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Narratologies of Gravity’s Rainbow

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0. Introduction

“I wonder if you people aren’t a bit too – well, strong, on the virtues of analysis. I mean, once you’ve taken it all apart, fine, I’ll be the first to applaud your industry. But other than a lot of bits and pieces lying about, what have you said?” (Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*)

This is a narratological analysis of a single novel – Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*. A considerable amount of narrative theory is discussed in it, as well. The twin perspective results from an examination of the interaction of certain models of narrative analysis and this remarkably complex and challenging piece of narrative fiction. For these reasons, the title of the study could well be *Pynchon’s Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text*. However, Hanjo Berressem has already written a brilliant study under that very name, albeit referring to different theories and different kinds of interfacing. Hence “Narratologies of *Gravity’s Rainbow*”, slightly humbler and sans alliteration, will have to suffice. Before going any further, in order to contextualize the project (and perhaps to provide an initial justification for it), let me briefly discuss a very distinguished earlier study with reminiscent starting points.

In the preface to his *Narrative Discourse* (1980), Gérard Genette famously refuses to give a definite answer to the question of whether the “essay in method” should be regarded primarily as a study of the eccentric narrative structures of Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* or as a theoretical work utilizing Proust’s work merely as a source of illustration. The question has, no doubt, been subsequently answered, not by Genette himself, but by the critical community that clearly has adopted Genette’s work as narrative theory. (The fact that the Library
of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication call number situates *Narrative Discourse* among studies of francophone literature does not alter this.) As a result, Genette’s work is unanimously, and sensibly, considered most important because of the remarkable contribution it makes to narratology.

Nonetheless, Genette’s insistence on the basic duality of his approach should not be overlooked: the strategy holds important lessons for textually oriented criticism and theory. The limitation of utilizing one principal exemplary text – granted, a massive one – underscores the problematic relationship between the material and theoretical conclusions of *any* instance of literary study. Genette does nothing to hide the fact that his theoretical concepts and tentative rules of narrative spring (almost) equally from the intense interaction with Proust’s work as from more general theorizing. This should be blurred neither by Genette’s notorious eagerness to coin new terms nor by his at times overly generalizing rhetoric.

Genette having been dubbed the primary model-builder and both “arch-formalist” (Darby 2001: 838) and “arch-geometrician” (Gibson 1996) of narratological theory, it might be difficult to view his work as in any way capitalizing on the individual or the specific in a given narrative, or as respecting the non-conforming ‘otherness’ of texts. Nevertheless, precisely the procedure of utilizing a single work as the source of textual evidence demonstrates Genette’s emphasis on the particular and the uncommon (cf. Kearns 1999: 8). Here is Genette, writing in the afterword to *Narrative Discourse*:

> It has no doubt become evident, in this comparison of Proustian narrative with the general system of *narrative possibilities*, that the analyst’s curiosity and predilection went regularly to the most *deviant* aspects of Proustian narrative, the specific
transgressions or beginnings of a future development. (Genette 1980: 265.)

Reading *Narrative Discourse* in this way, one is faced with a paradox. It is true that the categories and hierarchical concepts of Genette’s narratology can indeed be used in a most unsophisticated manner by blindly subjecting texts to the mechanisms of narratological categories and waiting for the easily predictable results. On the other hand, even the brief examination above of the origins of Genette’s concepts suggests that narratology can also be a benign monster, a non-oppressive machine. Christine Brooke-Rose (1995: 96) agrees; she refers to *Narrative Discourse* in somewhat paradoxical terms as “structuralism at its humanistic best”. The obvious fact that narratological categories are based on an undoubt-edly ideological notion of a ‘normal narrative’ should not hinder their use to bring to light the particularities of a given work. Here is Genette again: “The ‘grid’ which is so dispar-aged is not an instrument of incarceration, of bringing to heel or of pruning that in fact castrates: it is a procedure of discov-ery, and a way of describing” (Genette 1980: 265).

In similar terms, Jacques Derrida (1978: 6), writing in 1963, provisionally grants the “structuralist passion[,] simultaneously a frenzy for experimentation and a proliferation of schematizations”, the power to reveal in a structure “not only its supports but also that secret place in which it is neither construction nor ruin but lability”. This sounds promising. Ultimately, however, Derrida does not view structuralist criticism as the “technical liberty” (ibid.) it pretends to represent:

In the future [structuralism] will be interpreted, perhaps, as a relaxation, if not a lapse, of the attention given to *force* […]. *Form* fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself. That is, to create. This is why
literary criticism is structuralist in every age, in its essence and destiny. Criticism has not always known this, but understands it now, and thus is in the process of thinking itself in its own concept, system and method. Criticism henceforth knows itself separated from force, occasionally avenging itself on force by gravely and profoundly proving that separation is the condition of the work, and not only of the discourse of the work. Thus is explained the low note, the melancholy pathos that can be perceived behind the triumphant cries of technical ingenuity or mathematical subtlety that sometimes accompany the so-called “structural” analyses. (Derrida 1978: 4–5.)

Derrida’s tantalizing allusion to structuralist criticism as structuralism that has become aware of itself invites to view it as potentially self-reflexive in a constructive sense, not merely “avenging itself on force”. The rather dismal view of a structuralist criticism knowingly and willingly separated from textual force could perhaps be replaced with a view of a literary-critical paradigm en route toward productive self-recognition (cf. Gibson 1996: 5). Arguably, the absence of “the low note, the melancholy pathos” in recent works of narratological theory attests to this, as will be shown below.

For present purposes the most important and encouraging lesson provided by Genette’s example – and why not Derrida’s, too – is that the way to formulate and test narrative theories is to let theoretical concepts and particular texts mingle, and prepare to be surprised by the outcome. Curiously, however, it is precisely this tendency to pay attention to individual pieces of literature that prompts Tzvetan Todorov (1977: 31–33) to exclude Genette’s work (Todorov discusses Genette’s Figures) from the domain of poetics in the strictest sense of the word. From an orthodox perspective, Genette’s theoretical criticism is not “structuralism” in the sense of revealing underlying gen-
eral structures of literature. It seeks by contrast (and in addition) to elucidate the concrete structures of individual texts.

Regardless of the ultimate extent and nature of Genette’s structuralism, an approach at least superficially resembling his will be adopted in this study. For the most part, the discussion consists of a series of readings of specific narratological problems or concepts in the context of Pynchon’s (1937–) third novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973). Both the traditional structuralist model of narrative analysis, and more recent theoretical approaches to narratology, namely cognitive narratology and possible world narratology, will be considered. This obviously provides one explanation for the plural form “Narratologies” in the title¹. Indeed, as will become evident, narratology cannot at present be regarded as a homogeneous, monolithic discipline. In fact, this was probably never possible: narratology, while not comparable to ‘poststructuralism’ or ‘postmodernism’ in conceptual indeterminacy, presents quite sufficient problems for the categorizing mind – an issue not often acknowledged among the critics of the approach. The heterogeneity of narratology has never been more apparent than today.

The goal is to examine ways in which Pynchon’s fiction challenges the concepts of narratological theory by abusing and extending the narrative conventions underlying them. Rather than merely presenting theoretical commentaries and critiques of the various notions of narratology, many chapters test the concepts in the demanding narrative situations *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Now, what is so special about this particular Pynchon novel? While I do not wish to unnecessarily mystify the novel, it is sensible to consider *Gravity’s Rainbow* as epitomizing Pynchon’s paradoxical narrative strategies. Pynchon’s earlier fictions – the short stories as well as the novels *V.* (1963) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) – involve many unconven-
tional narrative characteristics. Indeed, it is a critical commonplace to consider these early works as exhibiting in embryo the techniques more fully developed in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Accordingly, the author’s subsequent novels, *Vineland* (1990) and *Mason & Dixon* (1997) are unmistakably Pynchonian. This is true despite the less than ecstatic reception (see Green et al. 1994) of *Vineland*, the novel assigned the unfortunate fate of following *Gravity’s Rainbow* after seventeen years of literary near-silence². The narratological importance of *Mason & Dixon* remains still unexplored. Regarding narrative conventions, the novel seems less exuberant than *Gravity’s Rainbow*. *Mason & Dixon* involves, however, narrative elements not present in any of Pynchon’s earlier works; for instance, it can be read as simultaneously parodying the conventions of both 18th century novelistic conventions and today’s historiographic metafiction (cf. McHale 2000). Nevertheless, this study considers *Gravity’s Rainbow* Pynchon’s high-water mark of narrative innovation. This is the mundane perspective on the matter. There is, however, an alternative way to justify the limitation of analyzing the narratologies of *Gravity’s Rainbow* alone. The novel can be interpreted, in Theodore Kharpetian’s words, as a “monstrous omen”, a singular literary event that is fundamentally different from anything that precedes or follows it, including Pynchon’s other works. This view, however concurrent with the aesthetic effect of the novel, is obviously misguided and mystifying. *Gravity’s Rainbow* is best interpreted as being engaged in an intimate dialogue with the novelistic tradition preceding it.

Variously, Pynchon’s narrative peculiarities will either illustrate and provide (counter-) examples for established theoretical positions, or suggest altogether new methodological insights. This is another, more relevant, justification for the title of the study: the ‘interlocutions’ between Pynchon’s text
and narrative theory will inevitably amount to a collection of multiple and contradictory views of narrative, narratologies not simply describable with titles such as “traditional structuralist narratology”, “cognitive narrative theory”, or “possible world semantics”. In other words, Pynchon’s narratologies really are plural – and inescapably Pynchon’s.

While *Gravity’s Rainbow*, like Proust’s work, represents radical convention-shattering and non-conforming fiction, all narrative texts, at least in principle, present potential challenges to narrative theories. For this reason, every application of narratological concepts ought to reflect some of Genette’s intellectual tightrope-walking between the particular and the general. This examination of Pynchon’s narratology will deliberately emphasize the bi-directional influence between the object of study and the theoretical notions considered.

Each chapter constitutes an individual discussion. I hesitate to label the discussions *theoretical*, however. The study certainly addresses theoretical questions, but always from the perspective of practical application, even from that of the economy of literary study: what kinds of results would a given theoretical conception yield vis-à-vis Pynchon’s text, were it adopted? How should the conceptual apparatus be amended in order to make it function more efficiently? Gerald Prince (1996: 163) has called this kind of study simply “narratological criticism”, dedicated to “test the validity of narratological categories, distinctions, and reasonings [...] identify (more or less significant) elements that narratologists (may) have overlooked, underestimated, or misunderstood”3. Peter Rabinowitz and James Phelan (1994: 8) introduce the concept of *theorypractice* to designate the kind of approach that pays attention both “to interpretation and to the grounds of interpretation”. This notion has an obvious affinity to the present approach. Also Claude Levi-Strauss’s concept of *bricolage* bears a resem-
blance to the research attitude adopted for this study. Derrida cites Genette as stating that the “analysis of bricolage could ‘be applied almost word for word’ to criticism, and especially to ‘literary criticism’” (Derrida 1978: 285). Commitment to this overall research philosophy supplies the discussion with a certain tone of ‘observations of a practising narratologist’. There should, in principle, be nothing wrong with this.

An interesting methodological point of comparison is the concept descriptive poetics, a favorite of Benjamin Harshav (formerly Hrushovski) (1976: xv–xvi; see also McHale 1994), among others. For Harshav, the concept refers to textual study that does not seek to apply a specific theory, but instead attempts to produce, with the aid of analytical concepts, descriptive accounts of texts that can in turn be utilized as material for interpretation or theory-formation. The inevitable theoretical situatedness of descriptive poetics does not escape Harshav’s analysis, however:

Descriptive Poetics is based on fieldwork, much in the same way as the research work of a sociologist or a linguist is. It is nevertheless a systematic study based on a question or a set of questions derived from the theory of literature. Indeed, the relationship between Theory of Literature and Descriptive Poetics is a very intimate one. It is impossible to make a descriptive study without a theoretical framework, as much as it is impossible to build a theory without material from descriptive studies. (Hrushovski 1976: xvi.)

Thus, fieldwork this is, surveying Pynchon’s narrative zone, if you like. However, in addition to providing readings of Pynchon with “a set of questions derived from the theory of literature”, the present project considers the questions (or concepts) themselves objects of study as well. An unfortunate side-effect of this approach is, once again, that the results of
the analysis are necessarily tentative, mostly the outcome of analytical procedures of various narratological heresies, not of ‘authorized’ methods of narrative analysis. This is the Catch-22 of narratological criticism.

The initial two chapters present introductory surveys and commentaries on both the scholarly work on Pynchon, and the status and future prospects of narratological theory. In the first, a mapping of the literature on Pynchon will be attempted. Pynchon being by far the most eagerly studied of the canonized American postmodernists of the 1960’s and 1970’s, a truly comprehensive account of the literature is obviously unimaginable. This problem will be in part surmounted by presenting a survey of the narratologically or textually oriented strain in the study of Pynchon’s fiction. It will become evident, perhaps surprisingly, that Pynchon has not been extensively studied from a narratological perspective. Some critics have utilized narratological concepts in their work, but on the whole the critical attention has been devoted to the thematic aspects of Pynchon. Far from being the most relevant reason for studying the implicit exchange of ideas between Gravity’s Rainbow and narrative theory, the apparent methodological gap in Pynchon criticism provides further justification for the present study.

The second chapter will look at the history and current status of narratology. The first section is devoted to the criticism that structuralist narratology has confronted over the past two decades. The so-called ‘crisis of narratology’ has led to severe intra-disciplinary re-assessments of the foundations, goals, and uses of narratology. In particular, the universal aspirations and categorical concepts of structuralist narratology have been subjected to strong suspicion. However, as the discussion makes evident, the traditional approaches to narratology have by no means dwindled away; recent times
have also witnessed theoretically more relaxed and ideologically less guilt-ridden approaches to the refinement of the structuralist analytical apparatus. The remaining two sections will comprise brief introductions to cognitive literary theory and possible world semantics, providing some theoretical background for later and more detailed discussions.

In the subsequent two chapters the study will turn to a practical (or theorypractical in Rabinowitz’s and Phelan’s terms) examination of some concepts of structuralist narratology in the context of Gravity’s Rainbow. Chapter 3 deals with the notion of narrative hierarchy as it is reflected in Pynchon’s unconventional narration. In a way, the discussion serves as an intellectual blueprint for the remaining text-analytic chapters: it introduces Pynchon’s paradoxical and, for lack of a better word, deconstructive narrative attitude. The attitude is manifested as a strategy of simultaneous subversion and confirmation of narrative conventions and, consequently, narratological concepts. The most crucial findings of the chapter concern the ways in which Gravity’s Rainbow reassesses the narratological concept of narrator and the notion of the stratification of narrative into a stable hierarchy. Pynchon’s attitude toward narrative conventions will also be demonstrated to have affinities with the deconstructionist wing of the critique of narratology.

The deconstructive project implicit in Pynchon’s fiction will be further probed, as chapter 4 turns to investigate the faux-didactic nature of Gravity’s Rainbow. The discussion focuses on the ways in which the complexities of Pynchon’s narrative undermine the seemingly attractive and useful guidelines for thematic interpretation offered by the novel itself. In particular, a somewhat problematic application of the narratological concept of implied author is central to the examination of the novel’s dual strategy of providing the reader
with untrustworthy interpretive clues and of making the reader aware of their falsity. In addition, the concept of *mise-en-abyme* is both utilized and to some extent reassessed in the process.

Chapter 5 concentrates on a potential remedy for the alleged lack of theoretical foundations of narratology: narrative theory based on cognitive science, or *cognitive narratology*. The cognitive approach to literature and language has recently been gaining strong support on the literary-critical scene. Cognitive narrative theory can be regarded either as complementary approach to traditional narratology or as its full-fledged theoretical replacement; its proponents tend to opt for the latter. This becomes evident, as the chapter discusses in detail some aspects of Monika Fludernik’s *Natural Narratology*, hitherto the most comprehensive theoretical account of cognitive narratology.

Chapter 6 is an attempt at a practical application of cognitive narratology. For reasons of relevance and presentational economy, the textual analyses concentrating on the new narratologies (chapters 6 and 8) will focus on the related questions of narrative *voice* and *focalization*, though from very different perspectives. Apart from obviously being perennial problems for narratology, these concepts are also hotly debated in the discussions of new narratologies (see *New Literary History*, 3/2001, a special issue on voice). Thus, chapter 6 concentrates on Fludernik’s theoretical contributions to the analysis of *free indirect discourse* and the attribution of narrative voices. The goal is to measure the descriptive and explanatory power of a combination of Natural Narratology and structuralist narratology vis-à-vis the complex cases of dual voice narration in Pynchon’s novel.

Chapter 7 consists of a commentary on Marie-Laure Ryan’s *intensional/illocutionary* narratological theory, so far the most advanced narratological conception based on possible world
semantics. In some degree of contrast to Fludernik’s Natural Narratology, Ryan’s narratology seeks to build on the ideas of traditional narratology. In this respect, Ryan’s approach reflects the general attitude of possible world semantics as a literary theory. Possible world semantics has in a relatively inconspicuous manner been the theoretical persuasion of a small group of literary theorists since the 1970’s. During the 1980’s and the 1990’s it gradually established itself as a significant branch of narrative theory and nowadays arguably provides an alternative, or a complement, to both traditional narratology and cognitive literary theory.

In chapter 8, the problem of perspective in Gravity’s Rainbow is examined with reference to a recent conception of focalization informed by possible world semantics, namely David Herman’s hypothetical focalization. In the course of an attempt at practical application, the concept of hypothetical focalization will be subjected to amendments and extensions. The discussion will conclude with a tentative general conception of focalization based on possible world semantics, Genette’s typology of focalization, and the insights provided by Pynchon’s narrative.

Chapter 9 will focus on an attempt to synthesize the descriptive potentials of cognitive science, possible world semantics, and ludology, the study of games. The topic of the discussion is Ryan’s recent study on the immersive and ludic characteristics of literature and other forms of art. In particular, the chapter will consider the relationship between the playful and world-evoking effects of literature, mainly by examining Ryan’s use of the literary metaphors game and world. Together, the critique of Ryan’s notion of game in the study of literature and the analysis of the world-evoking and ludic functions of Gravity’s Rainbow suggest that cognitive narratology, possible world narratology, and ludology provide useful
insights for the study of literature, playful or otherwise. In addition, the discussion demonstrates ways in which the notion of textual games can be used to complement and extend both cognitive and possible world approaches to narrative fiction.

It is obvious, in the light of the above outline, that the study cannot conclude with a simple corroboration or refutation of an initial hypothesis. Each chapter discusses the notions and concepts of various narratologies in ways that render impossible the recuperation of the results into a coherent “Narratology of Gravity’s Rainbow”. Or, at least, the result would be a monstrous narratology crudely stitched together from incompatible organs and lumps of flesh. (Disturbingly enough, however, this description seems to fit pretty well any conception of narratology.)

Nevertheless, the incompatible pieces of the narratological bricolage definitely point toward novel approaches to narrative analysis and invite further study of both the traditional structuralist narratology, and its recent theoretical extensions (or replacements). Most important, each chapter surveys the selectively permeable boundary between Pynchon’s text and narrative theory and thus considers ways in which narratological concepts, old and new, are in a paradoxical manner promisingly helpful, yet utterly deficient, in coming to terms with the inescapably textual reality of Pynchon’s greatest novel to date.
1. The Question of Form in Pynchon Criticism

In a trivial sense, it is easy to understand why the novels of Pynchon have not been extensively studied from a narratological perspective: Pynchon exploded onto the scene of literary criticism during the 1970’s, before narratology really became an option in Anglo-American critical discourse. The couple of years after the publication of *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) produced several influential monographs and critical anthologies on Pynchon that seem largely to have set the thematic tone of later achievements of the so-called Pynchon industry. Granted, this is a paranoid explanation: a thematic bias conspiracy theory. Nonetheless, there is some truth in it. While Pynchon’s textual complexity has in this tradition been duly acknowledged and often meditated upon, it has for the most part served as a self-evident, or given, backdrop for thematic interpretations, not as a primary object of study.

A good reason to refrain from concentrating on the textual oddities of Pynchon’s fiction is, in addition, that it simply responds well to thematic analysis; the novels burst with themes – controversial, funny, disgusting, politically incorrect, and so forth (see McHoul and Wills 1990: 30; Kharpetian 1990: 15–17). Pynchon’s thematic overabundance initiates an interesting chain reaction: many studies become afflicted with the peculiar attitudes and obsessions of Pynchon’s fiction. At its best (or worst; *funniest* in any case) Pynchon criticism gets noticeably Pynchonian, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> Reality is a spectacular put on by the Firm. Literary reality included. Nothing exists outside the system save death and dissolution. But death and dissolution are themselves *effects* of
the system. From the people who brought you reality. The Puritan God (and the omniscient narrator), when he elects a few for salvation (eternal life), by the same act consigns the remainder to damnation (everlasting death). (Mackey 1984: 11; see also e.g. Chambers 1992: 123.)

While getting Pynchonian is arguably possible regarding structural analysis as well, the enticing call of thematics has made criticism primarily concentrating on the analysis of narrative scarce, not to mention narratological criticism à la Prince (1996). The same is true with respect to poststructuralist or deconstructive work on Pynchon. Good examples of this approach are Alec McHoul’s and David Wills’s study Writing Pynchon (1990) and Berressem’s Pynchon’s Poetics (1993). “Deconstructing Pynchon” was, in addition, the theme of a special issue (14/1984) of Pynchon Notes, the scholarly journal devoted to the study of Pynchon’s fictions (see Duyfhuizen 1984a). In general, however, the vastness of Pynchon criticism is a methodological optical illusion.

Brian McHale’s (1992/1979, 1992/1985) essays on Gravity’s Rainbow most clearly exemplify narratological analysis of Pynchon’s texts. In addition to presenting textual analyses, the essays consider the perspectival difference between textually and thematically oriented literary study. In a mildly chastising tone, McHale observes the critics’ willingness to subordinate Pynchon’s textual particularities to “global interpretive strategies”, without exception thematic:

Inevitably, the critics misread. Or perhaps it would be fairer to say that they under-read; that is, they fail to entertain the entire range of possible interpretations for any given instance of you, but instead opt for one of them – the one, obviously, that is most compatible with whatever general interpretive hypothesis they happen to be pursuing – suppressing the other, per-
haps equally plausible alternatives. In their reaching (irritable or otherwise) after fact and reason, the critics do not so much misconstrue the text but construe it prematurely. (McHale 1992: 103.)

By contrast, Kathryn Hume, studying the mythography of Pynchon’s fiction, considers Pynchon criticism as habitually dwelling on the deconstructive, disintegrative characteristics of the novels. According to Hume (1987: 2–3), postmodernist or poststructuralist critical approaches to Pynchon seek to analyze “elements within the novel [...] that foreground unknowability or uncertainty [that] may have philosophical, scientific, or linguistic foundations in the works of figures such as Nietzsche, Heisenberg, or Saussure [and] lend themselves to deconstructive readings”. To compensate for the alleged deconstructive bias, Hume propounds an interpretation that ostensibly synthesizes the deconstructive and affirmative tendencies of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

Now, while some of Hume’s “deconstructionist” critical approaches indeed represent textually oriented research, most do not. The critics’ frequent remarks on the destabilizing and alienating features of Pynchon’s text rarely rely on a systematic textual analysis of those features. Moreover, as will become evident in the course of this study, analyses of the allegedly deconstructive and negative structures of *Gravity’s Rainbow* are apt also to produce ‘formally positive’ results. Not all of Pynchon’s narrative structures are bent on denial and randomness.

To be sure, avowed poststructuralist critics do not share Hume’s view of the deconstructive emphasis in Pynchon criticism. Berressem (1993: 1) considers Pynchon’s fiction an exceptionally difficult object of deconstructive analysis because of its inherent tendency to “undercut [...] stable meanings and
readings”. Ironically enough, according to Berressem (ibid. 7–10), constructing a poststructuralist poetics of Pynchon is problematic precisely because the novels themselves constitute near-parodies of the poststructuralist notion of text. Berressem overcomes this difficulty by presenting complementary analyses of Pynchon’s novels, utilizing several poststructuralist theoretical frames of reference: Derrida’s deconstruction, Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis, and Jean Baudrillard’s simulacrum-theory. However, in terms of the textual strain in Pynchon criticism, Berressem’s *Pynchon’s Poetics* is most appropriately described as an exercise in poststructuralist thematics. The study provides novel analyses of oft-discussed passages of Pynchon’s works and situates their thematic content into the interpretive context of the poststructuralist theories. Hence, while Berressem’s theoretical framework prompts him to consider the theoretical idea of textuality and its interpretive ramifications, the analytic practice, or method, of his study is not particularly textual.

