

Poetics at the Interface

*Patterns of Thought and Protocols of Reading in Pynchon
Scholarship*

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Tutkielma käsittelee poetiikan, lukemisen teorioiden ja yhden kirjailijan tuotantoa tulkitsevan tutkimuksen suhdetta. Lähestyn aihetta yhdysvaltalaisen Thomas Pynchonin ja tämän romaaneita käsittelevän runsaslukuisen tutkimuskirjallisuuden kautta. Tutkimusongelmani on kirjailijan teosten kirjallisuustieteellisten tulkintojen rooli yleistettävien poetiikan periaatteiden ymmärtämisessä. Työssä määrittelen poetiikan Jonathan Cullerin, kirjallisuusfenomenologien ja reader-response -teoreetikkojen oppien pohjalta lukemisen teoriaksi. Näin ymmärrettynä poetiikka tutkii kirjallisen tekstin tulkinnan ja analyysin taustalla vaikuttavia havainnon, ymmärtämisen ja kognition prosesseja. Tästä näkökulmasta katsoen poetiikka on niin kognitiivisen kirjallisuudentutkimuksen, lukuprosessin empiirisen tutkimuksen kuin myös jälkiklassisen narratologian keskustelukumppani.

Tutkimukseni tarkentaa vuoroin poetiikan teorioihin lukemisen proseduureista, vuoroin Pynchon-luentoihin, joiden analyttisiä valintoja voidaan kuvata lukemiseen tarkentavan poetiikan avulla. Oma analyysini pyrkii hienosyiseen mutta tulkinnan taiteen herkkyyttä kunnioittavaan erittelyyn Pynchon-tulkintojen tunnistettavista piirteistä. Menetelmäni vastaa seuraavanlaisiin kysymyksiin: Jos Pynchonin romaanien mittasuhteita ja tematiikkaa voi pitää suorastaan ensyklopedisena, miksi tutkimuksessa niin usein keskitytään samoihin teemoihin ja tekstuaalisiin piirteisiin? Mikä tekee tietyistä avainkohdista ohittamattomia tulkinnan kannalta? Miksi kompleksisesti rakentuneen ja idiosynkraattisen tulkinnan ero on lopultakin melko selvä?

Vastauksia hakiessaan tutkielma etsii jalansijaa lukemisen konventioiden ja tekstin kognitiivisen prosessoinnin väliltä. Työn teoriaosassa eritellään lukuproseduureja ja tulkinallisia malleja ja huomataan, että rakenteelliset metaforat, miniatyyrianalogioiden ja tematisoivat lukutavat ylittävät tämän kuilun. Kaikkien näiden lukutapojen teoretisoinnissa vedotaan kirjallisiin konventioihin tai traditioon, mutta samalla niiden nähdään kytkeytyvän erottamattomasti kognition ja havainnon prosesseihin. Työn analyysiosassa tutkitaan Pynchonin esikoisromaani *V.*:n (1963) tulkintoja näiden proseduurien käyttöä tarkastellen. Analyysissä korostetaan myös tekstin sekventiaalisen prosessoinnin sekä narratologian kuvaamien kertomuksen äänten ja puhuja- tai kertojaposition vaikutusta siihen, miten edellä mainitut lukemisen proseduurit toimivat. Työn eräänlaisena mottona toimii kirjallisuudentutkija Robert Scholesin ajatus, että lukemisen protokollat voidaan ymmärtää menetelmällisesti vain tiettyyn pisteeseen asti. Työ lähestyy tätä pistettä suunasta, jossa kirjallisuudentutkimuksen lukuproseduurit alavat sekoittua yleisempiin tulkinnan ja havainnon prosesseihin.

Avainsanat: Poetiikka, Thomas Pynchon, lukemisen teoria, metahermeneutiikka, lukutavat, narratologia

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PART I: AT THE INTERFACE

1. Pynchon and Poetics

In this sort of book, there is no total to arrive at. Nothing makes any waking sense. But it makes a powerful, deeply disturbing dream sense. Nothing in the book seems to have been thrown in arbitrarily, merely to confuse [...]. Pynchon appears to be indulging in the fine, pre-Freudian luxury of dreams dreamt for the dreaming. ("A Myth of Alligators.")

Thomas Pynchon's reputation as a difficult writer was established early on after his confounding debut *V.* came out in 1963 when the author was 26 years old. The *Time* magazine review of *V.* cited in the epigraph can stand in for quite few contemporary responses. Pynchon's challenge was also taken on in the academia, even though he only became one of America's most extensively studied post-war novelists in the wake of *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). Even in the present state of affairs, marked by an abundance of scholarly interpretations, whole databases of annotations, and a stock of culturally transmitted fore-knowledge about Pynchon, the experience of reading one of his novels retains its aura of inexplicability.

Recording one's early encounter with Pynchon's work has become a veritable convention in scholarly discourse, and one which I would gladly reiterate. Yet I have had the curious pleasure of finding this encounter phrased to perfection by others. I first read Pynchon's *V.* as an undergraduate, and while reading it I remember feeling constantly at loss about what it was really about and how it was to be understood, but it permanently changed my perception of novels. This is very much my experience,

but it almost doubles as a free translation of lines found in the M.A. thesis of a Finnish Pynchon-pioneer Tiina Käkälä-Puumala (1994). In comparison, consider the following anecdote beginning a recent book by an international one, David Cowart (2011):

I read my first Pynchon novel in Ethiopia, in quarters that lacked electricity and indoor plumbing (actually, there was no outdoor plumbing either). When the daylight faded, I read on by Coleman lantern. [...] A solitary American in the Horn of Africa, I read a lot, half-systematically filling gaps in a haphazard undergraduate education. I did not understand Pynchon's *V.*, but it transported me. Reading it became a turning point in my intellectual life. (Cowart 2011, SIVU.)

While this anecdote, and others of its kind, represents someone else's experience, it is certainly representative of mine as well. It is easy to recognize "one of the most persistent encounters of [one's] intellectual life," to borrow Thomas Hill Schaub's phrase, but difficult to get into particulars about the processes actually undergone in reading (see Schaub 1981, ix).¹ The descriptions of first encounters with Pynchon also show traces of what I find one of the most characteristic as well as elusive features of the vast field of writing on and around Pynchon, something best described as a sense of *déjà lu*: explications of the difficulty of reading Pynchon – whether terse and anecdotal or book-long and erudite – ring strikingly similar.

The broad aim of this thesis is to show how study of poetics may help us come to terms with similarities in readings of extremely complex novels. The task is undertaken, on one hand, by reading Pynchon's novels, with a special place reserved for his novelistic debut, *V.* (1963), and on the other, reading Pynchon scholars, with a special focus on those who somehow engage with the notion of "Pynchon's poetics." My reason for considering Pynchon an exceptionally appropriate writer for this purpose is precisely the curious imbalance one finds between the shared critical understanding of his texts and the writings they have inspired. His novels are famous for their impenetrable language, interpretative indeterminacy, and innumerability of discourses, all of which can be seen as aspects of his poetics. Yet delving into scholarly and other writings on Pynchon, as diverse as they are, reveals a wealth of canonized readings and stock responses. In both academic and non-academic responses to his novels, and especially to their *difficulty*, we encounter far less indeterminacy and divergence than the reputation of the novels warrants. Commentators are continually held back and baffled by the same "key passages" and interpretive dilemmas. Reading, even when it is by consensus deemed

¹ There are, however, a few descriptions of reading of Gravity's Rainbow (for the first, second, even third time): McHoul And Wills 1990, 23–33; Leverenz 1976.

nearly impossible, seems prone to produce a consensus quite regularly. If Pynchon's texts are so labyrinthine and centrifugal, why all the convergence?

The present work aims to revisit the idea that study of poetics might be most fruitfully understood as a theory of reading. This idea of poetics provides a stage on which my own readings can enter into a fruitful dialogue with individual responses found in Pynchon studies. Yet more importantly, this theoretical context is one that allows us to discuss the conditions and restrictions under which existing studies can be used as a kind of documentation of ways of reading Pynchon, as well as one that allows for a negotiation of the extent of generalizability of protocols of reading.² Poetics as a theory of reading allows one to dwell on the questions arising from the marvelously heterodox field of Pynchon studies which is however more and more coming to be defined by its "will to community" (Berressem 2012, 173).

This chapter is intended as a general introduction to the discussions taken on in this thesis. It will organize the research questions into a field of inquiry and contextualize them theoretically. Chapter 1.1. discusses some prominent threads in Pynchon Studies, which is one of the two primary contexts to my thesis. The brief introduction to Pynchon Studies focuses on two aspects in particular. Firstly, early Pynchon Studies, as well as some of the more recent work, often conceptualize their discussions of Pynchon's literary "ideas"³ – the concepts, themes and metaphors in the novels – as a search for "Pynchon's theory." There is a whole continuum of work that partially fits this description. Many ideas falling in with this loose grouping play a major role in the novels and have had a long-standing effect on Pynchon studies. The second law of thermodynamics, for instance, has remained a talking point for almost five decades.⁴ Likewise, the epistemological incongruence between two ways of interpreting statistical data, embodied by Roger Mexico and Dr. Edward Pointsman in *Gravity's Rainbow*, keeps coming up from one decade to the next. Few ideas in Pynchon, or Pynchon studies for that matter, have proved as influential to the self-reflexive rhetoric of the scholarly enterprise as the epistemological gulf of Mexico-Pointsman.⁵

² The phrase is found in Jacques Derrida's *Positions*: "[R]eading is transformational. [...] But this transformation cannot be executed however one wishes. It requires protocols of reading." (Derrida 1981, 63.) It is later picked up by Robert Scholes, whose book *Protocols of Reading* (1989) is an inspired attempt to discuss our reading protocols in such a way that gives the creative and idiosyncratic art of reading its due.

³ Probably the best early systematic treatment of the vague-sounding "Pynchon's ideas" can be found in Schaub (1981; see also Cooper 1983).

⁴ See e.g. Mangel 1976; Palmeri 1989; cf. Eve 2011; Letzler 2015. For a more comprehensive view on the scope of studies on entropy see the bibliography of secondary materials on Vheissu web page, where search term "entropy" scores 60 hits: <http://www.vheissu.net/biblio/>.

⁵ George Levine (1976) comments on the shadow Pynchon's ideas cast on the enterprise of systematic study: "A critic of Pynchon needs to consider whether he isn't Ned Pointsman to Pynchon's Roger Mexico" (10). The idea of the

Secondly, at the other end of the spectrum, there are studies that aim to show that the views expressed in Pynchon's novels are consonant with an existing theoretical frame or philosophy. Sascha Pöhlmann has recently referred to this branch as "that tradition of Pynchon criticism that dwells extensively on scientific and philosophical concepts in order to elucidate the texts that are fundamentally informed by them" (2012). The diversity among these concepts is striking, however. Pynchon's work has been put to dialogue with a myriad approaches and theories. Some of these are not even extensively thematized in the novels. One can find discussions of Pynchon drawing from quantum mechanics, post-structuralism, Peircean pragmatics, or phenomenology, for example.⁶

The approaches above are examples of ways in which Pynchon Studies have pursued Pynchon's "poetics" – although this is poetics in a very specific sense. The sense is roughly Bakhtinian: the Russian scholar saw poetics as the author's "*artistic* visualization of the world, the principle behind his artistic structuring of a *verbal* whole, the novel" (1984, 11, emphasis original). The first approaches, seeking "Pynchon's theory," largely make do with ideas talked about in the novels, while the second appeal to more implicit thematization of theoretical ideas, often based on the seeming resonance they have within the novels. There are also other partially related senses in which studies pursue Pynchon's poetics. For example, Pynchon's works have been studied in the context of literary genres or movements. These studies have variably cast Pynchon's work as Postmodernist fiction, historiographic metafiction, Menippean satire, metahistorical romance, mythography, or encyclopedia.⁷ Some of these approaches are discussed at length below.

Poetics, provisionally without epithets, is the other primary context for the present study and requires more elaboration. If this chapter is named vaguely "Pynchon *and* Poetics," it is for the reason that the relationship between a literary *oeuvre* or work and poetics remains at this stage indefinite. The task of working towards definitions is taken on in chapter 1.2. Today, there may be no need for overt anxiety about the history of poetics as a "science of literature." The erstwhile science of literature has outlived each of the scientific pretensions it has taken on. Yet undoubtedly, poetics in the guise of one among the myriad "approaches" to literature, now has a position in literary studies that can at

Pavlovian Pointsman representing, and warning against, the systematizing, totalizing attempts to contain Pynchon's art within a scientific framework has had a lasting effect on Pynchon studies.

⁶ Quantum mechanics: Friedman (1983), Savvas (2011); post-structuralism: Berressem (1993), McHoul and Wills (1990), Mattessich (2002); Peircean pragmatics: Amian (2008); Phenomenology: Sigvardson (2002).

⁷ Postmodernist fiction: Mchale (1987); historiographic metafiction: Hutcheon (1988); Menippean satire: Kharperian (1990); metahistorical romance: Elias (2001); mythography: Hume (1987); encyclopedia: Mendelson (1976).

best be called marginal. As Monika Fludernik puts it, the current literary theory is marked by eclecticism, and approaches are used strategically towards specific needs of the research, without imposition of superordinate frameworks. Where “poetics” is used, it is in reference to an open system that reacts to locally arising questions. (Fludernik 2010, 924-925; cf. Pier 2012).

Also, the notion that interpretation, the hermeneutic process aiming at finding meanings of texts and understanding them, plays a part in development of poetics is no longer as controversial as it once was (cf. Seamon 1989). Even the harshest critics of interpretative criticism now remark that the study of literature as a system never precluded interpretation – although an interdiction of sorts was momentarily in place (Culler 1981; cf. Seamon 1989; Henkel 1990). The same critics now say that structuralism and the systematic endeavor of theorizing discursive practices “enabled the remarkable exfoliation of critical possibilities, which became ‘approaches’ to interpretation” (Culler 2010, 907).

In the second subchapter of the introduction, I will also show how the emphasis within poetics has shifted between privileging or giving the dominant position either to the text or to the reader, with the problematic question of the author never far away. The overarching question of poetics has wandered from how the “text itself” works, to how literary communication works, to what happens in the process of reading, and back again. Poetics during the 20th Century spans a vast expanse from studies of how authors write, to how texts come to mean, to theories of how we read. Here I will frame poetics in a way that is relevant to the goals of my study.

In chapter 1.3, I will argue further that in recent decades the most natural habitat to poetics in the old guise of “science of literature” has been in certain branches of cognitive literary studies. Yet the questions of how, and with what cognitive faculties and cultural competences we make sense of texts are very much the traditional province of poetics. However, today these questions, in the frame of cognitive studies, comprise the area of literary studies with strongest links to cutting-edge research in empirical and natural sciences. As I will show, however, the question of mind and cognition has figured in the study of poetics throughout the past century, and its recent ascendancy not only reflects recent theories and discoveries about the mind, but affirms the process of seemingly eternal return in the study of poetics.

The field of Pynchon studies has traditionally been eager to adopt technical innovation. Our times make no exception to this pattern. Digital humanities are rewriting the rules of studying materials spanning thousands of pages – such as Pynchon’s *oeuvre* – as well as implementing new methods to

study of reading. In chapter 1.4, the introduction concludes with a look into these new applications, and argues that taking a few lessons from the history of poetics and theory of reading might help us avoid adopting an overly simplistic view of the interaction between texts and reading.

In these subchapters, a place for poetics will be sought in between the study of textual features and reflection on procedures of reading, and between institutional practices of interpretation and phenomenology of reception. This allows me to articulate how and in what (limited) capacity Pynchon studies and readings of Pynchon's novels may be analyzed as a corpus of reading procedures. As the forthcoming excursions into the history of the 20th Century poetics show, there seems to be a periodically renewed need for the type of study that takes a step back to reflect on the analytical or interpretive practices afoot on the field. Rather than proposing a novel understanding of what studying studies or reading readings entails, the aim of this work is to revisit some of the insights from the previous cycle – what used to be called a systematic study of poetics, even a “science” of literature, and its later self-critique.

1.1. Approaching the Pynchonian – Reading, Theorizing, Interpreting

If the sampling of Pynchon Studies in this introduction needs to be deliberately narrow, a more comprehensive picture of the field will be assembled piecemeal throughout the work. True comprehensiveness is beyond the scope of this study, and perhaps these days the same goes for any study on Pynchon. Summaries of the field were made frequently amid the early enthusiasm, and this task was later taken on in the back pages of the seminal *Pynchon Notes*.⁸ In 1989 Clifford Mead compiled a 176-page bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and later still, the dream of the encyclopedic knowledge of all things Pynchonian survived in web-based environments. Unsurprisingly, the usefulness of communally networked databases was immediately apparent to Pynchon-scholars and enthusiasts.⁹ However, in more recent publications, such as the high-profile

⁸ *Pynchon Notes* was founded by John M. Krafft and Khachig Tölölyan in 1979. In addition to becoming the most important journal of the young field it also was the foremost pre-internet era discussion forum, a fascinating artifact of scholarly communality and collective effort. In the latter stages of writing this work all of the past issues of *Pynchon Notes* have been made available as an open access archive <https://pynchonnotes.openlibhums.org/>. As the successor to the earlier journal, *Orbit: Writing around Pynchon* (2012–) took the logical step forward and has been published exclusively online: <http://www.pynchon.net/>.

⁹ The crowd-sourced annotation project of Pynchon's novels is ongoing at <http://pynchonwiki.com/>, curated by Tim Ware. The web page “Vheissu,” recycling the name of one of the first Pynchon-portals, maintains an up-to-date bibliography of secondary sources: <http://www.vheissu.net/biblio/alles.php>.

Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon (2012), the selected bibliographies are conspicuously avoiding any claims to comprehensiveness.

The prospect of Pynchon becoming one of the most studied, analyzed, and interpreted authors of his time was not inconceivable at the time of the publication of *V.* in 1963, but this prospect only became reality in the aftershock of the author's third novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). The academic institution had to react to what many felt was a whole new novel, and early scholarly writing on Pynchon is marked by certain distinctive aspects. One of the remarkable features in early Pynchon studies is the eagerness with which scholars undertake studying the texts with concepts lifted out of the very novels they aimed to bring within the discourse of criticism. Earliest post-*Gravity's Rainbow* writings include discussions of topics such as entropy, paranoia, and anarchism (see Levine and Leverenz 1976). On the other hand, the employment of concepts that seem suggestive of interpretive strategies was deemed a distinctly Pynchonian textual strategy. As noted above, many of these concepts remain widely discussed – both for their literary effects and their relevance in the cultural context of the novels. Their academic renewability is a point of interest in itself. This reciprocal movement between Pynchon's concepts and their real-life contexts marks a whole branch of criticism. In this work, it is described as the “search for Pynchon's theory.”

This aspect of Pynchon studies may be juxtaposed with attempts to study Pynchon's poetics by approaching them in particular theoretical contexts, such as poststructuralism, deconstruction, or classical and postclassical narratology. Here the movement is from theory to analysis, or from theoretical writings to Pynchon's writing, and back again. These attempts, too, often emphasize the centrality of Pynchon's concepts, but slightly differently. Instead of grappling with concepts explicitly deployed in the novels, studies invested in specific theoretical approaches make inferences about the theoretical impetus behind Pynchon's texts. This approach will be discussed below under the heading “reading theory with Pynchon.” The juxtaposition of these two approaches is not meant to imply a separation of two distinct categories of coming to terms with Pynchon's work. Rather, the difference is operational, and in practice it mainly manifests in how the aims and scope of study is spelled out. Across this analytical division, studies may share in other things, and inversely, they may practice their own creative idiosyncrasy regardless of their neighbors. The interpretive, explicatory and theoretical power of each study is not contained by anything as simple as two (or more) possible relations between Pynchon and theory. The distinction is made for practical purposes, and its usefulness will be argued for below.

Illustrating the repeated patterns in analyzing Pynchon requires posing a few relatively unsophisticated questions to scholarly works of considerable finesse. These questions concern the methods and practices of literary analysis. Inevitably this leads me to read Pynchon-scholarship in a way that in other context – significantly that of literary interpretation – might be seen as tendentious or symptomatic. Again, one hopes that the proof of the pudding is in putting it where the mouth is: if the questions posed help us understand reading Pynchon, interpreting literary texts, and writing academic studies, then perhaps the occasionally instrumentalizing readings of prior studies will be justified. Among other things, the work at hand offers an account of Pynchon’s exceptional longevity – and I do believe the logic is applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to a great many representatives of Pynchon studies as well.

In Search of Pynchon’s Theory

What on Earth is “Pynchon’s theory?” This question more or less defines the first volume of academic writings on Pynchon’s work. Although the book stands as the first visible trace of the emergence of Pynchon studies, it would be slightly dubious to call *Mindful Pleasures* (Levine and Leverenz 1976) an attempt at formulating a theory, let alone a poetics. In fact, the book explicitly expresses its reservations towards the possibility and plausibility of such a task. The editors assert that the book will do little to produce a “settled reading” of Pynchon, and that this tentativeness is very much intended (3). However, those afforded the luxury of retrospection may now say that the collection keeps being read in precisely this capacity. It is seen as a cornerstone upon which much of the first post-*Gravity’s Rainbow* generation of scholarship builds. One of its most enduring contributions, however, may well be the recognition of how Pynchon’s work challenges the idea of systematic study:

The very idea of a collection of essays about Pynchon violates the terms on which he presents himself to us. V. mocks the synthetic minds that insist on making shapes out of the meaningless variety and colourfulness of experience [...]. A critic of Pynchon needs to consider whether he isn't Ned Pointsman to Pynchon's Roger Mexico, whether he isn't mistaking the occurrence of “caries” to “cabals” [...]. (Levine and Leverenz 1976, 10.)

The same ethos is captured, in more transparent diction, by Peter L. Cooper, who remarks upon Pynchon’s deep ambivalence towards the human instinct to “find – or make – patterns of experience and then interpret them” (1983, 1). Therefore, the idea that this instinct is thematized in Pynchon’s novels is almost as old as the idea of studying them in the first place.

Two further points about this influential collection give context to this self-reflexivity, but also suggest how the phenomenon may transcend its immediate context. Firstly, *Mindful Pleasures* studies the novels mostly by elaborating on the concepts found in the novels themselves. It is easy to sympathize with Hanjo Berressem, who suggests that the early critics attempt to come to terms with Pynchon's difficulty "by clarifying – to themselves as much as to the critical community – some of the central concepts Pynchon uses to organize his text" (2012, 169). In *Mindful Pleasures* the challenge of merely being able to read Pynchon is captured by the brilliantly unorthodox "On Trying to Read *Gravity's Rainbow*" (Leverenz). In addition, the collection unearths the critical resources of paranoia (Sanders) and dehumanization (Tanner). It also establishes that the idea of entropy informs Pynchon's work in such a way that it becomes an organizing principle and not just a theme (Mangel). It also makes a lasting contribution to genre theory via the concept of "encyclopedic novel" (Mendelson). No more than two years later many of the essays were responded to and reacted against in Edward Mendelson's *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1978). These two collections, with later volumes such as Clerc's (1983) and Bloom's (1986), fixed several concepts or themes as staples of Pynchon studies: anarchy, apocalypse, decadence; information and entropy; technological progress and atavism. These collections also roughly span what we might call the Golden Age of Pynchon Studies.

The second point of interest in *Mindful Pleasures* is that the volume seems perfectly in tune with its time in how it articulates a certain need for scholarly self-reflection. It was published just before De Man's *Allegories of Reading* and the English translation of Derrida's *Writing and Difference* aired the post-structuralist grievances about literary criticism still falling short of understanding its own logic and rhetoric. The early blossoming of self-reflection in Pynchon studies is often reported as lost in the process of academic canonization. Whether or not the assessment is sound, this loss, too, is prophesied in *Mindful Pleasures*. The anxiety felt at the consolidation of reading strategies finds a fitting metaphor in "routinization of charisma," an expression in *Gravity's Rainbow* which itself alludes to Max Weber's writings on the gradual "disenchantment" of the modern world. In Levine and Leverenz's introduction, it already becomes characteristically difficult to draw the line between Pynchon's writing, his intertextual allusions, and the critical discourse of the scholars (cf. Vella 1988, 133). If a third long-lasting influence may be attributed to *Mindful Pleasures*, it would be this blending of discourses. Although linking this exclusively to studying Pynchon might be too near-sighted, it is evident that few authors are cited in academic prose as extensively, as informally and so often without attribution as Pynchon. Perhaps more than any other Anglophone author of the late 20th

Century, Pynchon seems to have the knack for the *mot juste*, which scholars find themselves resorting to, almost in spite of themselves.

Pynchon's concepts, therefore, start a life of their own early on in the emerging Pynchon studies. Levine and Leverenz already see this in an ironic light. They write:

The temptation, clearly, has been irresistible to take his allusions, his dropped clues, his metaphors, and run, right into the ordering patterns that that welcome us to the Firm. We see V's, or double S's, or WASTE baskets and make criticism. We "do" the themes and the symbols [...] (Levine and Leverenz 1976, 10).

Indeed, the temptation to focus on Pynchon's key terms or metaphors and to base an interpretation on them may have proven strong, but surely this is something we could say about studying most authors. The distinctively Pynchonian aspect of the issue at hand is rather that in Pynchon's texts such keys are found in unusual abundance.

In my view, therefore, the more interesting line to pursue would be to see this temptation as something we should credit the works with. Certain aspects of Pynchon's textual practice might actually make certain strategies of reading or interpreting seem appealing, even unavoidable. While this is close to what Levine and Leverenz argue, they adopt a strangely apologetic rhetoric – as if Pynchon's intention (like Joyce's before him, should we take the *Dubliner* for his word) had been precisely to throw off academics with their conventional recuperative practices, and academics were now declaring they were not going to abide by this pact. Rather, these thematized hermeneutics, these models borrowed from natural sciences and mathematics, can be seen to provide a simpler point of departure. Pynchon's novels clearly have a thematic concern – seriocomic in the best literary tradition – with the myriad of ways of acquiring and using knowledge, with the ways of making an organized worldview of the chaos of phenomena and perceptions. These ways are as plural as anything in Pynchon's universe and may be used as means to various ends: to understand humanity, to control nature, to subjugate our others, to love God's critters, to build bombs and conquer space, to remain knowing of the wind and the skies. However, if the temptation to interpret the work with or through them is so inescapable, there must be a way to describe them theoretically within context of poetics – of both Pynchon's poetics and poetics as a theory of reading.

The task of theoretical description is taken on in chapter 2. It is argued, on one hand, that we need a distinction between the author's topics and what is often described as Pynchon's theory. On the other

hand, the concepts, metaphors, and emblems cannot be seen in isolation of their content and context – purely structurally, as it were. The concepts catching on in Pynchon Studies clearly transcend their “mere” thematicity and become metaphors and models for literary structures and reading (cf. Cooper 1983, 154). Yet if such concepts are understood as suggesting reading strategies, it is often because they *also* are explicitly about matters of knowledge and interpretation.

We might recall here Pöhlmann’s phrase on concepts which can elucidate “the texts that are fundamentally informed by them.” The view taken on poetics in this work would suggest that comments like Pöhlmann’s should be read, not only as statements about the texts or their features but rather as summaries of complex interpretive processes which may be described in terms of “the developing responses of the reader,” as Stanley Fish proposes, or in terms of conventions and operations by which literature produces its observable effects, as Jonathan Culler puts it (Fish 1972, 387; Culler 1981, 52–53). It will be then suggested that the complex process of reading, recognition, and interpretation may be conceptualized as what is called the hermeneutic circle in certain traditions of philosophy.¹⁰ Section 1.2 below explores how the study of poetics negotiates its relation to hermeneutics before its reorientation as a theory of reading.

Reading Theory with Pynchon

In contrast to the idea of “Pynchon’s theory” discussed above, there are works that clearly state their intention to bring Pynchon within the sphere of certain critical discourses in order to study how the formerly unpursued lines of inquiry might show Pynchon in a new light. We could, for instance, draw a comparison between Hanjo Berressem’s post-structuralist *Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text* (1993) and Samuli Hägg’s *Narratologies of Gravity's Rainbow* (2005). These works are avowedly “interfacing theory and text”, as the subtitle of Berressem’s 1993 book declares. Hägg points out that he might have used the same title, although both “interfacing” and “theory” would have meant something different (Hägg 2005, 8). Berressem takes his theory from poststructuralist thinkers: Lacan, Derrida and Baudrillard. Hägg, on the other hand, draws from classical and postclassical narratology. The two works are obviously dissimilar in their theoretical orientation, but they resemble each other in how they spell out their aim to study the author in the light of certain theory or poetics. Berressem sets out with the task of filling a gap in Pynchon studies, and finds it

¹⁰ See especially Heidegger 1962, 190–191; 194–195.

ironic “that Pynchon should be almost the last contemporary American writer to be fully incorporated into a poststructuralist framework” (1993, 1). Hägg, likewise, remarks on the virtual absence of narratological studies on Pynchon (Hägg 2005, 9). Furthermore, the two scholars share a certain fore-conception of Pynchon's prose: both find that it anticipates, resists and parodies theoretical approaches to the text (Berressem 1993, 6–10; Hägg 2005, 21).

Studies of Pynchon framed in this manner have seen a recent increase in numbers. One recent contribution has been made by Martin Paul Eve with his book *Pynchon and Philosophy* (2014). This study, too, finds in Pynchon a “hostility towards (or at least engagement with) theoretical discourses” and then a complication of this attitude. Eve aligns himself with earlier Pynchon studies by citing Berressem’s line on how Pynchon’s novels constantly undercut their previous statements – Berressem being of course far from the only one to suggest something like this. To Eve, it is apparent that the hostility towards theory is participatory and productive, and that bringing (also) philosophical discourses to bear on Pynchon’s novels will help us towards a better understanding of the author’s thinking. (Eve 2014, 3.) This is very much in accordance with the current communal spirit in Pynchon studies. However, like many contemporary Pynchon scholars, Eve also engages in a metatheoretical debate around the critical practice of discussing theory (in his case various strands of philosophy) and literary works side by side. He explicitly sets his method against Berressem’s, whom he singles out as the most significant precursor to this type of study. Whereas Berressem describes his attempts at reading through various post-structuralisms – Derridean, Baudrillardian, Lacanian – as *multiple* readings which are “complementary rather than exclusive,” Eve purports to work towards a *single* reading that “explicitly *excludes* points of incompatibility from each theorist.” This is done to avoid statements of there being a Wittgensteinian, a Foucauldian, and Adornian Pynchon. Eve’s focus is unapologetically set on how ideas from each thinker could be complementary to one another.” What emerges from these readings is a construct Eve is happy to call a “critical Pynchon.” (Ibid., 8–9.)

In all three works mentioned above, therefore, we hear the emphasis fall differently on the idea of *interfacing theory and text*, and by all accounts the works share little theoretical ground. The justification for placing them side by side is not found in their similarities to each other but, rather, in their representativeness of an institutional branch of study – one that can, indeed, be characterized as *interfacing theory and text*, or, as I would argue, more particularly as *reading theory with Pynchon*. The distinctive quality of these studies which justifies the latter characterization is the *articulated* attempt to bring a pre-selected set of theoretical ideas to interaction with Pynchon’s texts.

As individual accounts of Pynchon's poetics, the three books mentioned here find some common ground. Although each of them deals with different kinds of theory, poststructuralist, narratological, or philosophical, each of them discovers that it is (also) this particular theory that Pynchon's work resists (cf. Berressem 1993, 1; Hägg 2005, 5–6; Eve 2014, 3). While Pynchon's perceived resistance or engagement with theory is concretized through analyses of texts, it would be misleading to suggest that this outcome results from application of theory to objects of study. Rather, the assumption already in place is confirmed by the readings performed in each study.

The assumption of my study is that something remains to be said about this process, which my study proposes to treat as hermeneutical. Whereas the studies discussed earlier under "Pynchon's Theory" discover the concepts informing Pynchon's texts in those very texts, the studies "reading theory with Pynchon" find the crucial concepts in other texts. In a sense, the difference is superficial, because in no way can any of Pynchon's concepts be truly immanent to the texts alone – truly "Pynchon's," as it were. Yet it is possible to discern two different configurations of interfacing theory and text: one in which the texts seemingly provide the concepts by which they are fundamentally informed, and the other, in which the concepts are found in other (theoretical) texts, and their use is based on an assumed or perceived relevance of the concepts and their expected capability to elucidate the text.

The studies discussed above, therefore, provide another fascinating point of entry to the discussion of relations between text and theory. On one hand, they exemplify the critical notion that texts may interact better with some theories than others, or that texts may even require or elicit certain approaches. Further, each of them finds in Pynchon's writing a peculiar quality of theory-consciousness, even though the meaning of "theory" varies significantly. The latter discovery is reminiscent of the one made by several scholars of the early Pynchon's studies, namely, that Pynchon's novels seem always already engaged in a cleverer-than-thou repartee with our theoretical approaches. However, as will be demonstrated below, the idea of Pynchon's novels anticipating various theoretical approaches occurs even more widely in Pynchon studies. It comes up even where the focus is on more particular questions of literary poetics such as those concerning genre or period.

Pynchon's Genre and Period, and, Does Pynchon really Know All This Theory?

A large number of studies approach Pynchon's work as postmodern or postmodernist fiction. Pynchon's third novel *Gravity's Rainbow* is often portrayed as the paradigm case of the American

postmodern(ist) novel, and most studies which cast Pynchon in this role tend to give this novel a privileged position in the oeuvre.¹¹

Brian McHale's influential definition of literary postmodernism in relation to conventions of high modernism has been found useful in Pynchon studies (see McHale 1987; 1992). McHale's well-known early analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow* operates on this very conception of postmodernism in showing how the novel seems to demand various modernist reading strategies, which it then leads up various blind alleys. This process serves as a "de-conditioning" of the reader. (McHale 1979, 107.) In Molly Hite's *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (1983) we find the same emphasis: Pynchon's fiction calls into question, undermines and parodies modernistic conventions. Hite links the term postmodernism to Pynchon's texts because they cannot be read successfully through "our knowledge of established conventions, even modernist conventions." (Hite 1983, 3–4.) At this point, however, we must focus beyond the modernist and postmodernist conventions themselves, on the recurring pattern in criticism: the play of conventions and the way Pynchon seems resistant to conventional reading. In Hite and McHale, the pattern is concretized in the to-and-fro switching between the *theory* of modernist and postmodernist poetics and the *processing of the text* in a way that seems to suggest that such a theory is relevant to reading and understanding Pynchon. This circular logic should already sound familiar to us.

Similar pattern can be found in some accounts of how Pynchon typifies certain characteristics of periods or genres. Pynchon's novels have been read through many generic lenses, as shown above, but rarely without pointing out that Pynchon tends to bring the urge of categorization itself into relief. Some ostensibly in-between terms have been tried on: Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction," and Wilde's "midfiction," to mention but a few. Yet these studies, too, have found that Pynchon's texts fail to abide by the generic pact that they first seem to necessitate (Hutcheon 1988; Wilde 1987, 75–76).

According to Hutcheon, Pynchon's fictions are "intertextually overdetermined" and "discursively overloaded" to the point where they both parody and enact the systematizing tendency of all

¹¹ Our day and age is witnessing what must have been inconceivable before the turn of the millennium: Pynchon's role as the prophet of postmodernism is being questioned in Pynchon Studies. Indications of this shift have been around at least since the publication of *Against the Day* in 2006, and rereading Pynchon's previous novels in the shifted light of his later works has become a prominent thread in criticism (see e.g. Pöhlmann 2010; Rossi and Simonetti 2015). Also, the theoretical arguments for Pynchon's postmodernism have been revisited. (See De Bourcier 2014.)

discourses (Hutcheon 1988, 133). As Hutcheon points out, despite acknowledging problems of systematization, even postmodernist criticism cannot help but seek some system or another. She cites *Gravity's Rainbow* as an example of a novel that is conscious of this dilemma and employs it as a vehicle of parody. This effect is achieved “by over-totalization, by parodies of systematization.” (Hutcheon 1988, 58–59.) Patricia Waugh also comments on the parodies of systematization in the novel: “[S]ystems compete with each other, collectively resisting assimilation to any one received paradigm, and thus the normal channels of data-processing.” The information is never systematized or structured into a coherent body of meaning or interpretation. (1984, 39.)

One more illustration of how such over-totalization is discovered in Pynchon can be seen in how Pynchon's massive novels have been studied as “encyclopedic.” Novels like *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*, or *V.*, seem to attach to certain domains of knowledge with an unusual urge to say everything about them. The encyclopedic as a generic term has been discussed with explicit linkage to Pynchon, postmodernism, or both, and these discussions are usually accompanied by reflections on the theoretical implications of the term (Mendelson 1976, Bersani 1990, Herman and Van Ewijk 2009).

The term “encyclopedic narrative” is coined by Edward Mendelson in his well-known essay. He classifies *Gravity's Rainbow* alongside *Don Quixote*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Divina Commedia*, among others, as a work that signifies the moment in the history of a “Western national culture” when it “becomes fully conscious of itself as a unity, [and] produces an encyclopedic author” (Mendelson 1976, 161)¹². Given the time of writing, Mendelson was probably reacting to the Pulitzer board’s controversial decision not to award the prize to *Gravity's Rainbow*, against the unanimous recommendation of the fiction jury. Subsequently the grandiose rhetoric of his essay as well as the idea of encyclopedic narrative has invited some criticism. The notion of the encyclopedic, however, caught on in Pynchon-scholarship.

Luc Herman and Petrus van Ewijk (2009) revisit the view, suggesting more moderately that some novels may “produce *the illusion* that they have encyclopedic proportions and perhaps even manage

¹² Others, including Brian McHale, do not impose such cultural singularity on *Gravity's Rainbow*. McHale outlines a field of proto-postmodernist American “meganovels” that anticipate Pynchon’s encyclopedism (2008, 403). Ercolino recognizes that there have been several attempts to describe the “long, hyperabundant, hypertrophic narratives, both in form and content.” (See Ercolino 2014, Karl 2001, Moretti 1996, LeClair 1989.)

to impose some form of order on the wealth of material” (169, emphasis original). More importantly, and in a fashion that is reminiscent of other accounts which endow Pynchon’s work with pre-emptive powers over theorizing, the authors claim that *Gravity’s Rainbow* actually reflects and builds upon “an insight into its own limitations as an encyclopedic novel” (ibid.). The illusion of encyclopedic order hinges on the imposition of “some form of order” on the chaotic material – and this is only just achieved, by falling suitably short. Again, theory and perceived features of text feed back into one another, since only by applying the theory of encyclopedic narrative can one read the novel as flaunting its limitations as an encyclopedia, and the application of the theory requires a tentative idea of encyclopedic narrative as a relevant concept in understanding the novel as a whole.

Again, the work at hand proceeds from the assumption that this dialogue of theory and text can be seen as a hermeneutic process. At the same time, however, the different works discussed above – those in various ways interfacing theory and text – form a portion of what this work approaches as Pynchon’s poetics. In literary poetics, however, hermeneutics or interpretation has often been excluded from the realm of poetics. The rationale for this exclusion can be questioned in a number of ways, as will be shown below. There is also a branch of poetics which seems particularly apt to produce readings in this way. It was named descriptive poetics by Benjamin Hrushovski (later Harshaw), and it will be discussed in the context of literary poetics in the following chapters.

Interpreting Pynchon’s Theory-Consciousness

What connects these attempts to bring genres and periods, and theories and thinkers, to bear on Pynchon is the cyclical logic of toggling back and forth between a theory and a reading that makes the theory relevant or necessary. It can be argued, then, that the capacity of Pynchon’s text to undermine theoretical approaches is not due to our understanding of Pynchon’s work depending on any theory as such. In a limited sense, then, the search for Pynchon’s theory is not to be resolved, even if we should finally be able to decide on the right concepts, philosophies, and theories to bring to bear on his work. We are probably better off this way, too, as the search for Pynchon’s theory has already shown its remarkable ability to reinstate itself in different theoretical domains and under different theoretical dominants. This, after all, may be why we are now able to find the politically radical Pynchon, an unlikely prospect in the relativist postmodern era (see e.g. Thomas 2007; Herman and Weisenburger 2013; Freer 2014). This, in brief, might be why half a century after John Barth wrote about his famous essay on “exhaustion,” Pynchon can show us he was renewable all along.

To wrap up this chapter, let us close the circle and return to the experience of reading Pynchon. The impetus for much of the scholarly work on Pynchon may be approached in the light of Schaub's description of his experience of reading *Gravity's Rainbow*:

My initial efforts at understanding [...] were characterized by a frustrating search for repetition, symmetry, and a consistency revealing Pynchon's true disposition and theme. The experience of reading Pynchon, however, is really an analogue of the conundrums of search his books describe. (Schaub 1981, ix.)

One recurring notion in these impromptu stories of first encounters with Pynchon's works is that the frustration of reading is "an analogue of the conundrums of search his books describe." Another theme in scholarly narratives is identifying repetition and symmetry as elements of the search for the point, the argument, the philosophy, or "disposition and theme." A question was posed at the beginning: if Pynchon's writing is so difficult and disruptive, why studies of his work are marked by such a startling degree of correspondences?

Taking a retrospective look into Pynchon studies, *Writing Pynchon* (1990) by McHoul and Wills discovers in Pynchon-scholarship "a whole secondary mode of reading, itself a secret postal system" – a canon of textual fragments and citations that is circulated in secondary literature (108). The same passages from Pynchon's books get picked out by a scholarly generation after another. To McHoul and Wills it seems almost as though the critics read the critics and circulate the texts among themselves (ibid.). Schaub's search for repetition and consistency, disposition and theme, has been rearticulated so consistently in Pynchon-scholarship it has itself become a theme. McHoul and Wills were among the first to distinguish some effects of the consolidation of readings predicted earlier in *Mindful Pleasures*. While they were not the only ones to observe this phenomenon, their willingness to elevate the issue into the center of their discussion still seems daring. In other respects, *Writing Pynchon* itself may be regarded as an exercise in "reading theory with Pynchon." In this case the chief theoretical ideas are the Derridean play and deferral of meaning and Barthes' notion of the writerly text. *Writing Pynchon* could easily be called post-structuralist, and therefore juxtaposed with Berressem's *Pynchon's Poetics*. The analytic practice in McHoul and Wills's book is so left-field, however, that this would do justice to neither of the two books.

According to the authors, *Writing Pynchon* takes quite seriously the task of approaching Pynchon in the open-ended field of poststructuralist textuality. By now we know some of the more obvious

critical moves this elicits. For example, when the writers think that the Derridean notion of writing is “too Pynchonian to ignore,” it by definition entails that they must not only “locate” the textual play but participate in it (ibid., 8–9). Their attempt can certainly be deemed a qualified success. As exceptional and exhilarating a work of literary criticism as *Writing Pynchon* is, some of its exhortations feel, well, “something like a hot air balloon”, if one may not only cite the book but also appropriate its apparatus of citation (McHoul & Wills 1990, 63). Yet it would be disingenuous to fault McHoul and Wills’s textual analyses. The unusual method of selection and presentation of “textual evidence” yields genuinely interesting results, and provides new insight, not only into Pynchon’s texts but also into practices of criticism.

The most radical feature of *Writing Pynchon* might be how the whole of its analytical practice is interwoven with reflections on practices of analysis which are rarely seen as worthy of consideration at all – such as citation.¹³ While the book is permeated with the deconstructive games with these practices it also displays a rare sensitivity to the potential spectrum of analytical choices, or “maneuvers,” of putting the text to use. That the book frequently opts for the least likely of choices seems rather symptomatic in context. The practice of McHoul and Wills’s book reacts to the challenges arising both in the academic deconstructive criticism of the time and in Pynchon studies of the 1980s, as the field was greatly informed by the current theory but yet to implement its challenges to methods and practices of criticism.

Indeed, there is a more general context for McHoul and Wills’s inquiry into what they call the “secret postal system” of Pynchon studies. It is nothing less than the practices of literary analysis and criticism at large. McHoul, who may have said it best without Wills, argues in a 1987 issue of *Pynchon Notes* that in literary study quotations are always used strategically, to strengthen the coherence, logic, or position the argument builds toward. To demonstrate the implications of this practice, McHoul decides to do something else for a change:

¹³ In chapter entitled “Telegrammatology” the authors take the first sentence of each chapter of *The Crying of Lot 49* and compile them into a paragraph, which turns out to be a surprisingly good plot summary of the novel. Citing the final sentences of each chapter, on the other hand, produces a markedly different text “poetic – metaphysical even.” (McHoul and Wills 1990, 109–111.) Elsewhere, the book juxtaposes textual fragments hundreds of pages apart and presents them in a way that typographically – through use of the virgule – coincides with the conventional way of citing verse poetry without line breaks.

I try to show how a critical reading of a work can be constructed from passages which have been selected not on the basis of their support for a particular preconstructed argument but on random, or at least thematically unmotivated grounds. [...] Another reason for selecting textual samples first (rather than selecting them later to support a pre-given reading) is that it avoids what is rapidly becoming, in the case of *Gravity's Rainbow* at least, a "canon" of Pynchon quotables. (McHoul 1987, 31.)

McHoul's approach questions what has been nearly unquestionable in literary studies, the status of textual evidence and the methods for finding it. Of course, McHoul's anti-method is actually a specific kind of method for fulfilling a specific kind of theoretical task. The task is clearly more "metahermeneutic"¹⁴ than interpretive and it serves as an illustration of the conditions and conventions of a general but undertheorized critical procedure. Yet, this critique could perhaps be taken even further. One could justifiably wonder whether the preselectivity or preconstructedness that McHoul's procedural restriction on text selection is supposed to help resist might not yet work on other levels of analysis. This apprehension, in fact, is supported by the relatively conventional deconstructive analysis ensuing from the anarchic attempt to circumvent method on one level.¹⁵ This does little to diminish the force of the underlying challenge to literary analysis, utterly convincing in its intuitive and emancipated act of self-reflection.

Yet one might want to ask what might account for the ease with which the most iconoclast among us revert to conventional procedures of analysis. If one can successfully dodge out of dogmatism in one place, why it is so easy to behave dogmatically in another? One answer is given by Paul H. Fry in his *Reach of Criticism*. Fry proceeds from a view that we cannot help but be preselective, and methodically so. Fry writes:

That there is method to our inadvertencies is such an old and clearly established paradox in nearly all fields of cognitive inquiry that it scarcely bears repeating. Preselectivity, whether it be unconscious, ideological, or simply, in general, what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "prejudiced," is of course methodical – so intensely so, indeed, that it makes the firmest efforts at formal thinking seem absentminded by comparison. (1983, 1.)

This stance implies that one cannot simply observe texts for their salient features without applying a theory of what is salient in texts. The practice of citing key passages as evidence permeates the whole business of analyzing literature and producing interpretive, descriptive, or explicatory writings on literary works. Passages chosen to support an interpretation are made persuasive by the global

¹⁴ See Korthals Altes 2014. The concept is defined and discussed below in chapter 1.2.

¹⁵ The reading procedures typical to deconstruction and deconstructive literary criticism have been discussed by Culler (1982) and Gasché (1986), among others; for an overview of this discussion see e.g. Keskinen (1998, 50–56).

interpretation already provisionally implied. The whole grasped through the select passages it is a kind of whole they can uphold. This is characteristic of any number of interpretive approaches, but as will be argued below, as much can be said of the systematic approaches to poetics.

Yet the position according to which preselectivity permeates all thinking also allows one to move to another level of analysis, and it is the level which a sampling of Pynchon criticism brings to relief. Quotations are doubtlessly used to strengthen a preselected logic, coherence, or position. Yet if one quotation may serve evidence for several positions, and if quotations selected at random can support any number preselected positions, this suggests that the interplay of textual evidence or key passages and provisional interpretive frames is more complex than might first appear.

It is suggested above that the distinctive feature of analyzing Pynchon's novels might be the tendency of the processes of self-conscious observation becoming foregrounded. This may explain why the idea of Pynchon's theory-consciousness arises in so many of the various theories and contexts informing Pynchon studies. If the novels come across as breaking from modernism, it is because the shortcomings of a reading conditioned by modernist conventions are still understandable to a modernistically conditioned mind, but only just. Likewise, the failure of the works to fit into epistemologies implied by cultural constructs such as periods and genres can be conceptualized within these epistemologies – but not without the very epistemologies being thrown into relief. This logic seems inescapable in Pynchon studies. Undercutting a self-imposed system, dialectically raising an opposing system; this is a recurring discovery in Pynchon studies. It has gone by many an ingenious moniker in the studies of the yesteryear: muffin-crater interplay (Hume 1987, 185), faux-didacticism (Hägg 2005), autodestruction (Berressem 1993), and as already mentioned above, de-conditioning of the reader (McHale 1979).

Chapter 2 discusses some of the ways in which this effect, while remaining distinctly Pynchonian, is of wider significance to reading and interpretation and can be approached through certain much-theorized concepts of literary theory. First, however, the cyclical hermeneutical process must be contextualized within the study of poetics. The function of the next section of the introduction is, first and foremost, to frame theory of poetics in such a way that is pertinent to the protocols of reading I have above treated as ways of approaching Pynchon's poetics.

1.2. Problems of Poetics and Poetics of Problems

It is now necessary to leave Pynchon aside for a while in order to elaborate on the “Poetics” in “Pynchon and Poetics,” and to show how the field of study called poetics is understood in this thesis. When looking at the history of literary poetics, it is plain to see that many groundbreaking studies have been devoted to a single author’s poetics and its “problems”, and fashioned as a search for the principles behind the author’s artistic structuring of the literary work, to paraphrase Bakhtin (1984, 11). As suggested above, it is precisely in this sense that the search for “Pynchon’s theory” may be seen as a quest for a poetics.

Even when study of poetics entails primarily a descriptive scrutiny of one author’s work, the aim tends to be more general, and of course producing broader statements about literature within a study largely based on one author is a time-tested endeavor. Although poetics engages with the general through the particular, there is variation in how observing specific authors or works weighs against observing larger systems like canons, genres, or cultural literacy. Particularly in scientific poetics, studying single authors or works is devalued, and in the 20th century context of various formalisms and structuralism poetics becomes associated with the outspoken goal of formulating a “science of literature.” Histories of literary theory tend to draw a trajectory through Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* (1st ed. 1916) to its influence on Russian formalists, and via Roman Jakobson to Prague linguistic circle and beyond to the New Critics and French Structuralists (Eagleton 1996, 83–96; Doležel 1990, part II). There are also numerous pre-20th Century precedents to scientific criticism (see Doležel 1990, part I). From one century to the next, the history of “occidental poetics” is defined by a pronounced engagement with structure, systematicity, and scientific thought of the time (cf. Doležel 1990, 1–8). However, the 20th Century schools can be set apart from their predecessors by their affiliation with linguistics (cf. Seamon 1989, 294). The development of linguistics-based systematic poetics culminates in structuralism and structuralist poetics.

