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"A Game Theoretical Approach
To The Early Fiction of Thomas R. Pynchon"

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To my **Mutti** and my **Papa**.
Thank you for being so patient.

In kind memory of Kurt A. Mayer.

*The result of a year's work depends more on
what is struck out than what is left in.*
(Henry Adams)

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A GAME THEORETICAL APPROACH . . .

Introduction

The developments in literary theory over the past three decades have been rather upheaving and challenging. French philosophy, with names like Jean Genette, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Gilles Deleuze, has put the wheels of literary analysis once again in motion. New aspects on the nature of language and text have considerably altered the basic understanding and notions of literary criticism. A whole new critical jargon and line of argumentation have found their way into the literary discourse although their merits are still subject to vast discussion and hearty dispute. Aleid Fokkema tries to summarize the relationship of author vs. text as follows:

Although I disagree with some of the extreme poststructuralist positions that have coloured the debate on postmodern fiction, I firmly adhere to the view that no text originates entirely from a single author. Had I need of any proof, then the conditions that have led to the final shape of this study would have been sufficient. A heterogeneous lot of published scholarly discourses has found its way onto this text [...]. (Fokkema 9)

I have chosen to deal with an author who, as I have learned, is known only to a small portion of European — until recently — as well as American readers. Thomas Pynchon is frequently referred to as *the* paradigmatic postmodern author, without doubt mainly because of his peculiar biography. The last address of the writer I could find was published in *The Cornell Alumni Journal* and dates back to 1963. His elusiveness has spurned the attempts of journalists and literary scholars alike to track him down. His reluctance to public appearances has also given rise to the most awkward theories about the reasons of his hiding. This thesis will not deal with the real person, Thomas Pynchon, but with his literary work, though a short appendix is supplied at the end of the paper, summing up the commonly agreed on biographical data concerning the author. This is done for the sake of completion only.¹

Game theory became rather popular after the publication of John von Neumann's book *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944) in the field of economics. But the play-concept is much older, goes back to the old Greeks

¹ Cf. Appendix p. 98. Pynchon reportedly appeared on CNN. A picture of him and his son is in the appendix.

and had a renaissance with Friedrich Schiller and much later the deconstructivists. The offset of the various ways of approaching game in a scientific manner differ enormously. I have had various discussions on the nature of my undertaking, i.e. applying a game/play theoretical concept to literature, and it soon turned out that almost everyone had a different idea of what game/play is. Even in the academic publications on the subject, the terms often oscillate between sheer nonsense concepts and a bulk of overstuffed and constructed theory. Reading Pynchon brought the idea to analyze the "ludic aspect" in contemporary and modern literature to my mind.

Modern literature is by definition playful, playing on and with its tradition to its own ends. I am not talking about playing in the sense of comedy and jokes, but about a movement in the "postmodern" generation that goes deeper than mere aspects of theme or character. It involves the structuring, composing, and epistemological conception of literature as a whole. Pynchon's novels are full of characters which rather stumble through than move along a line of plot; the action is "de-centered"; chronology and setting are transformed toward simultaneity and independence. This way of writing is exercised in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Thomas Pynchon's predilection for word-play and his preoccupation with naming catch the eye, being truly playful and thoroughly light hearted though at the same time rigorous and serious with respect to interpretation; for his point is quite clear most of the time. This thesis could also focus on a social background in the U.S. — e.g. taking the social situations of the sixties and the ways in which Pynchon ridicules and perverts the hedonism of the beat generation — but I will deal primarily with the literary notions of game/play and their ramifications in his texts.

Thematically this paper falls into two parts: a theoretical concept of a model of game/play analysis in textual discourse and the application thereof to the early work of Thomas Pynchon. The first part will offer a methodological structure as well as a historical survey of literary game theory. A specific terminology shall be worked out according to which literature can be analyzed. The second part attempts to highlight the game aspect in Pynchon's fiction.

For personal as well as critically relevant reasons I have chosen to deal with the texts which appeared between 1959 and 1967. *Gravity's Rainbow*² is still subject to extensive attention from the critical side whereas the book's predecessors have been comparatively neglected, especially the first novel, *V.* The texts I am going to elaborate on below are: the short stories "Mortality and Mercy at Vienna" (1959) and "Entropy" (1959), and the two novels *V.* (novel, 1964), and *The Crying of Lot 49* (novel/la³, 1967). The two novels have been published various times by different publishing houses, the short stories, with the exception of "Mortality and Mercy at Vienna," are available in the collection *Slow Learner* (ed. 1984) which is also remarkable for its Introduction⁴. "Mortality and Mercy at Vienna" is available only in its original publication in the journal *Epoch*⁵ and in an unauthorized publication by British Aloes Books⁶.

² *Gravity's Rainbow* shares the fate of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, as one of the critics pointed out: "[*Gravity's Rainbow*] is among the most widely celebrated unread novels of the past thirty years" (Moore 1).

³ If one sticks to Poe's terminology, then the definition of a novella may be that it is a novel that can be read in one session.

⁴ The Introduction will also be dealt with later on in the text. (Cf. p. 40)

⁵ *Epoch* IX:4 (1959): 195-213.

⁶ A copy of this edition exists at Cornell University Library.

How To Write an Essay on Thomas Pynchon

The following short chapter can be seen as an "guideline" for the composition of the present thesis since it provides a "formula" for the composition of a paper on Pynchon's texts and a paper on any piece of literature, respectively. These outlines are intended to make aware of the process of literary criticism and at the same time doubt its basis in the light of a pre-formulated methodology. In 1991, Alec McHoul published an article in *Pynchon Notes* reflecting on the merits of a "new" companion to *The Crying of Lot 49*. He criticized the "explanatory" access to parts of Pynchon's texts. The following quote shows the constituents of a formula of "do's and don'ts" which should be employed respectively when writing a paper on Thomas Pynchon.

A. Employ one or a number of the following theoretical strategies

1. "x is like y" — for example, "the reader is like Oedipa" [...] This is a major constituent of the formula and should not be overlooked. Since pretty much anything can be made to appear pretty much like anything else, there is a low risk of failure in the strategy.
2. "x means y" — for example, "'Oedipa' means 'Oedipus'" [...] This is a less important strategy than the first because it risks going wrong and leaving the writer with a set of difficult connections to hold down. [...]
3. "x corresponds to y" — [...] This is very like strategy A.1 — except that it's a better vehicle for getting theoretical schemes from outside the novel to fit the novel's own contents. In this sense, it has quite high priority since it's a further part of the formula that the writer should try to pass off his or her theoretical speculations as belonging, in fact, to someone called "Pynchon."
4. "x/y is an indissoluble binary" — [...] [T]here are a few standardly-available binaries, in case the writer can't find a new one. Among them are: entropy/negentropy, paranoia/anti-paranoia, order/chaos, meaningfulness/meaninglessness, the Tower/the Void, life/art, original/copy, metaphorical/literal, 1/0. [...] These days, a generally popular meta-theory of indeterminism (see B below) means that *this* [*i.e. to sort out, resolve, or transcend these binaries*]⁷ is no longer necessary. Instead the writer should observe the principle of "necessary equivocation" [...] — though it is still permissible to write of *this* as an integral part of the human condition.

⁷ Annotations in square brackets are mine.

B. *Get yourself a theorist*

It's essential to find a well-respected theorist, preferably French [...] . [...] Remember: it's not essential that you understand the concepts you take from these theorists, so long as the *terms* which relate those concepts can be *made* to look as they fit your own speculations. [...] Moreover, as a writer of a paper on Thomas Pynchon, you are not expected to make sure that any of the concepts or theories you use in this way are commensurate. [...] [I]t's particularly important to use the word "deconstruction"[]

C. *Re-tell highly selected bits of the novel*

Your re-telling should effectively be an adumbration of your theoretical position derived in stage A and supported by stage B. [...] A note of caution here (in connection with stage D below): you can't just re-tell any old bits of the novel you like. Instead, read at least five published papers on the novel, and you will see that there are stock episodes available off the peg. Particularly important here are the main faves: the Remedios Varo painting episode; the Metzger/Strip Botticelli/Baby Igor seduction scene; the *Courier's Tragedy* performance and aftermath; the Nefastis Machine; and the Old-Sailor-With-The-DTs event. The first is best for a metaphysical argument; the second for a hypothesis about media, impersonation and gender; the third fits nicely with cyclical ideas (the repetition of events in "art" and "life," for example); the fourth is good if you're using theoretical ideas (stage B) from popular philosophies of science; and the last is useful for humanistic theorists who want to show that there can still be touching and soulful moments in the most alienating social formations.

D. *Don't read the novel as much as quote it*

[...] [I]n particular, there is effectively a "canon" of *quotables* you should turn to on every possible occasion. For example, no one ever quotes what Emory Bortz's nameless daughter says to Oedipa when she turns up at his house; if you quoted that little speech, you'd automatically be seen as incompetent in the writing of Pynchon papers.(McHoul B 157-160)⁸

⁸ McHoul gives a list of "quotables", - some of which will also be in this paper.

Pynchon has "a penchant for play. Not only do we 'locate' it, we participate" (McHoul C 9).

The game has started. Although the game is intended to be played seriously, not everything is indeed meant seriously. It is up to the player to pick the colors, field, and opponent. The player usually has multiple choices in any game: whether to stick to the rules, adapt the rules, or break the rules, i.e. spoilsports if this is done without wider consent. Whatever the player chooses it will not affect the game *per se*, only alter the ramifications. This thesis is an attempt to grasp the rules of modern literature.

To start from somewhere. Pick your colors, field, and opponent.

To be is to do. *Aristotle*
To do is to be. *Sartre*
Do be do be do. *Sinatra*

These days, one of my favorite ways to begin a sentence is, "It is a matter of semantics whether . . ." When I was trying to define the way in which play/game influence and structure modern literature, I often came to a point where everything seemed plausible, be it, that the concept takes up all the space that is around us or that it is I who grants it all that space. These ontological doubts are also the two dark forces that haunt Pynchon's literary mind and determine the actions of his characters, only one of many "binary options."

I have worked through books like Eigen/Winkler's *Laws of The Game. How the Principles of Nature Govern Chance*, some of the literature on and of Derrida, understanding at certain times all of it and sometimes not even a bit. In the course, I have realized that very many things are indeed a matter of semantics, thus a matter of understanding and interpretation. I departed from "classic" literary analysis, peering into scientific books and philosophical treatises on my "quest" for the play/game principle. I have been following the discussions on *Pynchon-L* newsgroup,⁹ inhaling the hot air coming out of academia and pseudo-academia while still admiring these intellectuals for what they know. And now, I am sitting here and am called to write down what I have found over the course of, by now, years.

The following analysis presents Thomas Pynchon as a gamewright, sometimes in the very classical way of the educator (Greek: *paidaia*), who wants to show the readers his views of the world — the world which he/she perceives and conceives; and Thomas Pynchon, the pure player. Some people argued that Pynchon were a romantic at heart, which is true with respect to his educational purposes. This also made me stop seeing the author as a postmodernist — since this positioning would be contradictory to the humanist ambitions in his writing. He is beyond that, simply using the patterns and lingo of postmodernist

⁹ Cf. Appendix p. 103 (Net-bibliography).

writing, which was not yet postmodern then. But most probably he is a postmodernist ahead as well as out of his time, a postmodernist with a cause. Now, one reason why Pynchon does not speak all too well of his early fiction¹⁰ may be that at that time he had not yet been hiding behind the enigmatic literature of his later periods. *Vineland*¹¹ is an exception within his later fiction. Here, he writes in a rather "conventional" and straightforward manner — and he rather outspokenly presents his beliefs to the reader guiding his play and makes game with the reader. Back then his game was obvious and detectable, the playfulness was still on the surface, hidden in metaphors and not words. The whole show *is* a game, with regard to the way that the reader does not realize what the author is doing with him, where the author will take him. Pynchon's theorems are implanted through his stories, or rather parables, in the Socratic tradition of teaching philosophy disguised in stories. The characters are not aware of what is going on around them most of the time. *The Crying of Lot 49* turns out to be a *Lehrroman* in the tradition of German idealism. And "Entropy" is a first attempt to write in that manner. "The Secret Integration" signifies the next step: outspoken ways of how to behave are given, and together with the mode of plot of "Mortality and Mercy at Vienna" we get a picture of the early Pynchon, and the first masterpiece is within sight: V. Here all the elements used before and after run together, the absurd (MM), the *Lehrroman* (CL49), the simple parable (SI), and pseudo-science gone literary (ETP, CL49).

Eric Berne, in his best-selling analysis of games in social psychology, writes:

The eternal problem of the human being is how to structure his waking hours. In this existential sense, the function of all social living is to lend mutual assistance for this project. (Berne 16)

Existentially spoken, man is, from his/her birth onwards, confronted with an enormous amount of "spare-time" which calls for sensible use. Berne goes on to argue that man does so by activities which can be discerned as "games," or manifestations of play.

¹⁰ Introduction to the short stories (*Slow Learner*). Cf. Footnote 38 on page 40.

¹¹ All the titles of Pynchon's texts are abbreviated where the text flow would be impaired by the full title: "Mortality and Mercy at Vienna" (MMV), "Entropy" (ETP), "The Secret Integration" (SI), V., *The Crying of Lot 49* (CL49), *Gravity's Rainbow* (GR), *Vineland* (VL), *Mason & Dixon* (MD).

In the course of the composition of a text, any character of a novel is shaped around this problem. The author has to structure their "void of being." He/She has to fill his/her characters reasonably, and the substance to fill this blank is the world, his/her world. A finished book constitutes the author's confrontation with the world, or rather his/her rendition and representation of the world as a whole, his/her vision of reality, mind and matter, character and "worldhood."

And if literature indeed were a game, as George Steiner postulated, or at least gamelike, it should be possible to analyze literature in the light of some principles of game theory. The problem is simply that there is nothing like a coherent, comprehensive game theory of literature. Probably this is due to the fact that critics sometimes do not like to see literature being treated seriously unserious and vice versa. Ross Wetzsteon, a former student at Cornell University, describes a lecture, in which Vladimir Nabokov made fun of an exaggerated scientific approach to literature:

"I want you to copy this down exactly as I draw it," Vladimir Nabokov instructed us, after explaining that he was going to diagram the themes of *Bleak House*. He turned to the blackboard, picked up a piece of chalk, and scrawled "the theme of inheritances" in a weird arching loop. "The theme of generations" dipped and rose and dipped in an undulating line. "The theme of social consciousness" wiggled crazily toward the other lines, then veered sharply away. Nabokov turned from the blackboard and peered over the rims of his glasses, parodying a professional twinkle. "I want you to copy this exactly as I draw it."

After consulting a piece of paper on the lectern, he turned back to the blackboard and scrawled "the theme of economic conditions" in a nearly vertical line. "The theme of poverty," "the theme of political (the chalk snapped under the pressure, he picked another and continued) protest," "the theme of social environment" - all leaping and dipping wildly across the blackboard. Some people can't draw a straight line.

Again he peered at us, over his shoulder and over his glasses, in silent reminder to copy this exactly.

And finally he scrawled the last "theme" in a neat dipping curve, a half-moon on its side, "the theme of art," and we suddenly realized he had drawn a cat's face, the last line its wry smile, and for the rest of the term the cat smiled out of our notebooks in mockery of the didactic approach to literature. (Huwiler 26f.)

Like Nabokov's cat, the grinning face of the playful author seems to smile from between the lines of some of the texts. Most often this smile is benevolent, at

times it is vile. Play and game invoke unseriousness and childish fun, which is exactly what literature, outside academia, should aim at, entertainment in its most positive sense.

Literature, nowadays increasingly through its realizations in movies, enormously influences our lives, structures and molds our actions.¹² It is play in the sense that it is set in an artificial reality, arbitrarily agreed on, and that we, as readers, can temporarily take on this alternative reality as our own. We "behave like," "act like" the hero of a story and through this function literary tropes are digested over and over. Characters, or rather samples of character stereotypes, can be found again and again throughout the history of literature, and each author is working on and with them. The same stories with their easy recognizable puppets are told all over again and again.¹³

In the piece of art the author tries to transcend, explain or simply present the world. He/She may rearrange this material substance, which may be his/her environment and discourse, according to his/her own parameters, and he/she may also do so playfully. Although he/she can never totally step out of his/her world, being bound by social inhibitions and more often the senses, the world is at his/her disposal. The reader and the author have to some extent the same knowledge of the world, a fact that makes literature possible. The playful author makes the reader aware of this process of creating individual worlds, aware of the communion of a silent conspiracy.

The author remains "visible," and "readable." Fiction itself becomes the topic of the text, at its most extreme the reader becomes the creator of the plot, as in Cortázar's *Hopscotch* or Alina Reye's novel *Derrière la Porte*. The reader may choose his/her own line of plot by skipping pages, re-reading, and conferring to annotations.¹⁴ He/She is free to go back and forth in the text, without spoiling the story. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and the two "Alice" novels by Lewis Carroll are less recent examples of playful fiction. In *Through the Looking Glass* he leads the plot along the moves of a chess game, which is referred to and explained by the author. However, ignorance of the rules of the chess game

¹² I take this as a given fact which does not need a specific study to prove.

¹³ Ronald B. Tobias counts 20 masterplots, Rudyard Kipling had 69, Carlo Gozzi counted 36. (Cf. Tobias 19).

¹⁴ The possibilities of "hypertext" should also be mentioned in this connection.

does not spoil the text. *Tristram Shandy* has the impossibility of writing an autobiography as its very topic. The author is always behind time when writing an autobiography, is always late. The author can only write about past events. People were confused by the insertion of a black page in the book while it was simply Sterne's way of expressing the narrator's mourning of the death of a friend. Examples, also in other texts, are abundant.

I will discuss with the early fiction of Thomas Pynchon, the varieties in which game/play are used in literature and use literature. What follows is a reading of the texts *sub specie ludi*. Above all, I will try to come to different readings than those which pervade secondary literature. "To playfully read where no one has read before." Choose your color.

Choose Your Color. A Historical Survey of A Concept.

Find the constituents of the theory as you go.
(One of the notes on my pinboard.)

From the times of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus onwards, the Western world has had a tradition of dealing with game/play as a structuring principle as well as a mode of education for the human mind and society as a whole. Thus, had literature to do anything at all with the "real world" or its discursive manifestations in philosophy, it should be possible to analyze and interpret literature according to the jargon and argumentation of game/play theory. If only there were such a thing.

Already the term "game/play theory" is confusing since it first of all implies two entirely separate concepts, i.e. game and play, and second, the term "theory" implies the existence of an agreed-upon line of thinking. Unfortunately, the humanities have not succeeded in accomplishing a thing like a coherent game theory.

A historical survey¹⁵ of the different approaches is given below. I will stick rather closely to the table set up by Rawdon R. Wilson, in which he distinguishes eight different approaches. The ontological and metaphysical dimensions will be inferred where necessary, along with the diachronic development and status in the works of various intellectually prominent figures. The distinction runs as follows:

1. Greek philosophy/literature, 2. German idealism as represented by Schiller, 3. psychoanalysis and its impact, 4. make-believe and role-play, 5. the roles of games in the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, 6. mathematical game theory, 7. OULIPO and the rules of writing fiction, and, 8. deconstruction and the concept of "free play."

(1) The view of the world as a game of the gods is an intricate characteristic of Greek mythology. Mihai Spariosu states that "In Homer, [...] the cosmos appears as a divine lottery in which misery and happiness are differently allotted, or distributed not according to merit but to chance" (Spariosu 15). The Trojan war, as presented in the *Iliad*, turns out to be a war game undertaken by

¹⁵ Cf. Rawdon R. Wilson and Mihai Spariosu.

the gods with the Greeks and the Trojans as their pawns. This metaphysical presence of a playing god will be given up in modern thinking for the sake of a world of direct and human forces. Thomas Pynchon devotes a vast proportion of his writing to the analysis of the forces which drive his characters and constitute the world they have to face and deal with. Heraclitus takes up this concept of a play-governed world in his most famous quote: "[L]ifetime (*aion*) is a child at play, moving pieces in a game" (Spariosu 15).

Going on to Parmenides, Plato, Xenophanes, and finally Aristotle, Spariosu notes a shift from an irrational to a rational principle, evoking the modern time usage of the term play as an "as if"-activity through which inaccessible truth becomes accessible in the "as if" mode of being. The back-and-forth movement of the term, from an ontological truth to a lie, culminates in Aristotle whose work suggested that poetry were a means of imitating and supplementing nature. "Poetry does not speak the truth, it only speaks like the truth" (Spariosu 20). In Aristotelian view, that is to say, poetry is mere simulation of reality and its highest truth, which can only be found in philosophy. "Aristotle subordinates aesthetic to cognitive pleasure which, in its highest form, derived from contemplation (*theoria*) is only accessible to philosophy" (Spariosu 21). These statements call, of course, for the comments of deconstruction. The development of discourse throughout the history of Western thinking, with regard to the treatment of truth and presence, may be summed up as follows: from literature/poetry to myth and from myth to philosophy. This development is taken further in German idealism and the ensuing period of enlightenment.

(2) The German philosopher and dramatist/poet Friedrich Schiller postulates in his *Letters On Education* that man can only be truly man, i.e. human, in the act of playing. In play man is allowed to live up to his/her "highest ideals," allowed to actualize "human thought." Thus the play drive is the central force to human expression and "the foundation of all aesthetics" (Wilson 9). He distinguishes a drive to play (*Spieltrieb*) as one of the basic needs of any human being and as an intermediary between the sensuous drive (*Stofftrieb*) and the formal drive (*Formtrieb*). For the first time play is valued higher than serious activities and the aesthetic higher than the cognitive.

[Friedrich Schiller] holds that game is both central and fundamental to human experience because it is in play that the human beings manage to realize themselves [...], make real their highest ideals. The drive to play mediates between the other two basic "drives," toward the material and the formal, or the empirical and the ideational [...] and allows the actualization of human thought. (Wilson 9)

Schiller remains within the Platonic framework and subordinates play to the ideas, nevertheless a "spontaneous, exploratory, constructive, creative" activity (Wilson 10). Play is the ultimate expression of freedom, and "art is useful precisely because of its apparent uselessness" (Spurius 25).

