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"The Ad Hoc Adventure": Pynchon's Ecological Nationalism in *Gravity's Rainbow*

ABE Kodai

> The dearest nation of all is one that will survive no longer than you and I, a common movement at the mercy of death and time: the ad hoc adventure.
> —— *Gravity's Rainbow*

Introduction

Since around the end of the Cold War, leftist critics have acknowledged an epochal shift in the significance of the word "radical" in political terms. It was Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's renowned 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, with the subtitle *Towards a Radial Democratic Politics*, that inaugurated the debate concerning the shift, i.e., the shift from class struggle to the so-called new social movements, or identity politics. Within this new paradigm wherein we still abide, what designates the radical is less the commitment to the promotion of economic redistribution than that to cultural recognition. As tellingly suggested by the title of another pivotal study by Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?* (2003), the problem here is that it seems we need to choose one or the other, despite the coauthors' effort to attain both.[1] No wonder, then, that some more "authentic" Marxist critics such as Frederic Jameson warn us against the illusion that "the new small groups arise in the *void* left by the *disappearance* of social classes" (319; emphasis added), while calling this post-social situation "postmodernism" proper. Thus Slavoj Žižek entitled one of his articles engaging with this topic "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes Please!" in which he also problematizes, and encourages us to dismiss, "the false alternative today's critical theory seems to impose on us" (90). Putting aside for the moment the question as to whether we should prioritize

[1] To be more precise, whereas Fraser argues for an endeavor to attain both redistribution and recognition, Honneth contends that redistribution would be subsumed under the latter.

redistribution or recognition, it seems true that too much emphasis on cultural recognition oftentimes obscures the urgency of economic redistribution.

From this viewpoint, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), an allegedly postmodern novel composed by a self-proclaimed leftist writer,[2] looms as a text that merits particular attention. Pynchon criticism in the past decade has undergone what might be termed a political turn: from Samuel Thomas's *Pynchon and the Political* (2007), through David Witzling's *Everybody's America: Thomas Pynchon, Race, and the Cultures of Postmodern* (2008), to Joanna Freer's *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture* (2014), and to Sue J. Kim's article "Racial Neoliberalism and Whiteness in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*" (2015), just to name a few, Pynchon's works, especially *Gravity's Rainbow*, are now being eagerly revisited with a post-"cultural turn" hindsight, with a special focus on racial issues. More or less, the above critics and others have formed a consensus that *Gravity's Rainbow* remains entrapped by the aforementioned either/or alternative, preferring recognition over redistribution, or, at best, that it offers nothing more than pessimistic representations of this dilemma: "For Pynchon, cross-cultural understanding involves the abandonment of the political center" (Witzling 148). If such an evaluation is fair, we shall regard *Gravity's Rainbow* as a typically postmodern fiction by Jameson's definition of the word. However, Pynchon's novel depicts two distinctive yet partially overlapping and seemingly radical political groups, the Schwartzkommando and the Counterforce. Whilst the former is obviously a racial organization—"schwartz" signifies black—the latter is indifferent to identitarian categories, their goal therefore not being cultural recognition. Furthermore, since both groups are supposed to be fighting against global capitalism, subsumed under the term "They" throughout the novel, we should not hasten to draw a conclusion that *Gravity's Rainbow* erases the issue of redistribution in favor of recognition. An assessment concerning the degree of the novel's radicalism would necessitate at least the comparison between those two fictional groups.

That being said, it is true that the deification of the enemy with the capital T certainly renders it difficult, if not impossible, to subvert, or at least to represent the way in which one can strike a major blow at, Them. This capitalization is not

[2] As for the Pynchon studies' longstanding consensus around the author's political radicalism, see Flay, 779-81.

necessarily a purposeless obfuscation of the situation; as Jameson notes, the logic of multinational capital is so enormous and abstract that it requires "nonhuman" kind of agency to be pointed at (408), which is, in turn, nonetheless inseparable from the promotion of the illusion that social classes have *disappeared* being replaced by cultural politics. How can one imagine a viable radicalism in the age of globalization, taking into account the dominance of those daily, and therefore much more tangible issues of cultural recognition? This is the dilemma radicalism has been confronting since the 1980s. Although neither of Pynchon's two fictional organizations gives up envisioning the issue on a global scale—as will be shown, their enemies do not exactly coincide—the practice of the Schwartzkommando is, on the one hand, no more than identitarian, a politics that cannot address its putative enemy, and, on the other hand, the Counterforce does not seem political enough to organize people so as to subvert Them, insomuch that neither embodies Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of the multitude. Thus the judgment that Pynchon himself is pessimistic regarding his political actuality gains persuasiveness.