It is reasonable to claim that today structuralist literary theory or poetics mainly survives as a collection of writings by scholars who were not merely its practitioners but also its most astute critics. One thinks, in the Anglo-American context, of Culler (1975b, 1981, 1982), and Jameson (1972, 1981), but also Roland Barthes, whom the English-speaking academia knew well through both his

structuralist and post-structuralist writings.¹⁶ Although Structuralism did initially foster ambitions of becoming a pilot science for humanities, in literary studies scare-quoting “science” was common enough even amid the early optimism (Hrushovski 1976; cf. Olsen 1976; Lokke 1987, 546; McHale 1994, 57). In subsequent accounts of the state of literary studies, indictment of the scientific pretensions of poetics varies from severe (e.g. Jackson 1989) to lenient but firm (Fludernik 2010). In the following sections I will discuss some of the challenges that arose from within the scientific endeavor of poetics, and show how they intersect with the issues that have been linked to the different ways of “interfacing” theory and text.

Theoretical and Descriptive Poetics

The heyday of structuralist poetics was marked by interesting ambiguities. As Seamon (1989) shows, the use of Saussurean linguistics as a model posed various problems that derive from the model itself.¹⁷ In the *first phase* of scientific poetics the problem concerned the proper object of study and defining the “system” to be studied. The object of study of poetics was not to be the work, which was traditionally the object of “criticism, understanding, and interpretation,” but neither could it be the whole of language. Roman Jakobson famously defined the mid-level object of study situated between language and a particular work as the “literariness” of literature. But if the system of literariness was the proper object, then what was one to do with this or that particular work? “There is no ‘science’ particular to this rose or that squirrel,” quips Seamon, mimicking the scientist talk of the time. (298; cf. Todorov 1977.) Jameson, too, argues that the focus on (super)structures instead of individual works sets structuralists apart from, for instance, the Russian Formalists (1972, 101).

One answer to the question of what to do with individual works can be found in Benjamin Hrushovski’s (later Harshaw) introductory essay to *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, which distinguishes between theoretical and descriptive poetics. Under descriptive poetics Hrushovski groups the studies which aim to describe properties of literary corpora,

¹⁶ In the American context this double exposure to structuralism and its post-structuralist critique both at once has a significant precedent in the 1966 seminar “Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man” at the Johns Hopkins University, which featured such speakers as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, a young Tzvetan Todorov, and Jacques Derrida, among others, and which to many hearers served as an introduction to structuralism while also unveiling its most radical critique to date (Macksey and Donato 1972).

¹⁷ Jackson (1991) and Tallis (1988), among others, argue that structuralist literary theory is based on a radical misreading of Saussurean linguistics.

genres, or canons in the metalanguage of theoretical poetics. The descriptive practice treats the literary materials as test cases for the poetic theory. He writes:

Theoretical Poetics (or “Theory of Literature”) involves a theoretical activity, the construction of a system built according to the logic of a question or a set of questions. On the other hand, descriptive Poetics is a scholarly activity involving an exhaustive study of the literary aspects of certain specific works of literature (Hrushovski 1976, xv).

In this configuration, the thing to do with particular works is to describe them in sufficient detail at a relevant level (cf. Barthes 1975a, 253). According to Hrushovski, descriptive is to theoretical poetics as “fieldwork” is to theory in other human sciences. Thorough scrutiny of literary works provides material, data and experimental evidence for theory to build on. (Hrushovski 1976, xvi). The twofold task assigned to poetics echoes the synthesis of rationalism and empiricism in Kant’s metaphysics: fieldwork accumulates the perceptual data without which concepts remain empty, yet fieldwork produces nothing, remains blind, unless it relies on conceptual structures. The bipartite scientific practice also aligns with the Popperian ideal of scientific progress through the interplay of falsifiable theory and repeatable experiments.

For Hrushovski individual readings required in description of texts are of secondary value. Interpretation is seen as a subfield of the science of literature still in its “pre-scientific” stage. Hrushovski proposes that it can be developed beyond that only by “the vigorous development of a systematic poetics” (ibid., xxiv). Hrushovski prioritizes the systematizing goal of descriptive poetics, and studying specific works is given largely an instrumental function. Descriptive study validates the theory or turns back on it, revealing its shortcomings, while interpretations of the texts are inconsequential as concerns the goals of poetics.

Yet as far as poetics was concerned, at some point two roads had already diverged. Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980, orig. *Figures III*, 1972) was already reshaping poetics with its refusal to choose between theoretical and descriptive approaches. To Genette, it was not enough to discover the typologies of narrative techniques in Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, nor was it enough to have Proust's fathomless, time-shaped novel simply provide the textual illustrations required by the emergent poetics. (22–23.) It is fair to say, as Samuli Hägg does in apprising the effect of Genette’s work on narrative poetics, that Genette's subsequent readers have made the choice for him. Narratology adopted Genette’s work on narrative discourse as a theory of narrative poetics. (Hägg

2005, 8.) It is tempting to hypothesize that this might have to do with how certain key passages in Genette's *Narrative Discourse/Revisited* have taken on a life of their own. The fact that these passages include the typologies of narrative situations and focalizations, during which Genette's discussion extends beyond Proust, towards a larger canon of texts (mostly realist and modernist fiction written in French and English), seems rather concordant with this hypothesis. Be it as it may, it is clear that Genette's work is often understood as a prefabricated framework which is, in principle, applicable to analysis of any and all narratives. The debate goes on as to what is the most appropriate context for Genette's work. John Pier, among others, suggests that Genette never set out to write a treatise in theoretical poetics. Instead his treatment of narrative discourse is "a study of the specificity of narrative within the scope of an open poetics." Genette's method "navigates between" the particular and the general. (Pier 2010, 10.)

From the viewpoint of analytical practice, Genette's decision is a productive one. It allows the analyst to work closely with the text while constantly reflecting on the conceptual network with which one analyzes it. Apparently, but perhaps only apparently, *Narrative Discourse* therefore performs the double task spelled out in Hrushovski's take on poetics: it analyzes empirical data to test the concepts of theoretical poetics. However, the joint effort of theoretical-descriptive poetics differs from Genette's approach in one important respect, this being the diminished role given to a particular work in Hrushovski's poetics. Tzvetan Todorov is also making it quite explicit that the individual work "remains alien" to the goals of structuralism (1977, 31). Tellingly, the focus on Proust persuades Todorov against considering Genette's *Narrative Discourse* a work of structuralism in the strictest sense (1977; cf. Hägg 2005, 4–5; Pier 2010, 16–17). Seamon argues, however, that the theoretical priority of a system over a work always posed problems to the practice of poetics. In what Seamon sees as the *second phase* of scientific poetics, the work makes a return, and with it, the question of interpretation.

Poetics or Hermeneutics?

The theoretical-descriptive model, as Hrushovski devised it, did not revolutionize structuralist poetics. This may be, as Paul de Man has suggested, due to a certain "resistance to theory" in the academy. The aims and scope of poetics have on one hand been exaggerated and on the other diminished, sometimes based on genuine misconception, at other times on strategic grounds. (1986,

4–5; 11–12.) Culler suggests that instead literary criticism has managed to give itself an immense scope by insisting that a work may *express* any number of things, almost anything, in fact, and that it is the critic's task to interpret and make explicit what it expresses within the context provided by one or another "approach" (2010, 906). Culler links this argument with a long tradition of what philosopher Jacques Rancière names *expressive poetics* in his *Mute Speech* [orig. *Parole muette*, 1998]. Expressive poetics (or poetics of expressivity) makes possible an understanding of literature (and, more generally, art) as mute in the sense that it is seen as a specific mode of language: "a language that speaks less by what it says than by what it does not say, by the power that is expressed through it" (2011, 59). The regime of expressivity is contrasted with representative poetics: representative poetics determines the genre and generic perfection of literature; and expressive poetics determines them as direct expressions of the "poetic power" (Ibid., 67). According to Rancière, the view of literature in the regime of expressive poetics gives rise both to the notion of self-sufficiency of literary art and the view of literature as an expression of society:

This fundamental division puts on the same side the adepts of pure literature and the historians and sociologists who see it as the expression of a society, those who dream of a spirit world along with the geologists of social mentalities. It subsumes the practice of pure artists and social critics under a single spiritual principle whose ineradicable vitality consists in its remarkable capacity to transform itself to a principle of positive science and materialist philosophy. (Ibid.)

Rancière argues that both the idea of literature and the idea of culture are offspring of the same revolution. History and sociology are henceforth "sciences that give the silence of things its eloquence as a true testimony about a world" (ibid., 68). Seamon, writing well before the publication of Rancière's book, recognizes the idea that modern systematic poetics pursues mute things. He traces the contours of this pursuit throughout the 20th Century history of literary theory:

Plato thought that the poet spoke, but madly or wrongly, while modern poetics assumes that poetry is, in [the poet Archibald] MacLeish's famous phrase, "palpable and mute." [...] [T]he establishment of a scientific criticism entails the notion that the object of study is "a verbal imitation of a human productive power which in itself does not speak" (Frye, *Anatomy* 12). Psychoanalytic theory also treats the work as dumb (for dreams and symptoms do not speak), as does Fredric Jameson when he calls narratives "magical" ([*The Political Unconscious*] 103). Umberto Eco makes the same claim when he refers to the "aesthetic text" as a "magic spell" that semiotics can undo ([*A Theory of Semiotics*] 270, 271). (Seamon 1989, 296.)

This implies that what the text appears to say is never what the work means, hence the critic's job of articulation or "explication," as the New Critics put it. Not only may one's experience of literature be

a non-rational one, as Wellek and Warren suggest by insisting that the student “must translate his experience of literature into intellectual terms, assimilate it to a coherent scheme,” but the same could be true of writing and interpreting literature (Wellek and Warren 1973, 15; Seamon 1989, 296). According to Rancière, all “expressive poetics” proceeds according to two principles: “first, to find beneath words the vital force that is the cause of their utterance;¹⁸ second, to find in the visible the sign of the invisible” (2011, 67).

Culler argues on the basis of Rancière’s theory that under the expressive regime of poetics the mute works may be interpreted endlessly, and this is evident in the myriad approaches seeking to make explicit the ideas, ideologies, politics, and artistic visions that the works implicitly express (cf. Culler 2010). This ties in with Culler’s criticism of the view that the institutional and professional role of the scholar is to produce interpretations. In an earlier essay Culler states that interpretation still seems to be the only legitimate activity for a professor of literature (Culler 1981, 17). He links the ongoing preference of interpretation or hermeneutics over poetics with the enduring influence of New Criticism on literary studies. The influence of New Criticism lives on in “that widespread and unquestioning acceptance of the notion that the critic’s job is to interpret literary works” (ibid., 5).

The Cullerian denigration of interpretation, then, finds its proper target in the procedures of the profession, and not in the processes of interpretive reading as such. In fact, hermeneutics, as discussed by Wolfgang Iser, another prolific theorist of reading, is often seen in terms not too dissimilar to those found in Culler’s poetics. Scholars like Seamon, working in the wake of scientific poetics, argue that interpretation quickly finds a place *within* poetics and that discussing the role of interpretation in poetics is another aspect marking the *second phase* of scientific poetics (1989, 298). However, Iser’s description of hermeneutics suggests that the very distinction might be misconceived. In Iser the hermeneutics is linked to the tradition spanning from the 18th Century thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher to the hermeneutic phenomenology of Paul Ricœur. According to Iser, this tradition has by default conceived of hermeneutics as a self-reflexive practice of coming to understand the conditions of understanding. Interpretation is seen as “the rigorous practice of discovering and elucidating the ramified conditionality of how understanding comes about.” In this view, hermeneutics is seen as a specific historical and generic variety of interpretation whose arrival marks “the stage at which interpretation becomes self-reflective.” (Iser 2000, 41–42.) Thus defined, hermeneutics emphasizes self-reflexivity and interest towards its own conditions. As we will see

¹⁸ Orig. “la puissance de vie qui les fait énoncer.” Culler translates this as “the animating force that drives their articulation” (2010, 906).

shortly, similar self-reflective turn also characterizes Culler's version of structuralist poetics, and prefigures what Seamon calls the *third phase* of scientific poetics.

Poetics versus hermeneutics is a common scholarly theme throughout the 1970's and the 1980's, but it is possible to find concurrent attempts to evade strict distinctions between, on one hand, theoretical and descriptive poetics and, on the other, poetics and interpretation. Stein Haugom Olsen, in his 1976 essay "What Is Poetics?" addresses these distinctions by highlighting the necessarily prescriptive nature of poetics. According to Manfred Bierwisch, whom Olsen singles out as the representative of the earlier generation of linguistically oriented scholars, the objective of poetics is to identify "the particular regularities that occur in literary texts and that determine the specific effects of poetry" (Bierwisch, 1970). According to Bierwisch, doing descriptive poetics on a literary work would require being able to detect the effects and judgments that come about through the "maximally adequate" understanding of the text. Yet for Bierwisch, description of the measures one has to take to arrive at a "maximally adequate understanding" of a poetic text exceeds the scope of poetics, as does the question of what constitutes such an understanding. (See Olsen 1976, 350–351.)

Olsen responds to this view by pointing out that in this configuration poetics will always have to predetermine the relevance of certain features or properties of literary texts. Seeing literary work as structured requires a prescribed set of relevant structural categories. Olsen claims that no account of the poeticity or literariness of the work can rest on given structural features but requires an explication of "a method (interpretation) [sic] of assigning artistic relevance to parts of a work identified through this method" (Olsen 1976, 349). This characterization of how analysis in poetics works can be seen in relation to the readings discussed in the previous section. In articulations of "Pynchon's theory" or "theory read with Pynchon" the circular logic seemed inescapable, and it was characterized as hermeneutic. Indeed, Olsen's critique of scientific poetics doubles as an argument for treating analysis in poetics as interpretative practice.

Olsen argues that any interpretative question, even when answerable in the form of a structural description or description of "meaning," is in the end made significant only because it asks how an element serves the intended artistic purpose (Olsen 1976, 350–351). Olsen argues that the intertwined practice of structural description and interpretation should provide grounds for figuring out the work's intention. Here, by contrast, the overlapping interests and questions in poetics and hermeneutics suggest that Olsen's view can be seen as a description of the hermeneutic process itself. Textual features chosen in support of an interpretation are made perceptible and significant in the context of

the global interpretive frame. The whole grasped through the parts it is a kind of holistic interpretation these parts can support.

Furthermore, it seems that even in a stoutly anti-intentionalist context, where laying foundations on concepts like the author or the work is expressly renounced, we can locate the cyclical practice of identifying features in interaction with a dynamic interpretation of the whole text. This can be, for instance, a theory supposedly informing the text, or the “disposition and theme” of the text, to repeat once again Schaub’s telling phrase from his early treatment of Pynchon. Such antifoundationalist theoretical context can be found, for example, in Berressem’s or McHoul and Wills’s poststructuralist analyses of Pynchon’s text. Olsen’s position could be seen to plausibly describe many of the readings in search of Pynchon’s theory, as well as those readings presupposing the relevance of certain theoretical ideas. Therefore, instead of a rigid and mechanic endeavor, “doing poetics” comes across as a creative activity with much closer affinities to interpretation than is often admitted in the context of literary theory.

“The Text Itself” or Reading?

The view emphasizing the overlaps of poetics and hermeneutics also allows us to consider a reader-oriented position on poetics. The notion of poetics as a theory of reading is a major, if sometimes neglected feature in Jonathan Culler’s work, beginning with his *Structuralist Poetics*. The key to this can be found in the much-quoted statement relating poetics to literature as linguistics is to language, a statement, one might argue, often misunderstood.¹⁹ The analogy of poetics being to literature as grammar is to language is not Culler’s invention, but it is his notion of grammar that sets him apart from earlier structuralists adopting the analogy. Indeed, Culler emphasizes that works like Todorov’s *Grammaire du Décaméron* use grammatical metaphors – and is quick to point out that there are problems (ibid., 252). Culler’s poetics, in contrast, finds a new model of grammar in Chomskyan generative grammar. If, according to Culler, poetics is a “grammar,” it is so by virtue of being a theory applied unconsciously while reading, as result of a culturally determined *literary competence*. To Culler, the work has a structure and meaning because it is read in a particular way, because what we

¹⁹ On (mis)attributing ideas to Culler, see the exchange between John Searle and Louis H. Mackey in *The New York Review of Books* (Searle 1983; Mackey and Searle 1984).

may perceive as structure and meaning is concretized through a “theory” applied in the act of reading (113).

An offhand reading of this stance might suggest that the model of linguistic grammar is almost a contingent element in Culler’s theory – it simply happens to be a fitting analogy to whatever it is we do while reading texts – but this is not really the case. Rather, what Culler does to poetics in *Structuralist Poetics* is best understood by taking the linguistic analogy as po-faced as possible. The Chomskyan *Transformational-Generative* grammar superseded former, mostly descriptive approaches that used to dominate linguistics (see Searle 1972). What Chomsky represents in study of grammar, is in a sense a “turn toward the conditions of language-use” – and Culler’s reconceptualization of structuralism, and later semiotics, as a *theory of reading*, is in many respects a faithful analogy of the Chomskyan move in study of grammar. The Chomskyan definition of the subject matter of generative linguistics as “speaker’s knowledge of how to produce and understand sentences, his linguistic competence” finds an accurate analogy in Culler’s recalibration of poetics as a study of the conditions under which it is possible for literary works to have a meaning or a range of meanings.

The generative model shows in Culler’s practice, too. He cites Barthes’ notion that “structuralism has emerged from linguistics and in literature it finds an object that has itself emerged from language” (Culler 1975, 112). His next step, however, is not to start developing tools which are analogous to the ones used in linguistics. This would be a kind of activity that the first generation of structuralists engaged in. Culler explicitly takes a stand against the more and more “elaborate and complex analytic procedures” created in structuralist poetics. In the spirit of the generative model the proper goal is to “define the conditions of meaning” and “to specify how we go about making sense of texts, what are the interpretive operations on which literature itself, as an institution, is based” (ibid., xiv–xv). This is how structuralist poetics or semiotics becomes, according to Culler, a theory of reading (ibid., 258–259; 1981, 47–80). Culler may be the only one to have put it this explicitly, but the idea that (structuralist) poetics would develop into a theory of reading was more widespread during the period (see Seamon 1989, 301–302).

Steven Mailloux names Culler, alongside with scholars like Stanley Fish, as “social critics,” who study the underlying systems of textual meaning production (Mailloux 1982, 21–22). Jacqueline Henkel’s (1990) thorough discussion shows that these writers, with many others, including Mailloux himself, are united by their interest in linguistic or speech-act models. In particular, they are interested

in those linguistic models which posit that works and interpretations are not produced and realized through private codes “but according to a set of rulelike principles held within some community and assimilated by the individual.” (449.) It is easy to see now that it is the “generative” impulse in Culler’s poetics, or in other words the social or institutional emphasis, that makes him so reticent when it comes to working with texts with a pragmatic toolkit. For Culler, readings or interpretations are data rather than the goal of study of poetics (1981, 47–79; 1982, 64 – 83; 1988b). Culler therefore rarely participates in the structuralist *bricolage*²⁰, but when he does, his approach stands apart from the huffing entrepreneurship synonymous with American spin-offs of structuralism – especially narratology. Culler’s analyses, even when they might count as “ingenious interpretations”²¹ do not present us with new instruments to poke our discourses with. Of all the American advocates of structuralism Culler may have always been the least “practical.”

Seamon, however, finds a context for the sensibility Culler embodies. It is found in what he considers the *third phase* of scientific poetics. In this phase the object of study changes yet again: “from the structural unity that underlies literature or literary works to the deep structure of interpretation itself” (Seamon 1989, 301). The model based on the interplay of conventions and competences, which Culler introduces in *Structuralist Poetics* always shows the potential to straddle the gap between being a theory of reading *literature* and a theory of reading *readings of literature*. Gradually the emphasis shifts towards the latter: in his early writings he maintains that the meaning of the work, which New Criticism and hermeneutics engaged with, is less interesting than the conditions of works being able to have meaning in the first place. Later, however, this transforms into a claim that individual interpretations are less interesting than the competences and conventions of reading which make *interpretations* possible (Culler 1981; 1988a; 1988b).

The problematic consequences of Culler’s reframing of poetics as a theory of reading are, however, apparent in the light of the discussion above. Culler’s treatment of interpretations as data renders them, in effect, *paroles muettes*: they become texts that, like literary texts, cannot say what they mean and it remains the critics (unchanging) job to explicate their meaning. The consequence, as predictable as it is disappointing, is that Culler ends up speaking by himself. This can be seen both on theoretical and practical level. Interpretations used as data can be made to express great many things, and therefore they are available as evidence for Culler’s readings. Arguably these readings

²⁰ On *bricolage* and literary criticism see Genette (1982, 3–4; cf. Derrida 1978, 360).

²¹ Culler prefers that critics take existing ingenious interpretations as data instead of producing more of them (see Culler 1988b). Yet arguably he has produced a few of these himself (see Culler 1981, 47–79, 169–187).

come across as blends of description and interpretation, as Olsen's critique of poetics suggests they should. The practical consequence is that most authors of interpretations show no more interest in discussing them with Culler than literary authors typically delight in discussing the interpretations of their works with scholars.

The study at hand, however, wishes to revisit the idea of poetics as a theory of reading. The final, and according to Seamon unfinished, phase of poetics involves asking questions about the rules by which interpretations are produced. According to Culler himself, however, "approaches attempting to reconstruct codes, generic or otherwise, that make possible literary works and their effects" have fallen out of favor, because the first question posed to any new critical idea is whether it helps us produce better interpretations (2010, 906–907). However, a follow-up question seems obvious: can asking questions about the procedures by which interpretations are produced help us produce better interpretations? The final section of this chapter outlines a methodological argument for a practice of reading novels and their readings, which in the latter stages of this study will be applied to Pynchon and his critics and interpreters.

Descriptive Poetics Reconsidered

Brian McHale's conception of descriptive poetics differs from Hrushovski's on several significant points. While the earlier notion of poetics gave systematic description of corpora, genres, or more hesitantly, individual works, a reciprocal role in relation to the theory of poetics, McHale's revision casts descriptive poetics as a "mid-level" theory. This intermediate status means that descriptive poetics no longer functions as an experimental level in a scientific model based on theorizing and testing. While descriptive poetics no longer aims at verifying or falsifying theoretical hypotheses, it still strives to operate on a level of generalization beyond a specific text. McHale writes that descriptive poetics should be sufficiently general for its findings to work as "evidence for *more than one* interpretation of a specific text," but also "not *so* general as to prevent its findings being subsumed under *more than one* high-level theory (of literature, culture, semiosis, etc.)" (McHale 1994, 59, emphases original).

To understand the implication of this reorientation in descriptive poetics, it may be useful to consider an analogous shift in philosophy of science. The earlier Popperian view of science posited that theoretical conjectures must be falsifiable by experimental observations. This is clearly the model on

which the old theoretical-descriptive model of poetics builds. Subsequently, however, Thomas Kuhn took a step towards a less mechanical view by arguing that expectations inherent in theoretical “world views” pre-structure observations. Observation is “theory-laden” (see Kaiser 2016, 78).²² Obviously, there can be no description without observation, and in fact this is what McHale’s descriptive level entails: stopping to observe *ranges* of possible meanings and the level of phenomena making them possible (McHale 1994, 63). In this light descriptive poetics is a theoretical endeavor. It entails a theory about this mid-level, which makes certain phenomena observable: literary forms functioning within their semi-autonomous traditions, literary conventions which explain what it is to read something *as literature* instead of a reflection of phenomena made observable by some other theory.

The possibility of viewing descriptive poetics in this light in no way quarrels with McHale’s original argument for the benefits of this approach. McHale argues that while descriptive poetics is not identical to either interpretation or theory it can be informed and have implications for both interpretation and theory. It is this in-between status that makes defining descriptive poetics slightly awkward, but it is also what recommends it. (McHale 1994, 59.)

As suggested above, it is quite reasonable to perceive descriptive poetics as broadly theoretical. It is also possible to find a context in which descriptive poetics can be seen as an interpretive practice. This context is “metahermeneutics” as defined by Liesbeth Korthals Altes (2014). Speaking from within the field of narrative studies, she posits that metahermeneutics can study presuppositions, procedures, aims, and claims implicit in interpretive processes and conditions. This does not preclude study of particular works, as “metahermeneutic validation proceeds via reasoning and does not itself include empirical testing.” However, according to Korthals Altes, it is possible to see the metahermeneutic orientation itself also as broadly hermeneutic, and it is distinguished from interpretations of individual works “by kind rather than type.” (96.) Not unlike McHale’s descriptive poetics, its distinctive feature is its level of generality and distance, and while it can certainly concentrate on particular texts, the focus lies on “reconstructing interpretive processes and conventions.” The focus on poetics as a metahermeneutic endeavor allows us to be concerned both with meanings of texts themselves and conditions of reading them as specific kinds of texts.

²² The centrality of this notion to the Kuhnian view of science as well as the difference between Popper and Kuhn has recently been discussed on the occasion of the semicentennial anniversary of Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (See Richards and Daston in *Kuhn’s Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty* or Ian Hacking’s new introduction to Kuhn’s book (Richards and Daston 2016; Hacking 2012.) On ideas of falsifiability in literary poetics see Hrushovski (1976). On pre-selectivity of observation in literary analysis see Olsen (1976) and Fry (1983).

According to Korthals Altes, metahermeneutic approach “expands on what Genette and Culler termed *poetics*” (ibid.). The continuity with the tradition of poetics suggests that also descriptive poetics can be seen as metahermeneutic. Indeed, like metahermeneutics, descriptive poetics dwells on conventions by which people read literature and the conditions under which texts are read as literature (cf. ibid.; McHale 1994, 65).

While descriptive poetics is contiguous with theory-formation as well as with interpretation, the mid-level focus of descriptive poetics also has implications for our critical practice. These implications are significant enough to have warranted a view that descriptive poetics can be used as a method. McHale never claims that descriptive poetics is a straightforwardly applicable method but rather that it is a way for analysis to negotiate the scope, aims, and focus of study in the space between theory and interpretation. However, it is quite possible to methodize McHale’s version of descriptive poetics, and this is helped by parts of the essay reading like a procedural guide. McHale writes:

[T]he introduction of the descriptive level compels our discourse to *hesitate*, to linger over or circulate among a range of possibilities. Instead of rushing to specify a text’s meaning in the light of a theory, the descriptive project encourages us to map out a range of possible meanings, or to seek to grasp the conditions of meaning in specific texts. (1994, 65, emphasis.)

This passage seems to lay out quite a few guidelines for how to proceed in analysis. Admittedly, hesitation, lingering, circulating, and not rushing constitute at best an impressionistic picture of what one is actually supposed to do in analysis. The methodization of descriptive poetics is, as McHale argues its definition should be, negative (cf. McHale 1994, 59). The true methodological potential of descriptive poetics is revealed by the available interpretive range, by the reflective vantage on conventions, made possible by *suspending* the point-to-point blanketing of text by theory (see ibid., 62).

If McHale’s descriptive poetics can be seen as a method, it might not be a method of “doing poetics” as much as it is a method of talking about what transpires in a specific kind of reading or interpretation. In accordance to his own reformulation of poetics as a theory of reading, Culler has made an analogous adjustment in his approach to interpretation, which he sees as producing “stories of reading.” Culler writes:

Focus on the conventions and operations of reading leads critics to treat literary works as a succession of actions on the understanding of the reader. An interpretation of a work thus comes to be an account of what happens to the reader: how various conventions and expectations are brought in to play, where particular connections and hypotheses are posited, how expectations are defeated or confirmed. To speak of the meaning of the work is to tell a story of reading. (1982, 35.)

If we entertain the idea that readings may be seen as articulations of what “the reader” does while reading, then descriptive accounts can also be seen as stories: stories of what the reader perceives and pays attention to. If analysis results in what Culler calls a story of reading, evidence suggests that McHale’s essay on descriptive poetics builds its argument around a comparison of such stories. McHale argues that the happiest story is that of a reader who might reach any number of interpretations, but on observing a range of possible meanings, stops to reflect on the procedures of reading and on the conventions enabling or restricting them. As Culler points out, the early reader-response theories were partly spurred by the discovery that there is no authoritative basis for stating what is in the text and what is not. It turns out, however, that it is no easier to say what is the reader’s experience. The reading, or the reader’s experience, much like “the text” in structuralist thought, is something that needs to be recovered, but can only be recovered by producing it. (Culler 1982, 81–82.)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the cyclical movement between theory-formation and detection of textual features is integral to poetics. Its inadvertent methodicity is amply demonstrated by Pynchon studies, but undoubtedly it could be demonstrated by any corpus held together by a common object of study. According to Robert Scholes (1989), it is likely that our “protocols of reading” allow a degree of methodization. Yet he adds that reading may have “too much of in it of art and craft to yield entirely – or even largely – to methodization.” Studying reading requires “taking method as far as it will go and then finding some way to go a bit further.” (2.) If this is so, then descriptive poetics could provide an opening.

The descriptive practice can contribute both to theory and interpretation, while also avoiding the “flattening” or “blanketing” effect inherent in interpretations also aspiring to be theories in themselves (cf. McHale 1994, 59). Granted, the theoretical insights may be shaped by preconceptions of relevance, and interpretation may be restricted by the features becoming observable through application of a theory, but rather than concerning descriptive poetics in particular, this is a potential criticism towards all approaches interpreting literature in a theoretical context. As a practice of theory-laden observation and metahermeneutic reflection, descriptive poetics, with its interest in mid-level

description, however theory-laden and interpretation-colored, allows for a maximal mobility for reflection of reading procedures.

The methodological choices made in this work stem from the idea that descriptive poetics, with McHale's revisions and the ones suggested here, might actually have somewhat broader scope than has been previously acknowledged. It furthermore shares with many other approaches the mobility and circularity of procedures – the movement between theory and text, the particular and the general, concepts and contexts, parts and wholes. This argument is further elaborated in chapter 2.

1.3. Poetics and the Mind

While reader-oriented poetics and recent reformulations of descriptive poetics can be seen as attempts to navigate between the dichotomies endemic to study of poetics, there may still be areas of inquiry where the earlier aims of scientific poetics can be found in their strong forms. The present chapter will show that quite a few of the questions formerly discussed in different phases of systematic or “scientific” study of poetics are central to many of the ongoing projects in cognitive literary studies. This inquiry has relevance to Pynchon studies, too. As mentioned above, Pynchon studies were quick to adopt technological advances of the computer age. Perhaps because of the colossal volume of the corpus, as well as its apparent difficulty and density, annotation databases, digitized versions of the novels, and searchable digital bibliographies were brought to Pynchon studies early on. It is hardly surprising, then, that the recent technological and methodological innovations in digital humanities and empirical reading studies are being eagerly implemented in Pynchon scholarship. The problems this chapter addresses, with regard to studies trying on these technologies and methods, is only indirectly connected to the new Pynchon studies themselves. Rather, the focus lies, on one hand, on the underlying conception of the literary text and textual evidence, and on the other, on the notion of how text interacts with the readers' minds. The digital humanities may be technologically forward-looking, but they sometimes express views of humanistic research, and literary studies in particular, that seem exceedingly conservative.

Therefore, some of the issues here clearly mirror the discussions in the previous chapter. The first section below considers the ways in which cognitive literary studies have presented themselves in scientific terms, while the second one delves into discussions about the role of interpretation in

cognitive literary studies. The third section asks how cognitive literary studies address the question of literariness. There are different views within cognitive literary studies as to how the qualities and effects that are specific to literature or to the experience of literariness come about. Here it is inquired how different cognitive approaches navigate the space between textual features and cognitive processes in locating and defining literariness. It will also be argued that this question is no less pertinent in earlier structuralist and formalist poetics, and that these earlier schools of literary study were, in some ways, quite successfully coming to terms with this ambivalence. The question of whether the forms pursued by poetics reside in the text itself or the reading human mind, are not only asked throughout the three phases of poetics distinguished by Seamon, but actually precede the systematic poetics of the 20th Century.

The Cognitive Science of Literature

Perhaps more than any other branch of literary study since the 1970's programs of systematic poetics, early cognitive literary studies emphasize that scientificity should be the justification for the endeavor of studying literature. Mark Turner's *Reading Minds: The Study of English in the Age of Cognitive Science* (1991) certainly wears its faith in a scientific paradigm shift on its sleeve and celebrates the age of discovery of the human mind (16). According to Turner, the cognitive approach "provides a ground that is common to the whole profession" (22). Richardson and Steen (2002) state that the cognitive approach is set apart from the "[c]ontemporary theories of literature and culture" by its willingness to re-engage with the category of "the natural" (3). In the era of cognitive literary studies poststructuralist theory has been attacked as relativist, even nihilist. One of the overarching goals has been to find a biological and material basis for cognitive processes (Jackson 2000, 322–323).

Exemplifying the latter aim, Joseph Carroll advocates an evolutionary psychological approach to literature (1995) by arguing that "the conceptual structure of syntax is lodged in neurological structures," and variations "in syntax generate variations in physical sensation" (106). Likewise, Patrick Colm Hogan finds in cognitive science the ground to which literary universals can be fixed (1997, 239). With benefit of hindsight, Alfonsina Scarinzi (2015b) argues that the early, "cognitivist," cognitive literary study is nothing less than defined by these arguments. For instance, cognitivist literary study explains literariness – the erstwhile object of study of formalist and structuralist poetics – by an appeal to deviation from pre-formed mental schemata, as opposed to deviation from ordinary language in formalist approaches (263). In each case, it is assumed that it is possible to ground

observed effects of artistic texts on a biological or neurological realism. Critics of cognitive literary study often point out that the foundations are rather shaky, as cognitive science is not yet able to offer a basis as firm as its adherents wish (Sternberg 2009, 455–456; see also Richardson 2004, 2). On the other hand, more recent cognitive literary studies insist that this basis is anything but universally agreed on. Instead of consolidating a consensus, newer studies often find themselves in a rather heated discussion about different conceptions of the mind and about the relation between the brain and the body and/in the world.

Although the principles of cognitive processes remain debated, there is wide agreement about what kinds of questions cognitive literary studies should address. Ellen Spolsky summarizes the foci of cognitive literary studies in one big question:

[H]ow does the evolved architecture that grounds human cognitive processing, especially as it manifests itself in the universality of storytelling and the production of visual art, interact with the apparently open-ended set of cultural and historical contexts in which humans find themselves, so as to produce the variety of social constructions that are historically distinctive, yet also often translatable across the boundaries of time and space? (Spolsky 2004, viii.)

Spolsky's question straddles the line between the historically changeable cultural contexts of reception and cognitive generalizability, insisting that they both are vital to the task of cognitive art studies. Opting for a less assenting rhetoric, however, Adler and Gross argue that the cognitive turn actually marks an aggressive overturning of priorities in study of literature. Cognitivist or post-cognitive-turn approaches elevate "the workings of the human mind, previously one among other possible foci of literary study, to the top level to which all other parameters of literature are subordinated" (Adler and Gross 2002, 198). According to some commentators, in Turner's *Literary Mind* (1996) this priority manifests itself so forcefully that Turner seems to be using literature to explain cognition rather than using cognition to explain literature (Jackson 2000, 340). Gross (1997) suggests that this logic of study entails "tailoring the object of inquiry to the mode of inquiry" in a way that seems less concerned with the former than it seems to strive for the legitimization of the latter (282). Yet one must remember that similar critiques were once directed at other schools of inquiry – such as structuralism (e.g. Derrida 1978, 4; see also Gasché 1986, 144–147; Jackson 1991).

In what may be seen as another attempt to stake a claim to scientificity of cognitive literary studies, many advances have been made towards making it more of a testable, experiment-based science. Experiments and test situations with actual human readers are newly abundant in literary study after

being out of the spotlight for decades.²³ David Herman asserts that the rise of cognitive science has also marked the return of empirical and experimental approaches in the humanities. According to Herman, there have been “attempts to establish empirical methods for testing correlations between textual features and the processing triggered by those features” (2009, 79). This orientation has already produced several influential studies.

A recent study conducted by David S. Miall (2015), who can be considered one of the pioneers of empirical cognitive literary study, is exemplary of this branch of inquiry. Building on previous discoveries of his own, as well as those of Willie Van Peer and Patrick Colm Hogan, Miall treats the ability to detect foregrounded elements in texts as a kind of cognitive universal. Miall believes that foregrounded features account for literariness of literature (see also Miall and Kuiken 1994; 1999; Miall 2006). The test method involves measuring changes in reading time – the milliseconds it takes for the stone to become stony, as it were – and requires the test readers to rank segments of text on basis of how “striking” they appear. According to Miall the test results were as expected: readers took longer to read passages in which effects of foregrounding were evident, and the foregrounded passages also elicited a heightened emotional response (2015, 178–180).

Miall’s arguments for the necessity of empirical studies of reading have been humanist rather than scientist. It is easy to agree with the general ethos of his study. Miall has argued that since reading as a cultural practice might be in decline, it is important to ask why and how actual people read, and to observe what happens to them when they read. Equally urgent is the need to test whether there are effects unique to reading literary texts or whether reading can be shown to yield quantifiable cognitive benefits. While these questions should be more than enough to keep scholars occupied, it often seems that maintaining the accordance with the current cognitive science is the most pressing challenge. In a field that itself goes through rapid changes, painstaking and rigorous differentiation among theoretical ideas is constantly required. According to Carroll (2011), those who take evolutionary study of literature seriously “must constantly be assimilating new research in the evolutionary human sciences” (xi). The need to make literary study accommodate the different and often incompatible theoretical advances often seems the foremost rationale behind the publication of new volumes of literary studies.

²³ Culler’s critique of empirical approaches during the heyday of reader-response approaches argues that these approaches cannot help but participate in the production of stories of reading. (1982, 64–83).

Hence, in response to the “cognitivist” approach, which proceeds from a theory of cognition based of mental representations – schemata, scripts and such – we now also have the anti-Cartesian, anti-representationalist, enactivist views of cognition, all of which refute the view according to which cognition is based on mental representations (see Scarinzi 2015a). Several other recent volumes have shown similar emphasis in being primarily concerned with rectifying errors in our notions of the mind. Even Peter Stockwell, in his notably analysis-driven *Cognitive Poetics*, has an agenda for a renewed understanding of cognition. He urges that cognitive literary studies move beyond the Cartesian mind-body view of cognition (2002, 4).²⁴ These examples point toward a more general preoccupation in cognitive literary studies. The scientific basis, which the new approaches are negotiating, is frequently so novel and disputed that literature actually becomes the fallback term, the affirmative, confirmatory point of reference in the rapidly changing wilderness of ideas about the mind. Consequently, one must constantly ask what, if anything, the responses to different scientific theories arising within cognitive or evolutionary literary studies are telling us about literature. “In a way they claim that literature is what people have thought it is since Aristotle,” Tony Jackson deadpans, “but now we know that this is biologically true” (2000, 336). Indeed, among the critiques of cognitive literary studies one of the more prominent has been the accusation for lack of novelty and inability to say anything about literature which is not already commonly held. However, theorists working in cognitive literary studies often articulate the need for practical and critical applications, even though producing them has proven a genuine challenge for a number of interesting reasons. Significantly, they are reminiscent of some of the problems encountered in structuralist and formalist poetics.

The Problem of Interpretation in Cognitive Literary Studies

Richardson and Steen (2002) note that few critics have produced “cognitively informed interpretive readings of literary texts that at the same time acknowledge their historical specificity” (5). They therefore seem to adhere to the argument that the capability to support well-formed analytical readings is the measure of success for any new theoretical perspective – and the lack of good readings therefore a deficiency (cf. Culler 2010). This deficiency is, of course, something that numerous publications since 2002 have striven to rectify. Yet unlike many other programs or theoretical

²⁴ Arguably, however, the idea of embodied cognition has been extremely successful in cognitive literary studies and probably the one question concerning cognition that is less divisive in cognitive literary studies than it is in cognitive studies at large.

orientations, cognitive literary studies are not best known for producing insightful readings. As the role of interpretation was found problematic in earlier phases of systematic poetics, this dilemma can be approached by looking into Peter Stockwell's work on cognitive poetics (2002; 2009).

In his approach to cognitive poetics, Stockwell makes no effort to hide his allegiance to some of the aims of the structuralist and scientific endeavors of the earlier generations. Some of his basic notions are minor variations of old-school formalisms emphasizing the specific quality of literature, its literariness. Literature, Stockwell writes, is defined by its "texture," which is "the experiential quality of textuality" (2009, 1, 14). On the other hand, his assertion that textuality itself "is the outcome of the workings of shared cognitive mechanics, evident in texts and readings," echoes the Cullerian version of structuralist poetics, or in other words, the conventions-and-competences approach to the basic conditions of literary texts having meaning *as* literary texts (Culler 1975). Stockwell, like Culler, also posits that studying readings is a necessary part of poetics (Stockwell 2009, 1). He acknowledges that being able to discuss interpretation systematically was one of the reasons why the cognitive turn was embraced in literary studies (*ibid.*, 4). Gavins and Steen (2003b) attest to this enthusiasm: "[Cognitive poetics] suggests that readings may be explained with reference to general human principles of linguistic and cognitive processing" (2).

When it comes to analytical correspondences between structuralist and cognitive poetics, Stockwell is forthright about many central concepts of poetics maintaining their relevance in the context of cognitive poetics. In *Cognitive Poetics* (2002), many of these correspondences are explicitly spelled out. For one, narratological concepts of narrative agents and restrictions in point of view and knowledge are linked to the idea of *deixis* as part of embodied cognition. On the other hand, figure-ground configurations in perception, on which the term "foregrounding" is based on, form a basis for *literariness* in the context cognitive literary studies. What was taken as the object of study in formalist and structuralist poetics, is redefined as the cognitive effect of foregrounded figures producing cognitive estrangement (see Stockwell 2002, 14). The connection between aesthetic and cognitive estrangement actually predates Stockwell's cognitive poetics, as it was Reuven Tsur who first spun Jakobson's catchphrase about literariness as a motto for cognitive poetics in the late 1970's. Whereas Jakobson saw in poetry "an organized violence of poetic form over ordinary language," to Tsur literariness was violence committed against cognitive processes (see Tsur 2002).

Various criticisms facing Stockwell's work result from the apparent mismatch of the conservatively conceived reach of poetics and the insistence on a non-conservative, non-Cartesian view of cognition

as embodied and extended. On one hand, therefore, the concepts are traditional, often linked by analogy to concepts that were already discussed by earlier formalist, structuralist, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic critics. As Miall points out, *Cognitive Poetics* sets out to deal almost exclusively with meaning and signification, thus failing to benefit from many of the new areas on which the notion of embodied cognition could expand, such as emotion, feeling, and aesthetics (see Stockwell 2009, 4). On the other hand, Stockwell's readings are fine-grained and immediately accessible to readers with background in literary studies. Again, it is evident that poetics and interpretation are rather more needing each other than being mutually exclusive.

On the other hand, Stockwell's work expedites the process in which cognitive poetics may become more metahermeneutic (Korthals Altes 2014). According to Korthals Altes the metahermeneutic approach to narrative entails a "metacritical analysis of conventions which allow people to make and interpret narratives." The notable precursors to such metahermeneutics are found in poetics of Culler and Genette. (96.) Because of the strong emphasis on understanding underlying processes of readings and interpretations, Stockwell's idea of poetics indeed comes close to some of the earlier ideas of poetics.

If poetics, as Fludernik suggests, should today be seen as an open field of locally arising questions, sometimes the workings of cognitive literary studies seem to draw in the opposite direction (cf. Fludernik 2010, 924–925). Some critics have argued that this leads to the "disappearance of literature into the mind" (Gross 1997). Others have pointed towards the circularity or redundancy of argumentation (Jackson 2000; McHale 2012). In this, cognitive literary studies actually bears little resemblance to poetics, its appeal to scientificity notwithstanding. Rather, cognitive literary studies seem to become more and more defined by their approach to the study of mind, and less and less by their approach to the "literary" in the sense found in earlier poetics.

As Richardson and Steen imply, the relevance of concepts used in one's approach is usually shown by means of convincing analytical results (2002, 5; cf. Spolsky 1993, 3). In cognitive literary studies, there has been an internal polemic going on about the priorities of study. Marco Caracciolo raises this point in making a useful distinction between readings informed by cognitive science and other readings (2016). He argues that readings informed by cognitive science are not necessarily better interpretations than any other readings. If they are, it is not because the theory which they employ rectifies former theoretical shortcomings. In fact, Caracciolo suggests, readings "cannot contribute to a scientific project *as is*." (190–195.) Caracciolo is not alone in saying this. This statement resembles

Hrushovski's programmatic treatise on the division of labor between theoretical and descriptive poetics. One also hears a similar echo in Spolsky, who argues that descriptions of cognitive processing of literature should "only incidentally produce new interpretations of literary works" (2004, ix).

This gives rise to an interesting contradiction in cognitive literary studies. On one hand, we can see that the cognitive turn recalls the heyday of structuralism in its attempts to ally literary study with "the aims, rules, and methods of scientific inquiry" (Korthals Altes 2014, 94). On the other hand, the orientation of cognitive literary studies also begins to resemble other "hermeneutic programs," to use another, and in some ways opposite term from Korthals Altes (2014, 96). Korthals Altes defines hermeneutic program as an approach in which the adjective, "such as ethical, feminist, or rhetorical, defines the relevance frame, which in turn determines which textual elements become signifying in the first place and how they are taken to signify" (96). The adjective "cognitive" could be added to the list, although not all cognitive literary studies are equally liable to be seen as adherents of a hermeneutic program. It is worth pointing out that this is very much business as usual in poetics: as discussed in chapter 1.2, this cyclical movement between the predetermined relevance of certain concepts and perceived features is a constant in poetics. That is, it is not only the adjectival modifier which can define relevance – arguably poetics is always inclined to posit more or less prescriptive relevance frames as well as liable to produce more or less tendentious readings. As Susan R. Suleiman puts it, "Hermeneutics is not [...] something one can do without (it is coextensive with all criticism), but merely something one can acknowledge or not" (1980, 38).

If it is the case, as Korthals Altes suggests, that we tend to view the "adjectival" approaches as hermeneutic programs, it is evident that the results presented by cognitive literary studies are often programmatic interpretations of texts. Yet this might not be the sternest of critiques. If all interpretations entail a theory applied in reading, and if all approaches are somewhat hermeneutic and somewhat programmatic, it can simply be questioned whether cognitive literary studies has been a successful hermeneutic program. This is one context for the critical argument that the cognitive approaches are yet to illuminate literary studies with convincing readings.

This work shares interest in the metahermeneutic direction taken in cognitive literary studies – especially cognitive poetics. Issues discussed in cognitive literary studies are closely related to the focus of this thesis, which views poetics as a theory of procedures and patterns of reading (but also, less amenably to the cognitivist focus, conventions of reading *literary* texts). Especially descriptive poetics, as discussed above, clearly states its metahermeneutic goals. Yet as shown in the previous

chapter, the cyclical procedures of poetics can be seen as hermeneutic in themselves. Poetics, therefore, is not seen as an alternative to hermeneutics, but as a way of coming to terms with a spectrum of interpretative processes. All the while, it must be acknowledged that this process of coming to terms is inherently circular and entails a movement characterizing the becoming of understanding in the modern hermeneutic tradition.

Cognitive Poetics – A Theory of the Literariness of the Mind?

Above, we have glimpsed into the ways in which cognitive approaches stake their claim to scientificity. On one hand, we have seen how cognitive literary studies emphasize that the validity of its results hinges on operating with a current and valid scientific view of how the human mind works. On the other hand, the blooming field of the digital humanities has renewed our interest in empirical and statistical data literary texts and actual acts of reading can present us with. Cognitive approaches to literature have adopted some of the methods of digital humanities, and with them, the scientific ideals of falsifiable theoretical conjectures and empirical testability. In addition, and even more importantly, cognitive studies have also informed the digital humanities. Cognitive science is largely responsible for the underlying conceptions of the mind, and for the understanding of how texts interact with minds.

Cognitive literary studies have fought off the relativism and conceptual instability that seemed inherent and unavoidable in structuralism and various post-structuralist approaches. The strongest arguments for a stable ground on which the new cognitive literary studies should build are perhaps found in branches of cognitive literary study seeking neurobiological or evolutionary psychological basis for literary effects and experience of the literary (cf. Richardson 2004, 10–14). However, there is a link to an earlier stage in 20th century science. Asking whether the structures with which we analyze our culture are actually mental patterns was central to early structuralism. Robert Scholes nods towards this tendency by bestowing the ambiguous title “Structuralism as a movement of mind” on the opening section of *Structuralism in Literature* (1974). The scholars he cites, ranging from Claude Lévi-Strauss to Jean Piaget, are far less ambiguous. Lévi-Strauss writes in *Structural Anthropology*:

[W]e have been behaving as if there were only two partners – language on the one hand, culture on the other – and as if the problem should be set up in terms of the causal relations: ‘Is it language which influences culture? Is it culture which influences language?’ But we have not been sufficiently aware of the fact that *both* language and culture are the products of activities which are basically similar. I am now referring to this uninvited guest which has been seated during this Conference beside us and which is *the human mind*. (1963, 71.)

Let us also consider the following, from a 1984 interview of A. J. Greimas by Paul Ricœur:

[Greimas:] We notice – simply, for example, by consulting a reader such as the one published by Dell Hymes on *Language in Culture and Society* – that three thousand human communities fabricate proverbs, riddles, stories, and so on in the same way, and that they narrate these by using forms which are, *mutatis mutandis*, identical. Consequently, when we speak about semio-narrative structures we are in fact dealing with kinds of universals of language, or rather with narrative universals. If we were not afraid of metaphysics we could say that *these are properties of the human mind*. (Greimas and Ricœur 1989, 555, emphasis added.)

While there are similarities between the structuralist and cognitivist approaches to the forms of culture, these passages also help appreciate the differences. The excerpt from Greimas’s interview points towards a significant difference between the intellectual context of the structuralist and the cognitivist era. While the cognitive approaches may willingly engage with the category of the “natural,” Greimas abides by the (post)structuralist mistrust of “metaphysics,” if not without a hint of reluctance. Some branches of cognitive literary studies, especially those identifying themselves as materialist, are equally wary of metaphysics. The cognitive materialists, however, firmly count on the materiality of the neurocognitive basis to fend off this threat (cf. Richardson 2004, 19–20).