The most radical pronouncements about the state of Pynchon criticism have been made by McHoul and Wills, the authors of the other book-length poststructuralist analysis of Pynchon’s fiction. Their *Writing Pynchon* (1990) includes many a merciless characterization of the traditionalist thematic aspirations of fellow Pynchonians. According to McHoul and Wills, the ‘Komical Dekonstructionists’ (see Brown 1997), the criticism of Pynchon has altogether disregarded “contemporary literary theory” and, as a result, continues to produce uninteresting, not to mention questionable, readings:

We can summarise as follows: *Pynchon has only been allowed to speak in certain ways and not in others*. Our complaint about this is twofold: not only are the possible ways of speaking thereby limited, they are also, only and always, precisely, ways
of speaking – not of writing. The critical mode of Pynchon-author as ‘speaker’ (that is ‘pure representer’) of the real world of living presence is limited in its logocentrism. (McHoul and Wills 1990: 4.)

What McHoul and Wills propose instead is textual analysis of the “post-rhetorical” and the “material typonymy” in Pynchon’s fiction; a textualist reading strategy heavily informed by deconstruction. One of the analytical concepts McHoul and Wills (1990: 11–12) introduce to aid the analysis of Pynchon is ‘bookmatching’, a textual craft whereby it is possible to analyze the complex relations of Pynchon’s fictions to, principally, the texts of critical theory. Regarding previous criticism, McHoul and Wills insist that “[a]lmost any passage from any book by Pynchon ranged against almost any passage from any book or paper by his critics [...] shows a simple lack of matching” (McHoul and Wills 1990: 1). Not so with the texts of poststructuralists. In terms of the textual tradition of Pynchon criticism, the frolicsome approach pursued by McHoul and Wills produces notable results, perhaps accidentally. For instance, many excellent textual analyses of the novel are presented as abandoned reading strategies of Gravity’s Rainbow. The deconstructionist ‘method’ of McHoul and Wills makes the evaluation of the full input of their “post-rhetorical” analyses difficult, however. Donald Brown (1997: 110) is probably correct in being skeptical about the continuing interest of “abstract discursive practices that negate their own codes even as they insist upon them”, regardless of how philosophically correct and non-logocentric they may appear (see also Fludernik 2001b: 710).

The schism between the traditional and deconstructionist wings of Pynchon criticism leads us into the question of the uses of textual analyses. Arguably, the sensible conclusion that
previous scholarly work on Pynchon has been mostly thematic does not automatically warrant the claims that it has “made an industry out of choosing between twofold options” (McHoul and Wills 1990: 17; see 4.2). Surely there is no inevitable connection between thematic criticism and ideologically naïve criticism? Nevertheless, in a similarly belligerent manner, Terry Caesar (1984: 71) blames the critics for having disregarded the “mindless” features of Gravity’s Rainbow with the Pavlovian Edward Pointsman’s “We must never lose control” (GR 144) as their credo; Stephen Schuber (1984: 72) concludes that “a certain phallologocentrism governs many of the [critical] orbits around Gravity’s Rainbow”; finally, according to Duyfhuizen (1984b: 75), critics of Pynchon have “seen their task as one of control and mastery”. Is there a justification for such rhetoric?

The fact that analysis of narrative structures is used as a vehicle of primarily thematic interpretation does not necessarily transmogrify the whole critical effort into rulemaking or policework. Adopting a more moderate view, one could well acknowledge the value of textual analyses presented to support thematic interpretations without losing sight of the divergence of the aims of textually and thematically oriented study. Let me demonstrate this by briefly commenting on Molly Hite’s study Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon (1983), one of the targets of McHoul’s and Wills’s critique.

Hite considers many issues pertaining to narrative structures, in particular the narrator’s apparent heteroglossia (Hite 1983: 143). Hite goes on to support her case with the aid of examples from the text of Gravity’s Rainbow. For present purposes, the thing to notice, however, is the use Hite has for her close-readings. Immediately after the textual observations she concludes:
The fact that the narrator refuses to stand aloof from the characters has implications for the value systems of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The novel deals with some of the most horrifying prospects of contemporary life: the rise of megalithic international corporations, the corresponding dehumanization of twentieth-century society, the immanent purposes of technology, the threat of global annihilation. But though the text insists on a polarized vision with indelible lines drawn between Us and Them, it does not condemn any of its characters. The narrator treats even the most villainous figures with such compassion that it becomes impossible to regard the novel’s world as populated by villains and heroes. [...] And it is the pathos of this situation that the narrator is able to communicate because he speaks from inside the action and even from inside characters. (Hite 1983: 144.)

Hite utilizes her analysis of the indeterminacy of the narrative voices of the novel as evidence to support a major thematic claim. In fact, the results of Hite’s textual analysis are *overabundant* in terms of a thematic conclusion like the one she proposes. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with this. If anything, narrative analysis like Hite’s makes thematic interpretations more plausible than ones based on the established thematic ‘givens’ of Pynchon criticism (entropy, indeterminacy, non-causal reasoning, paranoia, keeping cool but caring, and so forth). Nevertheless, the difference in orientation between Hite’s approach and narratological criticism is obvious. In terms of narratological analysis, the multitude of voices evoked by the narration of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a thing in itself, not merely an indication of the novel’s ideological significance regarding the conditions of the present-day world (or what have you). For narratological criticism, the subtle ways in which the voices of the narration seem to mingle, the nearly imperceptible shifts in focalization, or the ways the narrative
voice acquires traits from the characters are all features of interest as such – this will become painfully clear in the course of this study.

Here, Pynchon’s narrative peculiarities are regarded as functioning as an implicit commentary on narrative conventions and, consequently, on the concepts of narrative theory. This situates the emphasis on the elucidation of minute textual features, especially ones that deviate from the various established ‘rules’ of narration. From the purview of the deconstructionist ideology, nonetheless, it is obvious that both Hite’s thematic approach and narratological criticism reduce Pynchon’s writing to manifestations of (or anomalous deviations from) pre-established intellectual structures and norms.

The question of formal study also surfaces in the generic considerations of Pynchon’s novels. Kharpetian (1990) is among those critics\(^6\) who consider *Gravity’s Rainbow* an instance of postmodernist\(^7\) Menippea:

*Gravity’s Rainbow* is a prodigy, a monstrous omen, and perhaps the definitive Menippean satire in American postmodernism [...]: the critical exposure of official cultural institutions and demystification of power; the focus on the ugly, the painful, and the ridiculous; the attention to carnality, scatology, and consumption; the caricatures’ paranoid obsessions [...]; the serio-comic prose and verse [...]; and, finally, the epideictic variety of the comic and the fantastic represent an encyclopedic extension of the genre’s possibilities, and any refusal or failure on the part of the book’s commentators to acknowledge its Menippean construction is due primarily to the text’s obscure form, an especially radical departure from conventional mimesis. (Kharpetian 1991: 108–109.)

Kharpetian (1991: 17) begins his study by lamenting the already familiar thematic emphasis of Pynchon criticism. This
is promising: the features that underlie the interpretation of *Gravity’s Rainbow* as Menippea invite textual study as much as they do thematic analysis. However, Kharpetian himself does not pursue a study of the Menippean structures of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Instead, after designating the novel as formally exemplifying Menippea, he turns to investigating the thematic and ideological consequences of that generic consideration. Somewhat surprisingly, then, Kharpetian’s approach continues the tradition of using the narrative complexities of Pynchon’s fiction as a point of departure without really studying them. In a disturbingly circular manner, labeling *Gravity’s Rainbow* as an instance of Menippea naturalizes the textual “monstrosity” of the novel, which consequently never becomes a legitimate object of study.

Working in more textual terms, Steven Weisenburger (1995) considers Pynchon’s novel as exemplifying “encyclopedic satire”. As a representative of this genre, the novel seeks to subvert the value systems of modern society. Of particular interest is Weisenburger’s detailed analysis of the rhetorical trope of *hysteron proteron*. For Weisenburger (1995: 241–256), the frequent backwards presentation of sequences serves as a formal indication of ideological dissent inscribed in Pynchon’s narratives. Weisenburger (1994) presents an equally perceptive reading of the ideological functioning of the embedded narratives of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Weisenburger’s interpretations effectively use perspicacious analysis of narrative structures for the purposes of ideological criticism. Once again, they reflect the fact that there is a thin but noticeable strain of textual analysis to be found in Pynchon criticism, however significantly the *purposes* of the analyses might differ from the ones they have for narratological criticism. The complementary relationship between formal and thematic approaches to Pynchon is nowhere clearer than in Weisenburger’s most
influential work to date, *The Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* (1988). In the introductory chapter, Weisenburger inverts the usual manner of doing Pynchon criticism: he uses the meticulously gathered historical data and thematic information in order to reveal the governing formal make-up of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. (It is a *mandala*.)

The reconciliatory viewpoint adopted above – acknowledging the textual nested inside the thematic – will be periodically revisited below. In the course of the text-analytical chapters it will become increasingly evident that the thematic and textual approaches to *Gravity’s Rainbow* must be considered as interdependent and complementary perspectives on the novel. The structural analysis of Pynchon’s texts relies to a significant extent on thematic interpretive frames and general information about the existents and events of the story-world. In addition to demonstrating the actual thematic emphasis of Pynchon criticism, the above discussion also reflects the fact that the critics are themselves aware of it. In this respect, the story of the thematic bias of the scholarly work on Pynchon is akin to other topoi of the industry, apologizing for subjecting Pynchon’s texts to literary study, speculating on the identity of Pynchon, and the like.

In the next chapter I will discuss the other intellectual context of this study, narratology. It will be demonstrated that the textual study arguably neglected by the Pynchon industrialists by no means constitutes a monolithic narratological theory. Instead, it is formed by several rival – or complementary – approaches to the analysis of the structures of narrative.
2. The Points of Narratology

2.1. Whatever Happened to the Crisis of Narratology?

It seems that Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan has at least twice succeeded in articulating something essential about the state of narratology, in different intellectual phases of the discipline. The first occasion was in 1983, in the “silver age of narratology” (Mosher and Nelles 1990: 419). In the epilogue to her influential Narrative Fiction; Contemporary Poetics, Rimmon-Kenan ruminates on the deconstructive challenge of narratology, utilizing funereal rhetoric:

In many circles, including some universities, the poetics of narrative fiction is either ignored or treated with suspicion [...]
In other circles, this discipline is already considered dead or at least superseded by deconstruction. (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 130.)

In other words – those of Manfred Jahn – Rimmon-Kenan anticipated narratology’s becoming “sicklied o’er by the pale cast of poststructuralist thought” (Jahn 1999: 190). While Rimmon-Kenan eventually ends her book on an optimistic note about the possibility of narratological life after deconstruction, the epilogue served to prepare the reader for the subsequent critique of narratology, as well as for the transformations the discipline was to undergo during the following decade. As will be discussed with some examples below, starting in the 1980’s many theorists of narrative began to dwell upon the problematic philosophical foundations of the discipline and limitations of its basic tenets, a process Herman (2001b: par. 48) has characterized as narratological “autocritique”.
Rimmon-Kenan called for a reconsideration of narratology for the second time in an article in 1989; she declared that the discipline was in crisis. However, Rimmon-Kenan’s primary concerns were no longer the challenges posed to narratology from the hostile outside theories. Instead, she chastised narrative theory for having “neglected its medium”. Rimmon-Kenan (1989) argued for a more broadly based study of narrative that would pay more attention to the specificity of the linguistic material of narratives. Consequently, she encouraged narratologists to develop new tools for a more ‘language-sensitive’ analysis of literature. Rimmon-Kenan’s shift of focus arguably reflects the general intellectual development of the discipline. While the crisis of the 1980’s was characterized by the questions of context and ideology, the second version of the narratological crisis concerns the need to furnish narratology with new theories and methods. Herman’s (2001b: par. 48) term for the latter phase is, accordingly, narratological “auto-autocritique”.

The topics of the earlier discussion are represented in the 1990/1991 special issues of Poetics Today titled “Re-Visiting Narratology”. The latter phase of the crisis is visible in the proliferation of the interdisciplinary approaches to narrative witnessed during the 1990’s, and in the continuing refinement of the concepts and categories of structuralist narratology. Perhaps crisis is too strong a word? Nonetheless, the dramatic rhetoric continues; from the vantage-point of the new theories of narrative the crisis is, conversely, a revolution (see Richardson and Steen 2002). I turn now to trace the essential themes of both the intra-disciplinary and external critique of narratology in order to draw a somewhat more comprehensive picture of its status and outlook, and to present commentaries on the intellectual issues at stake. What makes narratology particularly susceptible to criticism?
The most conspicuous criticism of narratology has been contextualist: historicist, new historicist, poststructuralist, feminist, post-colonial, and so forth (see Chatman 1990; cf. Darby 2001: 848). The inability and unwillingness of classical narratology to come to terms with questions of gender, power, history, or politics has been frequently noted among the narratologists, as well as among the critics of the discipline. The demand for contextualizing has made the pursuit of a universal theory of narrative seem exceedingly outdated, not to mention ideological.

Revisiting narratology in 1990, Mieke Bal sketched out three alternatives for narratological study: “regression to earlier positions [...], primary focus on application, or rejection of narratology” (Bal 1990: 728). She considered all three problematic, either as symptoms of a stubborn and non-progressive adherence to the methodology of yesteryear, or as a denial of the importance of the problems narratology sought to solve in the first place. (Ibid. 728–729.) Perhaps narratologists have directed their analytic endeavors to the wrong objects? This is Bal’s diagnosis. For her, the appropriate solution consists of “moving on” to other fields of investigation, yet without losing the analytical viewpoint of narratology. To support her case, Bal presents convincing examples of the application of the narratological apparatus to anthropology, the study of the rhetoric of science, and the analysis and interpretation of visual art. She contends that narratology, while mechanistic and “rigidifying” in the study of narrative literature, can “derigidify” other objects of study. (Bal 1990: 730.)

Curiously, by endorsing the adaptation of narratology to the study of other kinds of cultural objects, Bal actually leaves the theoretical foundations of the discipline undiscussed. In other words, Bal implicitly judges the fundamental assumptions that underlie the narratological research sound; appar-
ently, narratology simply yields more satisfying results in the study of other cultural phenomena than literature (cf. Bal 1997: introd.). This conclusion has interesting consequences.

First, almost trivially, the strategy of shifting focus to new objects of study is susceptible to the full range of the theoretical criticism directed toward narratology. The fact that narratological study constitutes a somewhat fresh approach in the analysis of, say, visual art does not alter the discipline’s theoretical foundations. Thus, in seeking the “point” of narratology by widening or shifting the focus of application, Bal does not address the most fundamental critiques narratology has been confronted with.

Second, more interestingly, Bal’s observation about the potentially rigidifying/de-rigidifying tendencies of narratological criticism invites one to reconsider the uses of narratology for the study of narrative literature. If we take at face value Bal’s contention that narratology can be used in novel, liberating ways in the study of the non-literary, why not try to find ways to subject literature to this more flexible narratological criticism as well? In fact, as has been argued earlier, narratology has always had at least an implicit tendency to de-rigidify also its literary object texts. From this perspective only bad narratological study is mechanistic, uninteresting, and violent to its material. There is thus a good chance that the dissemination of narratological ideas to other fields of inquiry, the “centrifugal force of narratology” in Jackson Barry’s (1990) terms, may point toward novel ways of ‘doing narratology’ in its original domain as well. This train of thought seems promising enough.

Many critics, however, do not share Bal’s implied view of the basic theoretical soundness of narratology; for them, making a distinction between successful and unsuccessful narratological research is hardly enough. Discussing
narratology from the perspective of literary history, Liisa Saariluoma (1987) points out that the applicability of the conceptions of narrative offered by the likes of Genette or Franz Stanzel (e.g. 1984) is inevitably limited to the literary conventions dominant at the time of the development of the models. Consequently, Genette’s concept of focalization and Stanzel’s typology of narrative situations are not universally applicable, or at least not historically valid (see also Prince 2001: 50).

This observation might not seem too radical, or even surprising, keeping in mind the openly synchronic nature of Genette’s categories and the contradictory relationship already discussed between Genette’s object text and the theoretical conclusions of his study (on the question of literary-historical change and narratological categories, see Pavel 1990; Bal 1990: 750; Fludernik 1996: 331). Saariluoma continues, however, by portraying narratology as the prime exemplum of modern literary criticism overly engaged in a scientist’s attitude toward its objects. Finally, for Saariluoma, the most fundamental flaw in narratology has to do not with its particular conceptual inadequacies, but with the unfortunate philosophy of science that informs the presuppositions of the discipline. In a more recent essay, though not directly discussing narratology, Saariluoma (2000) describes the proper manner of establishing the relationship between a theoretical apparatus and the object of study: the analyzed text is to be regarded as an ‘other’ upon which the critic should not blindly impose a grid of theoretical categories. The concepts of a particular theory should be regarded, metaphorically, as ‘questions’ which the object of study further refines and provides tentative answers for.

It is easy to see, considering both Genette’s work, and the approach adopted for the present work, that narratological concepts can indeed be utilized as questions, as hypotheses to be corroborated or refuted in the course of an interaction with
the analyzed text. Saariluoma’s criticism, though pertaining to specific theoretical problems as well, demonstrates for the most part that narratological theory and criticism provide easy targets for sweeping accusations of literary-critical scientism, of which they on closer inspection constitute only disappointingly vague examples.

For Herman, precisely the aspirations toward a “science of text” of the early narratologists, most notably Barthes, represent the most valuable heritage of structuralism (see also Dolezel 1979b: 527–529). Seeking to synthesize, among other things, discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and literary study into a truly comprehensive interdisciplinary approach to literature (and other kinds of discourse), Herman considers the notion of scientific study of texts prematurely jettisoned:

I reject the dominant characterization of structuralism as a futile exercise in hyper-rationality, a destructive rage for order. I also dispute the orthodox view that structuralist literary theorists such as Barthes were engaged in a doomed attempt to scientize (the study of) literary art. Instead, I contend that Barthes and his fellow-travellers made a productive, consequential effort to reconfigure the relationship between critico-theoretical and linguistic analysis – to redraw the map that had, in the years preceding the rise of structuralism, fixed the positions of humanistic and scientific inquiry in cognitive and cultural space. In the mid-twentieth century, granted, neither literary theory nor linguistics had reached a stage at which the proposed reconfiguration could be accomplished. There is thus a sense in which the structuralist revolution envisioned by the early Barthes (among others) has started to become possible only now. (Herman 2001a: par. 6.)

Herman’s insistence on the scientific goals of structuralism is in all likelihood misguided, if not outright abhorrent,
from Saariluoma’s perspective. Not only does Herman share the early structuralists’ scientific utopianism, he seems in addition to believe that the scientific study of literature is possible today! In this respect, Herman is a bold representative of narratological auto-autocritique and an agent of Seymour Chatman’s (1993) “narratological empowerment”. There seems, thus, to be a real difference between the philosophical presuppositions of certain kinds of narratology and hermeneutic literary criticism, at least if one chooses to emphasize it. Let me turn to narratology’s alleged ideological burden.

Apparently supporting Saariluoma’s perspective on the scientism of narratology, Virgil Lokke (1987: 546) proposes that narratologists are dependent upon “the eschatology of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century philosophies of science”. Thus narratology, failing to recognize its faulty philosophical premises, cannot become a truly reliable provider of neutral literary data. However, for Lokke, in contrast to Saariluoma, the most crucial flaw of narratology is not its allegedly naive scientism; this standpoint is not pursued any further. Instead, Lokke addresses at length the true danger of narratology, its political insensitivity:

They [the narratologists] look at myths, or tenant farmer’s stories, or migrant worker’s stories, or black, or Indian, or women’s stories, or children’s stories; and they exercise their ingenuity, given certain features of their own academic storytelling habits, in trying to disguise the patronizing way in which they teach others to tell their stories in a more proper way. The impetus of their narratological project is always to subdue the otherness of the alien story, to accommodate, engulf, and destroy. [...] My quarrel with narratology is simply that it seems such a handy dandy imperializing, colonizing strategy, which, frequently enough, conceals its violence to other man’s or woman’s story under the rubric of canons of method, of objectivity,
of detachment, and of sweet and reasonable good will – forgetting, as it is easy to do, that the story of the repression of the voice of the other is, inescapably, another story. (Lokke 1987: 557.)

Lokke’s argumentation condenses the most unsophisticated ideological arguments against narratology one is likely to come across. Indisputably, political awareness and contextual situatedness are features that narratological criticism should pay attention to. There is, however, a difference between pointing out a theoretical or ideological area of indeterminacy, and judging an entire discipline politically corrupt. As has been demonstrated above, one can find sensitivity toward the particular even in the most manifesto-like pieces of narratological writing. It is all in the reading; Lokke’s point of departure, Harshav’s (1979) definition of descriptive poetics, serves as an example. For Harshav, as we have learned earlier, descriptive poetics focuses on specific works of literature instead of constructing generalizing accounts of literature. According to one reading, this is a direct refutation of a view of narratology as executing a program “to accommodate, engulf, and destroy”. Moreover, Harshav’s (ibid.) acknowledgment of the intimate relationship between previous theories of literature and descriptive poetics suggests at least a modicum of contextual awareness. Now, there is obviously ideology and “sweet and reasonable good will” involved in this reading. Lokke is quite right in stating that the expectations and prior theoretical considerations affect the ways an average descriptive narratologist decides what is ‘literary’ (or worth explicating) in a given narrative (see Lokke 1987: 546; Hrushovski 1976: xvi.). Nevertheless, I would argue that Harshav’s distinction between theoretical and descriptive poetics is more important than the ideological bias informing the distinction.
The inevitable ideological myopia of all analysis and interpretation is true enough to be trivial; it hardly justifies considering narratology as merely conforming texts to pre-existing models of narrative. Nonetheless, Lokke is content to consider all narratological study as not merely contextually indifferent, but intentionally repressive and evil. (See McHale 1994.)

Jonathan Culler, himself critical of narratological categories, responded in his Structuralist Poetics to the claims of the ideology of structuralist poetics by utilizing rather defensive rhetoric: “[W]hile structuralism cannot escape from ideology and provide its own foundations, this is of little importance because the critiques of structuralism, and particularly of structuralist poetics, cannot do so either and through their strategies of evasion lead to untenable positions” (Culler 1978: 253).

It is easy to see that the argument, while in principle sensible, is apt to lead to a premature end of an intellectual dialogue. Nonetheless, as Lokke’s critique of narratology makes clear, there is some justification for the ominous feeling that the differences between narratology and extreme contextualism cannot easily be resolved.

To be sure, however, contextual issues have been brought into the framework of narratology, somewhat more moderately. The works of Marie Louise Pratt (1977), Susan Sniader Lanser (1981), Phelan (1989), Rabinowitz (1987), Ross Chambers (1984), and Michael Kearns (1999) provide ways to study both structural and contextually situated aspects of literary works. While these theorists mostly apply the speech-act theory to fiction, their contextualism is, nonetheless, strongly attached to narratological analysis. For instance, Chambers’s strategy of studying the communicative situation of literary works is decidedly formal. In his Story and Situation (1984: e.g. 22–27), Chambers considers the context of reading as structurally encoded in literary texts (cf. Kearns 1999: 20). Contextual
questions can thus be discussed without abandoning the text-oriented approach of narratology.

Feminist narratology is probably the most visible special case of contextually oriented narratology, or “eclectic narratology” in Kearns’s (1999: 3) terms. Robyn Warhol’s (1999: 354) statement on the relationship between structuralism and feminist narratology makes clear that contextualist narratology is not merely ‘applied narratology’: “[O]ne of the goals of feminist narratology was to ‘mess up’ the neatness of structuralism’s binary systems”. Feminist narratology illustrates the reciprocal influence between narratology and its politically involved variations; traditional narratological categories are used as tools of ideological criticism and are, in turn, refined in the process. Nevertheless, sex and gender remain somewhat controversial as narratological concepts, as the debate on feminist narratology between Lanser, Nilli Diengott, and Prince makes evident (Lanser 1986; Diengott 1988; Lanser 1995; Prince 1996).