This essay approaches this dilemma by relocating the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop between, so to speak, redistribution and recognition, and between the Schwartzkommando and the Counterforce. To be more specific, I will attempt to reinterpret the almost magical scenario that the critics have found somewhat inscrutable, wherein Slothrop, toward the end of the novel, turns into "one plucked albatross" and "scatter[s] all over the Zone" in postwar Germany (Pynchon 712). He loses his physical integrity and scatters away, while being sharply contrasted with all the others in the Zone, including peoples, nations, groups, and corporations, each of whom remain frantically engaged in organizing, assembling, and, to employ salient terminology from the story, synthesizing people and things, especially the debris from V2 rockets that wartime Germany had misfired, now strewn throughout the area. In order to understand the protagonist's mysterious scatteration, I would like to take heed of the fact that Slothrop's gradual disintegration coincides with his development of an ecological consciousness: "Trees, now—Slothrop's intensely alert to trees, finally" (552). As several critics have shown, Pynchon wrote *Gravity's Rainbow* under "the influence of the ecological discourse in the 1960s" (Schaub 59). Against those who are "no longer to be at the mercy of Nature" (Pynchon 249), *Gravity's Rainbow* has its hero dissolve into "Nature" like so many feathers of an albatross, allegorizing him as Orpheus. The result is, however, not anarchism as some

critics have argued;[3] rather, the present study will conclude that the novel advocates an alternative way of organizing people, naming it "the ad hoc adventure," which is defined as "the dearest nation" which "will survive no longer than you and I, a common movement at the mercy of death and time" (706). With recourse to those natural, ecological tropes, Pynchon endeavors to imagine neither identitarian politics nor a clearly delineated organization declaring to subvert global capitalism right away, but rather a theoretical, feasible mechanism to unite people in the age of global capitalism. The novel clarifies the Counterforce's failure as their inadequate understanding of the significance of Slothrop's dissipation, the very thing that we must take a close look at. Distancing itself both from exclusive identity politics of recognition and from romantic notions of global redistribution, the novel puts forward a temporary, dynamic, and sustainable "nation" that everyone is allowed to participate in, and to move away from. It is this new "nationalism" that I term "ecological nationalism."

"Tribal Unity": Schwartzkommando's Racial Nationalism

Gravity's Rainbow is a World War II novel. Yet, with VE Day set toward the end of Part Two, the massive volume's latter half—actually more than 65% of the novel—is focused on capturing and detailing Slothrop's progress in post-WWII Europe, especially in devastated Germany, or "In the Zone" (which is also the title of Part Three). What this fact indicates, however, is not that *Gravity's Rainbow* is a post-WWII novel, not so much because, for example, the atomic bombs have yet to be dropped, but rather because "There's something still on, don't call it a 'war' if it makes you nervous, maybe the death rate's gone down a point or two […] but Their enterprise goes on," or, more concisely, because "The real War is always there" (628; 645).[4] In other words, for Pynchon, WWII, the conflict between the Allies and the Axis, is a mere symptom of a more grandiose structure, the capitalized War. Elsewhere, "Their enterprise" is paraphrased as "A Rocket-cartel" (566), which consists of global capital such as IG Farben, Siemens, Royal Dutch Shell, British Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), General Electric, Du Pont, etc., an international

[3] As for Pynchon's anarchism, for example, see Benton.

[4] I will employ "[…]" to differentiate my ellipses from original's in this whole article.

interlock extending "[e]ven to Russia" (566), whose origin can be traced back far before the beginning of WWII.[5] Thus, this ingenious 1973 novel almost provides the post-Cold War worldview; in that globalized world, the War is "still on," and the enemy is global capitalism. Who, then, dares to fight against Them? There are two major groups: the Counterforce and the Schwartzkommando. This section takes a look at the latter.

