world of chaos:

For the reader who works through the text sufficiently to get beyond disorientation, Gravity's Rainbow should imply an author who has achieved a vantage point on the far side of the abyss into which all conventional meaning has disappeared.<sup>10</sup>

Weisenberger's analysis follows the same mythopoetic route Hume traveled. His text, A Gravity's Rainbow Companion (1988), extracts temporal and structural coherence from the religious and mandala symbolism. What becomes apparent, though, is that in the intricacy of his detail he clearly replicates the hermetic modernist criticism that Gravity's Rainbow encourages but also seems to parody. The question neither of them are prepared to answer is how does Gravity's Rainbow address the role of the critic? The inability to respond to what Mendelson termed Pynchon's "call to explore the motives of criticism," confines them to a purely modernist/mythopoetic approach, investigating only the motives of reading--the search for meaning--but never the critic's production of it. The texts that they produce within the discourse community, obscuring the dimensions of Pynchon's work which confront the critic as well as the reader, orient access to the book congruous with a conception of "postmodernism" that is merely an extension of the modernist movement into a further privatized space of internal coherence.

While there is legitimacy to their claims of eventual coherence--the mandala imagery, for instance--I am not convinced that this is not redundant criticism: Has not Gravity's Rainbow already preempted such critical positions? (If you stare at stars in the sky, for long enough, don't a series of

constellations become evident?) Joyce's ideal reader was the insomniac who read nothing but Joyce. What sort of reader does Gravity's Rainbow encourage? The novel's parody of our obsessive search for coherence ("so you will want cause and effect?"), the paranoid's solipsistic ordering of the world, and the "reading act" itself suggests that Pynchon cannot take seriously this relentless search, "holy center approaching," for internal coherence:

--all right, say we are supposed to be the Kabbalists our here, say that's our real Destiny, to be the scholar-magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it's all squeezed limp of its last drop... (520)

The next paragraph continues in this same metafictional mode which addresses the critical process rather than just the difficulty of reading:

But, if I'm riding through it, the Real Text, right now, if this is it [...] the bombing was the exact industrial process of conversion, each release of energy placed exactly in space and time, each shockwave plotted in advance to bring precisely tonight's wreck into being thus decoding the Text, thus coding, recoding, redecoding the holy Text...If it is in working order, what is it meant to do? (520-1)

This sort of metafiction is not only aimed at the reader, to reveal the constructedness of the fictional illusion, but extended to the writer, the re-producer of the holy text, Gravity's Rainbow, in the form of explication; "coding, recoding, redecoding." Molly Hume is careful to avoid "academic consumption," and she is sensitive to the experimental disruptiveness articulated by Schaub and McHale. Her main thrust

is that the text invites rereading, and as this process continues, we become more comfortable with the idea of uncertainty and begin to establish links and connections.

In conclusion, I think two things are apparent. 1) if we agree that this type of hermetic criticism is already a textual phenomenon, through the metafiction described above and certain characters in the text (Slothrop, for instance) who pursue such reading strategies, then this mythopoetic criticism is redundant: As Joel Black said earlier, the text has already preempted such critical positions. 2) if, on the other hand, we are prepared to say that the text cannot maintain such a degree of self-criticism and collapses into internal myth in the way his earlier text, The Crying of Lot 49 was able to avoid, then I think we end up agreeing with the process of cultural absorption Mendelson described in "Gravity's Encyclopedia:" The cultural "illegality" of the text is assimilated and normalized. Now, I think both of these positions are predicated upon the assumption--implicit in "modernist" discourse--that the text can construct an oppositional space (privately coherent) for itself, however momentary, either in the form of experimental complexity or a metafictional anti-realism.

In Vineland, this space evaporates. The notion of an "oppositional space" which permits Hume's conception of a "vantage point on the far side of the abyss into which all conventional meaning has disappeared" (1987,221) itself is a fiction in postmodern discourse. The master narratives of

modernist culture--Psychoanalysis, Marxism, scientific positivism, and the privileged position of the work of high art etc.--become fictions in the postmodern culture, where, as Mary Kelly said, "There's no single theoretical discourse which is going to offer an explanation for all forms of social relations or for every mode of political practice." (Kelly:1982,62)

In stepping beyond the modernist bracketing of literature as a privileged and autonomous fiction, the poststructuralist criticism on the novel reproduces it in a much more meaningful socio-political context. The text is not divided along the axis of old historicism (realism) and formalism (anti-realism), which makes a discussion of the world and the text elusive and problematic. Khachig Toloyan, in "Discoursing with Culture: The Novel as Interlocutor" (1988), and Charles Russell's "Pynchon's Language: Signs, Systems, and Subversion" (1983) both see the text as an "interlocutor in cultural discourse." Toloyan centers his discussion of Gravity's Rainbow and Tolstoy's War and Peace on a conception of the novel as a site of interaction and conflict between competing discourses. In particular, he uncovers the role of science within capitalist discourse of control in Gravity's Rainbow, which he links to Bakhtin's theory that discourses are neither "always autonomous nor merely interpenetrating, but rather exist at certain historical conjunctures...in which some are more determining than determined." (Toloyan:1988,230) He argues that