Poetics deriving from formalism and structuralism, rather than establishing a structural uniformity of the text and mind, saw the internal emphasis between text and the reading processes switching to and fro without finally settling on either. Alfonsina Scarinzi shows how this mobility has helped the idea of literariness, foundational to the erstwhile “project” of poetics, to be adopted in cognitive literary studies. Even though literariness was introduced by Jakobson as a linguistic concept, it effortlessly transformed into “a matter of reader response coming into being in the interaction between the striking devices, which characterize a literary text, and the reader’s cognitive processes and feelings” (Scarinzi 2015b, 262). In her discussion Scarinzi proposes to reassess the place of literariness in cognitive literary studies in the light of the so-called enactivist view of cognition, which purports to shed the dualisms dominating earlier studies, such as mind and body, or text and cognition.

According to Scarinzi, the early cognitivist view on literariness conceives of it as a readerly frame activating in response to “the striking stylistic devices of a literary text.” The anti-dualistic variant, marking a shift from cognitivist to enactivist literariness is defined as follows:

[L]iterariness can be considered to be the lived aesthetic quality of the reader’s consummatory experience of the embodied process of sense-making of the reader’s deviation from expectation she brings forth in the interaction with the striking devices of a text. (2015b, 262.)

One way to assess the possible validity and usefulness of such redefinitions must lie in their consequences for theory and application. This particular definition is all too helpful in determining what exactly is new about the notion of enactive literariness. It is not the concept of literariness, which is defined conservatively through the idea of deviation – the textual devices are equally “striking” whether they are defamiliarizing the language on the sentence level, or forcing the mind to refresh its schemata, or affecting the experience of the embodied process of sense-making. Neither is it the idea that literariness is negotiated between the text and the reader, as the interaction of the mind and text is the basic premise in all cases. The difference, then, is simply the different conception of mind in cognitivist and enactivist approaches. The theoretical strength of the enactivist definition seems to be its ability to exclude dualistic and disembodied notions of mind, but whether this has any practical and analytical consequences is questionable. The definition, in short, does not make the experience or quality of literariness emerge any clearer from literary texts. It simply makes a claim about how the experiencing and perceiving mind works. Such claims may affect our understanding of the mind in any number of significant ways, but they must be subjected to scientific scrutiny themselves. Gross’s comment on Turner is a case in point: she argues that when Turner’s argumentation seems most grounded on the physiological, neurological level it is actually purely speculative (Gross 1997, 283).

There is a recurring point of criticism, made by Bo Pettersson, among others, that cognitive literary criticism at times shows a disregard for previous discussions in literary theory and criticism, which may lead to “thwarted results or false claims of critical novelty” (Pettersson 2011, 94). In particular, one has in mind here the history of critical scrutiny of the idea of *deviation* as the defining feature of literary language.²⁵ The new empirical studies by Miall (2015), Emmott et al. (2013), and the

²⁵ Cf. chapter 2.0 for further discussion for criticism of deviation-based conceptions of literary qualities of texts.

theoretical reframing in Scarinzi (2015b) all appeal to a simple, stylistic conception of deviation. The empirical studies proceed to seek corresponding deviation in neurocognitive responses to literary text. The theoretical reassessments, on the other hand, struggle to create any difference in the analytical applicability of the concept of literariness itself. It seems clear that both the empirical and the theoretical revamps fail to reap the rewards hard won by generations of thought questioning the deviation-based theory of foregrounded features of literary texts. The seemingly hard data provided by new methods encourage the researchers to assume a facile correlation between textual cues and cognitive effects (see Stockwell 2009, 3). Granted, it may be extremely difficult to measure the subtleties of literary experience, but at the moment these reassessments of literariness yield little more than a weary formula: deviant text, therefore, the mind, it boggles.

Yet cognitive literary studies make several important points. Reading is not just decoding meaning but a multifarious experience. Although other aspects of that experience – attention and emotion as well as sensation, affect, and other types of physiological response – are deservedly getting more and more attention, we should maintain that seeking meaning is part of the experience of literature. Experienced effect of meaning, such as ambiguity or undecidability, surely cannot be reduced to the citations we use to demonstrate this effect in our interpretations. However, it is perfectly reasonable to consider ambiguity and indeterminacy as properties of text as well as its reception. If whatever constitutes such experience is codified in the text, if only partially, the new methods are far from being able to come to terms with the textual complexity of the phenomenon.

This critical, perhaps overly critical, look into cognitive literary studies is not only relevant to poetics but also to Pynchon studies. Applications of cognitive science to literary study overlap with new digital and empirical approaches to processing texts, and indirectly contribute to the analyses made with the new methods. As ever, Pynchon Studies have been quick to embrace innovation in the new millennium. Christos Tsatsoulis studies the possibilities of algorithm-based data mining in describing the chapter structure of *V.*, and Simon Rowberry uses the web-based *Pynchon Wikis* as a possible corpus to look into alongside with academic readings. The articles presenting these studies and their methods and results can be found in *Orbit*, the successor to *Pynchon Notes* and the main sounding board for new ideas in Pynchon studies (see Tsatsoulis 2013; Rowberry 2012). On the other hand, there are projects like Martin Paul Eve's wordcloud "Visualizing *Gravity's Rainbow*" (2015), which contains the text of the novel arranged according to word occurrence and proximity to other words. Most importantly, from the point of view of the field of study, it is freely available for the community

to use and evaluate both as a source of interpretable data and as a method of producing it.²⁶

These trends merit a mention before moving on to the final chapter of the introduction, in which a method for studying and describing secondary literature is laid out. The tasks of interpretation, annotation, and contextualization are taken on socially, communally, and institutionally. To some degree, in the academic context this has always been so. However, this is likely to be a growing trend in the advent of the innovative methods in digital humanities and new empirical studies of reading. However, it seems that many things central to our notions of Pynchon and the Pynchonian still depend on individual human readers for their realization: the experience of reading Pynchon, the creative leap of seeing in a passage the key to understanding an extremely complex text, and the marvelous feeling of *déjà vu* or *déjà lu* when one first dips into the classics of Pynchon Studies. This work proceeds from the idea that there is still a great deal to be said about this human industry.

1.4. Studying Pynchon Studies, Reading Readings: A Few Methodological Remarks

Dialogue about ways of reading can be as gratifying as soliloquizing about others' ways of reading is awkward. Garrett Stewart encapsulates one facet of the problem by reminding us that "an ethos of embodied reading is singular, intimate." Yet at the same time this singularity is held in common to all readings: "it is the precondition for community as well as for representation, for social space all told." (Stewart 2015, 2.) For several reasons, therefore, one cannot expect probing Pynchon Studies for demonstrations of shared ways of reading to be unproblematic. The present study sees this problematic not as something to be contained and surmounted but as an opportunity to practice a certain methodical sensitivity. The introduction concludes in this attempt to further describe the exact role of Pynchon studies in this work, while also striving to reflect on its own procedures of reading readings. The theoretical context for this self-reflection is poetics, understood as a theory of reading, and the methodological limitations of this work are, to a great degree, limitations of poetics.

As discussed above, the urge to understand the conditions and conventions of interpretation and grasp

²⁶ Also, in Pynchon Week 2015 conference Erik Ketzan introduced a corpus-based computational application, which recognizes recurring configurations of word patterns, sentence structures, and simple semantic relations such as antonymy in Pynchon's texts. It seems that the results are yet to be published.

the underlying protocols can be seen as a sign of “the turn towards the reader” in literary theory, but, in equal measures, it is symptomatic of the *third phase* of scientific poetics (see Seamon 1989, 301). According to Seamon, this stage is the one in which the “project” of poetics stalls. It is possible to wonder, after de Man, whether theory finally reached the point in which the increasing sophistication of theory veered into the impossibility of “doing” it (cf. de Man 1986, 19).

Indeed, any attempt at methodical observation of reading procedures has to be met with certain caveats. On one hand, academic readings are complex and sophisticated, and it is easy to see the potential problem in seeking basic similarities in studies bringing different, often avowedly “incompatible” theories, contexts, and ideas to reading Pynchon. Also, seeing Pynchon Studies as a corpus that demonstrates how Pynchon is read requires interpretation in itself. Few studies are themselves methodically committed to the task of reflecting on how they proceed in analysis, and a great deal will have to be inferred. As the diversity of possible approaches to literary study keeps growing, also the possible priorities of studies become more and more plural. As Culler notes, recent decades have not favored approaches attempting to reconstruct “the codes that make possible literary works and their effects” (Culler 2010, 906).

On the other hand, using Pynchon-scholarship as source material elicits a suspicion that the shared ways of reading and explication in evidence can never be shown to be anything but an institutional phenomenon. The similar ways of writing and talking about Pynchon could be merely conventional, and they might result from exposure to academic training in practices of textual analysis. This would inevitably point toward the mechanic springing from the pages of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, “the routinization of charisma.” This possibility, lest we forget, is something Pynchon Studies have deemed paranoia-worthy for nearly four decades, ever since Levine and Leverenz’s *Mindful Pleasures* (1976).

There are certain practical steps that one can take regardless. The methodological choice is to provisionally bracket off the theories brought to bear on Pynchon. For the purposes of my study it is not necessary to categorize Pynchon Studies according to a distinctive qualifier, such as approach or theoretical orientation. Such undertaking would be appropriate for a bibliographer or perhaps somebody writing a guidebook to Pynchon Studies, but not to somebody who is interested in the repeated patterns across the spectrum of approaches. As mentioned above, the initial bafflement arises because of certain citations coming up regardless of the theoretical context in which they are used as evidence. It should therefore be certainly possible to look at the citations themselves, and try to

discern how they are used to support the argument, logic, or position of the study. The simplest explanation is often the most plausible. Many citations are chosen because of their referential content. Pynchon's fictional paraphernalia, fixtures, and garb tell us a great deal about the vision mediated by the novels. His dogs, landscapes, seascapes and skyscapes, rivers, buildings, faces, cars, ships, and machines offer countless possibilities to detect an interest towards certain aspects of the world, but also to explore their role in the fabric of the works. Here, however, the focus is more limited, and the point of interest is in how citations are used as part of an argument.

I am talking about the step in which the citation is used in demonstration of its relevance to the work, its connectivity within it, and its capacity to illuminate and even *stand for* the whole. Such passages are framed functionally, as key passages seen as relevant to the global interpretive framework. On the level of analysis, this very often entails appeal to some of the procedures discussed in the following chapter. All of these procedures seem to involve 1) showing that certain thematic material suggests a model that is seen to reflect metaphorically or even analogically the overall design of the work; and 2) treating a part of the text as representative of the whole.

As much of my own vocabulary derives from the study of poetics, which remains a theoretical background for many theories of reading, it should be said that there are certain ideas stemming from this tradition which this study expressly tries to resist. The work at hand will not treat Pynchon studies as attempts to bring Pynchon's writing within a sphere of some metalanguage or another. In its illuminating critique of structuralism, Fredric Jameson's *Prison-House of Language* (1972) dedicates a great deal of space to the problem of metalanguage. Jameson approaches the problem in its classical structuralist form via Roland Barthes, who noted that when the analyst speaks in a metalanguage, she or he inaugurates an infinite type of knowledge-system: if someone analyzed the writings of this analyst for its latent content, it would be necessary to do this in a new metalanguage (Jameson 1972, 208). The idea of metalanguage potentially obscures the inevitable realization that we still reflect on our use of language by the means of language. In fact, the simultaneity of communication and metacommunication can be considered a definite feature of discourse (see Gasché 1986, 78).

Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981) offers a solution to the language-metalanguage problem, and it strikes a familiar chord. The deconstruction of the binary of metalanguage and object-language became one of the recurrent procedures of deconstructive criticism (cf. Keskinen 1998, 55). Jameson's solution also dismantles the opposition, but it is also recognizable in the context of poetics. While defending his interpretive position (the neo-Marxist) against others – the ethical, the

psychoanalytical, the myth-critical, the semiotic, the structural, and the theological – Jameson states that we never confront a text immediately but through sedimented layers of previous interpretations and categories inherited from critical traditions. These presuppositions, according to Jameson, dictate the use of method, which Jameson conceives as “metacommentary.” (Jameson 1981, ix–x; also 1971.) The idea of metacommentary differs from that of metalanguage in that it does not entail a hierarchical model of subordinate linguistic levels. Jameson writes: “every individual interpretation must include an interpretation of its own existence, must show its own credentials and justify itself: every commentary must be at the same time a metacommentary as well” (1971, 10). The method of metacommentary is reflective but posits that this reflectivity is possible within language, not only by means of a metalanguage. In a distinctly Cullerian way Jameson also suggests that in a metacommentary the question about interpreting a text properly is accompanied by the question of why we should have to do so at all (ibid.).²⁷

According to McHale (1994), Jameson’s approach is sensitive to the space between theory and the meaning of the text arrived at via interpretation. This perhaps explains McHale’s suggestion that Jameson is very good at doing descriptive poetics. Jameson’s analysis leaves room for “a semi-autonomous level of forms” and does not “rush to neutralize the mediating forms of literary expression.” (63.) McHale’s treatment of Jameson also reflects the change in thinking about the role of poetics. The insistence on different levels of observation now comes across as a precaution against the phenomenon McHale sees as a symptom of the proliferation of “cultural” theories and approaches, in which the mediating level of textual features and the attendant tradition and history is neglected and theory is allowed to collapse into interpretation (ibid., 56). If McHale calls forms “semi-autonomous,” perhaps not the most illuminating expression, it is not to suggest that forms are not shaped by ideology or social sphere, but to emphasize that they do not *express* an ideology or social realities without also being part of the history of literary forms or without being shaped by literary traditions (see ibid., 63–64). Conspicuously absent, compared to earlier, structuralist conception of studying and describing literature as a system, are the assumptions of isomorphic relations and discoverable transformational rules between the levels.

This brings us to another idea stemming from the formalist poetics that needs rethinking. According

²⁷ Jameson eventually turns the question on its head and states that what requires explanation is not so much the need to interpret novels but the fact that we do not always have that need (1971, 12). This leads Jameson towards the political unconscious behind the deceptively transparent realism and those texts of each historical moment that seem the least in need of interpretation.

to a long line of work on “literariness,” the passages most likely to elicit interpretation offer themselves to scrutiny through various mechanisms of linguistic or cognitive deviance.²⁸ Wolfgang Iser is quite right to call this idea, first theorized by the Russian Formalists, the “old answer” (1978, 87–91). The question of textual passages with seemingly heightened “interpretability” might be difficult to answer without some notion of deviation (cf. Chambers 1984, 12–13). Iser, however, insists that this deviation should not be defined as a difference from ordinary or non-literary language, but simply deviation in context, deviation from norms which are determined contextually. It is therefore the concept of context that most critically requires rethinking. When Iser discusses context, he is concerned with the sum total of not only literary and social systems by which the work is formed but also of the context provided by the whole of *the work*. This together amounts to what Iser names the work’s *repertoire* (1978).

According to Iser, the specifically literary problem of context lies in “the fact that the whole text can never be perceived at any one time” (ibid., 108). The text as “an object” can only be imagined by way of consecutive phases of reading. The reader’s “wandering viewpoint,” however, is at once both caught up in and transcended by what it is to apprehend. Each of the phases of reading concretizes aspects of the object that reading tries to constitute, but none can be representative of it. (Ibid., 109.) According to Harding (1993), Iser’s notions of context and repertoire should be seen against the backdrop of phenomenology, going back as far as Hegel. Drawing on Mukarovsky’s background/foreground distinction and figure/ground perception of gestalt psychology, Iser states that reading can be understood as a series of consistency-building, gestalt-differentiating operations.

To Iser, however, the process is neither cumulative nor complementary. There are alien elements only just excluded from the emerging *gestalten*, “outlined without being brought to focus.” Iser goes on: “From their virtual presence arise the ‘alien associations’ which begin to accumulate and so to bombard the formulated *gestalten*, which in turn become undermined and thus bring about a reorientation of our acts of apprehension.” (1978, 126.) Harding shows that Iser maintains that we always fall short of the final synthesis, the constitution of the whole or the totality. Instead the concretizations produce a series of wholes, “movements.” According to Harding, there is no culmination or resolution for the movements: “[T]he pull is not toward an autonomous unconditioned external Universal, but through semantic, interactional diversities. While the dialectical interaction is actual, it is textual and linguistic, not transcendental or spiritual.” (1993, 46–47.)

²⁸ See chapter 1.3 above.

In addition to complexifying the idea of literariness as deviation, the notion of dynamically shifting “movements” of reading could be crucial to understanding how novels like Pynchon’s are processed.²⁹ The idea closely echoes the Gadamerian conception of the hermeneutic circle of reading. Gadamer states in *Truth and Method*:

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (2004, 269; cf, Aczel 2001, 606–607.)

A succinct summary of how context is understood in this line of thinking is offered by Michael Wheeler: context is a local manifestation of the background, the whole of which is unrepresentable (cf. Iser 1978, 94–95; Harding 1993). This conception of how the gestalt or figure changes, loses its form, or is replaced by another during the process of reading seems a viable – if possibly unwieldy – option to the simplistic model of deviation.

The final caveat to the method of reading readings is that it should not be accompanied with grand claims of novelty. Indeed, what I would rather claim is that reading readings is something few studies can do without. In this work, however, the focus on poetics and on the procedures of reading requires an unusually concentrated effort at negotiating the degree to which our protocols of reading allow methodization.

²⁹ McHale’s (1979) analysis of the concretization-deconcretization structure of *Gravity’s Rainbow* presents a version of this line of reasoning.

2 Approaches to Pynchon Studies as Pattern Recognition

I have tried to argue that quotations, like statistics, can easily be extracted to muster evidence for whatever 'coherence,' 'logic,' or 'position' their manipulator wants to find anyway. (McHoul 1987, 31.)

We can classify new studies of *Gravity's Rainbow* by their quotations: do they focus on the juicy set pieces – the colonies as the outhouses of European souls, the vampirish lament of Technologies for their funding, the stout rainbow cock – or do they regale us with felicities we had passed over? (Hume 1986, 116.)

If we construct meaning from comparing pattern recognition, we must rely less on a will to truth than on a will to community. (Berressem 2012, 173.)

As the first surge of Pynchon Studies settled, having spanned roughly a decade from 1976 to late 1980s, the accumulated reservoir of criticism made possible as well as necessary a certain introspective stance. Two of the citations above, one from Alec McHoul and another from Kathryn Hume, represent the interest stirring in Pynchon Studies towards its own reading practices and analytical procedures. Both of the studies cited above reflect on the field of Pynchon Studies as an “interpretive community” negotiating the canon of citations and preferred interpretations, as well as reflecting on its habitual interpretive moves. The turn toward the reader, breaking into the academic

mainstream with the publication of several influential volumes on reader-response (such as Tompkins 1980; Suleiman and Crosman 1980) as well as Culler's rethinking of poetics as a theory of reading were debated in many of the main publications on the field. That these writings coincide temporally with the peak period of reader-response criticism seems by no means incidental, and many studies not directly committed to the "turn toward the reader" can be expected to share some interests with one of the prevailing research paradigms of the time.³⁰ Yet the debate about citing Pynchon has always been very much a debate *about* Pynchon, and about the question whether his works are in agreement with our methods.

In emphasizing the metatheoretical side of these studies I wish to suggest that the questions they raise about ways of reading and making interpretive moves are still compelling and, largely, unanswered. The third epigraph above, from Hanjo Berressem's contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon* (a veritable *Who's who* of Pynchon Studies as of the early 2000's), is also very much of its time. The term with which it approaches the common procedural ground in Pynchon Studies, with its diverse approaches and analytics, is sensibly broad: pattern recognition.

However, neither Berressem nor anybody else is mooted the point about a "canon of citations" in Pynchon Studies (cf. McHoul 1987, 31). As suggested in the introduction, that the recognition of this canon requires but a tentative dip into Pynchon studies is intriguingly at odds with the widespread notion of ambiguity and indeterminacy at the heart of Pynchon's art. Yet of course the issue is more general. Citing the analyzed text to strengthen whatever coherence, logic, or position one wants to find is one of the fundamentals of academic writing, and therefore the issue is much larger than Pynchon Studies. Anybody who is not a complete stranger to literary studies knows that it is not just Pynchon whose studies are continuously illuminated by the same key passages. The field of Pynchon Studies, however, has clearly benefited from acknowledging that there are conventional patterns – and from making the effort to look past them. As shown in the introduction, several recent works intentionally set out to work with overlooked segments of Pynchon's novels. Arguably, though, Pynchon Studies have always tended towards a self-reflexive rhetoric, quite possibly inherited from the object of study (see chapter 1.1 above).

³⁰McHoul's and Hume's comments can be seen as emblematic of a number of logics or positions. McHoul's position is that of a rather extreme grammatological textualist, as best seen in *Writing Pynchon* (1990, with David Wills). With her *Pynchon's Mythography* (1987), Hume was among the first to comment on the theoretical lopsidedness of Pynchon Studies during the 1980s and to argue that the predominance of postmodernist theory might end up impoverishing the stock of knowledge about Pynchon (1987, 186–195).

The starting point for my inquiry into the patterns of Pynchon studies is the observation that some citations show up with great frequency *regardless* of the coherence, logic, or position they are meant to support. It suggests that there are operations at play perhaps best characterized as pattern recognition, to borrow Berressem's term, that are not a priori subordinate to our consciously and methodologically applied logics and our chosen theoretical positions. Becoming a reader of Pynchon Studies will quickly lead to a realization that certain passages come up with such frequency that the repetition itself begins to seem almost Pynchonian. Again depending on our position it might either confirm that some qualities of writing make Pynchon's prose exceptionally citable, or that literary language has means to attract our attention to itself, or that style can produce an effect of heightened intensity and reader engagement, or that it is necessary to subject literary criticism to the Derridean idea of citationality or *iterability*. The chapter at hand, however, proceeds along two simple lines on a more general level.

First it argues that some aspects of Pynchon's writing rather than others *can* be linked to the extreme citationality and the copious repetition of patterns in Pynchon Studies, and studying these aspects has traditionally been the province of poetics. Secondly, it must be argued that the answers to the first question are in some respects generalizable to literary study at large. This idea structures the latter parts of this chapter, which consist of three discussions of specific interpretive or analytic procedures. The first of these (chapter 2.1) looks into the use of Pynchon's "ideas" as models and metaphors for the ways his novels work. Modelling can be regarded as a basic mental operation behind many cognitive skills – some perfectly mundane, some highly imaginative. Pynchon's ideas discussed here seem to resist easy assimilation as models of literary designs or interpretive moves, but can be and often are given that role in interpretations. I will argue that conventions of reading literary texts play a significant role in the strategy of seeking models and metaphors. The second subchapter (2.2.) takes a further step towards reading strategies more specifically connected to aesthetic reception. This subchapter studies the tradition of the device known as *mise en abyme*. This device has been extensively discussed in aesthetics and art theory, including literary theory. Here it is treated as a specific type of modelling procedure, and this is also the view taken in new cognitively informed studies of *mise en abyme*. The final part of this chapter (2.3.) discusses a specifically literary critical procedure of thematization. It is argued here that thematization is at work in many extremely well received and persuasive readings, of Pynchon and otherwise. On the whole, this chapter seeks to identify certain recurring reading strategies that participate in great many readings of Pynchon's novels. They are also telling of the practices of analysis and of structures of literary criticism itself.

With the methodological reservations of the final part of the first chapter in place, my sampling of Pynchon studies mostly focuses on the practices and procedures of interpretive and descriptive work. Yet it is important to acknowledge that these types of “work” in literary criticism are fundamentally a site of creative and idiosyncratic thinking. Some aspects of literary analysis are best understood as creative yet purposeful acts of reading than as derivative and metalinguistic (meta)commentaries. Although reading may be only possible “after (a) theory,” as Valentine Cunningham puts it, this should not suggest to us that either the use of theory is fully programmatic and methodical or else it is fully inadvertent (cf. Cunningham 2004). In literary theory, this position might be best represented by Iser. According to John Paul Riquelme, Iser’s view on reading does not entail understanding something “contained and given in advance by the text.” Instead, it generates “a new perspective and mental object.” Rather than taking stock of procedures of reading, Iser’s view of the act of reading sees reading as the place of creativity in culture. (Riquelme 2000, 8.)

While Iser’s position is shaped by the tradition of studying the phenomenology of literary works, the ideas he puts forth also have bearing on a more general theory of understanding and knowledge. Highlighting the role of creativity in methodical thinking, Thomas Kuhn coins the term “re-orientation.” He holds the view that there is an ongoing exchange between the conscious and unconscious, as well as the inadvertent and learned aspects of observation. Kuhn writes:

The complexity of the objects presented by experience permits an infinity of independent observations; so that the process of scientific observation presupposes a choice of those aspects of experience which are to be deemed relevant. But the judgment of relevancy is made on a largely unconscious basis in which commonsense experience and pre-existing scientific theories are intimately intermingled. (Cited in Galison 2016.)

Kuhn’s idea about the predetermined relevance of certain aspects of experience, which can be either unconscious or conscious, is also found in theory of poetics. We can see it at work in Olsen’s account of poetics, which posits that interpretation entails a method of “assigning artistic relevance to parts of a work identified through this method,” and which sees this cyclical process as inevitable (Olsen 1976, 349). This view, where expressed by Kuhn, is often found in the form of an argument for perception and observation always already being “theory-laden” (see Kaiser 2016, 78). Similar ideas of there being, as Fry puts it, “method to our inadvertencies,” are found in theories of reading, reception, and interpretation. Such approaches suggest a possibility of a theory of reading that could challenge the dichotomies commonly structuring our theorizing.

Reading must be allowed to traverse the boundary of conscious and unconscious processing, cultural learning and human capability. As Culler has pointed out, it is extremely difficult to draw clearly the line between what is done consciously and what is done unconsciously in reading (1975, 137). Although it is obvious that much of interpretive reading results from consciously made interpretive moves, and while it is clear that many reading processes are guided by conventional procedures attributable to cultural knowhow and literary competence, too much in reading is decided on the threshold of conscious attention to warrant leaving either aspect of reading out of consideration (cf. Rabinowitz 1987, 42–46). Furthermore, understanding the creative idiosyncrasy involved in literary readings requires a reflective stance on seemingly commonsensical notions of application or use of theory. In contrast with inadvertencies, working with texts often entail a pragmatic and goal-oriented employment of theory rather than a mechanical and neutral application.

To briefly show why discussion of readings benefits from giving room to creative idiosyncrasy, let us consider Matthew Carbery's essay "A War on Totality." Its interpretive conclusions are based on what seems to be a unique reading of one of the most often quoted passages in *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.*, 63, emphasis added)

What is particularly distinctive about this reading is that Carbery's attention is drawn to the fact that the text from Sidney Stencil's journals is not really "a sentence" but three sentences, which allows the analysis to focus upon the other principal meaning of the word "sentence." We may interpret the passage sentencising Stencil to his obsessive search.

But this interpretive idiosyncrasy is necessarily offset with certain shared and familiar interpretive moves. Carbery's point is not that the text uses the word "sentence" in its punning and punitive sense. Rather, the text creates an unsolvable indeterminacy of meaning:

Ultimately – as is so often the case throughout *V.* – we cannot decide on the sovereignty of either of the meanings of the 'sentence' from which the quest begins. We are thus led to an indeterminate position between the two which is not, following Barthes' notion of the text, necessarily a negation of any possible meaning. (Carbery 2012, n.p.)

Carbery also sets off from the widespread interpretation that in *V.*, Stencil is the reader's double, or that the reader's position in relation to the novel is analogous to Stencil's position in relation to V. Carbery also cites a classic treatment of this idea, Elizabeth Campbell's essay "Metaphor and V.: Metaphysics in the Mirror" (1988). It seems strikingly obvious that this holistic interpretation is much less directly based on anything we could point to as "textual evidence." It also seems that the idiosyncratic reading on the level of detail can easily attach to more familiar larger-scale interpretive patterns, which makes the whole reading comprehensible in terms of conventions of the novel and novelistic reading. The figure of the reader's double makes a strong appeal to self-reflexive qualities routinely ascribed to literature. We can find the notion of reading or questing characters mirroring the reading process recurring in works as dissimilar and temporally far apart as Robert Alter's classic *Partial Magic* (1975) and *Reading Matters: Narrative in the New Media Ecology* edited by Joseph Tabbi and Michael Wutz (1997). In literature, the convention suggests, reading characters are interpretable as the reader's images, whether sentenced to their fate or not.

Interestingly, the idiosyncratic part of the process seems to be more directly engaged with the textual features, and also more imaginative and creative. This type of idiosyncrasy is actually one of the things that brought New Criticism under fire in the post-war academia (cf. Culler 1988b, 275). The less surprising aspects of the reading, are, inversely, based on textual evidence far more indirectly and implicitly, and they also are more clearly entangled with institutional ways of reading. The reading strategies discussed in the following parts of this chapter belong to the latter category. Although they allow for great interpretive ingenuity these strategies also have been institutionalized and theorized, taught and learned, consciously and unconsciously. However, let this interlude stand as a reminder that our protocols of reading only allow methodization to a certain degree: like literature itself, literary analysis has an element of "singularity" to it (cf. Attridge 2004). While this aspect is often backgrounded in literary studies, we had better stay attuned to it. At least if one day, as Geoffrey Hartman once demanded, criticism should look beyond its educational and social functions to "take back its freelance, creative powers" (Hartman 1977, 410).

The coming scrutiny of Pynchon's novels and their reading in this thesis should be bookended by an emphatic statement about what this study aims *not* to question, namely the force of any individual interpretation. Individual readings can end up stating the obvious and the conventional without this meaning that what the interpreter does, when working closely with the text, is obvious at all. Inversely, highly original and contemporary theoretical approaches may find their best illumination in the same key passages that have been cited for decades in Pynchon Studies.

2.1 At the Interface: Models and Metaphors

He inverts all values and all proportions, because he is constantly under the impression that he is deciphering signs [...] [H]e sees nothing but resemblances and signs of resemblance everywhere; for him all signs resemble one another, and all resemblances have the value of signs. (Foucault 1989, 54.)

I had discovered that scientific language, when taken “literally” (non-scientifically) becomes metaphoric. (Brooke-Rose 1991, 14.)

Readers of Pynchon’s novels are familiar with the uncommon extent to which the author’s work engages with natural sciences and mathematics. The dialogue with numerous scientific fields is also mirrored in Pynchon Studies: the role of scientific concepts, ideas, and theories in the novels has been discussed vigorously since the emergence of the field. Among the scarce biographical details, Pynchon’s engineering studies at Cornell and subsequent period of employment as a technical writer for the aircraft and missile manufacturer Boeing are well known.³¹ Those areas of scientific inquiry

³¹ Pynchon worked as a technical writer in either the Minuteman or the Bomarc project – or quite possibly both (cf. Comyn 2014; Cowart 1980; Wisnicki 2000). The former project developed an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of delivering nuclear charges, while the latter worked on a surface-to-air interceptor missile which was to become the weapon of choice of the automatized missile defence of the North American continent. The only known piece written by Pynchon in the job is the slightly odd health and safety essay “Togetherness” (1960), which was published in the journal *Aerospace Safety*. However, Wisnicki (2000) suggests that *Bomarc Service News* may have featured up to 30 articles by Pynchon in 1960–1962.

which academics are these days more and more obliged to call the STEM fields³² also figure far more in writings on Pynchon than generally tends to be the case in literary studies. The influence of science, technology, engineering and mathematics on Pynchon's writing is inescapable, but their function in his novels has proven more difficult to pin down.

To presume in turn that at least some scientists have been able to connect with Pynchon's work is not entirely fanciful, either. One of the first and most extensive treatment of the role of science in Pynchon was written by Alan J. Friedman, a physicist as well as a literary scholar (1983). The role of sciences has occupied scholars to varying degrees through decades, and in recent years the significance of various scientific revolutions to Pynchon's novels has been most extensively discussed in *Pynchon and Relativity* by Simon de Bourcier (2012).³³ The notion that Pynchon's fiction might meaningfully address the scientific revolutions of the 20th century – such as the changes in our view of natural laws and cosmology brought about by quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity – has also elicited actual dialogue between literary scholars and scientists.³⁴ All this has contributed to the view that Pynchon might be in possession of the rare ability to reach across the “Snovian disjunction,” to speak to scientists as well as to “literary intellectuals.”³⁵

In the context of this work it is obvious, however, that the use of sciences in Pynchon is in many respects a subset of what is named above “Pynchon's theory” and defined as a fluid conception of all those fields of knowledge by which Pynchon's writing seems to be “fundamentally informed” (cf. Pöhlmann 2012). In this context, revisiting scientific ideas is worthwhile for one specific reason, and it has to do with what these ideas are *not*. As discussed in chapter 1.1 and below, an important aspect of “Pynchon's theory” has been its capability to show that whatever literary or linguistic theory we bring to bear on the novels, Pynchon's text can be seen to comment on and undercut the explanatory power of this theory. As I will show below, the specific interest of analyzing scientific models in Pynchon arises from how they resist being incorporated in interpretation purely as models of textual production, structure, or reception.

³² Acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

³³ Moreover, the multifaceted relationship between science and fiction has been discussed by Ryan (2011) and Rabinowitz (2011), among others. See also *Routledge Companion to Literature and Science* (Clarke and Rossini, eds. 2011).

³⁴ Richard Pearce in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (1985) Pearce's essay was followed by Laurence Rosenheim's reply with Pearce's rejoinder in *Pynchon Notes* issue 17 (1985). See also Tabbi 1984.

³⁵ C. P. Snow's famous dictum about the split of the academic world into two cultures, of scientists and of literary intellectuals, haunts Pynchon's mid-career. While announcing the nomination of *Gravity's Rainbow* for the National Book Award in 1974, author Ralph Ellison praises the novel for “bridging the gap between the two cultures.” Pynchon himself gives Snow's 1959 lecture “Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution” a place of privilege in the polemic of his essay “Is It OK to be a Luddite?” (1984).

Therefore, models of natural sciences and mathematics, transformed though they are into literary ideas in Pynchon, present a new kind of challenge. The challenge is specifically posed to the idea of “interfacing theory and text;” the kind of integration or synthesis, which is endemic to study of poetics.³⁶ In addition to becoming distinctly literary ideas which are quite capable of being turned back on the hermeneutic circle of textuality, these ideas also remain open towards other processes of understanding (in) the world. Through its strong bonding with other, non-literary discourses, and other, non-literary contexts, the scientific theory incorporated in Pynchon’s novels reminds us of the larger horizon of models, discourses, and conceptual networks within which the literary is no longer the primary concern. For its part, science in Pynchon participates in thematizing the human need for explication and interpretation everywhere, not just in reading. However, the capacity to be used in explaining textual and literary features remains potent, if latent, in these models. Hence the scientific ideas come to have a peculiar kind of functionality in Pynchon. This functionality can be demonstrated in a short analysis of a short story.

Interpreting Entropy in “Entropy”

Pynchon’s early short story “Entropy” demonstrates the functional mobility of scientific concepts and theories in fiction. Dictating his personal history to his assistant, (and in the process becoming the first of Pynchon’s many characters to refer to a version of himself in the third person,) the brooding Princeton alumnus Callisto puts it thus: “he found in entropy or the measure of disorganization for a closed system an *adequate metaphor to apply to certain phenomena* in his own world [...]” (SL, 88–89, emphasis added). This seems like a good description of how the concept is used in Pynchon, too. It is unlikely that outside science fiction any of Pynchon’s contemporaries go to greater lengths in motivating the use of scientific concepts in such a way that retains an explicit connection to scientific discourses. However, the surplus of meaning these concepts generate in Pynchon’s fiction is due to them seeming such adequate metaphors for certain phenomena.

Discussing the characteristics of the use of entropy therefore requires keeping the interpretive horizon open. Callisto’s use of entropy as a metaphor may be the foregrounded, and apparently the more literary meaning, but it is equally important that the concept is also thematized in the story in the

³⁶ See chapter 1.

sense which is conventionally understood as non-metaphoric. This multivalence is what makes the use of entropy particularly telling of the way Pynchon's novels build their network of ideas, concepts and highly interpretable passages. The short story shows how this plurality of potential meanings opens up the interpretive horizon.

In one of the two alternating storylines, Callisto tries to harness thermodynamic entropy. He has turned his apartment into a hermetically sealed "hothouse," in which he assumes all temperatures are bound to become and remain equal. This should help him revive a dying bird, whom he tries to warm with the heat of his own body. Callisto talks us through the basic theory of thermodynamic entropy, but also extends the idea of entropy metaphorically in his premonition of the imminent "heat-death" of culture (*SL*, 87–89). The other storyline concerns a party that goes on interminably in the adjacent apartment. One of the guests has marital problems which he attributes to "noise" in communication. This concept comes from information theory, in which noise is analogous to and sometimes equated with "entropy" (Schweighauser 2011, 147). The analogy also inverts some of the relations involved: whereas in thermodynamics the states of high entropy are the least complex, in communication theory high entropy means high complexity (Bruni, 2011; Hayles 1990, 51; Palmeri 1987, 983; Schweighauser 2011, 147). The cultural analogy thrives despite this inconsistency. High communicational entropy makes communication impossible just like high thermodynamic entropy makes life impossible. Neither sounds like it is good news for humanity.

In the story, the multifaceted figuration created by the different meanings of entropy becomes a rich source of interpretations. The party can be taken to represent the idea of cultural heat-death (cf. Plater 1978, 139); the states of affairs in the two apartments may be seen analogous to two different ways of understanding entropy (cf. Tanner 1971, 154–155; Seed 1988, 36–49); the two main characters, one in each apartment, can be shown to function as "a shorthand picture of the human alternatives" of coping with it (Tanner 1971, 155). With its two storylines, flatly allegorical characters, and different concepts of entropy each spun as metaphors to the others, Pynchon's story itself can be seen as a mobile system of differential states (cf. Seed 1988, 52). In its capacity to fuel such interpretations, we see the force of entropy as a metaphor in the context of the story. We see how it remains connected to the scientific fields in which it is taken to figure non-metaphorically, while also being richly suggestive of phenomena of society and of human interaction. While the story may be relatively unsophisticated, as its author later writes in an unhappy review of his early works, it shows that the emplotment of the idea into fiction unshackles it from the scientifically rigid rules of analogy and equivalence and makes it exfoliate into a flexible and expressive metaphor (cf. Pynchon 1985, 13).

The implications of the use of entropy extend beyond Pynchon's story, however. In applying the idea of entropy to the social sphere Callisto partakes in a rich tradition of understanding and applying (scientific) concepts as analogies. In particular, Callisto's view on entropy is made in the image of Henry Adams, whose humanistic extrapolations of scientific marvels at the turn of the 20th Century Pynchon echoes through several of his characters (Seed 1988, 40–41; cf. Cowart 1980, 67). Rather than Adams, Pynchon himself might be taking his cue from Norbert Wiener, whose work in the early 1950's both entertained and warned against the idea that certain theories are generalizable across the spectrum of scientific inquiry (Wiener 1989, 16–17; cf. Pynchon 1985, 13). It can be argued that the specific interpretive potential of the ideas Pynchon incorporates in his fictions – and not just the scientific ideas – is in part due to these ideas themselves so often being products of discourses whose aim in their primary context is to explain and analyze phenomena of our world: “natural” as is the case with phenomena sciences take as their objects, or “cultural” as with phenomena linguistics and social theory strive to account for. Of course, Pynchon's entropies and gravities come unhinged from these frames often enough to suggest that such pre-given domains of thought are constructs themselves. This aligns Pynchon with the many thinkers on various fields who have argued that our conceptualizations, even those which natural sciences are based on, are always already analogies or metaphors and can always be extended as such (Foucault 1989; Lakoff and Nuñez 2000; Hofstadter and Sander 2013).

The idea of entropy has continued to inform Pynchon's work.³⁷ Indeed, while the word “entropy” may be conspicuously absent in *V.*, its modulations color the novel's take on the sinister novelty of the 20th century values, virtues, and master narratives – as if they were affected by an entropic force beyond human control. If “the century's master cabal” is real, as certain characters in their paranoid moments suspect, it may be much less the force behind the decadent condition of humanity than it is a symptom of this force (*V.*, 226). This functions as a part of the historical setting of the novel, too. The historical period which Pynchon places under the eyepiece of fiction in *V.* is one showing much interest in the metaphorical sense of entropy, namely the turn of the 20th Century. “Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man,” Henry Adams had put it, knowing full well that the reading public would respond to the idea immediately and intuitively rather than through grasping the new

³⁷ Pynchon's most explicit and best-known employment and emplotment of entropy is found in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). Vanderbeke (2000) discusses the changes in Pynchon's use of the concept from “Entropy” to *Mason & Dixon* (1997).

scientific laws and equations presented as its proof (Adams 1918, 451).³⁸ Alongside Adams one may spare a thought for a number of influential modernist poets who prophesied that the world as we know it was coming to an end – slouchingly, whimperingly.

From Model-Building to Reading Literature

While entropy may be the best-known instance of scientific metaphoricity in Pynchon's work, it is far from the only one. Neither is entropy as such all that relevant to the work at hand. Far more pertinent is the somewhat more generalizable process of metaphORIZATION which the use of entropy can illustrate. While many Pynchon-scholars have reached a formidable level of expertise in entropy, most have focused on the literary functions of the scientific ideas and the ways in which the ideas, understood in their literary functionality, can help interpret Pynchon's work. In a manner that can be seen as representative of this branch of criticism, Schaub (1981) detects a more general pattern in Pynchon's work: Pynchon's "ideas" tend to be as much things in the world as they are its potential meanings (103). Cooper (1983) writes in the same vein that science in Pynchon urges a new understanding of the cosmos, but also a new aesthetic of fiction – and thus insists that earlier comparisons between science in Pynchon and whaling in *Moby-Dick* does not capture the full scope of Pynchon's ideas (Cooper 1983, 110–111; cf. Cowart 1980).

The notion of scientific concepts and ideas urging a new understanding of the novel and of fiction is a way of saying that these ideas join the stock of knowledge by which Pynchon's work seems informed, and arguably, that they should be considered part of "Pynchon's theory." If we consider the wealth of interpretations toward which the idea of entropy contributes, it is clear that the science in literature does not simply function as an expression of a world view or of the natural order of the world represented. Rather, the interpretive potential of the idea of entropy shows how ideas begin to function as part of the "mute speech" of literature: "a language that speaks less by what it says than by what it does not say, by the power that is expressed through it." (cf. Rancière 2011, 59).

Pynchon Studies have acknowledged the need to address the ways in which Pynchon's use of these conceptual constellations is transformed by the context of literature. According to Cooper (1983),

³⁸ Evoking the law of thermodynamics in the context of the early 20th Century is also a device for discussing the contemporary culture of *V.* – as the idea of entropy was common cultural currency in the late 1950s. As Tony Tanner has shown, the cultural notion of entropy was much in vogue in American post-war literature and was widely employed by numerous authors "as a word or as a tendency" (Tanner 1971, 141–152).

Pynchon does not only analyze social issues and human psychology with the concepts of science, but “renders into literature its most challenging epistemological and methodological problems” (110). In her discussion of the links between scientific revolutions of the 20th century and Pynchon’s fiction, Kathryn Hume makes a similar point:

Pynchon has not created a postnewtonian cosmos, but rather a fictional analogue to that world, one in which characters and readers must deal with uncertainties as radical as those of physics. His creation remains an analogue, however, not a scientific reality. [...] Science is one of Pynchon’s metaphors, not his starting point for examining reality (Hume 1987, 190–191.)

While in Pynchon’s oeuvre science *also* remains science – instead of becoming just an adequate metaphor – there is no reason not to have it walk under the same shadow that befalls any epistemology, explanation, or model in Pynchon’s universe. As suggested above, the STEM bundle of sciences holds a special interest here because it resists immediate interpretation and assimilation through metaphorization. Science in Pynchon seems highly conducive of creating a sense of signification while still resisting settling on particular meanings. The whole sonorous register of potential meaning is available to interpretation, neither the use as an adequate metaphor nor the scientific, conventionally non-metaphoric use is ultimately privileged.

In a sense the same applies to all theory Pynchon’s fiction uses. While the scientific theory may have its functional peculiarity, as I have suggested, Thomas Moore argues that Pynchon’s sciences and humanities are irrevocably intertwined:

While, one must assume, it is just barely possible to tear the scientific/philosophical/cultural-historical thematic family out of its connections with others of the novel’s such families [...] it seems quite impossible to discuss Pynchon’s science in isolation from his philosophy or his history (1987, 149).

Moore’s conceptualization of Pynchon’s ideas as “families” is clear-sighted. The ideas from different spheres of knowledge can be connected in fiction through the family resemblances of their functions in the text.

Therefore, sciences do hold a prominent place in Pynchon’s work, but beyond their capacity to illustrate how Pynchon’s “ideas” work as part of his novels, there is no reason why they should necessarily detain any description of Pynchon’s fiction. This is apparent in how far beyond STEM we end up reaching even when trying to limit the discussion to the most scientific of Pynchon’s ideas.

Indeed, to even scratch the surface of the reservoir of ideas in Pynchon we would have to delve in equal measure into psychology, sociology, history, politics, philosophy, and linguistics.³⁹

Model and Metaphor in the Context of the Work

Pynchon scholars have been keenly perceptive in discussing the functions of Pynchon's use of scientific ideas and concepts. The question which I have tried to answer here has been posed less frequently: why and how such "ideas" are interpreted as functionally polymorphous in literature?

The evidence in Pynchon studies hints at a two-way drive at work in analysis. Seeing the science thematized in literature as an aspect of its poetics means allowing the science to function in all of its many roles, "neither literally nor as a metaphor" to borrow the title of one of the finest essays on Pynchon and entropy (Palmeri 1987). This way of viewing artistic works can be linked to Rancière's "expressive" regime of poetics, which not only considers the figurative mode of language essential to the notion "literariness" but also sees it as primary in the division between figurative and literal:

The figurative mode of language expresses a spontaneous perception of things that does not yet distinguish between proper and figurative, concepts and images, things and our feelings. [...] Poetry is a language that speaks of things "as they are" for someone awakening to language and thought" (2011, 57).

As Inger Dalsgaard (2012) remarks, in asking about the use of science in fiction literary analysis rarely aims at a better understanding of science. Rather, the focus tends to be on the literary functionality of science and on how its use is motivated from the artistic point of view. In practice, analyses often proceed to building analogies between fictional or literary strategies and scientific concepts, theories or methods. (157.) Yet as I have argued above, scientific thought is in its peculiar way both extremely appealing and strangely resistant to the functionalizing and metaphorizing reading strategies. It seems obvious that the gap is more easily straddled when the theory interfaced

³⁹ Pynchon studies has (re)constructed a sub-canon of secondary literature, a kind of Pynchon Sourcebook. Common topics and theories include Poisson distribution as a mathematical description of randomness (Schaub 1981, 108–109); Norbert Wiener's cultural interpretations of laws of physics such as entropy, relativity etc. (Cooper 1983, 46; Schaub 1981, 22); Pavlovian behavioristic theory of conditioned response; Henry Adams; Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (Cooper 1983, 135); Max Weber's theory of historical progress as rationalization, secularization, and disenchantment (Schaub 1981, 57). These scientific subtexts were widely discussed in the early 1980s, when the corpus of Pynchon's novels was limited to the early novels up to *Gravity's Rainbow*. Later research has found relatively little to add (for a summary see e.g. Hume 1987, 187–195). Beyond this, comprehensive enumeration of theories and ideas possibly influencing Pynchon is not the job for an inconspicuous footnote.

with text is in some sense a theory of textuality. Scott Drake, for instance, nicely encapsulates the idea of reciprocity between *textual* theory and practice. According to Drake, Pynchon enacts in his fiction the very problematic that poststructuralist theory reveals. Further, “Pynchon participates in a metafictional or metacritical language where theory and fiction are not mutually exclusive categories” (2010, 224). This mobility across the interface, promised by the textuality of either side, is the fulcrum of the post-structuralist analyses of Pynchon by Berressem, Duyfhuizen, and McHoul and Wills.

Apart from these very general observations of how literature makes use of, and makes literature of concepts, ideas, and theories, there is also something more particular to be said of the practices of literary criticism. The next two chapters focus on those practices. The widespread interpretive procedure, one to which past studies of Pynchon more than amply testify, is that such ideas, concepts, and theories are seen as analogues or metaphors for structures and techniques of writing, aspects of the fictional world, or the interpretive dilemmas of reading. Although the conceptual development of these analogues or metaphors may be realized in patches and piecemeal in the work, they are usually seen to crystallize in textual segments which Pynchon scholars have used as “key passages” capable of elucidating entire works.

Hägg (2005) speaks of such passages collectively as “structural metaphors of interpretation.” They are representations of reading and interpretation which suggest interpretive strategies to the reader. Hägg distinguishes three types of structural metaphoricity: 1) There are characters in Pynchon’s novels who read and interpret the world or texts in ways that are comparable to reading Pynchon;⁴⁰ 2) characters in the fictional world face interpretive problems that seem analogous to the problems of interpreting the *novels themselves*; and, 3) elements of narrative can be interpreted as a metaphor or a *mise en abyme* image of reading and interpretation. (101–102.) The diversity found among these types already undermines the possibility of any one metaphor being quite adequate enough – being able to support a complete and proper reading or interpretation of the novel. Rather, structural metaphors hint at the very plurality of interpretive horizons to which they themselves contribute. Indeed, according to Hägg, the multilayered presence of images of interpretation hints at “interpretive overdetermination” at every level, and reading becomes a site of “meta- or anti-interpretation” (ibid., 106).

⁴⁰ Molly Hite memorably names Pynchon’s questing protagonists “hermeneuticists,” and sees their quests as mirror images of those the reader partakes (Hite 1982; 1983, 13–14). Scholars have commented copiously on the parallelism between the meaning-seeking actions of Pynchon’s characters and the readerly quest for meaning (e.g. Patteson 1974; Kermode 1983, 84).

While the distinctions found in Hägg are demonstrably useful in describing passages of Pynchon's novels, they can also be used as an analytic heuristic in distinguishing among interpretive procedures encountered in Pynchon studies. Also, the interpretations usually take their cue from clearly demarcated textual segments, because the unavoidable solution to demonstrating how (Pynchon's) novels work is found in the citation of key passages. The next two chapters look into some of the accompanying moves. More specifically, the following chapters argue that certain concepts studied in poetics and literary theory can be used in describing these processes of selection. One of them, discussed in the next subchapter, is *mise en abyme*, or an embedded miniature analogue of the whole. However, this discussion goes from the particular to the general, and moves on to discuss the relations of parts and wholes, which can be seen as the most general conceptualization of the issue at hand. In the final subchapter, the focus is on the conceptual family of *theme*, especially the analytical procedure of *thematization*. Following from the old division between form and content, theme is at times seen as the counterpoint for poetics, even something excluded from poetics. Yet it is often, even in various formalisms, treated as part of poetics. My argument in this discussion is that literary analyses privilege themes that can be seen to transcend "mere thematicity" and be integrated into the artistic design of the work.