In postwar Germany, everybody searches eagerly for debris from V2 rockets, including not only the US (Project Hermes), Britain (Operation Backfire), France, and the Soviet Union, but also the Schwartzkommando and Slothrop. Each of them seeks to secure the rocket-related technology developed by Nazi Germany in order to, with the possible exception of the protagonist, enjoy an advantage in political and military terms in the coming Cold War era. In the Zone, as one character observes, "so many individuals, nations, firms, communities of interest [are] com[ing] after the fact" (517). Within the context of the present study, what merits particular attention is that each of those entities of different scales, "individuals, nations, firms, communities," comes to be regarded here as homogeneous institutions; put another way, the anarchic situation of postwar Germany drastically reconfigures the definition of organization. Interestingly enough, *Gravity's Rainbow* does not anthropomorphize but "nationalizes" them. In addition to the Allied nations, the Schwarzkommando "now constitute a nation of their own" (451); one character who belongs to Them declares, "our little chemical cartel is the model for the very structure of nations" (349); as shall be closely examined later, Slothrop "as properly constitute[s] a state as any other in the Zone these days" (291). In a sense, the latter half of *Gravity's Rainbow* describes an experimental site where the ideas of the individual, the nation/state, the firm, and the community are deconstructed and reconstructed under the term "nation" without differentiation. Regardless of whether they succeed, this condition endows every "nation" with a potentiality to challenge Them, envisaged as another "nation."

Compared to the Allied occupying forces, the Schwartzkommando's purpose needs to be distinguished; they are aiming to reassemble the broken pieces into the *original* rocket so as to launch it again, a task they are actually able to carry out. The members of the Schwartzkommando are formerly kidnapped Herero survivors of the

[5] As for the historical account of this global interlock, see Weisenburger.

genocide perpetrated by the German Empire before WWI (1904-08). During the following two generations, according to one pejorative character, those "*kraut* niggers" had "drifted somehow into the ordnance branch of the German Army, and pretty soon learned how to be rocket technicians. Now they [are] just running loose. Wild" (287-88). Although we do not know to what extent they know about it, Schwartzkommando members are already technologically familiar with the rocket. What they seek is, therefore, the debris not for information but for its material resources. While the novel does not provide the depiction of their rocket's launch, toward the end of the book the members of the Counterforce suggest its completion.

However, as the commander of the Schwartzkommando Enzian's conditional contemplation, "if the Schwarzkommando mission in the Zone has been truly revealed just now" (525), divulges, their "mission" remains unclear throughout the novel. Even if they seem to succeed in launching the rocket, the reader eventually will not be informed of its actual target; after the end of the war, the primal problem those "kraut niggers" bear is that their enemy "*seem*[*s*] no longer to be Allies" (326). Without the clearly delineated contour of an antagonist, one might say that the Schwartzkommando are literally "just running loose." No wonder then, within the Schwarzkommando, that there is a faction called "The Empty Ones" headed by Josef Ombindi, who is at odds with Enzian. While the former advocates "the Final Zero," which will allegedly be accomplished through the practice of racial suicide,[6] the latter's slogan is "the Eternal Center," a less morbid but nonetheless mythical dream of tribal reunion (519). Thus Enzian is in charge not only of reassembling the rocket, but also of organizing his troops, enhancing their solidarity. That said, they largely share a sense of the absence of a cause to attach to their mission in the Zone, and "The Eternal Center can easily be seen as the Final Zero" (319). Lacking a concrete objective to achieve, they cannot help resorting to the tautological credo: "the search will rule" (525).

This brings us back to the dichotomy between recognition and redistribution. With the capitalized "Search" (525) seemingly becoming its own goal, their tacit wish is to attain what Ombindi terms the "Tribal Unity" (320) *by means of* the

[6] Freer shows that Pynchon anachronistically and critically embedded The Black Panther Party's idea of Revolutionary Suicide in Ombindi. See *Thomas Pynchon and American Counter Culture*, Chapter Four, "The Black Panther Party, Revolutionary Suicide, and *Gravity's Rainbow*."