In Pynchon's novels, science and technology, two discourse of knowledge and mastery, are used to show



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the extent to which, when they seem to work best, they lead only to our being mastered by the illusion of mastery, by our misconception of ourselves as masters of nature's creatures and of our own creations.<sup>11</sup>

He goes on to claim that the text's scientific discourse, an illusory control, exists within the institutional configuration of capitalism, yet is (more) determined by the discourse of mathematics and statistics. This is the recognition that in "a technocratic and information-oriented society, the repressed is the anxiety over lack of certainty." He claims that what the novel's use of statistics suggests is that the only certain thing is the perpetual continuation of uncertainty, as formally described in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and the Poisson distribution.

In conjunction with my hypothesis that Gravity's Rainbow is an intermediate step in the dialectical transformation of modernist discourse (i.e., the articulation of the postmodern in the spirit of modernism) it seems symptomatic that even Toloyan's postmodern analysis naturalizes a mastering position to the text. While his argument certainly is not incorrect, there is the sense in which it mythologizes what this discourse really is. He says:

Even a reader who knows nothing about the Poisson distribution...can read Snake [p.342] as a figure of predictable unpredictability set loose in the garden of certainties. But when this reading is mediated by a knowledge of the statistical discourse, it becomes linked to the rocket and far more ambitious thematics of control that speak to the real world that the V-2 made, in which we dwell, where the only certainty is that there will always be an absent rocket, as much beyond our control as death is beyond mastery.<sup>12</sup>

This concluding passage suggests that the Poisson distribution

lends an element of closure to the text by formally encoding the notion of eternal uncertainty: "...as much beyond our control as death is beyond mastery." Yet, the Poisson distribution is not an underlying law regarding the probability of events like falling rockets, but merely a mathematical function whose variables can be adjusted to describe probability distributions that satisfy three essential conditions. Morris Degroot's Probability and Statistics (1975) describes the first condition: "The probability of occurrence in any two disjoint intervals of time [or space] must be independent of each other." (254) The fact is that the relationship between Slothrop's sexual encounters and the rocketfalls is not a Poisson equivalence, but a one to one correlation. This alone does not preclude the existence of a Poisson distribution, but it underscores the fact that such an uncertainty depends on what sort of information-- what sort of perspective--you have. Keeping tabs on the Slothrop's peregrinations, for example, would reestablish Pointsman's cause-effect relationship and create a sense of certainty about where the next rocket would fall. Further, the minor variations caused by atmospheric uncertainty implied in a Poisson distribution of rocket blasts seems relevant only to buzzbombs, not the ICBM headed for the Orpheus theater at the end of the book. In other words, the scientific explanations that circulate in Gravity's Rainbow are textual explanations, are largely ideas of individual characters within the book, and this statistical explanation seems to be Mexico's--that is, relative

to his subjective position within the fictional world. Toloyan, because he extends this statistical discourse beyond its applicable limits, beyond the particular position Pynchon has given it in the text (i.e., Roger Mexico's explanation, based upon no exterior knowledge about the nature of the Rocket and Slothrop), mythologizes the Poisson distribution as a form of narrative closure. It becomes, then, despite a post-structuralist analysis, a critical vantage point which paraphrases the text based upon the assumption or desire for closure, on some meta-discourse to rise above, and structure, the cacophony of heteroglossia.

There is no doubt, however, that the reabsorption of the text within this community of post-structuralist criticism orients discussion outside of "modernist" discourse. By this, we realize that the criticism of the book certainly is no monolith, but only a loose gravitation to some normative discursive operations which I have termed "modernist." What I think is evident, however, is that the book both encourages and is explicated in ways that mark a continuation of the spirit of modernism, even if it is described as an aesthetic break, a nonconformist retreat into a species of anti-modernist, anti-realist "postmodernism."

It is from this reconfiguration of the discursive environment of Gravity's Rainbow that we can now move on to see Vineland playing with the normative conditions of realism, modernism, and mass culture rather than defining itself on the

basis of its difference from these norms. For critics such as Fredric Jameson, this type of art is schizophrenic, lacking in the particular modernist self-identity. However, we shall see that the novel demythologizes the oppositional space--Jameson's master narrative--and suggests a new mode of oppositional discourse.