This discussion of science in Pynchon hopefully shows why the notion of suggestivity or adequacy of models and metaphors is actually of broader relevance to the discussion of Pynchon, his poetics, and Pynchon studies. The subtle resemblances and the ability of ideas to stand for each other allow for the countless interpretations that inhabit Pynchon studies. This brings us back to the epigraph of the chapter at hand. When Michel Foucault wrote the words cited, he was, of course, describing the madman Don Quixote. To Foucault Quixote's appearance to literature marks the change of the episteme. It is Quixote who keeps seeing resemblances in a world in which things and words, resemblances and signs, no longer hold their old alliances. Judging by the evidence of Pynchon studies, however, the ability to see resemblances, and to see meaning in resemblance, is central to the experience of reading Pynchon. Indeed, reading Pynchon could be a distinctly quixotic affair: signs resemble each other and all resemblances seem sign-like; adequate metaphors abound and the abundance of metaphors itself becomes both a motivation and a source of interpretations. Yet all the while, Pynchon's ideas still have the feel of things in the world, of more than just their meanings.

2.2 The Interface within: Devices and Reading Strategies of Textual Self-Modeling

'It is a frequent habit,' says Descartes, in the first lines of his *Regulae*, 'when we discover several resemblances between two things, to attribute to both equally, even on points in which they are in reality different, that which we have recognized to be true of only one of them'. (Foucault 1989, 56.)

Whereas the previous discussion was concerned with the ideas, concepts and theories which may function as models and metaphors for the novels in which they appear or for problems of interpreting them, the present chapter moves to a more specific level and draws on a phenomenon well known to aesthetics, art theory, and most importantly, literary theory. The chapter at hand focuses on a specific reading strategy which is commonly involved in identifying key passages in which models and metaphors are discovered. This strategy is well known to literary studies, even though it tends not to be conceptualized in terms of reading at all. The type of procedure theorized in this chapter involves endowing distinct textual passages with global interpretive significance. This commonly involves finding a textual passage presenting a condensed image or idea suggestive of a global theme or interpretation. In other words, a *key passage* with certain thematic or formal properties is seen to work as a model or metaphor for how the text works on, works with, or works through the idea encapsulated in this passage. Therefore, while the issue is arguably relevant to the more general practices of analyzing literary texts, it is also easy to see how the phenomenon at hand is related to attempts to

find textual encapsulations of “Pynchon’s theory.” Likewise, it is connected to the discussion of models and structural metaphors in the previous chapter.

According to Brian McHale we are used working with such a strategy in reading texts. It beckons to us at certain points in classic works of literature, such as:

When Don Quixote, in Part Two of *Don Quixote*, becomes aware of the existence of Part One; when Hamlet stages a play that mirrors his uncle’s crime; or when Roderick Usher’s friend, in Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” reads aloud a tale that duplicates Roderick’s own situation; or when Edouard, in Gide’s *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, reflects on his plans for the novel he is writing, also entitled *Les Faux-monnayeurs* (McHale 2006, 175).

Since André Gide’s first theoretical observations concerning this device or figure it has gone by the name of *mise en abyme*. The following sections approach academic readings of Pynchon’s novels, and Pynchon’s “ideas” in the context of the theory of *mise en abyme*. By extension, they pose the question of what it means to read, interpret, and cite parts of texts as representative of the whole.

My argument here is that while *mise en abyme* has successfully been defined and studied as a discrete artistic device, we are yet to grasp the ramifications of the complementary discussion of those functions that the device may share with other textual strategies. Relatedly, it will be argued that while *mise en abyme* can be used as an analytically distinctive concept in analysis of textual features, it should also be seen to contribute to the more general discussion of determining significance of parts of text in relation to the whole work. It also provides, therefore, one way of approaching the question of scholarly pattern recognition and the many differences, resemblances and relations among readings of literary works – Pynchon’s or otherwise. Arguably certain passages in Pynchon’s works have held sway over interpretations of the novels precisely by giving forth the impression that they might, in some capacity, be able to stand for the whole. Although the phenomenon is certainly of broader significance to literary analysis, the discussion around the concept *mise en abyme* is where it has been approached with particular analytical tact.

Here, the theoretical conceptions of *mise en abyme* will be studied in tandem with readings of Pynchon’s works. More specifically, I am interested in readings which make the interpretive move in which a textual passage is taken to represent in an encapsulated form an aspect of the whole. The readings show that interpreting textual passages as putting into miniature some aspects of the work is

a widespread critical practice. It is then shown that since its inception as a formal concept *mise en abyme* has also been considered with focus on function, reception, and cognition. This theoretical circumference suggests that while it may be useful to retain a narrow definition of *mise en abyme* for analytical purposes, the narrow conception cannot do justice to the more general issue at hand: seeing textual parts as representative of the works of which they are part.

What is specifically Pynchonian about these condensed images of global meanings is that in Pynchon they seem overabundant and foregrounded, but their effect transcends that of mere self-reflexivity – in the postmodernist, metafictional sense. This has to do with the specific quality of Pynchon’s ideas, discussed in the previous chapter. As of today, self-reflexivity in the playful, postmodernist sense is a well-studied topic in literary studies. Yet important works like Robert Alter’s *Partial Magic* and Paul De Man’s *Allegories of Reading* have shown that self-reflexivity is a significant yet elusive property deeply ingrained in fictional and poetic rhetoric. Far from belonging exclusively, or even particularly, to the province of postmodernist metafiction, poetics of self-reflexivity shows that literature has, in various ways throughout literary history, been able to model itself and put its own models under duress. On the evidence of Pynchon Studies, fascination with textual strategies of self-reflection has also survived the recent decline of interest in metafiction and postmodernist poetics. As my discussion below shows, quite a few of the more recent studies of Pynchon’s novels keep giving credence to the miniature analogy or *mise en abyme* as it appears in Pynchon.

The following sections begin by looking into the theory of *mise en abyme* and expand towards the more encompassing question of what it means to read parts of texts as models of the whole. In Pynchon, different kinds of part-to-whole relations are thematized in many passages concerning the problem of interpreting information or deciding which pieces of information are significant, but they are also foregrounded through repetition and variation of thematic concerns, plot developments, and motifs.

Mise en Abyme: Practice and Theory

Let us move straight to a practical example from Pynchon studies, one that involves reading a literary representation as *mise en abyme*. An illustrative practical example, and one accompanied with a telling analysis, can be found in Berressem’s *Pynchon’s Poetics* (1993). Before being introduced to the main protagonist Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, we are confronted with the “godawful

mess” that is his desk: “Things have fallen roughly into layers, over a base of bureaucratic smegma that sifts steadily to the bottom [...]” (*GR*, 21). Berressem emphasizes how both the text and the desk it brings into being are saturated with “discarded objects and discourses” (Berressem 1993, 7). Berressem’s initial reaction is to the overwhelming torrent of signifiers, “a polymorphously perverse delight in signification”, but he then turns back to delve into the level of the signified, and discovers “the lovingly detailed refuse of writing itself” (Berressem 1993, 6–8). Indeed, the description of the desk lingers at “red and brown curls of rubber eraser, pencil shavings,” “very fine debris picked and flung from typewriter ribbons,” and “tattered sheets of carbon paper” (*GR*, 21). The profusion of writing on the page of the book contrasts with the traces of writing left lying on a desk in the fictional world.

Most importantly for the present chapter, Berressem reads the description of the desk as a virtual thematic catalogue of the novel, in addition also seeing it as incorporating important cultural and historical allusions as well as the novel’s “main metaphors” (1993, 8). Indeed, the claim is justifiable. Just the “lost pieces to different jigsaw puzzles” on the table contain several motifs that metonymically point towards some of the novel’s central preoccupations: a dog for unethical science, an explosion and a bomber plane for technologies of war, a pin-up girl for erotica. In addition to the materials of writing, different semiotic systems are evoked: texts, music, costumes,⁴¹ (but surprisingly, no film). It is easy to see why Berressem thinks that the table functions as a “shorthand for the historical panorama” of the novel (*ibid.*).

Berressem then contracts this multiplicity into a statement about *Gravity’s Rainbow* and its main themes.

Slothrop’s desk is a replica of the war in general. The introductory *tableau* thus prefigures not only the shape of history but, simultaneously, the shape of the book, highlighting both its indebtedness to the signifier and its investment in the signified. (Berressem 1993, 8.)

History has converged on Slothrop’s desk, and it is a mess. As Berressem puts it, the table is as impossible to order as the war itself; the war, which the novel circumscribes with just such debris and refuse while largely avoiding conventional depictions of acts of warfare. The image of the table has

⁴¹ See e.g. Barthes *The Fashion System* (1990).

been a demonstrably powerful tool for thinking about the novel as a whole. However, is it really a case of textual *mise en abyme*, and why should it matter whether it is or not?

Theoretically, *mise en abyme* has been most extensively studied in the framework of structuralism, semiotics and narrative poetics. In this theoretical sphere, two contesting definitions emerge. In one, represented here by Brian McHale (2006), the distinction between *mise en abyme* and other categories of analogy is emphasized. McHale summarizes this branch of thinking about *mise en abyme* in a two-part definition. Firstly, the part *en abyme* must have a demonstrably analogous relationship to the whole. Secondly, it must belong to an ontologically secondary world, which is contained within the diegetic world (McHale 2006, 176–177; see also 1987, 125).

Therefore, Slothrop's desk can be seen as an emblematic example of Pynchon's miniature analogies: many descriptions and scenes in Pynchon's novels fulfill the first criterion of being readable as a small-scale analogy of some aspect of the whole, but not the second one, as they are not located at a secondary level – neither ontological nor diegetic. This does not stop critics from describing such passages in terms evoking characteristics of *mise en abyme*. According to Berressem, the table on the whole functions as “a perfectly well-ordered microcosm that provides a precise architectural blueprint for the book” (Berressem 1993, 8). While failing to fulfill the strict criteria of *mise en abyme*, the description of the table is seen to perform a similar function in reading. The quibbling sort of criticism might deem the analysis terminologically inaccurate, but this seems beside the point as the reading is no less persuasive for it. It can be argued that there is something characteristically Pynchonian about the deviance of this case. In fact, Pynchon's novels seem to use the definition-abiding type of *mise en abyme* sparingly (the “pure” *mise en abyme*, according to McHale⁴²), but nonetheless find countless ways to suggest analogous relations between parts and wholes. This argument can be backed up by looking further into readings found in Pynchon Studies.

While considerable analytical sharpness can be gained in insisting on a narrow definition, other theorists have followed the opposite trajectory. Since the focus of this study is on readings, here the most pressing question about *mise en abyme* has to do with its inclusiveness, its capacity as a logic or procedure in interpretation. This, as McHale correctly points out, makes *mise en abyme* veer

⁴² Cohn (2012) uses the term *pure mise en abyme* ever so slightly differently, and with a reference to Gide's original definition. Cohn says: “in a pure *mise en abyme*, an interminable process is inevitably involved, and it develops, at least in theory, in two directions” (108). To Dällenbach and McHale, interminable recursion is a subspecies of the phenomenon, not a necessary condition. Cohn notes, however, that pure *mise en abyme* with its infinite recursion, is only ever *suggested* by a text and not actualized by it (ibid., 109).

towards a more general principle of analogy – which I believe is its right place, at least in the context of this work (cf. McHale 2006, 176).

Moshe Ron, for instance, distances himself from the narrow conception of *mise en abyme*. Ron suggest the following definition: “any *diegetic* segment which resembles the work where it occurs” (1987, 436, emphasis added). Ron waives the rule of secondariness and emphasizes instead that the figure must transpose a salient aspect of the work to the “scale of the characters” (ibid., 420).⁴³ This seems like a wise move insofar as it evades some of the questions inherent in the notion of ontological secondariness – like why a *textual* representation of a view seen through a doorframe or a windowpane is *ontologically* different from a representation of a framed picture.⁴⁴ Or, in this case, the question of whether a desk can be represented textually in such a way that makes it seem like a secondary world (cf. Ron 1987, 427–428). There seems to be no reason why it could not be so – Berressem even calls the description of the desk a *tableau*, making the issue of framing or isolation a matter of perception or reception rather than fictional ontology.

Though perhaps avoidable, this conundrum is highly illuminating as concerns the ambiguous status of *mise en abyme*. It is on one hand treated as a textual representation but on the other hand as an effect experienced in reception and as an interpretive procedure. This ambiguity is reflected in McHale’s bipartite definition, in which the first rule of analogousness is obviously far more open to interpretive idiosyncrasy than the rule of secondariness, to which definite and rather technical restrictions can be appended. McHale does just that in restricting the scope of pure *mise en abyme* with the rule of ontological secondariness. Mieke Bal makes another such restriction by requiring *mise en abyme* to be *diegetically* secondary – “an object of second degree narration” (1978, 119).⁴⁵ Yet ontological secondariness or narration at a further remove can also be seen as “non-essential” features (Dällenbach 1989; Ron 1987). Further, even such criteria may be subject to various interpretive judgments in reading more often than is habitually acknowledged. As Ron discerns, many “objects” traditionally found *mise en abyme*, such as paintings or musical pieces, are not textual in

⁴³ The expression “scale of the characters” stems from Lucien Dällenbach’s classic work on *mise en abyme* (1989 [orig. French 1977]).

⁴⁴ This is a question much probed in 20th Century art. René Magritte’s pair of paintings both known as “The Human Condition” and another one called “Euclidean walks” may be the best known illustrations of the problem.

⁴⁵ According to Ron, however, Bal is ambiguous about whether interruption in narration or diegetic downshift is constitutive of *mise en abyme* (see Ron 1987, 428). From this point of view McHale’s focus on ontology is helpful, if not unproblematic.

themselves and therefore are rendered textual or represented textually rather than “embedded” or inserted into texts in a way that necessarily constitutes a “diegetic downshift” (Ron 1987, 428).⁴⁶

With these reservations in place, we may now take a look into some of the more conventional *mises en abyme* in Pynchon. As conspicuous as the relative drought of such cases in Pynchon’s big historical novels may be, his shortest novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), contains no less than two strikingly classical examples of *mise en abyme*. One of them is an ekphrasis of a Remedios Varo painting *Bordando el manto terrestre*.⁴⁷ The other is a play within the novel, which the protagonist Oedipa Maas actually *expects* to be analogous to the structure of the emergent conspiracy she is yet to comprehend. The very reason she goes to see the play (as well as hunting down its myriad folios and versions) is to get a glimpse to the secret order of things as a whole.⁴⁸ (*Lot 49*, 11–12 [the painting]; 49–58 [the play]).

The embedded painting has been read as putting into miniature certain aspects of the whole of *The Crying of Lot 49* at least by Tony Tanner (1971), Stefan Mattessich (2001) and Hanjo Berressem (1993). Tanner describes the correspondence thus: “The painting [...] is of course a lyrical reflection of Oedipa’s own embroidery work, those self-spun versions of reality with which she tries to fill the void” (Tanner 1971, 175). Tanner therefore points out the analogousness of the reality-fabricating activities depicted in the painting and in those of Oedipa’s own mind. Mattessich’s reading, on the other hand, sees here “the part-whole relation at the heart of the novel’s signifying system in an example of *ekphrasis*, in Oedipa herself, and in the novel proper” (Mattessich 2001, 45). He finds that the painting is analogical to the novel in terms of the means of produce and the product: the fabric produced in the tower turns out to encompass the ground on which the tower stands, and the painting produced by means of textual *ekphrasis* can be seen to encompass the whole text of the novel. Berressem, on the other hand, finds in the passage a Lacanian mirror scene. The painting is literally a reflection, Oedipa’s self-constituting self-image:

⁴⁶ In texts, that is. This is just the kind of medium-specific point of divergence one does well to acknowledge. Yet from the point of view of a more general theory of reception, or perception, one must not fail to appreciate the intersemiotic and intermedial translatability of the concept.

⁴⁷ <http://www.iupui.edu/~lmena1/varo/manto.jpg>

⁴⁸ McHoul and Wills read the play *The Courier’s Tragedy* as analogous to the whole novel in one particular aspect: the thematization of the “hermeneutic bind” between the whole and the system that organizes it into a whole (McHoul and Wills 1990, 67–69). The authors also read Derrida’s *The Post Card* alongside *The Crying of Lot 49*, and purposefully obfuscate the apparent hierarchy between a primary and secondary text (ibid.).

She is one of the frail girls, and the tower the ego that imprisons her. [She is] always already part of the tapestry she is weaving. [...] The tower in which she sits, however, is itself a part of this world, so that she is always already woven into the world she is weaving. (1993, 91–93.)

According to Berressem, this encounter happens exactly within the Lacanian parameters. Oedipa gets the first glimpse of her own self, which however splits as it is constituted by this reflection. Prereflexive ego is an impossibility, but the mirror scene reveals that the ego is always already split (cf. *ibid.*, 91). Therefore, when Oedipa sees the fabric being made in the pictured tower which stands on the said fabric, she gains a perspective on the condition of the subject: it is at once made and unraveled in such encounters. This encounter may prefigure Oedipa's paranoia and, by extension, motivate the epistemological undecidability of the novel. Yet as Berressem points out, many critics have interpreted Oedipa's paranoia as a distorted perception of objective reality, whereas the Lacanian interpretation allows one to do away with the very notion of objective reality. The recognition of the mirror scene and the subsequent paranoia are a way of coping with the plane of the symbolic inscribed on the plane of the real (*ibid.*, 94). Berressem argues that while the Lacanian theory mainly concerns the construction of the symbolic space, *The Crying of Lot 49* "follows in detail what happens when this network begins to disintegrate" (*ibid.*, 95).

Each of these readings, while unconcerned with theorizing or defining *mise en abyme* as such, is however taking the painting as a structural feature performing a doubling function on a holistic aspect of the text. All three readings involve procedures which are perhaps not so much interpretive moves as something prefiguring them. Firstly, they all rest on the recognition of the painting as a part of the text that in itself is foregrounded as an isolable whole, one which itself can conditionally be seen as a "world" ontologically distinct from the narrative world of novel. Secondly, this embedded representation is seen as a condensation of an aspect that is integral to the whole novel. In each case the inset painting is seen to reflect or miniaturize a crucial aspect of the novel itself.

However, another point should be made here. As far as the scholarly craft of interpretation is concerned, these three readings differ in no uncertain terms. Inevitably, in each case the very fabric of the interpretation is woven with the theory brought to bear on the text. Therefore, we may find another commonality between the different readings: they all conceptualize the *mise en abyme* in such a way which makes the analysis of the part representative of or continuous with the analysis of the whole. In all cases, that is, the theory brought to bear on the text in reading makes a difference insofar

as it has an effect on *what kind* of an analogue for *which* aspect of the whole novel the passage may become.

Cases like the Remedios Varo ekphrasis, however, represent a minority in Pynchon's novels. The passage with its uses in criticism could be just about the most illustrative and accessible Pynchonian example of how a canonical case of *mise en abyme* works in a Pynchon novel and figures in its interpretations. While the interpretive use of Varo's painting is highly illuminating, the scholars discussed above are not theorists of *mise en abyme* and are in no way committed to any of its competing theories. At the very least, however, the readings above show how the literary critical practice makes use of a broader category of part-whole analogies. This broader view would include the grasping of motifs, characters, descriptions, and plot sequences as standing for an aspect of the whole (cf. Dällenbach 1989, 43, 76). This broader notion – whether one wants to still call it *mise en abyme* or not – is of far greater pertinence to reading Pynchon, at least if we are to judge by readings of Pynchon available to us. A more comprehensive look into the theory shows that certain issues, formerly discussed at the fringes of the theory of *mise en abyme*, are actually more telling of this broader phenomenon than of the narrowly defined device.

The Miniature Analogy and the Whole

It is possible to argue for a looser definition of a miniature analogy on the basis of the rule of ontological or diegetic secondariness being “non-essential” (see Ron 1987, Dällenbach 1989). On the other hand, if one proceeds from existing literary critical readings empirically, it seems evident that scholars have not taken heed of any strict definition, whether analyzing Pynchon or otherwise. The principle is frequently applied to “impure” instances of embedded analogies. Slothrop's table provides a prime example of this practice. As suggested, the possibly compromised nature of the device does not prevent the passage from creating the effects commonly associated with *mise en abyme*.

Since its conception by André Gide in 1893, the theory of *mise en abyme* has emphasized the compromised nature of the literary cases. Writes Gide:

Finally, in literature, there is the scene in which a play is acted in *Hamlet*; this also happens in many other plays. In *Wilhelm Meister*, there are the puppet shows and the festivities in the castle. In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, there is a piece that is read to Roderick etc. *None of these examples is absolutely accurate. What would be more accurate, [...] would be a comparison with the device from heraldry that involves putting a second representation of the original shield 'en abyme' within it.* (Cited in Dällenbach 1989, 7, emphasis added.)

Gide's ideal *mise en abyme* was best actualized in the heraldic technique of reproducing the entire macrodesign *en abyme* and in miniature. Gide's *mise en abyme*, more *littérature potentielle* than a practical method of literary composition, could only ever be realized inaccurately. As Dällenbach (1989) demonstrates, Gide's original concept never aimed at becoming the fine-meshed heuristic dragnet it becomes in contemporary criticism (see 20–26). It was an artistic pipe dream, an idealistic structure of the mind, which the author struggled to translate into writing. Tellingly, Gide revised his own theory later on, replacing the idea of embedded duplicate shields with a different metaphor, “mirror in the text.” This is illustrative of both the dialectic of how the device may be thought about and thought with, as well as of the wider analytical allure of *mise en abyme*. Gide was both describing an idea he knew existed – in arts and crafts as well as the minds creating and perusing them – and trying to produce artistically something that did not yet exist.

It is reasonable to be wary of watering down analytically distinctive tools. Yet the other hand, formal definitions of *mise en abyme* may needlessly complicate the basic hierarchy of interpretive needs. It is obviously the case that not everything represented as an ontologically or diegetically subordinate embedding in a text is an instance of *mise en abyme*, yet it is also plain to see that interpreting passages as miniature analogies of the whole does not require an ontological or diegetic downshift. In his inquiry into the possible cognitive functions of *mise en abyme*, McHale emphasizes that the decisive factor in the identification of the device is its function (2006). Focus on function, slightly downplayed in McHale's earlier work in favor of the ontological distinction,⁴⁹ emerges clearly in his more recent foray into *mise en abyme*. Interestingly, though, McHale is still adamant about the rule of secondariness being useful. In spite of the analytical sharpness gained by the narrow definition, this insistence seems unnecessary.

A brief look into the very idea of ontological downshift will show how this may be the case. As McHale is right to point out, the pure, formalized *mise en abyme* does not require interpretation or

⁴⁹ See McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987).

present any cognitive challenge. The purist view of the self-embedding figure would evoke the infinite regress seen, for instance, in commercial packaging in which the image of the package contains an image of the package and so forth. (McHale 2006, 177.) A linguistic or grammatical version of the pure *mise en abyme*, albeit without explicitly presented infinite regress, is best represented by a self-quoting sentence such as Willard Van Orman Quine's reduction of the Epimenides paradox (in which a Cretan states that all Cretans are liars). Quine's version goes: "'yields falsehood when appended to its own quotation,' yields falsehood when appended to its own quotation." Douglas Hofstadter and others have taken this sort of syntactic-semantic recursion to heights quite giddy enough (see e.g. Hofstadter 1985, 8–9). Yet the logically formalized device is ultimately unhelpful in understanding the analogousness of parts and wholes as encountered in literary texts. First of all, this is because these purist formalizations are not analogies in the same sense as the cases *mise en abyme*. *La vache qui rit*—cheeseboxes and self-replicating sentences clearly do something slightly different. In reading a passage describing, for example, Slothrop's table, we read a passage of language as an image of a novel or its world. While not entirely different, this mode of perception is clearly subtler and more complex. The thing to notice about phenomena such as recursion and self-replication is that in their exemplary and straightforward forms they are blatantly explicit and unambiguous. In reading literature there must be something else at stake.

Relatedly, one may extend this criticism to the idea of *mise en abyme* as an object of "second degree narration" *à la* Bal (1978). On one hand, scholars as different as Lisa Zunshine and Douglas Hofstadter have pointed out, in their respective contexts, that we can process with perfect nonchalance three recursive levels in a radio news report or conversation we overhear (Hofstadter 1979, 128; Zunshine 2006, 28–29). Yet on the other hand, three levels are more than enough to suggest infinite regress, as we quickly realize in reading a William Burroughs story which portrays a man reading a newspaper story about a man reading a newspaper story about a man reading a newspaper story (cited in McHale 1987, 114–115). The only difference is the exact replication of the scenario in the latter. However, Burroughs brings an unmistakably artistic sensibility to play and adds: "I had the odd sensation that I myself would wind up in the story and that someone would read about me reading the story [...]" (ibid.). He therefore evokes Borges's famous idea that we worry about Don Quixote reading *Don Quixote* because of what it might imply about ourselves and our world; because we suddenly feel the gravity of what one Vladimir Nabokov narrator calls "a black burden, a huge aching hump," the experience that reality is ultimately indistinguishable from dream. (And further: "How much more dreadful it would be if the very awareness of your being aware of reality's dreamlike nature were also a dream, a built-in hallucination!" (Nabokov 1972, 93)).

While defining and formalizing *mise en abyme* is possible, artistic use of the device clearly transcends restrictions suggested by definitions. In the literary evocations of the embedded reflections of the whole, these reflections are typically also given a sort of interpretation – as they are often accompanied by a statement, fantasy, warning, or apprehension about how glimpsing such a reflection might affect our outlook on life. This is why the difference between the pure *mise en abyme* and other miniature analogies should be looked into at length. If the classical types of *mise en abyme* are rare in Pynchon, we are however likely to come across myriad embeddings (without miniature analogies within them) as well as miniature analogies that are not framed as ontologically or diegetically subordinate. Hägg (2005) demonstrates the complexity of what he calls “structural metaphors” with a number of well-chosen examples from *Gravity’s Rainbow* (83–101). He justifiably points out that the existing typologies of embedded narrative mirror-structures are less than helpful in analyzing actual cases (96). Whether this is because the Pynchonian cases themselves are “impure” is an interesting question, but slightly beside the point. As Hägg concludes, the analytically cumbersome typologies do nothing to take away the interpretive appeal of the idea of *mise en abyme* (ibid.).

However, this interpretive dimension is what remains somewhat undertheorized. My argument is that it can be fruitfully discussed in the context of a more general theory of reading – even in the context of reception and phenomenology of reading. A brief detour into the discussion of the functions of *mise en abyme* will provide a background for this claim.

Mise en vertige: A Functional Approach

McHale compares John Fowles’s novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* with the Harold Pinter-scripted film adaptation which replaces the novel’s three mutually exclusive endings with two, but also nests the one inside the other as a film filmed within the film. That the filmic *mise en abyme* is so successful in translating the effect achieved by the novel with use of alternate endings, each putting the others under erasure, prompts McHale to comment on the functions the devices perform: “[the] transformation suggests something like a *functional equivalence* between strategies of self-erasure or self-contradiction and strategies involving recursive structures [...]” (1987, 112, emphasis added). McHale sees this as an indicator of the shared function of the two devices. They both pluralize the ontological horizon of the fiction in which they appear.

This insight is related to the observation made by Cohn (2012) in her discussion of *mise en abyme* and metalepsis, in which she shows that the idea of the two devices performing similar functions is rather well known. The functional aspect is clearly what concerns several theorists who have found the “feeling of vertigo” as essential to *mise en abyme*. Indeed, this vertigo is something we may experience in the face of both *mise en abyme* and metalepsis. (108–110.)⁵⁰ Arguably, however, the capability to induce a feeling of vertigo in the reader is perhaps better characterized as an effect of *mise en abyme* – one that is quite accommodating to the narrow definition emphasizing the ontological boundaries *mise en abyme* transgresses.

In study of *mise en abyme* there is, however, a branch of theorizing which grants the device far less outlandish and more general function. This tradition begins with Gide and continues with Ricardou, Dällenbach and Ron. Dällenbach describes it thus: “Very generally, one can therefore conclude that every *mise en abyme* reverses the function of the text that uses it” (1989, 71). One exemplification of this function will be discussed towards the end of this chapter. Ron reiterates the view with subtly different emphasis when he writes that the device “ironically subverts the representational intent of the narrative text, disrupting it where the text aspires to integration, integrating where the text is deliberately fragmentary” (1987, 434). As we will see later, *mise en abyme* can encapsulate an interpretation which says that this very procedure is unnecessary, illogical, or impossible. The reverse function can therefore certainly be a vehicle for irony, but as we shall see, it may also have the effect of destabilizing ontological boundaries.

Even this function is a kind of second-degree development of the most straightforward function of *mise en abyme*, which is to make the point of the message clear by concisely reiterating it. Indeed, as McHale concurs, in some periods and genres the main function of the device seems to be elucidating the text, making it more comprehensible by doubling it (2006, 178). As Russell shows in his study of the role of emblems in the French culture, this function of *mise en abyme* is paralleled by the long-standing, if historically variable, cultural function of emblems and *devises*, which were primarily used to facilitate communication among different social strata (Russell 1985, 62–65; cf. McHale 2006,

⁵⁰ In her *Narcissistic Narrative* Linda Hutcheon cites John Barth’s notes on *Lost in the Funhouse*, according to which the method of linking the stories making up Barth’s book is that of turning as many aspects of the storytelling as possible, such as the structure, the narrative viewpoint, the means of presentation, or the process of composition, enunciating, reading, or listening “into dramatically relevant emblems of the theme.” In another variation of the functional approach, Hutcheon convincingly argues for functional connections between Barth’s use of *mise en abyme* and certain features of parody, as well as what she calls a “more extended allegory.” (See Hutcheon 1980, 56.)

175). Gide's discussion of the history of the device makes this link explicit (see Dällenbach 1989, 7–10, *passim*). The post-Gidean *mise en abyme*, on the other hand, has quintessentially featured in discussions of genres and periods marked by their deviation from the dominant “realist” modes of their time: romance, *nouveau roman*, and postmodernism, among others (see Ron 1987, 434–436; McHale 2006, 178). It is therefore the subversive role of *mise en abyme* that has received most attention in literary studies.

The post-Gidean is also the main context informing Dällenbach's (1989) book-length treatment of *mise en abyme*. Dällenbach acknowledges, however, that functionally there is still a full spectrum of uses for *mise en abyme* from “virtually mimetic reproduction” to completely “free transposition.” Therefore, the most usual function of *mise en abyme* may be to complicate the logic of the narrative, yet it still alternatively performs as a kind of “miniature model” which seems to double and elaborate the central point of the narrative. According to Dällenbach, when *mise en abyme* concentrate on the latter type of doubling it tends to restrict the play of signification. Accurate duplications place a limit to the interpretive potential in the text, and instead elucidate the point and central theme. (1989, 56–57.) Pynchon's use of the device makes use of both these roles.

Dällenbach's book interestingly combines a rather technical and formal approach with a more reader-oriented and functional appraisal of *mise en abyme*.⁵¹ Dällenbach writes that although *mise en abyme* is determined through function rather than form, there are different operations which the device can participate in, and which are distinctive enough to be adequately formalizable. Particularly important to determining these operations is the tripartite distinction between *mise en abyme* of the utterance, the enunciation and the whole code (1989, 55). Within these categories we see the reach of the functional approach beyond the narrow and formal definition.

The first category, *mise en abyme* of the utterance, is where the consolidating, message-enhancing function is most commonly performed. According to Dällenbach, *mise en abyme* of the utterance can be divided into two groups: “the particularizing (miniature models), which concentrate and limit the meaning of the fiction; and the generalizing (transpositions), which give the context a semantic expansion beyond that which the context alone could provide” (*ibid.*, 59).

⁵¹ This is apparent in how Dällenbach hesitates to connect his study with narratology and argues that *mise en abyme* differs from the “elementary structures of poetics” (1989, 54, note 38).

On Dällenbach's second level, *mise en abyme of enunciation*, the idea of duplication becomes more metaphorical. A text can certainly dramatize and thematize its own telling, as Dällenbach shows (ibid., 76–81). It is likewise plausible to claim that when this happens in narratives, it is also probable that they make a theme of reflecting on their own production, or at least this becomes a recurring feature (ibid., 77). Therefore, *mise en abyme* of the enunciation is often a thematization or representation of the situation, agent or context of enunciation (ibid., 75). In cases which Dällenbach labels as *mises en abyme* of the enunciation, such thematizations or representations are interpreted as a self-reflexive rhetorical move. Many thematizations or representations that fall within the range of this type have become conventional. Since the days of *Don Quixote*, if not before, representations of invention, creation, and craftpersonship have come with the potential analogy to writing, and the products with an analogy to the written work (ibid., 77–78; Alter 1975, 8–16).⁵²

The third level, the level of code is not based on duplication at all, but is, rather, a realm of metaphors and model such as those discussed above.⁵³ The conceptual categories of invention, creation, and craft are typical here, equally successful in modelling structural principles as they are as figures of the enunciation. That is, on this level, instead of being metaphors of the act of production they double as images of the structural principles of the product. According to Dällenbach, the favored metaphor is that of fabric, in which case the analogy implies that both text and textiles are “interwoven” and have a “texture.” There are other thematic fields that seem to provide suitable images for the organization of the text. These include the anatomical, the artistic, and the technical. (1989, 96.) As perceiving the analogy on this level requires quite a bit of imaginative thinking and competence with literary conventions, the *mise en abyme* of the code cannot be seen as a text-immanent form. Instead, the *mise en abyme* of the code may be seen as a further sign of proximity between the broad understanding of *mise en abyme* and what Hägg calls a structural metaphor, and understood primarily as a function and a readerly strategy (Hägg 2005, 96).

Many facets of Dällenbach's treatment of *mise en abyme* support the idea that the functional approach is more accommodating to the diversity of actual, empirical cases of miniature analogues found in literature than the narrowly defined device of *mise en abyme*. In Dällenbach's account only a specific type of *mise en abyme* of utterance is accurately describable as a textual copy, reproduction, or a

⁵² In *Don Quixote* we have, for instance, the simile of *translations* being like the backsides of Flemish tapestries: “although you see the pictures, they are covered with threads which obscure them so that the smoothness and gloss of the fabric are lost.” Of course, *Don Quixote* itself is presented to the reader as a translation from Arabic (see e.g. Brink 1998).

⁵³ See chapter 2.1; cf. Dällenbach 1989, 94–96

miniature of the whole. In most instances *mises en abyme* at the level of utterance, and in nearly all instances at the level of enunciation and code the cases may only be *interpreted* as mirror images or models of an aspect of the work. Therefore, the problematic of *mise en abyme* inevitably expands to the realms of reading, interpreting and understanding. The theory of the device is at many places understandable as a theory of how and to what ends parts of the work are foregrounded and become understood as models or metaphors for the whole. Further, recent reformulations, such as McHale's (2006), suggest that the theory may also be able to address the cognitive processes through which these parts are seen as significant miniatures of larger and more complex textual wholes. Arguably, therefore, what the theory of *mise en abyme* outlines is a specific procedure of seeing or reading a part as suggestive of the significance of the whole. While the theory of *mise en abyme* has developed into a highly sophisticated subfield of art theory and literary theory, it may also be seen as one of the most specialized and advanced elaborations of distinct reading procedures to be studied in poetics. Interestingly, the theory of *mise en abyme* also mirrors the movement within poetics discussed above. Like its discipline on the whole, the study of the literary device has gradually drifted towards being understood as a theory of reading or a description of an interpretive procedure.

Miniature Analogies in V.

As most of Pynchon's novels make little use of the canonical types of *mise en abyme*, the use of the device or figure has not been extensively studied as such.⁵⁴ However, readings evoking the functions of *mise en abyme* are far more common. This can be demonstrated by taking a brief look into commentaries of *V.* which make use of the discovery of miniature analogies, yet do this in such ways that are not easily reconciled with the orthodoxies of *mise en abyme*. A good example may be found in Tony Tanner's (1978) reading of *V.* which highlights several passages foregrounding the theme of detecting plots and patterns. In an episode connected to the main plotlines of the novel only by the finest of threads a barmaid named Hanne cannot get rid of a stain on a plate. The stain is hardly visible and "roughly triangular." According to Tanner, the passage contains the problem of the book in miniature (34).

⁵⁴ See, however, Hägg's discussion of metaphors of interpretation, which doubles as a sophisticated account of *mise en abyme* and modelling function of key passages in *Gravity's Rainbow* (2005, chapter 4.).

Puzzled, she moved her head to look at it from another angle. The stain flickered twice in and out of existence. Hanne found that if she focused her eyes a little behind and off the edge of the plate the stain would remain fairly constant, though its shape had begun to change outline; now crescent, now trapezoid. [...]

Was the stain real? She didn't like its color. The color of her headache: pallid brown. It is a stain, she told herself. That's all it is. She scrubbed fiercely. [...]

O God, would it never go away? She gave it up at last and stacked the plate with other dishes. But now it seemed the stain had fissioned, and transferred like an overlay to each of retinæ. (*V.*, 90–91.)

Tanner sees the passage as analogous to the whole in two aspects. He writes that Hanne “is experiencing as a temporary puzzle” what is “a lifelong dilemma” to one of the novel’s main characters and its primary pattern-seeker, Herbert Stencil (Tanner 1978, 34). Yet the problem extends to the level of the whole novel and the meaning-determining actions its readers have to undertake: “Perhaps the changing shapes we see on the external blankness are the shifting projections of our own ‘headaches’ or subjective pressures; on the other hand, there might actually be a stain on the plate” (*ibid.*). As Tanner notes, the description of the shape of the stain further encapsulates the problem. The geometrical descriptions abounding in the novel are themselves patterning and structuring our perception of the fictional world. Do we the readers of the novel *V.*, then, infer that the stain is V-shaped, or is it just “roughly triangular”? Even the allure of this slightly paranoid overinterpretation is itself mirrored in the passage, in which the shape of the stain, once detected, remains imprinted on Hanne’s retinæ and overlaid on her perception. The V-evoking potential of the scenario is also intensified by the fact that the passage on Hanne and the stain is itself part of an embedded “Stencilized” narrative showing many of the uncertainties associated with its production.⁵⁵

It is easy to see how the tenacious stain transposes some aspect of the whole novel on the level of characters. The interpretive conundrum encountered by a minor character is presented succinctly in a few short paragraphs, but it finds parallels in problems other characters have in interpreting the world of novel and events around them. The problematic even exceeds the scope of the fiction as the reader is implicated in a similar problem of interpretation.

As a further example of miniature analogies, let us consider the way in which Grant comments on another passage in *V.* In one of the historical chapters of the novel, Herbert Stencil’s father finds

⁵⁵ See chapters 3 and 4 for more on how the “Stencilized” narratives create a horizon of indeterminacies on several levels.

himself in a situation (or Situation, as Stencil Sr. calls it) the likes of which refuse “to make sense no matter who looked at it, or from what angle.” Based on his experience of international crises Stencil Sr. has reached the conclusion that “no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment.” (*V.*, 189.) Grant’s comment on this passage goes: “Sidney’s thoughts on the subject of ‘Situations’ reflect an ambivalence that resembles the reader’s response to Herbert Stencil’s various attempts to make sense of the V-phenomenon” (Grant 2001, 99). Like Tanner’s more elaborate analysis of the passage with Hanne and the V-shaped stain, this brief comment draws two parallels. One is made on the level of characters: Stencil Sr.’s thoughts are reported in an intradiegetic story but seems to mirror the predicament of the master plotter Herbert Stencil, whose search engulfs the whole novel. The other parallel is made between the problems encountered by fictional characters and the problems of reading and interpreting *V.* The question arising on all levels connected by this parallelism is whether the sense of meaningfulness and connectedness one observes individually can serve as a ground for making assumptions about the interpersonal reality on a global scale.

Grant’s is another example of analysis that makes use of the modelling function that can be read into discrete textual passages. Again, the reading does not explicitly treat the passage as *mise en abyme* but it is read as functionally equivalent to those uses of the device which make the text more comprehensible by doubling it (cf. McHale 2006, 178). Readings such as the two discussed above are based on two reading procedures: 1) discovering a representation of a character trying to make sense of something, and 2) taking the interpretive choice of seeing this representation as performing a modelling function. While we may find several passages in Pynchon’s novels that resemble more closely the classic cases of *mise en abyme*, it is more common to come across passages which do not fulfil the strict conditions set out for the device, but which can nonetheless be treated as functionally equivalent.

The final question to be asked here is whether the procedure of reading involved in such analysis could sometimes be more distinctive than the device itself. One further example from *V.* sheds light on this idea. This episode in the novel finds two characters facing a message – or rather, a passage of text that requires an interpretation of some kind to be readable as a message at all:

One night he [Mondaugen] was awakened by a disheveled Weissmann, who could scarcely stand still for excitement. “Look, look,” he cried, waving a sheet of paper under Mondaugen’s slowly blinking eyes. Mondaugen read:

DIGEWOLDTIMSTEALALENSWTASNDEURFUALRLIKST

(V. 277–278.)

In this case, we clearly have an isolated and distinct textual instance represented within the text. Whereas the previous cases were defined by the apparent analogue between the problem encapsulated by the passage and the problem of interpreting the novel, here the immediately apparent aspect of the “message” is its distinctiveness against the background of the fictional world – its second-degree status within the fiction. Yet the seemingly nonsensical string of letters cannot be an analogue for anything without first being interpreted as a message and deciphered accordingly. On the character-level, Lieutenant Weissmann has done just that:

“So,” [Mondaugen] yawned.

“It’s your code. I’ve broken it. See: I remove every third letter and obtain: GODMEANTNUURK. This rearranged spells Kurt Mondaugen.”

“Well, then,” Mondaugen snarled. “And who the hell told you you could read my mail.”

“The remainder of the message,” Weissmann continued, “now reads: DIEWELTISTALLESWASDERFALLIS.”

“The world is all that the case is,” Mondaugen said.

(V., 278.)

The message, such as it is, consists of the scrambled name Kurt Mondaugen, and, in addition, the opening thesis of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.⁵⁶ Again, this message resonates in smaller scale on the level of the characters involved in the situation, but also on a larger thematic level of Stencil’s quest. The metaphor or model for reading which emerges from this scene is of a different functional type than the ones discussed above. Instead of doubling and strengthening a meaning, a theme or an interpretation, this embedded message subverts the whole and undermines the conditions of interpretation. As discussed above, this is one of the common functions of *mise en*

⁵⁶ See Eve 2014 for the latest and most thorough discussion of the relationship between *Tractatus* and *V*.

abyrne (see Ron 1987, 434). Weissmann discovers the message about the world being all that the case is only after extensive interpretive tinkering. Receiving this message in this manner is, as Tanner puts it, “like discovering that the secret is that there is no secret” (1978, 34). David Seed’s turn of phrase casts this as a “bizarre synchronicity,” which mockingly reflects both the characters who obsess over plots and the readerly desire to form connections (1988, 96). The message, once correctly interpreted, seems to say that interpretation is unnecessary, arbitrary, or simply impossible. If there is a model for the novel here, it is the model of self-deconstruction. Finally, however, it is the reader who has to take the decision about the sincerity or irony, or the possibilities of making sense of signs, the world, or *V*.

Further, although the passages discussed above may be treated separately, it is above all important that in a sense they all participate in drawing the *same* analogy piecemeal throughout the novel. In the course of the novel a similar relationship is continually found between the character-level attempts to read or make sense of the fictional reality and the trials of reading the novel. This analogy also figures in the background of the more global structural dilemma presented by the novel. This aspect of *V*, which informs my analyses in chapters 3. and 4. involves delving into the interactions between the parts and the whole of the novel. It so happens that the passages foregrounding problems of reading and interpreting, the ones mirroring the reader’s problems, are often mediated through the narratives involving Herbert Stencil and the accompanying narrative quirks.

2.3. Metasolutions

Surrounded by the desert, man builds a pyramid. That would be another way of saying what *V.* is all about. (Tanner 1978, 34.)

I have never had the slightest doubt that all literature is *about* something [...]. That this has come to seem to some recent critics problematical merely means that the only works ("texts" they call them) which they are comfortable discussing are those which approach degree zero; that is, purport to be about nothing but "aboutness." (Fiedler 1993, 288.)

Tony Tanner seems to imply that the literary riddle of *V.*, interwoven of diverse thematic materials and intricately structured stories, is best described in the form of another riddle. Why do we have the need to feel that we live among geometry? Why would we rather fill the space with imagined lines and planes than confront shapeless space? This, Tanner says, is what *V.* is all about – this is its theme. Tanner's pyramid-builder is, of course, an image of the reader, and the act of putting up a structure in a featureless space a metaphor for how we read *V.* Instead of telling us the solution to the riddle or explicating the meaning of the novel Tanner reformulates the riddle in a larger human scale.

I will argue in this chapter that we might say that Tanner's reading of *V.* can be characterized as a *thematizing* reading of the novel. A thematizing reading can be treated as an interpretation of the theme of the work, and it can therefore be seen as a solution to the riddle posed by any text: what is

this text (really) about? Yet Tanner's solution is especially illuminating because it also exemplifies the type of solution which Brian McHale calls *metasolution* (1992, 113). The solution to the difficulty and arbitrariness of determining the theme of the novel, it is implied, is to take this difficulty and arbitrariness *as* the theme. While this is a solution to the riddle of the novel insofar as it is an interpretation of its theme, moral, or message, it is at the same time a metasolution insofar as it hints at a strategy more generally available for sense-making, meaning-determining, or pattern recognition. According to McHale, a metasolution produces insight into what makes a range of possible solutions available, and allows us to ponder the stakes involved in preferring any one solution over others. This kind of problem-solving contributes to understanding processes of literary reading itself, and McHale clearly values texts which require us to practice a type of self-reflexive metareading – such as *Gravity's Rainbow*. (Ibid., 113–114.)

In contrast to linguistic definitions, the more literary and more reader-oriented sense of thematization this chapter wishes to evoke is found in Peter Rabinowitz's *Before Reading* (1987, 159–160).⁵⁷ Rabinowitz defines thematization as a type of coherence-building strategy in reading. A thematizing reading often interprets the presence of unexpected or difficult elements, or absence of expected elements, as significant in the sense that they help determine the theme of the text. For instance, the reader may use a thematizing strategy when facing a surprise ending. This strategy will thematize the unfulfilled expectations of reading by determining that unfulfillment of expectations is the theme of the text. Thereafter, the preceding reading is revised so that what “first seems a surprise, turns out to be in fact prefigured.” (Rabinowitz 1987, 162.) As we saw above, a similar procedure allows Tanner to interpret *V.* as thematizing the very indeterminacy of theme. Thematization, when approached from the direction of reading, is already a metasolution – not merely solving one dilemma, but also suggestive of a distinctive procedure of interpretation that may be seen in operation in a variety of readings.

This view of thematization proceeds, not necessarily from what there is explicitly evident in the text, but from the need for a holistic, even if provisional, interpretive framework in which to place the various parts of the text. As argued in previous chapters, the circular hermeneutic of interpreting parts and wholes provides a way of discussing great many aspects of the endeavor of poetics. This is the

⁵⁷ The earlier discussion by Gérald Prince clearly informs Rabinowitz's notion of thematization. Although it is only the latter who sees thematization as a procedure of reading, Prince lays the groundwork for this idea by insisting that theme does not arise solely from the text itself but depends on interpretive choices and inclinations of the reader (see Prince 1985, 432–433).

appropriate context for the thematizing strategy, too. Therefore, as far as reading is concerned, thematization must not be conflated with focusing on the thematic level of the text. In fact, thematizing reading is often a kind of *formalist* reading in that it ostensibly “lays bare” the devices and conventions involved and makes form significant (cf. Shklovsky 1965a; 1965b).⁵⁸

Though thematization may be linked to a number of general frames of reading, arguably it is quintessentially a scholarly reading procedure. Many have argued that there are certain privileged themes that more readily than others allow or invite this kind of reading. Such themes are also historically variable, and should be seen context of the critical schools under which they acquire their privileged status. According to Culler, any critical practice has a preference for concepts which “can be and are treated as themes” (1982, 212). More particularly, in the context of deconstruction, Culler argues that in practice deconstruction is often a method of interpretation seeking to identify particular themes (Culler 1981, 18). Thematizing strategies of deconstructive criticism are distinctive, on one hand, for their criticism of thematics as such, and on the other, interest in themes which “define a figural or textual logic that produces them” (Culler 1982, 212; also Rimmon-Kenan 1995, 17).

Deconstruction may serve as an exemplary case, but the logic can be discovered elsewhere. This is why the second epigraph to this chapter, cited from Leslie Fiedler, while perhaps primarily addressed to the postmodern critic, has relevance to any discussion of the role of themes in literary study. However, the readerly maneuvers required to move to the level of metasolutions may be closely related to the ones practiced and scrutinized in the postmodernist critical climate. Likewise, deconstructive criticism may be overtly preoccupied with making texts talk about and against their own logic, structure, or rhetoric. However, this also provides perspective into other theoretical and historical contexts in which certain works have been seen to thematize certain theoretical issues so pivotally that they appear to articulate literary conventions or textual logics with an unprecedented force. We can therefore contextualize Fiedler’s comment, which primarily implicates postmodernist theoretical hyperboles about “literature of exhaustion” and “allegories of reading.” As Rancière, among others, points out, the turns of literary history periodically prefer the Flaubertian “book about

⁵⁸ As thematization offers one answer to the question of how we make texts signify, it can also be seen as a subset among the processes which are at work in what Culler calls *naturalization* (see Culler 1975, 161). It may also be linked to the interests of *natural* and *unnatural* narratology, insofar as they are also concerned with readerly frames through which surprising and unconventional elements are made cognizable (Fludernik 1996; Alber et al. 2010). More particularly, it can be argued that what is at stake in both thematization and naturalizing strategies, and possibly even “unnaturalizing” strategies (see Nielsen 2013; Mäkelä 2013), is our capability to see texts in relation to base-level conventions of reading literary texts, such as significance and coherence (see Rabinowitz 1987; Culler 1975, 161).

nothing” to books about “a people and an age in the world” (see Rancière 2011, 114–115). Fiedler, then, suggests that in the postmodernist era this momentarily manifests in a surge of interest in books “about nothing but ‘aboutness’” (Fiedler 1993, 288).