Search. Under such a reading, the assemblage of the original rocket becomes an allegory for their racial solidarity. "Over the couple of generations" after being taken to Germany, "they have been growing an identity that few can see as ever taking final shape" (316). Even at the time when they are made aware that their antagonist is not the Allies but global capital, Enzian's vocabulary is far from economic but rather romantic: "They have lied to us. […] What have They ever given us in return for the trust, the love—They actually say 'love'—we're supposed to owe Them? Can They keep us from even catching cold? from lice, from being alone?" (728). Nowhere in the text does the redistribution/recognition dichotomy for the Schwartzkommando become clearer than in the passage where the narrator (who here seems to be representing Ombindi via free indirect speech) mentions the nature of colonies with reference to none other than Marx: "wait, wait a minute there, yes it's Karl Marx, that sly old racist skipping away with his teeth together and his eyebrows up trying to make believe it's nothing but Cheap Labor and Overseas Markets. . . . Oh, no. Colonies are much, much more" (317). Thus, their goal is not to redress economic inequality but to consummate the "final shape" of their racial identity. Of course their desire is not blameworthy in itself, but, if their (ostensible) intention is to overthrow Them, their rocket does not seem to reach the putative enemy. The nationalistic ideal of "Tribal Unity" consequently misrepresents and, worse, trivializes Them.

In short, the Schwartzkommando's politics is a cultural politics. The group members commit themselves less to redistribution than to recognition. To the question of "Class Struggle or Postmodernism?" they would and do choose the latter. Additionally, the uniting mechanism of their "nation" consists of no other identity than a racial one, within which even further divisions are incurred. As one "nation" in the Zone, what they seek is racial nationalism. Much worse, as several critics have noted, the Schwartzkommando acts "as if their two chances for political freedom were death or obtaining for themselves the White Man's terrible power" (McHugh 14), "mimic[king the violence] of the oppressive regime" (Freer 185). During the two generations in Germany, the German Hereros have been inevitably "Europeanized in language and thought" (Pynchon 318). No doubt they are victims of European colonialism, yet their political incapacity is nonetheless undeniable. The Schwartzkommando's radicalism is outdated in the age of global capitalism with which *Gravity's Rainbow* remains primarily concerned.

"You Can Tickle His Creatures": Counterforce's Local Disturbance

One cannot discuss the Counterforce's organizational means independently from Slothrop, not only because he somewhat belongs to and even engenders the squad, but also because a close reading of this novel, as I shall demonstrate, betrays the reason why the Counterforce's radicalism eventually fails to fully grasp the significance of the protagonist's dissipation. Remarkably, Slothrop's *scatteration* and the Counterforce's *organization*, the two antipodal movements, temporally synchronize with each other in the text. What is more, those two directionalities are signified as two different kinds of "paranoia," perhaps one of the most renowned Pynchonesque terms. Since paranoia betokens a sense of connectedness, it is no wonder that one character of the Counterforce advocates "creative paranoia" (638) as a means to unite resistance, whereas Slothrop inclines toward "anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long" (434). When Slothrop's physical dissipation is announced for the first time in the novel, followed by a fictional journal paper that analyzes the phenomenon by resorting to jargon, the narrator remarks, "Well, if the Counterforce knew better what those categories concealed, they might be in a better position to disarm, depenis, and dismantle the Man. But they don't" (712). Yet, of course, neither can the scattered American lieutenant subvert Them in person. Thus, in order to reappraise the intensity of radicalism that *Gravity's Rainbow* could offer, one needs to read those two "nations" as complementary of each other.

The emergence of the Counterforce is first prognosticated much belatedly in the novel by Katje Borgesius, a character who had been formerly one of the minions of Them. When a man tells her "Not very organized around here yet. But it's coming along," Katje reflects, "Dialectically, sooner or later, some counterforce would have had to arise . . . she must not have been political enough" (536). The dialectical configuration of the Counterforce against global capital might remind us of Hardt and Negri's idea of the multitude. In their coauthored 2000 study, *Empire,* the two political philosophers attempt to conceptualize a new form of solidarity of the proletariat in the age of globalization, a unity that could "recognize imperial sovereignty as the enemy and discover the adequate means to subvert its power" (Hardt and Negri 212). Indeed, as shall be seen, *Empire* is a text that parallels *Gravity's Rainbow* to a large extent. Those primal queries in the former—such as

"How can the actions of the multitude become political? How can the multitude organize and concentrate its energies against the repression and incessant territorial segmentations of Empire?" (399)—are the very missions that the Counterforce also has to grapple with.