George Orwell's sci-fi dystopia, 1984, immediately thrusts the reader into a world so grotesquely violated, such a fantastic perversion of the big words like "democracy," "freedom," and "liberty," that we displace it immediately to the spaces that Stalin, Hitler, and Mao have etched in the modern mind:

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast...slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him. The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats... (5)

Orwell quickly constructs and consolidates a vantage point exterior to the wretched squalor of this fictional world; i.e., there cannot be much doubt in the reader's mind about what sort of perspective to take to the world of 1984. We see that such a perspective is similar to the one the reader assumes in Gravity's Rainbow, united with Pynchon against the entropic wastefulness and reproduced terror of the System, united, as Molly Hume said, "on the far side of the abyss."

Vineland, however, projects a world to the reader that is not written in the nightmarish vocabulary of apocalypse but in the image of America seen through the eyes of Hollywood and Madison Avenue, and resituated along the LA-Las Vegas axis:

Later than usual one summer morning in 1984, Zoyd Wheeler drifted awake in sunlight through a creeping fig that hung in the window, with a squadron of blue jays stomping on the roof...On the table in the kitchen, next to the Count Chocula box, which turned out to be empty, he found a note from Prairie..."Froot Loops again I guess," he mumbled at the note. (3)

From the "encyclopedic" sweep of cultural variety in Gravity's

Rainbow--plastic man, Rossini, Dracula, Dillinger, Dietrich, Dickinson, and Dumbo--Vineland offers a smorgasbord of every day, commodified homogeneity--malls, television cop-shows, Nestle Quick, and the Super Bowl clutter the text's environment.

Gravity's Rainbow and Vineland are sort of "about" the same thing. That is, Vietnam-era America of Nixon, written through two different historical perspectives: The past, through a cinematic reconstruction of World War Two, and the future, through the televised images Reagan's America. Yet, there are considerable differences. This is evident in Rushdie's comment, "It is also not the book we thought Thomas Pynchon was writing." What I want to do is offer a way to situate this "difference."

First, in beginning with a juxtaposition of the two dystopian novels and Vineland, I want to foreground the spirit of postmodernism: Both the dystopic texts project themselves to a fictional (i.e., futuristic, bizarre, or geographically displaced) space. In some sense, by reading the dominant discourses of modern culture (capitalism, communism, technology, etc.) they produce readings of these discourses (i.e., subtexts) which are mythologized as what "could" be. In Gravity's Rainbow, the subtext of the discourse of multinational capitalism--the cold war reproduction of terror--is the rocket/phallus metaphor. Lawrence C. Wolfley, in "Repression's Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon's Big Novel," suggests that this psychological subtext is the eschatology of thermonuclear armageddon. Vineland, however, denaturalizes the mythical,

fictional space we inhabit (the "vineland" of Reagan's America) without producing the type of reading we expect, coming from the modernist discourse of Gravity's Rainbow. The "subtexts" of this text are no more than representations themselves. Consequently, they are not as easily displaced to some allegorical, mythical space.

Having dramatized the shift from modernist to postmodernist discourse as one which demythologizes the modernist production of the subtexts of cultural discourse, I want to frame this shift around their different mechanisms of representation. Such a contrast, will, I think, situate Vineland closer to the postmodern culture that Baudrillard describes in "The Ecstasy of Communication:"

What I mean is this: what was projected psychologically and mentally, what used to be lived out on earth as metaphor, as mental or metaphorical scene, is henceforth projected into reality, without any metaphor at all, into an absolute space which is also that of simulation. <sup>13</sup>

Along with Fredric Jameson, Baudrillard expresses nostalgia for the modern, for its stable vantage points and metaphoric control. As Craig Owens and Linda Hutcheon, however, have suggested, there is the possibility of a postmodern discourse that does not erode categories and boundaries, that does not "implode," but a moves toward a "concept of difference without opposition."

(Kaplan:1988,43)

My specific focus, the discursive re-production of Gravity's Rainbow, is the mastering position of modernist literary discourse. The shift in representation, from modernist

oppositional space to the postmodern space of simulation, I shall argue, offers an alternative form of social critique, one which demythologizes the elitism inscribed in the modernist reading of "mass" culture.

Now, how is this "space of simulation" different than the oppositional space Gravity's Rainbow? The illustration I used in the introduction is a convenient way to contrast the nature of representation in the two novels: Gravity's Rainbow maintains a meta-commentary on its own novel/cinema analogy, projecting an audience and an author exterior to the "screen" of the printed page. Whereas the movie theater--and I include the whole structural edifice; screen, projector, lights, seats, speakers, and ushers--might be an adequate image for Gravity's Rainbow, Vineland seems to bring to mind the picture of two televisions placed face to face, creating a fictional space where the explicit metafictional demarcation between screen/audience and text/reader has disappeared without prompting an endorsement of literal realism: This space is the playful denaturalization, rather than the "reading," of the texts of contemporary culture.