(3) Another dimension, which will also be important when dealing with Berne's influential work, is psychoanalysis. Game becomes real life and vice versa, and the theory along with that becomes obscure because this statement not only affects the composition of the text but also the mind that puts it together, as well as the world of the text and the real one. The unconscious becomes the driving force which structures our lives. It makes a "game out of the conscious mind" (Wilson 10) and language thus its manifestation. Psychoanalysis tries to uncover the motivation of characters as well as of the mind that creates them. Not only what is said is important, but how it is said, and, above all, what is not said. "The hero of the day-dream is always the subject itself, either directly or by an obvious identification with someone else" (Wilson 10). Within the psychological theories the tendency shifts again towards mimesis and catharsis, as Spurius defines "play [...]" as compensation (it satisfies psychic needs [...]), as catharsis (it purges destructive or violent emotions [...]), or as assimilation of unpleasant experiences [...]" (31). In any text, "the illusive surface manifests the results of exploratory and creative activity played out in the dark latency of a hidden mind" (Wilson 10). "Pastimes and games are substitutes for the real living of real intimacy" (Berne 18).

Berne distinguishes three different types of basic needs in a human being; he calls them types of "hunger." We have stimulus-hunger (a certain stimulus to compensate our physical and psychological needs), recognition-hunger (any recognition of a person's presence), and structure-hunger (the need to structure the waking hours) which has been mentioned already. It is this psychological dimension which makes a theory like deconstruction or the concept of freeplay

impossible to the human mind. Man needs structure, which is in this connection order, for he/she cannot think disorder. He/She needs a structure to think matter, and the matter has to be structured as well. A thing that is not structured gains structure through the language by which we communicate. For a thing which is unspoken of does exist, but it does not exist for man (society). Man needs structure for his/her understanding. There exists a hunger for structure and understanding.

This psychological approach has similarities with the next category, the play of make-believe.

(4) An extraordinary amount of attention in the analysis of game/play is devoted to make-believe and role-play. Along with that category comes the problem of the ontological status of game/play since in the role of the game as make-believe (as the name suggests) it takes the place of reality. Art may also be one manifestation of make-believe as it is an act of psychological displacement; it replaces nature with a "better and more acceptable world" (Wilson 11).

As shown on an ancient vase, Achilles and Ajax were thus absorbed in a game of backgammon that the two heroes eventually miss the beginning of a fight. The game takes on its own reality; it is alternative, compelling, self-enclosed. In Schiller's terms, here man can live to his/her highest ideals, though it is not the real world.

"Art, the most extreme development of make-believe, is also believed and accepted alternative to nature" (Wilson 10). Again play serves as a preparation for serious occupation, as when Jean Piaget writes: "Practically every form of psychological activity is initially enacted in play. [...] Cognitive activity thus initiates play, and play in turn reinforces cognitive activity."¹⁶ Again, acting out by the means of play is where the human being is totally free, highly creative.

[R]ole-playing can lead to a global analysis of texts based entirely on one or more distinct premises: 1. that characters play roles, 2. that characterization is nothing but complexes of roles, 3. that characters are latent aspects of the author's self now being played out indirectly but publicly, 4. that characters are unfilled roles waiting on the reader's exploratory playfulness. (Wilson 12)

¹⁶ Cf. Wilson 11.

The category can be seen both as a mode of education and a "vehicle for self-expression" (Wilson 12). Role play and make-believe are also important when discussing the literary godgame.¹⁷ In a way literary texts are always games of make-believe in which the reader becomes a participant, at least insofar as he/she is present as an observer. Literature always offers an alternative reality such as a child at play.

Now when a group of children play with mud, they simultaneously touch globs of mud - in the real world - and offer one another tasty pies in the world of make-believe, which is real within the game. Running away from tree stumps in the real world becomes, for the same children, a flight from dangerous bears in the world of make-believe. (Wilson 193)

A story may give us the creeps even though there is no immediate or physical threat to the reader.

(5) With the atomistic studies as presented by Ludwig Wittgenstein game theoretical aspects found their way also into language analysis. Human activities and also language may be split into small units which are called games. These parts of human expression are "a logically primitive activity that possesses its particular rule" (Wilson 12). The activity can be isolated, contains meaning, and a description can be given. The rules that constitute the game gain their significance through the game in which they function. Thus, the meaning stands pragmatically as a function of use.

Wittgenstein postulates that language can be analyzed according to these minimal constituents. These fragments of language may take various shapes, can be distinguished according to their function, and constitute a logical entity in his language philosophy. Wittgenstein tries to evade the problems of discourse by regarding language as a repository of function as opposed to a concept of meaning.

This kind of treatment is close to literary formalism and is also present in modern speech act theory. In his first novel, Thomas Pynchon refers to the early philosophy of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which, however, stands contrapuntally to the above mentioned *The Philosophical Investigations*.

¹⁷ Cf. p. 64 ("The godgame").

(6) Mathematical game theory is probably the most misinterpreted field, that is, when applied to literary texts. This line of thinking deals with the analysis of probabilities and mapping activities, such as games, as sequences of decisions which can be taken or refused. What seems to have been neglected with literature, however, is that literature does not always operate rationally along right and wrong parameters, that the assumed knowability, i.e. the total availability of all possible options, does not exist. The extrapolation is inaccurate since plot does not provide full rationality and total availability of options to the parties involved. When literature is concerned, only the author is in the know of the rules, as long as he/she intends to play a game; the text itself does not primarily follow rules but rather conventions which the reader has to recognize and interpret. In the light of this theory literature would be a game between the author and reader, the reward being the gain of knowledge and meaning.

What mathematical game-theory contributed to literary analysis is a certain amount of jargon and a "few suggestive metaphors" (Wilson 14). But literature cannot be seen as single game which can be subjected to rules, and if so, only as a vast amount of all sorts of games where the gamewright is always one step ahead.

The general aim of mathematical game theory is an economic one, i.e. to provide the basis for predictive models.

(7) One group of writers as well as literary theorists holds that literature is both self-contained and self-referential, reflexive and isolated from the "real" world. Texts follow rules (or rather conventions) which equal the rules of a game. This is being proved by creating texts according to previously established rules and conventions. The name behind this kind of literary movement is Raymond Queneau with OULIPO,¹⁸ a group that produced texts along certain parameters, e.g. a short story consisting of nothing but questions, a whole novella that lacks the letter "e."

The text constitutes a world of "rules of logic and inner consistency" (Wilson 15), in which anything conceivable becomes possible. According to the understanding of OULIPO all literature must be game, or at least gamelike,

¹⁸ **Ouvroir de littérature potentielle** ("workshop of potential literature").

since there is always a secret agreement between author and reader about what is allowed and what is possible.

(8) The final category is also the most recent one and referred to as deconstruction. Ever after his speech "Structure, Sign, Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in 1966 at Johns Hopkins University, interest in the French philosopher Jacques Derrida has been enormous and has turned into the favorite fad among American literary theorists. One of Derrida's most controversial concepts is that of *jeu libre*, or free play, which is nevertheless crucial to the understanding of postmodern literary analysis. In this context, play is the continual working out of the relationships between various non-centers and complete randomness; it is a boundlessly limited concept, as Derrida says himself:

[Play], that is to say, [is] a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. (Derrida 2 236)

Wilson states that "[p]aradoxically, it may be said that *jeu libre* is so wide a concept that it is not a concept at all" (Wilson 15). In his argumentation the writer cannot but play — though not in the conventional sense — because language plays through him. Play is always already there, to put it into deconstructivist terms, the system of play as the condition of play's modality, and only manifests itself in actual, perceivable play. Since Thomas Pynchon has been referred to as *the* paradigmatic postmodern author, due to his reluctance to publicity and his thematic inclination for language and culture issues, deconstruction seems more than appropriate when dealing with his writings. One question arises immediately: Is it possible to deconstruct a postmodern author?

Derrida is an enormous challenge to the understanding of language and his followers admittedly have produced the most rewarding articles and books on the author at hand.

Derrida's concept of *jeu libre*, put in a nutshell, is the interplay of absence and presence, that is, as deconstruction says, that full presence of an object through language can never be attained, and that the idea of presence in

language is wishful thinking of a "logocentric and ontotheologically misoriented Western culture." The manifestation of the freeplay of language is "différance," the unbridgable relationship of the signifier and the signified, word and concept. In a Pynchonian sense, this concept is the last stake that holds together a decentralized and entropic world. As he has one character at the end of *V.* say, "All the while only in the process of learning life's single lesson: that there is more accident to it than a man can ever admit to in a lifetime and stay sane" (*V.* 320f.). Freeplay is a concept of continual working which represents the relationships between various non-centers and complete randomness. To Derrida, it is a boundlessly limited non-term — making his points more than vague at certain times —, a term which is neither "sens-ible" nor intelligible. The *aucteur ludens* exists because he/she cannot but play, because language continually plays through him, in the free play of the signifier. The signified, the origin can never be attained, meaning can only be grasped relatively to all other possible meanings. A problem which is also central to Pynchon's *CL49* where the heroine Oedipa Maas is investigating on the reality behind, what she repeatedly refers to as "the Word," the mysterious Tristero¹⁹ organization. Derrida writes in "Différance:" "What we do know, what we could know if it were simply a question of knowing is that there never has been and never will be a unique word, a master name."²⁰ Oedipa's search for the word of redemption is prone to fail.

James S. Hans, in a remarkable article on Derrida, summarizes as follows:

The central statement [...] is that Derrida denies the possibility of perception because it relies on a belief in things which exist independently from language, from the system of reference. For Derrida nothing can exist independently from language, which means that all things are merely concepts, including perception, experience, and consciousness, [...] only language remains.
(Hans A 814)

The question of consciousness is raised, for example, in *CL49* when Oedipa realizes that her ego is just incidental, an insight that pushes her into an identity

¹⁹ Both spellings "Tristero" and "Trystero" are used. Tristero will be used in this paper.

²⁰ Cf. Hans A 816.

crisis and on her long quest. Modern man has to think the world without origin and presence, staying at the same time aware of them, because otherwise

we will only be able to play freely without understanding how free play plays freely, without understanding that freeplay plays freely while still being bound by its own play. Nor will we be able to see that while language is part of the freeplay of the world, the freeplay of the world is more than the freeplay of language. (Hans A 815)

That is the point where I will not go any deeper because here chaos theory for the humanities meets the discussion of what was first, chicken or egg. *Il n'y a pas dehors de* chasing your own tail.

Is play imposed on reality or does reality constitute itself in play? Is a game a transcended level of reality or does reality follow the pattern of a game. What was first, play or reality? Depiction or object? Had the temple been ugly before Demosthenes called it so, or was it indeed ugly?

Absolute literature, or the literary absolute, does not exist. There are no rules which would constitute a strategem of "how to." The procedure for theoretical game analysis could look as follows:

1. Recognize a certain sequence of operations (maneuvers).
2. Collect samples of the possible games.
3. Isolate significant features.²¹

²¹ Cf. Berne 48ff.

The Game/Play Element. Choose Your Field.

Reality is our Game.
(Slogan 3D Realms, creators of "Doom" and "Duke Nukem")

The reality of games is man alone.
(Paul Valéry)

Above all, one has to face a paradoxon when dealing with game theory, and that is, a game is the workful expression of the play spirit. But it does not destroy the concept since game is still considered an alternative to the hardship of work.

Play, on the one hand, can be understood as a random, free movement, as in "the play of the world," on the other hand, as the fruitless, useless counterpart of work, the acting out of surplus energy. Along with that second meaning of play the term "game" can also be defined as play's formalized manifestation. Play constitutes game, is its generic and defining character. Play is indeed pervading everyday activities. Play is omnipresent, be it in the humanities, science, or its physical manifestations of the "real" world. At a certain level game/play can be detected in any situation and any human or inhuman interaction. People are always "playing the game," even when they are trying to be authentic. The concept is as omnipresent and omnipotent as the pictures and realizations of decay in Pynchon's novels.

Consider the word *play*. We play musical instruments, odds, hunches, markets, hands, and roles as well as games. We habitually not only play with words but also with toys, fantasies, notions, ideas, possibilities, signs, signification, other people, and playmates. In the froth or exigencies of the moment, *anything* might become a plaything, played for high stakes, or for low, or simply for the fun of it. And (briefly to play the prepositional game) we play with, we play by, we play up, we play down, we play beyond and within (the possibilities, the rules, what is permitted, one's expectations, the limits), we play on, we play back, we play through, we play over, we play under (the cover of, or simply the covers), we play at, we play for and from, we observe watchfully how "things" will play, and we commonly (alas) play out. Any activity or object can be playful; anything, even a game, can be transformed into a plaything; and anything can be either the subject or the object of play. It is possible, Bernard Suits writes, "to make a game out of virtually any other activity or practice, from driving to work in the morning to explaining a logical principle." Someone else's game may become the object of our play as we playfully hypothesize absurd rules, obscure intentions, ludicrous goals, or (most seriously) place bets on the outcome. [...] Similarly, the duller moments in an adult's life may be

enlivened by inventing a rule that will promise a reward or transform mere tedium into the observation of possibilities. (Wilson 18)

Everyday language is pervaded by phrases which have to do with games and play the passage above argues. Either where our means are insufficient or underestimated, play comes in to modify the activity. Postmodern literature exercises these shortcomings of the means of presenting reality as the end of subjectivity in the text. Its authors laugh at a void which is represented by a paradoxon: knowing that meaning in the structuralist sense has been lost, they are still in no position to break out of its boundaries.

Without giving a name to what he identifies as a new sensibility, Richard Wasson sees in such exemplary authors as Pynchon, Barth, Robbe-Grillet, and Iris Murdoch a literature aware of its own artificiality that serves to critique the modernist use of myth as a controlling or unifying discipline or metaphor as a means of reconciling opposites. Responsive to the contingent and accidental nature of things, these contemporaries, Wasson contends, see a world resistant to the subjectivity of hero and author and their attempts to subordinate that world to the drama of self. (Trachtenberg 3)

The author is free, however, to play within these restrictions. Conscious of the state of things, he/she acknowledges them and is caught between an outcry of wrath and a burst of laughter. Laughter gets the upper hand, most of the time. Modern literary game analysis mentions three persons as its founding fathers, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, along with Roger Caillois, and the French philosopher Jacques Ehrmann. Their seminal studies are based on the findings of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, which was published in 1936, nevertheless, still the most influential piece of writing on games and culture. Huizinga's central statement is that culture is the manifestation of play. Therefore both terms are interchangeable and have an ambiguous relationship to reality from which they are differentiated.

Huizinga distinguishes irrational (primitive) and rational (natural) play which pushes him directly into one of the problematics for which his study has been criticized. Since he was interested only in the social dimension of play, he did not investigate the irrational side of play, realizing that "in interpreting primitive play we immediately come up against that irreducible quality of pure playfulness which is not [...] amenable to further analysis" (Spairosu 35). Again we

come back to Derrida's *jeu libre*, which is, in its essence and by definition, beyond analysis.

Huizinga concentrates on rational play which is the extract of all competitive activities of social behavior. Irrational play has been lost since "[r]eally to play, a man must play like a child" (Spariosu 36). This loss of the innocence of playing applies to modern games as well as art which has become self-conscious and has lost its spontaneous, irrational force.

Roger Caillois follows Huizinga in *Les Jeux et les hommes* (1958) and develops four categories according to which play/game can be analyzed: *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation, drama), and *ilinx* (vertigo, frenzy). Superimposed are the larger dimensions of *paidia* (spontaneous and irrational play) and *ludus* (regulative and rational play). In anthropological history he discerns a development from *ilinx* and *mimicry*, as prevalent in primitive cultures, to *agon* and *alea*, which are mainly found in developed cultures. Again one may detect some kind of valorization of one culture over another. Similar to Huizinga, Caillois remains caught in the ambiguity of rational and irrational play with respect to the degree of the development of a culture. But with Caillois play becomes a structuring principle, in Kantian terms, which makes an essentially irrational reality accessible to the human mind. Sometimes play has also been viewed as a kind of theological principle which makes "blind forces" plausible and graspable for the individual. In the terminology of game theory and game analysis, play is becoming "mythos," a way of seeing things. But even if seen as this primary and consequently structuring principle, it evades logical analysis by being *per definitionem* at the bottom of everything. Its use is its aim, the reason its purpose. The game theorist is thus trapped in, if not in the hermeneutic circle in the first place, then in a kind of "circulum ludorum," i.e. playing while being aware of being part of a game at play. Another layer and definition of game/play is being inferred, linking play with individual action against these very "blind forces" which it should supposedly explain by lying at the center of them. The player orders the chaotic material he/she is being confronted with into another "fictional" world, thus, a second world which mirrors the "real" only through the filter of game. Play has educational and cathartic functions. Opposed to the blind forces of nature, the

mind tries to break down this "absolute determinism of the cosmos."²² Play equals the influx of mind in order to break down the determinism of the cosmos, trying to find out the rules of the "big game" and setting up new rules. Since the player rearranges "chaotic material into meaningful patterns" and in such a way creates a world alternative, or rather supplementative, to the real one, according to his/her own paradigms.

This is why V.'s Herbert Stencil is caught in the hermeneutic circle, understanding neither the parts nor the whole. By forming and shaping the parts he constructs a whole which is not his. He makes the parts fitting the whole while he has no idea what the nature of the whole is. Pynchon leaves no doubt that neither inductionism nor deductionism lead to general truths. The world is made to conform with one's own expectations and assumptions. It is made to conform with the norms established by the player. Something like Piaget's assimilation, which is also a learning process in the development of the child.²³

Subtracting the "assimilated" world from the second, the "real," world would by definition reveal the nature of "pure play." However, the dead end is not far. As soon as the differentiation of the "real" and the "unreal" is allowed, the argument is lost. A creative writer must study the work of his/her "rivals, including the Almighty, but only avoid duplication of labor" (Huwiler 12). Player novelists generally claim not to believe in the existence of an objective, shared reality. "Art replaces the oppressive world of average reality with one of human significance" (Huwiler 40). By means of the texture of plot and the manifestations of characters, the postmodern author continually reminds the reader of his/her presence and of the fictional, artificial nature of the world he/she has created.

Caillois sets up a list of defining characteristics of play. Play is *free* (not obligatory; otherwise it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion); is *separate* (within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance); is *uncertain* (its course cannot be determined; the result cannot be attained beforehand; some latitude of innovations is left to the player's

²² Cf. Huizinga in: Clausen 174.

²³ Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist who differentiated between the assimilating and adapting processes in the development of children, the first one being the act of making oneself accord to the rules of life and the other being the opposite of making the world adapt accord to individual standards.

initiative); is *unproductive* (it creates neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, it ends in a situation similar to that prevailing at the beginning of the game); is *governed* by rules (conventions that suspend ordinary laws; a new legislation, which alone counts); is *make-believe* (a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life).²⁴

The "Yale French Studies" (1968), one of the fundamental studies in game/play analysis, comprise Jacques Ehrmann's article "Homo Ludens Revisited." Here, the author returns to speaking of play as the generator of culture, and he adds that neither Huizinga nor Caillois ever realized "that reality and culture are interchangeable" (Spariosu 38). Play cannot be separated from the real world and the real world does not "exist outside of or prior to the manifestations of the culture that expresses it" (Spariosu 38). The three terms, play, culture, and reality, become interchangeable because, as Ehrmann's predecessors seem to have been ignorant of, the player may himself be subject of play, meaning "that the player can be its stakes (*enjeu*) and its toy (*jouet*)" (Spariosu 39).

Though Huizinga, Caillois, and Ehrmann start out from different positions and head to different aims, the quintessences of their work reveal striking similarities. Caillois sees play as an instrument through which culture subordinates reality, whereas Ehrmann gives up the distinction between culture, reality, and play, entirely and suggests that there is no difference at all, which is to say, that play is both reality and culture.

This is the point where one has to consider the nature of literature. So far there has been a psychiatrist who analyzed social behavior in terms of games of interaction, some historic personalities who considered play to be either life's structuring principle or its highest completion, and at last three thinkers who have notably influenced modern literary game analysis.

Reality is determined by culture, and vice versa; culture is molded by play and molds play. The written word comprises all these dimensions; literature plays

²⁴ Cf. Hutchinson 5, Ehrmann 35.

the world and puts reality to life. C.E. Nicholson contends on the ways in which we can refer to literature:

Fiction can, at any rate, also be seen as a thrust at truth, an attempt to imitate and understand some of our experiences of the world; or, simply and obviously as a story, an account of things which have not happened, a lie. (Nicholson 107)

Pynchon leaves the reader uncertain to decide whether he is dealing with "fict" or "fact." Literature deals with people, at least most of the time with shadows thereof; thus, Berne's interactive concept of play and games must be applicable to the written word as well, either by the way the characters fit into his strategems or by the way they evade these social games. The author cannot but play because language plays through him, as Derrida says, and we, as readers are caught in this web as well. Literature plays a game whose rules are known only to the author, if at all. From the moment of opening a book the game between an author and the reader starts leaving all the other persons involved in the production of the text aside.

Hutchinson writes,

There is a "conflict" between the parties in that one of them wishes to know the outcome of a situation and the other is determined that he shall *not* know until the other, the narrator, considers it appropriate, and there is 'co-operation' between the two in that the listener will accept such a disadvantage in the interests of suspense and ultimate satisfaction of his curiosity. Conflict may be heightened by all forms of delaying tactics. (Hutchinson 1)

Different from social activities, literature does not aim at beating the opponent; the aim is not the triumph at the expense of the other, but as Hutchinson states, "it is [...] the pleasure which is derived from analysis and recognition, [...] the pleasure of mastery over a text which has been presented as a specific form of challenge" (Hutchinson 7). Pleasure will be an important term; for where the dimensions of humor and spontaneity are missing, play becomes automated and a game turns into a simple mental or physical exercise. Pynchon entertains his readers by diligent permutations of a single metaphor,²⁵ by intruding into his texts and by making his authorship visible, and by his open fondness for word-play.

²⁵ Cf. p. 41 (Mendelson A 6).

Hutchinson distinguishes three categories of play, i.e. play with words in the widest sense as it affects texts, play with the reader, and word-play. First, play with words is a concept that involves all entanglements with language that determine a text, second, play with the reader is a phenomenological concept as well as a system of various techniques, and finally word-play, which can be found throughout literary history and aims at entertaining the reader. This will be another basic pattern that structures this paper: first, play the text, then, play the reader, and third, play the words.

So far a working definition of game/play has been established. Still, play has to be distinguished from game. Play is a spontaneous, creative and creating, random movement or activity, or simply a state of affairs, that has intention but no utilitarian purpose. It manifests itself in the free variation of everyday activities, transposing them onto a ludic level which is not yet game. Play enters the scene when insufficiency of means, frustration, boredom, or any other blank confronts the individual who has to pass time.