The first and foremost predicament the multitude has to encounter is the same as that of the Schwartzkommando: to adumbrate the shape of its enemy. Hardt and Negri contend, "The first question of political philosophy today is not if or even why there will be resistance and rebellion, but rather how to determine the enemy against which to rebel" (210-11). In the age of globalization, the exploitative institution is too enormous—recall Jameson's adjective "inhuman"—for us to grasp. Conversely, the other side of the same coin constitutes a difficulty in finding a cause for unity to establish solidarity: "What we need to grasp is how the multitude is organized and redefined as a positive, political power" (399-400); "The problem we have to confront now is how concrete instances of class struggle can actually arise, and moreover how they can form a coherent program of struggle, a constituent power adequate to the destruction of the enemy and the construction of a new society" (403-04). After all, however, the feasibility of the idea of the multitude seems obscure; all they can offer in the end of the book resembles no more than wishful thinking: "Certainly, there must be a moment when reappropriation and self-organization reach a threshold and configure a real event. […] The only event that we are still awaiting is the construction, or rather the insurgence, of a powerful organization," and they conclude, "We do not have any models to offer for this event. Only the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and determine when and how the possible becomes real" (411).

This specific limitation of Hardt and Negri's conception can also be applied to the Counterforce: "The resistance offered by the Counterforce is […] ambivalent and uncertain" (Kim 275). In a nutshell, their resistance remains local insurgency—though not and better than cultural politics—in part effectuated by Their insinuating strategy. As if anticipating Hardt and Negri's observation that "Empire can only isolate, divide, and segregate" (399), *Gravity's Rainbow* proffers a keen diagnosis of its globalized situation: "The War, the Empire, will expedite such barriers between our lives. The War needs to divide this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together. The War does not appear to want a folk-consciousness […] —it wants a machine of many

separate parts, not oneness, but a complexity" (130-31). Consequently, as one critic comments, "Its divisiveness undermines the characters' solidarity that has the potential to grow into a resistance, and its complexity defeats their understanding and thus makes them feel powerless" (Nagano 89). Under such a condition, to quote Leo Bersani, the Counterforce's tactics can only "create local disturbances that are easily forgotten and leave the most menacing paranoid structures perfectly intact," and that therefore, continues Bersani, "We should be suspicious of some of the most appealing alternatives that *Gravity's Rainbow* offers" (103). Actually, the narrator puts forward this "Proverbs for Paranoids" earlier in the novel: "You may never get to touch the Master, but you can tickle his creatures" (237). Neither paranoids nor the multitude brings about solidarity strong enough to defeat Them.

So far, the Counterforce might appear as politically impotent as the Schwartzkommando: their resistance is "nice but not critical" (713). True, the former does not possess any tacit motivation to organize people as in the Schwartzkommando's "Tribal Unity"—emerging as a dialectical reaction against Them—but their radicalism remains local. Indeed, the most conspicuous insurgency depicted in the novel would be a scatological verbal assault in the middle of Their extravagant dinner, which causes some members of Them to throw up the food they consumed. Obviously, this "repulsive stratagem" (Pynchon 715) should be regarded as one example of "tickling his creatures," a local disturbance that never constitutes fatal damage for Them. Now, however, "the failed Counterforce" (713) brings us back to Slothrop. In the section wherein the scatological attack is portrayed, we find two other pivotal episodes juxtaposed; chronologically, we read 1) the Counterforces' conference, 2) Slothrop's dissipation (and the Counterforce's misrecognition thereof), and then 3) the "repulsive stratagem." Namely, we read the Counterforce's inadequate activity after the narrator's critical commentary on them. If so, and if the narrator says, to quote again, "if the Counterforce knew better what those categories concealed, they might be in a better position to disarm, de-penis, and dismantle the Man" (712), I believe we need to parse exactly what it is that the Counterforce fails to observe.

"The Ad Hoc Adventure": Pynchon's Ecological Nationalism

"A screaming comes across the sky" (3)—preceding this famous opening sentence,

Gravity's Rainbow bears an epigraph, a quotation from Wernher von Braun, with the genuine first sentence reading: "Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation" (1). *Gravity's Rainbow* begins and abounds with the word Nature. Hence, a number of critics have shed light on the topics of nature, environment, and ecology of this novel.[7] Written against the repercussions of the upsurge of ecological consciousness from the 50s through the 70s, especially accentuated by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the promulgation of the National Environmental Protection Act (1970), "*Gravity's Rainbow* is the most penetrating representation of the way [… in which] transnational capital came under attack from a groundswell of environmental activism" (Schaub 60-61). Capitalism vs. Nature is the fundamental formulation of the ecological discourse. Tendentially, ecocritical studies on *Gravity's Rainbow* have coalesced to demonstrate Pynchon's "effort to dramatize the interconnectedness of everything in the ecosphere and the urgent need for an understanding of this mutuality" (Keesey 84). In contrast to the Rocket Cartel's industrial, exclusive connectedness, "[t]he practice of literary ecology […] consist[s] of 'listening to and seeking for what is secluded'" (Coughran, "Plotting" 207).