Continuing his early campaign to legitimize structuralist poetics, Culler envisions a study of literature that seeks to evade the ideological pitfalls of structuralist poetics in a particularly sophisticated manner:

The critic comes to focus, therefore, on the play of the legible and illegible, on the role of gaps, silence, opacity. Although this approach may be thought as a kind of formalism, the attempt to turn content into form and then to read the significance of the play of forms reflects not a desire to fix the text and reduce it to a structure but an attempt to capture its force. The force, the power of any text, even the most unabashedly mimetic, lies in those moments which exceed our ability to categorize, which collide with our interpretive codes but nevertheless seem right. (Culler 1978: 261.)
Culler’s description of the role of the structuralist critic is obviously reminiscent of the poststructuralist approaches to literature. Points of comparison are provided by the reading strategies of deconstructionist criticism, both literary and philosophical – if such a distinction is allowed. The concept of textual force figures prominently in Andrew Gibson’s *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (1996), which provides a recent attempt at constructing a poststructuralist conception of narratology. Informed by Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Serres, Gibson sets out to deconstruct the “geometry” of structuralist narratology. In the process, he presents several eloquent passages of criticism of the ideologies of structuralist narratology (e.g. 1996: 7, 33, 212–216). Perhaps reminding one of the unfortunate exchange among Dorrit Cohn, Mark Seltzer, and John Bender (Cohn 1995a: 17; Cohn 1995b; Seltzer 1995; Bender 1995), Gibson considers the ethos of narratology as essentially oppressive:

Indeed, narratological models have tended to construct narrative levels according to the principle of what Foucault calls ‘hierarchical observation’ as practiced within disciplinary society. […] Foucault refers to the principle in question as ‘embedding’ […], which can hardly fail to remind us of narratology itself. (Gibson 1996: 219.)

With Gibson’s poststructuralist contextualism, we are once again reminded of the ideological bootstraps of narratology: narratological categories link to the power relations of patriarchal society. Mark Currie seeks to alleviate the situation with a more moderate *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998). Echoing Bal’s previously mentioned three alternatives for narratologists, Currie describes the recent history of narratology with three concepts: diversification, deconstruction, politicization (ibid. 1–6). For him, narratology has not so much been sub-
verted by contextualism and deconstruction as modified by them as needed: “Rather than a model of linear displacement, it would be more realistic to see the new criticisms of the 1980’s and the 1990’s as approaches that were enabled and resourced by narratology” (Currie 1998: 10). This view is implicit in Currie’s (ibid. 131–134) loosely deconstructionist reading of Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and explicit in his wry remarks on Edward Said’s interpretation of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (Currie 1998: 149–151). In a constructive spirit, Currie invites consideration of the possibility of an intellectual continuity – in addition to the ever-popular dialectic – between structuralist narratology and its successors/subversors.

The most inconspicuous response to the challenges posed by the critiques of narratology is to quietly continue refining the narratological conceptual apparatus. This is the position that most resembles the approach of the present study. Is this an ideologically corrupt choice? The fact that the theoretical discussion concerning the concepts of traditional narratology persistently continues in journals of narratology does not, to my mind, suggest that the present-day narratologists are in any way oblivious to the theoretical and ideological challenges that the discipline has faced. Conducting narratological research (almost) as before does not imply a naïve adherence to the universalist aspirations of early narratology any more than it implies disregard of the ideological problems inherent in the concepts and models of narratology. The intellectual heritage and conceptual apparatus of structuralist narratology is simply too valuable to be abandoned on a whim. While Fludernik (1996: 341) proposes “throwing out the baby” of traditional narratology (yet preserving the bathwater), many critics consider narratology still a worthwhile topic of theoretical discussion.
William Nelles’s *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative* (1997) is a recent book-length example of this; Nelles’s study of embedded narratives is actually a comprehensive narratological theory disguised as a study of “Chinese-box” narration. Most important, the study confines itself to rethinking basic narratological concepts strictly in the framework of structuralist narratology. Nelles’s approach exemplifies most clearly the relaxation of the crisis of narratology. This is noticeable, for instance, in his discussion of the notion of narrativity, concluding in a rather pragmatic definition:

Narrativity, if I may so call it, is the product of a tropological operation by which the metaphor of narration is applied to a series of words on a page. To read a text by means of the trope of narration is to read out of it a narrator and its voice, and a narratee and its ear. […] The text read literally is a series of words – the text read metaphorically through the trope of narration becomes a narrative. […] In other words [:] narratives are those texts we use narratology to study. (Nelles 1997: 116; see also Kearns 1999: 2, 40.)

The relief of crisis anxiety is also evident in Nelles’s (1997: 162) meditation on the triumph of narratology over its erstwhile nemesis, deconstruction: “I suspect that many poststructuralists will follow the lead of [J. Hillis] Miller […], much of whose work hardly breathes the word ‘deconstruction’, concentrating rather on (highly perspicuous) analyses of narrative voice and point of view”.

To conclude: the criticism and crisis of narratology has prompted several varieties of response in the narratological circles, roughly corresponding to the ones Bal (1990: 728) proposed for narratology. One alternative, as has become evident, is to move toward application of certain useful concepts for novel purposes. As a result, narratology has branched out
to other disciplines; Martin Kreiswirth’s (2000: 295) list of fields affected by the “narrativist turn” includes communication theory, pedagogy, sociology, cognition, therapy, memory, jurisprudence, politics, language acquisition, and artificial intelligence. On the other hand, recent times have seen attempts at an ideological refinement of narratology; at making narratology more suitable for the purposes of ideological criticism. The development of specialized narratologies for the needs of specific areas of interest, such as feminist narratology, attests to this. Chatman (1993) seeks legitimation for narratology – if all else fails? – from literary pedagogy; by teaching narratology, it is possible to make the students of literature more perceptive readers and interpreters of texts. Finally, as Nelles’s example makes evident, structuralist narratology continues to produce refinements of traditional theoretical concepts, crisis or no crisis.

The most ambitious response to the alleged crisis of narratology is the pursuit of novel theoretical ideas to complement or replace the structuralist framework. The following two sections will introduce some ideas of literary theory based on cognitive science and possible world semantics, and briefly review the history and criticism of the approaches. More detailed analyses are postponed until chapters 5 and 7, in which exemplary representatives of both theoretical persuasions are critically examined.

2.2. A Cognitive Revolution?

In 1991, Mark Turner argued for a new kind of profession of English and, ostensibly, literary study in general. In his view, the hitherto elitist, marginal, and self-legitimizing discipline should start paying attention to the cognitive parameters common to all uses of language, if not all thinking in general:
An attempt to reintegrate the study of language and literature as grounded in human cognition is, I suggest, the most likely path to restoring our profession to its natural place as central cultural and intellectual activity. (Turner 1991: 24.)

Informed by the theories of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, among others, as well as disgruntled by the allegedly sorry state of literary criticism, Turner examines ways in which literary production and reception can be attributed to basic functions and properties of the embodied mind. Turner is a prominent figure among the literary scholars for whom the interdisciplinary theoretical framework of cognitive science promises novel insights into literary analysis and interpretation. One of the major attractions of cognitive literary theory consists in its promise to provide literary study with a broad theoretical background; most important, it seems, one that has nothing to do with structuralism.

Of course, cognitive considerations in literary study did not start with Turner’s declaration of the birth of the cognitivist paradigm. Sabine Gross (1997: 272; see also Richardson and Steen 2002: 2–3) divides the cognitive study of language and literature into three main research traditions: cognitive reading research, research into narrative structure and discourse comprehension, and the cognitive study of concepts and language. Thus, in addition to the most visible branch of cognitivism, the theory of metaphors and concepts exemplified by Turner, there is also a tradition of cognitive literary study in the sense of actual empirical research of reading, as manifested, for instance, in the journal *Poetics*. Elrud Ibsch (1990: 411) describes this tradition as the result of the “cognitive turn” in linguistics and literary studies. In terms of critical attention, however, the phrase “cognitive turn of literary studies” would perhaps more appropriately be attributed to the theo-
retical cognitive study of literature exemplified by the likes of Gilles Fauconnier, Lakoff, and Turner. For instance, the special issues on cognitivist literary theory of the journal *Poetics Today* attest to this (4/1992; 3/1999; 1/2002; see Fludernik, Freeman, and Freeman 1999; Richardson and Steen 2002). However, many contributors of a recent anthology of essays on narrative perspective (van Peer and Chatman 2001) predict a bright future for also the empirical psychologically oriented narratology, or “psychonarratology” in the nomenclature of Peter Dixon and Marisa Bortolussi (2001).

While many cognitivist critics and theorists have concentrated on the study of poetic and other metaphors – “conceptual integration” and “blending” being the current terms (Turner and Fauconnier 1999; Turner 2002) – narrative texts have not been similarly attractive for cognitivist literary theorists. Nonetheless, some narratological applications of the insights of cognitive science have been made by theorists such as Fludernik (1993, 1996) Jahn (1996, 1997, 1999), Ansgar Nünning (2001), and Herman (1997, 2001b, 2002). Even though the work of these scholars is to some extent related to the empirical psychological study of narrative comprehension, there is good reason, at least for now, to demarcate between empirically oriented “psychonarratology” and theoretical cognitivist narratology. Van Peer’s and Chatman’s anthology on narrative perspective illustrates the matter. While many articles acknowledge the importance of an interdisciplinary narratological study, the narratological and psychonarratological accounts of narrative remain distinct: the psychologists (e.g. Graesser et al. 2001) do not generally utilize the findings of recent narratological theory; the narratologists do not make use of the results provided by psychological testing. Most interestingly, there seems to be no significant connection between the conceptions of *cognitivist* narrative theorists
such as Fludernik, Jahn, or Nünning, and the empirical research conducted by the psychologists.

This is not to say that the parallel efforts of literary scholars and psychologists were completely cut off from each other; it merely suggests that cognitive narratology is still a pronouncedly literary effort. For this reason, I will limit the discussion of cognitivist literary study to the theoretical cognitive narratology, leaving the tradition of empirical research mostly undiscussed. Fludernik’s version of cognitive narratology, Natural Narratology, is the subject of chapter 5; the following seeks to provide a general account of the general theoretical assumptions shared by the theorists of cognitive narratology.

Cognitive accounts of narrative rely heavily on the concepts of *frames* and *scripts*, discussed in cognitive science and the research of artificial intelligence by Marvin Minsky, Roger Schank and Robert Abelson. A frame, in Minsky’s definition, is a remembered framework to be adapted to fit reality by changing details as necessary […]. The “top” levels of the frame are fixed, and represent things that are always true about the supposed situation. The lower levels have many terminals – “slots” that must be filled by specific instances or data. (Minsky 1979: 1–2; quoted in Jahn 1999: 174.)

A script, according to Schank and Abelson, constitutes a structure that describes appropriate sequences of events in a particular context. A script is made up of slots and requirements about what can fill these slots. (Schank and Abelson 1977: 41; quoted in Jahn 1999: 174.)
In cognitive literary theory, frame is used to refer to a prototypical, or ‘default’, literary situation which the reader utilizes in the interpretation of specific texts. Jahn (1999: 174–175) proposes more literary definitions for the concepts of the frame of a narrative situation and the genre-specific script of narrative performance. It is easy to see that the narratological interpretations of the concepts overlap just as the originals do. In fact, a useful way to think about the concepts is to consider them different aspects of a single cognitive process of using pre-established prototypical interpretive models in order to comprehend a new narrative situation (see also Herman 1997). Lakoff’s (1999: 392–393) strategy of situating the concepts of frame, script, and schema under the more general notion of propositional cognitive models reflects this basic similarity. Richard Gerrig (2001: 306) proposes a more idiosyncratic notion of external perspective, defined as the “unique point of view with which each reader approaches a text”. (Internal perspective, by contrast, is the perspective represented in the text itself.) While Gerrig’s concept bears a resemblance to the previously mentioned conceptual family of frames and scripts, it is not meant to be used in the formulation of a theory of text. Working in the domain of empirical psychological reading research, Gerrig considers the notion of external perspective merely a general framework within which to empirically study the processing of texts by actual readers. In this respect, Gerrig’s example once again reflects the significant difference between the goals and procedures of cognitive narratology and empirical literary research. While the approaches share the processual view of narrative analysis, their methodologies and goals remain very different.

The most essential difference between structuralist narratology and cognitive narratology is one of emphasis. Jahn (1997; 1999) adopts directional metaphors “top-down” and
“bottom-up” to describe the difference. Cognitive analysis of narrative proceeds “top-down”, concentrating on the interpretive frames the reader uses to make sense of a narrative. In other words, cognitive narratology is interested in the process of adapting pre-established typicalized structures to specific literary situations. Traditional narratology, by contrast, mostly tends to use refined analyses of bottom-level textual phenomena to formulate more generalized accounts of narrative; hence “bottom-up”. To use more standard terminology, “top-down” entails a holistic view of narrative, while “bottom-up” is a featural approach (see Stanzel 1990).

As a result, the theoretical representations of the oppositely oriented approaches look very different. The cognitivists’ descriptions of narrative are simpler and do not attempt to categorize particularities of specific texts. In this respect, Stanzel’s (e.g. 1984) holistic theory of narrative has proved useful to cognitive narratology. Both Jahn (1997) and Fludernik (1996) provisionally adopt his three situations (authorial, first-person, and figural) as models for their cognitive macro-frames. By contrast, Genette’s account of different agents and aspects of narrative, a “bottom-up” model if there ever was one, categorizes practically everything that is left outside the macro-frames of cognitivists.

The difference in direction and emphasis is the result of the diverging goals of cognitive and structuralist narratology. Unlike traditional narratology, cognitive narratology seeks to explain narrativity, not merely to describe and analyze narratives. Bearing this in mind, it is only natural for the average cognitivist not to be awestruck by dazzling analyses of specific works of literature (see Jahn 1997: 464; cf. 1999: 190–191).

Jahn (1997: 464) is quick to underscore this contrast between a cognitive approach to narrative and “narratological
In Jahn’s view, the traditional narratological analysis of textual features does not manage to describe the actual cognitive processing of narrative structures. He illustrates the issue by quoting Chatman’s comment on his own narratological analysis Joyce’s “Eveline” as a “laborious and unnatural way of reading[;] not what the reader actually does but only a suggestion of what his logic of decision must be like” (Chatman 1978: 206; quoted in Jahn 1997: 463). Now, in one sense there is no clash between “top-down” and “bottom-up” models: cognitivist analysis seeks to describe what happens in the process of reading; analysis such as Chatman’s, by contrast, tries to examine which textual features are likely to influence the process. In the terms of Dixon and Bortolussi (2001: 277–278), cognitive (or psycho-) narratologists concentrate on “text effects”, while structuralists study “text features” (see also Morrow 2001: 226–227; Nüning 2001: 210, 222). Hence, one would suppose that cognitive and structuralist accounts of narrative provided complementary views on texts: a cognitivist-structuralist narratological symbiosis. However, Jahn (ibid. 463–465) argues that a cognitive analysis actually points toward different interpretive conclusions than a meticulous narratological close-reading. A traditional narratological analysis such as Chatman’s might draw its conclusions from cognitively irrelevant textual details, and vice versa (see also Gerrig 2001: 305). It seems, therefore, that “bottom-up” and “top-down” approaches cannot be considered unproblematically as complementary analytic strategies. This is a disturbing observation. How do other theorists approach this problem?

Fludernik’s (1996) distinction between holistic and featurist analysis is less pronounced. She does not hesitate to present complex narratological/linguistic readings that are as
“laborious and unnatural” as Chatman’s, both in terms of the everyday experiences of reading and her theory of interpretive cognitive frames. Textual analysis in the context of Fludernik’s Natural Narratology is understood as the study of formal and contextual gestures toward likely interpretations of the reader. In short, Fludernik considers “top-down” and “bottom-up” analytic approaches as more or less complementary (see also Fludernik 2001c: 102–103).

Menakhem Perry’s (1979) early article on the dynamics of meaning-production is also an example of a synthesis of holistic and featurist analytic strategies. Perry figures among the predecessors of Jahn’s (1997) cognitive narratology, mainly because he uses the concept of frame to describe the way in which readers organize the information provided by a literary text (Perry 1979: e.g. 36–37; see also van Dijk 1976). For present purposes, the most important feature of Perry’s analysis is its reliance on both holistic and featurist strategies. He presents a general theory of the dynamics of frame adoption and substitution, and discusses ways in which the prior expectations of readers guide their interpretation. In this respect, Perry’s account is a “top-down” model. However, on the level of narrative analysis, Perry relies on interpretive close-reading and studies textual and thematic features, large and small, in order to present a “reconstructed first reading” (ibid. 357) of his example text, Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily”. Thus, Perry’s narrative analysis proceeds in a decidedly “bottom-up” manner. The holistic perspective is not lost, however; in the course of the analysis, Perry considers the potential effects the bottom-level textual features have on reader’s choices of interpretive frames. In this respect, Perry’s approach is not that different from Fludernik’s. Most important, Perry makes explicit the “reconstructed” nature of his analysis: he presents one ‘collection’ of textual features that are likely to influence
reader’s interpretation, but acknowledges that the holistic interpretive framework allows for other readings as well:

The principles I have enumerated are principles whereby one can justify the comprehension of a text, as well as principles which the readers follow intuitively. Misunderstandings by specific readers stem from unskilled application of these principles, but not from failure to use them. I agree with Hrushovski (1976: 3) when he says that “all readings, ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, even ‘misunderstandings,’ as well as ‘partial’ readings, employ similar techniques.” (Perry 1979: 46.)

It seems that considering featurist narratological analyses as descriptions of specific instances of the cognitive processing of texts alleviates the contrast between holistic and featurist approaches. According to this reasoning, bottom-level narratological analysis produces ‘transcriptions’ of exemplary readings of texts, not the definitive descriptions of them. As one would expect, narratologists’ armchair analyses and interpretations of literary texts are overly refined in comparison to real readers’ non-analytic reading experiences. Empirical research on narrative comprehension has provided ample support for this claim (see Ibsch 1990; van Peer 2001: 337). A narrative analysis slowly and painstakingly performed by a skilled reader of literature is, of course, more detailed than the ‘working analysis’ of a test subject / first-time reader. It is, however, misguided to consider this a reason to refrain from producing detailed narratological analyses. Sabine Gross (1997: 286) defends the cause of traditional literary study in a similar vein: “In more ways than one, literary criticism at its best does exactly what Turner attributes to cognitivism: it exemplifies and highlights how the human mind works and engages texts.” Featurist analysis understood in this way is not terribly alien to cognitive narratology, even though it might
sometimes draw attention to cognitively irrelevant details of narrative.

Jahn’s approach to cognitive narratology, while not yet providing an account as detailed as Fludernik’s Natural Narratology, seems to consider traditional narratology principally a source of inspiration. While Jahn (1997) builds his approach on frame theory and Jackendoff’s (e.g. 1999: 327) systems of preference-rules, his theory also springs from Stanzel’s narrative situations, Bal’s account of focalization and narrative agency, and Meir Sternberg’s Proteus Principle. Here is Jahn on the relationship between structuralist narratology and its cognitive rival:

The lesson to be learned from Artificial Intelligence is that one can use process models (like stacks and scripts) as well as state models (like frames) without losing the heuristics of structuralism; specifically, an enriched and flexible structuralism of this kind allows narratology to escape from its atomistic-holistic doublebind. (Jahn 1999: 190–191.)

Moreover, Jahn utilizes the concepts of frames and systems of preference-rules in a constructivist rather than a cognitivist spirit. In this respect, Jahn’s cognitive narratology is less clearly linked to cognitive psychology than to a more general conception of interpretive frames (see Jahn 1997: 441–442). This is evident, for instance, in Jahn’s (1999: 191) tentative turn toward a more culturally determined notion of preference-rule systems, which would “differentiate as well as define what Stanley Fish [...] has termed interpretive communities”. Jahn’s approach, therefore, bears a resemblance to Nünning’s (2001) “constructivist” narratology, whose goal is to examine both the strategies through which readers process narrative literature and the textual features relevant in that processing.
Cognitivist literary theory has confronted a certain amount of critical resistance. Gross (1997) finds at least Turner’s (1991) version of cognitivist literary study problematic insofar as it is grounded in pseudo-scientific rhetoric and at times in circular reasoning. In a similar though less hostile manner, Tony Jackson reviews the achievements of the approach without being particularly impressed by the interpretive achievements of cognitive literary study:

If evolutionary psychology and cognitive science are really to matter in literary studies, then they will have to do more than say what literature is. In other words, if a theory does not produce much of interest in the way of practice, then however true the theory may be, it just will not make much difference to most literary scholars, who after all have a bottom-line concern with interpreting specific texts. (Jackson 2000: 338.)

Richard van Oort (forthcoming) sets out to debunk the discipline of cognitive linguistics and, consequently, cognitivist literary theory on the basis of evolutionary psychology. Drawing, among other things, on the results of research conducted on the communicative abilities of primates, van Oort demonstrates that the cognitive explanation of concept formation prevalent in the theories of Lakoff and Johnson is fundamentally flawed. Regardless of its validity, van Oort’s critique underscores a troublesome feature implicit in interdisciplinary research such as cognitive literary study, in Michael Fischer’s (1996) words, that of “putting literary critics in the passive position of depending on the (still unsettled) expertise of another discipline – [...] waiting for results and then modifying their self-understanding accordingly”. There is, of course, always the option of becoming an expert on the field of evolutionary psychology – this alternative hardly seems inviting to most literary scholars (cf. Turner 2002: 17).
The fate of cognitive literary theory, however, is unlikely to depend primarily on the future advancement of cognitive science. From a traditional viewpoint, the success of a literary theory relies, ultimately, on its continuing force to inform interesting analyses and interpretations of specific works of literature, as well as on its heuristic value in terms of theory-formation. I mean the formation of literary theory (see Jackson 2002: 176–177). The theoretical foundation of traditional narratology is an obvious point of comparison; Saussurean structuralism continues to serve as an (admittedly vague) theoretical background of narratology long after it has become all but obsolete in linguistics. At present, however, the primary attraction of cognitive literary theory is, arguably, its close relation to cognitive science and thus to the prestige of empirical sciences.

2.3. From Modal to Narrative Semantics

The above discussion of cognitive narratology strongly suggests that the approach presents itself as a new paradigm for literary studies in “the age of cognitive science” (Turner 1991). Despite the heuristic use it makes of the models of structuralist narratology, the cognitive explanation of literature inescapably demarcates cognitive narratology from its traditional predecessors, at least regarding its fundamental research objectives. In this respect, narratology based on possible world semantics appears to provide a softer variety of new narrative theory. Here is Marie-Laure Ryan on the topic, writing a decade ago:

I [...] believe that the best use for the ideas put on the critical market by PWT [possible worlds theory] is to let them infiltrate the treatment of a variety of cultural phenomena from a variety of point of views, in the same way that concepts of the
Genette school of narratology infiltrated most brands of criticism and eventually spread into interdisciplinary discourse studies. PWT does not offer a critical ideology, but a collection of analytical tools applicable to many disciplines, in the service of many purposes. (Ryan 1992: 554.)

Apparently, possible world semantics does not claim to provide a new explanation for literature, but a conceptual framework for new ways of looking at literature. Ryan’s comparison with the dissemination of the concepts of Genettean narratology is particularly interesting; it remains to be seen whether the terms of possible world semantics acquire the status of interdisciplinary descriptive tools that certain concepts of traditional narratology arguably possess. The most revealing expression in the preceding quotation is “PWT does not offer a critical ideology”; Ryan attributes the stance of possible world theory to the deliberately non-ideological attitude of structuralist narratology. From this perspective, possible world semantics provides a relatively adaptable complement to previous models of narrative analysis: a supplementary set of handy concepts. This view is problematic, however. Possible world semantics does in fact offer a critical ideology.

This is evident in the decisively political rhetoric with which Thomas Pavel opens his Fictional Worlds (1986), the first book-length study on the possible worlds of fiction. He comments on the lack of concern for the semantic dimension of fiction in structuralist narratology:

The moratorium of referential issues has by now become obsolete. Freed from the constraints of the textualist approach, theory of fiction can respond again to the world-creating powers of imagination and account for the properties of fictional existence and worlds, their complexity, incompleteness, remoteness,
and integration within the general economy of culture. (Pavel 1986: 10.)

While not setting out to overthrow the “textualist approach” altogether, possible world semantics does suggest a shift of focus from structures to the relationships between texts and worlds, actual and possible. Possible world narratology has since the mid-1970’s re-introduced the concerns of reference and meaning to narratological theory by combining the age-old intuitive metaphor of a literary ‘world’ with the concept of possible world as it is presented in modal logic. The outcome of this synthesis of a metaphor and a concept (or two metaphors, if you like) indeed establishes a literary-critical belief. It is an ideology insisting both on the essentialness of the world-creating properties of literature and on the textual origins of the projected worlds and meanings. A passage from a relatively early essay by Lubomír Dolezel succinctly illustrates the inherent duality, hermeneutic/formalist, of literary possible world semantics:

Unlike traditional hermeneutics, narrative semantics is a study of meaning expressed in forms, a study of formally organized meaning. Unlike formalism, narrative semantics does not claim that the aesthetic effect results from ‘pure’ forms; rather, its source is located in the totality of the literary work. […] The formal base of meaning warrants the objectivity (inter-subjectivity) of textual meaning. The task of narrative semantics is to recover and to formulate the intrinsic meaning of narrative texts. (Dolezel 1979: 193.)