The cinematic discourse of Gravity's Rainbow is, I think, an essential metafictional device. Critics such as Cooper (1983), Cowart (1980), and Clerc (1983), and McHale (1987) have demonstrated the ways in which Gravity's Rainbow uses the paradigm of film/audience to foreground its historical and fictional illusions. Cooper, for instance, suggests that Pynchon's incorporation of cinematic technology undercuts the



stability of cause and effect realism. (1983,117) McHale claims that the film becomes a distinct ontological level, threatening a confusion of "real" with "reel." (1987,128) What is apparent, I think, is that the literature/cinema analogy demystifies the process of artistic production, to some extent, by comparing it to the more visible technology of the movie camera. Once this analogy is established (right down to the row of boxes before every episode) Pynchon's metafictional statements function to continually remind us that we are only spectators in an audience:

The rhythmic clapping resonates inside these walls, which are hard and glossy as coal: Come-on! Start-the-show! Come-on! Start-the-show! The screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent. The film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out. It was difficult even for us, old fans who've been at the movies (haven't we?) to tell which before the darkness swept in. (760)

The metafictional pun on military vernacular, "its all theater," is repeated continually (pp. 3,267,302,326,521,722,etc.).

The central question to all of this is the degree to which the book suggests that the fictional-cinematic quality of the world is inescapable, the degree to which Pynchon's reconfiguration of the world really is "all theater." Here, again, I think we can conceive of the book as being poised between a sense of modern and postmodern reality, being stuck, almost, in having to articulate its "postmodernity" within the prevailing "modernist" discourse. That is, the book's well-developed cinematic discourse ultimately reinforces the position of the novel as a privileged fiction--one which gives us a

vantage point, an "oppositional space" of private coherence outside of the shape and substance of culture to articulate the cinematic subtexts of "mass" culture.

Gravity's Rainbow, then, uses cinematic discourse as a convenient mechanism to foreground its anti-realism, its "consciousness" of its own constructedness, incorporating the subtexts of popular culture as part of the novel's intertext. These use of these "subtexts" of pop-media, I think, become instrumental in creating the sense that this text offers a privileged position or vantage point to somehow get a global perspective (i.e., see Hume:1987). Again, this is reflective of the modernist conflation of form, and difficulty with meaning (see Davis:1986). It is further emblematic of a conception of the literary "masterpiece" being an autonomous realm (i.e., Mendelson's view that the encyclopedic narrative somehow corresponds to the culture's conception of itself).

In Gravity's Rainbow we can see a number of these prominent cinematic subtexts emerging as the quasi-themes of the book. The complex rocket-phallus metaphor and masculine/feminine division explicit in the book's parody of the popular war fictions, for instance:

Beyond simple steel erection, the Rocket was an entire system won, away from feminine darkness, held up against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature. (324)

Further, in addition to the book's critique of the production of gender in cultural images, the ideological repression of class, race, and sexual difference within "popular" culture emerges as a

significant theme of the text. This is evident in the mention of films such as Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" (p. 578) and Cooper's "King Kong" (pp. 57,247,275,688,689). The King Kong metaphysics of the novel--the control erotically out of control, in the fist of the sanitized, white culture's repressed "blackness"--is apparent:

And so, too, the legend of the black scapeape we cast down like Lucifer from the tallest erection in the world has come, in the fullness of time, to generate its own children. (275)

This continued motif of "blackness" and sodomy ("...Slothrop may have chosen this gown...out of some repressed desire to be sodomized, unimaginably, by a gigantic black ape..."[688]) suggests an irrational subconsciousness buried at the heart of the rational, bureaucratic, Weberian society (see Wolfley:1978).

Though a more thorough analysis of the representation of gender, race, class, and sexual difference in Gravity's Rainbow lies outside the scope of this paper, I think we can see that the analysis of the subtexts of popular culture rests upon both modernist assumptions of both insoluble "obnoxiousness" (i.e., disruptive obscenity) and as a culturally privileged space to "read" these subtexts.

In discussing Vineland, I want to foreground the transformation of the modernist "oppositional" space, which inscribed notions of literature's position as a privileged fiction, to the postmodern space of representation, of "play." The anti-realist and metafictional critique of representation, the disruptive formal experimentation, and the intellectual

pyrotechnics of Gravity's Rainbow that mapped out a "modernist" space of opposition have largely disappeared here. Now, what exactly is the difference between modernist "opposition" and postmodernist "play?" Linda Hutcheon articulates this as opposition from the inside:

Wilfully contradictory, then, postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within.<sup>14</sup>

Hutcheon's concept finds a slightly different expression in Anna Kaplan, yet I think the essential continuity is the loss of the global vantage point, the modernist oppositional space. Kaplan argues, and rightly so, in "Feminism/Oedipus/Postmodernism: The Case of MTV" (1988), that there certainly is the need to continue to articulate oppositional discourses. Yet, she cautions against insisting on a fixed point of enunciation, "ontological truth," claiming that we must recognize these oppositional discourses as just that--discourses, an ongoing production of knowledge within institutional fields of power.