Amongst those critics, Thomas Schaub and Chris Coughran stand out since both make equivalent efforts to probe the radical aspect of Pynchon's ecology. On the one hand, Schaub observes, "Equally important to *Gravity's Rainbow* and subsequent novels by Pynchon is the growing recognition that ecology is a subversive science with revolutionary implications," arguing that ecology ultimately would resist a Western "culture of death" (Schaub 63). On the other hand, Coughran's query concentrates on the idea of self: noting the novel's depiction of the "full spectrum of ideological values" with regard to ecology, concluding that "Slothrop seems doomed to live out his life as an egocentric, phallogocentric agent" (Coughran, "Green Scripts" 274). In sum, while the former reads Pynchon as a postcolonial novelist, the latter provides a counter-poststructuralist reading, so to speak. The contention of the present essay in terms of Pynchon's radical ecology, on the contrary, shall be not that Slothrop's "Orphic naturalism" (Eddins 5) is in itself politically radical—this phenomenon itself changes nothing directly—but that it proffers a theoretical concept for a new configuration of the way in which we, paradoxically, will be able to

[7] Other than the critics I directly mention here, see also Adams, McLaughlin, and White.

organize people. This, I argue, is the very thing that the Counterforce leaves unheeded.

As early as in its fourth section, the novel designates death as a natural process to which every human being must submit. On the gravestone of Constant Slothrop, one of the protagonist's ancestors, the inscription reads: "Death is a debt to nature due, / Which I have paid, and ſo muſt you" (26). In contradistinction to this natural cycle, "chemists were no longer to be at the mercy of Nature" (249); in Their view of the world, Nature must be dominated by Technology, which is of course a banal idea in itself. Instead, of special note in *Gravity's Rainbow* is that the novel explains the opposition between Nature and Technology in terms of, again, *connectedness*. For instance, "the first thing" that Enzian is taught by his master Weissmann in Germany is that "the Rocket was an entire system *won*, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature (324),[8] in which the rocket is viewed as a negentropic aggregation secured within Nature's scattering proclivity. More important, beginning from the invention of nylon by Du Pont's Wallace Hume Carothers, a.k.a. "The Great Synthesist," the connectivity of Technology is deemed to be evil in Pynchon's perspective, which would ultimately result in the atomic bomb: "Here to say that critical mass cannot be ignored. Once the technical means of control have reached a certain size, a certain degree of *being connected* one to another, the chances for freedom are over for good" (539). Here, the technical term "critical mass" means "the smallest amount of fissionable material necessary to sustain a nuclear chain reaction" (Weisenburger 282-83). It is as if too much connectivity is literally deadly unnatural for Pynchon. Thus we arrive at the schematic opposition between nature/mortality/scatteration vis-à-vis the triad technology/immortality/connection.

From this standpoint, August Kekulé's dream, which is not wholly Pynchon's creation, merits particular attention. Although he ought to be located within the lineage of the great synthesists, being the most preeminent virtuoso of the developers of the benzene ring theory, the chemist's legendary Great Serpent dream nonetheless appears ambiguous with regard to the above dichotomy:

[8] As this paper cannot address the issues of sex and gender despite the obvious genderized connotations in this passage, see the 2018 collection, *Thomas Pynchon, Sex, and Gender*, which includes a bibliography of sex/gender relevant Pynchon criticism (xxxiii-xxxviii).