In short, possible world narratology aims to incorporate referential questions of fiction into the study of textual structures. Dolezel’s insistence on the textual basis of narrative semantics is an interesting point of comparison with Pavel’s “con-
straints of the textualist approach”. Narrative semantics, while considering referential issues, is in a sense a paradoxically textualist pursuit.

How does one manage to utilize the concepts of modal logic in literary analysis and interpretation? Let me again cite Dolezel’s description of the assumptions underlying the procedure. Again, the tone is not one of presenting minute adjustments to previous approaches to narratology:

For imaginative literature, [the perspective of possible world theory] is doubly significant: first, if literary texts refer at all, they certainly refer to possible fictional worlds, rather than to the real world. [...] Second, and more importantly, possible-worlds semantics leads us to postulate a more dynamic relationship between the literary text and its world; therefore, every literary text has to construct its domain of reference, has to bring its fictional world into existence. [...] The most attractive feature of possible-worlds semantics is the scope of its explanatory power. All the traditional problems of meaning in literature can be rephrased in the metalanguage of this theory; moreover, this approach reveals [...] semantic aspects of literature which up to now have not been noticed or have not been assigned their proper significance. (Dolezel 1983: 511–512.)

As many discussions of possible world semantics document, the origin of the concept lies in the philosophy of Leibniz; a multitude of possible worlds exist as thoughts in God’s mind, and God; being infinitely wise and good, has chosen the best of these for actualization (e.g. Ryan 1991: 16). The notion was re-defined by philosophers such as Saul Kripke and Jaakko Hintikka during the 1960’s and 1970’s; subsequently, the metaphor “possible world” has been transformed into a theoretical concept of modal semantics (of which the present survey does
not pretend to be a comprehensive discussion). In Kripke’s famous formulation, the *model structure* of a system of possible worlds consists of a set $K$ of possible worlds, a ‘privileged’ member $G$ of this set (the real world), and a relation $R$ that links together the worlds belonging to the set $K$. (Kripke 1963: 84, 91; paraphrased in e.g. Pavel 1986: 44–45; Dolezel 1998: 12–13.) Hence, the worlds of a particular ‘universe’ are alternative (or accessible) to each other in ways determined by the relation between them (*relation of alternativeness* in Hintikka 1963: 66).

The postulation of a system of interconnected possible worlds provides indispensable tools for modal semantics. Following the logic of Kripke’s formulation, it is possible to interpret propositions in terms of their truth-values not only in the real world, but also in a constellation of alternative worlds stipulated around it. Thus *necessarily true* propositions have a positive truth-value in every accessible possible world. *Possible* propositions, by contrast, have a positive truth-value at least in one possible world accessible from the privileged (real) world. Accordingly, *necessarily false* propositions are false in all accessible possible worlds.

The relevance of possible worlds to literary theory is nearly self-evident. The concept of possible world joins forces with the intuitive notion of the imaginative worlds of literature and provides a more rigorous terminology for talking about them. However, the conceptual apparatus of modal semantics is not as such applicable to literary study. It is a duly acknowledged fact that for logicians possible worlds are abstract constructions stipulated in order mostly to elucidate the theoretical problems of counterfactuals, whereas students of literature consider the possible worlds of fiction as full-fledged, fully furnished imaginative domains, ‘pregnant’ worlds in Umberto Eco’s (1979: 218) terms.
This discrepancy, among others, has prompted the proponents of possible world narratology to adjust their terminology accordingly: for instance, Pavel (1986) uses the concept of fictional world; Ryan (1991: 21–23) discusses recentered fictional universes. From a more rigorous perspective, however, simple modification of nomenclature does not suffice. Ruth Ronen has chastised literary scholars for their sloppy use of the philosophical concept:

[I]t seems that a fictional world can be considered a possible world only in a radically modified way. The analogy between fictional worlds and possible worlds must obey severe restrictions. Consequently, ‘a possible world’ can only be considered a metaphor for fictional existence. In examining the conceptual components that build the notion of possible worlds […], one recognizes that these are understood and interpreted differently when applied to the case of fictional worlds. One might conclude that the interdisciplinary move of possible worlds from philosophy to literary theory necessarily entails a considerable loss of original meaning. (Ronen 1996: 27; see also Ronen 1994.)

In Ronen’s (1996: 28–29) view, both the literary and the philosophical interpretations of possible world reflect a major change in the understanding of meaning-production, a “relaxation” of the correspondence theory of truth in favor of more pragmatic interpretations. Thus, while the terminology of possible world semantics as such is not directly applicable to literary analysis, the disciplines share a fundamental belief about the ‘nature of things’. According to Ronen (ibid.), this is the truly promising, and philosophically legitimate, intellectual overlap between literary theory and modal logic.

Unfortunately, however, precisely the ‘heretical’ applications of the concepts of possible world theory have so far pro-
vided the most interesting interpretive results. One is tempted to undertake yet another “willing suspension of disbelief” – regarding conceptual accuracy – and make the most of the fertile interdisciplinarity, however theoretically dubious it may be. The importance of the relationship of creative unfaithfulness between modal semantics and possible world narratology is manifest, for instance, in the interpretation of the concept of *accessibility*. Hintikka emphasizes the decisiveness of the relation of alternativeness in the formulation of modal semantics:

> What we have [...] therefore is a slightly modified version of the traditional idea that possibility equals truth in some “possible world” while necessary equals truth in all “possible worlds”. [O]ur only departure from the traditional idea lies in rejecting the presupposition that all “possible worlds” are on a par. [...] Hence the use of the alternativeness relation and the consequent appearance of the phrases “some alternative possible world” and “all alternative possible worlds” where you probably expected the simpler phrases “some possible world” and “all possible worlds”, respectively. (Hintikka 1963: 67, see also 76–77.)

The relation of alternativeness is thus, again, the organizing principle that makes possible worlds more than merely intuitive concepts. This is also true in possible world narratology. However, in Ryan’s (1991: 31–33) account, the *accessibility relation* is in addition, and most interestingly, used to make *generic* distinctions between texts. Ryan presents a refined set of accessibility relations, the combinations of which determine the generic contours of a particular fictional universe. Ryan’s way of turning an abstract concept of modal semantics into a useful analytic tool is nothing short of ingenious. And, most important, it reflects the general attitude with
which literary scholars approach possible world semantics: “Make it literary!”

McHale’s (1987) study of postmodernist fiction exemplifies the use of possible world semantics in a literary study that seeks to provide genre-specific descriptive accounts of narrative and thematic strategies. McHale utilizes both Pavel’s and Eco’s accounts of fictional worlds and entities to analyze the ontological instability and playfulness of experimental narratives. Of particular interest for McHale is the concept of *transworld identity*. McHale’s discussion of the notion illustrates, once again, the surprising literary-theoretical value of the abstract concepts of modal semantics.

Possible world narratology is susceptible to the same contextualist and philosophical arguments that have been raised against structuralist narratology. It is not surprising, then, to find Gibson (1996: 70) criticizing Pavel’s account of narrative worlds for its adherence to referential and thus *readerly* issues of literature. From a poststructuralist perspective, narrative semantics is bound to appear ideological; after all, as Gibson (ibid. 89) notes, possible world narratology grants the real world “ontological priority” over the worlds of make-believe. Furthermore, though Gibson does not discuss the issue further, the notion of fictional universes recentered around a privileged ‘fictionally actual’ world – an essential insight in possible world narratology – would in all likelihood seem even more oppressive. Gibson’s critique illustrates the relatively meager chances for a meaningful exchange of ideas between poststructuralism and possible world narratology. All the fundamental tenets of narrative semantics based on possible worlds are thoroughly alien to poststructuralist thought: the referential, world-creating potential of literary language, the hierarchical structuring of narrative universes, the textual basis of narrative semantics. In this respect, the difference between the
disciplines is greater than that between structuralist narratology and poststructuralist poetics. After all, if nothing else, they have the shared problem of signification to quibble over.

Presenting a “friendly challenge” to narrative semantics, Hutcheon (1996) suggests that the complex and contradictory worlds of postmodernist fiction exceed the descriptive capacity of possible world narratology. By analyzing the “politics of impossible worlds” in Coetzee’s *Foe*, Hutcheon (ibid. 225) points out the necessity to go beyond the concept of impossible world, lest possible world narratology becomes irrelevant vis-à-vis the politics of literary experimentation. Dolezel’s response to the challenge again demonstrates a perspectival difference between contextually motivated literary criticism and possible world narratology. Dolezel (1998: 221–224; see also Sternberg 2001: 157–158) concedes that the narrative universe of *Foe* indeed is constituted according to the logic of impossibility. However, Dolezel (ibid. 224) is quick to downplay the decisiveness of the aesthetics of postmodernism: “The impossibility of the fictional world of a [postmodernist] rewrite is judged by the same criterion that applies to all fictional worlds: only those are impossible that contain or imply contradictory states of affair.”

The exchange of ideas between Hutcheon and Dolezel, and also McHale’s (1987) work on the world-play of postmodernist fiction, reflect the surprising fact that precisely the strong attachment to the tradition of philosophical analysis and fairly conservative views of textual meaning-production make possible world narratology a useful framework for the analysis of experimental fiction. The traditional theoretical presuppositions of possible world narratology and its considerable use-value in the study of non-traditional texts such as *Gravity’s Rainbow* form an irresistible paradox.
3. Gravity’s Rainbow as a Commentary on Narrative Hierarchy

In the following two chapters, some of the concepts of structuralist narratology will be subjected to the narrative intricacies of Gravity’s Rainbow. The goal is not so much to relish schadenfreude vis-à-vis the inevitable weaknesses and blind spots in narrative theory as it is to point toward ways in which Pynchon’s fiction explores the margins of narrative conventions, in the process implicitly presenting critiques of specific narratological ideas. The order of the analyses – moving from the traditional models of narrative analysis to more current approaches – is not meant to suggest a teleology of narrative theory. Pynchon’s fundamentally deconstructive attitude toward literary conventions and theories will become evident also in the discussion of the more recent developments of narrative theory. Hence narratological work based on possible world semantics and cognitive science is just as susceptible to the effects of the textual peculiarities of Pynchon’s fiction as are more traditional approaches.

In this chapter the novel will be dealt with specifically as a critique of narrative hierarchy. From the perspective of a Pynchon scholar, Gravity’s Rainbow is perhaps too obvious an example of innovation inside the novelistic tradition: much ink has been spilled over its exuberance. It is, however, still an interesting case, at least for two reasons:

First, Gravity’s Rainbow’s way of re-assessing and commenting on the hierarchies of narrative is more subtle than what one would expect in the light of the scholarly work on the novel and its overall reputation. The novel’s relationship to the traditional novelistic conventions is subversive in a contradictory manner: Gravity’s Rainbow exhibits a strong attach-
Second, the way Pynchon’s novel implicitly criticizes the conventions of narrative bears some resemblance to the criticism that structuralist narratology has recently faced. One can see an analogical relationship between the poststructuralist criticism of narratological concepts and *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s commentary on narrative tradition. Characteristic of both is a strategy of simultaneous subversion and confirmation. While the commentary implicit in *Gravity’s Rainbow* should not be regarded as essentially literary-theoretical, one can at least play with the idea of the novel having some traits of the criticism of narratology. Pynchon’s work could perhaps best be described as raising the same questions that literary criticism does, however differently.

First I will explicate, with the aid of examples, the contradictory relationship between classical structuralist narratology and its poststructuralist critique. After this, I will analyze *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s implicit commentary on the conventions of narrative hierarchy. The analysis is divided into two sections, the first of which examines the category of the narrator, while the second deals with the novel’s metafictive situations. In conclusion, I will discuss the nature of the critique of conventions inscribed in the novel, and its relationship to literary theory and to so-called theoretical fiction.

### 3.1. Subversive Confirmation

As has been discussed earlier, narratology has received its most conspicuous criticism from theorists and critics who have pointed out the contextual insensitivity of structuralist narratology. For the present discussion, this front of the criticism of narratology is not particularly relevant. The
deconstructive attack on the hierarchical concepts of the discipline, however, is all the more interesting a point of comparison for Pynchon’s view of the novelistic tradition. Let me illustrate the matter with two examples, the first already a classic formulation, the second a fairly recent one.

Culler’s well-known deconstruction of the dichotomy between the concepts story and discourse (1981: 169–172) is an illuminating example of the way in which the deconstructive criticism responds to hierarchical concepts of narratology. One cannot claim that Culler destroys or even renders the concepts of story and discourse unusable, even though he questions the assumptions underlying them.

In Culler’s (1981: 169–172) analysis, the views that story exists prior to and regardless of discourse, and that the rules and demands of discourse produce the story, are shown to be incompatible. The critic has to decide which interpretive option to rely on in order for the analysis to be possible. However, there is no logical or absolute solution as to which is the correct one. The hierarchy between story and discourse is for Culler an inevitable starting-point of criticism, despite its lack of ‘natural’ basis. In the absence of a fundamental principle, the concepts go on with their useful and necessary lives.

A similar contradictory logic about the relationship between poststructuralism and narratological concepts is to be found in Gibson’s previously mentioned study Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative (1996). Gibson introduces a series of new narratological concepts as an alternative to the apparatus of traditional narratology. Gibson’s most radical argument is directed toward the “geometricity” of narratology, the allegedly restricting thinking in terms of hierarchies and centers. In effect, Gibson wants to use terms such as “energetics” instead of geometrics and “narrative laterality” instead of narrative hierarchy. The following quotation
(analyzing Robbe-Grillet’s *The Voyeur*) reveals, however, Gibson’s contradictory attitude toward the notion of narrative levels, especially in the light of Gibson’s strong views on the concepts of narratology:

In producing a multiplicity of possible spaces, it [*The Voyeur*] rather produces the virtual spaces of thought itself. In part.

In part, *The Voyeur* also seems to retreat from the very multiplicity of the spaces it produces. [c]ertain parts of *The Voyeur* appear to resolve the indeterminacies which others create. [T]he text might appear to lure the reader into radically unorthodox expectations and then frustrate them. This would suggest that there are at least two narrative levels. (Gibson 1996: 227–228.)

Gibson’s way of interpreting the novel exhibits the logic of simultaneous subversion and confirmation, beautifully in concord with the deconstructive tradition. On the one hand, Robbe-Grillet’s novel illustrates for Gibson the idea of indeterminacy and narrative multiplicity. On the other, it forces the critic to finally acknowledge the novel’s internal logic and hierarchy. Recognition of this tension obviously makes Gibson’s interpretation a strong one. Nonetheless, an interesting light is shed on the polemic against all thinking in terms of geometricity and hierarchy (see also Fludernik 1996: 305, 314–315; cf. Ryan 1999: 137–138). *Gravity’s Rainbow* comments on narrative conventions with a similar double logic. The novel does not hesitate to construct narratives highly dependent upon the conventions of narrative hierarchy, only to make them look ridiculous in the next instant. The reader of the novel witnesses, like Culler and Gibson above, the peculiar situation in which the underlying assumptions of narrative are undermined, but the practice of narrative is not. An interesting point of comparison is Rimmon-Kenan’s (1982) article analyzing the in-
terchangeability of narrative levels in Brooke-Rose’s novel *Thru* (1975). According to Rimmon-Kenan’s analysis, Brooke-Rose’s novel is drastic in its use of extreme narrative gimmicks to create ambiguity of narrative hierarchy. As will be seen below, Pynchon’s strategy is somewhat subtler in its critique of conventions.

Naturally, Pynchon’s ways of criticizing the novelistic tradition have been dealt with in previous studies. Reference to the complexity and innovativity of the narrative is a strong convention in *Gravity’s Rainbow* criticism. The alienating effect of changing narratorial characteristics and of the severe unreliability of the narrator has received its due attention from all critics. One response to the overdriven narration is suspicion: is the author making fun of the readers? (E.g. Moore 1987: 43–44; Safer 1989: 106.) McHale admits:

Pynchon’s readers have every right to feel conned, bullied, betrayed. Indeed, these responses are the essence of the aesthetic effect of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. (McHale 1992: 81.)

*Gravity’s Rainbow* leads its readers astray only temporarily, though. The novel is constantly offering the reader interpretive strategies, only to debunk them later on (cf. Saariluoma 1992: 250–251). In the view of traditional narratology this leading-astray is of course not directed at the reader, who probably is able to recognize the novel’s strategy, and perhaps to enjoy it, too.

In effect, the novel merely *seems* to fool its reader. It is very difficult to be convinced of this, though: the ghostly figure of an author smirking at the reader’s efforts never quite vanishes.

Over-emphasis on the reader-fooling strategy turns out, however, to produce a somewhat simplified interpretation of
Gravity’s Rainbow’s relationship to the narrative tradition. The critic becomes too much of a “genius of meta-solutions” (Gravity’s Rainbow 102, henceforth GR). It seems commonsensical and gratifying to explain away Gravity’s Rainbow’s peculiarities as grossly parodying literary conventions and mocking its readers. This train of thought is not very analytical and concludes in a shallow interpretation. The novel does not merely parody and question, fool and lead astray.

One discovers the most interesting re-assessments of narrative conventions by paying less attention to the obvious chaos and silliness of the text, and more to the relationship between chaos and order. The questioning of narrative hierarchy is possible only because the novel is, in its own twisted way, surprisingly logical and hierarchical (cf. Gibson above). In the next section, I will explicate how Gravity’s Rainbow applies its double logic of subversion and confirmation by subtly subjecting the narrator to ironic suspicion.

3.2. The Stumbling Narrator

Charles Hohmann (1986: 25–34) does not think that Gravity’s Rainbow’s narrator is alone: “[T]he mere fact that the voice contradicts itself [...] suggests that we should distinguish between the novel’s several anonymous narrators and the virtual or implied author who can ’explain’ such contradictions.” (Hohmann 1986: 29.)

Hohmann is correct in concluding that the narrator of Gravity’s Rainbow contradicts its own narrative. This happens often at so many levels that it becomes difficult to judge whether it is the narrator or its audience that is being fooled. The contradictory nature of narration does not make it necessary to assume the presence of multiple narrators, however. It is more useful to interpret Gravity’s Rainbow as stretching the
concept of unreliable narration, as abusing it, rather than abandoning it altogether. Solving the problem of contradictory narration by postulating several narrators is easy, but it is apt to introduce a number of new problems.

Hohmann examines interpretive problems that the alleged multitude of narrators produces. In his view, the implied author is constructed by studying the relationships of the voices of the narrators, “the way they modulate into one another across narrative levels or the way they contradict themselves on one and the same narrative plane” (Hohmann 1986: 31). The tools are a bit excessive in this interpretation, too. The modulation of the narrative voices into one another across narrative levels can be analyzed reasonably well in terms of focalization and speech and thought representation, be it direct discourse, indirect discourse (or psycho-narration) or free indirect discourse (cf. 6.2.2), even in an extreme case like Gravity’s Rainbow.13 This in no way diminishes the complexity of the phenomenon, however.

Hohmann’s thorough analysis is an example of a drastic, yet simplifying view of Gravity’s Rainbow’s challenges to the conventions of narrative. It is tempting to regard Pynchon as a genius whose work one should not even attempt to analyze using stock methods. The pressure brought to bear on the concepts is real; it does not necessarily render them obsolete or unusable, however. It would therefore be in order to find out how the conventions of narrative and, consequently, the concepts of narratology have to bend with Pynchon. Gravity’s Rainbow serves as a test case for finding out how unreliable a narrator can get, and still be called a narrator. In a similar vein, the novel pushes to the limit the mixing of the narrator’s and characters’ voices, perceptions and consciousnesses in speech and thought representation.
The category of the narrator is not undermined in *Gravity’s Rainbow* because of its fantastic adaptability or its tremendous capacity for unreliability. It is placed under suspicion because now and again it is made to trip and stumble. The first example of this involves some play on words.

The most amazing (and well-known) pun in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (e.g. Moore 1987: 36; Weisenburger 1988: 240) is inscribed in a scene involving the protagonist Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop and a bizarre business deal. The most obnoxious character of the novel, Major Duane Marvy, is scavenging fur from the ruins of occupied Germany with his partner Bloody Chiclitz. The operation uses children, too; Chiclitz has something considerably more grandiose in mind for the children’s future:

“My dream”, he admits, “is to bring all these kids back to America, out to Hollywood. I think there’s a future for them in pictures. [...] I think I can teach them to sing or something, a children’s chorus, negotiate a package deal with De Mille [the producer]. He can use them for the real big numbers, religious scenes, orgy scenes —”

“Ha!” cries Marvy, dribbling champagne, eyeballs bulging, “You’re *dreaming* all right, old buddy. [...] He’ll use them little ‘suckers for *galley slaves*! [...] – yeah they’ll be chained to th’ oars [...]”

“Galley slaves?” Chiclitz roars. “Never, by God. For De Mille, young fur-henchmen can’t be rowing!” (GR 559)

The last sentence of the quotation puns on “Forty Million Frenchmen Can’t Be Wrong”\textsuperscript{14}. If the reader recognizes this, he or she has to ponder on an alienating, perhaps even an unpleasant question: is the whole episode presented merely in order to establish a pun? With good will, one could say that
the episode in some ways advances the plot, but the pun is quick to pull the carpet from under the interpretation.

For present purposes, the most relevant observation would be to note the ambiguous situation the narrator is being placed in as a result of the pun. The statement about 40 million Frenchmen reveals itself only when the text is read (preferably aloud). The communication of the pun seems to be necessarily out of reach of the narrator. Because of this narrative short-circuit, both the narrator and the narratee are deprived of the questionable joy of wordplay, and consequently subject to irony. The impression is particularly disturbing, in view of the narrator’s overall status as a cunning and manipulative agent (see also Kharpetian 1990:138).

The pun offers the reader a glimpse of an outlandish, yet remotely possible approach to reading, one in which the levels of narrative are not relevant. Justified suspicion arises: how many other ludicrous episodes of *Gravity’s Rainbow* have been told just to achieve linguistic joy? The logic of wordplay makes every bit of text a possible host, with or without story-related motivation. Bernard Duyfhuizen seems to refer to this strategy of reading. In order to avoid “traps”,

[R]eaders must adopt for GR [*Gravity’s Rainbow*] a postmodern strategy of reading in which the reader avoids privileging any specific piece of data because the text, in its implied poststructuralist theory of reading, thematically attacks the tyranny of reductive systems for knowing the world. The reader must engage the play of “differance” (sic) encoded in GR’s textual signs to avoid falling into traps of premature narrative closure. (Duyfhuizen 1991: 1.)

Duyfhuizen’s directions are not easy to follow, however. *Gravity’s Rainbow* tempts its readers very effectively into expecting the rewards characteristic for a traditional narrative:
plot, causal relations, logic. There is a tension between the things the novel implicitly shows us, and the things that are (still?) possible for us as its readers (see also Dällenbach 1989: 48; McHale 1992: 81).

My second example of the novel’s ways of reassessing the category of the narrator is linked to the paranoid thematic of *Gravity’s Rainbow* (e.g. GR 25, 395, 657, 703). Pynchon criticism has emphasized the feeling of connectedness induced by the novel: everything in *Gravity’s Rainbow* seems to be linked to everything else (e.g. Porush 1985: 116; Slade 1974: 176–177). However, the novel’s final hundred pages are apt to frustrate a reader seeking narrative cohesion. As the novel draws toward its end, the launching of a certain V-2 -rocket, the narration becomes fragmentary and chaotic. The text consists of incompatible parts that seem to add up to nothing. Joseph Slade (1974: 240) sees the paranoid thematic in this, too – inversely. According to Slade (ibid.), the finale of *Gravity’s Rainbow* illustrates a situation in which nothing is connected to anything: “When Slothrop slips into ’anti-paranoia’, the narrative itself begins to dissolve.” The outcome of this dissolution is, however, far from absolute chaos.

The multiplicity of the novel’s themes persists despite the fragmentary narration. The narration is for the most part a laconic statement of facts – the narrator is not too eager to make the thematic connections for the reader, as one would expect of this otherwise voluble agent. The reader is presented with scenes and episodes seemingly unrelated to each other, yet which magically always return to the novel’s obsessive themes.