The difference between modernist "opposition" and postmodernist "play," may be framed around Kaplan's analysis. The critical/oppositional space of modernist discourse defines itself through its difference from modern industrial society by establishing a position exterior to the reality of bourgeois culture, what Malcolm Bradbury described as its initial shock, "taking us behind familiar reality, breaking away from familiar functions of language and conventions of form."

(Bradbury:1987,24) The tendency which necessitates the continued struggle Howe described to avoid becoming the prevailing style is the problem of the reification of the modernist's space of opposition. Hence the articulation, in the early 1970's, of the new aesthetic of "postmodernism" (see Hassan:1973) represents the need of modernist discourse to move beyond the institutionalized and reified oppositional space of the high modernist aesthetic (i.e., Joyce, Kafka, Yeats).

Further, seeing its critique of bourgeois realism as what Kaplan calls "a fixed point of enunciation," the modernist vantage point reproduces a high/low cultural polarity. When we look at the traditional literary cannon, we see that institutionalized conceptions of "high" culture--definitions of "masterpieces"--are very much rooted in the reality of social power relations. The postmodern notion of "play," the space of simulation, then, demythologizes the notion that a space of internal linguistic coherence exists. Instead, it always contains what Bakhtin called "polyphony:"

The coexistence, in any textual or extratextual situation, of a plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single consciousness but rather exist on different registers, generating dialogical dynamism among themselves.<sup>15</sup>

It cannot take seriously the existence of a master narrative or vantage point to "read" the heterotopian mixture of different "realities" comprising a pluralistic society. Thus, Craig Owens says of Fredric Jameson's totalizing economic perspective in The Political Unconscious:

But sexual inequality cannot be reduced to an instance of economic exploitation--the exchange of women among men--and explained in terms of class struggle alone...Marxism privileges the characteristically masculine activity of production as the definitively human activity...women, historically consigned to the spheres of nonproductive or reproductive labor, are thereby situated outside the society of male producers...<sup>16</sup>

This example of postmodern discourse situates us in the position of having to give up any totalizing narrative or vantage point to "read" the texts of contemporary culture. Postmodern "playing" never situates the subject of discourse outside the production of ideology.

Far from becoming non-oppositional, then, postmodern discourse recognizes that its own space of dissent is very much a 'fiction', an inscription of subjectivity, which carries with it the chaos and power relations of the exterior world rather than leaving them behind. The non-interlocking They-system and We-system of Gravity's Rainbow, of course, is a movement toward the fictional (subjective) space of postmodern opposition: To dramatize the difference between it and Vineland, however, I locate them under the rubrics of modernist and postmodernist discourse, respectively. It is to dramatize the sense in which Vineland plays with the tropes and representations that saturate our lives without reproducing the "modernist" assumptions inscribed within adopting a stance of anti-modernism and anti-bourgeois realism. As Joel Black said, while modernism's adversarial stance "pits it not only against realism but against mass culture," it is postmodernism's non-adversarial stance that

"allows it to play (along) with realism, mass culture, as well as modernism without necessarily committing itself to any of their ideological assumptions." (Black:1986,102)

I guess the important question to ask here is, in the context of this hypothetical liberation from a "elite" culture and "masterpiece" orientation to literature, what is the postmodern escaping into? What sorts of fictions become privileged in the postmodern discourse? In response, I want to emphasize that this postmodern "consciousness" of the institutional matrix which supports a modernist canon of masterpieces is only meaningful within the context of a the particular transition (modernist to postmodernist discourse) such as the one I have provisionally described here.

As for the existence of this "postmodern" discourse, I think we see such an operation in the poststructuralist/new historicist criticism which sees the literary text as the site of intersection between competing social discourses, both manufacturing and reflecting ideological and historical "reality." In Gravity's Rainbow, as we have seen, there is the sense in which the text encourages the reader to think of it as a privileged site of heteroglossia (see Toloyan:1988). Vineland, however, attempts to avoid the reinscription of the specific cultural elitism implicit in the "modernist" discourse I have described: The book seems neither extraordinarily complex, obscene, or metafictional. Thus, it is in the specific context of this dialectical movement from the high modernism of

Ulysses and The Wasteland, through the modernist articulation of "postmodernism" (Gravity's Rainbow) that we can conceive of Vineland as situating itself within what I have called postmodern discourse. What it is playing with, then, is the modernist production of aesthetic hierarchies based literature's "readings" of the subtexts of the discourses of "common, popular, or mass" culture.