Play, says Huizinga, "only becomes possible, thinkable, and understandable when an influx of mind breaks down the determinism of the cosmos" which describes the man's situation rather than hers. (Clausen 174)

His definition can be accepted tentatively, though the mind not only breaks down the determinism but also transcends and transforms it subjectively.

Play strains for pleasure and entertainment; social issues and moralistic arguing are only touched upon, presented playfully and non-seriously.

Games follow rules on which a certain set of players have agreed, and the ignorance thereof is considered as a break of rules or spoilsports. Games have form, a distinct content, accorded rules, and purpose, most of the time this is competition. Play, in comparison, is the almost unrestricted variant and driving force that lies at the heart of a structure which eventually becomes a game.

Two Terms. And A Third Category.

There are two categories to begin with: first, "play," which can be described as any free, random, creative activity that may or may not have purpose, any expenditure of surplus energy other than work; second, "game," the institutionalized, formalized variant of play, containing structure, distinct and commonly accepted rules, and purpose or aim, which can be substituted by skill.

In his book, Berne refers to this third layer — the commonly accepted rules — as ritual, i.e. an activity, any social transaction or interaction, which is determined by conventions.

All of the three categories can be found in the writings of Thomas Pynchon, although the author's most cherished game (ritual) is an extratextual one, the game of hide-and-seek. His non-presence, as opposed to the overpresence of an author like Norman Mailer, has helped him to gain popularity and given rise to the most awkward explanations for the reasons of his anonymity.²⁶

George Steiner postulated, "All literature is play," but one should not go as far as to say, "All literature is a game," implying all its institutionalized connotations. This is true only insofar as reading itself is some kind of a game, since if certain rules are not adhered to, the game is being spoiled. If the latter were true, reading would have already found its end since reading works, at least to some extent, without knowledge of rules.

The distinction does not prohibit the conclusion that literary texts may be games in several ways: that they may incorporate empirical games, that they mark off the playground of the author's personal gamefulness, that they may engage the reader in textual game as well as in wordplay, that they may be constituted as games (whatever the author may wish or think) by the reader's own game playing, and even that they may be transformed into games by the rulelike procedures of interpretive criticism.

[...] Denied clarity, the concept of game will behave rather like a chess-piece transformed by the exigencies of a child's informal play into a simple plaything, or like a gameless shuttlecock. (Wilson 104)

²⁶ Please note that I will not refer to the events in 1997, when he was tracked down in New York. Cf. Appendix p. 103 (incl. Web-URLs).

We speak of chess as a game, with regard to rules, two opponents, board, and figures, whereas a person unfamiliar with the purpose of its physical components can play with them and set up new rules. He/She will play "with" chess but he/she will not play the game. Similar to what an author does when he/she uses literary conventions in different contexts. In *CL49* Pynchon plays with the dramatic conventions of the Jacobean revenge tragedy; he/she plays with literature, using different genre and register; but after all, the passages are there to serve the plot, to serve the author's own purpose. Thomas Pynchon does not try to excel in the art of drama composition. He takes a toy-doll and dumps it, as soon as another one turns up.

A reader may consider the Wharfinger play, *The Courier's Tragedy*, as a historical piece of Jacobean literature, but as soon as the reader acknowledges that the text is fake, the book gains a dimension which is essential for the understanding of the novel. There is more to be gained from the text if the reader is a "smart reader," for in modern fiction, the reader is invited to join the game of quoting and cross-reading, the game of literary codes and tropes. This is also true with regard to academic readings of texts. If reading already is seen as a game -- since certain rules and conventions have to be adhered to -- then, e.g., deconstructive reading might be a game taken one step further. Consider this paper: the corpus of a theory is placed, like a "stencil," on top of a piece of text. The outcome is a game with the text, possibly not the game the author intended.²⁷

Novels cannot be as rigorous as games — although they can be made so by widening the definition of terms. In Lewis Carroll's *Through The Looking Glass*, the structure of the plot actually follows the moves on a chess board, the characters, in fact, are the pieces on this board, and the game eventually ends with checkmate, but still the book is not a game. The reader is explicitly made aware of this plotting device in the foreword to the novel. The novel is only playful in that the author structured its plot in a way that is identical with the moves in a chess-game. The reader, however, does not need to have any knowledge of chess in order to understand the book, and if he/she does, he/she

²⁷ Pynchon purportedly has a contract with his publishing house that they will not publish any secondary literature on his books.

will not be more amused by it. The attention, however, is drawn to the composition of the text and how the author will manage to take the next necessary turn in order to fit the structure. A playful pattern in a novel would include any means by which the reader is seduced to read between the lines, go back and forth to different parts of the text, or make him leave the house to check up something extraneous to the text. However, a text that contains games need not be a game itself.

In *In Palamedes' Shadow*, one of the most concise studies on literary game/play analysis, Rawdon R. Wilson points out the shortcomings of a theory that says that all literature were game. The boundary between games and books has to be maintained. But still they share certain features, such as invention and absorption. Games, like texts, are more or less the inventions of another person, which an individual can use after having acquired certain capabilities. Further, both are set within a wide area of other or similar games (or texts), i.e., the understanding of other games is not required for the understanding of the game at hand, but knowing other games facilitates playing. The same accounts for the concept of intertextuality.

Like texts, games invisibly recall other games, replicate them (often unconsciously), and build upon them in such matters as improving skills, developing better strategies, and creating more sophisticated play. (Wilson 5)

Apart from the similar tasks of the gamewright and the author, literature and games share the dimension of absorption. Both literature and games distinguish themselves by taking the participant into their own world, a dreamscape.²⁸ Any game and text force their inherent structure on the mind of the reader or player since we have accepted to play according to the rules and get locked in a "lusory attitude" (Wilson 5). Thus both concepts are intertextual and intersubjective, while the spirit of the gamewright and the author hovers above. They are the masters to the scenery, and sometimes you can actually feel them.

²⁸ Consider the tasks of the game software programmer. The gamewright and the author melt into one person. The gamewright has become detectable again.

When Pynchon's characters fail in conducting sensible conversation, it is the author playing on the limitations of communication, though when Pynchon involves them in a game called "Strip Botticelli," as in *CL49*, or makes the sailors fight for beer from rubber breasts, a drinking sport called "Suck Hour" in *V.*, he clearly involves them in games. The distinction which has to be made, as described by Rawdon Wilson, is that children, for example, may play, that is engage in random movement like chasing each other, as well as play games. Between these two categories Wilson inserts a third category, which distinguishes itself by constitutive rules, or rules of practice, that is conventions. This third category presents an interface between terms since it is neither play, because it is limited and restricted by codes of action, nor game, because the activity does not follow rules, and the breaking of conventions (or constitutive rules) is not considered as spoilsports. This intermediary layer between play and game, governed by the exertion of conventions, can be taken as the domain of literature and criticism.

But also the texts themselves are full of games, rituals, pastimes and "procedures." Parties, for example, are granted a vast amount of attention. Close scrutiny reveals them to be almost interchangeable, be it Meatball Mulligan's party in Pynchon's celebrated short story "Entropy," Lupescu's party in "Mortality and Mercy at Vienna," the parties of the Whole Sick Crew, or Floppl's siege party in German South West Africa in *V.* Their participants most of the time are an international group of intellectuals, the procedures are characterized by a wide range of means of intoxication, and the party runs along a line of deterioration.²⁹ Conversations become increasingly senseless, chaotic input is granted by the arrival of new guests, eventually all social activities come to a full stop, and chaotic leisureness gains the upper hand. *V.* is full of such social gatherings. The end can always be anticipated, and is, of course, called for by Pynchon's favorite metaphor, that is, entropy. One of these stereotypical feasts is described in Pynchon's short story "Mortality and Mercy at Vienna."

²⁹ The party becomes formalized and thus a substitute and surrogate of a social gathering (i.e. life). The party-goers become "significant individuals" within the framework of the party.

The young lawyer, Cleanth Siegel, is invited to a party and eventually becomes the host of the party since the owner of the apartment decides to "go native." As the party goes on, Siegel finds himself in the role of a "father-confessor" for all the attendants. The party eventually ends with the execution of all party-attendants by a psychotic Canadian Indian who mistakes them for beavers. Only the main character, Cleanth Siegel, survives, but he is unable to save his fellow party crew. This short story constitutes Pynchon's early commitment that things are going from bad to worse, holding the status quo would already cost too much effort.

During these celebrations of "decadence," which usually last longer than two days, Pynchon takes the chance to unleash all social inhibitions to make his point playfully by showing that in any closed system, including society, things are developing towards an equilibrium of forces. The playful writer pushes the reader, manipulates him, jokes with and against him, but a connection is made, a look exchanged. A "common sense of fun" or shared delight is essential to play. "Remember that a model of playfulness is leaping, testing the limits of gravity through levity. [...] Laughter and buoyancy, levity, are the ingredients of playful fiction" (Shattuck 73). Play is experimenting, a "counterforce against gravity," putting things together in new ways in the hope the new invention will work.

The Game's Play.

The ineludable problem for the articulation of a theory of play in literature is whether one may have both, Bakhtin and Derrida, free play and dialogism, in a single inclusive model.
(Wilson 215)

What is of interest for the literary scholar about a theory which is concerned with game/play is that it throws light on areas which may have yet remained in the dark. A writer like Thomas Pynchon has discovered the entertaining possibilities of game/play and drawn extensively from the ludic side of things. By means of the texture of his prose the playful novelist continually reminds the reader, similar to the Brechtian alienation effects, of his/her presence and of the fictional, artificial nature of the world that he/she has created. The narrator of the story reminds the reader of "hermeneutic dangers." It is interesting to follow the development of the play concept in our time and throughout history, from the deterministic view of life as "playing games" in the cryptic writings of Heraclitus to the shady concept of "free play" in the heavily discussed philosophy of Jacques Derrida. If this thesis speaks of game/play as a social and inter/intraindividual activity, a distinction of terms must also be made on another level, that is, when game/play is not applied to individuals and social interaction but to language, which brings us into the field of linguistics and rhetoric. Pynchon's obsession for word-play is remarkable, and naming is only one conspicuous feature of this fad. *V.* and *CL49* are full of puns concerning names. In the former, creative naming is enacted mainly as a means of stressing the omnipresence of ghostly "V.", whereas in the latter, names function as parts of characterization. One character is called Mucho Maas — a mock-translation of Spanish "much more" — who eventually becomes a drug-addict. He is the husband of Oedipa, the female variant of the ancient solver of riddles. There is also a psychiatrist called Hilarius and finally, the omnipresent, absent character of Pierce Inverarity, a dead multi-millionaire, untrustful to the extent of his function in the plot.

Pynchon probes the reader's dilemma in his second novella, *The Crying of Lot 49*. When Oedipa is confronted with a mass of clues, signals which call for

decoding, she is in no position to do so alone. All she can do is come up with possible interpretations which include doubting her own sanity. But the point is to let the alternatives, the possible interpretations, play and try to grasp the pattern behind that play.

Oedipa is left with a philosophical dilemma, positivism or speculation, induction or deduction. She knows that "excluded middles" are "bad shit," but she cannot concentrate on tracking down a phenomenon. Too many signals cover the code underneath it. She is left with neither the means to deduct from one of her possible solutions nor with the possibility to invent new rules which may accord to the newly found hints. Since the alternatives exclude each other, taking sides is essential. Her lack of position does not allow that. On the one hand, she is barred from the circle by the ones she meets; on the other hand, she does not know whether she wants to be inside that circle. To her view, those who know the truth behind the Trystero die.

With respect to *CL49*, an attempt may be made towards analyzing decision theory in view of the transformation of Oedipa Maas. The character is confronted with a seemingly impenetrable conspiracy and finds its place in an unknown world. Decisions, either way, run into loose ends, and a firm mistrust in the world as it is perceived turns into a re-evaluation of beliefs though the outcome and the final gain is unknown to the character. She is caught within the game (and decides to play it out to the end) since she started playing it. New information in this tree of available decisions does not enrich her variety of possible choices since each new lead is canceled out immediately by some outward force.

One could read *The Crying of Lot 49* also as a parable of deconstruction, Derrida's concept of free play having been substituted by Oedipa's random search for hints to a secret world. I have chosen to do more profanely with respect to Pynchon's own literature, using *CL49* as a reader's guide to Pynchon's own texts. Immediately one falls into the first trap: "'x is like y' — for example, 'the reader is like Oedipa'. [...] Since pretty much anything can be made to appear pretty much like anything else, there is a low risk of failure in the strategy" (McHoul B 157).³⁰

³⁰ Cf. p. 5.

Play is not a "process," not "flux;" it is a structuring principle. But it paradoxically evades logical analysis. Like language itself, which according to Roland Barthes is "a product and the instrument of speech," play lies at the heart of activities and is an expression thereof. Along with that, the game of "Strip Botticelli" anticipates the outcome of the novel. The game structure of the whole book is reflected in that passage.³¹

Play/game grants the individual "significant identity" by simply realizing its part in the game. We are at the dog's tail once again. By realizing that one is part of a game (i.e. also acknowledging an outward force and impact), the individual may fully "realize" its self. And the rules of the game should guarantee significant identity to the individual and grant significant, meaningful movement. Thus, play creates order, *is* order. By losing oneself in a game, to an "external" structure, the individual acquires the desired significance in a personal universe.

Play is not connected with subjects and objects involved but with the activity, and "all meaningful activity begins with the activity characterized in play, and with the structure that results from such a playful activity" (Hans B 7). The original incentive is to question orientation, the doubt and will to openness. Play creates "ecstatic self-forgetfulness" and consequently a "self-remembrance" and a "new awareness of one's world"³². It is a form of activity which allows to find understanding that could not be found otherwise. And in order to be recognized as play, an activity has to reveal an intention. According to Johan Huizinga, "play only becomes possible, thinkable and understandable when an influx of mind breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos" that grants the individual "significant identity" (Hans B 6). Play is a means to rearrange chaotic material into meaningful patterns. Play is not simply a way of making sense of the real, external world and of the player's part in it; the player, rather, creates a second world, independently of the first, which makes sense and in which he/she plays a significant part.

"American fiction oscillates between [...] two polarities: integration (everything is connected) and disintegration (everything falls apart). [...] (hold/shift, drift)" (Petillon A 20). To play is one means of escaping dichotomies. In the texts of

³¹ Cf. Seed 119.

³² Cf. Hans B 8.

Thomas Pynchon this is done by cherishing metaphors which cover both extremes, the characters generate modern myths. In *V.*, for example, one episode, or rather one trope, is being enacted again and again. One motif is at the center of almost all the episodes of the novel. And thus a myth is being created, "a collective subconscious," or rather a parody thereof. Pynchon puts his characters and the readers on a quest, and he misleads them both. There are no boundaries to the game he is playing.

But like Oedipa, one sometimes does not succeed in escaping. Sorting out does not always call for a result or guarantee a result. *CL49* frustrates the reader by pretending to follow the conventions of a classic genre, i.e. the detective novel, but then refuses to provide the anticipated solutions. The ending remains open, satisfaction and revelation are denied. Everything the author reluctantly gives away are red herrings and the certainty that there has been something aloof the whole time. Solutions are impossible since the pieces of the puzzle can be arranged in various ways. An image seems to emerge every once in a while, a blur vision appears at the viscera, a notion that there were a conspiracy going on that would finally grant the parts some meaning. The result, however, is instantly doubted or dismissed; the pieces get shuffled again, and the search for a pattern starts all over. After all: The worst would be to realize one day that there is no conspiracy going on whatsoever, that the pieces of the puzzle do not fit.³³

Players feel themselves subordinated not to one another but to the game, whose rules, while binding, are so only by consent and are open to question by any player. Whatever destroys equality before these self-imposed rules, stops the game. When equality dies, honor dies, for only equals willing to risk with other equals create honor. In the constellation of the novel, it is important to note that Oedipa is from the beginning inferior, with respect to knowledge, to the Inverarity character. She cannot gain anything except some insight into her/self and some areas close to herself. The reader is in a similar position.³⁴ But he/she can go back to the beginning and start reading again, this time with the knowledge that there will be no revelation of knowledge in the end.

³³ Cf. p. 92.

³⁴ We are on the textual level not considering the author-reader relationship.

Wolfgang Iser describes "hard" authors, who refuse to reward the reader directly:

[...] [S]ome games do deliberately frustrate "positive" expectations, perhaps going on to provide more sophisticated satisfactions or simply resisting us without respite, creating "experiences that we can only have, but into which we cannot gain an insight." (Bruss 155)

This is true with regard to Pynchon's endings where the reader is usually left in the middle of another new development. The crux of the story has to be inferred by the reader, who is the "ideal Other."

The "author" is the implied initiator of the game, the strategist inferred for the sequence and direction of the play - neither more nor less than a "retrojection of the action itself, the agent-implied-by-the-act." But "the reader" is also a construct, the ideal Other for whom the test is posed, against whose expectations and likely calculations all the rules and hints have apparently been laid. (Bruss 154)

As most of the time when applying a theoretical concept to literary texts we come to a hiatus, a crossing where one road has to be taken: Is play imposed on reality or does reality constitute itself in play? Is a game a transcended level of reality or does reality follow the pattern of a game? What was first, reality or play? The object or the depiction thereof? Oedipa tries to solve the riddles with the means that she has at hand: "Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works ..." (CL49 21). To find the conspiracy laid out against her is one mode of self-defense. If she accepts the non-existence of a plot by Inverarity, she acknowledges her own insanity. But there has to be some magic entity which would put her world into focus. "Though the magic might be variously named id, probabilities, uncertainties, or accident, it forces her to seek order and control as a defense against disintegration and the void outside" (Plater 151). The question of ordering the universe, finding answers to fundamental questions, will be given below when discussing V. Joseph Slade summarizes the arguments that will follow in the later chapters:

According to the Augustinian, disorder in the universe is merely the absence of order, a matter of chance, part of the aleatory aspect of nature. The Mannichean attributes evil intent to disorder, a position which can verge on paranoia. (Slade C 36f)

Whether there is some basic design, some hidden grid to the world is one of the "big" questions Pynchon poses to his readers. He does not offer any

answers; all he does is let the concept work in his text: What would happen, if a middle-class California housewife were confronted with a secret conspirational organization? What is life like amidst the anonymous mass of corporate and private organizations? Pynchon starts spinning his yarn, playing this one tune in various keys, and finally leaves the reader alone, with the tune ringing in his/her head.

Is the Tristero real? Or is Oedipa hallucinating the Tristero? Is another world intruding her own or is she intruding another one? Pynchon confronts his characters with the foundations of their experiences, including sense and the senses. At the same time he is making the reader explicitly and repeatedly aware of the fact that the narrator is not to be trusted; that in the end, all there is is disorder, only man wanting order to be. It is not important whether the Tristero does exist, but how it influences the lives and surroundings of the people Oedipa encounters. The image is jeopardized and put in question as it is created, in the mind of the character as well as in the head of the reader.

Along the plot Pynchon experimentally probes the decentered and constantly deferred origin which is what deconstruction aims at. He gradually strips Oedipa of all certainties she seemed to have had, denies her to retreat to her world. Each step into a new direction is towards a new riddle she cannot solve. But if you look at the actual initiatives the author is taking towards solving the riddles, if there are riddles at all, there might be no quest after all. Oedipa finds preliminary relieve in the creation of a personal myth. But a myth is, after all, just another form of superstition, the belief in cause and effect.

If you only looked closely enough, there is a "V." in almost anything. Like his main character, he makes the reader put his/her personal grid onto the world and see the world through this grid; he makes the reader "stencilize" his/her own world. Oedipa, in the middle of the story, describes her task and state of mind:

I am meant to remember. Each clue that comes is supposed to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night." (CL49 118)

By changing the original and traditional myth, changing the figures and main constituents, the author shows the bleakness of the myth, its naiveté.³⁵

In V. the reader may decide whose story is being told, who the hero might be: Benny or Stencil. They are both granted approximately the same space. As on an oscillating curve, their plots meet and part. Along the plot evolves the "Game Itself."

³⁵ The construction of myths and the transcendental origins is the core topic of deconstruction. Playful authors share this delight in shattering the bases of traded beliefs.

... TO THE EARLY FICTION ... It's One Big Novel

The result of a year's work
depends more on what is struck out
than what is left in.
(Adams 389)

What seems to have been the technique when Pynchon published his first novel *V.* was that he took some of his then unpublished stories and strung them into a novel, at least something close to a novel.³⁶ He reworked these short stories and integrated them into his panorama of the inanimate. "*V.* served as a preliminary essay in organizing vast quantities of data into a coherent literary form"(Mendelson A 5). The two main characters are the only components that guarantee unity in the novel. Especially this first novel reads like an attempt at literature.³⁷ And the result is an American picaresque tale, a piece of road literature that has nothing to do with the road.

V. was followed by *The Crying of Lot 49*, which is both an appendix to *V.* and a preamble to *Gravity's Rainbow*. Certain themes show up that Pynchon had not been dealt with before. Sometimes it is obvious why Thomas Pynchon so much disliked the little novella.³⁸ Simply too shallow, it leaves the range of interpretation too wide. Rather easy to access, it offers the perfect text to be presented to first-year students while it is still a long text by Pynchon. The author goes back to the composition of his early pieces and offers a reminiscence of his apprentice years. The Introduction stands both as a piece of fiction and a self-contained preface to the texts of a dissatisfied writer. Many of the things Pynchon says about his early short stories are of course too harsh. "Entropy" is definitely his most popular – when it comes to critical appraisal – piece of fiction, but on closer scrutiny one notices the flaws which also Pynchon remarked. The language is too straightforward, the text is excessively stuffed with metaphors and symbolism, overall "adolescent" in the way the topic is being worked out. Thematically, Pynchon — like Henry Adams — called his involvement and occupation with entropy "sophomore." Where

³⁶ Two chapters of *V.* had been published earlier.

³⁷ Cf. p. 43 (The quest).

³⁸ Introduction to the *Slow Learner* p. 22:"[...] in which I seem to have forgotten most of what I thought I'd learned up till then."

Pynchon best dealt with entropy was in *V.* where he gives the metaphor a chance to live, to flourish in context, to "reveal itself in constellation" in Adorno's terms. Where the short story is still apprentice work, the novel has grown into a masterpiece.