“The Story of Byron the Bulb” (GR 647–655) exemplifies this tendency. The immortal light-bulb Byron takes a stand against the Phoebus-cartel, “Them”-agency of the light-bulb realm. Byron’s longevity alone is subversive, since Phoebus seeks to keep the bulbs’ burn-out rate steady, in order to en-
sure sufficient demand. Byron is also a dissident thinker, however, dreaming of the liberation of light-bulbs (GR 648). It is bound to fail in its aspirations, of course. The more Byron learns about the sorry state of all electric appliances and the international cartel controlling their existence, the more desperate it becomes. It is forced to acknowledge – and even enjoy – its powerlessness to change anything.

In addition to being a *mise-en-abyme* (with respect to Slothrop’s story), “The Story of Byron the Bulb” is a platform for narrative experimentation. The eight pages of Byron’s story have been filled with clear or unclear references to the characters of the novel, to themes, to previous and forthcoming episodes of the novel. These are not in any way made explicit; the narrator does not comment on them or try to explain any of them, nor are they motivated by Byron’s story. They seem to be *coincidences* which the narrator does not even seem to recognize. They are, to be sure, anything but coincidences. At least the following are mentioned (without good reason) in the context of Byron’s story:

- Géza Rózsavölgyi, a colleague of Edward Pointsman at the “White Visitation”,
- the ever-present “Them”,
- the notorious company IG Farben,
- kamikaze-squadrons, to be returned to later on in the novel,
- the mythical story of the *Kirghiz Light*,
- urolagnia, recalling the coprophagic inclination of one Brigadier Pudding,
- the Kabbalah, an interpretive frame invoked by the novel,
- the name Hansel, recalling *Hansel and Gretel*, the fairy-tale-frame of captain Blicero’s sadomasochistic game,
-Lyle Bland, a businessman partially responsible for Slothrop’s alleged conditioning,
-the dive into the toilet bowl, a parallel to Slothrop’s Sodium Amytal-induced hallucinations.

In addition, Byron’s story is plagued by (e.g. GR 654) the paranoid attitude of the narrator. However, the feeling of connectedness in Byron’s story is mainly produced by things the narrator does not seem to acknowledge. The reader is hard at work in making connections between the details above, seeking explanation as to why they have been presented.

Byron’s story is a reading comprehension test, which the reader passes but the narrator fails, or pretends to do so. The narrator is left in the background and the reader is made to practise paranoid reading at its worst. Regarding the hierarchy of narrative, the effect is the same as with 40 million Frenchmen. The reader finds in the narration something the pedantic narrator does not. This observation raises, again, troubling questions about the narrative agent. How should the reader relate to the impudent verbal talent who nevertheless is made to appear oblivious to the effects of its discourse?

A final example of a way of questioning the status of the narrator and thus commenting on narrative hierarchy is related to the third person singular of the verb say. Gravity’s Rainbow includes quite a few occurrences of this verb-form spelled sez (cf. McHale 1992: 100):

“Can’t you read? Sez ’War Correspondent.’ I even have a mustache, here, don’t I? Just like that Ernest Hemingway.” (GR 292)

It would seem that the form is a feature of the character’s idiolect, manifested in direct discourse. This is far from being
the whole truth: a few lines below the situation is different. The narrator continues:

Oh boy, am I gonna get out of here, sez Slothrop to himself, this is a badger game if I ever saw one, man. Who else would be interested in the one rocket out of 6000 that carried the Imipolex G device? (GR 292)

This time, the form is in the narrator’s inquit phrase, not in the free direct discourse (or quoted monologue) surrounding it. This is a well-directed blow at the idea of distinct narrative levels. One of the finest features of narratological analysis is its ability to obtain information about focalization and speech and thought representation by examining subtleties of idiolects – supported by certainty about a stable narrative hierarchy. Gravity’s Rainbow casts a shadow on all this by its (intentionally) sloppy use of the form sez. This is all the more noticeable, since the novel contains some very flexible and precise simulations of the characters’ idiosyncratic speech (even that of animals’ and inanimate objects GR 44, 229, 677). Once again, the narrator is portrayed in an ambiguous light.

Sez ironizes the conventions of speech representation for an additional reason, too: pronounced, the written forms sez and says sound identical\(^\text{16}\). The altered written form of the verb only looks like simulation of idiosyncratic pronunciation, without being that in any reasonable way.

As a diffused form, sez is also present in the acronym SEZ WHO (GR 271). As with all of the novel’s ludicrous acronyms, it offers yet another perspective on narrative hierarchy: Sez can be found in the characters’ speech or thought, in the narrator’s discourse or as a “read-only” element of the text, in which case the narrator is once again ironically pushed aside. As if the above was not enough, one should note that Pynchon
uses the form *sez* in his non-fiction, too, for example in the essay “Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?” (1984) and in the introduction to *Slow Learner* (1985). *Sz* is present on all levels of communication in Pynchon’s work. In this sense it is best understood as a joke – a joke that forces the reader into re-assessment of narrative conventions.

These commentaries on narrative hierarchy are, characteristically, not obvious. *Gravity’s Rainbow* does not undermine the category of the narrator with the overwhelming complexity of the narrative. Quite the opposite: it makes the most of the convention of omniscient-yet-unreliable narrator. The deconstructive and subversive intent is portrayed in the well-placed “mistakes”, alleged lapses of narratorial attention. The same is true with respect to the most metafictive situations of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which will be considered next.

### 3.3. Parodying Metafiction

Often the communication of *Gravity’s Rainbow* seems to operate above the extradiegetic level. This is the case especially in the many occurrences of second-person narration. McHale (1992: 96–98) has demonstrated that most of these can nevertheless be interpreted as either communication between the narrator and narratee or “pretend” communication between the narrator and a character. In some cases, however, the frames of narration are broken (ibid. 101–102, see also Genette 1980: 234–235; Margolin 1990: 427, 433–434; Fludernik 1994a: 461).

A clear case of violation of the narrative hierarchy is the episode in which the narrator speculates about connections between Freemasonry, Lyle Bland and world history. In parentheses, the reader is, surprisingly, encouraged to dig up additional sources:
Well, and keep in mind where those Masonic Mysteries came from in the first place. (Check out Ishmael Reed. He knows more about it than you’ll ever find here.) (GR 588)

A traditional narratologist (provided such a creature exists) would say that the narrator addresses the narratee. The status and role of the narratee is persuasively offered to the reader, though. The trap is ingenious: by temporarily positioning ourselves in the role of the narratee, we get to enjoy the gratification of recognizing the author mentioned by the narrator. The reader is made to feel like a specialist. It is all too obvious that this blatantly disregards the idea of distinctness of narrative levels.

Indeed, the narrative hierarchy is made to startle much more interestingly when it is not, despite all indications to this effect, transgressed. One could say that this is a way of fooling the reader. More analytically, it consists of play with the convention of mixing the narrative levels, of subverting the narrative hierarchy only to restore it later. An often-mentioned example of this is the episode “A Moment of Fun With Takeshi and Ichizo, the Komical Kamikazes” (GR 690–692). The radarman companion of the merry kamikaze-pilots on standby improvises a haiku, which seems to get a rather hostile reception:

 [...] – what? You didn’t like the haiku. It wasn’t ethereal enough? Not Japanese at all? In fact it sounded like something right outa Hollywood? Well, Captain – yes you, Marine Captain Esberg from Pasadena – you have just had, the Mystery Insight! (gasps and a burst of premonitory applause) and so you – are our Paranoid...For The Day! (band burst into “Button Up Your Overcoat,” or any other suitably paranoid up-tempo tune [...]. Yes, it is a movie! (GR 691)
The reader is in for a disappointment if he or she has supposed that the narrator reacts to the feedback from its narratee. The implicit criticism comes from the previously unknown Captain Esberg from Pasadena. According to McHale’s (1992: 97) analysis, the reader has to adjust his or her hypothesis about whom the “you” addresses. It is easy to interpret sequences like this too heavily, leaning on the notion of metaleptic second-person narration. McHale (ibid.) does not, however, emphasize the questioning of narrative hierarchy implicit in the episode, for present purposes its most important effect.

In a paradox, the fact that narrative levels are in the end kept distinct makes them seem artificial and arbitrary. A (hypothetical) reader steps into a vacuum with the attempt to interpret the narrator as addressing the narratee (and metaleptically the reader), thus becoming a victim of some narrative agent’s vile joke. The introduction of a brand new diegetic group narratee (Capt. Esberg & co.) to be fitted into the narration makes the reader’s situation even more awkward and embarrassing. In addition to having probably overinterpreted the episode, he or she has severely confused the narrative levels. What began as a simple playful narrative trick to be appreciated by a reader versed in conventions of experimental fiction, turns out to be a seemingly futile exercise in the hierarchy of narrative. The concept of a stable narrative hierarchy becomes effectively dubious, as the narrator ad libs whole subworlds and provisional layers of narrative communication with a few hasty strokes.

In Woody Allen’s movie *Husbands and Wives* (1992) the characters of the movie reflect in retrospect on the situations of the movie, apparently in a documentary based on their lives. This has been made to seem very believable, even to the extent of imitating the editing conventions of documentaries. *Gravity’s Rainbow* has moments filled with this documentary
feeling, too. The novel’s most characteristic kind of documentary is the *Making of*-documentary. The title “The Making of *Gravity’s Rainbow*” would appropriately describe the effect achieved by the commentaries of various specialists that intrude into the narrative. Examples abound: Mitchell Prettyplace is a *King Kong* enthusiast and a movie critic (GR 113, 275); Mickey Wuxtry-Wuxtry is a “world-renowned analyst” (GR 738); a “spokesman for the Counterforce” (ibid.) is interviewed in the *Wall Street Journal*; Steve Edelman has esoteric knowledge both of the Kabbalah and of the folklore of *Schwarzkommando* (GR 753–754, cf. 755); one Shetzline has written a “classic study” on Oneirine, a fictional designer drug (GR 389). All experts are ambiguous in reference to both the story of the novel and its narrative levels. The most distinctively metafictive of the experts is the “spokesman for the Counterforce”, who openly discusses the events of the novel in a retrospective interview (GR 738).

Mitchell Prettyplace is similarly mainly an outside authority, a commentator on the story. Here’s Prettyplace as the narrator’s outside source of information:

> Von Göll, with a straight face, proclaims it to be his greatest work. “Indeed, as things were to develop,” writes noted film critic Mitchell Prettyplace, “one cannot argue much with his estimate, though for vastly different reasons than von Göll might have given or even from his peculiar vantage foreseen.” (GR 113)

*Schwarzkommando* is, of course, a peculiar movie because it seems to have to have brought to life the German Herero rocket outfit. Prettyplace thus implies fairly early on in the novel that he has reliable retrospective information on the events of the novel. In fact, he gives the impression that the
events of the novel are common knowledge, at least among the cognoscenti.

Prettyplace takes part in an imaginary scholarly debate on the story of the novel in an non-specific space and time, from which, purportedly, one gains sufficient perspective to resolve the chaos of the novel into an integral whole. The reader is given the impression of the historical importance of the events of the novel, of their value as objects of study. Later on, however, Prettyplace is seriously ironized as an expert.

The narrator scorns Prettyplace’s work as a film critic by making his 18-volume *King Kong* study look ridiculous in its totalizing aspirations (GR 275; cf. 6.3.2). Prettyplace is also chastised for not having been able to predict all the consequences of the film:

> And so, too, the legend of the black scapeape we cast down like Lucifer from the tallest erection in the world has come, in the fullness of time, to generate its own children, running around inside Germany even now – the Schwarzkommando, whom Mitchell Prettyplace, even, could not anticipate. (GR 275)

Prettyplace becomes more and more involved in the world of the novel. He is shown at the same time to be a metafictive character, a “real” expert of cinema above the fictional world, and a more or less normal Pynchonian character with his own peculiarities. Once again, the reader with a strong interpretation, anticipating metafiction, is disappointed.

The status of Steve Edelman is even more unclear. At first, he is presented merely as a outside source of information about the Kabbalah and *Schwarzkommando*-folklore. Later on, however, Edelman evolves into a minor character who is plagued by an addiction to Thorazine. Edelman is transformed rapidly from a metafictive specialist into a multifaceted character: a
few pages after being presented as a scholar he suddenly is a transgressive “Hollywood businessman” (GR 755). As a result, then, Edelman is both a commentator on the novel and its sad and comic minor character, whom children try to trick into eating capacitors as tranquilizers. (GR 753).

This certainly gives an impression of transgressing against the narrative hierarchy. The effect is similar to the previously discussed cases of seemingly metaleptic second-person narration. Viveca Füredy (1989: 764–765) has introduced the concept of *pseudotransgression* to describe cases in which an artwork gives the impression of a subversion of ontological boundaries. The cases of *pseudotransgression* in *Gravity’s Rainbow* are considerably more complex than Füredy’s examples, one of which is the typical whodunit cliché of making the detective refer to his or her task as the plot of a detective novel. The narrative hierarchy is undermined by playing with the conventions of metafiction, not by simply applying them.

Nonetheless, Pynchon’s fiction is often considered as a good example in the theory of metafiction (Hutcheon 1980; Waugh 1984; cf. Moore 1987: 14–15). Both Hutcheon (1980: 20, 33) and Patricia Waugh (1984: e.g. 31, 145) emphasize the radical metafictional traits of Pynchon’s novels. There is plenty of reason for this, to be sure. As the brief analysis above demonstrates, however, *Gravity’s Rainbow* is not merely a good example of metafiction, it is also an implicit commentary on the typical conventions of metafiction.

In fact, Waugh’s (1984: 18) central idea that metafiction “lays bare the conventions of realism; it does not ignore or abandon them” coincides, *mutatis mutandis*, with *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s attitude toward the conventions of metafiction itself. This does not lessen the novel’s metafictionality, but only supplements and deepens it. Pynchon’s novel is also a prime manifestation of Hutcheon’s version of postmodernism, using
and abusing conventions both traditional and experimental (Hutcheon 1988). In this respect, Pynchon’s parody of metafiction is an indication of the current fast turnover rate of narrative conventions. Published in 1973, it already includes an implicit commentary on the conventions of radical metafiction, at the time a supposedly emergent style of writing. On the other hand, *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s sensitivity toward metafiction should probably be interpreted in the light of the ever-present metafictional strain in novelistic writing.

Both *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s complex second-person narration and the status of its curiously ambiguous specialists display the double logic of subversion and confirmation. By demonstrating laboriously that the distinctness of narrative levels prevails in seemingly transgressive cases, *Gravity’s Rainbow* reveals the artificial nature of narrative hierarchy. In the process, the reader is forced to re-assess both the traditional hierarchical view of narrative and the typical violations of it.

### 3.4. Theoretical fiction?

Currie (1998: e.g. 68–70) uses the concept *theoretical fiction* to describe the literary-theoretical fashion of contemporary literature: theory in a novel form. John Barth, Umberto Eco, John Fowles and Italo Calvino are among the obvious examples. Pynchon is not, I would argue.

In the present chapter I have maintained that *Gravity’s Rainbow* portrays an ambivalent relationship toward the conventions of prose. The novel has been shown to play with transgressions of narrative hierarchy and to raise futile expectations of subversion in its readers. In this sense *Gravity’s Rainbow* relates to traditions of narrative in a manner analogous to deconstruction’s way of criticizing the concepts of classical narratology. Why, despite all this, does it feel wrong to de-
scribe Pynchon’s novel as theory in novel form? I offer two points of comparison and potential illumination.

Barth’s *LETTERS* (1979) forces its readers to ponder on the relationship between curiously filled calendar pages and the novel’s structure. Moreover, the novel cannot be read if the interpretive (and certainly theoretical) problem posed by the presence of a fictional author is not in some way solved. Calvino’s *If On A Winter’s Night a Traveler* (1979) is, likewise, bound to make the reader feel ambiguous about his or her metaphorical involvement in the story. In both Barth and Calvino, the reader is made explicitly conscious of the theoretical questions underlying the text. The reader is made, at least in play, to act like a theoretician in order to survive.

Pynchon’s commentary is more practical and subtle. Duyfhuizen (1991) exaggerates in referring to the implicit “poststructuralist theory of reading” of the novel. *Gravity’s Rainbow* could perhaps be more appropriately described as a series of playful but subversive readings of narrative conventions, not amounting to a theory, yet making the reader think. In this sense, my position resembles that of Charles Caramello (1983), who interprets American literary postmodernism as both having internalized the tenets of poststructuralist theory and resisting them in its practice. The novel abuses the reader’s familiarity with – and yearning for – conventional narratives; despite its apparent chaos, *Gravity’s Rainbow* relies on the reader’s will to get a grip on it. This will is in large part frustrated by the small, well-directed, and disturbing blows against the novelistic tradition. This peculiar relationship, making the most of the conventions while ironizing their underlying assumptions, makes Pynchon’s novel a good test case for the concepts of narratology.
4. *Gravity’s Rainbow* as a “*Gravity’s Rainbow* Reader”: Interpreting a Faux-Didactic Novel

As the analyses and interpretations of the previous chapter illustrate, *Gravity’s Rainbow* is an equally rewarding and challenging test case for narrative theories. It is filled with examples of wonderful abnormalities and one-of-a-kind conditions of narrative. In addition to functioning as a rich repository of narrative peculiarities, the novel also presents a terrifying array of thematic perspectives.

In the following discussion the goal is to combine – or juxtapose – a thematic reading and structural analysis in order to achieve a satisfactory interpretation for the novel’s faux-didactic function. I will consider the ways in which the novel implicitly provides guidelines for the reader to follow in his or her interpretive task. In my view *Gravity’s Rainbow* offers quite a few possible key elements of interpretation. They are, however, offers which the reader is not obliged to accept. In fact, I consider *Gravity’s Rainbow* in many ways an inadequate reader’s guide to *Gravity’s Rainbow*. That is why it is referred to as a faux-didactic novel – in recognition of its tendency to lead readers astray.

*Gravity’s Rainbow* is by no means alone in its dubious teachings. All Pynchon’s novels display the tendency to a certain extent. In *V.*, the reader is continuously offered the inanimate/animate thematic as a key element of interpretation, for example. Similarly, in *Crying of Lot 49*, the entropy-theme is all too strongly underscored as an ‘authoritative’ clue to a good interpretation. In fact, the idea of faux-didacticism in fiction
invites one to review with a healthy skepticism a great many works of fiction that include implicit interpretive suggestions\textsuperscript{19}.

First I will briefly introduce ways in which textual narratives have been considered as having reader-instructing functions. The argumentation will then center on the metaphorical presentation of reading and interpretation in \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}. The object is to point out ways in which the novel stresses the importance of the activity of interpretation. Demonstration of the centrality of the arguably obvious themes of reading and interpretation in \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow} is followed by a discussion of the themes in the context of the novel’s hypothetical faux-didactic functioning. The argumentation will concentrate on the meta-level messages that the novel sends to the reader. The narratological concept of \textit{implied author} plays a crucial role in an attempt to move beyond mere thematic analysis. Metaphorical presentation of interpretation on different narrative levels, especially interpretive embeddings or \textit{mises-en-abyme}\textsuperscript{20}, will be analyzed in order to present an interpretation encompassing both the novel’s interpretive thematic and its faux-didactic features.

While certain interpretive dilemmas of \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow} can be better understood by reference to narratological concepts, it is again evident that the novel also very efficiently evades narratological scrutiny. The fact that analytic concepts such as \textit{implied author} or \textit{mise-en-abyme} do not seem to behave as they are supposed to in Pynchon’s context does not render them useless, however. \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow} is a good test case for narratology precisely because of its tendency to \textit{do something} to the literary-critical concepts utilized. Thus, in addition to providing an interpretation of the faux-didactic nature of the novel, the goal is to further explicate the ways in which Pynchon’s fiction probes the margins of narrative con-
ventions and, consequently, narrative theory and invites one to re-assess certain tenets of narrative analysis.

4.1. A Didactic Novel?

The idea of a fictional narrative being somehow pedagogical is not new. Classical structuralist narratology has always, at least implicitly, proceeded from the assumption that all texts include the means for their own decipherment. In other words, an operating manual structurally encoded within the narrative guides the reader in his or her reading. This is obviously in accord with the structuralist notion of having direct access to the text and the text alone.

The idea was nicely put by Todorov in his discussion of the construction of a character in a novel: “A text always contains within itself directions for its own consumption” (Todorov 1980: 77; see also Chatman 1990: 83). The directions to which Todorov refers are applicable to a number of narrative situations. Most texts that one is likely to encounter are decipherable using a set of interpretive functions sometimes called the “basic realist assumptions” (cf. Fludernik 1994: 12), the assumptions, that is, implicitly formed as a result of numerous instances of dealing with texts with basic realist “consumption directions”.

The pedagogical function of texts has had considerably more specific implications for the theory of metafiction. A non-traditional text, for example a programmatically metafictional novel such as LETTERS, forces the reader to discover new ways of coming to terms with texts (e.g. Waugh 1984: 91–92). The gimmicks needed for making sense of LETTERS are not easily applicable to other texts, however. (Nothing, of course, prevents the reader from willfully misusing them to make, say, the “genuine” epistolary novels radically new.)
Not all metafictional novels are dramatically idiosyncratic, which is why the reader is nowadays likely to have quite a few tactics under his or her belt with which to approach metafiction. The many radically non-conforming texts have forced readers to modify their assumptions about how fiction should be consumed. And readers, being flexible and ingenious, have responded. Generally, though, metafiction gives readers *ad hoc* hints about how to make it through the narrative in question. This is evident in the case of *LETTERS* – it is not typical to consult a peculiarly filled calendar pages interpolated in the text when reading novels (*LETTERS* 1, 55, 195, 343, 433, 537, 657 – *in toto* 769). This is, nevertheless, necessary if one wishes to grasp the working idea of Barth’s novel, “an old-time epistolary novel by seven fictitious drolls and dreamers each of which imagines himself factual”.

Prince (1980) has written about sequences of narrative in which the text can be read as commenting on the ways it should be read. Prince concentrates on narratorial “reading interludes”, serving as “indication[s] of how it ostensibly wants to be read and cue to the kind of program it considers most useful for its decoding” (1980: 237; see also Dällenbach 1989: 99–100). The pedagogical function of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is not, however, limited to overt narratorial commentary. The didacticism goes much further: readers are given made-to-order thematic clues pointing toward what purports to be a sound interpretation of the novel.

With Pynchon’s work, however, it is necessary to retain a doubtful attitude toward the novel’s interpretive innuendo. There is good cause for this skepticism, in part because the reader never really finds out how the novel works. This has been amply demonstrated in Pynchon criticism: it is very hard to come to grips with the novel’s narratology. Studying the novel in narratological terms, McHale (1992) has analyzed
the way in which *Gravity's Rainbow* tends to betray the modernist reader’s expectations of reliability and coherence. It achieves this in part by violating the stability of the depicted world, violations ranging from subtly foul ontological play to flagrant contradictions in the novel’s fictional world. Yet it is relatively easy to read the novel by partly overlooking these discrepancies. This is the case not least because of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s thematic generosity mentioned already in the introduction. The novel provides a plethora of themes to concentrate on, as McHoul and Wills (1990: 33; see also Kharpetian 1990: 15; Weisenburger 1994: 70) have very persuasively observed:

Critics return to the book in terms of its themes. The ‘entropy’ theme, relevant to a number of Pynchon’s texts, has been worked to death; but many other ‘themes’ present themselves in *Gravity’s Rainbow*: death itself, sex, science, religion, art, music.

And in search of a theme, one can always turn to paranoia: creative, operational or anti-. In fact, *Gravity’s Rainbow* does not merely present a smorgasbord of themes – it offers reading and interpretation as kinds of master themes according to which the novel as a thematic whole can purportedly be structured. *LETTERS*, by comparison, is structurally open, despite its multi-layered narrative complexity. Yet the novel gives no specific interpretive suggestions, at least not thematic ones. The reader is faced not so much with the dilemma of reconstructing the narratology of the text, as with the equally disturbing task of figuring out what to make of it. In other words, with *LETTERS* the most compelling question is not “How does this novel work?” but “How can a novel work like this?”
At the heart of my argument lies the paradox of *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* seemingly easy thematic interpretation vis-à-vis its complex narrative structure. I will now undertake to demonstrate the centrality of the themes of reading and interpretation in the novel by analyzing metaphors of interpretation in the narrative.