This postmodern discourse operates to demythologize the metafictional (anti-realist) space of Gravity's Rainbow: The double metaphor, the space of simulation, of Vineland does not recognize the exterior reality of a reader/author relationship. That is, metafiction in Gravity's Rainbow addresses itself to the reader, as McHale (1985) points out. Vineland, on the other hand, lacks the second and third person narrative address. The playful reorientation of the mega-texts of television discourse denaturalizes these texts which saturate us--without reproducing the modernist polarity between high/low culture. Vineland frustrates the expectation of a privileged reading of the texts of television discourse--the dystopic novel's manufacture of myth. What is precarious (and easily co-opted) about the modernist discourse, the possibility of the reification of its oppositional space and the (temporal, geographical, or psychological) displacement of its fictional world to an allegorical significance, is transformed in books like Vineland and Doctorow's Ragtime into a practical, if limited, bending and denaturalization of the official discourse's familiar



"realities."

This is evident, I think, in Christopher Lehmann-Haupt's review of the novel for the New York Times (December 26, 1989):

At other times, it can be annoyingly simplistic, especially when guns are likened to phalluses, or when a member of the Zoyd forces sums up the Reagan years.

The gun and phallus subtext, the "reading" of cultural discourse produced by and exploited as obscenity and novelty in Gravity's Rainbow, is nothing but Vineland's reorientation of what has become the official discourse. Lehman-Haupt is correct in his description of this "subtext." Within this postmodern discourse, the artistic "value" of a text operates under different assumptions. We have seen the modernist discourse expectation of what Bradbury called "the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal." (1987,26) Vineland does not produce a complex "reading" of the texts of T.V. culture, but rather creates a complex reorientation of these texts, showing the "unreality" of our media-produced reality. Further, the function of criticism is different here. This is apparent in Joel Black's critique of McHale's Postmodernist Fiction. The critical response cannot turn solely to the interior of the text and explicate the submerged myths and produced subtexts, because they are absent. Criticism is forced to turn outside, into a larger cultural and political spectrum. It moves into a landscape where the literary text is itself not a privileged construct, but an equivalent site of the polyphonic interaction of a plurality of different voices.

The images and representations of Vineland, far from being a "modernist" articulation of the subtexts of contemporary culture, are playful reproductions of the texts of television-- the very naturalized images that inundate our lives. Rather than deconstructing these texts and producing "readings" from an oppositional space of private coherence, Vineland resituates these naturalized texts among each other, denaturalizing them, but keeping them within the public space. The representation of the sixties as "the Mellow Sixties, a slower-moving time, predigital, not yet so cut into pieces, not even by television," of course contains the seeds of unreality, which Pynchon addresses:

War in Vietnam, murder as an instrument of American politics, black neighborhoods torched to ashes and death, all must have been off on some other planet.  
(38)

The absent Vietnam of the innocuous representation of the Sixties is projected into 1984 as the site of the CAMP eradication program, the presidential "war on drugs." The Vineland/Vietnam metaphor seems to be the introduction of reality into this mythical Viking space of America:

...the tune, with its bone-stirring bass, to a powerful and secret spell against invaders and oppressors, heard in particular a bit later in the year at harvest time, when CAMP helicopters gathered in the sky and North California, like other U.S. pot-growing areas, once again rejoined, operationally speaking, the third world. (49)

This whole metaphorical displacement, where the "war on drugs" becomes the substitute for the absent and culturally sanitized war in Vietnam, seems to provide the basis for a realistic

unification of the mellow and turbulent Sixties--the juxtaposition of subtext and naturalized text. This is the sort of operation that characterizes Gravity's Rainbow: The ontology of mixing the official text of World War Two with Pynchon's reading of its subtext--the phallic rocket and King Kong metaphysics.

Yet, this "demythologizing" (i.e. returning us to the author's depiction of its "reality") of Reagan's America in Vineland is tempting but ultimately no more than a myth itself. For instance, the plot seems to fit the naturalized, generic pattern of "Star Wars," or as the books jacket declares, a combination of "elements of daytime drama and the political thriller...a strange evocation of twentieth-century America..." Brock Vond, that "brutal fascist" is easily seen as the stereotypical Darth Vader character. The comic moment at the end suggests a synthesis of several naturalized representations of our contemporary culture: The scene in "Apocalypse Now," where the American air-cav comes screaming out of the sky to raid the Vietnamese villagers accompanied by music from Wagner's Ring Cycle, and the climatic moment in "The Empire Strikes Back," where Vader reveals his identity to the wounded Skywalker:

For about a week Brock, whom his colleagues were calling "Death From Slightly Above," had been out travelling in a tight formation of three dead-black Huey slicks, up and down the terrain of Vineland...Brock, in flak jacket and Vietnam boots, posing in the gun door with a flamethrower on his hip...as the rotor blades tore ragged the tall columns of fog that rose from the valleys. (375)

The key, Brock says, to this operation is "rapture. Into the sky

and the world knows her no more." As he descends like a Valkyrie upon Prairie he says:

But Prairie, I'm your father. Not Wheeler--me. Your real dad. (376)

In addition, the ending of the novel is reminiscent of "E.T.," a cotton candy ending which suggests the return to normality and reality after the fantastical experience:

...Prairie woke to a warm and persistent tongue all over her face. It was Desmond...wagging his tail, thinking he must be home. (385)

This ending is a complete departure from the suspenseful and disturbing endings of The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow. What is going on here? Is Pynchon suggesting that, in the end, America somehow has returned "home?"