According to Tony Tanner as well as Edward Mendelson, *V.* is "often mechanical and programmatic [...] [, an] overgrown elaboration of a simple idea," (Mendelson A 6), the "riddle" can be solved simply as the decline of the animate to the inanimate.

V. is like a riddle that, once correctly answered, never taxes the mind again; *The Crying of Lot 49* is founded in an emotion of mystery, an emotion which remains, inviolate and mysterious, even when the outside mystery is solved. *V.* is a complex novel that gets simpler with each rereading, *The Crying of Lot 49* a simple novel that, reread, grows more complex. (Sklar 90)

Various red threads run through all of his writings. One of them is the open use of sources: Pynchon copies from various literary sources and sometimes does not even bother to hide that fact. Some of his literary blueprints are: Baedeker *Egypt*, 1898, (the passage on Egypt), E.A. Poe *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (Vheissu), quotes from Eliot's "The Wasteland," Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Philosophicus* (Mondaugen's theories), *South West Africa Almanac* of 1922 (the stories and setting of South West Africa).

Interestingly enough, the influences which seem to shape his literature are those of Joseph Conrad, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Adams, E.A. Poe and the like rather than contemporary writers. Pynchon mixes American literary history and epistemology with contemporary scientific matter. His topics are themselves "preterite" but nevertheless seem to touch the American psyche. Who would associate The Pony Express with world conspiracy, the Herero tribe with a special SS squad? Pynchon does not tell stories so much as he is telling his one big story over and over again.

By connecting, or rather re-connecting, the world, he

can pipe the opening of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* into an engineering experiment taking place in South West Africa in 1912, thus making it appear, almost literally a universal principle gathered from beyond the limits of the Earth and at the same time a complete nonsense. (McHoul 9)

In *ETP* Pynchon goes no further with the idea of the deterioration of information through various channels. But communication theory will become increasingly important in *V.* and *CL49*. In *V.* Pynchon takes up the problem that he had defined in *ETP*, but he explores it far more thoroughly, and for the first time offers a solution — a preliminary one as it is. The solution will be tested in *CL49* and will be elaborated on further.

The Quest: (A Lesson in Reading). A Postmodern Concept.

In *The Crying of Lot 49* as well as in the Stencil chapters of *V.* the quest is the prevalent form of narrative. Pynchon uses this old, epic-romantic form of the heroic quest³⁹ in his novels, setting his characters on some kind of trail which they have to follow. It is always a hunt, a chase, a search that they have to accomplish. Oedipa and Stencil are the primordial questers in Pynchon's oeuvre. Oedipa searches for the big conspiracy against herself, her life, "her" America, and Stencil is looking for enigmatic V, an all-encompassing principle or sinister figure which seems to be at the center of manifold processes and events. Stencil eventually identifies himself as "He Who Looks for V." and takes on "whatever impersonations that might involve" (V. 226). "The "model of man" for the quester is paranoia; for the paranoid can see the patterns and purpose in absolutely everything"⁴⁰ (McHoul A 48). And the readers have to follow Pynchon's characters on their quests.⁴¹ He puts a similar task to his readers probing their ability to read meaning into a text. The reader suspects that there must be something under the surface of the text, some hidden meaning. Reading as well as playing games involves the process of learning, which includes sophistication and gathering information and strategies to cope with a set problem. In literature this could be either the development of a character or the development of the reader to a "good" reader. Like any activity reading provokes learning and other forms of adjustment. The quest for meaning in a seemingly empty universe is the task Pynchon sets to the reader.

Traditionally, the quest involved three phases:

1. Separation and departure of the quester from his/her "normal" life;
2. initiation of the quester into the mysteries governing social and psychological being (often dramatized in confrontations with a father figure or alter ego);
- 3.

³⁹ In the tradition of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* we have the tragic hero and the picaresque.

⁴⁰ But: Oedipa is also hebephrenic. The hebephrenic is someone who can see no patterns in anything — can make no sense of the most significant events or objects. She is also the anti-quester and relationless.

⁴¹ Literature does not refer to reality and this is because reality is inaccessible. Literature means semiotically and not mimetically. What is one reading towards? Interpretation, after all, can only be seen as a quest for order and intelligibility among the possible patterns. The modern reader is caught in a tension between the "interpreter's rage for order" and the knowledge that there is no such order.

return of the quester with his/her awards of personal growth and social starvation (including a restitution of harmony).⁴²

None of Pynchon's characters succeed, i.e., return home. The act of questing is itself the affirmation of human existence; the characters affirm their existences but gain little information or power that can be put to constructive use. The goal of "home" is necessary but illusory as even the basic requirements for a successful quest have been denied to modern man. Pynchon's "antiquests are movements away from rather than toward reunification of the quester and his society" (M. Siegel 6). At the end of the book, the reader is in the same position as Oedipa, for the full implication of the meaning is never graspable; the central truth remains elusive, subsidiary truths nevertheless confront her.

That is where the reader is forced to join the character of the novel. Thus the quests also function on the epistemological level — one of the main aspects of modern or modernist novels — the search for truth and meaning in a seemingly (and apparently) meaningless world (i.e. text). As for Stencil's quest, it is a search for knowledge and a certain kind of pattern or connection (connectedness). Meaning is ultimately connected with form (one theme that Pynchon celebrates all over), and one primary tension in *V.* "lies in the conflict between the attempt to discover or create form and the overwhelming tendency toward formlessness in universe [...]" (Patteson 20). Pynchon shows how modern man can confront his/her surroundings, "structure his waking hours,"⁴³ make a "meaningful influx against the determinism of the cosmos,"⁴⁴ the big questions of existence. He asks the questions while he refuses the answers, what is more, he offers too many possible answers. The one who is about to reveal the truth behind the Tristero to Oedipa is an unknown obscure character who prefers to remain anonymous and is represented by one Mr. Schrift, whose name of course is German for "writing" as well as "scripture." However, who or what is represented by "Schrift" remains in the dark. Only speculation and inference of meaning help towards a possible solution.⁴⁵

⁴² Cf. Tobias 87ff. and Mark Siegel 5ff.

⁴³ Cf. p. 8 (Berne 16).

⁴⁴ Cf. p. 27. (Clausen 174)

⁴⁵ The metaphor could not be more obvious. Who does Schrift represent? The doors close? Waiting? The book ends.

Oedipa is sometimes dimly aware of the intrusion of another world upon her own — she senses the existence of that world from which hers is being projected. With a feeling that she sometimes refers to as "religious" she knows

that another Driblette is operating upon her life from another plane of being and that this unknown "conspirator" is somehow responsible for her universe. It is only at such moments that Oedipa feels at peace, understanding that, even though she cannot see it, there is a pattern and a logic to her world; at such moments Oedipa realizes that if she could somehow stand apart from her world and observe it from an objective position she would be able to perceive an ordering principle at work. (Huwiler 157)

She experiences this "almost metaphysical sense of mysteriously imposed order" (Huwiler 158) for the first time as she drives into San Narciso. She senses an "intent to communicate." Oedipa comes to sense the reality of another world, another plane of being. Jesus Arrabal, a revolutionist she once met in Mexico and then again in a Mexican bar in San Francisco, gives the novel a definition of "miracle," i.e., when two worlds intersect and touch for a moment, or, the intrusion of another world into this one. Like for Stencil, the clues appear to amass to a clearly observed presence, take up an existence of their own.

She fell asleep almost at once, but kept waking from a nightmare about something in the mirror, across from her bed. Nothing specific only a possibility, nothing she could see. [...] When she woke in the morning, she was sitting bolt upright, staring into the mirror at her own exhausted face. (CL49 101)

Oedipa begins to acquire a sensory apparatus as new clues manifest themselves around her, almost as the epileptic comes to feel the approach of a seizure.

She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to — an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing his seizure. Afterwards it is only this signal, really dross, this secular announcement, and never what is revealed during the attack, that he remembers. Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (CL49 95)

There is the chance that there is someone hidden who supplies her with clues or, at least, guides her movements. Oedipa, being entangled at a low level, has no means to sort out trustworthy from untrustworthy pieces of information. Only the alleged conspirator is in a position to see the patten, the whole is never revealed to her.

She was meant to remember. She faced that possibility as she might the toy street from a high balcony, roller-coaster ride, feeding-time among the beasts in a zoo — any death-wish that can be consummated by some minimum gesture. She touched the edge of its voluptuous field, knowing it would be lovely beyond dreams simply to submit to it; that not gravity's pull, laws of ballistics, feral ravening, promised more delight. She tested it, shivering: I am meant to remember. Each clue that comes is *supposed* to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night. (CL49 118)

As the novel goes on, it becomes increasingly clear that this alleged conspirator is not Pierce Inverarity. He, too, is most probably a projection, a part of the plot. "What looks like a conspiracy on his part, is Inverarity's attempt to come to terms with the same problem that Oedipa faces — to project a world" (Huwiler 160). But he found a different alternative to his inconsistent and incoherent world. He wants her to finish what he had started looking for — although she was "unfit for marches and sit-ins," because she would be "a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts"(CL49 104). She is looking for that "epileptic" word, what is behind the word, the referent proper. CL49 becomes the story of the hermeneutic bind, when the will to know comes up against the maneuvers of a permanently assumed, yet ceaselessly deferred, truth. Oedipa begins to trace those deferences through a system which is more and more that of the text and that of the letter.⁴⁶

The conspirator is, after all, the author himself. When looking at a painting by Remedios Varo in Mexico City, Oedipa senses that she is imprisoned within a work of art, an artificial world, alternative to average reality.

⁴⁶ Cf. Hans 68ff.

[I]n the central painting of a triptych, titled "Bordando el Manto Terrestre," were a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world. Oedipa, perverse, had stood in front of the painting and cried.

[...]

She had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that what she stood on had only been woven together a couple thousand miles away in her own tower, was only by accident known as Mexico, and so Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there'd been no escape. What did she so desire to escape from? (CL49 21)

Oedipa knows that there is no escape from the construct, which is her world; she comes to sense that an "individual cannot stand outside of one's world, cannot escape to another plane of being" (Huwiler 161).⁴⁷ She can leave all the places behind, but it will not enable to run away from world in which the author, after all, has placed her. Only a representative of Mr. Schrift will be present at the auction at the end of the novel. She chooses writing and scripture to access the core.

All she can do is "create her own world or tapestry, perform her own magic, create her own illusions" (Huwiler 162). She can "project a world." Dr. Hilarius, the psychiatrist, who eventually goes mad, explains to her, that she should cherish her fantasies since they guarantee uniqueness.

"I came," she said, "hoping you could talk me out of a fantasy."
"Cherish it!" cried Hilarius, fiercely. "What else do any of us have? Hold it tightly by its tentacle, don't let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be." (CL49 138)

The creation of an alternative world enables the author to escape from our frustrating and deterministic cosmos to one of human significance and freedom. It is a world of dreams that is intelligible and meaningful in human terms, and it is that world which is embodied in playful literature. The world of the playful author has two characteristics: it is intelligible and coherent; and it provides the player with significant identity.

⁴⁷ Wittgenstein again: Man cannot think independently of the world.

Thus the quest also is a pattern of imagery, since the quest implies a certain kind of fulfillment, and thus produces a vision of innocence which still sees the world in terms of total human intelligibility.

Once the cleavage between the "real" world and the world of play takes place, play will always have a subsidiary role, no matter what the rhetoric might suggest. [...]

[A piece of literature or a painting] takes place in its own, special, aesthetic realm, a realm differentiated from our normal lives. And art as therapy, like play as therapy, has no truth value. In this conception of art or play, there is no sense in which the constructs of art become the constructs of life. (Hans B 2ff.)

For Huizinga, play has its function in providing us with a temporary sense of order, a "limited perfection." Its role no longer involves knowledge; it is merely therapeutic, providing a context in which we can act as though things are ordered and clarified. After such therapy, presumably, we can return to our normal situation, to the chaotic world in which we live. Art, like play, serves the same purpose. Playing a game is "the voluntary act to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Hutchinson 7).

Another characteristic of the playful novel is that of the authorial intrusion into the text. The author creates playful, subjective worlds in which his/her characters can possess significant identities. The authors are free to move in and out of fictions which they have created and manipulate the lives of their characters. Oedipa is dimly aware of the presence of some interventionist deity, and she makes explicit reference to the creator of the fiction which she seems to inhabit. Art imposes order on a subjective experience that does not really exist. In that way art becomes artificial, illusory and therapeutic, providing a respite from the fuzziness of our lives. Art is one aspect of play, transcending the objective world and reproducing it, according to its own paradigms and means. Art is born, lives, and dies in play. Play and art are inseparable. But then again, how illusory and therapeutic (fictive) are other structures by which we order our lives. The only truth lies in the "impossible alternative." We have to deal with different planes of reality. On one level, we have the playful world created by the protagonist characters as substitutes for the worlds the author created for them. At the next level we have the novel itself, the worlds of the characters created by the author, their average reality. And finally we have *our* average reality, the world in which also the author takes part, and which

he/she then playfully alters in the novels. One of the basic patterns of authors like Pynchon is the relation of the individual to its environment. Self-reflection is the survival strategy of their characters, trying to answer "how the world of apparent chaos is known to the creating consciousness" (Claas B 12). What the modern author tries to accomplish, is the "unmaking of meaning." Referring to another probable source of Pynchon, Tanner says:

Is nature encoded or blank? The problem of whether there are significant patterns and signs to be detected in reality which obsesses so many recent American writers is here adumbrated in one of Poe's most brilliant fictional games. (Tanner A 26)⁴⁸

Oedipa frequently refers to her surrounding's "intent to communicate" whenever she is confronted with a structure, a design that appears to have been lain out just for her.

Pynchon's characters have to become detectives, chasing hints and tracing clues. The quest starts to materialize and takes shape according to some "ominous logic," (V. 449) another one of Pynchon's recurring motifs. The reader follows Oedipa on her way to the formation of, what Stencil's father called, the "Situation." Stencil starts where Oedipa leaves the novel. (They both are in the middle of "something" without realizing what it might be.) Stencil's suspicion that everything is ordered according to some ominous logic echoes through the whole novel, and serves Pynchon as a kind of motif of the mind and conscious of his characters, who are drawn to the ambivalent appeal of paranoia. The reader notices a permanent failure on Stencil's side to differentiate *causa efficiens* and *causa finalis*. The logic cannot be grasped by words. The cause is at the same time the effect.⁴⁹

At the beginning of her search Oedipa still has some kind of innocence towards the world she lives in; in the end she will have lost "all that she ever believed in or held certain," "teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum" (CL49 171).

Stencil is looking for clues, whereas Oedipa is stumbling into them. Oedipa is confronted with an alternative universe; Stencil is creating it either through his

⁴⁸ Cf. Tanner A 26: "[...] Pym reveals an inclination to see meaningful shapes in the unmeaning blankness which, in one form or another, is a frequent subject of study in American fiction." Similar to Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*, where the protagonist detects words from the pattern of another character's peregrinations through downtown Manhattan.

⁴⁹ Cf. Pütz 90.

imagination or his "stencilization." At the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa's world is filled with the quest; it *is* the quest. Stencil's world is getting emptier as the quest takes over everything including himself. So, by different strategies Pynchon makes the main characters lose themselves in the worlds of their searches.

Oedipa is Pynchon's primordial quester. She is Benny and Stencil in one person. She suspects that something big is going on, and she senses what Benny realized at the outset of *V.*: "[H]e had his first intelligence that something had been going on under the rose, maybe for longer and with more people involved than he would care to think about" (*V.* 23). Only in the course of the text does she start to believe in revelations; she lets herself unconsciously drift, lets things happen, lets chance take over, hoping that this would guarantee her new insights or give her a clue of the dimension of the conspiracy she suspects. In other words, she is playing by letting loose. And so is Benny, although with him it is a "state of mind." For one thing, Benny is ignorant, a self-proclaimed "schlemiel." And in such a position he can do nothing but believe in outward forces since the schlemiel never shows initiative. All he can do is "take," take *in* (information, emotions), but he cannot give. On the other hand, Stencil is oversensitized to traces or manifestations of *V.* Like Oedipa and, at the end of the novel, the reader, Stencil is facing a world full of clues and hints to the existence of some ominous, dark power, which for one is *V.* and for the other is the Tristero. It turns out that the quest is only the form, the guise, for some bigger knowledge. It is the playful exertion of an epistemological dilemma. The reader is safely guided through it, without the promise of learning anything, and without the frustration of not having learned anything at the end of the novels. Oedipa, ragged and exhausted, leaves the book. She has grown during her quest, if only negatively.

One of the questions is which directions the search has to take. The heroes want to find something which is at the bottom of things. But there is no way of getting to the bottom (i.e. center) since there are either too many ways or there simply turns out to be no bottom. The experiment Pynchon makes is the principle of decentralization, i.e. one episode is repeatedly reenacted and spread out all over the book. One example would be the matter-of-fact

presentation of the New York "sewer scandal" of the baby alligators who live and grow in the canal system. This urban legend is spread in various episodes within the text.⁵⁰

The only structure that can hold such a loose concept is that of play. The origins and centers are empty, but an idea of possible, palliative perspectives is given. The completion of the quest is the underlying truth. Whether the Tristero really exists is never solved, Oedipa only finds manifestations of the mailing system, never the physical body which would redeem her from the quest.

And this indeed shows the strong connections between our notions of origin and centre. But anyone who has ever got to the centre of [e.g.] a large garden maze will know that the centre contains nothing special. It is an almost arbitrary point in the general landscape.
(McHoul C 93)

The characters of the novel do not realize what the reader has to be continuously aware of: the way is the only aim, there is nothing to be gained at the end of the novel, except for the fact that there is never anything at the end. "Centres, then, are arbitrary and are simply places we imbue with special significance" (McHoul C 93).

The vertical movement shows no result (as with Stencil *père's* search for the nature of Vheissu). Thus the horizontal dimension is being explored. But the links and possible interconnections are too manifold, and sometimes the links become the center of other links; the constellation becomes the center as it is. The structure seems to be the key to the dilemma. But the characters never get so far as to grasp these perspectives, and to the reader structure is most often only a matter of aesthetics. Thus, it does not surprise that man, when confronted with the bleak vastness of the desert, builds pyramids that break down the "determinism of the cosmos."⁵¹ Oedipa attempts to shape randomness into an order which she can comprehend but not in the same way as Stencil does.

[The novel V.] also demonstrates the advantage of aesthetic forms

⁵⁰ Cf. Claas B 81.

⁵¹ Cf. Patteson and Tanner D 39p.: "In einer geometrisch geordneten Welt zu leben gehört zu den Ur-Träumen (oder Ur-Bedürfnissen) der Menschheit. Um nicht dem formlosen Raum ausgesetzt zu sein, füllen wir ihn mit Winkeln und Geraden: Der Mensch baut Pyramiden mitten in der Wüste. Auch davon handelt V."

over philosophical concepts in presenting the contradictory logic of "postmodern knowledge." V. consists of two interwoven narratives: the "stencilized" (modernist) adventures of the anti-detective in search of "V." and the "profane" journeys of the (beatnik) drifter in flight of himself.

[...]

The narratives juxtapose [...] [the two] attitudes towards reality (the quest for truth and certainty of the enlightenment man and the quest for self-fulfillment and experience of the post-enlightenment avantgarde). (Klepper A 601)

Play is not a substitute for "process" or "flux"; it is a structuring principle. Like the prerequisites of plot, the rules of a game guarantee the player a significant identity (beginning and end, interludic relationship). The player defines himself within the game. The player is fully aware of the nature of the game. He/She is in the know of the rules; he may step in and out of the game as he/she pleases. The character of the novel may do so only insofar as he/she is aware that he/she is part of a plot, i.e. that his/her actions lead toward a certain aim and end. Most often this is not granted. Thus the play/game level must be a different one. The significant identity is not granted since characters serve the plot and not the other way. Meaningful action and movement is suspended. Everything takes place for its own sake. Movement needs not be justified since it is its own means. Pynchon's novels are structured similar to comic strips. Each episode contributes to the other only between the lines, while the theme of the novel holds the frames together.

The world that the player creates enables him to recover a sense of significant identity, which is one of the basic designs of all literature, the story of the loss and regaining of identity. One major design of plot is the struggle to find one's own status in society, the role in the game, and eventually to find the game itself through playing it.

In creating the alternative reality, this reality not only transcends the "average reality" but surpasses it. The alternative world is judged as more valid and more real than the substantial world of objective fact, which creates a kind of primacy of the self-created world.

Pynchon deliberately misleads the reader (another aspect of the playful novel) and plays with the reader's expectations. The reader notices that quickly. While the reader, similar to the characters, acquires the skills of solving the textual problem, he/she is continually led into traps and his/her new skills never seem

to suffice. At other instances he/she may find out that there has not even been anything to find out. In the end, the only logic thing to do is to start all over again, and to try the same task in the light of the new skills, to read under a new perspective, in a new light. Actually the reader has learned something from the text: Do not to trust what you have learned. One could call it another aspect of the postmodern circle: to learn that there is nothing to be learned, or at least to doubt the foundations of knowledge.

On the one hand, the reader becomes a detective as he/she starts looking for details, judging the value of information and reading between lines; on the other hand this search for information during the second reading will not be satisfied. There is no information in the text which the author had no intent of giving to the reader, for example, the search for anagrams leads nowhere. They exist only where Pynchon planted them, and where they are highlighted.⁵² There is nothing after all. Hidden meanings are abundant but only where the author placed them to be found by the reader, for example the play on the "dt" metaphor in *The Crying of Lot 49* and the jolly search for the V-characters in *V*. The development of the reader once again leads to a state of equilibrium where all the possible solutions (i.e. readings) are equally plausible. On reading *V*. the reader gets a huge amount of data which he/she has to sort out in order to gain meaning out of the book, and if not meaning then at least certainty about what is fact and what is fiction in the book. Klepper writes:

In Pynchons Romanen findet man sich jedoch am Ende — angesichts der Hilflosigkeit [...] — dazu hingezogen, selbst die Vermutungen der Charaktere nachzuprüfen: einerseits durch ein Nachforschen im Text selbst, andererseits durch das Nachprüfen der historischen Andeutungen, die die Brücke von den Romanwelten zur Welt der LeserInnen sind. Pynchons Romane treiben einen geradezu in die Bibliothek, um nachzuprüfen, ob die *Courier's Tragedy* tatsächlich ein Renaissance-Schauspiel ist [...]. (Klepper B 99)

Analogies which are created between the reader and the "hero" of the novel are never explicitly referred to but "realistically" covered. Only at the end of the novel, when the hero is left with an unfinished quest, does the reader notice the

⁵² D.E.A.T.H., W.A.S.T.E., NADA, SHROUD, SHOCK, . . .

similarities. Pynchon's novels literally drive the reader into the libraries to check the data given.⁵³

Pynchon maximiert seine Interpretationsangebote an den Leser, bis dieser sie kaum noch einzuschränken weiß, operiert also mit einer Erzählstrategie, die selbst etwas vom Charakter eines Komplotts an sich hat und den Leser ständig in eine Lage versetzt, in der zumindest der Möglichkeit nach die Harmonisierungsabsichten der Figuren des Romans auf ihn überzugreifen drohen. (Pütz 91)

The reader — like Maxwell's Demon — has to separate fast-moving from slow-moving molecules, i.e., he/she must sort out movement and meaning in a fictional universe which is in a state of total flux. The quest moves in circles. Pynchon's text is already a parody twice removed. Don Quixote already passed this way, interpreting imaginary signs while pursuing a real quest. The Tristero — like the Grail — "is both subject and object of the quest" (Brugiere 7).