> Kekulé dreams the Great Serpent holding its own tail in its mouth, the dreaming Serpent which surrounds the World. But the meanness, the cynicism with which this dream is to be used. The Serpent that announces, "The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning," is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to *violate* the Cycle. Taking and not giving back, demanding that "productivity" and "earnings" keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity—most of the World, animal, vegetable and mineral, is laid waste in the process. […] we had been given certain molecules, certain combinations and not others . . . we used what we found in Nature, unquestioning, shamefully perhaps—but the Serpent whispered, "*They can be changed*, and new molecules assembled from the debris of the given. . . ." Can anyone tell me what else he whispered to us? Come—who knows? (412-13; emphasis original)

Here, Pynchon's intention is quite clear: the "cynicism" is the misinterpretation, the misappropriation of the meaning of this conspicuously ecological dream. In this passage, we can safely assume that the capitalized "World" is tantamount to Nature (it is the resource from which Technology procures its "vast quantities of energy"). Whereas the Serpent represents the "cyclical" nature of Nature—a reminder of the epigraph, "Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation"— They assimilate the discourse and assume a false eternity at the sacrifice of "most of humanity," "animal, vegetable and mineral." Since Nature's eternity also depends on all the creature's life and death, one might say that They, no more than a constituent of Nature's totality, arrogate the higher mechanism that only Nature is authorized to enjoy. Further, most remarkable is that the Serpent "whispers" that "certain combinations" "*can be changed,*" which indexes the very potentiality that has been left unelicited. Thus we encounter again the pattern in which ecological connotations within a mysterious episode are misapprehended, which finally necessitates us to interpret Slothrop's dissipation.

As previously noted, in the Zone, individuals, nations, firms, and communities are together referred to as "nation." With this in mind, we need to scrutinize Episode 69,

the aforementioned section that first mentions the protagonist's physical scatteration. To begin with, this episode has an epigraph: "The dearest nation of all is one that will survive no longer than you and I, a common movement at the mercy of death and time: the ad hoc adventure" (706). The source of this slogan is indicated as "Resolutions of the Gross Suckling Conference," which is a pseudonym for the Counterforce (and the symbolical formula for their conference). It is in this context that one needs to interrogate the implication in the juxtaposition of Slothrop's dissipation and the Counterforce's heedlessness. The narrator describes his mysterious destiny as: "Tyrone […] has become one plucked albatross. Plucked, hell—*stripped*. Scattered all over the Zone. It's doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again, in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained.' Only feathers . . . redundant or regenerable organs" (712). We are now in a position to capture the reverberation of the fundamental duality between nature/mortality/scatteration and technology/immortality/connection, both in the epigraph and in the description of Slothrop. First, the "movement at the mercy of death and time" that "the dearest nation" has to obey and the hero's metamorphosis into "regenerable organs" are both ecologically loaded, or rather "cyclical," to employ a vocabulary from Kekulé's dream. Second, the dissipation and the slogan's adhocness concur in resisting the rigid fixation of themselves, in the same manner as the Great Serpent whispering "certain combinations can be changed." It is only Slothrop, now as one "nation" in the Zone, who succeeds in disassembling himself/itself as "point-for-point microcosm" (738). In a sense, he disseminates and implants his "feathers" within people's mind—the narrator only fleetingly, in parenthesis, mentions the possibility: "(Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there is no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering)" (742)—perhaps expecting that the (latent) members of the Counterforce would take over his spirit.

However, again, the Counterforce fails to appreciate and concretize its significance. Yet if they had been attentive enough, what then could and should they actually do with it? Would they have to scatter like Slothrop, too? The observation by Seaman "Pig" Bodine, one of the Pynchon's most important characters recurring in several novels by the author and Slothrop's best friend in *Gravity's Rainbow*, seems to answer, *Yes*:

> [Bodine is] looking straight at Slothrop (being one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature any more. Most of the others gave up long ago trying to hold him together, even as a concept—"It's just got too remote" 's what they usually say). Does Bodine now feel his own strength may someday soon not be enough either: that soon, like all the others, he'll have to let go? *But somebody's got to hold on, it can't happen to all of us—no, that'd be too much* . . . (740-41)

This passage contends to the effect that one must not "let go" of Slothrop "even as a concept" "like all the others." At least "somebody's got to hold on." Nevertheless, "they," above all the Counterforce, are negligent in "trying to hold him together," with the pretext "It's just too remote." To be sure, to scatter is "*too much*" since it is almost identical to death for an *individual*. However, it *can* happen to other "nations" such as the Counterforce; they, as a group of numerous individuals, are literally *dividual*, that is, capable of putting scatteration into practice. This is why, I argue, *Gravity's Rainbow* provides first of all an idiosyncratic viewpoint that treats individuals and groups uniformly as "nation"; the Counterforce should have emulated Slothrop's dissipation, the Great Serpent's wisdom.