In literary criticism, one such moment is reached in the New Critical classic *The Well Wrought Urn* by Cleanth Brooks (1974 [1st pub. 1947]). The titular metaphor of a poem as a “well-wrought urn,” found in John Donne’s “The Canonization,” is adopted by Brooks as a model (Brooks 1974, 17). Culler argues that the method of interpretation and explication throughout the essays of the book is a kind of methodization of reading Donne’s poem. This poem and its reading are granted the privileged position with regard to reading poetry in general. (See Culler 1982, 203–204.) When Brooks invokes “The Canonization” as a model, this means that the very phrase “well-wrought urn,” which the poem uses as a metaphor for its own craft, is taken up as a metaphor through which all poems become kinds of urns, indeed, best of them “better wrought” than the rest. Brooks makes a sustained effort at reading all the poems he analyses “as one has learned to read Donne and the moderns” (Brooks 1974, 193). While the case is unique in its particulars, it has generalizable characteristics. After all, for Brooks it is only the “sufficiently extreme instance” provided by Donne’s poem that finally allows him to articulate his view of the latent structuring principle behind the greatest poems of the western canon – the principle of paradox (1974, 11).

Arguably, a similar explanation can be given for the fact that the clearly extraordinary *Tristram Shandy* is called by Victor Shklovsky the most typical novel in literary history (cf. Shklovsky 1965b). In his essay on Sterne, Shklovsky is primarily concerned with “plot” (*sjuzhet*) as a device that may reorganize and defamiliarize the story (*fabula*), the seemingly natural sequence of “events ordered according to their temporal succession (as they would have occurred in reality)” (Steiner 1984, 51). As Lemon and Reis state in their classic introduction to Russian formalism, this ultimately implies that *Tristram Shandy* is the most plotted and the least “storied” of novels – it foregrounds the workings of the *sjuzhet* to such a degree that it never allows the *fabula* to become more than an unrealized potentiality (1965). Despite this unusual disequilibrium – or because of it – Shklovsky can polemicize that his essay is not so much an analysis of Sterne’s novel as it is a demonstration of general rules of plot. If for Brooks Donne’s poem provided a model for reading poetry, *Tristram Shandy* teaches Shklovsky to read all plotted prose narratives. Works like “The Canonization” and *Tristram Shandy* are at once both singular and representative of a whole class of works. However, only some exemplary works in a class “lay bare” their devices at all, and only some of these prove “sufficiently extreme” to thematize a textual logic or a set of conventions in such a way that makes them crucial to certain

discoveries in poetics.

It could be shown that similar thinking is also what enables Genette to regard Proust's fathomless *À la recherche du temps perdu* as the prose narrative best suited to revealing the devices and structures at work in all narrative discourse while simultaneously forcing him to gravitate towards its "most deviant aspects" (Genette 1980, 265–266). Also, this is the logic underlying Todorov's discussion of the detective novel, a genre which better than any other demonstrates the doubleness of all narrative – the split into story about what happened (*fabula*, story) and a story about how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it (*sjuzhet*, plot). This is, again, despite the fact that in the detective story both are used in a particular, genre-specific way that departs from the norm implied by the illuminatingly deviant case (cf. Todorov 1977, 45–46). All of the aforementioned instances prove extreme enough to be read as thematizations of a logic or a set of conventions that thereby gains a seminal, even constitutive role as concerns the distinctiveness of a genre or a literary mode of writing. This particularly strong variety of thematizing reading is marked by its search for what will be called below *emblematic deviance*.

The first and second section below contextualize the idea of thematization within the tension-laden juxtaposition of thematics and poetics. As suggested above, the reading strategy we can identify as thematization has relatively little to do with particular themes – although it is, of course, always seen in relation to particulars – but it can be productively understood in the context of theory of thematics. As will be shown in the first section below, thematics has a somewhat uncertain relationship to other areas of literary study, like poetics and hermeneutics. Its focus and scope has frequently been theorized in contrast to these fields of study. To find an alternative route to the study of thematics, the second section approaches thematics via discussions of "aboutness" in philosophy of language. Ultimately, the main concern here is the process in which themes become something more than the sum of their manifestations in the text, and in which they come to articulate, "at another level, a general textual structure" (Culler 1982, 212).

While thematization, seen as a strategy of reading, may best characterize certain critical schools, it nonetheless seems to identify a prominent reading strategy met in readings across the spectrum of approaches to literary analysis. The third section below shifts focus from theory to practice. In Pynchon studies, thematizing reading strategy often concretizes in how certain themes, like entropy, or competing scientific epistemologies, are made into principles structuring the novels in a way that transcends the thematic level. Tellingly, these are also the themes which have most often been

discussed as “Pynchon’s theory” (see 1.1 above). It is also these themes that were derided as the “Grand Unified Themes” of Pynchon studies by McHoul and Wills (1990, 3). It can now be observed that the critical activity of identifying Pynchon’s theory or the overarching themes of his *oeuvre* is often characterized by employment of a thematizing reading strategy.

More particularly, the third subchapter offers an illustration of how thematizing readings work by looking into one reading seeking to identify Pynchon’s theory as it is expressed in *V*. This reading is connected to a prominent thread in Pynchon studies, one characterized by the employment of a common interpretive move. This strategy typically involves bestowing thematic significance on the complexity and indeterminacy of the works, and arguing for the intertwining of this difficult form and the topics and issues dealt with in the novels.⁵⁹ Such themes have most visibly contributed towards “Pynchon’s poetics,” in the Bakhtinian sense. They are most frequently seen to represent the author’s artistic view of the world and its expression in the artistic medium (see Bakhtin 1984, 11). This section shows how in such readings the search for Pynchon’s poetics or theory overlaps with thematic interpretation.

The final section below shows how some well-known and particularly enduring treatments of Pynchon’s work have sought to specify its position in literary history with appeals to its emblematic deviance within the dominant poetics of its context. The best known of such readings is Brian McHale’s analysis of *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1979; revised in McHale 1992), which not only made Pynchon’s novel the paradigm case of literary postmodernism but also saw Pynchon’s trajectory through his first three novels as emblematic of the shift from modernism to postmodernism. My argument, which is partly backed up by McHale’s recent reassessment of his earlier views (2013), is that to McHale *Gravity’s Rainbow* is not so much defining a postmodernist poetics as it is treated as a “sufficiently extreme,” emblematically deviant exposition of modernist poetics. Rather than de-conditioning us out of reading through modernist conventions, the novel (in McHale’s analysis) goes to unprecedented lengths to lay bare the conventions most crucially involved in the canonization of the high modernist poetics. Whereas Donne or Sterne taught – so to speak – earlier critics how to read poetry or plotted narratives, McHale’s reading of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is more metahermeneutic (see chapter 1.2. above). It shows us what kind of readers literary modernism has made of us, and sees that this realization must arrive at the cusp of this readerly repertoire becoming outdated and automatized.

⁵⁹ For summary discussions of how Pynchon’s difficulty is turned into a theme in criticism, see, for example, Boccia (1989, 67 n. 5); Eddins (1990, 2).

Thematic aspects of literature are still regularly seen in contrast to poetics, and the distinction retains some of its evaluative overtones. Even in the current environment, with the desire for literary theory past its peak, it seems that we are not above the odd condescending nod towards *merely thematic* criticism (Sollors 2002, 232). The 20th Century schools advocating a systematic approach to poetics held the view that thematic criticism failed to address the *literariness* of literature, and therefore ran the risk of failing to be properly *literary* criticism (*ibid.*, 217–219). This dichotomizing view has been found outdated in recent decades, but more recent theory of thematic has been beset with difficulties arising from the theoretical baggage carried over from the earlier era (cf. Bremond and Pavel 1995).

According to Werner Sollors, it is especially on the fields of post-colonial studies, cultural studies, ideological criticism, and New Historicism that thematic criticism has seen a return – but this has happened without overt declarations of interest in thematics as such (Sollors 2002, 219). While few would today care to oppose literary study focusing on thematic interests, it is also true that we have very little of what might be called theory of thematics (*ibid.*, 220). According to Pettersson, the need for such theory is rarely articulated except by scholars who turn to thematics to broaden or challenge their previous views – scholars with background in structuralism, narratology, and semiotics (Pettersson 2002, 237–238; see also Peer 2002, 253). Against this background it seems indeed reasonable to think that the theory of thematics, ardently encouraged by the critics referenced above, is still conceived as a study of themes in a systematizing framework – in other words, conceived as the poetics of thematics.⁶⁰

Despite the familiarly “poetic” leanings of thematics, it is clear that the new fields on which thematic study of literature have come to the fore have had a revitalizing effect on many areas of study – including Pynchon studies. The new foci of interest have taken Pynchon studies beyond the “Grand Unified Themes.” Samuel Thomas notes in his *Pynchon and the Political* (2007) that Pynchon’s novels are full of “innovative and unsettling discussions of freedom, war, labor, poverty, community, democracy, and totalitarianism,” but points out that these have often been passed over in favor of “constrictive scientific metaphors and theoretical play” (11). This is a valid point, and “scientific

⁶⁰ This view of thematics finds a precedent in the writings of the Russian Formalists who conceived of thematics as a classificatory and transformational study of motifs (cf. Tomashevsky 1965).

metaphors and theoretical play” unmistakably a reference to the previously dominant themes of Pynchon studies. The reorientation towards the political and the social among Pynchon’s “ideas” is also seen in recent works by Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger (2013) and Joanna Freer (2014), among others.

These recent works also seem to confirm that critical interest in themes is not necessarily accompanied by interest in either theory of thematics or the methodological challenges of studying thematics. Herman and Weisenburger (2013) name domination and freedom among the “major concerns” of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, conspicuously omitting the word “thematic” in the midst (3). Freer (2014), on the other hand, sidesteps the issue by directly expressing her focus on Pynchon’s engagement with the *context* of the 1960’s American counterculture. Instead of coming across as thematic treatment of counterculture, passages evoking this context are now seen as “commentaries” and “responses” to it (7–9). The avoidance of a certain terminology is in all likelihood a conscious choice stemming from acknowledgement of the former strictures of thematics. The revitalizing effect of new “thematic” studies is in part due to the disengagement with the earlier tradition of discussing thematics in relation to poetics and hermeneutics (cf. Pettersson 2002, 240).

This background to study of “thematics” shows where the emphasis has traditionally fallen – on discovering the global interpretive frame within which as many elements as possible can be integrated in interpretation. The vocabulary is New Critical – the goals of analysis, equally so: according to Cleanth Brooks one of the tasks of analysis is to explicate “the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of the various parts to each other in building up this whole” (Brooks 1951, 72). However, scholars such as Claude Bremond and Thomas Pavel argue that the theory of thematics has moved forward (1995). It is now acknowledged, for instance, that the reader (or a reading) is perfectly entitled to avoid focusing on themes “offered” by the text. Bremond and Pavel write: “the reader’s interest is not permanently tethered to the general aboutness of a work, but treats itself to escapades, making for secondary aspects and marginal details” (185).

If one examines the themes which Pynchon scholars have considered crucial to Pynchon’s poetics or Pynchon’s theory, it is evident that there are disagreements about the “general aboutness” of the novels. This is, in fact, one facet of Pynchon’s reputed difficulty. If one is surrounded by the desert, a lone pyramid will certainly provide for orientation and structure; but perhaps it is not the desert one finds oneself surrounded by – for arguably Pynchon’s novels could evoke a far less arid and homogenous landscape. Indeed, it is not uncommon that scholars reject the themes seemingly offered

by the novels because there is so much more to capture one's attention. It is possible to argue that the strongest thematic readings of *V.* are made with an appeal to a thematizing strategy, which allows more peripheral and implicit themes to be considered both as pivotal to the whole novel but also as exceeding their "mere" thematicity. Making a persuasive thematic reading, therefore, might have relatively little to do with volume or prominence of textual evidence for a theme, and might rather be predominantly a question of scholarly performance. This observation is reasonable both in the light of the empirical evidence from Pynchon studies and in relation to theories of thematics.

Aboutness, Thematics, and Interpretation

Study of thematics frequently finds itself slipping back the old pattern defined by adjacency to other fields of interest, such as poetics and interpretation. Yet thematics might embody more strongly than other theoretical endeavors the drive towards the de-dichotomization of conventional binaries involved. Today it is not in thematics where one finds the association between thematics, meaning, and referential content bandied about as a given commonplace. While such categorization is not entirely without intuitive appeal or heuristic usefulness, I wish to argue that there is little to justify it either in theory of thematics or poetics.⁶¹

To grasp the difference between theme, on one hand, and referential content, on the other, we only need to recall Barthes' distinction between things and concepts. "The best way for a language to be indirect," Barthes writes, "is to refer as constantly as possible to objects and not to their concepts: for the object's meaning always vacillates" (Barthes 1972, 232). Concepts, in contrast, are precisely the opposite – they order, organize and label the flickering of sensory flow (see e.g. Noë 2004, 182). By all accounts it is evident that thematics is defined by conceptuality rather than referentiality (see Bremond 1993; Peer 2002). According to Rimmon-Kenan (1995), theme is usually found on two different levels at once. On one hand, theme is the highest-order judgment about the "aboutness" of

⁶¹ Perhaps contrary to common misconceptions, these binaries have been frequently debunked throughout the history of 20th century poetics, as well. In his critique of structuralism, Derrida argues that structuralism took as its object the totality of form and meaning, and furthermore in a specific sense: meaning rethought as form, and structure as the formal unity of form and meaning (1978, 4). Nancy Armstrong's Foucauldian analysis of theme and form concludes in a discovery that "form" is what we call the dominant theme of the time, and themes are imbued with potential to become "form" in another context (Armstrong 1993, 45). Richard Walsh, on the other hand, points out that the idea of the inseparability of form and content is widely accepted, but that the dichotomy is conceptually prescriptive regardless. The continuing use of the notion of "content" reinforces the idea of form as a "container." This conceptual pairing makes the equation of content with the "aboutness" of the text all too simple. (1995, 17.)

the work.⁶² On the other hand, Rimmon-Kenan suggest, theme can be seen as a thematic “integration” (or interpretation) of structural features. It is a formulation of a meaning that is homologous (or, if we prefer the bracketed option in the previous sentence, analogous) to the structure described. (14–16.) Neither of these is the level on which content is usually talked about, and both are linked to interpretive activity of the reader. Therefore, theory of thematics would allow us to consider theme as an interpretation concerning the underlying aboutness of the text without proposing that it be explicitly discussed by the text. (Rimmon-Kenan 1995, 13 Prince 1992, 5; cf. Mäkelä 2011, 39–40).

While this way of approaching the distinctive quality of literary themes is theoretically promising, it is not quite as evident that it actually represents the manner in which Pynchon’s themes are discovered in existing readings. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Pynchon’s text, and the search for Pynchon’s theory it propels, is marked by a certain excess of textual cues. Thematic issues of potential significance are suggestively abundant, as are textual passages which may serve as evidence for a reading focusing on these issues. Therefore, the theoretical neatness achieved by fending off themes that are explicitly evoked in the text, is countered by the thingy surplus one finds in Pynchon’s novels. The general difficulty of deciding what novelistic discourse is about – given the assumption that it does not directly say what it means⁶³ – is accompanied in Pynchon by the fact of saying a lot of things about a lot of things. Furthermore, Pynchon’s textual world is ambiguous as concerns the meaning of its things: merely referred to at one moment, they are only a hair’s breadth from emerging as conceptual at the next (cf. Barthes 1972, 232). This could certainly be another way to understand the seeming capability of Pynchon’s novels to anticipate theoretical approaches (see chapter 1.1.). Therefore, the distinction suggested by Rimmon-Kenan is easier to observe in theory than by looking into Pynchon’s thematic readings where the line between the explicit aboutness of the text and its interpretive high-order labeling is porous.

Some help may be found in philosophy of language, where discussions of “aboutness” also take place on general level, without explicit links to any specific thematics. Prince (1992) demonstrates that even though we can make the generalization that literature is always “about” its theme, the inverse is not quite true: only some of the theories of “aboutness” are relevant to literary themes (4). Offering a view from the philosophical side of the field, Peter Lamarque argues that aboutness in literature and literary study constitutes a useful special case to consider in philosophy of language:

⁶² See also Peer (2002): theme is the highest-level category of meaning construction – it is the “aboutness” of the text. (254).

⁶³ Cf. Rancière 2011; Rancière’s idea of the mute speech of “expressive poetics” is discussed above in chapter 1.2.

[W]e can learn a lesson from literary criticism. What is it to say that a novel is about love or death or pride or prejudice? Clearly it is to say something about the novel's thematic content but more particularly it encapsulates an interpretation of the novel. To say that *Animal Farm* is about totalitarianism is not to say that the term "totalitarianism" or any synonymous or cognate term occurs in the novel but rather that totalitarianism is a concept which helps us to make sense of the novel; no doubt there are other ways of making sense of it as well. By bringing to mind totalitarianism in reading the novel and using that concept to unite and explain elements in the novel we come to understand the satirical or allegorical content. (Lamarque 2014, 263.)

As Lamarque, too, suggests, a statement saying what a novel is about is an encapsulated interpretation. While this statement about the work can still be linked to the aboutness of its language, this is not a defining feature in the aboutness of the work. Prince makes the same point: theme does not consist of textual units, and it is different from them in kind; instead, it is illustrated, represented, or exemplified by any number of textual units (1992, 5–6; see also Rimmon-Kenan 1995, 13). Following Lamarque's reasoning, we can further argue that the point of interest is the link between questions of "aboutness" and conditions of understanding or interpretation (2014, 263). Indeed, it is intuitively clear to anyone with a background in literary studies that what we call themes are often implicit and something the reader is expected to arrive at in interpreting the text.

There are interesting overlaps in theories of themes, aboutness and interpretation. Culler points out that even formalist criticism can only suspend its judgment of the work as a means to an end. According to Culler, criticism "inevitably makes that move and tells us what the work is an example of, what experience it produces or what truths it embodies." Making a statement about the force of the work is not beyond formalism, or its alternative, it is "a *telos* for formalist discourse." (Culler 1979, 76.) One hears in Culler an echo of the famous essay by Geoffrey Hartman, in which formalism is defined as a method. According to Hartman, this definition neither posits that form is separable from content, nor does it claim that the two invariably become one in a successful interpretation. Instead, writes Hartman, formalism establishes "a priority which has procedural significance," and engages "mediately and dialectically with the formal properties of the work of art" (Hartman 1966, 542). Indeed, Hartman's is a method for "revealing the human content of art by a study of its formal properties" (ibid.).

As these excursions into theory of thematics and aboutness shows, attempts to define thematics as a field separate from poetics and interpretation have not succeeded. Far more interesting are the

connections between these areas that come to focus within the theoretical circumference of thematics, aboutness, and poetics. Thematics cannot be fixed either to explicit or implicit dimensions of aboutness. Rather, it must be seen as a bind tying together the implicit issues expressed through the mute speech of literature and concrete linguistic aboutness, while maintaining that both implicitly evoked themes and textual aboutness depend on interpretation.⁶⁴ Thematization can be considered a methodization of this bind – a honed scholarly procedure and a metasolution to the banal yet embarrassingly difficult task of saying what this or that text is (really) about.

Thematization – V. and the Art of Overcooking

Pynchon's *V.* provides an excellent example of this challenge. Many scholars have found *V.* a complex novel that gets simpler with each rereading (e.g. Sklar 1978, 90). Since at the very elementary, material level it is evident that the text does not become more or less anything while sitting in the bookshelf, waiting to be reread, this change must be understood in a specific way. Alan Wilde underscores that this alleviation of initial difficulties happens for a specific reason:

[N]ot because the book yields up all of its secrets to the determined exegete – it does not – but because these secrets (or, better, irresolutions) dwindle before the onslaught of Pynchon's unremitting concern with the devolution of the human. (Wilde 1987, 78.)

Few readers would disagree about the prominence of the theme of “devolution of the human” in *V.* Ideas of dehumanization, decline and decadence have embellished countless interpretations since the earliest writings on *V.* (e.g. Tanner 1971, 156–157). Even those academic readers who, unlike Wilde, do not consider the treatment of this theme “ham-fisted” and “tendentious,” often agree on the wild overabundance of this thematic. The main disagreement seems, in fact, to be on whether this thematic excess signals a distinctive literary quality or lack thereof.

As suggested above, individual readings of Pynchon studies have often rejected the themes most ostensibly offered in the text. Thematic interpretations of *V.* are replete with responses to a wide variety of textual passages, and some that have caught on in Pynchon-scholarship as condensed emblems of the attitude, philosophy, or theory characterizing the novel seem to offer a counterpoint

⁶⁴ In a famous essay questioning Wolfgang Iser's theory of textual givens and gaps, Stanley Fish shows that the categories of explicit and implicit are anything but clear-cut or “natural,” and are themselves constituted by a series of interpretive choices (Fish 1981, 7–8; see also Björninen 2017).

to the thematic concern with of decadence and dehumanization.⁶⁵ The alliterative endeavors of “keeping cool but caring” or “approaching and avoiding” have become recurring points of departure in scholarly readings of *V*. These mottoes have been seen to suggest that Pynchon is actually guiding his readers towards moderation and middle grounds.

Wilde’s reading is based on an approach that he finds persistent in Pynchon-scholarship:

Prompted by [Pynchon’s] repeated variations on the theme of the mysterious “domain *between zero and one*,” most of Pynchon’s critics have understandably directed their energies toward the discovery of whatever values escape the “intolerable double vision” that Pynchon shares with at least the more sensitive of his characters. (Wilde 1987, 75.)

The phrase “domain *between zero and one*” connects Wilde’s reading to a line of interpretations of Pynchon, primarily *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the novel from which the phrase is lifted. Furthermore, it links Wilde’s discussion to a specific scholarly tradition, which sees *Gravity’s Rainbow* as Pynchon’s masterpiece, and portrays *V* as a subordinate apprentice work anticipating the masterpiece. The intervening novel, *Crying of Lot 49*, is seen as something of a curiosity, but at the same time it is the first of Pynchon’s works to successfully realize the idea of the middle ground between zero and one. Today this view of the artistic development in the procession of Pynchon’s early works is not as dominant as it once was, but it remains widely recognized. Wilde names Joseph S. Slade as the notable precursor to the *between zero and one* school of Pynchon-criticism. According to Slade, the foremost guideline found in Pynchon’s novels is that “individuals should not exclude middles, should try instead to occupy the domain of Oedipa Maas [in *Lot 49*] and Roger Mexico [in *GR*], the realm between one and zero” (Slade 1974, 246).

Wilde’s argument builds on the contrasting ways in which the idea of *between* is on one hand conveyed thematically and on the other realized in the structures of the work. He accepts that the line “keep cool, but care”, spoken in *V* by the jazz musician McClintic Sphere might be presenting itself as “the novel’s official answer to the paralyzing binaryism [...]” (Wilde 1987, 79). In criticism this idea is widespread: another study calls this line the “creed” that Pynchon teaches his readers (Lhamon 1990).

From these preliminaries, Wilde’s analysis goes deeper. It is crucial to the possible success of the

⁶⁵ It bears repeating that although such passages fulfil none of traditional formal requirements for being labeled as *mise en abyme*, the theory of this figure or device is highly illuminating as concerns the interpretive functions of these mottoes or catchphrases (see chapter 2.2.).

novel whether this motto is something the novel on the whole is able to live by: “its validity depends on how effectively it stands up [...] to V. [the character] and the entropic vision she incarnates,” for “it is V. who defines for us not only the motive force of [the novel’s] plot but also its ethos” (Wilde 1987, 79). Wilde thinks it questionable whether the possibility of being both cool and caring is borne out by the way the text balances its other dichotomies. According to Wilde, the ultimate problem facing the critic is as follows:

[W]here, in the thematic *or* the formal structure of the novel, is there room for such counsel of moderation and *bon sens* as Pynchon provides in his suppositious resolution of “the cool/crazy flipflop”? The answer clearly is nowhere, and its implications have great importance for the novel as a whole. “To have humanism,” Fausto Maijstral says in his “Confessions,” “we must first be convinced of our humanity.” Is Pynchon? (Wilde 1987, 80, emphases original.)

Wilde’s reading is highly illuminating as concerns thematizing readings in general. Analysis of *V.* along the lines chosen by Wilde allows for two interpretations for the methodical overcooking of the novel’s ingredients. In one, the novel is guilty of complicating its simple agenda, which is, apparently, to embody in its holistic artistic design the theme of the dehumanizing, entropic drives afoot in the post-war America. In the other, the novel does not practice what it preaches: its own rhetoric calling for the middle grounds goes unheeded by the novel which ultimately produces only a vision of debilitating nihilism. In either case, we can see a thematizing reading strategy at work. Both verdicts of the novel entail a discovery of an issue dealt with thematically, but also realized in the design of the work.

In *S/Z*, Barthes suggests that *re*-reading is never possible without a consciously revised method. Failure to reread would mean reading the same thing over and over again – or, as Barthes says, reading the “same story everywhere” (1975b, 12–13, 16.) The methodically revised reading is, to paraphrase Culler, the only way *not* to read the only way we already know how (1992, 122). This stance poses a question to Wilde’s conviction that complex works might become less so on each rereading. A counterargument can be made that perhaps it is the reenactment of an interpretive pattern or process that makes a complex text become simpler with every rereading. In Culler’s terms this would amount to telling the same “story of reading” over and over, and only ever playing the role of one kind of reader (see Culler 1982, 67). This is also what Wilde must mean: the existing interpretation of the text may be strengthened in repeated reading. This is not, it might be added, because the text rewards the reader with an insight of which elements are worthy of interpretation, but because the familiar

story of reading dampens the unremitting onslaught of divergent and centrifugal textual forces the novel struggles to control (cf. Barthes 1975b).⁶⁶

If the term “close reading”, as it has been said, suggests an intimacy with the text,⁶⁷ many readings built on previous readings perhaps suggest a former intimacy, a cooled-off interest in the idiosyncrasies of works – those that make the work complex in the first place. It seems, almost by necessity, that the analysis of much-discussed works should move on to focus on other things besides the elements needed for an “maximally adequate” description of the work.⁶⁸ This is why readings focusing on less conspicuous themes and context – such as those one finds in the aforementioned Thomas (2007), Herman and Weisenburger (2013), and Freer (2014) – have been met with such enthusiasm in Pynchon studies.

Emblematic Deviance – Anatomy of a Paradigm-Building Reading

McHale’s early essay (1979) on reading *Gravity’s Rainbow* will be taken here as a representative example of a reading that not only uses a thematizing strategy to a great effect but also extends the argument to make a broader claim about the significance of the novel. McHale’s reading proved extremely influential in the 1980’s discussions of Pynchon’s postmodernism, but it also provides a groundwork for McHale’s account of literary postmodernism at large (see De Bourcier 2014).

To illustrate the difference between a thematization and a reading appealing to emblematic deviance, we may look at different readings *almost* reaching similar interpretations of why Pynchon’s novels put certain coherence-building conventions under extreme duress. Molly Hite’s (1983) aptly named *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* sets off by considering the role various orders play in our understanding of the world. Narrative, of course, can be considered one type of order: “narratives are orders, or orderly arrangements of signs,” Hite writes, and continues:

⁶⁶ McHoul and Wills’s *Writing Pynchon* (1990) is probably the closest thing Pynchon-scholarship has to offer by way of methodical overinterpretation. Interestingly, much like *S/Z*, McHoul and Wills’s scholarly excursion allows itself to become a productive overinterpretation by reflecting on its own method of citation. As far as the rest of Pynchon-scholarship is concerned, more modest ways of elucidating the target texts reign supreme.

⁶⁷ “In its own most deeply felt metaphor, the classic formalist reading is a ‘close’ reading – a desire for textual intimacy whose logic implies the end of reading in self-effacement, all the while, against this logic, elaborating itself in complex performances more complex, say the detractors of formalism, than the text being read.” (Lentricchia 1990, 323.)

⁶⁸ Cf. Beirwisch 1970, cited in chapter 1.2.

[T]heoretically they can be orders of various kinds, embodying various assumptions about the nature and functions of form, structure, system, connection, relation, accretion, accumulation, unity, coherence, completion, closure, and plot – to suggest just a few of the relations that the demand for, or discovery of, order may imply. (Hite 1983, 3.)

Behind this apparent variety, however, narrative orders tend to be rather restrictive. According to Hite, this is because ideas of narrative order are closely tied to dominant social views of reality (ibid.). Thus, when Pynchon's novels challenge conventions of narrative or novelistic orders, this is often understood as implying something about the orders we experience and perceive in our lives. Quite often, as Hite points out, the relation is ironic: narratives being orderly serves to emphasize that lives and the universe are chaotic and inexplicable (ibid., 4).

In addition, however, Pynchon's novels are *about* order. Many of Pynchon's ideas discussed above – such as entropy and the different ways of interpreting statistical data – are contiguous with certain ideas of order. Hite specifies that being *about* order is by no means a straightforward thematic label, as this broad idea of the aboutness of the novels gives rise to a range of more specific interpretations. Pynchon's novels may be about the presence or absence of order, or about order “as an object of desire, dread, fantasy, or hallucination,” or “about what order means, how it is apprehended, and what it entails” (ibid.).

Commenting on McHale's essay, Hite agrees that *Gravity's Rainbow* challenges two modernist reading assumptions that lead us to expect order behind the “convoluted surface” of modernist fiction. First of these is the assumption that a chronological story and coherent reality underlie the surface of discourse, while the second one is that through careful deciphering the temporal shifts and multiple perspectives employed in the discourse modernist fiction can be naturalized or motivated. However, Hite takes a step further and argues that these reading conventions stem from a set of higher-level conventions of understanding life and literature. These higher-level conventions “require an explicable coherence from the work of art precisely because the work of art must stand in ironic contrast to the ‘chaos’ of reality.” (Ibid., 5.)

Hite, therefore, performs in her interpretation what has above been called a thematizing move. The “ideas of order” are found both articulated in the texts and implied in the structures of the work. This allows one to assign thematic significance to the structural features while also allowing the articulated thematics of order to transcend the level of explicit aboutness or “mere” thematicity. Hite then

contextualizes this interpretive reading with a theory of how modernism has taught us to perceive life and understand its relation to representations of life in literature.

This set of procedures stands in subtle but significant contrast to McHale's reading. McHale's line of argument sees the undermining of modernist conventions and reading strategies as an outward sign of the epistemological dominant of modernism giving way to the ontological dominant of postmodernism. McHale's reading has become both a canonical reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* and one of the readings that canonized *Gravity's Rainbow* as a paradigm case of American postmodernism. However, it has made one further theoretical contribution: McHale's reading serves as a part of his larger theoretical project of defining the shift from literary modernism to postmodernism in terms of shifting dominants. McHale's theory differs from many other theories of postmodernism in how it purports to locate the shift "inside literary history, inside the logic of genre" (McHale 2013, 358).

McHale proceeds to build his argument in tandem with careful readings of key passages that seemingly concern the epistemological perspective on the fictive reality but retrospectively turn out to drift towards the ontological questions such as "Which world is this?" (1987, 10). McHale shows how the opening sequence of *Gravity's Rainbow* invites interpretation as difficult and elliptical passage of modernist prose: we are expected to concentrate on the readerly task of processing the text, a task greatly accentuated in modernism because of its fondness for achronological and perspectivally pluralist narrative strategies (McHale 1992, 61–63). However, the opening, which reader can with not inconsiderable pains interpret as a description of an evacuation focalized through an unknown evacuee, turns out to be a dream. Similarly, several passages in the novel are retroactively revealed as something other than they seem: "dream, psychic flash, omen, cryptography, drug-epistemology" (*GR* 689; cited in McHale 1992, 66).

The only point of contention about these examples, replete with dreams, visions and hallucinations, is that it seems a stretch to suggest that they undermine questions of epistemology. Rather than shifting from the epistemological to the ontological, they emphasize the continuity between the epistemological and the ontological – juxtaposing questions of perception and knowing with questions of world-building and world-erasure. Of course, McHale is well aware of this. These instances of constructing and deconstructing, concretizing and deconcretizing are merely preparing the reader for the more radical tricks of the novel. When the novel counters its earlier statements and, in effect, narrates events out of existence, the ontological questions about the rules of the world and

world-building are unavoidable.

However, it is possible to turn the issue on its head. Has not the novel, by bombarding us with retrospectively triggered dreams, psychic flashes, and hallucinatory drug experiences, provided us with some of the most powerful and intuitive tools for naturalizing the more estranging and less clearly motivated use of modernist narrative devices – the abrupt and inexplicable jolts of perspective and voice, and the extreme instability of conventional orders of reality and temporality. What McHale conceives of as deconditioning can just as readily be taken as a kind of guidance. That deconditioning is just a type of conditioning is, of course, something any reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* will have been taught.

The point is not to quarrel with McHale's superb analysis of how *Gravity's Rainbow* works and makes the reader work. The interesting thing, in the context of this chapter, is how McHale's reading of the logic of *Gravity's Rainbow* appeals to an extreme kind of thematization of the shift of the literary dominant. Indeed, this is why McHale's reading aligns with, for instance, Shklovsky's analysis of *Tristram Shandy*. As suggested above, there are readings that show certain works as emblematically deviant with respect to those devices they lay bare. McHale's reading shows that Pynchon's novel lays bare the machinations by which the reader of modernist fiction can become a reader of postmodernist fiction while remaining "inside literary history, inside the logic of genre" (McHale 2013, 358). Understanding *Gravity's Rainbow* – and postmodernism – as McHale wishes to show it requires the realization that "we are all, still, modernist readers" (McHale 1992, 81).

As this is where the first part of this study concludes, it should be pointed out that the readings in the second part are greatly indebted to McHale's reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Much like McHale's analysis, the chapters below tease out conventions and reading procedures at stake in reading. More particularly, I will ask questions about the protocols and maneuvers in scholarly explorations into what *V.* is about, what "V." means – what, indeed, *is* "V." or *V.* The idea that carries the analysis is that readings may be read with focus on their choice of reading procedures: on what kinds of passages they choose to interpret, on which themes they consider more than just thematic, on what literary functions or devices they are seen to thematize. I believe that here lies the possibility of adding to the vast reservoir of knowledge about Pynchon's debut novel.

PART II: READINGS

3. Hauntings from the Future: Sequence and Repetition in *V.*

Overhead, turning everybody's face green and ugly, shone mercury-vapor lamps, receding in an asymmetric V to the east where it's dark and there are no more bars (*V.*, 10).

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(*V.*, epigraph.)

It has been argued throughout this thesis that one of the distinctive experiences of reading Pynchon's prose is that it exploits our ability to trace patterns, find analogies, and detect resemblances. The theoretical discussions in the previous chapter approached some cognitive, perceptual, and scholarly procedures allowing us to share in these recognitions. Instead of the means of recognitions, this chapter focuses on some of the patterns detected. The latter part of the thesis turns to questions particularly pertinent to *V.* and its readings, and argues that certain analytical categories most systematically studied in narratology or narrative poetics inform many studies of Pynchon's novels.

The starting premise, or caveat, is, however, that the categories discovered in narratological studies of novels need not be *essential features* of literary texts, nor must they be “real” in the philosophical realist sense of being there in the text independently of the theory-laden observation of a theoretically oriented mind. Yet it can be argued that the central points of interest in narratology are of wider significance to literary analysis. Order of events as they take place in contrast to the order in which they are told, the narrative voice and its capability to involve other voices, the possibility of a fictional character’s consciousness functioning as a filter through which we seem to perceive a pre-existing world: the analytical uses of these notions extend far beyond the jurisdiction of the conventionally understood narratological inquiry.

The narratology-derived ideas discussed here have to do with, broadly speaking, the temporal ordering of narrative discourse (chapter 3) and questions of narrative voice (chapter 4). Although these narratological foci could be sharpened upon any number of narrative fictions, it can be stated from the outset that they would not be discussed here at length if not for their seeming importance to interpreting *V*. This importance, which is supported by the frequent appeals to questions of temporal order and narrative voice in readings of Pynchon studies, obviously stems from the thematic relevance of these analytical foci. *V* is, arguably, very much about reconstructing past events, tracing narrative voices, and figuring out relations between events and their reports. The novel’s thematic preoccupation is, furthermore, reflected on the level of reading the novel, an activity which eventually bears striking resemblance to what some of the characters do in the novel.

The present chapter focuses on the “V.” of *V*. itself. The things and meanings “V.” could point towards, refer to, or be substituted for, make for a compelling case study. The citations used as epigraphs to this chapter demonstrate how right from the beginning the novel proceeds as a profusion of clues as to what “V.” could refer to while also implicitly challenging the reader to consider the reason for presenting “V.” as such a polymorphous mystery. As will be shown in this chapter, at the beginning *V*. presents the sign with a wide spectrum of different potentialities for signification, but the novel amplifies certain frequencies in this spectrum while others fade into the background. Ultimately, what is true of many Pynchon’s novels is especially striking with *V*. Despite the complexity and indeterminacy involved, many interpreters of the novel reach somewhat similar conclusions about the meaning, moral, or message of the novel, see it as embodying a similar version of “Pynchon’s theory,” or locate many of the same themes, often encapsulated by the same key passages.

In this chapter it is my intention to approach similarities and differences in readings of *V.* in the context provided by two protocols of reading: one of them can be called reading for the whole, the other reading sequentially. Both ways are recognized in literary studies, and have their own traditions of inquiry. This said, it is clearly the former that has been done more in the academia. It is probably the more intuitive of the two to most readers, including professional, academic readers, and also more in accordance with culturally conventional views of literature, about how it communicates, and how it comes to have meaning.

Melvyn New contrasts reading sequentially and reading for the whole in his classic analysis of *V.* (1979). He elaborates on Northrop Frye's idea of the modern awareness and its dedication to the "maze" of its own making. However, as a counterpoint to this dedication, there remains the drive towards the "whole form." One follows the contours of the maze by submitting to irony, ambiguity, discontinuity, and absurdity, yet one also follows the hermeneutic impulse through which the fragments are patterned into a whole. (New 1979, 400–401; cf. Frye 1976.) Therefore, reading may proceed along two lines. One assumes that this maze is all that there is, and the other assumes that it is possible to find meaning beyond the maze. In other words, the first strategy emphasizes that it is significant to scrutinize the process of reading from a (quasi)spatio-temporal position within the unfolding text (cf. Kafalenos 2006, 127). The second, appealing to what is perhaps the strongest convention of reading literary texts, suggests that the disparate parts finally contribute to the significance and coherence of the whole text (see Rabinowitz 1987). These two reading protocols may be provisionally distinguished, but as will be shown, it is common that they come together in interpretations.

These two ways of reading coexist in readings of Pynchon's novels. The Pynchonian version of the readerly balancing act between reading in sequence and interpreting the global meaning of the novel is visible throughout the history of Pynchon studies. In the following analysis of *V.* the two ways of reading are put in a dialogue. Arguably, descriptions of this complex novel can be greatly enriched by juxtaposing the two, as the contrast can bring to relief some of the conventions involved across the spectrum of readings. The processual encounter with the text, which I call the sequential reading, is strategically foregrounded in this chapter. In part, this is because sequential reading seems undertheorized in theories of reception and interpretation. Yet sequentiality is one of those aspects that make writing the medium it is. In other words, sequential reading offers a way of analyzing relations between the specific qualities of the medium, the designed patterns of the artefact, and the reading mind.

In the analysis below the focus is on the proliferation of V's in the novel, or more particularly, the cumulative effect of the V-names, V-words, and V-shaped clues on the signficatory potential of the sign. In this reading, the sequential processing of the text reveals another facet in the readerly quest for V. (the character), "V." (the meaning of the sign) or V. (the novel). This way of reading also points towards some conventions of reading and studying texts which often influence interpretations without being made explicit.

Since the sequential reading aims at an understanding of the reading process and conditions of signification, it can be characterized as metahermeneutic rather than interpretation-oriented. This metahermeneutic inclination largely stems from the theoretical background on which the notion of sequential reading is based. The main source lies in the works of the Tel Aviv school of studying literary dynamics (see Perry and Sternberg 1986; Segal 2011). The writings of Meir Sternberg, Tamar Yacobi, and, in particular, Menakhem Perry, offer perhaps the fullest sustained effort to discuss the dynamics of the text during the process of reading. Although the writings of the Tel Aviv school are only loosely connected to the other "schools" working on the dynamics of reception, there are certain affinities between the Tel Aviv approach and other contemporaneous attempts to account for the reading process. In this chapter, it will be shown that some ideas expressed in Perry's work on dynamics of reading can be fruitfully compared to Iser's theorizing of the reading process and interpretation. Although Perry distanced himself and his Tel Aviv peers from Iser's theory,⁶⁹ certain points of convergence emerge in the context of this work and its view on poetics.

3.1. The Shape of Things to Come

The following analysis focuses on the simplest of patterns (or so it seems). It aims to show how the potential significance of "V." develops in the sequence of reading. Furthermore, the analysis looks into readings of V. for commentaries acknowledging the developing sequence. The changing signifying potential of the sign "V." is a pattern that is traceable during the reading of a text, yet is rarely commented on in interpretations, as they more often focus on the meaning or message of the whole novel. Interpretations tend to be more concerned with emphasizing some of the global themes

⁶⁹ See Perry 1979a, 43 n.6.

of the novel, or, as seen in many classic treatments of Pynchon's novels, proceed towards discovering "Pynchon's theory." In an approach giving the sequential material of text its due, another dimension is added to making sense and finding connections. The following analysis will show how the potential significance accumulates and functions as a dynamic sequence in the textual unfolding of the novel. Discussing these aspects requires looking into literary theory addressing repetition and the dynamics of sequential reading. In this framework, reading is seen as a continuous and dynamic act of processing the unfolding text, while repetition functions as a linking device within the text.

The repetitions of either the sign "V." or its potential referents often connect different temporal levels of the story. Most frequently these connections are made between the narrative present (the events taking place in the fictional New York in 1956) and one or several of the historical episodes. Following the sequence of V's means considering the potential change of meaning resulting from the introduction of one "V." after another. The temporal "order" of the novel, to use Genette's term, of course points to another kind of sequencing (see Genette 1980). The term denotes the discursive rearrangement of the chronological sequence of events that is called *fabula* by the Russian formalists and classical narratologists (see e. g. Chatman 1978). More recent theory of narrative sequence highlights the interaction between the temporal sequence of reading and the reconstructed story (*fabula*) expressed through narrative discourse (*sjuzhet*) (see e. g. Kafalenos 2006; Baroni and Revaz 2016; Björninen 2016). The analysis here emphasizes the sequence of reading in favor of the temporal ordering of events, the Genettian "order." The latter, however, remains somewhat relevant to the sequential reading. Viewing the Genettian order from "within" the sequence, as it were, simply gives this order a new kind of dynamics to reckon with.⁷⁰

When "V."-motifs and potential referents of the sign link distant temporal moments within the novel, another kind of problematic is discovered. In accordance to novelistic conventions, the embedded past narratives interrupting the temporal flow of the narrative present should be motivated – it should be *someone's* past, past as *experienced* by one or another character. At least it should be past as inscribed or recorded somewhere – as this implies by metonymy the possibility of a witness or an experience. Yet the quasi-experiential filter through which the events of historical chapters are

⁷⁰ This is more of a comment on typical applications of Genette's "order" than Genette's theory as such. Genette's own discussion contains numerous highly sophisticated considerations of the sequence of reading. These begin with his statement that narrative contains no temporality but for the one it borrows metonymically from its own reading (Genette 1980, 34). Towards the end of discussion on order, Genette delves into *advance notices* and *anticipatory recalls* which belie the neat distinction between analepses and prolepses, in part because they may have a different function in the order of *discourse* and in the temporal process of reading (ibid., 82–83). In addition, several well-known concepts such as *paralipsis* have a sequential aspect (ibid., 53, 82).

mediated in *V.* severely tests the limits of this convention. In the novel, this “filter” goes by the name of *Stencilization*. Herbert Stencil’s suspect method of recreating past events based on flimsy or virtually nonexistent evidence is the fulcrum of novelistic innovation in *V.* This narrative strategy plays a major part in the ambiguities and uncertainties that have detained readers and scholars since the publication of the novel. It is also an exemplary case of those “Pynchon’s ideas” which seem to encapsulate in miniature certain narrative strategies at large, as well as to reflect and comment on the attendant literary conventions. Furthermore, the passages of the novel that discuss *Stencilization* thematize certain problematic aspects of the novel’s singular approach to history and historical narration in a subtler and more piecemeal fashion throughout the course of the novel. *Stencilization*, in short, can be seen as yet another key to Pynchon’s theory.

In technical terms, *Stencilized* narration may be characterized as free indirect discourse grounded in the mental projections of Herbert Stencil (Cowart 2011, 44). The *Stencilized* historical chapters have been convincingly analyzed as a novelistic smorgasbord of techniques and styles, many chapters borrowing specific parts of the canonically modernist repertoire (see Dugdale 1990, 86; Hite 1983, 63). This scenario is complicated, however, by Stencil’s habit of referring to himself in the third person. McHale has gone as far as to suggest that *Stencilization* not only uses free indirect discourse, but actually personifies, literalizes, or thematizes the technique (McHale 1987, 22). In other words, *Stencilization* has the special effect of destabilizing the conventions which allow us to distinguish between “the frame” and “the inset” in speech representation, and which allow us to differentiate the position of narration from the deictic position of a character (cf. McHale 2014, par. 4). Similar ambiguity faces the categories of focalization labeled “internal” and “external” (see Genette 1980, 191).⁷¹ The thematization of these issues entails that the effects are no longer restricted to the level of sentences representing speech, but can be taken as a model, metaphor, or analogy to the level of interpreting the global narrative situation of the novel. On the other hand, the narratological distinctions become a site of interpretive potentialities. Stencil could be the character-narrator of the whole novel, but he might also be a global focalizer of the type that Stanzel says characterizes the “reflector mode” of narration (Stanzel 1984). Yet Stencil could merely be a character represented by extradiegetic narration. The problem is that each of these solutions to the *Stencilization* either excessively simplifies the issue or simply raises more questions.

⁷¹ These effect of *Stencilization* are analyzed in greater detail in chapter 4.

The historical chapters filtered through the protean narrative strategy have the effect of disrupting the conventional horizons of expectations linking time, experience, and narrative. This is in part due to “Stencilization” being less characterized by a unified technique or a set of devices than by its capability to address on the level of literary presentation some of the problems we have come to have with time, experience, and narrative. On the structural level of the novel, it poses also the tantalizing question whether it is possible to overlay a pattern, a “stencil” as it were, of sameness on the historical chapters, which are actually told using *different* techniques and strategies (cf. Hite 1983, 57). The “Stencilized” historical chapters cannot consistently be provided with a naturalization or narrativization through natural, experiential parameters (see Fludernik 2003). Any reading settling on a naturalizing strategy is bound to be extremely “expensive,” its cost measured in excluded interpretive possibilities (McHale 1987, 14). There is no clear answer to who is channeling whose experience based on which document. To make matters worse, Stencilization actually is not so much a narrative “strategy” consistently making use of the same devices functioning similarly as it is a figure (of speech) tying together various discordant attempts to access the past. The historical chapters do not have a consistent narrative situation, they are variously focalized. Further, apart from disallowing psychological naturalization they even resist any interpretation fixing the narrative into one source or document.

The problem of Stencilization is interconnected with the accumulating sequence of motifs and words suggesting potential meanings of “V.” If the Stencilized narratives have the effect of destabilizing conventional expectations of motivation and coherence, the repetition of “V.” on different temporal levels intensifies this effect. As will be shown below, the sequential accumulation of V’s further complicates choosing any one solution to the riddle of Stencilization. The inverse is also true, as Stencilization as a narrative strategy refracts the seeming linearity of the sequence of V’s. It could be argued that the introduction of Stencil and his obsession with V. makes the previously free-floating signifier into a kind of psychological motif. Because of the obsessive search portrayed in the novel, the expectations towards V. shift. It is no longer adequate for “V.” to simply have meaning, its appearance should also be motivated in the context of Stencil’s obsession – psychologically, that is. This makes the idea that sequentiality could be a matter of simple accumulation or annulment of meaning seem naïve – in literary text, in an artful narrative fiction the meaning built in a sequence is constantly in interaction with the global interpretation. As looking into readings of V. will demonstrate, this is part of how we are used to reading the modern novel.

Repetition and Sequence as Signification in V.

Numerous Pynchon-scholars have agreed that repetition of words and motifs functions as an indicator of the novel's theme and design. Repetition may also be seen as a device for creating a certain interpretive need. Interpreters of *V.* have often drawn a parallel between the quest for understanding portrayed in the novel and their own process of reading. Both the readerly quest and the search represented in the novel apparently aim for the discovery of the meaning of "V.," a sign tantalizingly interpretable both to the reader and many of the characters of the novel. Its interpretive potential remains highly mobile throughout the novel, which is to a great part due to the repetition of the sign in different contexts.

The reader first encounters the letter in various paratexts of the novel, while the search of the novel's questing protagonist Herbert Stencil leads back to a mention of "V." in his father's journals. This entry contains the initial V. and a puzzling reference simultaneously evoking a gendered and an impersonal entity: "There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she." (*V.*, 53.) This is the key passage concerning Stencil's V.-quest, but its power to shape the readerly expectations of what the novel is all about is no less evident. The ambiguous quest for the sign "V." is concretized both in reading the novel and in the acts of interpretation represented in it.⁷² This analogy, however, is not the only one which readers possibly make. According to Elizabeth Campbell (1988) *V.* is "a tissue of analogies, and the reader makes connections by tracing the similarities or identities from one episode to another" (65). Therefore, reading and making sense of *V.* is another exercise in pattern recognition.

As the case of *V.* can very well demonstrate, repetition with potential to create difference of meaning is central to "V." being recognized as a pattern. The questions of identity and difference are crucial to the act of recognizing repetition in the first place. In their analysis of *V.*, McHoul and Wills (1990) link the question of repetition to other meaning-differentiating processes: "[t]he slightest displacement or derivation, even repetition, institutes the structure within which difference has the possibility of occurring" (170). Each repetition of the same signifier "V." comes with the possibility of different meaning. This view of repetition draws from the famous treatments of difference in works

⁷² In *Pynchon Studies V.* and Pynchon's other early novels are noted for their thematic reduplications of readerly positions and strategies (see e.g. Hite 1983; Schaub 1976, 93; 1981, 17–18, 103; Cooper 1983). A related interpretation, particularly of *V.*, is that it suggests an equivalence between the character Herbert Stencil, who looks for V., and the (implied) reader. (e.g. Campbell 1988, 61; Cowart 2011, 44; Hite 1983, 47–49; New 1979, 399; Schaub 1981, 16).

of Deleuze (1994) and Derrida (1982). As Deleuze argues, difference is never thought in itself, because it is only seen through representations of “[a] relation between different and different which would allow it to be thought” (1994, 262). Rimmon-Kenan reiterates this view in the context of narrative: “difference is introduced through the very act of repetition, the accumulation of significance it entails, and the change effected by the different context in which it is placed” (1980, 152–153). In *V.* the paradoxical status of repetition is emphasized and dramatized, but the theoretical point also applies more generally.