A playful text can be any text by which "the reader is deduced to read between the lines, different parts of the text or something extraneous to the text" (Wilson 19). And Pynchon's texts are full of that. Most of the time the reader has to check whether he/she is dealing with a historical person or with one of Pynchon's characters. The playful author enjoys the freedom to play in a world which is his/her own making.

That his novels can hold everything from Whitehead and Heisenberg to comic books and Disneyland in a single form is less a sign of interosculation than confirmation of Whitehead's conclusion that everything *is* related and that modes of perception *do* intersect. The analysis of this problem in terms of land and landscape is consistent with Pynchon's fiction in establishing a model that can accommodate Mickey Mouse and the unyielding philosopher. (Plater 128)

Seed claims that, in Pynchon's texts, "rubbish miraculously becomes charged with significance [...]"⁵⁴ The author makes the reader aware that there might be some hidden meaning behind each hint, word, sentence, whatever, but hardly ever there is anything to be found. There is indeed too much, as a glance at secondary literature may prove. The reader has to filter the rights from the wrongs. This sorting out can be done in various ways. The author playing with

⁵³ Cf. Klepper B 99. Cf. Siegel B 101: "It is a mistake in examining the work of any artist to insist on revealing some grand architectural structure. You can do that with Escher, because he did work that way. [...] Tom is not that kind of artist in the works that I have read. Thus, I think that it is sometimes better to let him just be himself, [...] because his sources are often disappointingly thin."

⁵⁴ Cf. Grant B 16.

the reader's expectations, giving away hints while at the same time withdrawing others or hiding them from the reader's eye.

A narrative can be a labyrinth if it captures its readers in the perplexities of explication and interpretation. "Structure (by a paradox of hermeneutic compensation) must spring, then, from the reader's own playfulness and skill in matching the text's gamefulness: an achieved goal, it becomes the prize for having read" (Wilson 165).

Thus, the reading process becomes a closed circle: the author and the reader at the game, the text their playground, there being only basic rules. What ensues is a game of give and take. Of course, the author's reaction toward the reader can only be limited. The text is guiding the reader through the world the author has created. (Remember that the text is the world and that there is nothing outside of it.)

[...] [T]he process of interpretation involves the paradoxical relationship between the part and the whole of that which is to be interpreted: one can only understand the whole through the parts, but one cannot begin to understand the parts without some understanding of the whole. Thus, one begins with certain prejudgements about what the whole is, confronts the parts with this set of prejudgements, and allows the sense of the whole to be continuously altered through the interaction with the parts. It is the back-and-forth movement whole and parts that constitutes the hermeneutic circle; and that, contrary to those who characterize this as a vicious circle, is the movement that makes interpretation possible to begin with. (Hans B 5ff.)⁵⁵

"His novel has no space in it uninvaded by man, and therefore no place where the exegetical capacity can rest" (Baxter 36). Both the author and the reader are part of the same world, though their realities may differ enormously. They are pawns and players on this board, which is the world. The author has the advantage of presenting to the reader his/her version of the world, his/her reality which may be fictive or received. He/She gives the reader an insight into his/her senses and mind, that is, his/her role of author or writer, the role he/she is either assigned to or has chosen to take. The game is an epistemological search.

The author's reality is the final product of the game he/she is playing in the world, his/her real world. This role and game, depending on his/her ideological

⁵⁵ The singular issue can only be understood with the whole of the historical background in mind. The whole on the other hand is a sum of these issues.

point of view, are determined or created by the author. Interactions between the world and the artist produce his/her reality, which then may be reproduced for anybody in the fictional output of the author. This is another sort of game. So far, the author is himself part of the game which is the world. He/She may alter this world, copy or transform it to his/her aims, and present it to the reader, what is exactly what Stencil does. He/She thus becomes the "God" of a world, which is ultimately his/her world, and to which he/she invites the reader to visit. Here the reader ends up as another pawn, along with all the things and characters that inhabit this world as well. Now, the author may want to play with the reader, which he/she can achieve by various means, mostly by playing with the reader's expectations. The world forms the reader and the author and the realities thereof as well as the world of his/her fiction which then acts out the games the author has encountered in the world. We all play games, most of the time not even realizing it, playing on our chances, probabilities and fellow-players. I do not mean to say that the outcome of a math formula were related to chance — although the argument would be interesting —, but the setting in which it may have to be solved can be a game-like situation, be it a classroom, office or a masochist attempt in one's privacy. But authors play with the reader, each of them plays with language and each other, the characters play in their fictional reality.

To accept the concept of freeplay⁵⁶ would mean to let go of all notions of a centered structure. But in speaking of freeplay we run the risk of "erasing it immediately" (Hans A 817). "Our alternatives are simple: to be nostalgic and act as though there is an origin which can be recovered, or to reject any notion of an origin and confirm absolute chance." (Hans A 821) Oedipa, like the modern reader, has to grapple with the question of

how to live in a world where the side of the signifier and the side of the signified cannot be conjoined and where neither alone is to be trusted: neither pure materiality (Sr) nor absent or continually deferred meaning/spirit (Sd): neither substance nor phantom?
[...]
she is caught between Origin (being) and Destination (purpose),
between "because" and "in order to". (McHoul A 41)

⁵⁶ "[W]e must decenter language and call an end to its reign if we are to see how freeplay lays the world" (Hans A 817). "Derrida has quite severely limited the play by equating it with discourse." Since discourse is also part of it, discourse is nothing more than "the human link to freeplay" (Hans A 824).

The game is neither the result of its parts nor a chain of incidental actions. It is neither the one nor the other, since it is both at once.

The fools rush in: Herbert Stencil and Benny Profane — the first is hopelessly nostalgic, the latter a manifestation of absolute chance made animate. Along these lines both are on the wrong way towards attaining truth. Stencil is caught up in his own grids of analyses, entangled in his own world, and Benny moves on grids only conjecturing their existence. And neither of them finds out anything in the end; the one is afraid to end the quest and the other ignorant of the fact that he should. We distinguish a stimulus-response model and an emulation model (Benny, the first, and Stencil, the second, approximately). Oedipa is caught in the same dilemma. While she believes in traditional values at the beginning of the novel, she does not believe in anything anymore at the end. She has also become a drifter, bouncing and yo-yoing through San Francisco nights, on the lookout for clues to her search. Along with Pynchon's elaborations on probability and chance Hans states that "[i]f freeplay is literally pure chance, then anything is possible; if freeplay has rules of its own, anything may be possible, but some things are more possible than others." (Hans A 823)⁵⁷

In one way Benny is a player: he refuses to commit himself, his deeper self. He is watching, a by-stander, "somebody who lies back and takes it from objects, like any passive woman" (V. 288). He refuses to interact with his surroundings. He is a character in his own life, in the traditional definition of the term. Unreal, though life-like, he is not a professional human being, he is an amateur at living. Masked for a carnival called life, staged on the streets he is walking. Stencil is the intellectual, entirely sensible of an ongoing cultural disintegration. Like Henry Adams, Stencil suspects that there is a subtle plan to historical events. He investigates all over the globe on the origin and possible nature of that force. This search ties together all the plots and subplots of the book, eventually subsumed by the various realizations of V.

⁵⁷ "There was no difference between the behavior of a god and the operations of pure chance" (GR 323).

Pynchon has fused the Virgin-Venus with the dynamo [i.e. infinity] into a single V., a remarkably scattered concept that can be presented adequately by no known single word, but only by an initial that means everything and nothing. [...] V. is V.: a symbol without reference - except that supplied by Stencil and the narrator ... or the reader. (Plater 21)

The reader goes along the lines of the young Stencil in *V*. Though *V*. is initially identified as a woman she/it gradually grows into an all-embracing principle. Whereas Stencil *père*, a British intelligence agent, might have had some conception of what *V*. is not, Stencil *fils* subsumes all his perception onto some prefabricated concept. He is looking for *V*. for the sake of the quest he is on, a caricature of Henry Adams in search of the Virgin. He is looking for the cause of a process which he senses going on around him, in a way working on and extending his father's "Situation." Everywhere he pokes into, it seems, some hidden reference to *V*. proves his suspicion of a conspiracy going on. His perception, and the very name suggests it, shapes (stencils) the environment according to his needs to entertain the tour. His quest and search are characterized by the attempts to fit the clues into his pattern, into his personal grid. The meta-narrative shapes the clues until they fit, and clues are shaped until they fit. He "stencilizes" facts and information, fighting windmills all over the globe and finally is joined and left by a "pseudo-Sancho Pansa," Benny Profane, a picaro of sorts.

V., as a metaphor for various things, seems to haunt Stencil, and within the paranoid mind of the quester it takes on the form of a woman, although Pynchon leaves no doubt that "she" is merely a concept, although to Stencil's father she still was a woman, or at least he spoke of one. The pursuit of the elusive *V*. becomes an obsession for Stencil. She/It is somehow responsible for the advancement of the disease which — in his view — began in 1859.⁵⁸ Stencil tries to convince himself of the possibility of *V*., of the existence of a plot — a plot for which *V*. somehow is responsible. For him conspiracy is a necessity. As Stencil watches his own degeneration into an inert, nonhuman state, his search for the cause becomes the way of resisting its effects, to retain what little remains of his humanity.

⁵⁸ Darwin published "On The Origin of Species" that year, a time when the "world contracted a disease." (Cf. *V*. 461)

Throughout the novel we find her in various guises, once a Veronica, Vera, a Victoria, successively acquiring all sorts of inanimate objects, and the reader is caught remembering the image of SHOCK, Benny's inanimate custodian.

Stencil seems to see that there may be more behind her than he had ever suspected, and his quest forbids him ever to find her. The clues to her possible identity are endless, but, instead of leading Stencil toward a solution, they only generate additional clues.⁵⁹

The reader starts to realize that she (the woman) is not the embodiment of an evil force but the subsequent manifestation thereof, and like caries and cabals, there is no conspiracy to a natural development.⁶⁰ But Stencil's manic drive to search for coherence and order keeps him in motion. He subsequently begins to refer to himself as "He Who Looks for V." The quest guarantees meaningful and significant identity to the protagonist and it provides a motive for action.

"The quest is all. It becomes the quester's identity. The end is always anticlimactic: rather than finding himself, the quester loses what identity has been created" (Mesher 45).

Thus, Stencil does not manage to grant the search any deeper meaning other than the search itself. It has no "existence independent of his own imagination, or, if it does, that he will never be able to discern it. He realizes that what is important to him is the search itself" (Huwiler 136f.). And also Benny's catalyst function becomes more and more clear. When Stencil tells him about the search and the resulting problems, Benny admits that he would not be able to help. "Be an ear, is all he needs," (V. 385) Stencil says. He wants him to be a "buffer zone" (V. 387) and goes on telling of the trip to Malta.

⁵⁹ Additional clues are generated as he goes along: "V. might have something to do with Valletta, the capital of Malta; or perhaps V. signifies Vheissu, that strange land whose gaudy exterior hides only emptiness; V. may be Veronica, the sewer rat converted by Father Fairing and hoping to enter a convent; V. may represent spread thighs, the perspective of the road and street ahead, or it may be connected in some way with the bar called the V-note; the furrows of history; or it might signify the horizon — the point at which everything fades from view; it might represent the woman whose existence has so closely paralleled the degenerative process that Stencil fears and who begins as Victoria Wren, the young woman whose nun-like personality was "[pushed] to its most dangerous extreme." [(V. 167)] Victoria Wren later makes an appearance as a promiscuous seductress and, still later, as a Lesbian transvestite lover." (Huwiler 134) She becomes increasingly inanimate. Finally, as the bad priest, Veronica is trapped in the rubble of a building and, like any other mechanical device, is disassembled, piece by piece, by a gang of children.

⁶⁰ The reader develops what may be called an "epistemological skepsis:" He has to read against the text, against the assumptions being made, against the interpretations and "solutions."

"His giving you any clear reason would mean he'd already found her. Why does one decide to pick up one girl in a bar over another. If one knew why, she would never be a problem. Why do wars start: If one knew why there would be eternal peace. So in this search the motive is part of the quarry."

[...]

"[...] Stencil became curious in 1945. Was it boredom [...] or was it something buried in the son that needed a mystery, any sense of the pursuit to keep active a borderline metabolism? Perhaps he feeds on mystery.

[...]

"Not even as if she were any cause, any agent. She was only there. But being there was enough, even as a symptom. Of course Stencil could have chosen the War, or Russia to investigate. But he doesn't have that much time."

[...]

"How does Stencil know," Stencil yelled, "How does he know what he'll do once he finds her. Does he want to find her? They're all stupid questions. (V. 386f.)

Stencil's act is to fuse historical events, to match isolated historical facts into his pattern, and to accomplish that he has to distort them at times. He "stencilizes" them to "keep up the appearance of connection or relatedness between the isolated historical events" (Huwiler 137). To exit the impasse is done by either creating new clues out of the blue or by adapting the stories to serve him. One instance of this adaption is Mondaugen's story of Floppi's party. "[...] [W]hen Stencil retold it, the yarn had undergone considerable change: had become [...] Stencilized"(V. 228). He makes up this conspiracy theory as he goes along, fully aware that he is inventing it. V. has become the center of his life, gives momentum and reason to his existence. The reader is made aware of his/her own readiness of myth-making as superstition.⁶¹

Considering the hermeneutic bind, one cannot objectively examine a situation of which one is a part. We are no more able to see the context in which we live than any character is able to see the pattern of the tale in which the author has placed him: in Pynchonian terms this also means that within the furrows of history one can not grasp its texture.

⁶¹ Cf. Claas B 83.

Perhaps there is a plot, a conspiracy, hatched early in the century and continuing to victimize us all. Or perhaps what is happening is part of a grand historical pattern which has been unfolding through the ages. Or, finally, everything that happens may be accidental and unrelated, and the fragmentary patterns that Stencil seems to perceive may be the result of a combination of self-delusion and coincidence. (Huwiler 139)

His perspective does not allow him to see the whole, nor track the existence of a great conspirator.⁶²

[...] Pynchon has had that narrator intrude at various junctures of the book; he is part of a complex web of diverse narrative styles, including interior monologue, diary narration, and multiple character points of view, most of which are further embroidered by Herbert Stencil. In tone the narrator's voice is mocking; one of his functions is to suggest that Stencil's quest after conspiracy is delusion, that randomness alone governs the motion of the twentieth century, that the successions of V.'s Stencil discovers are unrelated to each other, are merely coincidental occurrences of a common initial. On the other hand the narrator is a conscious artificer who serves to filigree the significance of events beyond Stencil's capacity to extract meaning from them. The device of the omniscient narrator thus allows Pynchon to have his cake and eat it too; there may be no pattern at all, but at the same time the seeming pattern is elaborately worked out.

The ambiguity is humorous and central to the book, since it heightens the epistemological dilemma every historian faces: does he extrapolate significance from accurately perceived events or does he impose that significance on history out of sheer human desire for symmetry? (Slade C 49)

Other characters such as Fausto⁶³ Maijstral admit that history cannot be grasped and that there is no lesson to history. Although he tries to recreate and capture history in his diary, he fails to do so. And he also gives the reader one of the most crucial and truly playful quotes of the book: "All the while only in the process of learning life's single lesson: that there is more accident to it than a man can ever admit to in a lifetime and stay sane" (V. 320f.). Fausto does not believe in the conspiracy, although its evidence would make things considerably easier; since the existence of a laid out plot would prove a real and concrete enemy. But he has come to the conclusion that there is no transcendent order, neither malevolent nor benign. So he devotes himself to art, which is his remedy for the lack of order and the search for a pattern. He "builds an

⁶² Oedipa's alternative choices are: a plot — a hoax — pure coincidence — madness.

⁶³ His first name means "happy" (V. 321)

alternate world of metaphor which provides an illusion of coherence and which he appropriately calls the 'Great Lie'" (Huwiler 140f.). Again these confessions — in four stages he develops his personality and worldview — provide an ordered and meaningful world of his own in which he possesses a coherent and significant personality. He sums up his life into an ordered account, and an attempt at history, while he knows that everything stands at the same time for something else, that metaphor prevails. The task of "Fausto's kind" — the poets — is to "cloak [...] that innate mindlessness with comfortable and pious metaphor so that the 'practical' half of humanity may continue in the Great Lie" (V. 326). Thus, his apologia can be seen as an "attempt to restructure a life in a way which is rational and meaningful" (Huwiler 142). It is a "great lie," lying to himself by creating his history and giving human significance to his life. Naive notions of reality sometimes function as antagonists in the playful novel. The playful novel displaces average reality by its mythic, verbal creations. It defends its alternative realms as more valid and more real than the substantial world of objective fact. We find further examples of these "pious and comfortable metaphors: "society, which we paint for it to change color; Vheissu, the name of a country whose mythical description only covers the emptiness under the surface,"⁶⁴ ... The metaphor gives the events, mechanisms, developments, and objects some coherence which is understandable and graspable to man, a great lie after all."⁶⁵ Again we are confronted with the primacy of the self-created world. This narcissism becomes obvious in the inclination to value personal fantasies higher than the real world.⁶⁶ The quest is ultimately a "means of replacing an unacceptable emptiness with the warmth and safety of a delusion" (Patteson 29).

"Why say disease? Only to bring it down to a size you can look at and feel comfortable?" (V. 461) The truth is bleak and blank. This is also why Stencil does not want to reach V. Through his strategy of "approach and avoid" (V. 55) he only moves on the surface. But Stencil permanently asks himself who produces and paints all those surfaces and who makes him run into them. Like

⁶⁴ Cf. Berressem A: Vheissu and Tsalal (E. A. Poe) share similarities in structure, plot, atmosphere, symbolism of color and death, Symmes's hole, Antarctica, ...

⁶⁵ Cf. Plater 192: "Stencil's paranoia is echoed in a number of minor characters: Godolphin has his Vheissu; Fairing has his parish of rats; Floppl has his 1904 uprising; and the senior Stencil has his Situation."

⁶⁶ Cf. Tanner D 47.

all addictions (our unsatisfiable search for origins) it has no purpose except for the satisfaction of addiction itself.⁶⁷ Is there a guiding hand hovering over Stencil, apart from the author. Stencil suspects yet another connection:

"V.'s is a country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of myth. Whose emissaries haunt this century's streets. Procépic, Mondaugen, Stencil père, this Maijstral, Stencil fils. Could any of them create a coincidence? Only Providence creates. If the coincidences are real then Stencil has never encountered history at all, but something far more appalling.

"Stencil came on Father Fairing's name once, apparently by accident. Today he came on it again, by what only could have been design."⁶⁸ (V. 450)

The characters sense that there is somebody who is "in the know," a person that seems to influence their lives, but they cannot grasp their identities and motives. While suggesting a shadowy agent or conspirator who is orchestrating the action, Pynchon lets his plot evolve around his characters.

⁶⁷ Cf. McHoul A 44.

⁶⁸ A scene in which various things come together. Here, in Valetta, Stencil gets to know that it was Profane who shot at him in Fairing's Parish, asking himself, "Is it really his own extermination he's after?". Father Fairing, or a namesake, was priest in Valetta. Stencil suspects Maijstral to be part of a plot.

The Godgame

I want to introduce another aspect of game/play analysis: one feature out of the number of games the modern author can play with his/her characters and with the reader, the godgame. The writer functions as a "Calvinist God," predestining the creatures of his pen to "weal and woe," inscribing in them the first of their total dependence on his/her authorial and authoritative decrees. Every book is doomsday, "a graphematic eschalon" (L. Mackey B 9f.).

Oedipa Maas when informed to execute the will of her ex-lover Pierce Inverarity does not anticipate the troubles she is about to meet when investigating in the legacy which Inverarity has made her to "sort out." The estate turns out to be almost boundless. From the very beginning of Oedipa has a feeling of being put on by somebody "up there" that she would be part of a practical joke, diligently planned by the deceased multi-millionaire. While having to deal with the estate Oedipa is getting caught in a web of clues which all point towards the existence of a secret postal organization which operates by the means of W.A.S.T.E. Until the end of the novel she is not sure whether this underground organization really does exist, she is left at the end of the novel in the auction room, where she patiently awaits the crying of lot 49, a set of forged post stamps like those used by the Tristero. Oedipa suffers paranoia and induced madness accomplished by an overwhelming amount of pieces of information which all point towards the improbable design of a malign character. She fails and sometimes even refuses to check the information she is acquiring throughout the novel and thus again becomes a subject of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. The possibility of right decisions has come to a halt since hot and cold have given her surroundings a constant temperature, a luke-warm choice of equal probabilities. She struggles to understand the rules of the game she is caught in, without even knowing whether there is such a game or not. Wilson describes the godgame as follows:

In a godgame, one character (or several) is made a victim by another character's superior knowledge and power. [...] [It] signifies a gamelike situation in which a *magister ludi* knows the rules (because he has invented them) and the character-player does not. [...]. The entrapped character becomes entangled in the threads of (from his

point of view) an incomprehensible strategy plotted by another character who displays the roles of both a gamewright and a god. The master of the game is godlike in that he exercises power, holds an advantageous position, will probably be beyond detection (even understanding), and may be even [...] invisible. (Wilson 123p.)

Who is Pierce Inverarity? An ex-lover who made a fortune in dubious enterprises. To the revolutionary Jesus Arrabal, he is the personified enemy, a prototype capitalist who seems to be almost too perfectly an enemy to be hated.