I think that, by assimilating the novel into the naturalized texts of "pop" media, by bending the text into the pleasant rhetoric of a Reagan speech, Pynchon creates a fictional landscape that slips into the space of simulation that Baudrillard described in "The Ecstasy of Communication," as the elision of boundaries between the public and private space:

The one is no longer a spectacle, the other no longer a secret. Their distinctive opposition, the clear difference of an exterior and an interior exactly described the domestic scene of objects, with its rules of play and limits, and the sovereignty of a symbolic space which was also that of the subject.<sup>16</sup>

Both of the novel's historical contexts are ultimately not much more substantial than the naturalized and homogenized media representations we take for granted every day. The Sixties displaces its Vietnam into the Vineland myth of America in 1984.

However, this demythologizing ultimately becomes no more than an assimilation of the text into the naturalized texts of contemporary culture--i.e., Reaganspeak, "Star Wars," and cop-action drama.

These "subtexts" of Vineland, like the New York Times review claims, are "annoyingly simplistic" at times. The "reading" of mass culture's texts has become no more than a cybernetic process in Vineland. The specific expectations of modernist discourse I identified as operating in the critical re-production of Gravity's Rainbow (explication, formal complexity, aesthetic break, and oppositional space constructed through critique of realism) largely are not fulfilled in Vineland. Instead of imposing either a dystopian or utopian master narrative upon its "reading" of contemporary cultural manifestations, Vineland creates a fictional space where the fantastic (i.e., Orwell's totalitarian nightmare and Pynchon's Zone) is the denaturalized play of the fictions that constitute the fabric of our ordinary existence.

It is in the specific context of the narrative of transition from "modern" to "postmodern" discourse that Vineland can be seen as demythologizing the modernist space of internal coherence, which, although problematized, was still articulated by Gravity's Rainbow in the spirit of modernism. By contrasting the mechanisms of representation as well as the quasi-thematic subtexts of pop-cultural discourse within the two novels, we see how Vineland does not **encourage** the same critical discursive re-

production as Gravity's Rainbow. This difference can be located within a categorization of "modernist" and "postmodernist" discourse depending on how we wish to define these problematic terms. What I want to stress, however, is that the production of Gravity's Rainbow as a postmodern text by "modernist" critical discourse fulfills certain desires specific to a particular discourse--i.e., the disruptive, difficult, and privately oppositional characteristics of modern art that Irving Howe expresses in Modern Literary Criticism and Decline of the New--that, my reading suggests, seem alien and opaque to Vineland. That is, there is a different formulation of the nature and function of literature and criticism operating here: A "masterpiece" definition of literature, and a modernist-explicative approach to criticism seem both redundant and unproductive when applied to this text. What this "new" discourse of Vineland seems to encourage is either what Joel Black describes as "playing along" with the fiction (paraliterary criticism?) or a what we might term a broader cultural criticism more thoroughly enmeshed in the critic's own social and political positions. I wish I could demonstrate the material existence of this hypothetical postmodern discourse in response to the text, but the type of criticism that will accumulate around Vineland is, at this time, still largely a conjecture on my part.

Nonetheless, in this paper's reconceptualization of the two different manifestations of the postmodern, Gravity's Rainbow and Vineland, I have tried to show how their seemingly different

discursive environments produce a different understanding of what the postmodern is. This is, then, a problematization of the formation of critical vocabulary (modernism, postmodernism) to provide a paraphrased vantage point to the text. It is a production which is, I think, specific to a discourse, the needs and desires of that discourse, and, as the hypothetical transition from "modernist" to "postmodernist" suggests, inextricably linked to the history of modulation of that discourse.

By looking at a book, Gravity's Rainbow, which seems perched at the cusp between the two different aesthetic eras of modernism and postmodernism, two things eventually seemed apparent: 1) These concepts are useful: These periodizing concepts of literary history which circulate in critical analysis are very convenient and instrumental devices to organize, differentiate, and understand a text. 2) We wonder how they are produced: Any such vocabulary (i.e., romanticism, modernism, postmodernism) is itself a useful construction fulfilling certain desires of a discourse community, specific to a general conceptual structure of literary history and assumptions about the function of literature and criticism.