For a community inhabited by multiple individuals, to scatter could not only effectuate the dissemination of a radical politics, but, more importantly, it might also introduce mobility, temporariness, and natural non-permanence into the community's own constitution as a "nation." The radicalism awaiting realization between Slothrop's "death" and the Counterforces' inadvertence is "the ad hoc adventure," a new, "dearest" reconfiguration of the idea of "nation." Distancing itself both from the Schwartzkommando's identitarian organization and from Their counterfeit permanence, and at the same time embracing adhocness, Pynchon's "nationalism" brings to light the forthcoming mechanism of organizing people. Its salient characteristic is the paradoxical sustainability secured by means of exposing itself to the cyclical "common movement at the mercy of death and time." Through Slothrop's scattering and the Counterforce's failure, *Gravity' Rainbow* adumbrates a yet to be embodied nationalism, one that might be termed ecological nationalism.

Coda: Radicalism in the Age of Globalization

Let the preceding discussion bring us back again to the fundamental question of today's politics: redistribution or recognition? To summarize, first, the Schwartzkommando prioritizes recognition over redistribution. Second, examining the Counterforce's political inadequateness, Kim argues that "Antiracialism works well with neoliberalism and globalization, purporting to embrace formal legal and economic equivalence but leaving the conditions of racism […] unchanged" (266). Here, "antiracialism," not antiracism, designates a politics that negates racial identities as a political solidarity. For Kim, the Counterforce disregards recognition with a gesture of redressing economic inequity. Put differently, the Counterforce fails to prioritize redistribution over recognition, and this is just criticized by Pynchon. Hence, we still do not know how Pynchon himself would finally answer the question; there is no positive answer in the novel.

Then, how about Slothrop? Or ecological nationalism that he embodies? The idea of "the ad hoc adventure," fueled by Slothrop's dissipation, appears eventually to refute recognition; it rather advocates abandoning any clear delineation of its own contour, so as for its identity to be kept blurred. Interestingly enough, by means of scattering, Slothrop is literally redistributed and becomes unrecognizable. This might sound no more than wordplay, but for the protagonist to be unrecognizable is of political significance since he, from the beginning, remains under (biopolitical) surveillance of Them[9] ("all in his life of what has looked free or random, is discovered to've been under some Control" [209]). It is of course not only Slothrop who is "under some Control"; the power of Empire puts everybody under surveillance in order to prevent any major insurgencies, and thus Hardt and Negri took great pains to imagine the possibility of the multitude. "[T]he Empire," to quote again from the novel, "will expedite such barriers between our lives. […] The war does not appear to want a folk-consciousness […] it wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness, but a complexity" (130-31). In such a world of surveillance, unrecognizability is the condition of redistribution and the solidarity therefor. The magical phenomenon of Slothrop's dissipation is a literary manifestation of this.

Now, by way of conclusion, we can make a contribution to the discourse of

[9] Breu (61-91) and Abe both examine biopolitical power depicted in Pynchon's first novel *V*.

radicalism in the age of Empire by reevaluating the idea of ecological nationalism that the present study has endeavored to cultivate from *Gravity's Rainbow*. The specific advantage of ecological nationalism's adhocness is, I would argue, its foresight and containment of Empire's primal strategy: "isolate, divide, and segregate" (Hardt and Negri 399). Pynchon's ecological nationalism, or what we might call ecological multitude, constitutes itself not by resisting or dodging its nemesis, but by *subsuming* it as its own mechanism to effectuate and perpetuate resistance. Foreseeing Empire's program, it fragmentizes itself in advance so as not to be detected, to outwit Them. This is what the theory of "the ad hoc adventure" proffers, which demands close attention lest we should fail to grasp. When Pynchon criticizes the Counterforce, he writes, first, "they don't [know better]. Actually they do, but they don't admit it. Sad but true," and then the subject slides from "they" into the first person plural: "We do know what's going on, and we let it go on" (712-13). Thus the novel not only warns but also incites us to fully understand the meaning of Slothrop's scattering politically. We are now in a position to read the very final sentence of *Gravity's Rainbow* as the political author's invitation for all the readers to participate, temporarily, in ecological nationalism: "Now everybody—" (760).

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