### 4.2. Debunking Binaries

A special concern for the themes of reading and interpretation has been a mainstay in Pynchon criticism. Studies of *Gravity’s Rainbow* have frequently commented on the novel’s peculiar sensitivity toward the problematics of sense-making and understanding. This has led critics to produce broad conclusions:

> Reading Pynchon’s novel gives us a renewed sense of how we have to read the modern world. (Tanner 1982: 77; see also e.g. Hite 1983: 17-18; Safer 1989: 106)

In other words, the themes of reading and interpretation in Pynchon’s works have been shown to have implications far exceeding the scope of the novels. This observation is easy to agree with. The world-interpretive dimension is visible, for instance, in the way the problem of historiography is dealt with in *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, not to mention *Mason & Dixon* (see e.g. Putz 1987: 144; Chambers 1992; Foreman 2000: 161–163). The present reading, however, concentrates merely on the ways in which the novel as a narrative anticipates or invites certain interpretive strategies, only to undercut them later on.

The most obvious place to start looking for metaphors of reading and interpretation in a narrative is the character.
pretation abounds in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, though interpretation of what and why is not always obvious. The schlemihl-like yet charismatic Slothrop does his interpreting in the Zone of postwar Germany. His search for clues leads to only partially achieved epiphanies about his personal history and a specific specimen of a German V-2 rocket. The scope of Slothrop’s interpretive performance is tremendous. At all times he is confronted with choices to make, symbols to understand. The narrator makes Slothrop’s status as interpreter quite explicit:

Those like Slothrop, with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity. (GR 583)

A significant addition to Slothrop’s interpretive lot is the familiar Pynchonian paranoid question: “Is there a conspiracy surrounding me or am I just delusional?” Other characters are equally into interpretation. Thus, for example, the rocket engineer Franz Pökler has to deal with the interpretive problem of the seemingly changing identity of his daughter Ilse, whom he can meet but once a year. Russian officer/agent Tchitcherine roams the Zone tracking down his Herero half-brother Enzian of Bleicheröde, who in turn considers the V-2 rocket a holy scripture of sorts.

Despite the major characters’ anomalous sensitivity to reading and interpreting, ludicrously manifest, for instance, in Slothrop’s capacity to hear quotation marks in speech, they are far from being the most talented sign-decipherers in the Zone. The novel is overloaded with hermeneutic freaks: Säure Bummer, who interprets reefers; the whipscar-reading Miklos Thanatz; Eddie Pensiero, who interprets shivers. A *Gravity’s*
Rainbow character is more likely to be an interpretive oddity than not; the conclusion is force-fed to the reader.

In her 1980 article “Fiction as Interpretation / Interpretation as Fiction” Naomi Schor has developed the concept of interpretant, designating a fictional character who metaphorically reads and interprets the story to which he or she belongs. The interpretant’s strategies of sense-making would according to Schor’s thesis in turn be reflected in those of the interpreter, i.e. the actual reader. Lucien Dällenbach (1989: 78–79, 81–86) approaches the character-as-interpreter dilemma in a similar vein, as an element in his typology of mise-en-abyme. The characters of Pynchon’s novel are indeed metaphorically interpreting Gravity's Rainbow. Frantically, it might be added. But this conclusion is by itself not sufficient.

With Pynchon, merely acknowledging the characters’ functions as interpretants produces a deficient reading. One also has to take into account the interrelations of the numerous interpretants and other elements of the narrative in order to grasp the presentation of interpretation in the novel more comprehensively. Hasty interpretations are to be avoided. To make a similar point, Dällenbach (1989: 85–86) refers to criticism of Kafka’s The Trial: in his view, the critics have been too eager to formulate their interpretations to conform to K’s interpretation of his position. In reading both Kafka and Pynchon, the reader has to strive for a certain attitude of skeptical detachment to avoid too obvious interpretations.

Hite (1983:13–14) has referred to interpreting characters as “hermeneuticists” and “critical” characters, functioning “as analogues to the reader”. Hite (1983: 15) sees the protagonists of Pynchon’s novels as trapped between binary interpretations, neither of which seem satisfactory: Slothrop, for example, “vacillates between paranoia and antiparanoia until he begins to disintegrate”. I agree with Hite in that Pynchon’s novels do
not support either pole of these oppositions but instead invite exploration of the “excluded middles” in between (see also Kharpetian 1990: 131; Mendelson 1976: 188; Schaub 1981: 15; Slade 1974: 188). In Gravity’s Rainbow, however, the idea is carried even further. It is the idea of discarding binary thinking itself that is placed under suspicion; it is an interpretation anticipated or internalized by the novel itself. Consequently, it is only a pseudo-interpretation.

In a similar vein, David Seed (1988: 161-162) has observed that characters “personify different ways of interpreting phenomena, even of interpreting the novel itself, and are arranged in the narrative so that no single possibility gets unconditional authority” (see also ibid. 209; Pütz 1987; Safer 1990; Slade 1974: 177; Schuber 1984: 67–69). Seed is correct in stating that Pynchon’s novel is constructed in a way that does not allow the reader to use any of the characters’ interpretations as a vantage-point from which to come to grips with the novel as a whole. He does not, however, analyze the way in which Gravity’s Rainbow further underscores the characters’ critical attempts.

In contrast to Hite and Seed, I argue that Gravity’s Rainbow actually does seem to valorize certain strategies of interpretation. To demonstrate how the novel produces this effect, I will analyze two interpretations overtly personified by the characters. The interpretive strategies employed by Pynchon’s characters appear to have very specific implications for the interpretation of the novel, despite their lack of comprehensiveness.

The most obvious and telling example of this is the fundamental schism between the behavioral psychologist Edward Pointsman and statistician Roger Mexico (cf. Weisenburger 1995: 253–254). The well-known problem is the coincidence of Slothrop’s erotic conquests and the V-2 rocket blasts in
London. Pointsman, a stimulus-and-response-oriented Pavlovian, is eager to see a causal relation between the V-2 rockets and Slothrop’s erections. By contrast, Mexico the statistician insists on the random distribution of the fall sites and the indeterminable causality of the phenomenon.

In one of the many memorable scenes of the novel Mexico pleads for a new perspective on things: “there’s a feeling about that cause-and-effect may have been taken as far as it will go. [...] The next great breakthrough may come when we have the courage to junk cause-and-effect entirely, and strike off at some other angle.” (GR 89) It is easy to view Mexico as suggesting “strik[ing] off at some other angle” in reading Gravity’s Rainbow, too. The Mexico-focalized meditation on the matter strengthens the notion of characters personifying interpretive strategies. In Pavlovian terms:

Roger stares back at the man. The Antimexico. “Ideas of the opposite” themselves, but on what cortex, what winter hemisphere? What ruinous mosaic, facing outward into the Waste...outward from the sheltering city...readable only to those who journey outside...eyes in the distance...barbarians...riders... (GR 89)

Are we, the readers of the novel, the questionably privileged ones for whom the “ruinous mosaic” is readable? Yes, in a way we are “eyes in the distance”. We do read Pointsman and Mexico as personifying opposing views on the novel. This interpretation is constantly flirted with in the novel. The capability of dealing with indeterminacy and inhabiting the “gray area between one and zero” haunts the reader, for example, in the words of the spirit of Walter Rathenau: “All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic.” (GR 167). The thematization of an interpretation deconstructing “ideas of the opposite” is reflected in multiple
sets of paired characters personifying the alternatives. Examples of this are, for instance, the difference in view between Pointsman and other “casual Pavlovian” Dr. Kevin Spectro (GR 142), the seance including Nazi officials/businessmen and the mediated spirit of Rathenau, quoted above (GR 167). Here is yet another interpretive pair, a film-induced discussion between Franz Pökler the “cause-and-effect man” (GR 159) and his wife Leni Pökler:

“Not produce,” she tried, “not cause. It all goes along together. Parallel, not series. Metaphor. Signs and symptoms. Mapping on to a different coordinate systems, I don’t know [...]” She didn’t know, all she was trying to do is reach.

But he said: “Try to design anything that way and have it work.”

They saw Die Frau am Mond. Franz was amused, condescending. He picked at technical points. [...] Leni saw a dream of flight. One of the many possible. Real flight and dreams of flight go together. Both are the same movement. Not A before B, but all together... (GR 159)

Joseph Slade (1974: 222) finds it odd that the scientifically adept Pökler does not recognize the implicitly sketched Theory of Relativity in the words of his wife. This would indeed be strange, if Pökler was not, like Pointsman, functioning as a sad exemplum of a technocratic scientist, at least in this scene (see also Tabbi 1995: 118; Cooper 1983: 171). In my opinion, Leni utters the fundamentals of the faux-didactic interpretation of “debunked binaries” in the quote above.

Hite (1983: 41) sees Leni’s non-causal view as reflecting “Pynchon’s narrative strategy in Gravity’s Rainbow”. Thomas Moore (1987: 278) finds support for Leni’s arguments in Jung’s concept of synchronicity, which he also considers the governing structural principle of the whole novel. The hermeneutic
clues inscribed in the characters’ opinions would serve as recurring and partial *enunciative mises-en-abyme*, referring to the interpretation of the novel (Dällenbach 1989: 60, 70–71). In my opinion, Leni’s (and Mexico’s) indeterminacy-approach, the non-causally-minded way of dealing with interpretive dilemmas, is what the novel seduces us into considering a sound interpretation of the novel, which it definitely is not. Thus, the overt *mises-en-abyme* must be judged untrustworthy, or faux-didactic. Duyfhuizen (1981) comes close to my view by arguing that the novel entices the reader to adopt the causal way of interpreting the novel itself (Duyfhuizen’s example is Pointsman’s reading of Slothrop’s map of London). To my mind, by contrast, the numerous pairs of characters valorize the non-causal interpretation of phenomena: the strategy of Mexico, Leni, Spectro, and Rathenau. However, Duyfhuizen (ibid. 20) is right in concluding that the whole map-yarn is best understood as a narrative device fulfilling the sole purpose of motivating the “complex picaresque plot” of the novel.

To summarize: interpretation is more than just a recurrent theme in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The novel not only emphasizes hermeneutic action; it seems to spell out a *specific* interpretation. The idea of resisting binary thinking and causal reasoning is particularly valorized in the overt juxtapositions of characters’ interpretive strategies and attitudes toward interpretation. I will be referring to this view as the interpretation of “debunked binaries”. The validation of creative indeterminacy, personified by key characters, is made exceedingly clear to the reader.

It is, however, also an interpretation later deconstructed by the novel. In the next two sections I will consider how the novel casts suspicion on this attractive non-oppositional interpretation with the aid of covert metaphors of interpretation.
In the following cases the interpretants, to use Schor’s terminology, are less aware of their roles as decipherers.

4.3. The Anxiety of Interpretation

Characters in *Gravity’s Rainbow* are often put inside little parables of interpretation (GR 25). In such cases the characters, despite their often exceptional abilities, are unable to come to terms with the “text of the day” (GR 204). This form of metaphorical presentation of interpretation comes in two variations: the character can be somehow unable to perform the required task of reading and interpreting, or wholly oblivious of it. In both cases it is from the vantage-point of the reader that the interpretive metaphor, or *mise-en-abyme*, is perceived (see Ron 1987: 424). The instances discussed below confirm Dällenbach’s (1989: 86) observation about readers and characters vis-à-vis *mises-en-abyme*: “[T]he reception of the fictional *mise-en-abyme* by the reader is qualitatively superior to that of the character”. Pynchon’s characters, then, find themselves in hermeneutic culs-de-sac that, nevertheless, are informative for the reader.

Slothrop is the most complicated of the many critical characters in the novel. Slothrop’s admirable ability to interpret is constantly shadowed by his schlemihl’s attitude, however: Slothrop displays at times a frustrated indifference toward interpretation. The most obvious case of this is near the novel’s end, when he becomes increasingly unmotivated in his mission of discovering the secret of the S-Gerä (GR 623–626). Slothrop, however, also shows signs of hostility or indifference toward interpretation much earlier on in the novel:

He gets back to the casino just as big globular raindrops, thick as honey, begin to splat into giant asterisks on the pavement,
inviting him to look down at the bottom of the text of day, where footnotes will explain all. He isn’t about to look. Nobody ever said a day has to be juggled into any kind of sense at day’s end. He just runs. (GR 204)

Slothrop’s identity as a tragicomically talented interpretant is presented in condensed form in the Roseland Ballroom-episode (GR 60–71). Slothrop’s light Sodium Amytal narcosis is referred to in the novel as the Allied Intelligence’s way of getting in touch with repressed American racial feelings (GR 75). More important, the disturbingly funny episode of hallucinated toilet-diving is the scene of powerful and complex metaphors of interpretation. It illustrates essential problems involved in reading the novel.

The sediments of excrement in the Roseland Ballroom’s sewers, “patterns thick with meaning, Burma-Shave signs of the toilet world, icky and sticky, cryptic and glyptic” (GR 65) guide Slothrop in his search for his lost harmonica. At first Slothrop is represented as a sovereign interpreter, finding that “he can identify certain traces of shit as belonging definitely to this or that Harvard fellow” and even that “he can, uncannily shit-sensitized now, read old agonies inside poor Dumpster [Willard], who’d tried suicide last semester” (GR 65).

After a while, however, things get bit more complicated:

At which precise point there comes this godawful surge from up the line, [...] a jam-packed wavefront of shit, vomit, toilet paper and dingleberries in mind-boggling mosaic. [...] ...seems he’s been tumbling ass over teakettle – though there’s no way to tell in this murky shitstorm, no visual references. [...] It occurs to him he hasn’t felt the touch of a hard wall since he started to tumble, if that indeed is what he’s doing. (GR 66)
Slothrop is no longer in control of the situation, but at the mercy of the “mind-boggling mosaic” of excremental signification. The sudden change in Slothrop’s ability to interpret can be read as reflecting the protagonist’s oscillation between paranoia and anti-paranoia, pathologies overtly commented on in the novel. Slothrop’s interpretive achievements are in any case the object of disarming irony, manifest for example in Slothrop’s conviction that “negro shit [...] all looks alike” (GR 65). Ironical or not, Slothrop’s futile attempt to understand his position reflects beautifully the reader’s puzzlement before the text (see Chambers 1992: 164).

The effect is heightened as the hallucinatory episode shifts to depicting Slothrop’s journey through the quasi-solipsistic western-movie world of the “westwardman” Crutchfield and his sidekick Whappo, inhabited by “one of each of everything” (GR 67). As if this were not in itself enough to grasp, Slothrop is faced with a blatant contradiction: the allegedly sparse world of Crutchfield seems to be swarming with activity. The observation leads to ontological nitpicking, though with whom is not made clear. Typical of Gravity’s Rainbow, the passage concludes in an indirect paranoid reference to the dark Them-agency.

Slothrop is puzzled. Isn’t there supposed to be only one of each?
A. Yes.
Q. Then one Indian girl...
A. One pure Indian. One mestiza. One criolla. Then: one Yaqui. One Navaho. One Apache...
Q. Wait a minute, there was only one Indian to begin with. The one that Crutchfield killed.
A. Yes. [...] 
Q. Then what about all the others? Boston. London. The ones that live in cities. Are those people real, or what?
A. Some are, some aren’t.
Q. Well are the real ones necessary? or unnecessary?
A. It depends what you have in mind.
Q. Shit, I don’t have anything in mind.
A. We do. (GR 70)

The metafictional interlocution manifests Slothrop’s inability to reach a cogent interpretation of the fantasy world of which he is a part. Obviously, this seems to be in accord with the reading presented here. Expectedly, though, with Pynchon there are no clear cases supporting this or that interpretation: the metaphorical presentation of interpretive problems is intertwined with the omnipresent paranoid thematic of the novel. The dialogue and the whole Sodium Amytal -episode is multifunctional. On the one hand, it is a relatively isolable (cf. Ron 1987: 427–429) enunciative mise-en-abyme; on the other, it is at the mercy of the obsessions of the narrative.

One of the most puzzling sections of Gravity’s Rainbow is the “Disquieting Structure” episode. It creates an illusion of pseudo-summary: the action of the novel fades away and some of the characters gather at a dreamlike or hellish cocktail-party or “convention” to discuss, among other things, the problems of interpreting their positions. The whole section is a reader’s guide in miniature to the novel. Captain Geoffrey “Pirate” Prentice functions as the reader’s fellow newcomer to the “very extensive museum, a place of many levels” (GR 537). Prentice has guided readers before, too: the novel’s beginning is a (supposed) depiction of his nightmare (GR 3–4). Prentice is set before a difficult interpretive puzzle in approaching the party:

er, excuse me, sir, could you hold this for a moment? thank you – the joker is gone, leaving Pirate Prentice here, newly arrived still a bit puzzled with it all, holding one end of a candy clew whose other end could be anywhere at all...well, he might as well follow it... [...] well, its labyrinthine path turns out, like
Route One where it passes through the heart of Providence, to’ve been set up deliberately to give the stranger a tour of the city. This taffy trick is standard orientation device here it seems, for Pirate now and then will cross the path of some other novice...(GR 537–538)

Prentice’s strategy, granted, cannot be said to be among the most ingenious ones in the novel. It rather resembles that of the first-time reader of Gravity’s Rainbow: clinging to what string of a plot one can. Probably to find, in retrospective, that sections of the novel seem indeed to be “set up deliberately to give the stranger a tour”21.

After this Ariadne’s Thread initiation, the outcome of which is a cumbersome ball of taffy, Pirate is introduced to the “Committee offices”. The offices reflect conspicuously the web of the novel’s themes: “A4...IG...OIL FIRMS...LOBOTOMY...SELF-DEFENSE...HERESY” (GR 538). Pirate is, metaphorically, the reader of the novel: standing clumsily, sticky ball of puzzled reading in hand before the plurality of thematic approaches to the novel. The metaphor of interpretation climaxes in the curiously natural conversation between Pirate and a previously unknown young woman:

“Naturally you’re seeing this all through a soldier’s eyes,” [...]  
“For you it’s all a garden,” he suggests.  
“Yes. Perhaps you’re not such a stick after all.”(GR 538)

The juxtaposition of a “soldier’s” or “gardener’s” attitude in the face of plurality echoes once again the previously sketched debunked-binaries interpretation. The reader is not offered anything concrete, however. After the initiation Prentice, along with the reader, is clearly incapable of coming to terms either with the situation or with the novel at large.
Father Rapier’s “Critical Mass” sermon, which follows Prentice’s introduction to the scene, is a compelling metaphor of the interpretive situation, including this gloomy view on the future, and arguably also on the novel itself: “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. The word has ceased to have meaning.” (GR 539.) Rapier’s sermon, once again, functions doubly: As a metaphor of reading and interpreting, it refers to the difficulty of comprehending the novel. As a rundown of the novel’s paranoid thematic it suggests that “it is possible that They won’t die [...] that we die only because They want us to: because They need our terror for Their survival” (GR 539). The novel grants the reader a glimpse of potential meta-level understanding, at the same time continuing to weave its web of unclear paranoid allusions, effectively discouraging the reader in the search for definite interpretive clues.

The problematic of summarizing is also presented in the hallucinatory episode. Prentice asks a nearby double agent for a “sort of a sitrep on all of this”. The response certainly is analogous to the reader’s frustrating experience of trying to understand the novel: “Geoffrey, by the time you get any summary, the whole thing will have changed. We could shorten them for you as much as you like, but you’d be losing so much resolution it wouldn’t be worth it, really it wouldn’t.” (GR 540–541.) The problems of summary and a holistic view of things, metaphorically on Gravity’s Rainbow itself, are recurrent in the novel, and will be considered at length in the next section.

The Disquieting Structure -episode does not let the reader draw conclusions about how to interpret Gravity’s Rainbow. At the same time, it forces the reader to draw conclusions about what it is to interpret the novel. Reading Gravity’s Rainbow is
random orientation within the “labyrinthine paths” of narrative, juxtaposed with dubious thematic abstractions and paranoia, with no hope of a reliable “sitrep” on anything, least of all the novel itself.

4.4. Structural Metaphors of Interpretation

In this section I will concentrate on metaphors of interpretation embedded in the narrative that are not directly linked to characters’ actions or thoughts. The characters are involved in interpretive situations similar in principle to those in the previous section. In the following examples, however, the characters function increasingly like parts in a puzzle and not as individual hermeneuticists. This difference in degree warrants reference to the examples as structural metaphors of interpretation. These instances cut across Dällenbach’s (1989: 75, 94–98) typology: on the one hand, they are enunciative *mises-en-abyme*, representing the interpretive burden of the reader, while on the other, they are textual *mises-en-abyme*, reflecting the structure of the novel. In this respect, the complex *mises-en-abyme* in *Gravity’s Rainbow* succinctly illustrate the frustrating fact that the presented typologies of embedded narrative mirror-structures do not seem to be helpful in the analysis of actual cases. Dällenbach’s categories, for instance, provide only a very general typology with which to approach *mise-en-abyme* structures. This does not affect the value of *mise-en-abyme* as an interpretive concept, however.

*Gravity’s Rainbow* presents interpretation as a complicated issue in these embedded metaphors, often resulting in perpetual hermeneutic confusion. Needless to say, this is in sharp contrast to the relatively simple interpretive options overtly personified by the characters. This reading supports Moshe Ron’s more general remark (following Jean Ricardou and Dällenbach)
about the functioning of *mise-en-abyme*: “*mise-an-abyme* always ironically subverts the representational intent of the narrative text, disrupting where the text aspires to integration, integrating where the text is deliberately fragmentary” (Ron 1987: 434; also Nelles 1997: 145).

Berressem (1993: 8) has analyzed the representation of Slothrop’s desk, according to the narrator a “godawful mess” (GR 18), as an “architectural blueprint for the book” (cf. Chambers 1991; Siegel 1978: 23). It is easy to agree with Berressem: Slothrop’s desk is indeed a telling example of the many instances of textual *mise-en-abyme*, mirroring the structure of the novel. Slothrop’s seemingly chaotic, yet, according to Berressem, rigorously organized desk does not serve solely as a map of the novel, however. It is also apt to elicit a particular strategy of reading, a strategy many critics have called “paranoid reading” (e.g. McHale 1992: 81–82; Moore 1987: 30; Siegel 1978; Tabbi 1995: 122). Thus, the desk functions both as a textual *mise-en-abyme* and as a potential enunciative *mise-en-abyme*. While the representation of the messy desk does nothing to corroborate simple thematic interpretations of the novel, it does not go to the other extreme, either. It is not a grim celebration of the impossibility of understanding the text; it invites the reader to search for connections and correspondences, however “Kute” they may be. This represents well the novel’s implicit attitude toward hermeneutic activity; while the novel continuously frustrates interpretive attempts, it does not seek to extinguish the reader’s will to understand.

A hilarious example of figural embedded interpretation is set in the second part of the novel, “Un Perm’ au Casino Hermann Goering”, where at a party Slothrop organizes the drinking-game “Prince”. The simplicity of the game can be assessed from the way Slothrop explains it to Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck, a sympathetic agent of the They-system:
“[E]verybody takes a number, a-and you start off the Prince of Wales has lost his tails, no offense now, the numbers going clockwise from that Prince, or whatever number he wants to call out actually, he, that’s the Prince, six or anything, see, you pick a Prince first, he starts it off, then that number two, or whoever that Prince called, sez, but first he goes, the Prince does, Wales, tails, two, sir” [...] 

“Yes yes but –” giving Slothrop the most odd look, “I mean I’m not quite sure I really see, you know, the point to it all. How does one win?”

Ha! How does one win, indeed. “One doesn’t win,” easing into it, thinking of Tantivy, one small impromptu counter-conspiracy here, “one loses. One by one. Whoever’s left is the winner.” (GR 212)

The game is a seemingly innocent example of the slapstick fun that Pynchon is famous for, complete with ludicrous features such as impromptu songs, a tub filled with ice, and champagne in beer mugs. It serves, however, many purposes: on the story-level it is for Slothrop a means of getting information about the conspiracy he is starting to perceive around himself (GR 214). It also provides an opportunity for getting back at the system in some marginal way, by way of harassing Dodson-Truck. In terms of narrative suspense, the game is a climactic point, after which Slothrop for a short period seems to be in control of his own life. As a metaphor of interpretation, the game is a sign of things to come, representing the difficulty of fathoming the novel.

The metaphorical functioning of “Prince” becomes increasingly evident as the game progresses: “The game has switched to Rotating Prince, where each number called out immediately becomes Prince, and all numbers shift accordingly. By this time it is impossible to tell who is making mistakes and who isn’t. Arguments arise.” (GR 213) The last time
the narrator refers to the game it is “difficult to locate any more” (GR 214). Rotating Prince is a dramatized reading and interpretation of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The Pynchon industry has, of course, been immersed in a session of the game for three decades (see 9.2).