In the first section of this paper, I tried to demonstrate that when we say that Gravity's Rainbow is a "postmodern" text we are orientated by the desires and assumptions of what I called "modernist" discourse. The concept of the postmodern, as it is produced here, marks a continuation of this discourse's expectations of what the masterpiece should be. There is a sense in which Gravity's Rainbow is a dialectically necessary step, as an articulation of the "postmodern" within the culturally dominant modernist discourse, in the transition to a different set of assumptions and definitions about the function and nature of literature and criticism. I tried to use the actual criticism of the text to show how this discourse's re-production of the text orients us to perceive and paraphrase it in certain ways. Further, by grounding my argument in this criticism, I hoped to



convey the idea that we never are really uncovering an absolute origin or authorial intention in the text: What Gravity's Rainbow has meant has always been inextricably part of a continually evolving process of absorption and re-absorption in the discourse communities that produce "readings" of it (i.e., a sort of dialogic conception: the form and ideas of the text produce the criticism while, simultaneously, the criticism is producing the text). My analysis, then, marking an attempt to denaturalize some ways in which these readings are produced, is only in reaction to the certain positions which are currently circulating (i.e., McHale, Mendelson, Hume). It is not, nor should be, considered an attempt to find a totalizing answer to "what the text is." That, I assert, would be a distinctly modernist operation.

In the second section of this paper, I framed the transition from the modernist discourse of Gravity's Rainbow to the postmodern discourse of Vineland around the notion of opposition: A shift from the critical/oppositional space to the playful space of simulation. Here, before I sound like I am constructing a rigid categorization or division, I want to emphasize again that Vineland's "playfulness" is that it does not produce subtexts that criticism can explicate but instead denaturalizes the existing tropes and texts of modern media culture that saturate, rather than surprise, us. It is in the specific context of the subtexts that Gravity's Rainbow seemed to produce (i.e., rocket=phallus) that Vineland is playing with the

"reality" of post-industrial consumer culture rather than opposing through a withdrawal further into the reified space of a (anti-realism, -modernism, -mass culture) critique in the "spirit" of modernism.

I think what has been implicit in my discussion of these two texts are the questions of whether this hypothetical transition in literary discourse is real, to what degree the discourses coexist, and what sort of implications such a shift would have on the evolving function and nature of literature and criticism. I think we may locate two stresses which might effect such a transition. First, interior to the discipline is the movement to dismantle the monolithic structure of the cannon to include a broader articulation of our heterotopian, pluralistic society. That is, the "masterpiece" itself, becomes a socio-historically constituted phenomenon, becomes a site for the interaction of different discourses--but consequently loses claims for an eternal and global articulation of reality. Second, the competition of other persuasive media transforms the role of print culture from the outside. That is, cinema produces the "masterpieces" that print culture used to generate. Evident in Pynchon's incorporation of the technologies of other media is a sense of their cultural position. While we certainly are not witnessing the death of print culture or of literature, then, we can certainly detect signs of its transformation. Lyotard writes that the loss of the master narrative of modernity is not the crisis that Baudrillard, Jameson, and Eagleton have claimed:

"Nostalgia for the lost narrative is a thing of the past"  
(Owens:1983,65).

At this stage, I wonder whether, in articulating the present as a cusp between two types of discourse--"modern" and "postmodern"--if I am not reproducing the same desire to live in a period of crisis that Chabot described earlier. I guess an important set of questions to formulate at this juncture would be the way in which the analysis of the concept of "discourse," so crucial in the framework of my argument, might become a postmodern equivalent of the reified space of modernist "opposition." That is, a set of critical operations that are mechanically reproduced and become naturalized. This hesitancy to fully endorse the critical procedures I have used here, coupled with what seems to be an internal and external strain upon the traditional notion of the function of the English discipline, creates a sense of anxiety as I conclude this paper. The freedom of moving into cultural criticism, which, I think, makes the study of English more relevant, is balanced by uncertainty about the limits and constraints of this new freedom. My paper, then, can be seen as both an expression of this anxiety and a celebration of new possibilities.

## Notes

1. Howe (1967). p.13
2. Chabot (1988), p.19
3. Howe (1967), p.13
- 3.5 Mendelson (1976), p. 174
4. Stark (1980), p. 174
5. Black (1986), p. 97
6. Ibid, p. 102
8. The majority of the post-1979 critics I have discussed, Schaub, Hume, Hite, Weisenberger, and Black, include McHale in their argument.
9. Hite (1983), p. 4
10. Hume (1987), p. 221.
11. Toloyan (1988), 236
12. Ibid, p. 238.
13. Baudrillard (1983), p. 128
14. Hutcheon (1988), p. xiii
15. Stam (1988), p. 129
- 16a. Owens (1983), p. 63
- 16b. Baudrillard (1983), p. 130

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