In Rimmon-Kenan’s view, we could regard repetition as a kind of approximation of Jakobson’s poetic function (Rimmon-Kenan 1980, 152). In the poetic function the principle of selection along the paradigmatic axis of selection is superimposed on the syntagmatic axis of combination. Consequently, repeated resemblances become the dominant device of the poetic sequence. (Cf. Lodge 1977, 91.) This leads to another paradoxical aspect of repetition, one also discussed by Rimmon-Kenan: repetition only serves a poetic function through its differences, while repetition of the same is disruptive and erodes meaning (ibid., 153). The problem, as Christine Brooke-Rose sees it, is that the same features that are considered the privileged marks of the poetic function can also “when hypertrophied and rendered transparent, become the very same features of, let us say, the *unpoetic function*, or the way the poetic function collapses” (quoted in ibid., 153-154, emphasis added). However, the repetition of the sign “V.” interestingly dramatizes both functions because each repetition is by necessity “letter-perfect” as well as indeterminate in meaning. Therefore, the text allows one to treat repetition as a signifying feature, functioning in accordance with the Jakobsonian poetic function. Yet it never completely eliminates the possibility that the function of repetition might collapse into the meaninglessness of the “unpoetic” function.

Käkelä-Puumala weighs these options against each other, and concurs that there are, indeed, two strategies of reading, one seeking to fix a meaning and another fixing on the unavoidable possibility of its negation (1999, 35–37). However, a larger sampling of Pynchon studies shows that most scholars prefer a positive, affirmative reading of the repetition as something that can produce a synthesis of the ideas and motifs associated with “V.” For example, Thomas Schaub identifies “abstraction of the literal” as one of Pynchon’s techniques by which he creates meaningfulness among his labyrinthine plots (1981, 15). His example is the elaboration of the street motif in *V.* At the beginning of the novel we learn that Benny Profane has grown a “little leery” of the countless “named pavements” he has seen during his peregrinations. The streets have in his mind fused into a “single abstracted Street which come the full moon he would have nightmares about” (*V.*, 10). According to

Schaub this thematization of repetition on the level of characters has the function of suggesting that the repeated images in the novel suggest an underlying order. The eventual capitalization of the word marks the “typographical transformation of meaningless detail into meaningful symbol.” This is also an analogy of what happens with Stencil and his “literal” pursuit of V. the person. By the means of repetition, the images and the ideas associated with them “transcend the book’s timebound plots to suggest a world of meaning competing with the piecemeal chaos within each episode.” (Schaub 1981, 15.) Although Schaub’s way of reading does not attempt to solve the meaning of “V.” as such, it is illustrative of how repetition tends to be understood as an integrative mechanism rather than as an occasion for sabotage of meaningfulness.

The sequential procession of V’s provides an example of the function of repetition in narrative. The sign “V.” and the different things it could stand for, together produce a symbol-like sign. In his analysis of *V.*, Maarten Van Delden evokes a view of literary modernism, most memorably articulated in T. S. Eliot’s essay on Joyce’s *Ulysses*. According to Eliot, the mythic parallelisms in *Ulysses* were “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (quoted in Van Delden 1990, 119). A similar explanation can be given to how the referential meaning of “V.” or “Street” becomes subordinated to a symbolic sign which can be seen as an augury of an underlying order.

The poetic function entails that the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis are synchronically overlaid, with the sequential (metonymic, combinatory) aspects of language becoming overshadowed by the principle of integration through the metaphoric, selective principle. Given the metonymic dominant of prose, Jakobson argues, the poetic function is most commonly seen in poetry (see Lodge 1977, 92). However, Joseph Frank’s classic study *Spatial Form* (1945) proposes a way of understanding also modernist prose literature according to a principle not much unlike the poetic function. In the prose works Frank studies, the diachronic sequence is a counterweight to the synchronic spatial form becoming the new dominant in modernist poetics (225). Discussing *V.*, new criticism, and modernism, Van Delden argues that the spatial form, studied by Frank and propagated by the New Critics’ readings of high modernist texts, is a reading strategy which *V.* knows and parodies (1990, 120–121). One way of showing how *V.* does not simply conform to the modernist spatial form, is to look at its repetitions as complicating the very idea of resolution – be it in terms of thematic integration of the whole or providing a satisfactory closure to the sequence.

However, as discussed above, neither synchrony nor diachrony is ruled out as a strategy of reading V. The possibility of following more than one order is also considered in Frank's essay. He locates the difficulty of *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos* in "the internal conflict between the time-logic of language and the space-logic implicit in the modern conception of the nature of poetry" (Frank 1945, 229). He then goes on to show that one has to read modern novels like *Ulysses* "in exactly the same manner as [...] modern poetry" (ibid., 234). While Frank focuses mainly on the spatial logic in order to dwell on the innovations of modernist texts, later commentators such as Eric S. Rabkin have emphasized that reading always introduces a diachrony as counterweight to the modernist tendency to spatialize our understanding of texts: "To speak of the 'spatial form' of a plot is to speak metaphorically. A plot, as actualized, must occur through time in the mind of a reader" (Rabkin 1977, 253). According to Rabkin, the temporal or diachronic experience – what has been here referred to as sequentiality – cannot be ignored. Rather, reading involves both synchrony and diachrony as its perceptual modes (253–254; cf. Frank 1977, 235–254).

One way of addressing the repetition of the "V."-sign and V.-names is to consider the functions of repetition in the novel more generally. As the past events, expressed through the "Stencilizations" and "impersonations" making up the historical chapters, start echoing motifs introduced in the "narrative present," the boundaries between temporal and narrative levels become increasingly complex (cf. Käkälä-Puumala 1994, 43). This is where tracing repetitions in different timeframes and the ordering of *fabula*-events are most clearly shown as disparate activities.

Intriguingly, the discordancy between the spatial form and the experienced unidirectionality of time is inventively dramatized in Pynchon's later novels. It is metaphorized by Charles Mason in *Mason & Dixon* (1997) as a "haunting from the future." The metaphor is literalized in "the Trespassers" of *Against the Day* (2006), who seem to be both time travelers and ghosts – yet not quite either (cf. Dalsgaard 2011, 124). The canniest idea these imaginings convey is that time travel and haunting may quite successfully express what the reader's operations in piecing together the spatial form of the text might look like from the point of view within the other sequence, the *fabula*. As the discussion around spatial form shows, however, free textual navigation is an institutionalized strategy available for novel at least since the high modernist era.

Repetition, therefore, serves as a kind of caveat to the sequential reading undertaken below. Though at first unanchored to any specific meaning, "V." is gradually endowed with more and more potential meanings. This is first done via repetitions of the sign "V." and via its displacement into V-names

and V-words. In the third chapter V. is personified as something referable as both “it” and “she.” Subsequently, the significance of the recognitions of “V.” will be assessed according to whether they fit into the category outlined by the passage from Sidney Stencil’s journals. Readings with thematic and plot-related interests have been keen to emphasize those potential meanings of “V.” which are individuated and gendered – and it is just as well that they did. The novel seems to end with the feminine V.-character trumping all other interpretations. The novel later comments on the broad horizon of interpretation it first seems to entertain when at one point Stencil comes to a realization that “V. might be no more a she than a sailing vessel or a nation” (V., 226). But it is a she, is it not? At least the overwhelming majority of scholars seem to have decided that Stencil’s quest approaches and avoids nothing less than the repressed presence of the mother. This can literally point to lady V. as Herbert Stencil’s biological mother, but also evoke the mythical symbol V. as the metaphorical mother of “the century’s child,” Stencil (V., 52).

V., Pre-Stencillized

In the passage initiating the thread of feminine V.-motifs, another character asks Stencil: “Is it she you are pursuing? Seeking?” He answers (referring to himself, as he does, in the third person): “You’ll ask next if he believes her to be his mother. The question is ridiculous.” (54.) However, when the novel draws to a close this has stopped being ridiculous and seems, rather, the most plausible interpretation: V. may well be a woman, Stencil’s mother, and it could be her Stencil was pursuing all along.⁷³ In retrospect, therefore, it is quite reasonable to wonder whether Stencil simply protests too much at the beginning of the novel. From the vantage point available to the reader at the beginning of the text, however, something makes this reading less than tempting.

As the Gadamerian conception of the hermeneutic circle has it, any interpretation begins with fore-projections, or expectations, about the meaning of the whole which are replaced by more suitable ones during the process of interpretation. The reading process also involves shedding the distracting fore-projections that are not suited to the continuing process of interpretation. (Gadamer 1975, 269–270.) We can see how the beginning of *V.* manipulates the emerging interpretive horizon by looking at the way the novel builds up towards the introduction of Stencil’s obsession with V. As Käkälä-Puumala (1999) shows, the early state of affairs concerning all things “V.” is quite complex, and

⁷³ Grant (2001, 28–29) produces a list of scholars who accept or at least entertain this interpretation: Cowart (1980), Poirier (1975), Hite (1983), Kharperian (1990), Slade (1974), Eddins (1990), Richter (1974).

fixing down the polymorphous signification of “V.” into a reference to a woman does not mean that earlier expectations are completely eradicated. Käkälä-Puumala writes:

All these dimensions seem to fuse in the text, or change rapidly from one to another, so that the attributes of a symbol – depth, complexity, several layers of meaning – remain when V appears as a “mere” shape, and the neutrality of a geometrical shape survives in cases where V appears as a traditional symbol. [...]

In the course of reading it becomes evident that no classification can exhaust all possible meanings. They always remain as an imaginary reserve, as a totality that is too vast to be grasped, but that somehow directs all interpretation. (1999, 22–23.)

Neither the accumulation of the (symbolic) meaning nor the persistence of the material V. fully cancels out the other. The idea of the plurality of meaning surviving as the text runs its course can also be seen in the context of textual hermeneutics. As Harding’s elaboration on the ideas derived from Iser and Gadamer shows, the hermeneutic process may not result in a final synthesis because instead of a consolidated meaning we have one unable to shed the attending “alien associations” (Harding 1993; see chapter 2).

In the course of the novel, therefore, the transformation of the sign “V.” into an initial of a feminine name is overcast by the many V-shapes and signs preceding it. The shape [V] is presented as a perspectival effect of vision (V., 10), the capital letter is found in the name of the jazz club “V-Note” (51). Also, the world of the novel is repeatedly evoked as a geometrical space of angles, lines, and intersecting surfaces. The V-evoking potential is seen in an early descriptive passage in which a room is deconstructed into a grid of crossing planes, surfaces and lines:

Directly across the room from Rachel was a mirror, hung high on the wall, and under the mirror a shelf which held a turn-of-the-century clock. The double face was suspended by four golden buttresses above a maze of works enclosed in clear Swedish lead glass. The pendulum didn’t swing back and forth but was in the form of a disc, parallel to the floor and driven by a shaft which paralleled the hands at six o’clock. The disc turned a quarter-revolution one way, then a quarter-revolution the other, each reversed torsion on the shaft advancing the escapement a notch. Mounted on the disc were two imps or demons, wrought in gold, posed in fantastic attitudes. (V., 45–46.)

Here the space of the room is first structured as planes set in right angles with respect to each other, horizontal: floor, ceiling, shelf, pendulum disc; and vertical: wall, mirror, clock face, hands at six

o'clock. The quarter-revolutions of the pendulum disc make another right angle. The scene, thus far perfectly perpendicular, is split into a field of virtual V's by Rachel Owlglass's line of sight:

Rachel was looking into the mirror at an angle of 45°, and so had a view of the face turned toward the room and the face on the other side, reflected in the mirror; here were time and reverse-time, co-existing, cancelling one another exactly out. (*V.*, 46.)

As these examples show, the problem of the possible meaning of “V.” has from very early on in the novel two facets. One of them is the lack of information – the paucity of indicators as to who V. is, what “V.” means, or what the novel *V.* is about – but the other facet is the always already overdetermined field of signification buzzing around the distinctive shape on the printed page or evoked in the reading mind (cf. Käkelä-Puumala 1999, 23).

McHoul and Wills (1990) demonstrate this by simply presenting a series of early V-sightings in the novel:

an asymmetric V to the east where it's dark and there are no more bars (2) / Section v of chapter 1 (27) / '...V-Note, McClintic Sphere. Paola Maijstral.' Nothing but proper nouns (40) / Not who, but what: what is she (43) / the sentences on V. suddenly acquired a light of their own (44) / The V.-jigsaw (44) / ... (McHoul and Wills 1990, 164.)

This citation gives us a passable picture of the chaotic world of *V.* in its pre-Stencilized state, it is possible to look even further back: the title, the epigraph, the layout of the title of Chapter 1. (See fig. 1.)

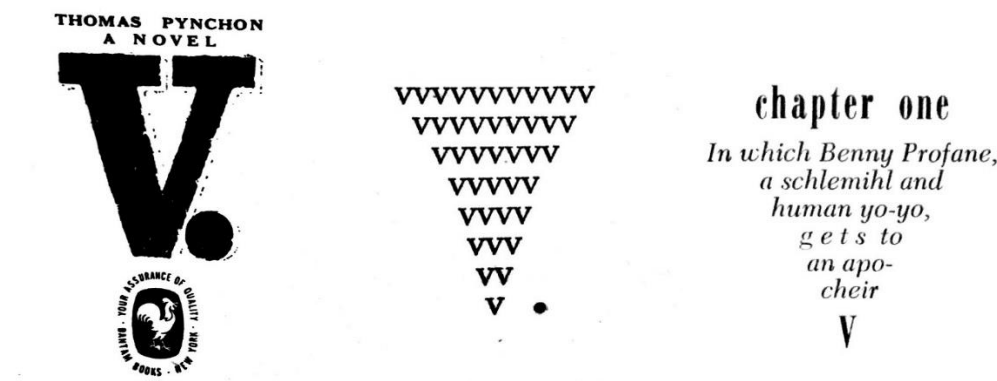


Fig. 1 V-shaped peritexts

The V.-sign or the V-shape is everywhere to be seen even before the text proper of the novel begins. As though as an afterimage, the V-pattern keeps being overlaid on the fictional world as it comes to life.

In the sequence of the novel these V's precede the introduction of Herbert Stencil – the connoisseur of all things “V.” and ultimately the seeker of the personified, feminine V. One peculiar feature of the sequence in which the possible meanings arise is that none of the early clues point toward the option that “V.” should refer to a woman. With the introduction of Stencil and his search for lady V. these early occurrences become secondary, unmarked, backgrounded and unmotivated.

As shown above, this dynamic of literary reading has been discussed in hermeneutics by scholars elaborating on the idea of the hermeneutic circle. Outside hermeneutics, the twists and turns in the process of reading have been most successfully theorized by Menakhem Perry in his remarkable essay on literary dynamics (1979a). At the most general level, Perry's essay is a contribution to theory of reading, but with strong focus on medium-specific features of reading texts – the sequential mode of processing, in particular. Perry summarizes his view of the reading process and the shortcomings of earlier theory:

The nature of a literary work, and even the sum total of its meanings, do not rest entirely on the conclusions reached by the reader at the end-point of the text-continuum. They are not a “sifted,” “balanced,” and static sum-total constituted once the reading is over, when all the relevant material has been laid out before the reader. (1979a, 41.)

Perry argues that studies of the nature of literary text have neglected the study of dynamics and process in favor of producing finalized interpretations of object-like works. However, he argues, the process and its different stages contribute to our understanding of the work, and should be described in theory. According to Perry, there are several overlapping processes, only one of which moves towards reconstructing the chronological or natural order that narratologists have called *fabula*. Perry argues that elements of the text may participate in several temporal frames at once: “the ‘natural’ sequence of an ‘external’ occurrence; the ‘natural’ sequence of a character's consciousness; the sequence within a block of information transmitted from one character to another, etc.” He remarks that when scholars find examples of distorted order of the *fabula*, these are usually cases where the

text does not conform to what Perry calls the natural-chronological sequence (1979a, 40; cf. Ronen 1990). Acknowledging this bias broadens the scope of dynamics of reading beyond the streamlined version of narratological analysis of the Genettian “order.”⁷⁴

Although contemporary to Culler and Iser, who were discussed in the previous chapters as distantly related proponents of theory of reading, Perry belongs to yet another tradition of studying reading and interpretation. In the late 1970’s, the Tel Aviv school, which Perry helped establish, specialized in “literary dynamics.” Like Iser, Perry assumes that the text depends on its reader for “concretization” (Perry 1979a, 35).⁷⁵ Similarly reminiscent of Iser is Perry’s emphasis on the capability of the text to surprise the reader so as to require a reorientation of thinking (ibid. 356–357; see also Gadamer 1975 269–270; Harding 1993). Perry writes: “The ordering and distribution of the elements in a text may exercise considerable influence on the nature, not only of the *reading process*, but of the *resultant whole* as well” (1979a, 35). This notion of the reading process offers a way to theorize the tension between the tentative meanings attached to “V.” and the strong thematic search for lady V. which only sets off in the third chapter of the novel. What is at stake in this tension is exactly the shifting horizon of expectations of what the whole, the novel, is like, what it is all about, and which reading conventions should be relevant to reading it. Like Culler, on the other hand, Perry shows throughout his essay that his theory of reading is a metahermeneutic effort: it is a study of readings and of the ways in which interpretations are made (see ibid. 62–64). Furthermore, Perry insists that the “reader” of his sequential reading is not any particular reader but a “competent” construct (ibid., 43; cf. Culler 1975, 131–135).

Perry’s theoretical model may be used to explain why the thematically strong interpretation of V. as a woman does not simply eliminate the signifying potential “V.” has before the quest-plot becomes the dominant interpretive frame. Perry remarks on “the peculiar survival” of rejected meaning (41). The backgrounded, retrospectively unmotivated interpretive possibilities keep influencing the

⁷⁴ The complex system of interrelations is quite rarely applied to textual analysis with Genette’s finesse and subtlety.

⁷⁵ Perry emphasizes that the “concretization” of the text means something different to him and to phenomenologists like Ingarden and Iser (Perry 1979a, 43 n. 6). Same can be said about the meaning of textual “gaps” in the writings of the Tel Aviv scholars and the phenomenologically oriented scholars. For the phenomenologists, the idea that readers concretize texts is interconnected with the idea that textual representations are incomplete, “gappy,” as it were (see e. g. Iser 1972, 278–282). For Perry and Sternberg, the gappiness of texts entails temporary or permanent withdrawal of relevant information (see Sternberg 1978; Perry and Sternberg 1986, 275–277). The Tel Aviv theory, therefore, is somewhat conversant with narratological accounts of the dynamics between *fabula* and *sjuzet*, but has little to do with the phenomenological texture of textual representations. This said, the account which Iser gives on the sequential processing of literary *gestalten* is much closer to Perry’s view. Both views emphasize the role of retrospective reassessment of the previously read and the provisional and dynamic character of interpretation.

projected *whole* towards which the reading process is oriented. This survival of the indeterminate meaning of “V.” is expedited by another factor Perry describes. The initial impression given in communication, or “information situated at the beginning of a message,” comes to have special significance because of its *primacy* (Perry 1979a, 53–54).⁷⁶ It can be argued, then, that the primacy of the possible, but retrospectively undermined meanings of “V.” do not only survive but are actually difficult to discard as the reading process advances.

Perry specifies what he hopes to achieve by analyzing the dynamic aspect of reading process:

The effects of the entire reading process all contribute to the meaning of the work: its surprises; the changes along the way; the process of a gradual, zig-zag-like build-up of meanings, their reinforcement, development, revision and replacement; the relations between expectations aroused at one stage of the text and discoveries actually made in the subsequent stages; the process of retrospective re-patterning and even the peculiar survival of meanings which were first constructed and then rejected (ibid., 41).

Perry describes the reading process as being full of “surprises” and “zig-zag-like” constructions and reconstructions of the text and its meanings. This is the strong point of Perry’s approach, and may also be considered the reason why it is primarily applicable to reading literary fiction. Obviously, not all texts call for such intricate description of their processing. We process many texts in a straightforward manner, helped all the way by a highly automatized literary and cultural competence.⁷⁷

However, Pynchon’s way of constructing his novels – or making the reader construct them – responds well to Perry’s approach. Brian McHale demonstrates this in his seminal analysis of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which is very much informed by Perry’s work (McHale 1979).⁷⁸ It describes the reading

⁷⁶ This idea has also later been adopted in cognitive narratology. Jahn (1997, 456–457) attributes Perry with first identifying the principles of text processing which Jahn calls *primacy preference rule* and *recency preference rule* and which form a part of Jahn’s cognitivist take on narrative modes. Fludernik (2010), too, considers Perry’s ideas as significant precedents to cognitive narratology (926).

⁷⁷ Perry himself is very clear about his essay describing the dynamics specific to reading literary text (1979a, 56–58). Yet the concepts *primacy* and *recency* have made a successful transition to cognitive narratology (Jahn 1997, 456–457). However, this is not the first transdisciplinary migration the concepts make: Perry takes them from psychologists who studied first impressions or judgments about descriptions of personality. Perry goes to great lengths to describe the specific requirements for these concepts placed by fictional narratives, and dwells on the reasons why the concepts cannot be simply transferred from one discipline to the next. (Perry 1979a, 53–58.)

⁷⁸ The scope of the influence goes deeper than the few references in McHale’s essay reveal: the essays by Perry and McHale were published back to back in the first issue of *Poetics Today*. Both scholars were also part of the editorial team (See *Poetics Today* 1:1–2), and both essays are seminal to the development of the Tel Aviv school of literary

process of the novel as a series of concretizations and deconcretizations (91, *passim*). According to McHale the many qualities of *Gravity's Rainbow*, especially *vis-à-vis* modernist and postmodernist poetics, are best seen by focusing on text-processing, pattern-making, and pattern-interpreting processes in reading rather than formal organization of the text as such (88). The processes Perry describes as “retrospective re-patterning” and the survival of rejected meaning are of special importance (Perry 1979a, 41). According to McHale the reader undertakes the pattern-making and pattern-interpreting operations which are conventionally meaning-producing in modernist texts, but are undercut in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Therefore, the reader has to continually recontextualize, revise, and remotivate entire scenes, events, and episodes. (McHale 1979, 91.)

In *V.*, this observation applies especially to the *V.*-sequence. It is certainly possible and plausible to reach the conclusion that *V.* is a woman from Stencil's father's past, and to construct a single continuous story (see e.g. Cowart 2011, 41–42). Yet this is only constructing the *fabula*, which according to Perry and McHale should not detain analysis exclusively. The *V.*-sequence understood as a process realized through reading paints another picture – and not just one but a whole series.⁷⁹

3.2. The Entire History of *V.*

As discussed in the chapter above, the difficulties of reading *V.* can be approached via the contradictory ways of reading the novel invites, the disparate orders at work in signification of narrative fiction, and the inherent paradox of meaningful repetition. The sequential reading taking note of the accumulation of details and possibly self-contradictory repetitions is interfered by the reading for the whole, which not only seeks closure and meaning but also prefers it to conform to a continuous, coherent, and psychologically motivated *fabula*. Although it is often stated in Pynchon studies that indeterminacy of meaning is the point, and that stable meaning and closure are not coherent with the entropic worldview of Pynchon's theory, it seems that rather than an admission to incoherence and meaninglessness this is just an appeal to a specific type of meaning and coherence.

dynamics (see Segal 2011).

⁷⁹ It is a testament to the predominance of reading for the whole that Käkälä-Puumala's careful inventory of the different types of meanings attached to “*V.*” comes across as an unusual approach. While it is often acknowledged that identifying “*V.*” as a reference to a fictional person is not straightforward, few scholars have taken comparable pains to demonstrate just how multifarious the signifying potential of the sign is – and how deeply intertextual. (See Käkälä-Puumala 1999, 22–35.)

Readings that discover in Pynchon an entropic theory of the human condition or a theory of history as a cycle of disenchantment and decadence are heavily invested in finding global significance.

As discussed in the first part of this study (chapter 2.3), the reading strategy that allows one to suggest a kind of analogy between thematic aboutness and artistic construction can be called thematization. Thematization is a strategy by which seemingly incoherent and meaningless details can be made into a kind of whole – one that addresses, is about, or grapples with incoherence and meaningless as a larger human concern. The thematizing procedure of reading is an admission to an entire tradition of reading literary works, a deeply humanistic one which values (and is bound to find) a unity or correspondence of meaning and form (see Schwarz 1990, 2–3).

However, I wish to continue to keep the thematizing synthesis at the arm's length in order to take a further look into *V.* and to the interaction of the sequences discussed above. In the course of the novel, the coherent and meaningful *fabula* seems to gain more and more sway over the haphazardly accumulating sequence of *V*'s, encountered as the text is being read. The sections below delve in to the readings of Pynchon studies to show how this schismatic situation is or is not reconciled in interpretations of *V.*

Telling the Hunter from the Hunt: Herbert Stencil and "V."

Whatever one makes of the play of possibility and signification around the acute-angled shape from the opening pages onward, the significance of the tentative personification of "V." in Chapter 3 is crucial for the plot development of the novel. This event functions as the initial thrust to the second quest of the novel – the one acquiring many generic features of a quest narrative – Herbert Stencil's attempt to track down *V.* the character, who might be his mother. This quest may be a travesty of the traditional quest, but it is one actually taking place in the world of the novel (cf. Tanner 1982, 44; Cowart 2011). This quest can also be seen as psychologically motivated: as rooted in the experienced desires, hopes and fears of a character in the fictional world.

This of course has some bearing on the readerly quest(ions) about the meaning of the symbol "V." Individuated females subsequently become the marked case among all instances in which something like a "V." is evoked. The privileged category continues to include all females, however: cyborg, rat,

or human; country or vessel. The sign “V.” may be attached to beings belonging exclusively to the fictional world of the novel, but also women of myth or historical artifacts like Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*. Although the free-floating potential of “V.” is by no means smothered altogether, the range of interpretive possibilities is placed under the thematic constraint of Stencil’s quest for V. the woman.

The interpretation of V. as a woman is prevalent despite the profusion of conflicting clues. This is, however, in accordance with Perry’s theory of how certain kinds of interpretive frames are preferred in reading literary texts. According to Perry, precedence is accorded to whichever frame connects textual elements most closely, so that frames in which “V.” gets the highest degree of continuity and order are preferred to those in which different V’s are merely linked (cf. Perry 1979b, 84). Therefore, if one were to locate where the early V formed by lampposts receding into distance becomes unmotivated and loses all but a residual stake in the “aboutness” of the novel, it is the occasion of Herbert Stencil’s obsession being introduced. Interpreting the meaning of “V.” is from this pivotal moment onwards increasingly dominated by the female figures who appear in the embedded narratives of the novel.⁸⁰

It seems that in addition to the abstract symbolic scramble for signs we now have a more typical quest narrative to follow. Yet when we look how the text instantiates this dual quest, we also see that it hastens to comment on this duality in terms that arouse a new kind of suspicion. The narration shows us Stencil himself pondering the dual concept of the quest:

He would dream perhaps once a week that it had all been a dream, and that now he’d awakened to discover the pursuit of V. was merely a scholarly quest after all, an adventure of the mind, in the tradition of *The Golden Bough* or *The White Goddess*. But soon enough he’d wake up the second, real time, to make again the tiresome discovery that it hadn’t really ever stopped being the same simple-minded literal pursuit; V. ambiguously a beast of venery, chased like the hart, hind or hare, chased like an obsolete, or bizarre, or forbidden form of sexual delight. And clownish Stencil capering along behind her, bells ajingle, waving a wooden, toy oxgoad. (Ibid., 61–62.)

⁸⁰ Molly Hite emphasizes that to attach names and meanings to V-symbol is to “limit the resonance of that symbol to a certain frequency.” Part of the mystery and fun of V. is, after all, the seeming inexhaustibility of possible reference. (Hite 1983, 27.)

The first “awakening” hints at the first quest: the symbolic hunt within a sign-system. References here are to the famous (proto-)structuralist⁸¹ myth-anthropologists James Frazer and Robert Graves, late 19th and mid-20th century, respectively. Their works can certainly be understood, among other things, as “adventures of the mind” – testaments to human capacity for pattern-finding and system-building. As David Cowart writes, Stencil’s quest for V. is itself modelled after “the more serious system making which, in any age, models reality” (2011, 44).

The second and, according to the text, the “real” awakening means returning to the pursuit of V. the woman. This quest may be called “simple-minded” and “literal” one, but it comes across as anything but literal and simple. It is, firstly, expressed in deliberately ambiguous terms. While words like hart, hide, hare, and oxgoad can be taken at face value, it is clear that together they point toward the mythographic discourse found in just such works as *The Golden Bough* or *The White Goddess*, in which they figure as symbols patterned across the universal structure of the myth.⁸² In addition to the realm of myth, the diction of this apparently literal and simple quest for V. evokes psychoanalysis and the subconscious realm of dreams, symbols and sexual fantasies – and also the psychoanalytical quest is anything but literal. “Venery” refers “ambiguously” to both hunting and sexuality, but it is, in addition, nothing less than a reference to a particular V. (Venus).

Consequently, a deep ambivalence towards the dichotomization of the two quests is already expressed in the text when the first female character who might be V. makes her appearance. One quest is a literal pursuit, the other a symbolic search; one seeks to locate something in the fictional world, the other enacts a search for rules of interpretation. Yet at the earliest intersection of the quests an intertwining of the two is suggested. This position of paranoid ambivalence, which the reader is urged to adopt, is that of Stencil. The reader who accepts it will find it very hard indeed to tell the hunter from the hunt.

As discussed in the previous subchapter, the repetition of the sign “V.” keeps accumulating hints and details that seem to fall outside the possibly reconstructible *fabula* of the lady V. and her connection

81 Sir James George Frazer’s original title was *The Golden Bough: Study in Comparative Religion*. Robert Graves’s complete title is *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar to Poetic Myth*.

82 The hunt of the hart has had at least since the Arthurian legends a symbolic significance, with special place reserved to the rare white variety. Artemis’s Ceryneian Hind, on the other hand, is famously represented in the story-cycle of Heracles’s labors. Hare is a trickster-figure in several folkloristic traditions, whereas a shepherdly goad has been pictured in the hands of Egyptian goddess Neith, Ganesha of the Hindus and St. John the Baptist in Catholic Christian iconographies. Various gods and goddesses of hunt, knowledge and war, all with a long rod of some variety, are not far off – and neither is the contrasting image of the good shepherd, without a goad, with the lost lamb on his shoulders, found in various stages of the history of Christian art, as well as in some pre-Christian contexts.

to Stencil's father. The excess and surplus of possible meanings of "V." is strangely concordant with internal inconsistencies in Stencil's quest-narrative. The inconsistencies of Stencil's quest include the differences between the narrative situations of the Stenciled chapters, the different "disguises" or aliases of V. (should we believe V. is one woman), as well as the temporal shifts of the fictional chronology. As discussed above, difference itself becomes thinkable only in repetition, or, as Deleuze writes, in the "iron collars of representation" – identity, opposition, analogy, and resemblance (Deleuze 1994, 262). Inversely, discussing effects and functions of repetition inevitably focuses on difference. The moment we bring up repetition, we are bound to turn to particular variables (Rimmon-Kenan 1980, 153). The kind of mobility of meaning which difference and repetition allow guarantees that the search for the meaning of "V." and the literal search for the personified V. may always be seen as somehow being two parts of the same signifying structure. They are bound to be interpreted together, if not because of their identity, then because they can be grasped together by analogy, resemblance, or even opposition. The play of the same and the different in the repeatedly evoked both in repetition of "V." and incredulous communicative situations of Stencilization seem to play into the hands of interpretability and possibility of coherence and meaning.

"Disguise Is One of Her Attributes"

As the early, non-human and non-feminine clues on "V." were discussed above,⁸³ we can now in turn approach the dual quest by looking into the succession of details that suggest that V. is a person. This is the dominant reading of what "V." means or refers to, but looking into the textual evidence presented in its defense reveals more uncertainties. The passage posing the question "not who but what: what is she?" is one of the two passages directly cited from the elder Stencil's near-apocryphal journals which many (but not all) of the "Stencilizations" and impersonations of the novel's historical chapters are supposedly based on. As suggested above, the interpretation of V. as a woman allows things to hang together in a more orderly constellation, which may account for the precedence of readings following this interpretive thread (cf. Perry 1979b, 84). Therefore, the interpretive force of the historical chapters does not hinge on there being a consistent relationship between the historical document and the events portrayed in the historical sections of the novel. As at least one critic points out "veracity" is one V-word notable for its absence in the novel (Gilmore 2012). Actually, what becomes the expected norm is not only that there might be discrepancies between the original

⁸³ See chapter 3.1.

document and the Stencilized story but that the specific quality of the discrepancy changes from one instance of historical narration to the next. It is only through these fragments we come to know V. as a person.

For illustration, we may consider Father Fairing's journal in Chapter 5. The clergyman's journal comes up and is cited in a chapter centering on the narrative present of 1956 New York. This is not, therefore, a "Stencilized" or "historical" chapter. Fairing's journal, however, is cited at length and verbatim while Benny Profane, the novel's antihero with no interest or personal investment in V. or "V." whatsoever, wades through the sewers in which Father Fairing once oversaw his parish of rats. A tantalizing turn of event takes place when the text of the chapter, thus far centering on Profane's subterranean quest, is interrupted by several passages straight out of Father Fairing's journal. The journal furthermore turns out to identify a "V." – a rat named Veronica. Fairing's actual journal is reportedly "still preserved in an inaccessible region of the Vatican library, and in the minds of the few old-timers in the New York Sewer Department who got to see it when it was discovered" (V., 120). While it is not impossible that Profane has interviewed one of the old-timers, the text provides no textual support for such an interpretation.

However, it is clearly not the point whether it is possible to explain or naturalize this oddity. In other words, it is not the question whether we can provide an experiential, emotional, or psychological grounds for the interpolation of Fairing's text between paragraphs focalized through Profane's point of view. According to Elizabeth Campbell (1988) the function of the interpolated narrative is to make the reader question categories like history and fiction, or fact and myth, but also to remind the reader that Profane is a fictional creation (60–61). Arguably the effect extends to the level of conventions of reading, as the novel seems here and again to foreground and undermine the readerly desire to motivate and explain unexpected elements by appeals to character psychology.

For further illustration of how little this type of "veracity" figures in the events around V., we may turn to chapter 7 ("She Hangs on the Western Wall"). It is possible to construct a reading in which the document which initializes Stencil's pursuit of V. in chapter 3 is repeated by chapter 7, although unrecognizably. This reading is found in Grant's *Companion* (2001, 28). Grant is perhaps right to wonder about the melodramatic tone of Sidney Stencil's journals. The elder Stencil writes: "Not who but what: what is she? *God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer*" (V., 53, emphasis added). Grant perceptively points out what is often overlooked in criticism: the entry from Stencil Sr.'s journal is dated, "Florence, April 1899," which coincides with young Evan Godolphin

arriving to Florence at the beginning of Chapter 7. Therefore, the primal scene of the search for V. is concurrent with events represented later in the novel. Were we to take at face value the claim that the historical chapters are, somehow, Stencil's doing, then the very entry that first mentions V. would be a part of the source material behind the narrative of "She Hangs on the Western Wall." Grant plays along with the idea and thinks it strange that the elder Stencil should be so aghast to name Victoria Wren, whom he meets in Florence. Why is she evoked in the journal with the cryptic phrase "Not who, but what: what is she"? On the other hand, if "V." in Sidney Stencil's journal refers to something else happening in Florence, it is strange that he wishes never be called upon to disclose any details of the "Situation" (a veritable V-pageant in which Victoria Wren is joined by Botticelli's Venus, the lost land of Vheissu, the volcano Vesuvius, and the nation of Venezuela).

Yet the situation in Florence is further complicated after another arresting metaphor comes up in the middle of the chapter. Within the Stencilized story the reality of historical "Situations" is called to question. None other than Stencil's father wonders whether any patterns one detects in such events are finally just tricks of the mind:

He had decided long ago that no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment. Since these several minds tended to be form a sum total or complex more mongrel than homogenous, The Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three. (V., 189.)

This passage in chapter 7 can be considered another pivotal metaphor for interpreting V., in part due to this thematization of interpretation. Here it is suggested that simultaneous existence of several interpretations must be considered even if the resulting whole is incomprehensible to any single observer. The events in Florence and the repetition of "V." in the pageant of its potential referents shows how repetition works not only as a device of continuity and coherence but as a way of questioning the expectations of continuity and coherence. If the kind of reading which seeks to establish V. as a single and continuous person must seek its evidence in the Stencilized chapters, the task is very clearly undermined at every turn.

In retrospect, it is possible to interpret that Victoria Wren is the true guise of the character followed in Stencilized chapters from Alexandria (1898) to Florence (1899), Paris (1913), and Deutsch-Südwestafrika (1922). This would make character continuity a linking principle between the aforementioned historical narratives, but also the (arguably) non-Stencilized Maltese episodes of the

“Epilogue” (1919), and “the confessions” of Fausto Maijstral (1942–1943), in which V. also makes an appearance (see e. g. Cowart 2011, 41). But even this continuity may finally come across as affirming indeterminacy and uncertainty of who or what V. or “V.” is. This is in part because the variables of the Stencilized historical narration are discontinuous with each other. This sentiment is echoed by Harold Bloom in his commentary on V.:

While possible to suggest that V. is a maze not without form or meaning, the real maze that V. creates, or invokes, or evokes, is the maze of certainty or meaning that readers often attempt to splice into life and literature, both. Time and again the narration of the book forces us to encounter the meaninglessness and uncertainty of the book, and ultimately it poses a question: what made us even think of “certainty” in the first place? (Bloom 2003, 52.)

Bloom realizes that in each of the various turns the novel takes, we *can* shift our position and look for certainty from this new position. Eventually, though, the ideal reader Bloom posits will choose to reflect on this twisting and turning and rise above it. From this metahermeneutic vantage another type of question poses itself: what does the novel do to make us think it is possible to be certain about “V.” or V.? Disguise is one of her attributes, V. tells us (388). Is certainty, then, just one of her disguises?

The Final Sequence and Some Consequences

This question can be approached in the light of Chapter 14, “V. in Love.” Here, finally, V. herself seems to be identified through the title and the chapter goes on to show that one of the central characters, first referred to only as “the woman” indeed is V.: “If we've not already guessed, ‘the woman’ is, again, the lady V.” (V., 406). In this chapter, however, V. is not just as presented as a particular woman, but also identified as Victoria Wren. Is this then where the mystery of V. is finally resolved?

Harold Bloom persuasively argues that this certainty brings us no closer to the “truth” about “V.” than anything hinted at during the procession of “V.s” in the novel. He adds that “by now we perhaps have more of a quantum sense of V.” and instead of “truth” we are looking for “probabilities” (Bloom 2003, 51). As Bloom suggests, this hesitance in the face of this explicit identification of the woman as V. and Victoria Wren may be caused by the education we have received. Having read this far in the sequence accumulating a V-word upon a V-thing upon a V-shape as well as in the sequence repeatedly betraying its promise of a continuous *fabula* of the mysterious V. it is hard to take the novel for its

word. One hears in this idea an echo of McHale's reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* that shows how the novel conditions the reader to accept retrospective reversal or erasure of seemingly stable realities in the world of fiction. Like McHale's reading, also Bloom's view of *V.* gives due consideration to the effects of the sequential experience of reading the novel.

However, Bloom's notion of "quantum sense" is surprisingly easy to translate into certain linguistic features in Chapter 14. The woman is *V.* is Victoria Wren, but only, it turns out, in the subjunctive mood. Framed by counterfactual sentences, the sense of a definite identity of *V.* is as indeterminate as ever, but the indeterminacy now frames not only the narrative situation but also sentence-level predication. The shorn hair of *V.*'s paramour is "only an obscure bit of private symbolism for the lady *V.*: perhaps, *if she in fact were Victoria Wren*, having to do with her time in the novitiate" (*V.*, 410, emphasis added). The younger Stencil and his inferential processes and uncertain deductions are laid bare: "*If she were Victoria Wren*, even Stencil couldn't remain all unstirred [...]" (*ibid.*). The hesitant narration continuously foregrounds Stencil's historiographic methods and the insurmountable distance between the events and the telling: "Stencil even departed from his usual ploddings to *daydream a vision of her now* [1956], at the age of seventy-six [...]" (411, emphasis added).

Bloom's evocative idea of a quantum sense, therefore, is highly suggestive of not only *V.*'s identity but the problem-solving involved in reading *V.* It is, indeed, slightly misleading to say that "by now" we have a "quantum sense" of *V.*'s identity, as this sense is not only a natural growth of processing the succession of appearances of *V.* and the different Stencilizations preceding "*V. in Love.*" The quantum sense is *also* produced in the narration of "*V. in Love.*" In addition to allowing us to counter its certainties with the training received during reading, the chapter constitutes another kink in the sequence of *V.*'s, another repetition with difference, by being strikingly unique among the historical episodes. For the first time, Herbert Stencil becomes a sustained reflector-character explicitly presented in the historical narration, and for the first time the conventional distance between narration and experience is established. The truly striking effect in the latter historical chapters of the novel is that while the earlier overdetermination of the meaning of "*V.*" decreases, and while the text begins offering explicit recognitions of *V.*, the previously backgrounded interpretive clues mount a resistance against this clarity.

Perhaps the strongest outward sign of this resistance is found in a non-Stencilized chapter 16 ("*Valletta*"), in which Stencil has finally traveled to Malta in what amounts to his most dramatic attempt to make sense of the circumstances of his father's disappearance and *V.* In Malta, Stencil

meets with Fausto Maijstral, whose memoirs (or “Confessions,” as they are titled in the novel) are among the documents on which the history of V. is based, and among the very few which are available to the reader without the filter of Stencilization. In the sixteenth chapter, Stencil recounts to Maijstral “the entire history of V.” and realizes that it adds up “only to the recurrence of an initial and a few dead objects” (V., 445). This reversal seems in accordance with Stencil’s predicament. The uncertainties of Stencilizations and impersonations can indeed be seen as resulting from the willingly applied method of “approach and avoid” (V., 55). Now that this method has been substituted for a more straightforward one, the mystery might just dissipate into the “scholarly quest,” it may always have been (V., 61). Yet this dramatic reversal is too neat to stand. The next clue, perhaps waking Stencil up for the real, second time, propels his quest onwards, towards Sweden and a mysterious Mme. Viola (V., 451–452).

The series of appearances made by lady V., however, does not conclude here. In the “Epilogue 1919,” a strangely fantastic tale detailing the circumstances of the disappearance of Stencil’s father, all the loose ends seem to come together. The chapter finally recounts the events taking place on Malta in 1919. The epilogue has been subject to some commentary, and the available analyses illustrate why on one hand the epilogue can be seen as an acceptable closure to the novel, but also why its version of the entire history of V. is difficult to digest. These readings show that the reinforcement of the interpretation of V. as a woman does not do away with the potential meanings attached to the V-initial or V-sign throughout the procession of the novel. The epilogue, seemingly showing how it all came to pass, has not been accepted unconditionally by scholars.

However, one reading strategy of the Epilogue is taking the novel for its word. David Cowart (2011), among others, shows that it is possible to construct a coherent and plausible timeline of V. the woman. To this end it is required that we accept the “Epilogue” at face value.⁸⁴ According to Cowart, the point of view in the “Epilogue” does not appear to be “Stencilized,” and “*the author* seems to identify V. as Stencil’s mother” (2011, 44, emphasis added). Molly Hite makes the same observation, although without evoking the author: contrary to the previous historical chapters, there are no framing devices around the epilogue, and therefore nothing hints that positing a reflecting character’s (Stencil’s) consciousness is called for (1983, 62). Dwight Eddins (1990) goes even further and suggests that the

⁸⁴ Cowart does this and more, as he also accepts story-level evidence from the early version of Chapter 3 (known as “Under the Rose”). The latter contains most of the events of chapter 3 “In which Stencil, the quick-change artist, does eight impersonations,” but the framing quasi-presence of Stencil and the fragmentation into eight impersonations are found only in the final version of *V.*

designation of the chapter as “Epilogue,” which can be seen as a type of peritext, gives it “autonomy, and authority” and suggests that the strangely *deus ex machina* ending takes the shape of authorial closure in the very literal sense (87). Despite considerable differences between the readings above, they all suggest that finishing the novel concludes the reader’s search for V. This reading therefore allows or invites the reader to escape her role as Stencil’s double – for this is history becoming unstencilized and our access to historical events becoming independent of the effects of Stencilization. Whether this invitation should be accepted is the final ambiguity of the novel.

The choices made by the scholars cited in the paragraph above suggest various interpretive frames in which the Epilogue can be seen as motivated. The one that emerges surprisingly strong is the interpretive frame of authorial exposition. This would indeed be the first historical episode using the classically authorial narrative strategy of the so-called omniscient, heterodiegetic narrator, with “zero focalization” (cf. Genette 1980, 208). While this is something that all of the scholars cited acknowledge, yet this does not make the issue of the epilogue any simpler. Cowart, for instance, sees that in addition to the “authorial” reading *also* the “Stencilized” reading of the epilogue is possible. More importantly, Cowart suggests that finally the choice is a non-binary one: “Even if one takes the epilogue as free indirect discourse grounded, still, in the projections of the younger Stencil, the suggestion regarding a baleful maternal parent seems nonetheless valid” (Cowart 2011, 44).

In contrast to those who choose to take the epilogue in good faith, there are scholars who think that the epilogue is all charade. Richard Pearce argues that the “Epilogue” is best understood a parody of epilogue: “it does not merely provide a shift in orientation, it is absolutely discontinuous with what came before” (Pearce 1985, 147). At first glance this reading departs radically from any reading choosing to take the Epilogue in as an exposition of formerly omitted story material. The main point of contention, as Pearce suggests, is that the very idea that the epilogue might provide closure seems incompatible with the indeterminacy carefully upheld throughout the sequence of the historical episodes (Pearce 1985, 145–147). The difference, therefore, is not so much based on seeing the textual evidence of the epilogue in different ways but, rather, on an interpretation of the ethos or message of the whole work. What is at stake is not so much the meaning mediated through details but an attitude towards conventions of motivation, coherence, and closure.

It is not difficult to see how this multifaceted web of indeterminacy might contribute to our understanding of Pynchon’s works and the ways in which they achieve the effects documented extensively in Pynchon scholarship. If the Pynchon of *V.* is the prophet of entropic forces affecting

humanity, then surely the floating “V.” and the indeterminable V’s, and the unfathomably Stencilized narrative fragments – no matter how internally contradictory – are part of the vision. Surely it is only all of this, and nothing less, that amounts to the full literary realization of “Pynchon’s theory.” It would be difficult to rebuke such an interpretation, but it is perhaps possible to point out – as has been done throughout this chapter – that behind the interpretive intricacy and textual play there are certain traditions of interpretation, protocols of reading. Focusing on these procedures may give a partial account of how all the interpretive intricacy and textual complexity may produce interpretations that are recognizable across the spectrum of approaches one might take to Pynchon.

This chapter has been an attempt to see *V.* in the double exposure of two reading strategies. On one hand, we have the sequential reading that focuses on the internal dynamics of the reading process and strategically seeks to avoid reading with the “anticipation of retrospection” that some scholars have taken to be our “chief tool in making sense of narrative” (see Brooks 1992, 23). Yet as we have seen, this strategy also has the capacity to tease out the conventions of seeking the retrospectively grasped global significance and weighing textual evidence based on its relevance to the holistic interpretive frame. This holistic and retroactive strategy works as a counterpoint to the sequential reading, and it largely conforms to the classically literary critical protocol of seeking the frame in which the whole of the novel becomes as meaningful as possible.

Although strategically foregrounding the sequential reading, the analysis here shows that eventually it is as difficult to choose only one of these strategies as it is to find one definitive answer to the indeterminacies of the *V.* This is probably why in many readings *V.* may be *both* an augury of historical force of decadence *and* an accidental figure at the fringes of cataclysmic events – just like Stencil Jr. may truly be “the century’s child” (*V.*, 52) as well as the son of lady *V.* whom we may (or may not) finally accept is Victoria Wren. The quest which the reader accepts in assuming the readerly position offered by Stencil is, after all, a dual quest. It is on one hand a quest for *V.*’s natural habitat in the 20th century – its historical states of siege. On the other hand the quest remains the “literal” quest for *V.* or “V.” in *V.*, a novel, whose reading is driven by a desire for a plot, coherence, and closure.

4. Prescribing a Common Dream: Problems of Narrative Voice in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*

We shall call *voice* the product of the reader's quest for the origin of the text. "A voice": such is the vague, empty answer that we must give to the question of "who speaks," at least until we can describe more or less correctly the situation at the other (sending) end of the act of communication. (Coste 1989, 164.)

"Stencil called it serendipity, not he. Do you understand? Of course you do. But you want hear him say it." (*V.*, 249.)

Halos of meanings around words his mouth evidently spoke (*GR*, 172).

This chapter will momentarily divert from analysing *V.* in order to approach an aspect of its interpretations. In the previous chapter I aimed to show how the sequential processing of details is taken into account in interpretations. Although earlier Pynchon studies have, to varying degrees, analysed the development of motifs, ideas and narrative strategies in the sequence of reading, they still mostly focus on the meaning of the emerging whole. The cumulative procession of V-shapes, V-words and V-women is intertwined with other aspects of the novel: the temporal organization of the novel viewed as a holistic strategy and the thematic significance of repetition as such. The holistic interpretation of the novel often thematizes these problems of reading as aspects of "Pynchon's theory," or in more commonsensical terms, the novel's worldview, message, theme, or moral.

Interestingly, sequential reading and reading for the whole come across as two strategies that underlie a wide range of readings approaching Pynchon with different aims and through a variety of theoretical interests. That is, they shape readings that are not explicitly expressing interest in the problems of reading literary texts. Somewhat comparably, in the present chapter I will argue that the problems concerning the historical narratives of *V.* can be – and have been – approached through the notion of narrative “voice” and structures of narrative communication. Many conspicuous, much-cited key passages thematize narrative or communicative acts in Pynchon’s novels. They foreground issues of voice, mediation and communication as significant to interpretation. Again, I will argue that even when the theoretical apparatuses brought to bear on the novels in scholarly readings are not primarily concerned with narrative structures or communication, communicative and narrative aspects are often seen as significant and operate in the background of analysis.

In addition to *V.*, which is focused on during the latter part of this chapter, my analysis will here look into *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which famously lays bare the conventions behind many of the novelistic effects of voice and psychological point of view (see McHale 1992; Hägg 2005). In the following analyses, I aim to show that the problems of communication and narrative mediation in *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* are in many ways similar, although the contexts in which these problems are thematized are notably different. The themes of communication and mediation in *V.* are most conspicuous in how the embedded historical narratives are framed and presented. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, however, the problematic of voice, mediation, and communication permeates the narration of the novel even more thoroughly. Thematizations of the narrative strangeness abound in the novel, but the most interesting ones in this context are those which concern various psychic and “supernatural” forms of communication. Rather than simply distinguishing formal properties of communication, the approach taken here emphasizes contextual and functional analysis. The activities of modelling communication and hearing voices are part of the interpretive process, and can be shown to operate in numerous existing readings.