The difficulty of finding a satisfying interpretation of the novel is also metaphorically present in the discussion of the song “Sold On Suicide”. The song repudiates the value of everything the world has to offer, save the act of suicide. According to the narratorial commentary,

The trouble [...] is that by Gödel’s theorem there is bound to be some item around that one has omitted from the list, and such an item is not easy to think of off the top of one’s head, so that what one does most likely is go back over the whole thing, meantime correcting mistakes and inevitable repetitions, and putting in new items that will surely have occurred to one, and – well, it’s easy to see that the “suicide” of the title might have to be postponed indefinitely! (GR 320)

In wanting to be absolutely sure that there is nothing positive to be said about the world, the singer bent on self-annihilation is engaged in a perpetual game of Rotating Prince. The position is reminiscent of that of the faithful interpreter of the novel: trying to find a plot that would make sense, struggling to come across a thematic structure to survive with – only to find the novel once again debunking the whole enterprise.

The Gödel’s theorem of indeterminacy mentioned in the quote above appears in yet another embedded metaphor of comprehension, in the episode in which Pointsman, along with his personnel, spend Whitsun by the sea. In the scene Pointsman is hallucinating, hearing voices, and consequently acting strangely, which causes concern in the company. Jessica Swanlake, Mexico’s part-time girlfriend, retreats into “kind
of a protective paralysis” (GR 275), imitating the terrified Fay Wray in King Kong. The narrator uses this as a point of departure, immersing the reader in the following:

“Yeah well,” as film critic Mitchell Prettyplace puts it in his definitive 18-volume study of King Kong, “you know, he did love her, folks.” Proceeding from this thesis, it appears that Prettyplace has left nothing out, every shot including out-takes raked through for every last bit of symbolism, exhaustive biographies of everyone connected with the film [...]...even interviews with the King Kong Kultists, who to be eligible for membership must have seen the movie at least 100 times and be prepared to pass an 8-hour entrance exam...And yet, and yet: there is Murphy’s Law to consider, that brash Irish proletarian restatement of Gödel’s Theorem – when everything has been taken care of, when nothing can go wrong, or even surprise us...something will. (GR 275)

The narrator’s escapade results in a terrifying sequence that includes narratorial reductions, paranoia, thematic condensing, questioning of narrative conventions – and metaphors of interpretation. Prettyplace’s massive study is a metaphor of an attempt to give a comprehensive interpretation of anything, including the novel itself. It also gives a flagrantly parodic view of criticism, in a way anticipating today’s Thomas Pynchon Kultists (cf. Moore 1987: 38). The narrator then proceeds to propound an ironic interpretation based on Murphy’s Law of another attempt at a totalizing interpretation, Brigadier Pudding’s frustrated mammoth work Things That Can Happen In European Politics. In Pudding’s combinatorial analysis the “permutations ’n’ combinations” for 1931 “don’t give Hitler an outside chance” (GR 275). Earlier on in the novel Pudding complains: “[n]ever make it, [...] it’s changing
out from under me” (GR 77), as developments in history inevitably preempt his work.

The sheer impossibility of a reliable summary and overview of the novel as a whole is a fact which the reader faces in interpretation. That is, if one insists on some kind of coherence – as most readers still do. The insurmountable difficulties involved in summarizing the novel are delightfully illustrated in the (pseudo)summary presented by McHoul and Wills (1990: 23–31), which, ironically, is one of the best summaries of Gravity’s Rainbow that I have seen.

4.5. Leveling Interpretation

In what follows, I will analyze some instances of interpretive metaphors with respect to narrative levels. First an inevitably dubious summary of the findings so far. The argument has been that Gravity’s Rainbow functions as a faux-didactic novel by thematizing interpretation and offering the reader interpretive strategies. This is fairly obvious in the overt presentation of reading and interpretation as recurring themes on the story level. In the covert mode, the reader is given clues concerning the interpretation of the whole work in the form of numerous allegories or metaphors of reading and interpretation embedded in the narration. Both the thematization and the more implicit yet abundant metaphoric presentation of reading and interpretation foreground them as governing themes in Gravity’s Rainbow.

The novel was found to represent reading and interpretation metaphorically in three principal ways:

1) by attributing interpretive strategies to certain characters, making them perform as surrogate readers or interpretants of the novel,
2) by having the characters face interpretive dilemmas that function as metaphors of the reading and interpreting of *Gravity’s Rainbow* itself, and

3) by making elements of narrative function as embedded metaphors or *mises-en-abyme* of reading and interpretation of the novel.

The first of these ways of incorporating interpretation into the novel seemed to guide the reader in a very specific way. The novel’s characters were shown to personify opposing views of interpretation, together pointing toward an interpretation of debunked binaries. This reading was to some degree reflected in the embedded metaphoric presentation of interpreting the novel. In general, however, the embedded *mises-en-abyme* of interpretation did not offer any single interpretation, but quite the opposite. At the heart of these structural metaphors of interpretation was the infinite complexity of reading and interpreting in general, including interpreting *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The interpretive *mises-en-abyme* do not warrant a simple thematic reading of the novel, but instead function as embedded warnings against it.

As has become evident in the course of the previous chapter, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, like all of Pynchon’s novels, can justifiably be read as parodying narrative conventions of all sorts (cf. e.g. Moore 1987: 44). Thus, the narrator of *Gravity’s Rainbow* performs daunting ventriloquist stunts in shifting focalizer, mood, and genre with fluidity and ease – only to betray its craft with far-fetched puns and subtle and gross violations of the established conventions of narration. In particular it was demonstrated that with *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the idea of determinable or fixed narrative levels is an emphatically suspect concept. Nevertheless, I would argue that provisionally insist-
ing on the relatively strict division of labor between the narrator and the implied author gives an insight into the dilemma of the metaphorical presentation of interpretation.

The category of the narrator is a relatively simple one: the narrator tells the story, and it is the narrator’s voice that the narratee “hears” (see Nelles 1997: 9–10). This is true for *Gravity’s Rainbow*, too – however the novel stretches the possibilities of the concepts. The narrating agent, in addition to being a flexible mouthpiece, has to be considered severely unreliable. I would argue that the overt thematization of a specific interpretation in *Gravity’s Rainbow* should be attributed to the domain of the narrator. In other words: the faux-didactic nature proposed for the novel is a feature of the agent telling the story. In some ways, this is quite obvious. The fact that the reader is able to perceive, with Seed (1988: 161–162, 209), that the characters personify different yet equally incomprehensive interpretive strategies is a tell-tale sign of this. But this conclusion is not enough. The fact that the so-called debunked-binaries interpretation has become suspect in the light of the metaphors of interpretation embedded in the narrative demands a more sweeping argument. In addition, an interpretation induced from the juxtaposition of characters’ differing interpretive strategies has to be part of the narrator’s faux-didactic scheme. It is possible to find ample support for an argument against the debunked binaries interpretation, as has been shown.

The category of the implied author is, in my view, following Chatman (e.g. 1990: 86; also Nelles 1997: 12; O’Neill 1994: 69–70; cf. Genette 1988: 145; Walsh 1997), best understood as a function of the text inferred by the reader (see chapter 7). What makes the function of the implied author crucial in interpreting a novel like *Gravity’s Rainbow* is the previously mentioned complexity and unreliability of the narrating agent – at times blatant, at times cunningly inconspicuous. It
is the implied author which makes the narrator contradict itself so that whole sections of the narrated story becomes dubious, which often happens in the novel (see McHale 1992). It is the implied author, again, which makes it possible to perceive discrepancies in narration (cf. Hohmann 1986: 29, 31). It is the implied author that we turn to in our puzzlement when the narrator attributes wrong linguistic traits or bits of knowledge to a character. And, finally, it is the implied author that we turn to when the narrator seems too eager in its interpretive instructiveness.

According to this interpretation, the narratee of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is the prime target of the narrator’s didactic plotting, while the implied author shares a significant wink with the implied reader (cf. Tammi 1992: 124). The narrator serves its narratee (and at least some readers of *Gravity’s Rainbow* as well, in the process) with a seemingly cogent yet deficient interpretation; the implied author invites readers not to be content with it.

Of course, it is also possible to approach the problem from the other end of fictional communication. Eco’s concept of *Model Reader* furnishes us with an alternative way of describing the novel’s dual strategy of faux-didacticism. According to Eco (1979: 11), the Model Reader is inscribed in the work itself, “a textually established set of felicity conditions […] to be met in order to have a macro-speech act (such as a text is) fully actualized”. In these terms, it is possible to interpret *Gravity’s Rainbow* as postulating two kinds of readers: a naïve reader, on the one hand, ready to accept the novel’s thematic faux-didacticism; and a critical reader, on the other, perceptible to the novel’s implicit structural strategies against it. Ultimately, it seems to be a matter of choice (and expositional elegance) whether the capacity of sober interpretation of Pynchon’s novel
should be allotted to the implied author, or to the reader-function ideally capable of deciphering the novel’s devious plots.

Having said all this, how should the thematic and metaphoric presentation of interpretation in *Gravity’s Rainbow* be interpreted? The interpretive over-determination of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, implicit and explicit, specific and vague, narratorial and implied-authorial, entices the reader into exploring the cultural notion of interpretation as such. Theoretically, this aspect of the novel raises questions about the relations of narrative structures and themes. In complex narratives like Pynchon’s, the easily perceived thematic is often implicitly undermined or even falsified by the intricateness of narrative. This can in part explain the familiar suspicion that Pynchon entertains himself by mocking his readers. But only in part; again, the uneasy feeling of having been had persists.

In order to analyze a situation such as this – the suspicion that even the implied author might somehow be unreliable – Patrick O’Neill (1994: 70; cf. Prince 2001: 43) has introduced the term *implied implied author*. There is, ostensibly, a hierarchy of implied authors just as there is a hierarchy of narrators. To my mind, this concept calls for Ockham’s attention, at least in the case of Pynchon. While the above analysis and interpretation only partially convince a suspicious reader and leave ample room for puzzling questions about the meaning of it all, stipulating yet another abstract agency above the implied author hardly solves the problem (see chapter 7 for further discussion of the implied author). Instead, it is enough to proceed on the path of anthropomorphizing, and ponder, though perhaps not in so many words, what the implied author might have had in mind. Or one can turn to Booth’s concept of career author, the composite image of the author as presented in his or her other works. In the case of Pynchon this works effectively: the reader is in all probability familiar with both
Pynchon’s strange public image and the peculiarity of his fictions. As a result, it is easy to imagine a sardonic, tall, slightly bucktoothed author in the wings, perhaps paring his fingernails in a Joycean manner, making an ass of yet another gullible reader.

Reference to the concepts of implied author and narrative levels does not offer a satisfactory interpretation for the novel, while it might make the readers abandon some of the most obvious thematic interpretations. The fact that the novel elsewhere both blatantly and subtly parodies narrative conventions and, consequently, concepts of narrative theory makes it difficult to rely wholeheartedly on the findings of the narratological analysis. While to a certain extent the narrative structure of *Gravity’s Rainbow* responds well to narratological scrutiny, the novel’s tendency to anticipate and preempt various analytical and interpretive approaches should be borne in mind. The explicit and implicit presence of interpretation in its various guises gives the novel a distinctive feeling of interpretive overdetermination. This, in turn, makes the actual making sense of the novel the notoriously difficult task Pynchon-criticism has invariably stressed. I enjoy the aesthetic effect this paradox produces in me, however unable I am to analyze or explain it.

The reader does not need to be satisfied with interpreting the novel even at this level, however. It is possible to question the overabundance of the interpretive thematic as such. Indeed, the mere bulk of interpretation-related material on any narrative level makes any interpretation look redundant. The thematic of reading and interpretation become the object of a meta- or anti-interpretation, the nature of which one can only guess at.

To conclude, I will turn to one more embedded metaphor of interpretation in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Scattered throughout
the novel’s first 300 pages are five “Proverbs for Paranoids”. The narrator cites these (apparently well-known) proverbs in conjunction with the developments of Slothrop’s quest. As such, they function as narratorial abstractions of the novel’s themes. Needless to say, they serve also as metaphors of the interpretive dilemmas of the novel. Proverb three, in particular, speaks volumes about the novel’s faux-didactic functioning:

Proverbs for Paranoids, 3: If they get you asking the wrong questions, they don’t have to worry about the answers. (GR 251)
5. Cognitive Narratology: Narrative as Experientiality

The preceding two chapters sought to analyze some of the concepts of structuralist narratology in the extreme narrative circumstances of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Both discussions demonstrated that narratological models provide useful tools for the description of the novel. However, more interestingly, it became equally clear that narratology is hopelessly incapable of coming to terms with the more adventurous characteristics of Pynchon’s narrative. While *Gravity’s Rainbow* quickly makes the structuralist impulse of categorization appear ridiculous, the effect is not one of dismal frustration but rather of creative anxiety. In other words, Pynchon transgresses and plays with narrative conventions in aesthetically interesting ways. This is an encouraging observation: it invites more analysis. In the course of this and the following chapter, I will turn to assessing the theoretical and practical input of cognitive narratology. The present discussion comprises a theoretical commentary on certain aspects of Monika Fludernik’s Natural Narratology. Chapter 6, in turn, exposes Fludernik’s account to the practical narratologies of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

*Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* (1996) marks the first, and to date only, attempt to construct a comprehensive narratological theory within the framework of cognitive science. Somewhat anachronistically, however, the conclusions of Fludernik’s earlier monograph on free indirect discourse (1993) were already built on the ideas more explicitly developed in the latter study. Fludernik (1996) bases her narratology on a wide theoretical substructure: the theory of cognitive frames (or schemata), the prototype theory of cognitive linguistics, and the so-called natural linguistics of Wolfgang
Dressler. In addition, previous narratological theories are taken into account in Fludernik’s theory, and not only to illustrate their shortcomings.

For present purposes, the relationship between the traditional narratological models and Fludernik’s narratology is of the utmost importance. Since Fludernik’s project serves in this study as the primary example of cognitive narratology, and in order to provide some theoretical basis for the more practical assessment of Natural Narratology in the next chapter, I will in what follows comment on the similarities and divergences between structuralist narratology and its Natural counterpart. Three issues are most in need of explication: the Natural interpretation of narrativity, Fludernik’s account of focalization, and her distinction between theoretical and illusionistic analysis of narrative.

Fludernik does not aim low: the goal of her theory is not only to provide novel interpretations or categorizations of types and features of narrative literature. Instead, true to its cognitivist affiliations, Natural Narratology seeks to explain narrativity. Fludernik’s explanation of narrative is based on the basic functions of human cognition; on the most fundamental level, reading and interpreting rely on natural cognitive parameters (Fludernik 1996: 12, 17). In this respect, Natural Narratology is intimately tied to theories of cognition, in particular to the concept of cognitive frames. Fludernik’s theory has received a fair amount of attention among literary scholars; the reader might do well to consult some of the review articles of both Fludernik’s study of free indirect discourse (1993), and Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology (Herman 2000, Jahn 1994; see also Kearns 1999: 31).

Essentially, Natural Narratology entails a theory of narrative that involves the dynamic interplay of four cognitive levels. In the order of cognitive fundamentality: Level I consists
of the “axiomatic natural parameters of real-life experience” (Fludernik 1996: 43). These form the basic cognitive schemata to be utilized in the interpretation of texts as well as practically everything else we do. Level II is occupied by four “explanatory schemas of access to the story” (ibid.): TELLING, VIEWING, EXPERIENCING, and ACTION (or ACTING). In other words, these are the principal varieties of mediation in a natural narrative situation. Level III includes “well-known naturally occurring story-telling situations” (ibid. 44), that is, information about the typical features of narratives, the characteristics of genres and the like. The information on level III is, however, still schematic and functions in a non-reflective manner; the reader is not conscious of the schematic structures of information. Level IV constitutes an “all-embracing dynamic process engendered by the reading process”. Narrativization\textsuperscript{22} is Fludernik’s concept for this procedure whereby readers “utilize conceptual categories from levels I to III in order to grasp [...] textual irregularities and oddities”. This process is conscious: the reader is actively seeking to make the text sensible by attributing it to familiar narrative situations. (Ibid. 45.)

In reading actual texts, then, readers narrativize with reference to various cognitive frames depending on what kind of experientiality is represented in the text. Hence, prototypically, if a narrative’s ruling consciousness, and thus mediated experience, is that of a protagonist, the EXPERIENCING frame is adopted. If, by contrast, a narrative is constituted by the consciousness of the narrator persona, the TELLING (or REFLECTING, in the case of self-reflexive narratives) frame is utilized. Finally, should the narrative portray neither a teller nor a character as a central consciousness, but merely evoke an illusion of vision, the reader resorts to the VIEWING frame. (Fludernik 1996: 50.) The schema of ACTION is used when confronted
with “texts that are highly inconsistent […] to tease out a rudimen-
tary sense in story-referential terms” (ibid. 44).

Fludernik’s tactic of anchoring the process of narrativization in the foregrounded consciousness in the texts reflects her view of narrativity. In stark contrast to traditional narratological views, Natural narrativity relies on experientiality mediated by the text, instead of the represented event structure (story, fabula). Any text that evokes an experiencing consciousness – the narrator’s, protagonist’s, or viewer’s – is a narrative, regardless of its formal or contentual makeup. (Fludernik 1996: e.g. 26–30.) As a result, the range of potential object texts of Fludernik’s theory differs somewhat from that of structuralist, story-oriented, narratology: Natural Narratology, surprisingly, can justifiably study experiential lyric poetry, but cannot consider purely reportative texts such as historiography as narratives in the strictest sense (Fludernik 1996: 28, 328–329).

The strength of Fludernik’s conception lies in its flexibility. The process of narrativization is powerful enough to make readers comprehend many kinds of spoken and written texts by attributing them to familiar, basic narrative situations that are recuperable in terms of the cognitive parameters of natural storytelling. Even postmodernist experimental texts are to some extent narrativizable within Natural Narratology. For instance, the extreme self-reflexivity of Barth, Sukenick, or Federman can be narrativized with reference to the frame of Reflecting (Fludernik 1996: 275–278). Similarly, texts that seem formally non-narrative, such as those utilizing a question-and-answer format, can sometimes be narrativized by reading “against the grain of the text” (ibid. 288), and thereby reconstructing a story (the frame of Action), or a ruling consciousness (the frame of Experiencing) for the text. (Fludernik 1996: 288–294.)
However, Fludernik considers the most radical modernist and postmodernist experiments as only partially accountable within the framework of Natural Narratology; for instance, texts that involve a montage of highly incompatible parts, such as Richard Brautigan’s *Trout Fishing In America*. Extreme narrative experimentation resists narrativization in numerous ways:

Narratives [such as these are] no longer recuperable as the consciousness of a narrator figure because the juxtaposed material [is] too heterogeneous either stylistically or thematically to warrant integration as part of a verisimilar stream of consciousness. These texts therefore constitute a limit-case of narrativization where the unification of disparate material becomes impossible: neither story and/or common situation nor a group of consistent characters, nor even a consistent narratorial voice can be projected from ‘stories’ like [these]. (Fludernik 1996: 287–288.)

The most challenging and non-narrativizable texts are for Fludernik (1996: 294) the instances of “hermetic writing” that aspire to transform literature into instances of non-referential linguistic sound-stream. Certain texts by Samuel Beckett and Gertrude Stein, for instance, evoke “no setting, no dramatis personae, no minds, no speakers. Language exists in and of itself, disjoined from its referential anchorings, free-floating in proper Derridean fashion” (ibid. 302). Natural Narratology, therefore, cannot describe or explain all literary experimentation; Fludernik’s model, based as it is on the cognitive parameters of natural storytelling, cannot describe experimental writing that is no longer attributable to any version of real-life experientiality. Fludernik is quick to acknowledge this. To point beyond her account of narratology, Fludernik (1996: 305, 314–315) refers to Gibson’s (1996) previously discussed
postmodern narrative theory as a potential extension of Natural Narratology, “build[ing] from postmodernist reading and writing strategies that complement and transcend real-world parameters”.

From a more traditional point of view, Fludernik’s discussion of the modernist and postmodernist limit-cases of Natural Narratology reveals that in extreme cases the traditional, story-oriented definition of narrative seems to work better than one based on mediated experience. This is Fludernik on what happens should no ruling consciousness be reflected in a text:

When narrativization breaks down […], it does so where the consciousness factor can no longer be utilized to tide over radical inconsistency, and this happens first and foremost where overall textual coherence or micro-level linguistic coherence (and cohesion) are at risk. Where texts have turned into a jumble of words [,] or where sentences are internally discontinuous or cohesively non-alignable in their sequence, narrativization is seriously impaired […]. (Fludernik 1996: 317.)

This seems clear-cut enough. It should be noted, however, that the experiential definition also fails to provide grounds for narrativization in less extreme cases. For instance, in her discussion of experiments with question-and-answer format, she frequently considers an underlying story the basis for narrativization and thus the ultimate indication of narrativity26. This is manifest in Fludernik’s (1996: 288–290) interpretations of the ‘Ithaca’-episode of Ulysses and Jack Matthew’s “Questionnaire for Rudolph Gordon”, in which the reader “reads a story where there is none” by reconstructing the events with the aid of the clues provided in a question-and-answer or questionnaire format. For Fludernik (ibid.) “the questions reveal potential story matter much on the presuppositional lines of the notorious When did you stop hitting your wife?” In other
words, the experience of the reflected consciousness no longer establishes narrativity but, instead, a sequence of events inferred by the reader (cf. Fludernik 1996: 30). To demonstrate the applicability of Natural Narratology even to these texts, Fludernik prefers to emphasize the experiential characteristics implicit in them. For instance, she proposes that the “Questionnaire for Rudolph Gordon” is primarily interpreted by “inventing a disturbed and guilty mind for Rudolph Gordon [...]” and hence the piece is “narrativized in terms of a ruling consciousness, and only secondarily in terms of ‘story’ material” (ibid. 290). It might well be the other way round, but this is not important; regardless of which of the narrativizing techniques is considered primary, both remain indispensable for a narrative understanding of the text. The “understanding---as-narrative” of a question-and-answer text is not merely the result of perceiving an experiencing consciousness in a text. The traditional story-oriented view of narrative creeps in to augment Natural Narratology when texts present insurmountable problems for the experiential model. The traditional account of narrativity, while not rooted in cognitive parameters, has no trouble in describing narratives that do not represent an experiencing consciousness but nevertheless tell a story.

Hence, when faced with radically experimental texts, readers cannot rely on cognitive parameters of natural narrativity but, instead, are forced to seek interpretive frames from other conceptions of textual comprehension. The most pressing question is, of course, how this supposed shift in readers’ narrativizing strategies should be reflected on the level of textual analysis and theory. As mentioned above, in addition to the traditional event-sequence model, one can conceivably turn to poststructuralist theories of narrative or other re-conceptions of narrativity as complements or replacements for Natural Narratology (cf. Ryan 1991: 266–267). Chapter 9 of this
study tentatively offers one such complement by discussing game as a literary-critical concept.

What is the relationship between Natural Narratology and structuralist models with respect to the tools of textual analysis? As has been discussed above (2.2), cognitive narratologies tend to apply a holistic “top-down” strategy in narrative description, as opposed to the word-smitten “bottom-up” strategy of traditional narratology. Ambitiously, Fludernik approaches narratology from both directions. In addition to providing the natural frames of narrative understanding, Natural Narratology seeks to subsume and reorganize the traditional concepts of narrative analysis. Apparently, all questions previously answered by narratology can be answered within the framework of Natural Narratology. Moreover, the answers come with a backbone provided by cognitive science. And, as if this was not enough, in addition to providing a better description of narrative in a given historical situation, Natural Narratology has a diachronic dimension:

What the present model therefore attempts to do is to rescue diachronic considerations for the study of narrative [by] establish[ing] a theoretical framework which transforms the standard narratological paradigms into prototypical special cases which can be extended in radial fashion. [...] The paramount use of this model, besides that of ‘explaining’ narrative situations as cognitively relevant categories, would therefore lie in its ability to trace the development of new narrative types, tracing, that is, the active deployment of cognitive strategies which are based on cognitive schemata drawn from real-world experience and prior textual and generic models. (Fludernik 1996: 51–52.)