Inverarity does impersonations when talking to Oedipa on the phone, he mimes a detective, the radio character Lamon Cranston, a.k.a. The Shadow.

By involving Oedipa in the business of the will he seems to try and point her nose towards an America that goes beyond tupper-ware and the weekly shrink-visits. He does not tell her about the Tristero, but sets her on the track, leads her towards an inevitable breakdown along the breadcrumb trail that he has made his dependants lay out for her. Oedipa feels that a wicked game is played out on her. Rawdon R. Wilson states:

Human intelligence, once made conscious of its entrapment, struggles to understand the rules of the game of which it has been made a piece. It will fight stubbornly to avoid Semele's unhappy fate. [...]

If any single convention marks postmodern literature, both by the obsessions it indicates and the fictional situation it creates, it must be the godgame [postmodern obsession with uncertainty, ambiguous perception, and cognitive entrapment]. (Wilson 125)

Somebody has to be responsible for the predicament she finds herself in. Someone is to blame for all the misery. But as usual, the god is beyond recognition, and the godly existence a matter of cognition and mind. The certainty of who or what is behind the mirror, watching and scheming, is never given. The godgame is a cognitive and existentialist detective novel where the main character does not show and the victim realizes that some crime is about to happen. But the victim cannot step out and analyze what is going on, since curiosity and intricate design prevent any revelation.

The formal properties of the godgame are as follows:

- [1.] a series of incidents that, through their linkage, create an illusion.
- [2.] these linked incidents will constitute reality for the victim.
- [3.] the constructed illusion will be impenetrable
- [4.] the illusion will form a self-correcting and self-explaining system
- [5.] the illusion will be plotted and planned [...], but to the character-player this plan will be unknown.
- [6.] the victim will act in terms of illusion
- [7.] the character-player's actions will be observed and will be subject to judgment, although an actual judgment will not be strictly necessary [...]

These observations are also open to the audience, the readers, ourselves. (Wilson 128)

Pynchon is a master at analyzing the myriad manifestations of dark forces. God never shows, there is no illumination. The only evidence for his existence is that hinted at in the game's rules. Its rules are his manifestations, the game and his existence are fused. Wilson sums up:

Pynchon is the most systematic of these [creators of godgames], for reasons that will become clear, but all three share an inclination to create situations in which one or more characters is subjected to a linked series of illusions that leads ultimately either to a revelation of the character-player's hidden nature or, as in Pynchon's fiction, to a modification of the character's essential nature. There is a fundamental pessimism and pervasive complexity to Pynchon's godgames: they reflect a post-World War II American understanding of the routine power of intellectual and administrative systems of all kinds, government and industrial. [...] Even the "god" of the game becomes unanalyzable other than in terms of function, the amorphous, unthinkable they of bureaucracy and behavioral conditioning. Pynchon's fictional world seems appalling. (Wilson 130)

Oedipa clearly sees how impenetrable the game is from the standpoint of the deluded victim. Psychosis and induced madness, connected with a notion of paranoia, are central to Pynchon's preoccupation with behaviorally determined personalities. Oedipa knows that, after all, it could be either an illusion or her own delusion. Is she creating her own myth? Pynchon describes a state of mind, an awareness towards the world, a consciously deluded mind. The illusion of the godgame equals the web of everyday incidents, a labyrinth of choices, perplexities, and methodological paradoxa. Within the game the road taken as well as the road not taken make all the difference.

In a godgame, the character-player not only discovers a monstrous, inescapably personal entrapment within the fabric of a constructed illusion, but also reacts delusionally. In the constricting grasp of an illusion, the option of simply stepping aside never occurs. [...]

[A] world [...] rises upon relatively little information, but it is experienced in temporal, spatial, and axiological complexity. (Wilson 245ff.)

Someone from another plane of reality, she gradually comes to feel, is in control and is deliberately supplying her with clues and messages. The legacy that Pierce passes on to Oedipa is that quest for order and meaning. Oedipa knows that there is no escape to; she understands that the individual cannot stand outside of one's world, cannot escape to another plane of being. This insight does not enable her to step outside of the tapestry, since being part of and within the game, the outside world does not look or feel quite the same.

Pynchon, too, is a projection, an invention of the conspirator from another world.

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Two historical periods stand out for the frequent use of complex and innovative godgames: the baroque and the modern era since World War I. (Wilson 141)

Pynchon sets his story into a time span of more than fifty years, showing various characters, some of them recurring in various episodes, at different stages in time. Like Stencil, Godolphin, who had traveled to Vheissu, comes to the conclusion as he is confronted with a glimpse of what he calls the "dream of annihilation:"⁶⁹ "If it were only a hallucination, it was not what I saw or believed I saw that in the end is important. It was what I thought. What truth I came to" (V. 206). His presentation is entirely playful in the way it contrasts or makes fun of the stringency of history-writing, or what the author might refer to as history-

⁶⁹ In fact he mentions the Antarctic.

making. Pütz refers to the characters' need of coherence, need for stringency and mysterious connectedness:

Getrieben von der wachsenden Gewißheit, daß Kontingenz die vorherrschende Kategorie geschichtlicher Prozesse sein könnte, versuchen die Figuren in V., mysteriöse Zusammenhänge, oft *plots* und Konspirationen, aufzudecken, deren scheinbare Kohärenz ein verlässliches Bezugssystem für die disparaten Vorgänge der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit wie auch für ihre eigene Stellung und Rolle als Suchende in dieser Wirklichkeit abgeben würde. (Pütz 76)⁷⁰

Chronological linking is avoided. Of the sixteen chapters, ten are about Profane and the Whole Sick Crew. Five interpolate accounts gathered from various sources or documents of historical episodes, starting with some espionage connected with the Fashoda incident, going on to disturbances in Florence which are connected with a Venezuelan rebellion and more international plotting and spying, then to a native uprising in German South-West Africa in 1922, which results in a large siege-party, then to an account of the siege of Malta during the Second World War, then back to Paris in 1913 on the brink of the outbreak of the WWI. The last chapter brings past and presence together on Malta, while an Epilogue goes back to 1919 when there were riots on the island.⁷¹

Even if one would rearrange the chapters and passages according to a timetable in which they take place, one would still find chapters which seem entirely out of place, which seem to be totally disconnected because of the sometimes irrational jumps of settings which Pynchon forces the reader to follow.

⁷⁰ The protagonists mix *causa efficiens* and *causa finalis*, cause and effect.

⁷¹ Cf. Tanner C 20ff.

This following presentation is taken from David Cowart's "Thomas Pynchon. The Art of Allusion."

	<i>Chapter I.</i>
Christmas Eve 1955: Profane in Norfolk, travels to New York	
	<i>Chapter II.</i>
Early 1956: The Whole Sick Crew Stencil in Mallorca (1946)	
	<i>Chapter III.</i>
Egypt, 1898	
	<i>Chapter IV.</i>
Early 1956: Esther's nose job Schoenmaker in France (1918)	
	<i>Chapter V.</i>
Profane hunting alligators Fairing's journal (1934)	
	<i>Chapter VI.</i>
February to mid-April: Profane with the Mendozas	
	<i>Chapter VII.</i>
Stencil meets Eigenvalue Florence, 1899	
	<i>Chapter VIII.</i>
April: various episodes	
	<i>Chapter IX.</i>
South-west Africa, 1904 and 1922	
	<i>Chapter X.</i>
Early summer to August	
	<i>Chapter XI.</i>
Malta, 1939 and 1940-3	
	<i>Chapter XII.</i>
August to December	
	<i>Chapter XIII.</i>
Late September: preparations to leave for Malta	
	<i>Chapter XIV.</i>
Paris, July 1913	
	<i>Chapter XV.</i>
Going away parties (New York and Washington)	
	<i>Chapter XVI.</i>
Valetta (preparations for Suez invasion)	
	<i>Chapter XVII.</i>
Epilogue: Valetta, 1919	

The sudden jump to another continent is less commented on than traveling in between subway stations in the New York City public transportation. Pynchon tries to break free of conventional boundaries, supposedly set up to keep the reader on the track, by forcing him to stay aware of all the events already presented. The reader knows what will happen but that does not spoil the story. V. is entirely episodic and has been criticized for that, but Pynchon's point

made goes beyond the structure of the novel.⁷² The book covers events that take place during almost a whole century: Victoria in Alexandria, occupied by the British since 1882 (1898); Victoria in Florence (1899); South-West Africa, German colony (1890-1918); Paris (1913); Epilogue, Malta: Sidney vanishes in a water spout, while Veronica sees him off (1919)⁷³; South-West Africa, Floppl's villa (1922); 15 years missing; the war years on Malta (1939-1943); the present (Christmas Eve 1955-1956).

Though the book appears mixed up at various times, time and space are only the means to an end of which Pynchon never loses sight. He is describing a situation, a state of being, a condition, a fate, also a process, and thus the where and when are sacrificed for the sake of his convictions. V. is a metaphor played out repeatedly and diligently. Like the so often quoted fugue, Pynchon orchestrates a whole symphony around a simple theme, or as we will come to see, around various themes. Joseph Tabbi states in an article on the shaping influence of science on Pynchon's "Entropy":

[T]he figure of the fugue, in the first sense, represents an imaginative order in music (a continual weaving of its haphazard elements) [...] alternations of the ideas of fugue as (counterentropic) music and fugue as (entropic) forgetting [...]. (Tabbi 63)

Pynchon makes no secret out of what he thinks of his characters; in traditionalist terms of characterization, they would have to be considered as flat characters. Benny exemplifies this refusal of progression when Pynchon stresses that he is wearing the same clothes at the outset of the story as he does at the end. "Profane's journey has not been a soul's progress but only the getting to another 'apocheir', [...] a return, [...] to the state already achieved in Chapter One" (Campbell 58): His outfit has not changed since his inside has not changed either. He has not learned a "goddam" thing on all his travels, Benny is eager to stress, as "momentum alone" carries him "toward the edge of Malta, and the Mediterrean beyond" (V. 455):

He has one last conversation with another supertourist, Brenda Wigglesworth, owner of 72 pairs of Bermuda shorts.

⁷² Cf. Mendelson A 5: "V. served as a preliminary essay in organizing vast quantities of data into a coherent literary form."

⁷³ Veronica came to Malta in 1914.

"You've had all these fabulous experiences. I wish mine would show me something."

"Why."

"The experience, the experience. Haven't you learned?"

Profane didn't have to think long. "No," he said, "offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddam thing." (V. 454)

Pynchon already mentions in the opening pages that all of the people had taken up "stereotypes from American movies," all but Paola,⁷⁴ who is somehow granted an exceptionally sympathetic role by Pynchon. Others rather stumble through the pages than live up to any character-outline which the author might have drawn for them. Perhaps if Pynchon does not shout at the world, he laughs at it from behind his mysterious wall.

V.'s thematic and structural complexities tend to obscure the underlying simplicity of its single great melody or, more accurately, fugue. The history of V. and the actual V. are parallel themes that form the novel's mindbody, to use Lyle Bland's terminology, and that are imitated in most of the novel's development of secondary characters and actions. While V. can be approached from several perspectives, the Adamsian metaphor of the Virgin-dynamo and the implication of an entropic history dominate; in this respect, at least, is a logical extension of the preceding stories. [...] V.'s mind, or history, can be reconstructed through Stencil's and others' recollections; it is a ritual transition from comparative innocence to an unnamable but destructive force. Similarly, V.'s body progresses from life to inanimateness. In Sidney Stencil's metaphor, V.'s history is the hothouse and her body is the street, but they are the same regardless of what metaphors are used. The parallel themes are developed contrapuntally and when viewed as a single composition they constitute one of Pynchon's most remarkable images of death transfigured. V. anticipates the process that control *Gravity's Rainbow*: her own continuance depends increasingly on being able to synthesize an artificial existence from the wastes she makes of life around her, to make something new of the debris of the given, to turn a profit by taking energy from the rest of the world. Reduced to a human scale, V. is able a microcosm of the later meta-cartels; consequently, we are able to witness her own collapse, unlike that of her successors, when she exhausts her artificial resources.(Plater 140f.)

Pynchon's characters are what their names represent; in the same way that the bishop's moves in a chess game are agreed upon from the beginning of the game. Profane's function in the novel is never doubted, neither are Stencil's ways of approaching and avoiding situations.

⁷⁴ It seems awkward that she succeeds in disguising as a black girl by tanning her skin with burnt cork. The "cork"-trick most improbable.

The pleasure of naming lies not so much in the very act of naming as in its uncompromising execution and its far-reaching consequences for the story. Pynchon makes fun of the conventional practice and his own, e.g. the Gaucho, a Venezuelan revolutionary, irritates the secret service, who ponder over whether the origin of a Gaucho should not be Argentina. This would invoke an interpretation of being left-wing, derived from the French word 'gauche.' Benny Profane's name also works in two directions, his first name suggesting benzedrine pills and his last name evoking the notion of an earth citizen. We meet Benny, dressed like the all-American pumpkin, walking through East Main Street in Norfolk, Virginia, on Christmas Eve 1955. He is heading for a sailor's hang-out, "leery of streets" (V. 10), and the reader is drawn into the world of navy people temporarily stranded ashore.

The chapters in which either Benny or Stencil appear are separated in time, space, and even with regard to style, text perspectives, and register. The two characters seem to allegorize the two realities of living, epistemological attempts at the world, two different ways of facing the "postmodern" dilemma of knowledge. The two realities meet but do not influence each other. They only meet in the common denominator of the aim of the quest.

"Since 1945, Herbert Stencil had been on a conscious campaign to do without sleep. Before 1945 he had been slothful, accepting sleep as one of life's major blessings" (V. 54). Thus, what puts Stencil onto his quest is the decision to take part in life. Henry Adams, Stencil's real life prototype, writes in "The Abyss of Ignorance":

[A]nd one of the greatest minds, between Decartes and Newton - Pascal - saw the master-motor of man in *ennui*, which was also scientific: "I have often said that all the troubles of man come from his not knowing how to sit still." Mere restlessness forces action. "So passes the whole life, and, when got, the repose is unsupportable; for we think either of the troubles we have, or of those that threaten us; and even if we felt safe on every side, *ennui* would of its own accord spring up from the depths of the heart where it is rooted by nature, and would fill the mind with its venom." [...]

Ennui, like Natural Selection, accounted for change, but failed to account for direction of change. For that, an attractive force was essential; a force from outside; a shaping influence. (Adams 427)

Coming across the cryptic entry in the diary of his father, Herbert Stencil starts the quest for the mysterious V. in 1945, when, in a café in Oran, "the sentences

on V. suddenly acquired a light of their own" (V. 54). His father had disappeared in 1919 without a trace (an event revealed only at the end of the novel). Stencil only has the three following sentences as clues to his upcoming search, the search for the past of his father and the nature of V.

Under "Florence, April, 1899" is a sentence, young Stencil has memorized it: "There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she. God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report." (V. 53)

One of the thematic anchor-points in the novels of Thomas Pynchon is the struggle of his characters with "the problem of meaningful human activity in an apparently absurd and disordered world and cosmos" (Huwiler 114). By looking for patterns and structures of the world, they look for the significance of their own existence, and the result of the search is always an artifice, a metaphor for something that cannot be explained. They look for the reasons of deterioration. But, as Plater says, there is very little of Stencil present in the novel, "despite his centrality. Most of the novel is digression that partially decorates the void of [his] existence" (Plater 76).

Like Callisto, who is trying to save the bird to reassure that there were neg-entropic forces, Oedipa reaches out for the center of the Tristero, since only the proof of its existence would guarantee her sanity. The dichotomy of chaos and order is dissolved in the story since in the end the chaotic situation is turned into order and the Rousseauian order is pushed into chaos. The equilibrium means the destruction of the system, not the system itself but the form of the system.

To trace the source of the problem in history is for Stencil a way to evade entropy. Callisto chooses the isolation of the hothouse, Stencil the isolation of the quest. He is a disciple of Henry Adams and believes that there is a pattern and meaning to what is happening. "They search for a way to reverse entropic processes of which they are only dimly aware" (Huwiler 122). Stencil notices that even he was a symptom of a V.-infected world. Thus, the conspiracy theory is unavoidable, as Stencil protocols his own breakdown into an dormant, non-human state. Searching for the origins and nature of V. becomes the way of neutralizing its malicious effects. But the search does not centralize; it does not focus towards the solution. Each clue leads to new, additional clues. This is

why Stencil must distort or "Stencilize" events in order to keep up the appearance of connectedness. He adapts tales to his own needs. And again he exemplifies an existential dilemma which is also an author's dilemma: One cannot objectively examine the situation of which one is a part. What remains is the quest for the situation. And as Oedipa will show, there is no answer to the quest.

Solutions are not given. The bird dies and leaves Callisto and his wife in their insecure isolation, the party downstairs goes on into the third day, Siegel walks out and hears shots fired, Benny stumbles into nothingness, Stencil goes on avoiding the undemanded, and Oedipa sits and waits for the crying of the lot. Aubade smashes the windows of the hothouse, a sign of surrender to the "decisive" 37 degrees Fahrenheit, and finally establishing the equilibrium with the outside, surrendering to "a tonic of darkness and the final absence of all motion" (*ETP* 98). Pynchon does not offer a solution to the problem he has defined.

The quest turns out to be an open form, looking for a center where there is none. Another form of "de-playing" since there is nothing to reconstruct, as soon as you realize the deliberateness of the forms of the world. It appears that the thought of something like V. is not completely new to Stencil. Stencil, like the reader, is collecting clues to put them together to one big narrative. He thus becomes a modern day detective, relying on ratio, generating a plot in order to explain events. He starts from the above passage in the diary. Further clues come to him in narrated form most of the time. Those stories Stencil then again builds into one big narrative of his own. He becomes the fictional as well as the metafictional hero.

Through Stencil, Pynchon offers an "[...] attempt to explore diverse [*sic!*] literary methods of discovering and communicating knowledge" (Patteson 21), typically modernist texts with complex plots and multiple codes and symbols. These are the attempts to synthesize Stencil's clues into a sense-making whole. These attempts of discovering and communicating knowledge are not only over-stylized but so abundant that they become absurd.

A basic characteristic of the quest novel is the transformation of the quester in the course of the search. Historical examples are: the quest for immortality, the

philosophers' stone, the Holy Grail, Atlantis, Valhalla, or the Golden Fleece. Alfred Hitchcock called this item in his movies a "MacGuffin," the object of desire which is ultimately of no importance with respect to the plot since it represents only the initial impetus for the search. To the protagonist it is everything, to the reader it does not mean that much. To the reader the "how" is more important than the "what." The reader observes the quester and is entertained by the steps and turns that the quest takes. He/She follows the development of the protagonist along its course.

The spatial field of the quest novel is a wide one and the structure is episodic, a thread of adventures and events at different places. The journey is essential to the quest. Stencil travels, as it seems, all over the globe, whereas Oedipa is confined within Southern California, which is quite a field for travels for someone who usually attends Tupperware parties on Sundays. The heroes start from some kind of home to which they usually return. In Pynchon's novels the notion of home has been lost. Oedipa does not recognize her husband Mucho anymore, realizing "that the day she'd left him for San Narciso was the day that she'd seen Mucho for the last time" (*CL49* 144). And for Stencil, the search becomes home. He lives in it, and sometimes begins to think of its end as death,⁷⁵ as it might have happened to his father.

The child born in 1900 would, then, be born into a new world which would not be a unity but a multiple. Adams tried to imagine it, and an education that would fit it. He found himself in a land where no one had ever penetrated before; where order was an accidental relation obnoxious to nature; artificial compulsion imposed on motion; against which every free energy in the universe revolted; and which, being merely occasional, resolved itself back into anarchy at last. He could not deny that the law of the new multiverse explained much that had been most obscure, especially the persistently fiendish treatment of man by man; the perpetual effort of society to establish law, and the perpetual revolt of society against the law it had established; the perpetual building up of authority by force, and the perpetual appeal to force to overthrow it; the perpetual symbolism of a higher law, and the perpetual relapse to a lower one; the perpetual victory of the principles of freedom, and their perpetual conversions

⁷⁵ Cf. Clausen 173: "Useful rewards lose their potency at the brink of the grave; the time spent in pursuing them, in denying or evading the inevitable end, merely brings it closer. [...] Play at its most conscious is a recognition of the futility of work, a celebration of the fact that our only freedom consists in doing things for their own sake, since none of the rewards of labor has any permanent efficacy. Play in this ideal sense is an activity of the enlightened, a realization in action of the abiding trust that because we cannot make our sun stand still, we are free — and only free — to make him run."

into principles of power; but the staggering problem was the outlook ahead into the despotism of artificial order which nature abhorred. The physicist had a phrase for it, unintelligible to the vulgar: "All that we win is a battle - lost in advance - with the irreversible phenomena in the background of nature." (Adams 457f.)

He is "the century's child" and he is "He Who Looks for V." But the quest is impossible. Charles Baxter points out in an article on *CL49* in the light of a defaced America that a "man looking at the world in the twentieth century runs a risk, as Heisenberg and others have warned, of finding only himself" (Baxter 36).

Plots are divided into three stages: exposition (initial impetus and start), presentation, and ending. The author confronts the character with some kind of situation which forces the protagonist on the quest. The quest starts with the decision to act. With Oedipa it is a feeling that puts her on the tracks, but it is already too late when she notices that she is getting entangled in a web. Pynchon offers only an elaborate study of the search, which is the middle of the plot, he refuses an ending. It is the reader who has to interpolate the ending. He also does not offer any deep or profound characters, they do not develop in the course, if at all, only to the worse. They do not even succeed in "finding themselves." The characters are left with the notion that though the game is not over yet, they have lost it already. There had been nothing to be gained from the beginning. They are left to play.

There is an initial event which forces the protagonist to leave home for the quest. Oedipa gets the letter where she is named the executrix of the will, Stencil reads through his father's diary and thus awakes from existential slumber. These events form the passage from beginning to middle. This is also the stage of the story where the sidekicks join the hero. Oedipa meets Metzger, and Stencil has various fellow travelers, most prominently of course, Benny Profane. The quester is hardly ever alone. Whereas in fairy tales and legends, the hints towards the new course of the search come from witches, oracles, or talking animals, Oedipa and Stencil find their revelations in discourse, i.e. books, latrine walls, conversation overheard or actual, stamps, diaries, or theater plays. This allows for the protagonist to keep moving. He/She must not stop.