At the outset, however, it is the narratological notions of “voice” that primarily inform this analysis. The further theoretical interest lies in the intersection of models of communication thematized in the novels and the ways in which they raise questions about textual voice. My argument, as concerns the liaison of existing readings of Pynchon’s novels and the metapoetic goals of this work, is that finding a place for “voice” is a factor in many readings and interpretations of Pynchon. After decades of theorizing in narratology, voice can be understood rather broadly and functionally. Seeking to identify the narrative voice can be conceptualized as a strategy central to reading narrative fiction. This entails

looking for a source of the text, an intent to communicate, even if this intent or source is not necessarily reducible to a textually marked, unified teller persona (see Coste 1992, 164; Aczel 1998; Dawson 2013a).

I will focus on analyzing *diegetic* instances of communication in Pynchon and the ways in which they have been approached. Yet it is vital to this discussion that in the narratological context the question of voice by default exceeds the scope of the diegetic. Narrative texts create, and sometimes also represent, their own narrating instance. That some narratologists have also tended to treat narrative text as the product of the represented narration is a source for disagreement and debate. I will argue that the paradoxical view of narrative – sometimes called the paradox of enunciation (Coste 1989, 9) – being at once the act of production as well as the product of that act, is reflected in thematizations of communication within *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. This is arguably most forcefully realized in the devices and strategies of Stencilization.

Richard Walsh sees this paradoxical view of narrative as a matter of contrast between, on one hand, “conventional understanding of narrative,” which places the narrating instance within the communication model, and on the other, “the rhetorical view,” according to which “the communicative gesture creates, rather than transmits, the multi-level structure of narrative” (Walsh 2010, 35). Richard Aczel, also acknowledging these contrasting positions, suggests that we should see the whole issue of voice more pluralistically, in the “space between structure and reception.” Aczel also believes that the theory of voice should encompass not only “an abstract speaker *function* or subject position” but also discursive features suggestive of subjectivity and voice *effects* (1998, 494–495). In both cases, we see a juxtaposition of agency in a communicative schema related to the fictional world ontologically and elements of text we may approach in terms of rhetoric, even style. These two ways of constructing voice in narrative have affected theory-formation in interesting ways, but they can also be seen to operate as procedures of interpretation in individual readings. The latter argument will be explored by looking into readings of Pynchon’s Stencilized narratives in *V.*, and to scholarly views on a case of otherworldly communication in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Chapter 4.1. below demonstrates how thematized and modelled communication in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* throws into relief our tendency to “hear voices” in texts. Previous readings of Pynchon’s novels provide evidence for the centrality of the ideas of voice and narrative transmission for a wide range of readings. Chapter 4.2. focuses on the chapter “Mondaugen’s story” in *V.* Arguably the emotional and ethical nadir among the novel’s excursions to the crises of the 20th century, this chapter

most forcefully foregrounds questions of voice, authority, and motivation of telling. In this subchapter, theories of literary communication and voice are discussed in relation to the question of narrative ethics. Additionally, readings of “Mondaugen’s story” are seen to negotiate between the ambiguity of voice and the ethical imperative emerging out of the represented events themselves.

4.1 Voice and World: Communications from the Other Side

This chapter analyses instances of diegetically staged communications in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *V. Second-degree narrative performances and intradiegetic stories figure crucially in literary history from *One Thousand and One Nights*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *Decameron* to Jan Potocki’s *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* and the modern novel – so crucially, in fact, that the form made up of the frame-story and the framed story has become a site for a host of generic conventions. As far as my examples from Pynchon are concerned, only the Stencilized stories discussed in the latter parts of this chapter are embedded narratives in this sense. These stories draw copiously from the literary archive of embedded tales, while bringing to relief the oddity of conceptualizing such tales in terms of oral telling. The Stencilized stories use this strategy to thematize those questions of credibility, realism, and historical accuracy that stem from the inherent strangeness of literary framing of intradiegetic tales. In contrast, the cases from *Gravity’s Rainbow* exemplify embedded structures of spoken or otherwise “voiced” communication in a thematic frame of supernatural or supersensory communication. These two classes of diegetic communication, largely discussed in different theoretical terms, are shown by my examples from Pynchon to have more in common than literary theory and narratology lead us to believe. Drawing from the readings of Pynchon studies, I will argue that theoretical ideas of voice and communicative structures are applied to both with analytically convincing results.*

Theoretically, however, it is far from obvious that the intradiegetic tale and other diegetically represented instances of relaying narratives can be seen as closely related phenomena. This can be shown by delving into the narratological theory of “voice.” In what perhaps amounts to the best known narratological theory of narrative voice, Gérard Genette groups under the heading of voice those categories that describe the “*relations between the narrator – plus, should the occasion arise, his or their narratee[s] – and the story he tells*” (Genette 1980, 215, emphasis added). In the Genettian tradition, the question of voice is clearly about the narrator and separate from questions of point of

view or focalization through a character – whose idiom might colour the narrative discourse. Voice, as a conceptual category pertaining to the narrator is also distinct from other tiers of communication. This view is summarized in William Nelles’s formulation: “the historical author writes, [...] the implied author means, [...] the narrator *speaks* (Nelles 1997, 9, emphasis added; see also Kindt and Müller 2006, 156). Most narratologists, to a greater or lesser degree, recognize and respect this definition of voice. The scholars taking this stance also proceed from the principle that the actual narrating instance is always “voiced” (if not necessarily produced) by the narrator (Chatman 1978; 1990, 85; cf. Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 91.)

Others, like Richard Aczel, point out that in one sense all narrative “agents” in texts, and not just the implied author who “means,” are implied (1998, 474–475).⁸⁵ This approach contrasts with many narratological theories, which present the question of the narrator as a deal-breaker in negotiations about whether certain texts are narrative or not. Both Genette and Chatman, for example, insist that the presence of a narrator, overt or covert, telling or “presenting,” is a prerequisite for narrative discourse (see Chatman 1990, 113–116). On the other hand, theorists otherwise far apart, say, Ann Banfield and Richard Walsh, both argue that positing a narrator in cases in which the presence of such textual agent is not textually implied is unnecessary and theoretically unsound. Yet to advocate either view, as Manfred Jahn points out, is not to deny that the narrator will often “speak or write, establish communicative contact with the addressees, defend the tellability of the story and comment on its lesson, purpose, or meaning” (2001, 670). Theorists from different branches of literary studies may acknowledge that a work of fiction “leads the reader to imagine a speaker, a situation, a set of ancillary events” (Ohmann 1971, 14). This view reciprocates with Fludernik’s, who remarks that although conceptualizing narrative fiction as (verbal) communication is not a necessary theoretical choice, this will not stop us from modelling literary communication as an interpretive move in reading (2001, 622–623).

Therefore, if the narrative agents can be seen as “implied,” in the similarly literalist vein we can now emphasize the “illusionistic” nature of the narratological communication model (cf. *ibid.*). It is a *model* describing the levels of intention and agency that can be considered relevant or necessary to understanding any specific case of discourse as communication. In narratology, the focus has been

⁸⁵ It can be added that at the time Booth’s book came out in 1961 the “implied author” was seen as a new element introduced to “interpretation theory.” It was only during the following two decades that the idea of the implied author was incorporated into the emerging study of poetics. (Kindt and Müller 2006, 67.) Even as the concept was gradually integrated into the vocabulary of narrative poetics, primarily via Chatman and Rabinowitz, the debate went on about whether the implied author was primarily an element of text or an effect of reading (*ibid.*, 87–89).

on fictional narrative texts and the agencies relevant to their communication. However, it is also clearly the case that communicative situations are more generally modellable – and do not have to be conceptualized only in terms of sending, receiving and mediating roles.⁸⁶

In the narratological debate the questions of narrative mediation and communication overlap with those of narrative voice. Many have striven to make further analytical distinction, arguably no one with greater success than Genette. While undoubtedly successful, Genette's distinctions are also a source of certain problems. For example, Richard Walsh notes, free indirect discourse, which is for many theorists a key issue in discussions of voice, is separated from the Genettian "voice" by treating it under "mood" (Walsh 2010, 37). This seems at odds with the long-standing perception of the history of free indirect discourse as embodying a kind of power struggle between the (omniscient) voice of the narrator and the characters' personal idiom breaking its spell as we approach modernism (cf. Dawson 2013b, 168).

In the context of my analysis of Pynchon's novels and their readings these conceptual disagreements and overlaps are of special interest, because the represented narrative acts taking place in the world of fiction and the actual narration seem to strategically play off each other – often to the effect of destabilizing each other. Arguably, one benefit of conceptualizing "voice" as a space spanning from speaker function to voice effects is that this conceptualization allows us to see the analogousness of the narrative voice and represented voices within the narrative – yet this analogy does not have to suggest an equivalence between the two levels on which voices are "heard" in narratives. Walsh (2010) makes a useful simplification about what makes this possible: "Acts of representation [...] are themselves among the possible objects of narrative representation" (37).

However, Walsh also acknowledges the abyss always latent in the hierarchy of the narratological model. According to Walsh, the communication model view *implicitly* posits that every narrating instance is "literal with respect to the events represented – that it is ontologically continuous with the world on which it reports." This gives rise to the prospect of an "endless series of implicit narrators." (Ibid., 39.) This may be a "false" problem, created by a theoretical flaw, yet in a sense the problem could be fundamental to fiction.⁸⁷ Here, one wishes to embrace such aspects of literary art which allow us to worry about our own ontological reality because Don Quixote can be the reader of *Don Quixote*, because doing otherwise seems like selling short both Pynchon's novels and the cognitive

⁸⁶ This is seen in Didier Coste's model (1992), and, of course, Jakobson's (1960).

⁸⁷ As suggested by e. g. Genette 2004; Alter 1975.

experience of reading fiction (see Borges 1964, 196; for a longer discussion see chapter 2.1 above). Therefore, this work is necessarily biased towards the stance of suspended disbelief, vertiginous glimpses of infinite regress – call it the Borgesian view. As will be shown below, the category-crossing thematizations of voice in Pynchon are often crucial to interpretations and readings of how the communication of these texts works. Further, as chapter 4.2. shows, they also figure in judgments about values and ethics of the novels.

Communication Model vs. Death in Gravity's Rainbow

As Hägg points out, narratological concepts describing literary communication are proven both useful and utterly deficient by *Gravity's Rainbow* (Hägg 2005, 13). This is, in a way, a productive paradox. As Pekka Tammi shows in his article, the seeming confusion of narratives both affirming the helpfulness of our concepts while also putting them under duress, is actually a better-than-average description of how narrative fiction works (Tammi 2008). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, no matter how esoteric the communications represented, there is some justification in saying that none of them are much stranger than novelistic communication. It is tempting to play along with Nicholas Royle, who declares the novelistic, omniscient narrator, “by definition, a clairvoyant.” The narrator seems to possess “the uncanny facility of a medium or fortune-teller who not only predicts or prophesies but also somehow enacts the prediction or prophecy.” (Royle 1991, 72.) It is difficult to decide whether this is taking your metaphors too literally or just literally enough. It is quite evident, in the light of *Gravity's Rainbow*, that the most otherworldly communications can quite readily be interpreted as thematizations of the strangeness of novelistic structures of communication.

The theme of psychic communication is developed to a dizzying complexity during the first part of the novel, which largely orbits a military cabal called “The White Visitation.” The faction specialises on various esoteric forms of espionage, psychic warfare, and scientific research. Much of the research is somehow connected to the fluctuant main protagonist Tyrone Slothrop.

The proceedings of a séance are first described at length in the early parts of the novel (*GR*, 34–37). In their excellent discussion of the novel's séances Herman and Weisenburger (2013) are fascinated by the descriptions of “the technology and protocols of divination” (159). The details of technologies and protocols are, indeed, largely responsible for foregrounding the séances as communication. Yet

at a more fundamental level the séance can be seen to thematize aspects of narrative communicative situations in a rather elementary manner. This is also how Herman and Weisenburger treat it in their discussion.

The novel is quite explicit about the communicative functioning of the séance, and clearly spells out the context-specific sender, receiver and mediator roles. In the following excerpt the novel implies a model for the communication of the séance:

[T]he slender medium [...] sits nearest the sensitive flame with his back to the wall, reddish-brown curls tightening close as a skullcap, high forehead unwrinkled, dark lips moving now effortless, now in pain:

‘Once transected into the realm of Dominus Blicero, Roland found that all the sings had turned against him ... Lights he had studied as well as one of you, positions and movement, now gathered there at the opposite end, all in dance ... irrelevant dance. None of Blicero’s traditional progress, no something new ... alien ... Roland too became conscious of the wind, as his mortality had never allowed him. [...]

[...]

The medium, irritable now, has begun to drift back out of his trance. Anybody’s guess what’s happening over on the other side. This sitting, like any, needs not only its congenial circle here and secular, but also a basic, four-way entente which oughtn’t, any link of it, be broken: Roland Feldspath (the spirit), Peter Sachsa (the control), Carrol Eventyr (the medium), Selena (the wife and survivor). (*GR*, 34–37.)

Psychic communication, then, involves four participants: the spirit, the control, the medium, and the querent. As Herman and Weisenburger (2013) put it, the séance takes a particular discursive form in which “the multiple intermediaries each ‘speak’ at a further remove” (161):

The client seeking access to the spirit of a deceased person engages a medium who, from this side, accesses on the other side a capable spirit, the control, who translates and transmits the deceased’s message back up the line, through the entranced medium, to the client (*ibid.*).

In part, then, this communication is symmetrical across the boundary of life and death: the control is the medium's mirror image on the other side – a sensitive who can communicate across the boundary, but only with another sensitive (*GR*, 171–172, 181). The two mediating participants engage in a two-way communication. The other participants are limited to communicating on their side of the affair. (See Fig. 2). On this side, therefore, the role of the medium in the “four-way entente” of the séance is to speak to the querent what s/he receives from the other side. The medium's speech is represented as quoted monologue, which momentarily places the reader on equal footing with the diegetic audience of the medium. To this audience the medium is now literally the one with the voice: the medium's quoted speech has both a speaker function and a voice effect. Also, as far as the other side is concerned, the reader is as dependent on the medium's discourse as the diegetic audience at the séance.

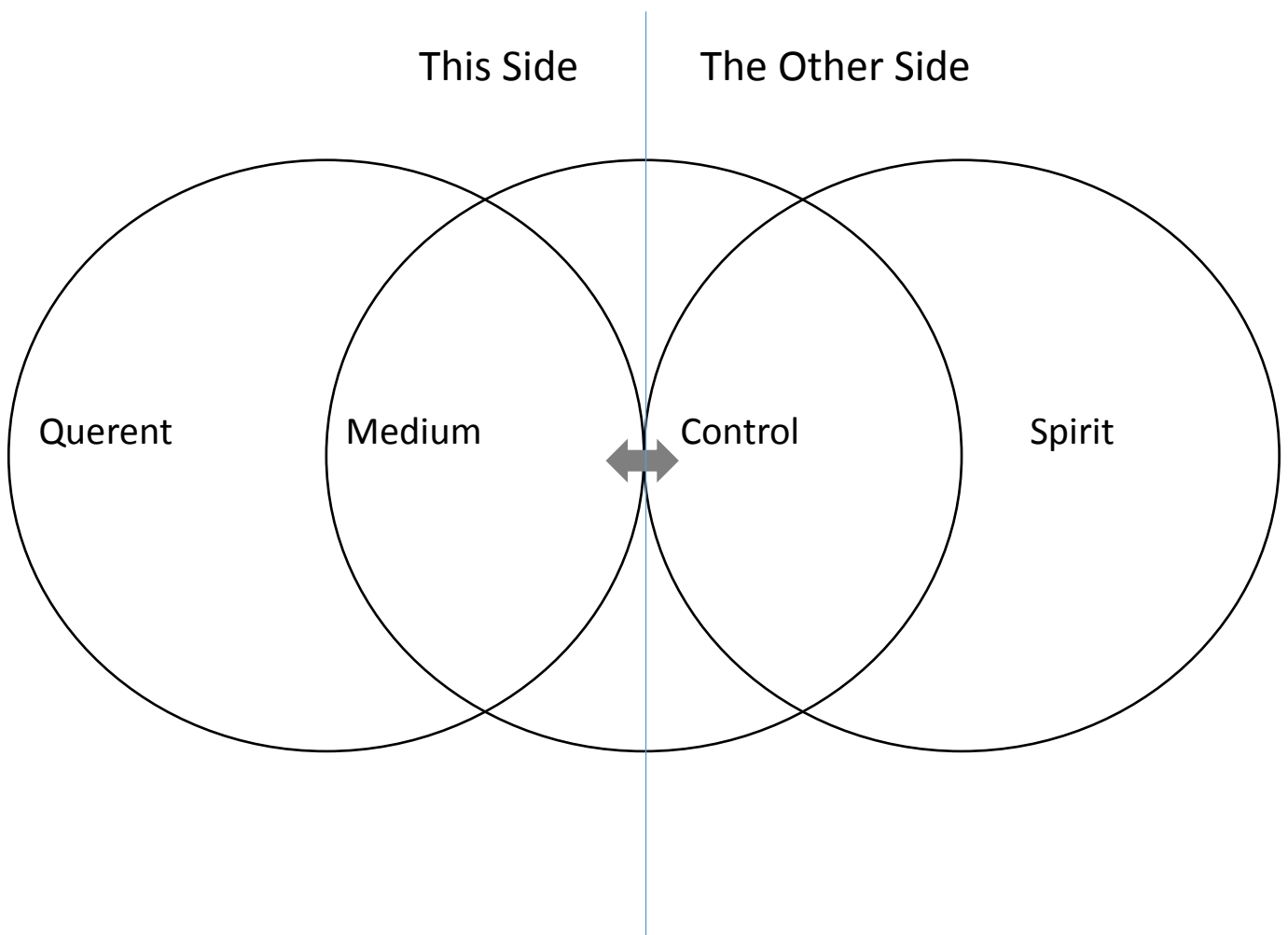


Fig. 2 The “séance communication model”

The séance momentarily brings together a thematic exploration into a bizarre instance of communication with some rather common devices of fiction. As Herman and Weisenburger convincingly argue, the whole continuum of communicating agents emerges clearly enough in the séance. The hierarchical model of communication helps us envision how fictional minds operate as a logical structure of communicative relays. Yet outside the explication of the séance communication model, the novel plays by a whole different set of rules. During the séance episode, focalization shifts to Jessica Swanlake. Later, in a “mind-to-mind” shift typical to *Gravity’s Rainbow* the focalization passes on to “Pirate” Prentice.⁸⁸ Yet even these relatively abrupt transpositions from one focalization to another are curiously reasonable here. Unlike in many other points in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in the first séance the multiple focalizations are restricted to the members of the medium’s diegetic audience, the dwellers of this side (cf. Herman & Weisenburger 2013, 163). This becomes evident when the narrator relates how the presently “irritable” medium begins to drift away from his trance, but it is “[a]nybody’s guess what’s happening over on the other side” (*GR*, 36).

The communicative situation is at once more complicated and less exceptional than it may seem – especially when seen in relation to the narratological concept of voice. As Käkälä-Puumala notes, the novel’s séance passages unveil only a series of messages and transmissions from one medium to another, without any access to the original linguistic event (2007, 77). Yet at the same time, the medium’s discourse in the text is not markedly different from any piece of quoted speech reporting someone else’s experience. The cited passage gives mixed signals, using the proper name of the spirit (“Roland”) as an indirect report of the spirit’s speech would. Yet this reporting could be made on either side of the boundary: by the medium or the control. Elsewhere, however, the querent Selena is addressed directly in a style and diction evoking direct speech: “Yet... Selena, the wind, the wind’s everywhere” and “Selena. Selena. Have you gone, then?” (*GR*, 35). This apostrophe resembles the medium’s fragmentary diction, yet in repeatedly calling by name the surviving partner, suggests a sudden intimacy across the levels of communication and states of being.

Arguably the séance communication merely foregrounds the indeterminacy inherent in literary speech and consciousness representation. In spite of the unusual communicative context in the world of the novel the end product is in formal terms no different from countless passages of novelistic consciousness representation combining forms of indirect and free indirect discourse. As of today, a

⁸⁸ On mind-to-mind shifts of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, see Hägg 2005, 234–235; Herman and Weisenburger 2013, chapter 10.

relatively strong consensus has been established on there being no strictly formal properties to distinguish between indirect and free indirect representations of discourse (McHale 2014, paragraphs 4, 17). Alongside with the difficulty of formally distinguishing between an internally focalized narration and narration externally observing a character's demeanor,⁸⁹ the indistinctiveness of voices in FID is one of the oldest chestnuts of consciousness representation, and examples from Pynchon show why one does not simply crack it open. The peculiarities of literary communication Pynchon dramatizes are rather ordinary, even though the *dramatis personae* are anything but.

The medium, it is later revealed, has no memory of speaking while entranced, “only halos of meanings around words his mouth evidently spoke” (*GR*, 172). This may be what prompts Herman and Weisenburger to characterize the séance communication chain as “Peter Sachsa's enunciation of Roland Feldspath's thoughts, spoken by spirit-captured Eventyr at Snoxall's,” that is: the *control's* enunciation of the spirit's thoughts, *spoken* by the medium (Herman and Weisenburger 2013, 165). However, in rendering the medium's speech a mere mouthing of words, this interpretation also makes the medium almost a pitch-perfect image of the narratological narrator as someone who, indeed, speaks, but mindlessly, simply uttering words given to her or him by the implied author (Chatman 1990, 84), the subject of enunciation (Aczel 1998, 475–476), the writer (see Patron 2011, 318), or some such entity from the “other side” of fiction.

Here we see how the rhetoric presentation of the communication model works together with the mental model of embedded levels of communication. To reach the interpretation Herman and Weisenburger make, one must at once make inferences about further levels of communication within the quoted utterance of the medium but also take the novel for its word as concerns the “technology and protocols of divination.” The phantasmal thematics of the séance, therefore, color the analysis of its communicative structures. While the representations of otherworldly communications certainly create a sense of being drawn to an uncanny world of fiction, the séance also thematises the inherent strangeness of the technology and protocols of narrative. As Aczel suggests, the term “voice” is telling of the sense of embodiment conventionally read into narrative agency. Yet the figure of the medium challenges this view by having an embodied voice but being at the same time virtually without agency. Represented as the only physically speaking subject in the séance, the medium is also the one communicator who is wholly emptied of subjectivity and intention. Yet this is not the only part in the communication becoming oddly voided. As Käkälä-Puumala (2006) notes, when the message comes

⁸⁹ On ambiguity of internal and external focalization see Genette 1980, 191.

through a medium, the origin of the message is also effaced: “what is left is the structure of mediation that has absorbed its origin as something precedent and absolute, and thus, as the slogan goes, ‘the medium is the message’” (77–78).

Indeed, in its apparent complexity, the séance communication model also foregrounds the fundamental material flatness of all textual representations. As Mäkelä puts it, it is fundamental to literary representation that the different levels on which agency, acts of telling, and experience are detected are inferred from the material text that in itself lacks the depth suggested by our common understanding of literary communication. The text works as a “syntactic-linear display” evoking the communicative models in the reading mind. (Mäkelä 2013, 138.) In the same vein, although taking the disembodiment of phantoms as his point of departure, Mikko Keskinen (2011) reminds us that the absence of embodied speakers is not just a special “unnatural” challenge arising in reading ghost stories but an “unmarked feature of reading literary language also known as narrative fiction” (213). This of course begs the question about the circumstances under which we may interpret a textual representation as a representation of mental activity of a fictional person (McHale 2014, paragraph 11).

It is therefore illuminating to scrutinize the séances of *Gravity’s Rainbow* in order to see how texts give rise to a mental model of communication. However, it will be shown below that this model pales in comparison to the real riches of communicative quirks of Pynchon’s novel. Ultimately, the hierarchical organization of voices and speaking intermediaries of the séance do not provide a model or metaphor for literary communication in *Gravity’s Rainbow* but, rather, a useful counterpoint to its truly deviant aspects.

Communication-Modelling and Hearing Voices as Aspects of Interpretation

The séances of *Gravity’s Rainbow* are fascinating for a number of reasons. In the first séance alone, the meticulous construction of the divinatory scene and the wandering point of view among the attending group of characters offer much to delve into. It is easy to overlook a simple textual fact: the levels of communication are not only inferred based on conventions of novelistic communication, readerly competence, and textual voices, they are also directly pointed out, and thus created by the text. If anything, the séance perhaps makes the logic of ghostly transmissions too concordant with

conventional novelistic communication. The novel is, however, quick to place its own logic under erasure – much in accordance with the process of concretization and deconcretization in evidence throughout the novel (see McHale 1979). It turns out that psychic communication in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a far more unpredictable business than the initial séance suggests. The “kute korrespondences” between the séance communication model and the conventional roles in narrative communication turn out to be local and fleeting. In a manner characteristic to *Gravity's Rainbow*, the novel has set up a network of relations only to disarrange it elsewhere.

This reversal is almost classically ironic: the obviously “supernatural” séance is cannily recuperated within a model, while much of what goes on “naturally” in the world of the novel seems far more inexplicable and incommensurable with constructs like the séance communication model. Herman and Weisenburger acknowledge this reversal, and offer a thematically strong interpretation: in *Gravity's Rainbow* the séance is, after all, *Their* tool, an instrument of control. In the hands of the White Visitation its communicative potential is subordinated to the needs of psychic warfare. (2013, 165–166.)

Alternative means of psychic rapport are found even while the séance is still in process. One Jessica Swanlake of the White Visitation realizes an onlooker of the séance has probably overheard her *thoughts*:

Jessica Swanlake, a young rosy girl in the uniform of an ATS private, noticing the prewar perfume, looks up, hmm, the frock she imagines is about 15 guineas and who knows how many coupons, probably from Harrods *and would do more for me*, she's also sure. The lady, suddenly looking back over her shoulder, smiles, oh yes? My gosh, did she hear? Around *this* place almost certainly. (GR, 36.)

The passage alternates between what Cohn names psycho-narration and narrated monologue, and is in most respects a perfectly conventional novelistic passage describing a character's perception and thoughts (Cohn 1978, 11–14). It ends with Jessica's “own mental language” apparently intervening in the reporting clauses (see *ibid.*, 14). The text seems to shift from *narrating* Jessica's thoughts to *quoting* them: “hmm, the frock she imagines [...] who knows how many coupons [...] *would do more for me*, she's also sure” (GR, 36.). The italicized section of the text may be taken as a typographical marker of Jessica's “voice,” in the sense of it being indicative of her “idiom” (cf. Walsh 2010, 48). The italicized words could also indicate that part of Jessica's thoughts which the lady hears and comments on, the response “oh, yes?” also apparently conveyed without speaking.

It turns out that quite a few characters around the White Visitation, not just the medium Carroll Eventyr, turn out to have gifts for psychic communication.⁹⁰ Geoffrey “Pirate” Prentice, a character whose “dream” we retrospectively realize opens the novel, is later revealed to be another kind of psychic sensitive – a *fantasist-surrogate*. This means that the beginning of the novel, already twice reframed in the process of reading, first as a representation of the “real” and then as a dream, gets reframed once over: as a dream, vision or fantasy belonging to another person (one Lord Blatherard Osmo, incidentally) which is dreamt or fantasized (hence *fantasist*) in his stead (hence *surrogate*) by “Pirate” Prentice. As Brian McHale suggests, retrospectively triggered ambiguities, correctives and reversals at the beginning of the novel set the template for much of the interpretive work the reader has to do while reading on (1979, 91). If Prentice is some kind of a psychic sensitive, the model of mind-to-mind transfer is different from the one we may construct in the séance. With Prentice, there is no four-way communicative scheme, no participants with clear-cut roles, just an abrupt intrusion of a whole another world.

Finally, there is the main character Slothrop, who is not so much your average psychic as he is the very fulcrum of communicative multilateralism in the novel. He has his share of visions and then some, but he also leaves an intrusive trace to other character’s points of view and discourse. His identity as a protagonist is highly discontinuous and he fosters multiple personae. During the first part of the novel, as well as the last, Slothrop is mostly peripheral figure, haunting the segments focalized through other characters. Towards the end of the novel, Slothrop famously “disintegrates,” which may be as much an effect of what the text says about Slothrop as it is a result of how the novel, after dutifully following Slothrop’s journey through the Zone, reverts to the more discontinuous structure of the first part.

The following passage shows one of the first mind-to-mind transitions somehow involving Slothrop. Bracketed numbers indicate possibilities for hearing a different voice:

⁹⁰ Similar manifestations of hypersensitivity to the spiritual world are, of course, found in all of Pynchon’s novels (see Käkelä-Puumala 2006, 138).

[1], [Dr. Pointsman speaking:] ‘Often, in our experiments [...] the first sight of the test stand, of the technician, a stray shadow, the touch of a draft of air, some cue we might never pin down would be enough to send him over, send him transmarginal.

‘So, Slothrop. Conceivably. Out in the city, the ambience alone – suppose we considered the war itself as a *laboratory*? when the V-2 hits, you see, first the blast, then the sound of its falling ... the normal order of the stimuli reversed that way ... so he might turn a particular corner, enter a certain street, and for no clear reason feel suddenly ...’

[2] Silence comes in, sculptured by spoken dreams, by pain-voices of the rocketbombed next door, Lord of the Night’s children, voices hung upon the ward’s stagnant medicinal air. Praying to their Master: sooner or later an abreaction, each one, all over this frost and harrowed city ...

[3]... as once again the floor is a giant lift propelling you with no warning toward your ceiling – replaying now as the walls are blown outward, bricks and mortar showering down, your sudden paralysis as death comes to wrap and stun [4] *I don’t know guv I must’ve blacked out when I come to she was gone it was burning all around me head was full of smoke* [3]... and the sight of your blood spurting from the flaccid stub of artery, the snowy roofslates fallen across half your bed, the cinema kiss never completed, you were pinned and stared at a crumpled cigarette pack for two hours in pain, you could hear them crying from the rows either side but couldn’t move ... the sudden light filling up the room, the awful silence, brighter than any morning through blankets turned to gauze no shadows at all, only unutterable two-o’clock dawn ... and ...

[1]... this transmarginal leap, this surrender. Where ideas of the opposite have come together, and lost their oppositeness. [5/?](And is it really the rocket explosion that Slothrop’s keying on, or is it exactly *this depolarizing*, this neurotic ‘confusion’ that fills the wards tonight?) [1] How many times before it’s washed away, these iterations that pour out, reliving the blast, afraid to let go because the letting go is so final [4] *how do I know Doctor that I’ll ever come back?* [...] (*GR*, 57–58, ellipses original unless indicated.)

The excerpt begins with the Pavlovian Dr. Pointsman mulling over his experience of conditioning dogs. Pointsman then begins to talk about Slothrop’s “transmarginal” states, comparable to those observed in dogs, when the paragraph of quoted speech ends mid-sentence. “Silence comes in”: this narratorial-seeming segment [2] literally silences Pointsman’s speech, but text makes us imagine other, more ephemeral voices – spoken dreams, pain-voices – within this silence. It is reasonable to assume that the following segment [3] then represents a number of sensations experienced by these “rocketbombed” now treated “next door” in the abreaction ward of St. Mary’s Hospital. While the narrating instance does not change between [2] and [3], a voice-change in another sense may be detected, as one of the local idiosyncrasies of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, you-narration, takes over.⁹¹ Its

⁹¹ See McHale 1992 (“‘You used to know what these words mean’: misreading *Gravity’s Rainbow*”) for the classic discussion of the second-person narration and you-address of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

function, as protean as ever, is here to represent the strangely voided experience and voice of the survivors (alternatively, victims) of a horrific bombing. On the other hand, the italicized sentences [4] most certainly represent another speaking voice – now in the same sense as [1] represents Pointsman’s. Presented in a mode sometimes called “free direct” (cf. McHale 2014, paragraph 2) this voice clearly has a texture of speech by a disoriented Londoner addressing an interlocutor (“I don’t know guv,” “me head was full of smoke”). This is a shift in voice in two senses as it both introduces a change in the speaker (function) and produces an effect of a distinct voice.

As the paragraph containing the voices of the rocketbombed begins and ends mid-sentence and with an ellipsis, another ellipsis begin the following paragraph. Again, we get mixed signals: the sentence fragment picks up where Pointsman’s speech trails off, but this time there are no quotation marks, and therefore no formal indication of direct speech. All in all, the segment ending the long excerpt cited above seems like a mixture of all the elements distinguished above. It features a narratorial voice, which characteristically to the novel, hints at internal focalization. Yet it also involves another italicized sentence of “free direct” discourse and another local idiosyncrasy – the odd interpolation of interrogative sentences in narration, arguably one of the major linguistic harbingers of the paranoid mood of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

The shifts that signal changes of voice foreground the many conflicting ways in which voice may be conveyed and conceived of in texts. Because of the overarching narrative strategies of the novel it is perpetually unclear whether strange features in certain passages should be seen as stylistic idiosyncrasies or whether they are suggesting a deep structure of embedded levels of subjectivity. However, here it is important to simply acknowledge that in the passage cited above these shifting voice effects and cited speakers are textually evident. In contrast to the séance, where the hierarchical structure of narrative agents each speaking at a further remove is a willingly constructed readerly illusion, the section cited above allows for a more detailed interpretive analysis.

Finally, this dilemma may be telling of how reading process preoccupied with questions of voice is complicated beyond the outcome of any voice-attribution exercise. The processes discussed in chapter 3.1 in terms of *primacy* and *recency* are also relevant here. As a careful reading of the excerpt cited shows, it is the shifts of voice which make the text difficult, not the narrative situations as such, which can usually be explained or interpreted in a number of ways – but always after the fact. As primacy and recency are related to the processes which cognitive narratologists have discussed as *preferences* affecting the selection of *frames* through which we may make sense of texts, the dynamic of reading

passages such as the one analyzed here could also be described in these terms (cf. Jahn 1997). However, even when described in different terms, the analysis highlights difficulties which can be fruitfully understood as indicative of the pre-analytic confusion in which categories like the Genettian voice and mood, Walsh's instance and idiom, Aczel's speaker function and voice effect – ideas of the opposite, indeed – blend into a more holistic but mostly intuitive experience of textual voice. Therefore, analysis of voice is never quite separable from the experience of “hearing voices” in silent texts. Much of the formal innovation of *Gravity's Rainbow* can be seen as a result of this protean mixture of speakers and voice effects being developed to extraordinary length.⁹²

Herman and Weisenburger, who have more patience than most scholars for the descriptive analysis of narratological kind, importantly point out that while these shifts violate both narrative convention and common sense, they know of no one “other than a few Pecksniffian guards in the house of realist fiction” who minds the liberties *Gravity's Rainbow* takes (2013, 165). As Herman and Weisenburger know based on decades spent teaching the novel to students, “the dizzying transitions and jump-cuts do require some attentiveness and getting used to but soon seem ‘natural’ and even rather exhilarating” (ibid.). While the text can usefully be analyzed with distinctions provided by narrative theory, finally the ensemble of voices follows a logic no less complex than the world of the novel itself. This is no doubt one reason why undecidability and aversion to categorical thinking are often deemed among Pynchon's central themes, or even as the takeaway moral of “Pynchon's theory.” It is clear, however, that Pynchon studies have been greatly enriched by the careful analyses which produce invaluable insight about how these themes, “theories,” and effects are produced and how they come to be understood as such.

Stencilization and The Other “Other Side”

This discussion will be continued in the light of the chapter “Mondaugen's story” in *V.*, which involves communicative scenarios comparable to the séances of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The effect of these communications is markedly different, however. In *V.* there is no smokescreen of otherworldliness created by séances and ghosts, yet the proverbial foreigncountriness of the past is

⁹² McHale's groundbreaking analyses show this exceedingly well (1979; 1985; both also in McHale 1992; see also Hägg 2005, especially chapters 3 and 6; and Herman & Weisenburger 2013, chapter 10).

rarely felt with more intensity. Both novels thematize conventions and conditions of novelistic communication, but as we will see, the explicit aboutness of the texts will have bearing on which aspects of novelistic communication are thematized. The passages of *Gravity's Rainbow* discussed above are explicitly “about” communication with the “other side,” whereas in *V.* the problematic accessibility of the past through historical narratives and documents is discussed repeatedly. As both examples concern a kind of boundary-crossing, be it between the living and the dead or the present and the past, the similarities are quite pronounced and suggestive of the question of “voice” more generally.

There are many points in which the communicative structure of “Mondaugen’s story” and the séance of *Gravity's Rainbow* compare fruitfully. In the former, the communicative structure within the text is once again introduced in a kind of exposition, but is later complicated by structural and thematic features within the chapter. The more encompassing context for these complications is the large-scale interpretative dilemma of historical chapters, namely their communication through “Stencilization.” Consequently, in “Mondaugen’s Story” there are numerous ambivalences which can be helpfully conceptualized in the matrix of “voice,” understood either as a speaker function or as an effect. As looking into Pynchon studies will show, these ambivalences are one evident source for differences in interpreting the role of the chapter in the novel.

There are also obvious and significant differences between the representation of the séance communication in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the way the communicative situation of “Mondaugen’s story” is presented. Unlike the brief instances of quoted and reported discourse allowing us to glimpse the other side in *Gravity's Rainbow*, “Mondaugen’s story” is a full-blown embedded narrative, in many ways marked as a literary creation in its own right. The model of communication in the séance is explicitly presented in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and while it may be seen to thematize the “unnaturalness” of literary communication, it also produces the effect of indeterminacy of the speaker in the séance. In contrast, while “Mondaugen’s story” is framed as speech of an intradiegetic narrator, it also cannily draws on literary conventions of represented situations of (character) narration and intradiegetic framing.⁹³ This means that while the interpretive frame of speech is available, we are no more dependent on it than we would in reading Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness,” which Pynchon’s story draws on both thematically and structurally. Different conventions attend to speech representation and intradiegetic narratives. This allows Stencilized narratives, which insist on the frame of oral

⁹³ See e.g. Chambers 1984, 3–10; Nelles 1997, 136–157; Phelan 2005, 197–201, 205–215.

delivery while freely appealing to conventions of literary fiction, to attract many kinds of interpretive attention. The variable focus can be detected in various treatments the story has received in Pynchon Studies.

The purpose in the following is to show that as far as communication and voice go, Mondaugen's story is every bit as preposterous as the ghostly mind-to-mind transitions of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The story is flaunting its own epistemological incongruity, unmistakably marking itself as writing with an intricate cock-and-bull story of its own production as speech. The subsequent section, which concludes this chapter, uses existing readings in dialogue with theories of voice and communication. The prior readings of "Mondaugen's story" serve to show how different notions of voice are significant to analysis and often evoked in support to interpretive claims.

Whose story is "Mondaugen's story"?

Stencilization by default blurs conventional distinctions. "Mondaugen's story" operates in a curious double bind of explicitness – on one hand it is marked by "Stencilization" as certain type of writing characteristic to V. and, on the other, the novel explicitly posits a frame of oral telling. This coincidence of conflicting codes is Stencil's stamp of authority, his signature, to use Derrida's term (1988, 19–20). If the notion of "Stencilization" opens a vast horizon of interpretive options, this partly results from this aporetic double exposure of the historical chapters as pure invention and pure quotation.

Taken this way, the chapter could be understood as a quotation, insofar as it is "mimesis of discourse" (Sternberg 1982, 107). It forms what Sternberg terms an *inset* within the *frame*, the frame providing the context of quotation (108). The expository framing could also be seen as "the narrator's text" framing "the character's text" (McHale 2014, par. 2). The status of the story as a framed instance of speaking is foregrounded occasionally, but as is often the case with long embedded stories, the framing act generally stays below the threshold of attention (cf. Walsh 2010, 42–43.)

The frame of the story takes place in the narrative present of the novel in New York of 1956. Stencil is pursuing another clue that might reveal another piece of the intertwining histories of his father and V., presumed at this point in the novel to be a woman of some importance (possibly an instigator of

quite a few international crises as well as Stencil Jr.'s mother). This leads him to Mondaugen, a German engineer whose "story" the chapter "Stencilizes." The link between Mondaugen and Stencil is purely serendipitous: during the war Mondaugen worked in Peenemünde facilities developing the rockets Vergeltungswaffe Eins and Zwei – "the magic initial!" (V., 228).⁹⁴ Yet for once the act of telling is staged remarkably unambiguously. "Mondaugen yarned," and "Stencil listened attentively," the text says (ibid.). This is Mondaugen's telling of the story, with Stencil as its only hearer. What the novel presents in chapter "Mondaugen's story," however, is something else. This is also where the idea of Stencilization is introduced:

The tale proper and the questioning after took no more than thirty minutes. Yet the next Wednesday afternoon at Eigenvalue's office, when Stencil retold it, the yarn had undergone considerable change: it had become, as Eigenvalue put it, Stencilized. (Ibid.)

Indeed, with "Mondaugen's story," the Stencilized version has to be distinguished not only from Mondaugen's "history" (his experience in 1922) but also from the story Mondaugen tells to Stencil in the narrative present. Mondaugen speaks exclusively to Stencil, who in turn confides the story to Eigenvalue. Only the latter version is represented in the novel. This series of tellings can be

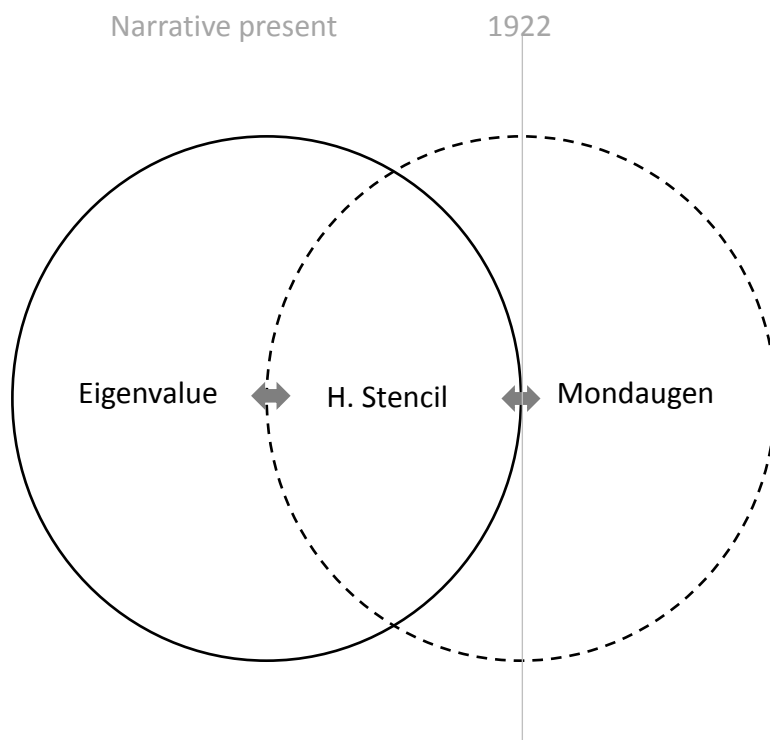


Fig. 3 Stencil-Mondaugen communication model

⁹⁴ Mondaugen reappears as a Nazi scientist in *Gravity's Rainbow*, alongside Lieutenant Weissmann and the V-2 rocket mentioned in the citation by its full name "Vergeltungswaffe zwei." The events of "Mondaugen's story" take place in 1922, and as Mondaugen meets Weissmann in Foppl's castle, the latter is surprised that the Bavarian Mondaugen has never heard of Hitler, and suggests that Germany will need men like Mondaugen in the future (V., 242).

schematically understood as another chain of teller-receiver-links represented either in the Stencilized story or its framing in the narrative present (see Fig. 3).

Furthermore, within the Stencilized story, characters tell (or otherwise communicate) their stories to “Mondaugen,” whom we must now recast a character in the Stencilized version. The ensuing model allows comparison to the séance-model devised above. In the light of the theoretical background introduced above, the problem of communication and voice can now be reframed. Instead of the strange speaking situation in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, here both the speaker function and voice as effect emerge as a problem concerning the status of narration of the chapter titled “Mondaugen’s story.” “Who speaks” may be posed as a question of the exact relation between the narrator and the world – as in Genette’s narratology. However, as Didier Coste puts it in the citation used in the epigraph of this chapter, the question “who speaks” may initially only be answered vaguely: “a voice” speaks. Coste continues that this will have to do “until we can describe more or less correctly the situation at the other (sending) end of the act of communication” (Coste 1989, 164). The symmetrical neatness of the narratological communication model might suggest that this is the case on all levels: extradiegetic, (intra)diegetic, metadiegetic, etc.⁹⁵ Yet “Mondaugen’s story” suggests that in extreme cases the opposite might be true. As far as the embedded narrative is concerned, the description of the sending end of communication leaves little to be desired. However, gradually the diegetic narrating instance becomes so torn with internal contradictions that we are left with little more than a possibility of “a voice.” In every sense of the word, “Mondaugen’s story” turns out to be quite unspeakable.

Hearing Voices with “Mondaugen’s story”

The ambiguities of communication in “Mondaugen’s Story” are reflected in the interpretations of the novel, in which the story often has a prominent place. As the story foregrounds problems of its own production and reception in the novel, many readings which are otherwise uninterested in narratological analysis involve considerations of the communicative structure.

On the first diegetic level, as Shawn Smith suggests, Stencil may be considered a narrator telling the story through “Mondaugen’s third-person limited perspective” (2005, 34). This seems to be the most

⁹⁵ Coste eventually present his own communication model. While informed by the “narratological” model derived from Booth (1961) and Chatman (1978), his model is significantly different. (See Coste 1989, 78.)

typical reading strategy. Despite the exposition of the story as an oral telling, it is more common to approach the Stencilized narrative as one produced by a literary narrator. This observation is supported by how readings often evoke the “third-person limited” perspective or, in Genettian terms, internal focalization, which is conventionally a novelistic device.⁹⁶ A more particular detail pointing towards literary rather than oral frames of storytelling may be found in the “dual voice” (Pascal 1977) effect in the very first sentence of the inset story. This already works to destabilize the frame and evoke the question of voice in a distinctly literary context. “Mondaugen’s story” opens with the following sentence:

One May morning in 1922 (meaning nearly winter *here* in the Warmbad district) a young engineering student named Kurt Mondaugen, late of the Technical University in Munich, arrived at a white outpost near the village Kalkfontein South (V., 229, emphasis added).

The illusion of two discourses blending is immediate, and it is the simple insertion of the intrusive deictic expression “here” which produces the effect.⁹⁷ The deictic “here” seems intrusive and odd as long as we consider it in the context of oral telling, as the exposition of telling in the frame narrative suggests we should. If, on the other hand, Stencil’s role is likened to that of a literary narrator, the expression “here” is likely to be read as Stencil’s representation of Mondaugen’s idiom in free indirect discourse. In free indirect discourse, the deictic expression is conventionally seen to establish a speaker function in the character’s rather than the narrator’s position (McHale 2014, par. 4). Furthermore, the expression “here” does what deictic expressions generally do, as it requires us to contextualize the expression in relation to subject, time and place (see Stockwell 2002, 43). As the only character involved in the communication who actually was *there* in the Warmbad district in 1922, Mondaugen is the only speaker whose experience the expression “here” could designate. The deictic language placing Mondaugen within the embedded narrative makes him, as Smith puts it, “Stencil’s literary creation” (2005, 34). The peritextual clues (the title), the represented communicative chain of tellings, and this voice effect together are more than enough to suggest that the story is to be read as if Mondaugen were a character through whom the story is focalized.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ According to Dorrit Cohn, internal focalization is nothing less than a distinguishing feature of fiction (Cohn 1990, 786).

⁹⁷ Even as the dual voice account of FID has fallen out of favor, the cognitive effect of deictic shift remains much studied (Herman 2002; Stockwell 2002, 46–47).

⁹⁸ As will be discussed in chapter 4.2., this reading also figures in judgments about whether the story is to be read as Mondaugen’s eyewitness account (albeit a fictionalized one) or an incredulous figment of the Stencilizing imagination of its narrator.

Since signs of this type of focalization are everywhere to be seen, the liberties the narrator of the Stencilized chapter takes may be interpreted in a frame that is consistent with the use of internal focalization: the frame of literary storytelling unhindered by real-world constraints. In this sense, therefore, the answer to the question “who speaks” can always be: “the narrator of the Stencilized story.” The novel has already established (in its earlier chapters) that the Stencilized narratives make short work of realist conventions of representing past events from an epistemologically restricted and consistent viewpoint. They are, in addition, remarkably opaque with regard to the material they claim to be based on, be it speech, as in Mondaugen’s case, or writing, as in many other places in the novel. The Stencilized stories have also tended to be opaque with respect to their production. Until now: “Mondaugen’s story” constitutes another break in the sequence of Stencilized tellings.⁹⁹ This time the text explicitly makes Stencil the narrator of the story speaking to a narratee, Eigenvalue, who, as the communicative situation warrants, at one point even interrupts Stencil’s narration to air his grievances about the liberties his oral storyteller seems to be taking.

To better understand this effect, we may draw on the concepts of sequential reading. Because of the narrative situation in the framing story, the interpretive frame of oral storytelling has a privileged position in terms of *primacy* (Perry 1979a, 53; see also chapter 3.1 above). When the story begins, we assume that we are “listening” to Stencil’s narration, because the frame narrative represents Stencil beginning his narration. The assumption that this continues to be the case in the chapter titled “Mondaugen’s story” is a conventional one, and it is supported by the fact that we are yet to receive any indication to the contrary. However, the first sentence proves incongruous with this primary frame. The sentence “One May morning in 1922 (meaning nearly winter here in the Warmbad district) [...]” poses problems to this assumption (V., 229). According to Jahn (1997), the rule of *primacy* entails a preference to maintain the primary frame if at all possible (457). Yet the *recency* of the conflicting frame prompts us to try to reinterpret previously given interpretation in the light of the more recent frame (ibid.). As is befitting for a story self-destructively insisting on being both writing and speech, in “Mondaugen’s story” the contradiction with the frame of oral delivery is maintained on several levels at once – even on the material level of writing, as the narrative clauses are bracketed as if to emphasize the shift from the teller’s deixis to that of the character’s. As Perry puts it in his original essay, this contradiction of frames is something literary texts may operationalize: “The literary text, then, *exploits* the ‘powers’ of the primacy effect, but ordinarily it sets up a mechanism to oppose them, giving rise, rather[,] to a recency effect” (Perry 1979a, 57). The complicated entry

⁹⁹ Cf. chapter 3.2 above

into “Mondaugen’s story” is fittingly symptomatic of what is to come. The story continues to foster ambiguities about its status in relation to the events it narrates, but it also turns out to contain a further embedded story no less ambiguous.

The commentary on either of these two levels in Pynchon Studies is where considerations of voice and communication seem unavoidable. The first level is that on which the Stencilized “Mondaugen’s story” is diegetically told in the novel, by Mondaugen to Eigenvalue. The other level is (meta-)metadiegetic, represented as a story within “Mondaugen’s story.” Towards the end the narrative turns more and more analeptic, in various ways reaching towards the not too distant past of 1904. The very beginning of Mondaugen’s story foreshadows this turn, when Mondaugen is sent to seek refuge at Foppl’s with warnings: “You weren’t here in 1904. But ask Foppl. He remembers. Tell him the days of von Trotha are back again.” (V., 233.) The year and the name von Trotha point to the atrocities of the great Herero uprising of 1904–1908. Events of this earlier time are recalled piecemeal in curious set pieces which include characters’ recollections of the rule of General Lothar von Trotha, and conversations between characters who act as if they were performing on stage. Yet by far the strangest analeptical parts are the fragments focalized through a German soldier participating in systematic extermination of the Herero in 1904. These could be parts of the delirious “common dream” which is somehow “prescribed” to the siege partyfolk by Foppl, who dresses up in his old Herero-slaying uniform and becomes the “siege party’s demon” (V., 255). However, there is no clear consensus among Pynchon scholars about how to interpret the narrative fragments depicting the horrors of the genocide. As the earliest introduction of these fragments coincides with Mondaugen falling ill, the analepses are open to interpretation as Mondaugen’s “scurvy-induced dreams,” to use Grant’s expression (2001, 131).

This embedded narrative within “Mondaugen’s story,” which is itself an embedded, intradiegetically narrated story, has been much commented on in Pynchon studies. In the section below its indeterminate narrative aspects are weighed against its inevitable historical and emotional weight. The problem of narrating past events ethically can be considered not only a prevalent problematic of literature but also of historiography. Therefore, while this problem is probed in readings of Pynchon, it also connects to wider philosophical issues of knowledge and representation in the postmodern context. Below, the layers of history inhabiting “Mondaugen’s story” are considered in the context of narrative ethics. I will also analyze how ethics and considerations of narrative mediation are brought together in readings of Pynchon studies.

4.2. Nacreous V.: Stencilization and The Ethics of Telling

Constantly engaging with truths stranger than fiction, Pynchon's historical fiction pushes at the boundaries of apocrypha and anecdote. *V.* is not an exception. Representations of historical events often come with a surreal tinge of their own. The events of the historical chapters are often situated at the fringes of historical crises in Europe or European-colonized areas, but they typically involve a fictional plot of intrigue in an exotic setting. Despite the historical gravity of the events portrayed, the characters and events are such that one finds in the spy novel, a genre which these chapters constantly evoke. The historical events depicted are often those that have been marginalized by the emerging grand narratives of the 20th Century Europe. *V.* rejects one-track views on history and instead presents a series of portents and omens against a background of prevailing gloom, suggesting that the (all but) forgotten crises at the turn of the 20th Century contributed towards the critical mass plunging the continent into two world wars. This is also the historical context for the events depicted in "Mondaugen's story."

The argument of this chapter is, in brief, that the available readings of Pynchon show that "Mondaugen's story" can be read as a serious exposition of events of historical *gravitas* and also as an act of self-conscious fiction-making flaunting its own instabilities. We may interpret the narrative uncertainties of Stencilization in narratives such as "Mondaugen's story" as thematizations of the postmodern doubt towards history, interpret them as aspects of "Pynchon's theory," or direct our interest in the aesthetic functioning of this curious literary narration. Yet at the same time we may also entertain a conflicting view, and engage with the events portrayed through more directly, immersively, and affectively. Historical imagination is not an oxymoron, and, as Luc Herman suggests, "Mondaugen's story" may be the strongest testimony to its force in *V.* (2012, 25).

Molly Hite is one of the scholars to argue that ultimately the *presence* of the past in the novel signifies more than the obscurity of chronology and the uncertainty of truth about events. According to Hite, the duplicity of *V.* is not that of narrativized history in general, but rather, that of Stencilization. (Hite 1983, 49.) By offering Stencil as a model "hermeneuticist" to the reader, the novel actually emphasizes the dangers of the epistemological assumption that history could be a reliable source of knowledge as long as it is first experienced by someone, then recorded in one or another appropriate medium, and then mediated via appropriate channels. This is also one of the psychologically realist

novelistic conventions which *V.* seems to throw into relief.¹⁰⁰ The chapter at hand analyzes “Mondaugen’s story,” taken as a kind of pinnacle – or perhaps better, the nadir – of Stencilization. The narrative is framed as an incredulous act of fabulation, and it ultimately focuses beyond the main events of the story to produce perhaps the gravest historical statements in the entire novel. As before, prior readings are read as examples of how scholars may negotiate between the artificial and the ethically imposing aspects of “Mondaugen’s story.”

Ostensibly, this is a story of Kurt Mondaugen’s mission in the former colonial realm of Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Mondaugen, a radio engineer, is sent to study atmospheric radio disturbances. However, his stay is complicated by an incident today referred to as the Bondelswarts uprising (of 1922), which saw a small native population rebel against an oppressive administrative reform. Mondaugen is invited to the safety of a manor belonging to a German named Foppl, a plantation owner still using Bondelswarts as slaves. Foppl declares a state of siege, which he uses as an excuse for starting an interminable “siege party.” Months later, from the roof of Foppl’s manor, Mondaugen watches with the other guests as German troops, aided with a bomber plane, come to wipe out the remaining Bondelswarts, ending the rebellion. At this point Mondaugen takes his leave from Foppl’s and his narrative comes to an end. However sordid this incident, the gist of Mondaugen’s story is enclosed within the walls of Foppl’s manor, in the second-order story gradually relegating the siege party’s violent drinking games to background. Perhaps the emotional and ethical low point of the novel, the fragmented narrative details the atrocities of the Herero uprising of 1904–1908, focalized through a nameless German soldier, the rider of a horse called Firelily.

It turns out, then, that the Bondelswarts incident is a kind of foil for presenting the events of the Herero genocide. Furthermore, the Bondelswarts incident is explicitly made into a kind of satellite event related or metonymically pointing towards the events of the Herero uprising. This relation, in turn, is analogical to how the Herero genocide, beginning with dehumanizing politics, developing through the institution of concentration camps, and culminating in an official program aiming at the destruction of an entire population is often seen as the template for the mass extermination of the European Jews forty years later. The connection between the inhuman politics of Deutsch-Südwestafrika and Nazi Germany is made clear enough in the story (*V.* 242, 245). The second world war, on the other hand, serves as a curiously unobtrusive context for the narrative present of 1955, with America sliding from the Post-War confusion towards the Cold War paranoia.

¹⁰⁰ The ways in which the organization of *V.* challenges these conventions is discussed in chapter 3.

The thematic links between the different historical layers of “Mondaugen’s story,” and those of the novel on the whole, are conspicuously complex while being made in a manner that is more suggestive

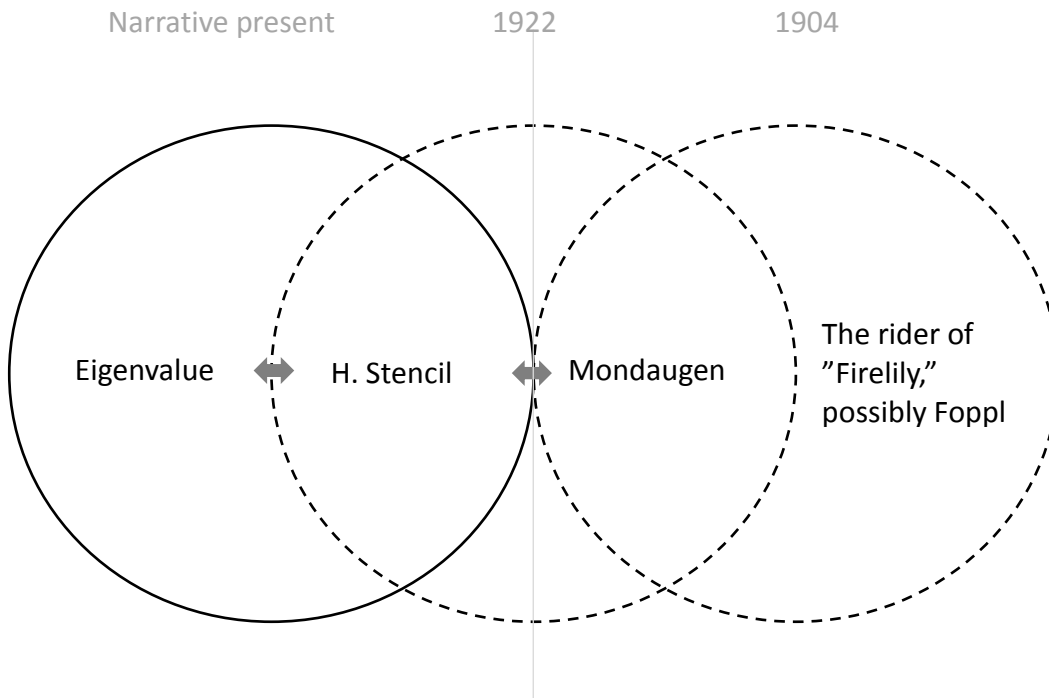


Fig. 4 Expanded Stencil's-Mondaugen's communication model

than explicit. To further complicate the situation, this historical layering is reflected on the level of narrative communication. As detailed in the previous chapter, the very act of telling “Mondaugen’s story” (the chapter) is represented in the novel, and this telling is at two removes from the events in 1922 and the eye-witness experience of them (Mondaugen’s). While we are told that Mondaugen’s personal eye-witness story of the events is delivered to Stencil, this version, which might more properly be called Mondaugen’s, is completely omitted. What we get instead is the stretched-out yarn subsequently told by Stencil, one in which the events are merely – and strangely enough – *focalized* through the story’s titular character, Mondaugen. In addition, the story involves a further level of embedding, in which a whole another layer of historical narrative is revealed, namely that of the Herero genocide seen through the eyes of the German soldier. (See fig. 4.) Whichever approach we take to “Mondaugen’s story,” it is difficult to ignore the effects of its narrative strategy. What is this 50-odd page literary rendering of a short oral narrative? Why is Stencil telling to Eigenvalue (and the novel disclosing to us) *these* events in *this* manner? What does “Stencilization” of Mondaugen’s narrative imply?

The import of the simple fact that all these events (and no others) are told cannot be underestimated. On one hand, as James Phelan suggests, in reading narrative we assess ethically both the events told and their manner of telling (Phelan 2005, 23). On the other hand, the Levinasian branch of narrative ethics argues that narrative forces us to face both what Levinas names the *Said* and the *Saying*. That is, on one hand we are dealing with the Said, including both what is told and the manner of its telling. Yet on the other hand we appraise the very act of something being told at all – the intersubjective, self-exposing, responsible act of Saying. (Cf. Newton 1997, 3–8.)

Judging by the sheer volume of commentaries this section of *V.* has elicited, “Mondaugen’s story” seems central to the impact and ethos of the novel on the whole. Yet, while the very fact of representing the events can be seen a crucial ethical gesture, there is much to be said about their preposterous manner of telling. As Newton argues, narrative structure and form is often seen as an allegory of the relation which the Saying constitutes (Newton 1997, 7). In a sense, then, assessing what Phelan calls the ethics of telling, with focus on narrative presentation and rhetoric, may double as a questioning of the relation of Saying (cf. Phelan 2005, 22–23). Are the complex games with narrative strategies advocating a kind of relativism? Is Eigenvalue’s skepticism as Stencil’s audience an attitude the authorial audience is to adopt to the events of the historical parts of the novel? With its narrative reliability undermined through the intricate communication flaunting its deficiencies, and with its tone finally veering towards a magic realist or fantastical register, how are we to take the story seriously? I want to suggest that one way to examine the ethical dimensions of the story is to look into the existing readings in Pynchon studies and try to find out how they end up taking a position in this matter.

Metanarratives of Stencilization

The interpretive decision to read “Mondaugen’s story” either as a felicitous exposition of events that need to be told, or as a dramatization of fiction-making flaunting its instabilities, or both, is not made at random. The interpretive moves in choosing among these options involve interpretation of certain key passages, many of which are in this case commenting on the narration or narrative production of the story. Adopting Ansgar Nünning’s terminology, these passages could be seen as examples of metanarration or metanarrative commentary (Nünning 2004). As a prelude to “Mondaugen’s story,” the epistemological opacity of the historical chapters is thematized in the exposition of Stencilization, and the chapter also performs the most thorough interrogation of the concept.

While the passage framing the chapter makes the scope of Stencil's fictional license explicit enough, it does not reveal details of Stencilization beyond it being some kind of manipulation and fabrication. Yet there is also an accumulation of information about Stencil's method that must be considered. The framing of an earlier Stencilized narrative (chapter 3) gives us another glimpse of how Stencil approaches the documents and materials containing clues about his father and V.:

Around each seed of dossier, therefore, had developed a nacreous mass of inference, poetic license, forcible dislocation of personality into a past he didn't remember and had no right in, save the right of imaginative anxiety or historical care, which is recognized by no one.

[...]

He'd only the veiled references to Porpentine in the journals. The rest was impersonation and dream. (V., 62–63.)

This passage prefaces the novel's first and arguably the most flamboyant Stencilized showpiece which tells a story of a political assassination in Alexandria through seven different focalizing characters and one strange and stationary camera-eye-like focalization. The framing passage and the name of the chapter¹⁰¹ suggest that Stencil "forcibly dislocates" into eight different viewpoints in a past he has "no right in" (see V., 62). In the framing passage cited above, Stencil's method of reconstructing past events is clearly presented as an imaginative feat.

Like the women with the initial V. in their names, and like the historical episodes of uncertain significance, explanations of Stencil's historiographical detective work add up and interfere with each other in the sequence of reading the novel. The earlier framing cited above is significant to "Mondaugen's story" not only because of its explication of Stencil's methods but also because of its choice of metaphors. The passage adds an interpretive layer to understanding the devices of Stencilization and their role in the later in the novel.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is often treated as a subtext to "Mondaugen's story" (see Grant 2001, 115, 130) This is in part because of the thematic concerns of each story – colonial violence, the ease with which we can lose our humanity. In addition, there are similarities in the way the narration is structured in each. For instance, McHale characterizes the narration of "Mondaugen's story" as "Conradian unreliable narration at two removes" (McHale 1987, 22; cf. Hite 1983). However, one of

¹⁰¹ "Chapter three, In which Stencil, a quick-change artist does eight impersonations." (V., 61)

the most compelling connections between Conrad's story and Pynchon's is the strong poetic image functioning as an emblem of the intradiegetic narrative situation. In *V.*, Stencil's narratives build like "a nacreous mass of inference" around "each seed of dossier."¹⁰² This metaphor of Stencilized narratives developing like pearls inside a shell of a clam bears more than fleeting resemblance to Conrad's emblematic image, which the extradiegetic frame narrator of Conrad's novella presents as follows:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze [...] (Conrad 2007, 279–280.)

According to Ian Watt, Conrad establishes here that "the meaning of the story represented by the shell of a nut or the haze around the glow is larger than its narrative vehicle, the kernel or the glow [...]" (Watt 1979, 169). Yet Conrad's is also a "mixed" metaphor, in which the dichotomy of inside and outside is complexified by the semantics of ethereal and solid, transparent and opaque, and hidden and visible. As concerns its function as a metaphor for "Heart of Darkness" itself, the fogginess of the metaphor is highly appropriate. Besides the particular similarities between the image created in "Heart of Darkness" and *V.*, more general parallel can be drawn: Marlow's tale of going down the river Congo is clearly unlike the "yarns of seamen" with their "direct simplicity," and the Stencilization of "Mondaugen's story" explicitly undermines any illusion of directness and simplicity.

Nünning (2004) labels this type of commentary on narration as "metanarration simulating orality," because the metanarrative aspects of the text stage an oral storytelling situation (33, 38). He also recognizes the possibility of metanarrative commentary playing it both ways: it may refer to both oral and written communication, "thus oscillating between both naturalization strategies" (ibid. 33–34). As discussed above, *V.* clearly plays it both ways: in "Mondaugen's story," the explicit metanarrative commentary sustains the oral frame, but it is implicitly undermined by how within this supposedly oral story certain (implicitly metanarrative) aspects mark it as writing. Therefore, the evaluations we make of "Mondaugen's story" depend on the interpretation given to the ambiguous narrative situation.

¹⁰² As Eddins perceptively points out in *The Gnostic Pynchon*, the metaphor of nacreous construction of history can also be taken as yet another allusion to *The Education of Henry Adams* (Eddins 1990, 86).

“Mondaugen’s story” as a Fictional Testimony

While the literary framing devices and the narrative situation of “Mondaugen’s story” are fascinating and prominently on display, the story they frame is no less intricately literary. The frame of oral telling is not only problematized by the framing devices but also by certain features of the story they frame. Furthermore, not all of the generic frames relevant to “Mondaugen’s story” are fictional. Strikingly, the only circuitous references *V.*, an American post-war novel, makes to the Holocaust are made within “Mondaugen’s story,” and the story circuitously incorporates within itself a fragmentary narrative of a systematic ethnic cleansing often considered as the immediate precedent to the mass murder of the European Jews. This makes Mondaugen not only the person whose experience the chapter represents, or perverts, depending on our stance on Stencilization. Mondaugen is also a potential witness of a genocide – although perhaps only in the same capacity as Stencil is a potential witness to an assassination.

However, it is precisely the model of Stencilization that allows us to entertain the idea that a character in a Stencilized narrative might hallucinate or have a dream “prescribed” to him by another character – and yet the events within this narrative level might be no more uncertain and unreal than anything else in the Stencilized stories. To borrow an idea from Eric Berlatsky,¹⁰³ Stencilization stands in stark contrast to conventions of historiography, and this is what enables it to avoid the problem of narrativized history in which “the real” becomes mere “realism.” It is possible to argue that the novel incorporates in Stencilization the possibility of being inexplicable and unverifiable, and yet more closely reference the historical past. (Cf. Berlatsky 2011, 139.) In *V.*, “Mondaugen’s story” marks the most accentuated case of this potential.

This capacity of Stencilization may be illuminated in the theoretical context of Tamar Yacobi’s discussion of differences between real-life testimony and its fictional counterpart (Yacobi 2005). In the literal, courtroom sense, testimony implies dialogue, making truth-claims, and scrutinizing their reliability for the end of making a judgment of both the testimony and the person giving it (ibid., 210–211). In fiction, this situation is embedded in a context that complicates making such judgments:

¹⁰³ Berlatsky introduces this idea in his reading of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (Berlatsky 2011, chapter 3).

[S]ince fiction is a mediated framework of communication, its “reports” are devised by the implied author, while the virtuality of its events and representations prevents readers from directly investigating the reliability of fictive testimony. Hence, the very notion of (un)reliability transforms in the case of fiction: from fidelity to the facts, or the “truth,” toward correspondence to the implied norms of the text. (Ibid., 211.)

The “virtuality” of Mondaugen’s experience of genocide poses problems to regarding the chapter as a testimony of historical events. In addition, Mondaugen’s fictive testimony, which consists of virtual events and representations, is made doubly virtual by its “Stencilization.” The ambiguity of the stories on the two levels has the effect of mutually reinforcing the ambiguity. Grant writes:

The deliberately ambiguous status of the fragments recounting events during the von Trotha campaign [in 1904] is a complex extension of the effect generated by the chapter’s already questionable provenance. Not only is the whole story “Stencilized,” but portions of it are further removed from any controlling principle of verisimilitude by the possibility that they may be the product of scurvy-induced dreams. (Grant 2001, 131.)

What Grant refers to as the chapter’s questionable provenance is the ambiguous status of both the telling and the events recounted. Not only is the “Stencilized” narrative a site of contradictions in its own right, but here Stencil’s telling is also a retelling of Mondaugen’s telling, which is itself, one imagines, a *recollection* of past events. Park (1999) concurs that it seems impossible to distinguish “between events and versions, between external reality and internal construction” (844).

It is possible, however, to juxtapose Berlatsky’s view discussed above with Yacobi’s claim that even fictional testimony becomes more complex “when witnesses report events that count as extraordinary” (2005, 212). Arguably, it seems that in some cases this makes fictional testimonies, or at least the capacity of fiction to testify, less complex. As shown above, Berlatsky’s approach, deliberately weighing fiction against the conventions of narrativizing history, allows the repertoire of the work to determine the standards by which this capacity is assessed. While the uncertainties and indeterminacies of the reality represented by Stencilized narratives are inescapable, they do not preclude reading these very narratives as serious expositions of historical events.

Peter Brooks regards Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* as a work in which there is plenty of narrating, as well as a discernible story set in the past, revealed in various fragments and digressions. However, as long they are not brought together in a plot, narrating and the story remain unmotivated and unconnected:

[There is] narrating on one hand, an epic historical story on the other, and no narrative plot or design to join them. In this structure of the absent middle, the failed mediation, the problem of the rest of the novel is formulated: How can we construct a plot? [...] On what authority? The narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* Not only raises these issues, it actively pursues them. The novel becomes a kind of detective story where the object of investigation – the mystery – is the narrative design, or plot, itself. (Brooks 1992, 294.)

According to Brooks, in works constructed in a particular manner, the plot or the narrative design becomes the mystery pursued. This can be applied to *V.* as well. The recurrence of *V.* and the figure of Stencil can be taken as a promise of plot, something that brings together the relentless narration of the novel and provides a common ground for the stories that point towards the dark turns of history in the 20th century. Brooks defines the plot as “something in the nature of the logic of narrative discourse, the organizing dynamic of a specific mode of human understanding” (ibid., 7). The absence of the plot, therefore, means the absence of an organizing principle. Missing plots also eradicate the motives of telling, and therefore become: “unable to name their sender or receiver, and unable to define the subject of their narrative discourse” (ibid. 292). This is an apt description of the problems arising in reading *V.* Looking into “Mondaugen’s story” may allow us to link these problems to particular features of narration and help us understand why the lack of motivation, which Brooks conceptualizes as plotlessness, is a problem of narrative ethics as well as of narrative comprehension.

Stencil’s retelling of “Mondaugen’s story” transforms a short oral story into a winding tale that includes several further embedded stories or sequences. There are four distinct temporal moments within the Stencilized story: 1) that of Stencil’s telling, 2) that of Mondaugen’s telling, 3) that of Mondaugen’s experience in 1922, and 4) analeptic episodes taking place between 1904 and 1908. As already mentioned, Mondaugen’s telling is elliptically brushed over by simply mentioning that Stencil’s interview of Mondaugen last less than thirty minutes. The substitution of Mondaugen’s story for “Mondaugen’s story” is, of course, the source of the “uncertain provenance” of the analepses and embedded representations within the Stencilized story (see e. g. Grant 2001, 131).

Also, the style and tone of the story pose problems. Allusive and dense, the story is distinctly literary and intertextual, with the usual generic references to the spy novel supplemented with heavy doses of the gothic. Apart from “Heart of Darkness,” with which the story shares some of its thematics as well as a narrative strategy, Poe’s “The Masque of Red Death” has been read as a specific subtext for the chapter (Berressem 1982).

Indeed, Mondaugen’s stay at Foppl’s manor is replete with phantasmagorical elements. Mondaugen dreams of once meeting a fellow siege inmate, Vera Meroving, the V. of “Mondaugen’s story,” during the Bavarian *carneval*. He develops a sense of “visual serendipity,” a gift which enables him to accidentally spy on all the right scenes and overhear all the right conversations (V., 246). He witnesses atrocities of colonial slavery, falls in love with a teenage girl, and meets a mysterious character whom he does not know (but Stencil does – it is his version of Mondaugen’s story, after all). The character is Hugh Godolphin, the senior partner of a father-and-son team that forms a double and a counterpoint to the Stencils, the disappeared father and the questing son. Mondaugen discovers an old alliance between Vera and Godolphin as he eavesdrops on conversations between the two. These conversations contain references to events of other Stencilized chapters in V. These references are, of course, what Stencil seeks. The problem is, as noted by Richard Patteson, among others, that “Mondaugen’s story” cannot answer the question whether these clues are part of Mondaugen’s version of the story or whether they are products of its Stencilization (see Patteson 1974, 36).

All these elements stand in need of motivation: why are these things told in this manner? Stencilization, for all its indefiniteness and inconsistency, holds a promise of integration – by Stencil’s willpower, if nothing else. Throughout the novel, even outside the Stencilized chapters, we occasionally glimpse references to a largely occult conspiracy plot, which may be coextensive with the story of V. itself. This plot is called “the Big One, the century’s master cabal [...] the ultimate Plot Which Has No Name” (V., 226). As McHoul and Wills (1990) write, Stencil’s dilemma is finding out whether V. “simply turns up at every earth-shattering event, or whether she is the actual cause of that event; whether she is real woman or simply clockwork” (180). The idea that V. might be the key to unlocking the organizing principle addresses the readerly desire to produce significance and coherence. V. as the emblem of a hidden order indicates that the uncertainty about the past, thematically addressed in the novel as well as thematized through the devices of Stencilization, might ultimately be surmountable. If, as Brooks suggests, the missing plot obscures the motives of telling and the pragmatics of novelistic communication, then the search for V. is largely equivalent to the

search for the missing plot. Each further clue about *V.* can be read as a renewed promise of an organizing principle and of the ultimate possibility of meaning and coherence.¹⁰⁴

Choosing the frame in which this aesthetic strategy is interpreted will affect readerly assessments about the ethics of the story, or to use the more exact term from Phelan, about its ethics of telling (2005, 23; 2007, 11). As we have seen, “Mondaugen’s story” gives contradictory signals about its relation to past events and its motives for revealing them. Eventually, the interpretation of the narrative strategy and aesthetic choices are often made into a part of the scholarly construction of “Pynchon’s theory.” In his much-cited early essay on *V.*, Patteson comments that Pynchon’s use of intricate narrative structures “underscores the difficulty of piecing together historical truth and separating it from the purely subjective” (Patteson 1974, 32). Indeed, Patteson links the changing techniques of Stencilization to a kind of postmodernist and relativist view of reality. Patteson shrewdly notes how “Mondaugen’s story” marks the place in the sequence of Stencilized stories where the focus in narration moves almost entirely “to an interior world of feelings and impressions.” However, this is taken as evidence for the same view on history. According to Patteson, Mondaugen’s story proves that historical knowledge, even when gained subjectively (through Mondaugen’s experience) is rather like Stencil’s eight impersonations, only speculation, dream, and delirium. (Ibid., 35.)

This can be seen as a challenge to ethics, and one avenue of interpretation is clearly to conclude that Pynchon’s theory – his epistemology, in particular – might be one of sceptical antirealism. In the face of such indeterminacy of reality, is it possible to know anything? (Cf. Patteson 1974, 36; Cooper 1983, 131.) However, this view of history is largely commensurate with more generally understood problematics of history in the postmodernist context. As Berlatsky writes, this is one facet of the Lyotardian withdrawal of the real: the ethical necessity of historical reference is recognized, yet defeated by the realization that history is always open to ideological manipulation (Berlatsky 2011, 3; cf. Lyotard 1984, 77). Yet Berlatsky argues that this view of history might itself stand in need of revision. The postmodernist and poststructuralist antifoundationalism might need some recourse to

¹⁰⁴ However, the conflicting reactions to the epilogue of *V.* can be seen as acts of weighing the revelatory content of the epilogue against the significance of the form through which it is revealed. Scholars who are suspicious of the epilogue tend to emphasize that the evidence of the epilogue is invalid because the epilogue is apparently not a Stencilized narrative. This makes the epilogue discontinuous not with the plot fragments revealed earlier but with the psychological motivation of the earlier fragments that is provided by Stencil, his quest, and his methods of recovering past events. See chapter 3.2 above.

objective historical reference, because if history is not something identifiable and locatable, the radical discourses end up undermined “subtly, but significantly.” (Berlatsky 2011, 30.)

Pynchon’s critics have felt this need as well. Even while the import of the postmodernist view is recognized, they find ways to suggest that Pynchon’s view of history is actually subtler and still somewhat humanistic. In Cooper (1983), for example, the postmodernist view of history is discussed at length and in depth. Yet in the final analysis, Cooper presents the view of impossible insight as Pynchon’s critique of the world of the characters, which brings out the worst in human nature: “the fear of Answers, the failure of courage or will that causes one to ‘approach and avoid’ – to retreat from knowing” (ibid., 152). Paul Maltby, tellingly classifying Pynchon as a “dissident postmodernist,” also makes Pynchon’s take on indeterminacy of knowing into a humanistic comment on the impossibility of intellectual growth “in a culture characterized by a deficit of meaning” (1991, 136). The divergent forces of relativist epistemology and ethical necessity seem to be in dialogue in Pynchon studies. As we will see below, these ideas and the judgments we base on them are connected to the narrative strategies used in “Mondaugen’s story.”

Mediation Is the Message? A View from Pynchon Studies

Firstly, the ethical impact of “Mondaugen’s story” on readings of *V.* cannot be measured only by seeking recurrences or patterns of ethical responses in readings. As in narrative ethics, we can see an indication of the ethical toll exacted by the story in the fact of (the critical act of) Saying itself. The volume of writings on “Mondaugen’s story” testifies to the price of reading it.

However, certain qualitative resemblances and differences can be detected in these writings. These differences may be teased out by using the conceptual distinctions discussed above. Phelan (2007) includes in the ethics of the telling “the narrator’s relation to the characters, the task of narrating, and to the audience; and the implied author’s relation to these things” (11). Ethics of the telling also allow for considerations of ethics of storytelling, but the focus is on the text’s implied norms expressed in its narrative strategies. One qualitative difference in readings commenting on ethics of Mondaugen’s story lies in whether, and how, the intricate communication is seen as a significant factor in making ethical assessments.

The communicative structures can be seen as (ethically) significant in various ways. As discussed above, many have found that the Pynchonian narrative strategies express a profound mistrust of historical narratives and impossibility of unmediated access to events. Readings in this vein are often supported by evoking the self-sabotaging narrative strategies on show. One such strategy is the disruption of the narrative by the diegetic audience – possibly yet another Conradian echo. The interruption is made by Eigenvalue, to whom Stencil narrates “Mondaugen’s story,” after a passage which presents an unlikely encounter between two characters and involves an exposition of a conspiracy in a manner reminiscent of stage dialogue. The scene even includes a kind of musical number, a common and profoundly puzzling feature common to all Pynchon’s novels. The intrusion afterwards is bracketed as if to strengthen the increasingly implausible idea that rest of the chapter is actually Stencil’s oral narration:

(Here Eigenvalue made his single interruption: “They spoke in German? English? Did Mondaugen know English then?” Forestalling a nervous outburst by Stencil: “I only think it strange that he should remember an unremarkable conversation, let alone in that much detail, thirty-four years later. A conversation meaning nothing to him but everything to Stencil.” [...]) (V., 249.)

Cooley (1993) comments on this incursion by emphasizing how it “foregrounds the problems of verisimilitude and narrative authority” (313).¹⁰⁵ Eigenvalue’s interruption and Stencil’s anxious insistence on the verbatim accuracy of his report are thrown into an especially sharp relief by the preceding section of the story which lays bare the intricacy of its layered communicative structure: Stencil is telling Eigenvalue that Mondaugen (told him that he) heard a dialogue of two other characters – with one of them afterwards delivering a soliloquy and a song. The unfeasibility of the text being a verisimilar account of events in Deutsch-Südwestafrika in 1922, told some thirty years later in an oral storytelling situation, is further emphasized by how in the story Mondaugen happens to eavesdrop on the conversation because of the strange gift of “visual serendipity” he has developed: “a sense of timing, a perverse certainty about not whether but when to play the voyeur” (V., 246).

Similarly, the dream-like sequences recalling the events of the Herero genocide of 1904 are often appraised in the light of indeterminacy cast on the events by the layers upon layers of communication. Simonetti (2015) writes that this strategy establishes a sustained uncertainty “among reality, memory, and dream” (2):

¹⁰⁵ Cooley is also one of the critics highlighting the similarities between Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and “Mondaugen’s story” (see Cooley 1993, 313).

[O]ne struggles to establish whether the events experienced by or told to Mondaugen are reliable historical reconstructions, memories of some other character, drug-induced illusions, fictional inventions, reveries caused by the disease (at some time Mondaugen gets scurvy), or individual projections (ibid.).

Smith agrees that “the dreaming Mondaugen is a primary source that complicates rather than clarifies the ‘truth’ of the past” (2005, 34). This complication is further amplified by the implication that these dreams may not be Mondaugen’s own, but part of the “common dream” prescribed by the “party demon” Foppl. Grant goes a step further by emphasizing the possible analogy between the “Stencilization” of the chapter and the complexity of the set pieces embedded within it. He calls internal structure of the chapter a complex extension of the effect of Stencilization (Grant 2001, 211).

As this chapter has been trying to show, the uncertainty and obscurity of access to the past may be seen as significant in other ways. In contrast to the skeptical, often theoretically postmodernist-leaning reading strategies of understanding “Stencilization,” we may find interpretations in which these aspects of *V.* are given other functions. According to David Cowart (2011), the novel “invites its readers to see history and other forms of system-making as *necessary fictions*, product of the collective human need for pattern” (56, emphasis added). In a way, then, the very indeterminacy enabling readings focusing on uncertainties of communication may also serve as a catalyst for another kind of reading, one emphasizing the possibility for a less debilitating awareness of the operations involved in making history speak to us.¹⁰⁶

If the tricks *V.* plays on narrative structures can be seen as significant in various ways, there are also various ways in which their importance to interpretation may be played down, and this may be done to various ends. Martin Paul Eve (2014) analyses another set piece in “Mondaugen’s story,” one that earlier in the course of the present work served as an example of *mise en abyme*.¹⁰⁷ During Foppl’s siege party, Mondaugen’s devices for measuring atmospheric disturbances are set up in Foppl’s manor. Mondaugen begins to think the disturbances are a coded message, but he cannot break the code. This is done at the end of the chapter by another guest at Foppl’s, a lieutenant Weissmann. According to Weissmann, the message is a string of letters including an anagram of “Kurt

¹⁰⁶ Interpretations in this vein may also be less broadly humanistic, as in Cooper (1983), who parallels the epistemological uncertainty of Stencilization with the 20th Century developments in scientific worldview (134–137; 140–141).

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 2.2.

Mondaugen” with the remaining letters reading DIEWELTISTALLESWASDERFALLIST.¹⁰⁸ This is the first proposition of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (published in the year of the events depicted, 1922).

Eve approaches Mondaugen’s story from the inside out, as it were, by taking the opaqueness, the most “unreliable” part communicated, the Wittgenstein reference acquired by a decoding of random atmospheric noises – all nested within the nacre of Stencilization – and treating it on one hand as a characterological clue and on the other hand as a thematization of a logic governing the whole novel. In the first place, Eve inquires: “from where does the message originate?” However, this is done in order to pose a question about Weissmann’s motives, not to question whether the multilayered report of Weissmann decoding this message is reliable. Thereafter, for Eve, Pynchon’s use of Wittgenstein serves as a framework for reading *Tractatus*. Eve finds in *V.* a kind of Pynchonian interpretation of the Wittgensteinian proposition that the world is everything that is the case (and nothing besides) (cf. Eve 2014, 28–30). Therefore, the question is posed on one hand locally in the world of fiction (characterologically), and on the other on the level of authorial philosophy.

Eve’s reading might initially seem simplistic or even misguided to someone trained in the art of narratological depth-perception – an interpretive art, to be sure. However, it is evident that this reading reaches another kind of sophistication in weighing complex epistemologies against each other – one fictional and provisional, the other logico-philosophical. The choice to take a character’s “philosophy” at face value is a kind of strategic choice, not to treat characters as if they were real people – Eve explicitly disparages such a view – but to suspend the perspectivizing force inherent in the narratological view which assigns to each layer of communication an increasing degree of virtuality.

It seems that reading literary works for their ethics is one of the areas where narratological conceptions of voice and communication are at once indispensable and most in need of pragmatic reassessment. After a fashion, the postmodernist view of history has done us the favor of foregrounding the role of conventions in assessing the veracity and reliability of historical narratives. The capability of historical narrative to be meaningful is not reducible to its veracity.

As demonstrated in the discussion above, Pynchon scholars have in various ways emphasized that the ethical stakes of Pynchon’s fictions are not voided even in the face of the irreducibly indeterminate provenance of representation. “Mondaugen’s story” even involves a scene that can be read as a thematization of the enabling capability of unsolvable ambiguity. As we have seen above, Stencil’s

¹⁰⁸ Translations include “The world is everything that is the case” or “The world is all that is the case.”

interlocutor, the intradiegetic narratee Eigenvalue, at one point makes a skeptical comment about the reliability of Stencil's account. He questions how the German Mondaugen was able to understand the conversation between the British Hugh Godolphin and Vera Meroving (presumably an alias of Victoria Wren). This is the reply:

Stencil, silenced, puffed his pipe and watched the psychodontist, a quirk to one side of his mouth revealed now and again, enigmatic, through the white fumes. Finally: "Stencil called it serendipity, not he. Do you understand? Of course you do. But you want to hear him say it." (V., 249.)

Stencil seems exasperated by this interruption, but he finally allows that not every word of his narrative is Mondaugen's. "But," he goes on to insist to Eigenvalue: "you want to hear him say it." This appears to be an appeal to the conventions of storytelling. One is not to question the teller's report lest one break the spell endowing the narrative with its peculiar powers. The readers of the Stencilized narrative may sympathize with Eigenvalue's suspicion rather than Stencil's defense – it is, indeed, an act of will to accept any information imparted by the means of Stencilization as a glimpse of the historical "real." However, as the quirks of Stencilization warrant, the passage is ambiguous. Since Stencil refers to himself in the third person, the final sentence can be read either as "you want to hear Mondaugen say it" or "you want to hear *Stencil* say it." The latter interpretation would render the passage an exchange between a fabricator who has been caught in the act and an interlocutor who is waiting for a concession. In Pynchon studies the latter interpretation stands virtually unrecognized, which perhaps shows whom *we* want to hear say it.

So, maybe this simply proves that some events require witnessing even if they are buried beneath layers upon layers of ostentatious fiction. Berlatsky argues that if we look into the question of history and ethics, we should see that ethics can only be derived from past experience. If past cannot be accessed, then we are incapable of making future decisions and actions based on experience. (2011, 36–37.) Judging by the responses in Pynchon studies it seems that in the moment of laying bare the duplicity of Stencilization the desire for experiential narrative trumps the desire for verifiable history. Later in "Mondaugen's story," when the atrocities of the Herero war are recounted, at three removes, as if hallucinated or dreamt, Eigenvalue makes no further interruptions.

5. Conclusions: Pynchon and Poetics, Patterns of Recognition

Reading and writing are complementary acts that remain unfinished until completed by their reciprocals. The last thing I do when I write a text is to read it, and the act that completes my response to a text I am reading is my written response to it. Moreover, my writing is unfinished until it is read by others as well, whose responses may become known to me, engendering new textualities. (Scholes 1985, 20–21.)

In the course of this book, I will say very little about its title, *Doing What Comes Naturally*. I intend it to refer to the unreflective actions that follow from being embedded in a context of practice. This kind of action – and in my argument there is no other – is anything but natural in the sense of proceeding independently of historical and social formations; but once those formations are in place (and they always are), what you think to do will not be calculated in relation to a higher law or an overarching theory but will issue from you as naturally as breathing. (Fish 1989, ix.)

The citations chosen as epigraphs are, again, emblemizing an aspect of the issue at hand. On one hand, Robert Scholes proposes that reading and writing are both hermeneutic at heart, and parts of the same circle. In reading a text we are already producing a response to it, and in writing down a response we are producing something that has to be read and therefore responded to. In a sense, then, our readings become writings as soon as others (or we) read them in order to understand their own responses and their own readings (or ours). It is hardly surprising, then that the enterprise of literary studies is so often conceptualized in terms of community. Equally unsurprising, and perhaps less alarming than the rhetoric might warrant, is the frequency of expressions suggesting power struggle, repression and resistance, even war. The communal motion through reading, writing, reading readings, and writing about readings which are read as writings, already suggests why literary reading, interpretation, criticism, and theory veer towards the metatheoretical and metahermeneutic. Whether

through conflict or in negotiation, the possibility of treating the field of study as a site of tensions and movements suggests that if there are common goals and purposes, and one of the goals is the deepening of our self-consciousness about what we are doing and why we are doing it.

On the other hand, as the passage from Stanley Fish provokes, however commendable the striving to understand what one is doing, this could always be beyond our grasp. Getting at the hidden, unconscious presuppositions of “theory,” which, Fish maintains, should be seen as a set of practices, has been a recurring battle cry accompanying various attempts to remedy theoretical blindness. However, Fish maintains, acknowledging that the position of pure theoretical observation is impossible and that we are always already interpretively situated is no way to escape the implications of this realization (1989, 437).

Therefore, the two epigraphs propose a contrast between two procedures available to critical self-reflection of one’s scholarly practice. Scholes’s hermeneutic movement between reading and writing helps us understand why observations made in reading literature are only with difficulty turned into academic literary criticism, but it also suggests why some literary studies can so compel us. We recognize that the text we are reading is written by someone who are also reading, and also that if we are to use this text critically, we supplement another link in the chain of reading and writing. Fish’s view, on the other hand, discourages taking this consideration much further – as there is no way to take it far enough. Try as one may, one can never be conscious of this chain in full. A certain blindness will always result from being embedded in a context of critical practice, and this, in effect, renders our efforts at producing writings on readings a kind of well-meaning folly.

However, it is not suggested here that one necessarily must or, indeed, *can* choose one or the other of these positions. This work, for instance, has been informed by the recognition of the necessity of reading readings in order to be able to articulate one’s own. Likewise, the work undertaken here has been spurred by the unavoidable inadequacy or incompleteness of one’s readings of both primary and secondary sources, of which *at least* the latter are also readings turned into writings. Furthermore, while the attention given to secondary sources in this work may somewhat exceed the average, in a sense nothing is done here that is not also done in nearly all literary studies. Reading readings is an aspect of scholarly practice – one that may be focused on to a greater or to a lesser degree – but one that seems so ingrained to the practice of studying literature that it has remained undertheorized. If not part of what comes naturally in criticism, it is at least something that convention suggests one should not try to do without.

I also believe that the contrast made between the scholarly epigraphs above is suggestive of the predominant analytical procedure of the present study. In various stages of this work, a contrast between perceivable critical protocols has been taken as a provisional distinction, which has been used to analyze, if not to classify, categorize, or otherwise pigeonhole existing studies and their readings of Pynchon. These distinctions have been made throughout: in the introduction, a distinction was made between readings seeking *Pynchon's theory* and *reading theory with Pynchon*. In the second chapter, it was argued that *interpretive model* or *mise en abyme* can be seen as a distinct device in the text but also as a protean set of conventions enabling an interpretive move of modelling the interpretation of the whole in a likeness of a part. Likewise, theme can be regarded as a statement of textual aboutness but also as a holistic interpretation of the work. The chapters of the second part make these heuristic distinctions even more strategically: chapters 3 and 4 are structured around the ideas of reading *sequentially* and reading *for the whole*; understanding narrative voice as a *speaker function* and as a *voice effect*. While each of the terms may describe a possible position on the issue at stake, these contrasts are far more usefully understood as heuristic distinctions that are capable of illuminating a whole range of intermediate or adjacent positions. In the course of this work, I have been trying to show that these heuristic distinctions are analytically useful. Moreover, I would like to argue that the usefulness of this maneuver does not stem from the needs of the present work alone.

As has been emphasized from the beginning, this study is an attempt to discuss the various efforts to articulate Pynchon's poetics. In a further move, literary poetics as an area of theoretical inquiry has been framed as a theory of reading. This framing has required us to consider Pynchon's poetics as a question of scholarly activity as well as of textual features, themes, and significant contexts of Pynchon's novels. While the Bakhtinian view of poetics as the study of the artistic expression of a worldview remains salient in many of these efforts, whether understated or concentrated, to discover Pynchon's theory, the argument that this theory is encoded into the novels and contained in them may no longer be viable. We have witnessed a profound change in reception of Pynchon's novels that stood as the paradigm of American postmodernism for more than three decades. As Paolo Simonetti writes in a recent essay, the fiftieth anniversary of *V.* in 2013 presented an occasion for rereading the Pynchon's novelistic debut programmatically, in the institutional context of literary studies.¹⁰⁹ According to Simonetti, reading *V.* "in the light of the most recent European and American political, economic, and historical events," reveals that *V.* foreshadows some of the most topical issues and

¹⁰⁹ Simonetti and Rossi put together a panel titled "Rereading *V.* Fifty Years Later" in the 2013 conference organized by the Italian Association for American Studies (AISNA).

anxieties of the new millennium. (2015, 5–6.) This observation squares with other recent reassessments of Pynchon – notably Pöhlmann’s vaguely disquieting “We may have to stop calling Thomas Pynchon a postmodern writer” (2010, 9). A far cry from any type of lazy revisionism, these statements preface new collections of insightful and careful readings of Pynchon’s novels old and new. Approaching these new fortunes through the notion of poetics as a theory of reading may shed light on this recent turn in Pynchon studies.

As it is framed here, poetics sits at the interface between phenomenology of reading and the discursive practices of doing criticism. While it must be obvious how analyzing discursive practices is relevant to understanding theoretical fluctuations on the field of study, it is perhaps not equally clear why a phenomenology of reading could illuminate an issue that seems chiefly institutional. The argument is, of course, that it is not the one or the other that is relevant, but that the issue is best seen where the two spheres of theorizing reading intersect – at the interface, as it were. It may be entirely uncontroversial to suggest that *some* parts of critical activity depend on tacitly applied ideas of what is relevant, significant and deserving of attention. Here, however, it is not assumed that the processes of reading automatic enough to warrant consideration as “cognitive,” can be decisively set apart from processes that are learned, trained, even communally negotiated – as many procedures of institutional interpretation are.

It was pointed out in the first chapters of this work that the truly striking feature of Pynchon criticism is not its canon of citations, nor is it the fact that these citations are used to bolster this or that “coherence, logic, or position” (cf. McHoul and Wills 1990, 108; McHoul 1987, 31). It is the frequency with which certain key passages come up regardless of the coherence, logic, or position they are meant to strengthen, regardless of the interpretation they are meant to support, and regardless of the preselected theoretical context they deem relevant. When exploring this phenomenon, I have wished to resist the effective but simplistic cognitive appeal to “deviation” or “foregrounding” of the parts of text that invite interpretation. On the other hand, I am unwilling to pay lip service to the obvious fact that “textual evidence” can be selected, manipulated, and misrepresented so as to support any argument. It is a bad time to be saying that “truth and falsity don’t apply” – and before we chastise Pynchon for saying it, let us remember that in *V.* this statement pertains to “sewer stories” (*V.*, 120).

Poetics, understood as a theory of reading, navigates the space between literary conventions and readerly perception. This is the middle ground this work has tried to map. The theoretical excursions into interpretive models, miniature analogies, and thematization, have shown that many distinctive

procedures of reading straddle the line: all of them distinctly appeal to literary or artistic conventions and tradition, but all of them also involve an aspect that might be called cognitive, even perceptual. A number of conventions behind the prominence of certain passages in Pynchon scholarship have been explored in this work. However, as suggested in the second chapter, the question of common analytical patterns in readings of Pynchon is answerable only insofar as our protocols of reading allow a degree of methodization. The answers this study offers are found where procedures of critical reading blend with patterns of recognition.

This study, therefore, has aimed to do more than to describe patterns detectable in previous readings of Pynchon's works. The contrasting reading strategies discussed in chapters 3 and 4 also have the effect of foregrounding certain conventions of reading literary texts. On basis of these analyses it can be argued that the difficulties of reading *V.* often result from expectations of a psychological motivation behind the difficulties or inconsistencies of the novel. It has been shown that sequential reading and reading for the whole frequently need each other, and that voice understood as a speaker function and as an effect often intertwine. This in itself may be wholly unsurprising. However, it is interesting that even the interplay of the different reading strategies can still be seen as a route towards fulfilling the expectations of a psychological coherence. Whether constructed dynamically during reading or integrated retrospectively to a holistic interpretation, the problems and inconsistencies of plotting and narration are often interpreted in the light of Stencil's compulsive quest and epistemological desire. Detection of pattern overlaps with expectations of significance and coherence: the global rationale for describing the plot and the narrative strategy coherently and adequately can still be to reconcile the difficulties of the literary form with the human concerns the text portrays.

Readings of Pynchon's novels regularly appeal to these conventions of reading. As has been argued throughout the analyses, the issues discussed in the final chapters are often evoked in interpretations that are otherwise uninterested in narratological theories of plot, sequence, communication, or voice. The importance of these concepts to reading across the spectrum of theoretical and contextual approaches to Pynchon's novels is undeniable. The inquiry into the ways in which these issues are evoked as interpretively significant shows that the theoretical intricacy of poetics and narratology is crucial to analyzing how literary analysis works. Yet it is often the subtlety and polyvalence of notions such as narrative sequence or narrative voice that allows for interpretive insights in individual readings.

Earlier in this work it was suggested that an inquiry into protocols and patterns of reading might ultimately be assessed in the light of the critical insights this method of metareading can yield. Delving into readings of *V.* not only reveals that the novel has invited readings which largely conform to the conventions of what Daniel Schwarz calls “humanistic poetics”¹¹⁰ but also suggests why this may be so. Criticism of *V.*, especially during the golden era of Pynchon studies, beginning with the publication of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, has somewhat downplayed what is especially striking about the debut novel. When Pynchon’s third novel took the American literary establishment by storm, *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* were often treated as apprentice work, their literary ambitions regarded as embryonic forms of the devices coming to full fruition in Pynchon’s *magnum opus*. However, *V.*, predating Pynchon’s later historical novels by several decades,¹¹¹ stands out among Pynchon’s early works by virtue of its extensive interrogation of historiographical methods, and affordances of fiction in accessing the past one “has no right in” (*V.*, 62). By problematizing the relations of narrative, memory, experience, and historical truths, it reveals the conventions structuring our understanding of quests for truths buried in the past. When *V.* most ostentatiously undermines the reading strategies that can be harnessed to the psychological realism of realist and modernist narrative devices, it is most forcefully trying to say something about the necessity of historical imagination.

¹¹⁰ These conventions are presented as gnomic statements, including: “form discovers the meaning of content”; “Man’s behavior is central to most literary texts, and should be the major concern of analysis”; and “the inclusiveness of the novel’s vision in terms of depth and range is a measure of the work’s quality” (Schwarz 1990, 2–3).

¹¹¹ *Mason and Dixon* was published in 1997 and *Against the Day* in 2006.

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