All the clues they collect are either spoken or written. They come as texts or are related orally. Whenever the track seems to vanish, new clues appear or are "generated." This is accomplished quite easily within a textualized world.

As soon as Oedipa hears about the semblance of the Beaconfield story and the plot of the Wharfinger play, she starts looking for a copy of the edition. Stencil does not do that sort of thing. More than once he lets clues peter out by being late (sometimes even on purpose). Oedipa becomes deeper and deeper entangled into the branches of the Inverarity estate. She still tries to evaluate the reliability of her sources.

The plot of the quest, as Ronald B. Tobias points out, can be compared to a ride on a rollercoaster. Beginning and end are not important, yet integrative parts of the whole. What counts are the whirling up and down parts in the middle, and the more you spin around, the better the ride. The plot is the structure. Once you take the quest out of the story nothing is left.

Stencil's seemingly aimless wanderings are an opportunity for Pynchon to make his point, namely that V. is an international and intersubjective phenomenon. Like Don Quixote, who is a preacher of knighthood and gallantry, Stencil is a preacher of V., a preacher of chance and deterioration.

After all, a quest is the search for the self, the I. We have to differentiate between the intention and the purpose of the quest: why does the quest exist and what is to be gained by ending the quest. Not the obstacles in the way are of importance but what they do to the protagonist. The quest is a lesson of learning. It teaches something.

Basically a story is like a drawing in which you have to connect the numbered dots.⁷⁶ At the end there should be a full picture. Pynchon gives away glimpses of the picture at a rather early stage, which would normally spoil the story. Not with his quests, since with the full picture in mind one can still reread the stories and enjoy them. Since the stories are not about the "MacGuffins" but about finding out, the quest is the topic on a metafictional level. How can one find meaning in a nonsensical universe? Not: what meaning is there? Not: how do myths come about? Not: what kind of myths does one live with? Pynchon erases the dictate of binaries: "She [V.] is neither malign nor benign; she is simply chance" (Campbell 68).

⁷⁶ Cf. p. 9: Nabokov's drawing of the smiling cat.

The essential final stage of the quest, the moment of revelation, the realization of the nature of the quest, is refused by Pynchon. Stencil is aware of the nature of his activities, but he has to keep on looking.

Oedipa – "the mass of America" – is left with "those symmetrical four:" the possibility that she is mentally ill, that she is hallucinating, that there is a plot set up by Inverarity, or that there is a real network.⁷⁷ Oedipa has to face these alternatives, of which insanity is the one she feels most comfortable with. It is the reader who learns the lesson. He has to decide what could be in the final chapter of the book.

At the end of the quest, the protagonist has to either accept or refuse the lesson he/she has learned, which means either grow as a person or go back to the start.

If the book is indeed a lesson in reading and the epistemological search for truth, then we can summarize it with Benny Profane, who did not grow with the text, who in the end is the same he was in the beginning. Along the same line James Hans opens an article on Derrida and freeplay, which has already been mentioned in this paper: "[D]econstruction is interesting, even very fruitful, yet its fruits are always the same. We always end up where we began" (Hans A 809). This resembles to what Pynchon has Benny Profane say at the end of the novel; "I haven't learned a goddam thing." This is of course Benny's interpretation of his own dubious progress. David Dean Huwiler summarizes the parallels between "Entropy" and *V.* as follows,

Herbert Stencil is consumed with the desire to find a pattern or a common denominator by which he can account for all of the world's seemingly random occurrences. He searches obsessively for *V.*, an undefined and mysterious entity which represents, for Stencil, the elusive principle of order which governs the universe. The problem faced by Benny and Stencil is the same as the one Callisto and Meatball Mulligan tried to deal with — the growing chaos and disorder in both the physical and cultural worlds. Benny and Stencil [...] try to act in a meaningful way in an apparently meaningless world. They search for a way in which to reverse entropic processes of which they are only dimly aware. (Huwiler 122)

⁷⁷ Cf. McHoul A 39.

As the Profane narrative dramatizes entropy (and ridicules its principal exponent, Profane), so *V.* dramatizes the contrary effort at negentropy (and ridicules its principal exponent, Stencil),⁷⁸ or as Robert Sklar puts it:

Pynchon's radical shift in focus from *V.* to *The Crying of Lot 49* took the shape not of new themes and images but rather of changes in form and tone that significantly altered the value of old themes and images. His verbal playfulness, puns and jokes are reduced in quantity rather than intensity, and are made to serve the movement of the novel. (Sklar 92)

The development moves towards the things which are not said. The reader is forced to read between the lines.

The early stories tend to speak about entropy. As Pynchon's skill develops, the novels reveal, but they do not speak. (Plater 7)

Stencil does not want to discover, only communicate what he might discover. "Approach and Avoid" is the motto to his search. Stencil, the child of modernism, has left modernism's certainties behind. Only in the final chapter of *V.*, when both protagonists have left the novel, does the narrator give away some of the information about *V.* However, at that stage the reader has been influenced that much that he/she cannot even trust the omniscient narrator. In the final chapter, which constitutes the climax of the narrative progress of the *V.*-chapters, the information derives neither from Stencil's dossier nor from his "on-the-spot investigations." At this stage, the reader (and the narrator) are as close to *V.* as he/she ever can get, and Stencil would ever have dared to go. The information is not mediated through any of the characters, but the reader is still suspicious.

Who is the narrator? What are Stencil's sources of information? Are they reliable? Is Stencil? Richard Patteson associates the omniscient narrator with the Whole Sick Crew. In the final chapter, this narrator gives for the first time some substantial information to the possible nature of *V.* Who narrates and relates Floppy's thoughts and actions? Are they his, Mondaugen's or even Stencil's?⁷⁹

Trying to be as objective as possible, truly enlightened and rational, no myth but reality in mind, Stencil goes as far as leaving personality and subjectivity out of

⁷⁸ Cf. Kharpertian A 11.

⁷⁹ Cf. Patteson 21.

the quest, addresses himself in the third person. He tries to recover the events in the past through "forcible dislocation of personality" (V. 62).

But Stencil knows that there is no end to this search. The quest is senseless, meaning that he may not gain any additional knowledge different from what he has had from the beginning. Stencil exercises this insight over and over again. In each of the episodes the result is the same. But through the quest Stencil moves away from inertia and sleep; and through the quest he gains personality, a personality, if only by first giving himself up altogether.

The V.-chapters may be split into five epistemological games, five different tries at knowledge, cognition and communication thereof (experiments of enlightenment, models of knowledge). In these modernist games Stencil brings enlightenment and experimental modernist writing together: chapter I (the helplessness and fragmented perspective of the spy), chapter VII (the craze of the explorer for depth; Vheissu), chapter IX (the collective dream of the voyeur), chapter XI (the confession), chapter XIV (the theater).⁸⁰ These "games," or rather modernist experiments, culminate in the epilogue at the end. The modernist narrative techniques and styles are tested, enacted/played, and exemplified. Pynchon's method is to express the epistemological aspects of his theme mainly "through narrative technique and the manipulation of the plot" (Patteson 20).

These chapters are the six "V.-chapters"⁸¹. They are given through the person of Herbert Stencil, and through this circumstance a number of questions arise as to the reliability of the text. From the first of these chapters, chapter 3 ("In which Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight impersonations:")⁸², onwards the reader has to question who the narrator is, because unlike Benny Profane's episodes which are told by an omniscient narrator, Stencil's tales are always mediated through a number of channels before they reach the reader. In chapter 3, Stencil was not even born yet, the time being 1898 and the place Egypt; nevertheless he does eight impersonations. It becomes clear that the figures in the text are imagined persons of Stencil *fil*s. But the narration does not stop at this attempt of reaching into the past through re-enacting it. Stencil

⁸⁰ Cf. Klepper A 612-614, Klepper B 26ff., and Patteson 20ff.

⁸¹ Five chapters plus the Epilogue (where V. initially appears as a human being).

⁸² This chapter been published before under the title "Under The Rose."

not only imagines the events of the past (as he passes them on to his listeners — and readers) but also how his father might have come to learn about these events. "He had only the veiled references to Porpentine in the journals." — Yet he tells the whole story of who Porpentine was and how he had been murdered. — "The rest was impersonation and dream" (V. 63).

Here we have eight different Stencils at work, each of them molding perception subjectively, impersonating and dreaming a past of which he was no part. Their stories add up to one big story.

But how can that be? The "multiple point of view" (Patteson 21) emphasizes the problem of piecing together historical truth and separating it from the purely subjective. All of the spies work according to prefabricated ideologies or beliefs. Perception depends on the hypothesis which precedes it. In the course of the V.-chapters, the reader can trace an apparent progression toward greater thematic clarity and greater reliability of the source material.

Pynchon shows the reader an impossible story; knowledge cannot be trusted. The narrators are unreliable, since they are "impersonations and dreams" of Herbert Stencil and since none of the impersonations knows the whole story and neither does Stencil. The independent stories are plotted together, creating part of it himself, into one big tale, which is the "Under the Rose" story after all.

The plot [...] is all that the case is. If a pattern, coherent story, or history exists, it must be put together by the reader, who, in a sense, mimics Stencil by supplying the pieces necessary to form a whole. If some of the pieces — the essential ones, the vital connections — are imagined by Stencil, then no plot really exists. The plot of Chapter Three becomes a metaphor for all plots (in every sense of the word) including the great 'plot' that is history. (Patteson 21p.)

The narrator's voice and reliability are not to be trusted as they are "undermined by dream, disguise and 'poetic license'" (Patteson 21). Finally the observer's identity is totally effaced and becomes only *one* possible vantage point.

Subsequently, Pynchon guides the reader to Italy and Eigenvalue's story of Florence (Chapter VII: "She hangs on the western wall:") which constitutes another attempt at the manic epistemological search of Herbert Stencil. Here the demystifying forces of enlightenment are enacted in the text referring to Vheissu.⁸³ The centers of consciousness are indeed characters (the first shift

⁸³ Which is mistaken as a code name for Venezuela.

towards the epistemological climax of the story)⁸⁴. But one cannot ascertain how much is truth and how much speculation. The text becomes increasingly complex with regard to plot. This complexity adds to the difficulty of determining what "really" happened.

"For Stencil [as for most of Pynchon's characters] the threat of conspiracy is an acceptable alternative to the horror of randomness" (Patteson 22). For the first time the characters start to reflect on the "situations" they are in.

The Egypt episode was only reporting "facts", whereas the Florence chapter already moves into the minds of the characters involved. This chapter is full of conspiracies: Vheissu, Venezuela, and Venus. The plots are Hugh Godolphin's journey to exotic Vheissu, the uprising in Venezuela (anarchy being another entropic force), and Rafael Mantissa's "love" for Botticelli's Venus.⁸⁵ In Chapter Nine ("Mondaugen's story:"), this process of interiorization is taken further; the story is related by a single character/witness. "The emphasis has shifted from the exterior world of 'facts' to an interior world of feelings and impressions." (Patteson 24) The chapter comes to the conclusion that "no Situation has any objective reality" (Stencil *père*) and that "knowledge gained subjectively is itself [...] only speculation, dream, or delirium," (Patteson 24). Thus, how is it possible to know with certainty? How can a pattern be found? "[...] [B]oth Mondaugen's story and Fausto's confessions are variations on the unreliability of subjective narration" (Patteson 24). For the reader the situation is the following: "Stencil relates to Eigenvalue what may be Mondaugen's account of what may be Floppl's past" (Patteson 24). Neither the narrator's nor the sources of the texts are reliable.

[B]oth narrative strategy and subject matter reflect Stencil's obsession with finding some pattern or connection that can be called truth, some scrap of indisputable evidence that history is not random nor all knowledge relative. (Patteson 25)

Similar to Stencil, Mondaugen is a voyeur rather than a participant of the action. He perceives the action through the mirror (a metaphor which is taken further in the Paris episode) or in a fantasy and a dream. As he is leaving the place, he is not even sure of what he has seen there. "Just before he leaves the compound,

⁸⁴ The shift from the impersonations to the reflecting character.

⁸⁵ Evan Godolphin was responsible for Schoenmaker's decision to go for plastic surgery.

Mondaugen reflects on his uncertainties and concludes that one cannot in any definitive way distinguish external from internal reality" (Patteson 25).

"Repetition [...] rather than the usual kind of novelistic progression constitutes the major structural and thematic framework of V." (Patteson 25). Floppl's party goes along with the description of the Whole Sick Crew, which most probably reflects Pynchon's view of the modern world. "The repetition of such thematic elements in different rhetorical contexts recalls the technique used in some kinds of musical compositions and long poems [...]" (Patteson 26). And it is Weissmann who in the end decodes the spherical noise.

DIEWELTISTALLESWASDERFALLIST. "In other words this bizarre synchronicity mocks both Weissmann's preoccupation with plots and the reader's desire to form connections" (Seed C 96).

The movement towards subjectivity reaches its climax in Chapter Eleven ("Confessions of Fausto Maijstral:") which is a direct first-person narrative. The text purportedly exists as a manuscript. Maijstral strives for "extraordinary" reliability by continually commenting what he has written before. "Once again the operative tension is between the urge to state and restate until the truth is captured and the inevitability of the truth's ultimate escape" (Patteson 26). By Chapter XIV ("V. in love:") the reader knows that he/she should be careful with the information given. After all, all he/she gets is third-hand information. The source of the text is Porcépic, the composer. Ironically, this part of the story is the most conventional and traditional one of the V.-chapters. Pynchon puts it at the end of the novels as if "to test just how greatly the reader's perception has been altered" (Patteson 27). Patteson goes on:

The structure of the Egypt and Florence chapters argues against the "objective reality" [...] of any Situation; and Mondaugen's story and Fausto's confessions belie the hope that it can be reconstructed from subjective accounts. The sources themselves cannot be believed. (Patteson 27)

"If we try to reorder these chapters we run the risk of Stencilizing events and damage the way in which Pynchon plays off historical time against novelistic chronology" (Seed C 111).

The point in the presentation of these various techniques is that they are essential to the quest since they show some kind of development where no development should be. And here Stencil catches up with Profane: Stencil's excursions into the past are just another form of yo-yoing. The movement that only pretends movement makes him appear human. There is no real epistemological progress since it was not the question from the beginning. Stencil does not even know how his father died, how very accidental this incident was, how "ridiculously random."

The omniscient narrator, instead of revealing a pattern, a crucial connection, a plot, or at the very least a means of knowing, only exposes once again "the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with 'reason'" [...]. Even if Stencil knew, as the reader does, the exact circumstances of his father's death, he would only know that he could know nothing. (Patteson 30)

The epilogue can be read as a parable on the postmodern epistemological situation. The belief in a totally enlightened world has been destroyed. Stencil is written out of the novel as he chases after another clue in Stockholm. The trip to Malta as well as his confrontation with Benny has not contributed anything to the pursuit of his quest. Stencil is by then a "professional paranoid" (Klepper B 35).

It turns out that the structure is one of the novel's major themes along with "the form, function, and ultimate limitations of knowledge" (Patteson 20).

The larger plot is the alternation of the Stencil plot with the Benny episodes and the simultaneous alternations of narrative technique. The narrative techniques are essential to his quest. Benny's episodes are related by the omniscient narrator. In the last two chapters the two plots meet. The relationship is more thematic than dramatic although there is some conversation in the Rusty Spoon.

Stencil tells Benny of V. ("V. in love:") and Benny becomes involved in the chase, going with him to Malta, where Stencil leaves Benny one day. Profane is again "on the road," which is, in his case, the street — the fact that it is Malta does not really matter.

The quest motif has altered since Kerouac, David Seed states:

Whereas in the fiction of Chandler, Brossard and Kerouac the quest pattern gives the narrative impetus, Pynchon's ambivalence about meaningful goals renders his characters' quests ludicrous. They become pretexts for action or self-perpetuating process. Kerouac's open road, full of the possibilities of discovery, narrows down to the street in Pynchon's first novel, a place of alienation, anonymity and threat. (Seed C 8)

All that Pynchon grants his yo-yo figure is that the rope has been shortened. The streets and roads on the island have notable limitations. His looping circles will be shorter nevertheless more frequent.

Plot, Structure, History: Structuring Plot and Plotting Structure.

Since the author has to put his/her text into some kind of form or structure, he/she needs to develop a plot line; each book has a beginning and an end. However, beginning and ending can be held open. In between, the author has to unfold, what is, by any definition, a story. Thus, plot does always exist, and the story runs along a line which guarantees the text coherence and form. Play is one way to give an action form, since it is a structuring principle. And sometimes the composition of the text is also the solution of the riddle posed. Oedipa circling the Tristero also leaves the reader spinning at the end. The ending comes rather abruptly, but there is no end to a spiral, so one can leave off at any point of movement.

The medium becomes the message. What could be the secret behind Oedipa's findings is of no importance since the book is about finding things out which might or might not exist and not about the nature of the Tristero, which is never solved. The Tristero is a set of (conspirational) signifiers, yet in its ubiquitous presence of a signified (unknown).⁸⁶

The ending turns out to be rather flat, by letting a character called Schrift do the bidding for an unknown figure. The scraps of material and elaborate deceptions climax in an ending that is no ending. All that is revealed is the meaning of the book's title. At the first glance, at least. David Seed describes this open ending:

Not only does this either/or rhetoric render ambiguous local events but it also posits alternative resolutions to the novel, neither of which, as Molly Hite points out, can be realized. Indeed the very possibility of resolution is brought into question. The prospect of a final discovery ensures momentum in the narrative but the narrative stops on the very brink of that last revolution. (Seed C 130)

Dietmar Claas analyzes Oedipa's final constitution:

Zurueck bleibt die Protagonistin im Bewusstsein, ihrer
Defensivstrukturen entkleidet und der Orientierungslosigkeit
ausgeliefert zu sein.

[...]

1. Zweifel am Gelingen der Queste
2. Erkenntnis, dass sie in eine Falle geraten ist, sowie
3. ihr Protest gegen das mit ihr gespielte Spiel

[...]

⁸⁶ Cf. Brugiére 15.

Von Anfang an ist sie von der paranoiden Vorstellung befallen, dass man mit ihr ein Spiel treibt. (Claas B 91ff.)

The mystery and riddle of the Tristero is never solved. Oedipa leaves the reader to decide since she has given up and is left without proper protection and orientation to the plot set out against her. The notion that she has been part of the game from the very beginning, that the quest had always been doomed to fail, that a trap has been set up for her, and that her protest against the situation is of no use, leave her with the certainty that while being part of the whole she will never be able to understand the whole. Schriener is the only one who could tell her who is behind the plot. But she refuses to decipher the person whose name stands both for scripture and writing.

In a way the game of Strip Botticelli anticipates the outcome of the novel. The game structure of the whole book is reflected upon in that passage.⁸⁷

History is a human product and is created retrospectively, rendered along a plot which is a quest. Oedipa tries to confront the existential fears of Benny Profane with Stencil's speculative force. Nevertheless, she is not forced through a kaleidoscope trip of historic events. Her quest is the search for the moment. CL49 is the analysis of the historic now, by definition preterite, "too late," and preoccupied with dubious assumptions. History is the result of an act of creation, and sometimes very close to fiction.

In its very recreation history is always distorted. Pynchon reenacts this phenomenon by recreating and re-presenting history, fictionalizing history, which inherently frees history-making of distortion. Since fiction is creation, as opposed to history's recreation, its vision is undistorted. South West Africa, e.g., seems rather like a psychological profile than an account of events. What Pynchon is interested in are personal tragedies amidst a global crisis. Again we have the individual aghast the ungraspable forces of life, subsumed in V.

Yet even if V. wears a "black humor" label, and stands as one of the most intricate and elaborate novels in that genre, it accomplishes a good deal more than that. One who rereads V. in the light of *The Crying of Lot 49* may come to feel that V. is itself a liberating gesture, a gesture of liberation from nearly all the styles and forms of fiction that have preceded it.

[...]

[T]he first American novel of collage, an abstract composition put

⁸⁷ Cf. Seed 119.

together with parodies of spy novels, political novels, adventure novels, decadent novels, romances, utopias and whatever category the ingenious mind can find. (Sklar 89)

Already this initial sequence when Oedipa and Metzger meet for the first time and subsequently spend the night together, the question whether the whole incident is a set-up comes to Oedipa's mind. She is looking for cameras and hidden microphones. Metzger indicates that he is a lawyer "reverting periodically to being an actor" (CL49 33), and the passage ends with Oedipa asking him what Inverarity had told him about her. Metzger answers, "That you wouldn't be easy." She starts crying, sensing a plot — a seduction plot where he might have even gone so far as to bribe the local TV station to play the movie. She suspects that he has made up everything.⁸⁸

At the beginning of Chapter Three, much of what is to come is given away by the author, e.g. the stamp collection is mentioned for the first time.

"[...] You want to bet on what'll happen?"
"Of course not," said Oedipa, "the movie's made."
(CL49 33)

Why should one bet on the outcome of a historic vote? Playing on certainties is spoilsports, playing on chance is game.

Imagine that Thomas Pynchon in the way the novel is written has indeed given us the way we should read texts. Then, we also have to realize that in his world truth is unattainable and ungraspable though omnipresent in its representations. Mankind is left to sit and await the crying of its lot.

When reading Pynchon the reader knows that he/she has to be thorough. The solution to the whole story may be hidden in the fourth relative clause of a sentence. Any name may be the acronym of something bigger.

But, as a matter of fact, Pynchon never misleads the reader. No acronyms are hidden, which he does not give away himself; but still he does not dismiss the reader from believing that there might still be something, not in the text, but "out there." The reader, like the heroine herself, is looking for hints where there are no hints and, like a literary critic, stuffs a metaphor with an abundance of inferences and personal interpretations.

⁸⁸ Cf. CL49 31.

Sometimes the reader is uncertain whether a trick is being played on him or the main character. The author is playing with both of them.

It may be a fact that Pynchon himself is, like Benny Profane, a "depression kid." But the author seems to have transposed his childhood memories into the sixties. Growing up in the 30s and 40s and spending the youth the 50s, one of America's most controversial periods, if you consider McCarthy, American apartheid and religious fundamentalism and political conservatism. It was definitely a time when paranoia was the only remedy against this ideological witch hunt. Pynchon grew up in times of financial turmoil and then lived his youth in an age of omnipresent threat through authorities, which may have made him to the paranoid Luddite⁸⁹ who wrote the books of his early phase.

Pynchon moves around several central motifs which are surfacing in all of his early novels: paranoia, conspiracy, authority, gender, and science. Drugs are also a central force in his novels, but I chose to neglect this issue totally since other writers have dealt with the effect of drugs on the creative mind far more ex- and intensively.

Pynchon's themes are "big themes," matters which trouble the American psyche. In the light of the success of series like the X-Files and its epigones, paranoia seems to be America's favorite pastime: always on the lookout for the scapegoat and the awareness that there might be something kept secret from the public. Abraham Lincoln, J. F. Kennedy, McCarthy's intelligence services, the origin of AIDS, CIA all over the place, reports on Area 51, alienology altogether — those are only some examples of what seems to fascinate a whole nation. It is also a game, kept alive by the steady influx of new theories. And the only thing that could possibly spoil the whole sport would be if somebody could prove irrefutably that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin and that he did it alone.

Remarkable is Pynchon's compassion for the preterite, for the common mass of humanity. A loser comes by far better off than any possible hot shot in the

⁸⁹ Pynchon. 'Is It O.K. To be a Luddite?' *New York Times Book Review* (October 28, 1984): 1, 40-41.

novel; the social outcast is granted more space than anybody else. Thomas Pynchon does not build his characters; they remain rather flat in what they do and what they seem to achieve. They are presented in snapshots, as "samplings of data," to create a statistical picture of the world. And this is the world of the preterite, the engineers who do not get revenues or honors for their inventions, the stranded sailor, the man without talents.

Something similar to the "potsage system" of the Trystero can be found nowadays on the net. People have set up anonymous "remailer"-systems which function like net-based e-mail providers but guarantee absolute anonymity to its users by encoding messages and cryptographing the name of the user. Tracing the sender of a message is next to impossible.

When Oedipa is confronted with this mass of clues, signals, which call for decoding, she is in no position to do so alone. All she manages to do is to come up with possible interpretations which include doubting her own sanity. But the point is to let the alternatives, the possible interpretations, play and try to grasp the pattern behind that play until they arrange in constellation.

Oedipa is left with a philosophical dilemma, which is positivism or inductionism. She knows that "excluded middles" are "bad shit," but she cannot concentrate on tracking down a phenomenon. Too many signals cover the code underneath it. She is left with neither the means to deduct from one of her possible solutions nor with the possibility to invent new rules which may accord to the newly found hints. Since the alternatives do exclude each other, taking sides is essential. Her lack of position does not allow that. On the one hand, she is barred from the circle by the ones she meets, on the other hand she does not know whether she wants to be inside that circle. To her view, those who do know the truth behind the Trystero die. When she is talking to Emory Bortz, the college professor, about the "dirty" Wharfinger edition, they come to discuss the question of what makes people do one thing rather than another. Bortz asks her, "You think a man's mind is a pool table?" "I hope not,"⁹⁰ Oedipa answers. By then, she is rather aware of the fact that she has herself already become the

⁹⁰ Cf. CL49 154.

pool ball, spinning by the momentum of some unknown force. To believe in cause and effect means to believe in the conspiracy.

Neither revelation nor apocalypse happen. Pynchon's characters only sense that the end is near. They are constantly on the verge on annihilation and therefore try to justify their existences by going on. They are voyagers who do not know where they are going, nor why.

In Which Various Things Come Together:

"Live?" Metzger said, "electronic music, live?"

If we look at the development from ETP to *Gravity's Rainbow*, we can sense a journey from a notion of deterioration (as a principle of nature) to the identification with those who have gone through this process, an identification with "global trash." This is, of course, strictly 60s since Pynchon is a historical writer and never a contemporary writer. Hindsight is a privilege, and one of his core topics, the presentation of history his literary hobby horse. He wants his reader to doubt everything and, above all, the author.

The reader is led towards creating his/her own myths and encouraged to become the author of his/her world, to stencilize a pattern on everybody's lives. It does not matter whether there are alligators in the sewers, the possibility of stories like this are enough to make people think. Considering entropy and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, one cannot but agree with Laurence Rosenheim:

They [quantum mechanics, field theory and relativity] also have little, if anything, to do with everyday experience. Only when we do experiments involving subatomic particles does the uncertainty principle step through the curtains into the footlights. However, we do not gain any direct insight into human nature from subatomic particles. (Rosenheim 36)

This is where we can make a sharp distinction among Pynchon's critics: one cannot oversimplify any of his stories vs. those who claim Pynchon's science to hold.

Different styles of writing evoke certain thoughts and attitudes in the reader. Pynchon tries to play out as many of these styles as possible for there is no "single" book. Every story is the context of all the others. Tony Tanner compares way of story telling to the tapestries that cover the bleak walls of and once removed reveal the void underneath it. Tanner states that Pynchon deliberately writes "empty books" in order to teach the reader to look behind the colored veils of deception.⁹¹ Understanding the nature of the tapestries does not tell you anything about the nature of the wall that holds it. Nevertheless, the

⁹¹ Cf. Tanner D 43.

secret is most of the time bleak and dull. All is vain – *vanitas vanitatum*. At times Pynchon grants his characters the insight their actions are vain, leading them to despair. But no one wants to live with the possibility of sheer vanity which keeps the characters moving. Pynchon reenacts their attempt to find what is behind the deceptive outside world over and over again. Sometimes the characters suspect too much and sometimes too little. So they decide to sit and wait, and the story ends. Sometimes Pynchon even lets a minor character criticize other characters as when Eigenvalue ridicules Stencil's progress as "stencilizing" facts, which is of course a critique of Stencil and a pun at the author, who reacts by pointing out that the characters are not to be trusted. What is the historic value of an autobiography? When the author and puppeteer holds the strings there are little surprises as to what is going to happen and most importantly why it is happening. In his piece on the riots in the Watts district in L.A., Pynchon rooted the origin of the violence in the automatism that happens to stereotypes, his theory of cause and effect. Critics vary considerably when it comes to naming Pynchon's basic theory in his fiction. Douglas Keeseey calls it "radical undecidability" or "the ambiguity of ambiguity."⁹²

Pynchon confronts the readers with their own readiness for accepting and creating myths, which is of course just another word for "making history." Here comes into play what Dietmar Claas has called the "Deutungszwang," the urge of interpretation. Pynchon does not valorize fact over fiction: projection, hallucination, theater and reality are connected in an inseparable way.⁹³ Pynchon interweaves chance into a pattern that enhances entropy and through this exaggeration the author shows the workings of entropy, which are comic and apocalyptic. His characters are parodies of themselves, making the reader aware of the as-if mode of being. How can one hold truths within a web of uncertainties, without the means of tracking the truth behind facts taken for granted. V. enacts these contradictions and tensions of the postmodern reader (i.e. the playful reader). It enacts the problem of knowledge which is always a question of other knowledge. There are no revelations, not even

⁹² Cf. Keeseey A 106.

⁹³ Cf. Claas B 97.

announcements of revelations. Stencil and Benny have not influenced each other. They might play their games yet another time.

"The voyager does not know why he seeks a goal at all" (Mendelson A 12).

Pynchon's early fiction is modernism in its most radical form. It leaves the reader with the epistemological possibilities of reality while in the constraints of boundaries of reason. The text's perspectives move apart making the reader even more skeptical of the text. The narrator seems to be as unreliable as to what the text is actually pointing at. Stencil is not as naïve as the narrator since he is aware of the fact that there will be no end to his search. What is more, Stencil is interested in why he is on the quest in the first place.

"[...] Since 1945, you see, he's been on a private manhunt. Or womanhunt, no one is sure."

"Why?" said Profane.

"Why not?" said Stencil. "His giving you any clear reason would mean he'd already found her. Why does one decide to pick up one girl in a bar over another. If one knew why, she would never be a problem. Why do wars start: if one knew why there would be eternal peace. So in this search the motive is part of the quarry." (V. 386)

He tries to find out why he is on the track disregarding how hopeless this adventure is. V. is dramatically overdetermined which makes it/her impossible to grasp. Interpretation is symbolic and allegoric, indication of its/her existence are vague. The reader is left with a negative aesthetics which can be sensed but not properly named or positively formulated. It seems as if the novel could go on forever without ever getting any closer to the nature of V. Like in a Moebius' strip, a simple twist abolishes binary relations but does not help at all to the solution thereof. The old paradoxon is simply perpetuated in a new guise. The world is falling apart: for the better, or the worse? There is no one to judge. Only coming generations can sort that out because they can look onto the situation. Being caught in the now, we are too close to the center to judge the whole. The whole is yet to come.

As long as we are trying to find our ways in this maze of "today" we can only make predictions of a probably better past and a most probably worse future.

Worse than the notion of a master plot laid out against the people would be the certainty that there is no plot at all.

What is it like to live with a sense that nothing is connected with anything, in a state of volitionless rambling, with no clues to follow, adrift in pure contingency and randomness? Pynchon calls this "anti-paranoia" - "a condition not any of us can bear for long". This is the condition experienced by Benny Profane who is a constant, motiveless wanderer up and down [...] "the generic street of the 20th Century", going nowhere, seeing only separate objects in a disintegrating world. (Tanner C 48)

Pynchon's early literature is a treatise of the structure of plot, history, and history making. Joseph Slade describes the movement involved: "Too much order leads to stagnation; too little results in disintegration."⁹⁴ In other words:

How much coincidence can be tolerated before being organized into a system varies with the paranoid, but there is certainly evidence of something. (Plater 190)

How is significant communication possible against the background of increasing disorder and noise if the alternative is redundancy, banality, and a predetermined structure?

Meaning, in information theory, exists in the author and the reader apart from the novel; what is communicated is complexity and unpredictability. Thus the more intelligible the form, the more banal and predictable it is. Information theory partially resolves the dilemma by proposing the existence of two kinds of information: semantic and aesthetic.⁹⁵

And the hand that controls does not even exist in the common sense, it may be this butterfly or me, even at the same time. V. is always everywhere, and Pynchon adds a social phenomenon to it which is the power to reify. V. represents in its most neutral sense, the power that makes all development possible and taking this interpretation as an analogy to Derrida, whose line of thinking can be traced in all of Pynchon's writings, and his concept of freeplay is established.

The forces of V. and freeplay are similar since both we have the problem, which also the heroes are facing, of either acknowledging its existence and attributing positive or negative values to the forces, or confirming absolute

⁹⁴ Cf. Slade A 80.

⁹⁵ Cf. Plater 225.

chance; the basic positions which Benny and Stencil take on, paranoid search for a center/origin and deterministic worldview.

Like Borges who has one of his characters write a story about time, without ever mentioning the word itself, Pynchon gives the reader only the initial of what the book is about. Entropy, the word is never mentioned in *V*.

The worst would be to realize one day that there is no conspiracy whatsoever going on.

. . OF THOMAS PYNCHON.

Appendix 1: Summaries

ENTROPY

Meatball Mulligan throws a lease-breaking party at his apartment in Washington, D.C. in early February of 1957. His guests are a colorful bunch, including Sandor Rojas, an "ex-Hungarian Freedom fighter," and the avant-garde Duke di Angelis quartet comprised of Duke, Vincent, Krinkles and Paco who together perform an original piece in complete silence. [...] The party degenerates [...]. Meatball, however, decides to take action rather than hide silently in the closet, and through the energy he exerts succeeds in minimizing the chaos of the party through the establishment of order, however temporary and fleeting.

Meanwhile, upstairs in the apartment above Mulligan's lives a man named Callisto in a hermetically sealed hothouse [...]. Callisto clutches a dying bird to his chest while expounding on the nature of Thermodynamics and its theoretical extension beyond the limits of physics into the realms of society and culture as well: just as all closed systems lose energy over time until a 'heat-death' occurs wherein motion ceases, so too does culture have a tendency to lose differentiation and slide toward what Callisto terms 'the Condition of the More Probable.' Entropy, then, which Callisto defines as 'the measure of disorganization for a closed system,' is valuable in that it is "an adequate metaphor to apply to certain phenomena in [the] world" such as the consumerist trend away from difference and toward sameness. Often Aubade [Callisto's wife] checks the temperature outside, which has remained at a constant 37 degrees Fahrenheit for a number of days despite the drastic change in weather. The story ends with the death of the bird Callisto has attempted to sustain through the transfer of heat from his own body to that of the sick animal. Aubade, finally comprehending Callisto's thoughts, punches out the windows of their apartment/self-contained ecosystem and sits with Callisto to await "the moment of equilibrium" between their world and the world outside.

(Taken from: <http://www.pynchon.pomona.edu/slowlearner/entropy.html>)

Appendix 2: Biography⁹⁶

1937, May 8

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon is born to Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, Sr., and Frances Bennet Pynchon in Glen Cove, Long Island, NY. William Pynchon, one of the ancestors of the family, arrived in America in 1630. He published *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption*.

Tomas Pynchon has two siblings, a sister, Judith, and a brother, John. The family moves to East Norwich when they are still children.

1953

During high school he earns his first literary merits as a writer of the *Life and Times of Hamster High*.

Thomas Pynchon graduates from Oyster Bay Highschool at the age of sixteen, salutatorian of the class and winner of the Julia A. Thurston Award for exceptional accomplishments in English. He is awarded a scholarship and enrolls at Cornell University in the division of Engineering Physics.

1955

He leaves university for the Navy and returns to Cornell in

1957

Pynchon transfers to the College of Arts and Sciences and attains his degree in English. Some speculate that he was a student of the classes of Vladimir Nabokov, who taught Russian literature at that time at Cornell. It is proved that he worked in the editorial staff of the *Cornell Writer*⁹⁷ where he publishes his first short story "The Small Rain" (*The Cornell Writer*, March 1959) in

1959

He receives his B.A. with distinction in all subjects. Several publications in various magazines follow:

"Mortality and Mercy at Vienna" (*Epoch*, Spring 1959)

1960

"Low-Lands" (*New World Writing*, 1960)

"Entropy" (*Kenyon Review*, Spring 1960)

1961

"Under the Rose" (*The Noble Savage*, May 1961). This story reappears slightly reworked as Chapter 3 in *V*.

The early stories clearly work on the experiences he had at the university and his time at the navy. His friend, the folk singer Richard Farina,⁹⁸ introduced him to the life of the hippie generation, experiences which are clearly reflected in "Mortality and Mercy at Vienna" and "Entropy."

⁹⁶ Various sources have been used setting up this biographical sketch. Cf. p. 102f.

⁹⁷ Ronald Sukenick published in the same issue of *Epoch* as Thomas Pynchon did. Pynchon was editor. They must have known each other. However, later he only marginally mentions Pynchon in his book on the beatnik artists.

⁹⁸ TIME magazine unsuccessfully tried to get a picture of Pynchon at the wedding of Richard Farina and Mimi Baez.

After his graduation he lives in New York and then decides to work for Boeing in Seattle writing technical documents and working as a publisher of an aircraft journal. One article is being published in the journal *Aerospace Safety* (December 1960) under the title "Togetherness," dealing with space technology in aircraft.

Walter Bailey remembers, that Pynchon wrote for an intramural paper called the *Minutemen Field Service News*.⁹⁹

However, he quit the job on September 13, 1962 already working on his first novel *V*.

1963

He finishes his novel in California and Mexico, publishes it, and receives the William Faulkner Foundation Award for best first novel of the year.

1964

"The Secret Integration" (*The Saturday Evening Post*, December 19, 1964)

Parts of the second novel get published as "The World (This One), The Flesh (Mrs. Oedipa Maas), and the Testament of Pierce Inverarity" in *Esquire* (December 1965), and "The Shrink Flips" in *Cavalier* (March 1966). Already at that time he does refuse to give interviews and to talk to the press.

1966

He publishes his second novel *The Crying of Lot 49* for which he wins the Hilda Rosenthal Foundation Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

He also writes an article for *The New York Times Magazine*, "The Journey into the Mind of Watts" (June 12, 1966), a feuilletonistic article on ethnic rivalries in the outskirts of Los Angeles. At that time, Pynchon lives in Manhattan Beach (CA).¹⁰⁰

1973

After seven years of seclusion Thomas Pynchon surprises the reading public with his much acclaimed *Gravity's Rainbow*. After all the years the book has not lost any of its popularity, as can be seen in the GR reading marathon at Princeton University: 76 volunteers read the original edition of 760 pages in 38 hours on the flagstone terrace in front of Princeton's University Firestone Library.¹⁰¹

1974

Pynchon shares the National Book Award with Isaac Bashevis Singer. Professor Irwin Corey,¹⁰² a comedian, accepts the award on behalf of Mr. Pynchon in front of a baffled audience. (The nomination for the Pulitzer Prize is withdrawn after the board calls the book unreadable and overwritten. No prize is given out all that year.)

⁹⁹ Cf. Cowart A 96.

¹⁰⁰ Chrissie W., Siegel's ex-wife, says in an internet interview. Cf. Siegel B 54.

¹⁰¹ Gray, Paul, 'The Spores of Paranoia', *Time* January 15, 69-70, 1990.

¹⁰² Interview with the artist on his internet site: <http://www.irwincorey.org/routines.html>.

1975

Thomas Pynchon is awarded the William Dean Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Although the prize is a great honor - being awarded only every five years - Pynchon declines the award through an open letter. Rumors about who he is start to flourish in the press: Pynchon is a pseudonym of J.D. Salinger or an authors' community.¹⁰³

1977

Jules Siegel, former friend and room-mate at Cornell, publishes an article in *Playboy* on Thomas Pynchon where he accuses the author of having cuckooed him. The article is interesting with respect to the biographical data which is given although the reader already notices the paranoid and envying tone that pervades the texts on Pynchon published by Siegel. "Who Is Thomas Pynchon ... And Why Did He Take Off With My Wife?" (March 1977). Later Siegel admits that there has never been any official response from Pynchon's side to the article.

1984

Pynchon's early short stories appear in a collection which features first autobiographical notes from the author, the *Introduction*, which for a very long time is the only source for biographical information. The only publications for a long time are blurbs and introductory texts for newly published novels. For the *New York Times Book Review* he writes one essay on the Sloth, one of the seven deadly sins, which is published in book form in 1993.

1989

Pynchon is awarded the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

1990

After seventeen years of creative hibernation, the novel *Vineland* is published. The novel is rather conventional compared to the earlier pieces.

1995

Thomas R. Pynchon, former Town of Oyster Bay supervisor, dies of heart failure on July 21, 1995.

Scholars claim to have detected Pynchon hidden in the person of a certain Wanda Tinasky, a "bag lady," who writes letters to the editor to a Californian newspaper.¹⁰⁴ In an interview with Marty Feldmann on CNN Pynchon denies having written those letters.

1997

Nancy Jo Sales (*NY Magazine*) tracks Thomas Pynchon. Spotted in New York, married to his agent, Melanie Jackson, they have one son.

¹⁰³ Cf. Batchelor, J.C. 'Thomas Pynchon or Not Thomas Pynchon, or, This is the End of the Plot Which has No Name', *Soho Weekly News* (22 Apr. 1976): This facetious article elicited an ironic reply from Pynchon who advised Batchelor to 'keep trying,' reacting to rumors of him and J.D. Salinger being the same persons.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Hollander, Charles, 'Where's Wanda', in: *New York Press* 8: 34 (August 23-29, 1995), 1, 18-20.

Mason & Dixon opens the author to a wider readership. Pynchon leaves the close circle of his community and the novel enters the billboard of the bestseller's list. To the disadvantage of the author. There is a public interest in him and the press are not long to spot him right in the heart of the American society, in Manhattan. But still "the Greta Garbo of American letters" refuses to speak to the public. "Let me be ambiguous," he says, "I prefer not to be photographed." In various journals a picture appears which shows a "possible" Thomas Pynchon at the hand of an eight-year-old kid, a bow-legged man, mustache and glasses.

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Thomas Pynchon has been spotted and his identity (that he is in fact a real person) fixed was not echoed at all by the "community" on the net. They prefer, I assume, to let Thomas Pynchon be their faceless hero. The real person interferes with the conspiracy theory cherished by the majority of them. But he keeps being a symbol for something which is not.¹⁰⁵

2006

Against the Day (novel) appears.

2009

Inherent Vice (novel) is published.

2004-2008

Pynchon appears in three episodes of the Simpsons. The producers emphasize that it had not been too hard to convince the recluse author to lend his real voice to his own character. Pynchon appears wearing a paper bag over his head, selling autographs to passing cars in the first of these episodes.

¹⁰⁵ A letter from Thomas Pynchon to Richard Farina was offered by bookseller Ken Lopez for \$15,000. (Cf. Siegel B 90, footnote.) — At an auction the 1963 original edition of *V.* was sold for \$ 820.

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Abstract

Literarische Spieltheorie ist ein Begriff, den es so nicht gibt. Allerdings haben sich die Kulturwissenschaften immer wieder mit dem Spiel als gestalterische Kraft auseinandergesetzt, da es sich formal kaum fassen lässt.

Diese Arbeit versucht, Thomas Pynchon in den Spielkontext der abendländischen Philosophie und Kulturgeschichte zu setzen; von Heraklit bis Derrida; vom Spiel der Götter zu *jeu libre* der Dekonstruktion.

Dieser Arbeit liegt die Annahme zugrunde, dass sich zeitgenössische Literatur vor allem spielerisch den "großen" Themen der Menschheitsgeschichte nähert. Die Erzähltechnik eines Autors wie Thomas Pynchon unterscheidet sich grundsätzlich von jener des beginnenden 20. Jahrhunderts. Paranoia hat den Glauben an das Transzendente ersetzt. Angesichts einer dunklen, namenlosen Macht, die das Leben jedes Einzelnen im Griff zu haben scheint, rückt das Selbst in den Hintergrund bis zur Unkenntlichkeit. Gott wurde für tot erklärt, und selbst die Sprache hat ihre Unschuld verloren.

Wie ist es möglich angesichts der Unmöglichkeit von Erkenntnis und Ursprung von großen Themen wie Erkenntnis und Wahrheit zu schreiben?

Im Spiel. Ein Schachspiel ist schließlich auch eine Übung in Kriegsführung ohne Blutvergießen.

Pynchons Charaktere sind letztendlich Schachfiguren, denn ihr Name entspricht meist ihrer Funktion. Sie wachsen nicht an ihren Aufgaben; manchmal ist Stillhalten ihre Hauptaufgabe, manchmal sinnentleertes in Bewegung bleiben.

Der Anfang ist wie das Ende. Dazwischen wird gespielt. Jeder gewinnt auf seine oder ihre Art und Weise.