The continuity between Natural Narratology and traditional narratology is mainly the result of Fludernik’s adoption of F.K.
Stanzel’s (1984) typology of narrative situations. Hence, Stanzel’s three principal modes of narrative – teller, first-person and figural – more or less correspond to the prototypical narrative situations of Natural Narratology, which in turn are “metaphorical applications of typical real-world strategies of sense-making” (Fludernik 1996: 51; see also Jahn 1997: 442). Building on Stanzel’s distinctions, Fludernik considers narrator an optional function of narrative: according to Fludernik, the analysis of pure reflector-narrative does not require the stipulation of an underlying narrator (see also Fludernik 2001a; cf. Nelles 1997; Ryan 199127). In this respect, Natural Narratology links with yet another narratological predecessor, namely Ann Banfield’s (1982) controversial account of the “unspeakable sentences” of fiction. Thus, Natural Narratology appears to be at least somewhat malleable in terms of the inclusion of previous models of analysis. Fludernik (ibid. 330) seeks to provide support for this conclusion by observing that “the many useful conceptual tools made available by Genette and others […] are especially relevant to the fine-tuning of the model”. Fludernik’s conception of narrative does not, however, manage to incorporate the analytical concepts of “Genette and others” to a significant extent. None of the central concepts of structuralist narratology are welcomed without substantial modifications to the analytical toolkit of Natural Narratology (Fludernik 1996: 343–344).

The differences and similarities between Natural Narratology and its structuralist predecessors are interwoven most tightly in the questions of voice and focalization. The principal difference is that Natural Narratology, despite providing some analytical concepts, is essentially a “top-down” model. For Fludernik, the most important feature of a text (or, more appropriately, of the reading process) is the interpretive frame it prompts the reader to adopt. According to Fludernik,
the general-narrative situation of a given text and, consequently, the utilized interpretive frame define the perspectival characteristics of a text. Once the reader reaches an initial conclusion about the overall nature of the narrative, the minutiae of focalization automatically fall into their places. As a result, the categories of the Genettean typology of focalization are *superfluous* in terms of the interpretive frames of Natural Narratology; Fludernik’s (1996: 346) model salvages only two parameters from previous models of focalization:

- **Viewpoint**: external / internal (‘objective’ vs. experiential focalization).

- **Access to internality**: a scale ranging from no access to complete access to another’s consciousness.

Moreover, the internality-scale is applicable only to teller-mode, or externally (in Fludernik’s sense, not in Genette’s) focalized, narratives. Internally focalized narratives are necessarily limited because a “realistically conceived teller (first-person) cannot read others’ minds” (Fludernik 1996: 346). The minimalism of Fludernik’s typology is, again, the result of her contention that the perspectival qualities of narratives are less varied than Genette’s model presupposes (cf. Fludernik 2001c: 103; Prince 2001: 45):

> A first-person narrator’s presentation of her own story is usually fairly consistent and slippages are motivated by suspense, part of the narratorial rhetoric [...] rather than indicative of a change in focalization. [F]ocalization ties in with frame, as Stanzel has already proposed for his narrative situations. **Tell**-ing frames and **Action** frames afford some kinds of focalizations, **View**ing frames quite different kinds of focalization. (Fludernik 1996: 345.)
Extrapolating from this reasoning, the macro-perspectival options in Natural Narratology are the following:

– first-person narrator option (Stanzel’s *first-person* narrative situation; Genette’s *fixed internal focalization* or *prefocalization*),

– omniscient narrator option (Stanzel’s *authorial* narrative situation; Genette’s *zero focalization*; Chatman’s narratorial *slant*), and

– reflector character option (Stanzel’s *figural* narrative situation; Genette’s *internal focalization*).

In addition, the last two categories may alternate in a text, constituting Stanzel’s *authorial-figural* narrative (all Genette’s focalization categories possible); this is obviously a typical perspectival configuration in contemporary fiction. To describe these main options, one does not necessarily need to talk about focalization at all. Moreover, beyond the macro-frames, Fludernik (1996: 346–347) considers the analysis of focalization as “fine-tuning”, apparently a pursuit of secondary importance. In this respect, Fludernik is quite right in proposing to abandon the concept of focalization. So far so good.

While the *prototypical* cases of consistent external or internal focalizations are easy to describe by means of the above macro-frames, the complex bottom-level textual characteristics of perspective equally present problems for Fludernik’s model, just as they do for the Genettean typology. Fludernik (1996: 346) acknowledges this: “It is only when one has determined on a macro-frame […] that one can then proceed to discuss how the details of this are handled in the discourse”. And, because Natural Narratology does not provide concep-
tual tools for the analysis of this “how”, one is indirectly invited to utilize the conventional narratological terminology\textsuperscript{28}.

At this point, however, a brief detour is necessary. To appreciate fully the potential of Natural Narratology for the description of voice and focalization, Fludernik’s concepts of reflectorization and figuralization require explication. Though Fludernik does not make it explicit in either her \textit{Fictions of Language} (1993) or \textit{Natural Narratology} (1996), her theory in fact provides potential analytical tools with which to rephrase the questions pertaining to the concepts of both narrative voice and focalization. Fludernik (1996: 217) defines reflectorization as the narrator’s strategy of provisionally adopting the viewpoint or mental habitus of a character, either for ironic or empathetic purposes. Requiring the presence of a “more or less prominent narrator function” (ibid. 191), reflectorization is thus a feature of authorial or authorial-reflectoral narrative situations. Figuralization, on the other hand, refers to an evocation of subjectivity in a reflector-mode narrative that has no ruling figural consciousness attached to it – a narrative with neither a narrator nor a reflector.

As the “echoing of figural discourse well beyond free indirect discourse into the very opinions voiced by the narrative itself” (Fludernik 1996: 217), the concept of reflectorization potentially reframes the question of speech and thought representation. Reflectorization is not a variety of speech and thought representation; rather, speech and thought representation is a special case of reflectorization. Consequently, reflectorization can be used to describe all kinds of idiomatic, perceptual, or ideological assimilation between the narrator and a character (or a group of characters). In this respect, the traditional question of \textit{who speaks?} is subsumed under the concept of reflectorization.
What about focalization? Throughout the discussion of reflectorization and figuralization, Fludernik (1996: e.g. 181, 183, 185) uses Genette’s categories of focalization, as well as the more general concepts of perspective and point of view, to describe the phenomenon. It seems that the concept of reflectorization covers the conceptual domains of both voice and focalization. The most notable difference between Fludernik’s reflectorization and Genette’s focalization is, once again, Fludernik’s insistence on the typically ironic function of reflectorization; Fludernik considers empathetic reflectorization (her example is James’s What Maisie Knew) as a special case of the generally ironic phenomenon. Fludernik’s emphasis on the ironic nature of reflectorization logically follows from her contention that the narrator is optional. Again, according to Fludernik (e.g. 1993: 64–66, 443; 1996: 196; 2001) there is no narrator in a reflector-mode narrative unless the text includes markers of narratorial consciousness. Irony, of course, is a typical “sign of the I” in Prince’s (1982) terms; thus, for Fludernik, the prototypical case of reflectorization is ironic.

The concept of figuralization makes its entrance, should neither narrator nor reflector persona be reflected in a narrative. Thus, the concept applies to texts that evoke an “empty deictic center” (Fludernik 1996: 192–198). According to Fludernik (ibid. 201), in the absence of narrative agents available for consciousness attribution, the reader steps in to adopt the deictic position of such texts. Thus in Woolf’s The Waves, for instance, the reader takes the role of a story-internal observer. Indeed, this is the only way to interpret plausibly such texts, if one insists on the narratorless view of reflector-mode narratives (cf. Stanzel 1984: 184). Owing to the lack of a narratorial viewpoint, figuralization is by definition non-ironic.
Now, many people are inclined to adopt Nelles’s (1997: ch. 2, esp. 59–73; see also Genette 1988: 101–102) view of a “general narrator”, overt or covert, underlying each and every instance of narrative discourse. Stipulating a narrator behind all narratives makes the concepts of reflectorization and figuralization even more interesting; a narrator becomes a scalar feature instead of either being there or not. Moreover, the necessary presence of a narrator would remove the ‘ironic bias’, i.e. the need to consider reflectorization as a primarily ironic phenomenon. Most important, postulating a general narrator allows one to rewrite both Genette’s focalization categories and all varieties of speech/thought representation as instances of reflectorization. The concept of figuralization could in the general-narrator version of reflectorization/figuralization be used to refer to cases of reflectorization that conspicuously invite the reader’s adoption of a story-internal viewpoint and not that of a neutral covert narrator agent.

Regardless of whether one extends Fludernik’s concept of reflectorization with the stipulation of a general narrator, reflectorization remains a broad concept. Reflectorization covers all kinds of amalgamation of the narratorial and the figural domain; it is desperately in need of operationalization. Fludernik (1996: 219) proposes two focal points for the analysis of reflectorization: matters of speech and thought representation, and a scale of empathy/irony. Stipulating a general narrator would add yet another variable: expressed narratorial presence. Thus, the varieties of alterity between the narrator’s and character’s viewpoints, attitudes, thoughts and idiomatic characteristics could conceivably be analyzed in a manner that cuts across both the traditional categories of discourse representation and focalization. Defined in this way, reflectorization would by definition break down Genette’s distinction between who speaks? / who sees, a distinction Fludernik has crusaded
against on many occasions (see Fludernik 1993: 326; 1996: 344; 2001).

It is, however, questionable whether the reframing of the questions of voice and focalization with the concepts of reflectorization and figuralization would ultimately yield a more efficient model for textual analysis. As Fludernik (2001a: 635) herself notes, all of the concepts provide “illusionistic solutions” to the problems of attribution of the voices and perspectives of fiction:

Both narratological categories [of voice and focalization] are established on the basis of roughly the same textual features, and they are so established by way of an interpretive move that, in the case of voice, projects a communicative schema on the narrative, and – in the case of focalization – uses a visual metaphor for determining the source of fictional knowledge. […] The concepts of figuralization and reflectorization […] elicit ingenious illusionistic solutions to the problem [of voice attribution]. Such attempts, therefore, take the reading experience as their departure point, arguing from the perplexity of unclear attribution. (Fludernik 2001a: 635.)

Adopting reflectorization and figuralization in favor of voice and focalization only replaces one set of illusionistic metaphors with another. Hence, the usefulness of a broad interpretation of the concepts of reflectorization and figuralization remains to be assessed.

The question of focalization once again illustrates the difference between “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches to narrative. In a sense, Fludernik is right to banish the concept of focalization from Natural Narratology: Genette’s categories mostly concern the details that need not be discussed in cognitive narratology. The crux is, of course, that precisely the subtle differences and inconspicuous changes in
focalization left undiscussed by Natural Narratology have traditionally been of great interest to narratologists. Consequently, students of narrative are likely to continue using the Genettean typology of focalization even if they accept the Natural definition of narrativity; the traditional categories of focalization creep in irresistibly. This makes Fludernik’s rhetoric of “throwing out the baby” of focalization (among other concepts of structuralist narratology) appear too dramatic. Many narratologists are still eager to nurse the (30-year-old!) conceptual infant, bottom-up. The problems of voice and focalization will be returned to in chapters 6 and 8. I turn now to Fludernik’s distinction between theoretical and illusionistic narrative analysis, an issue that has direct consequences for the practical application of Natural Narratology.

Fludernik is careful to distinguish between the illusionistic effects that texts have on their readers and the theoretical representation of textual structures. The questions of the narrator and narrative voices will serve to illustrate the matter: on the level of narratological description, Fludernik denies the existence of a general narrator and is sympathetic to Banfield’s notion of the univocality of narrative; on the level of readerly illusions, by contrast, she is happy to grant a provisional ontological status both to a narrator and to narrative voices.

In terms of readers’ reactions to individual texts, the tendency to attribute stylistic features to a hypothetical narrator persona and/or a character is a simple fact. However, this fact (that readers are led by the illusionism of the narrative to impose a communicational framework on the text) does not necessitate the stipulation of a narrator persona on the theoretical level at all. After all, narratologists are then repeating readers’ interpretive moves on a theoretical level, without due consideration of the illusionism involved. (Fludernik 2001a: 634–635.)
Jahn (2001b: 697) criticizes Fludernik for “hypostatiz[ing] a corrective level of narratological abstraction that is somehow superior to what the reader sees a text as being, doing, and meaning”. Fludernik’s distinction between analytical and illusionistic approaches to narratives may indeed be ideologically dubious, but this is not important. There is a theoretical issue involved, one with practical consequences. Bluntly: narratological analysis is nearly impossible, should one heed Fludernik’s advice.

A narrative understanding of a text in terms of Natural Narratology, it is recalled, is based on the interplay of four cognitive levels. According to Fludernik, three of these (levels I–III) are inaccessible to us and serve as the schematic cognitive machinery upon which the fourth level rests. Level IV, by contrast, is the arena of the readers’ conscious efforts of narrativization. On this level, the reader labors to attribute the numerous and often strange texts to typical literary situations, genres, and so forth. Now, this process is fundamentally illusionistic: in reading and narrativizing a text, the reader evokes an army of fictional existents, settings, events, and narrative agents in order to make sense of the text (see the quotation above).

Because of the non-conscious nature of levels I–III, the reader’s process of narrativization is the only aspect open to narratological study. Of course, Fludernik has arrived at her account of the cognitive parameters involved in the reception of literature by studying (an awe-inspiring) number of literary texts and making generalizing hypotheses about the mental processes involved. It is, however, not possible to observe these processes; they are merely stipulated as existing and functioning. In fact, at least within the confines of the methodology of literary criticism, we cannot really observe even the narrativization of level IV, save by introspection. The closest
thing there is to observing the process is to analyze texts and make educated guesses as to what textual feature might trigger this or that interpretation. We have learned earlier (2.2) that this is precisely what Fludernik does. Throughout her discussions of FID (1993) and in constructing Natural Narratology (1996), she very meticulously utilizes the concepts of both linguistics and narratology to explicate the assumed textual indices of the narrativization process.

Now, it is obviously necessary to make a theoretical/illusionistic distinction between the theory of narrativization in Natural Narratology (cognitive frames, parameters) and the study of the illusion-eliciting features of texts. This distinction, however, is not the only one Fludernik makes. According to Fludernik, there is a way to analyze and describe the narrative structures that evoke “readers’ interpretive moves” without repeating them. There are, apparently, three ways to do narratology: first, one can describe and explain what happens when we process narrative texts (the schemata of Natural Narratology, cognitive narratology in general); second, one can construct a theoretical system to depict ways in which texts evoke illusions (Fludernik’s linguistic/contextual analysis); third, one can create a non-theoretical and illusionistic account of the way in which texts evoke illusions (traditional narratology based on the model of fictional communication). Is there really a difference between the latter two categories? Since the process of narrativization involves a great deal of readerly illusionism, it seems fitting to utilize illusionistic categories (such as narrator, narratee, character, implied author and so forth) to analyze it.

Instead of posing a danger to analytical description of texts, the illusionist approach to narrative acknowledges the inherent illusionism of all reading and interpretation, even of narratological analysis. Moreover, the link between an illu-
sionist and a non-theoretical approach is somewhat dubious. Surely it is possible to use illusionistic concepts rigorously? A relaxation of the stark distinction between theoretical and illusionistic textual analysis is necessary for narratological analysis that seeks to combine the viewpoints of Natural and structuralist narratology, as will become clear in the next chapter.

To summarize: the most important and truly groundbreaking feature of Natural Narratology, and cognitive narratology in general, is the attribution of narrative processing and understanding to basic cognitive parameters, to the embodied mind. Whether this achievement has an elevating effect on the status of literary criticism, an effect Mark Turner was anticipating in 1991, remains to be seen. However, the liaison of narratology with cognitive science has certainly renewed the yearning for a sound theoretical foundation for narrative theory (e.g. Herman 2001a, b). As has been demonstrated with regard to Fludernik’s Natural Narratology, the theories of cognition are indeed able to provide many valuable tools for the analysis and interpretation of narrative literature, in addition to providing a general explanation for at least certain kinds of narrativity.

Nonetheless, the commentary on Natural Narratology also made evident that cognitive narratology cannot at present survive on its own. In terms of the detailed analysis and interpretation of texts, at least two sources of substantial difficulty remain. First, as noted by Fludernik herself and emphasized in the above discussion, Natural Narratology stems from a notion of narrativity based on the parameters of vernacular storytelling and is thus unable to come to terms with texts that transcend all conceptions of real-life storytelling. Second, and for present purposes more importantly, Natural Narratology relies inescapably on the concepts of the traditional models of structuralist narratology. This is evident in the way in which
Natural Narratology utilizes Stanzel’s narrative situations. More interestingly, as became clear regarding the concept of focalization, the omissions in Natural Narratology also implicitly invite one to seek ways to bridge the gap between the structuralist paradigm of narrative analysis and Natural Narratology. The next chapter will contribute to that project.
Eliciting the descriptive terms *heteroglossia*, *cacophony*, and *ventriloquism*, in addition to phrases such as Joel Black’s (1984: 26) “open-ended discursive playground”, the narration of *Gravity’s Rainbow* evokes a multiplicity of speakers. The illusion of several voices simultaneously present in narration has traditionally been considered a feature of speech and thought representation, particularly of *free indirect discourse* (FID). Studies of FID (e.g. McHale 1978; Fludernik 1993; 1995; see also Hrushovski 1979) have demonstrated, however, that expressions of subjectivity typical of FID can be found in all forms of narration. The case of *Gravity’s Rainbow* corroborates this: it is necessary to consider all types of narration in order to grasp the phenomenon of narrative voice more comprehensively. The choice of the present operational metaphor reflects this: the following will not be a study of FID in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. What is attempted instead is an examination of the attribution of *markers of subjectivity and consciousness* – in short, voice – in the narrative situations of Pynchon’s novel.

From the perspective of a Pynchon scholar, the study of voice in Pynchon’s fiction is long overdue. Jacqueline Smetak’s observant but short article “Who’s Talking Here: Finding the Voice in *Gravity’s Rainbow“ (1989) constitutes to date the most cohesive account of the novel’s voices. In addition, McHale’s (1992: ch. 4) narratologically oriented analysis of the second person of *Gravity’s Rainbow* discusses several aspects of voice attribution. The problematic has also been discussed in passing elsewhere, mostly in conjunction with various underlying thematic interpretations (e.g. Black 1984: 26, 32; Duyfhuizen 1981: 14; 1991; Schaub 1981). However, the frequent illusion of the mingling of narrator’s and characters’ voices has not...
generally aroused interest as such. From a narratological point of view, by contrast, the problem of voice attribution has come under extensive discussion. In the literature of FID the apparent mixing of voices has been frequently described as dual voice (DV), following Roy Pascal’s (1978) seminal study under the same name.

The present attempt takes its cue from both the intuitive assumption of the complexity of the voices of Gravity’s Rainbow and recent developments in the narratological description of speech and thought representation. As always in this study, then, two intellectual contexts inform the following analysis: the peculiarities of Pynchon’s fiction, and narrative theory. The two contexts approach each other in Fludernik’s (1993) theoretical study The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction. Surprisingly, Fludernik’s massive study includes a fairly detailed account of the speech and thought representation in Gravity’s Rainbow. While Fludernik by no means concentrates on Gravity’s Rainbow, the novel furnishes her work with a handful of examples, most importantly regarding the problematic of voice.

Fludernik (1993: e.g. 401) rightly assesses Gravity’s Rainbow as a problematic case for the study of FID, owing to the novel’s eccentric narrative strategies. Indeed, the nature of the novel’s speech and thought representation is difficult or downright impossible to judge by employing the conventional tripartite model of indirect discourse (ID), FID, direct discourse (DD): frequently, the text does not give clear formal evidence for distinguishing sequences of, for instance, ID from FID (Fludernik 1993: 309–310). The reader has to rely on contextual clues, even on pure intuition, in order to make such judgments. The problem is reflected in the task of discriminating between the narrator’s and the characters’ voices in potential sequences of double-voiced narration (Fludernik 1993: 329,
For Fludernik, the voices of *Gravity’s Rainbow* present themselves as fundamentally indeterminate. This is by no means the whole story, however. In the course of this discussion I will explicate some of the ways in which Pynchon’s novel in addition, and by contrast, makes itself more accurately interpretable in this respect, despite its apparent indeterminacy. The aim is to expose two opposing ‘currents’ underlying both the representation of speech and thought and the narratorial sequences of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, one of which frustrates the reader in the pursuit of definite attribution of voices, and one which sensitizes the reader in the search for subtle interpretive clues.

I will begin with a discussion of Fludernik’s revision of the theory of FID, concentrating on Fludernik’s account of DV. This is followed by an analysis of the phenomena in *Gravity’s Rainbow* in two sections: the first focuses on the occasionally contradictory interplay of formal and contextual clues in the interpretation of voices; the second examines the stylistic instability of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s narratorial passages and the novel’s tendency to deconstruct character discourse. Then, in conclusion, the potential theoretical ramifications of the textual analyses will be considered.

### 6.1. Towards a ’Natural’ FID

Fludernik approaches the problem of speech and thought representation in a Wittgensteinian spirit: she presents a very detailed linguistic and narratological analysis of FID and related phenomena, only to question seriously the analyses’ relevance in the new theoretical situation (see Jahn 1994). Fludernik propounds a conception of “schematic language representation” based mainly on the frame theory of cognitive science (Fludernik 1993: chs. 8 and 9), in other words, a conception of
speech and thought representation within the framework of Natural Narratology (Fludernik 1996). In Natural Narratology the methodological presuppositions of the linguistic and narratological analyses are no longer valid, and the findings have to be reconsidered. Luckily, they need not be altogether abandoned.

The question of double-voiced narration illustrates this. Fludernik uses the metaphorical concept of voice throughout the discussion of FID; in fact, she uses the traditional DV-hypothesis (in conjunction with the concept of irony) to illustrate the pragmatic shortcomings of Ann Banfield’s (1982) controversial account of univocal FID (see also McHale 1978: 254–255; 1983; Ron 1981: 31). The traditional DV hypothesis is debunked relatively late in the study, in the terms presented below.

According to Fludernik, the sequences typically described as DV do not in fact represent an actual mingling of narrative voices; the voices of putative DV passages are linguistically and contextually attributable either to the narrator or to a character. The illusion of two voices simultaneously present in the narration is an effect on a higher interpretive level. (Fludernik 1993: 355–356.) Hence, notably, Fludernik never denies the status of DV as an illusion evoked by the narrative, merely its status as a determinable textual feature is denied. In light of her schematic language representation, Fludernik presents an interpretation of passages of DV in terms of their contextual relevance within an established interpretive frame. In short, the reader attributes by means of his or her “inferencing activity” the subjectivity markers of potentially double-voiced passages either to the narrator (the frame of TELLING) or to a character (the frame of EXPERIENCING). This attribution depends on which option makes more sense in a given narrative situation. (Fludernik 1993: 452; see also Herman 1997; cf. Hrushovski}

The Natural interpretation of the voices of narrative transcends “mere amateurish impressionistic dabbling” (Fludernik 1993: 351) allegedly characteristic of more traditional approaches to the phenomenon. It does so by proceeding from the position that narrative discourse is “a uniform one-levelled linguistic entity which by its deictic evocation of alterity – whether in form of direct discourse, indirect discourse, free indirect discourse or Ansteckung [‘contagion’] – projects a level of language which is not actually there but is implied and manufactured by a kind of linguistic hallucination.” (Fludernik 1994: 453.) As a consequence of Fludernik’s move toward frame theory, the results of linguistic or narratological analyses lose their explanatory power; they function ‘merely’ as contextually framed gestures toward a particular interpretation of a DV passage.

The interplay of formal and contextual indices will become evident in the analysis of Gravity’s Rainbow; it is decisive either by disorienting or supporting the reader in the interpretation of the apparently double-voiced passages of the novel. In terms of Natural Narratology, the formal and contextual interpretive clues are either successful or deficient with respect to the adoption of cognitive interpretive frames. In this respect the following analysis will be deliberately illusionistic in the sense that Fludernik (2001a) attributes to the word. The
considerable strength of the Natural conception of voices can be fully utilized only by juggling the general cognitive framework of voice attribution with an illusionistic yet systematic analysis of textual features (see Herman 1997: 1048–1049, 1057; Fludernik 1995; Fludernik 2001a: 622–623). I wholly support the notion of the non-linguistic foundations of narrative voices, dual or otherwise. The alternating or layered narrative voices evoked by the text are ontologically akin to other beings inferred by readers: implied authors and readers – or stories and meanings, for that matter. Consequently, referring to the exemplary sequences of Gravity’s Rainbow as DV does not imply a commitment to a view of an actual ontological duplicity of voices; DV is a shorthand expression for the potential voice effects of the passages. The metaphor of voice has to be stretched somewhat in order to accommodate the impression of an underlying subjectivity in narratorial sequences; hopefully, it does not cease to be informative, however.

The concept of formal will be used in addition to linguistic to refer to purely linguistic (most notably lexical and syntactic) features of narrative. The concept of context is the most problematic of the key concepts used. In the literature on FID it has traditionally been used to refer both to the non-linguistic features of a narrative situation (content of utterances, for instance) and to formal features not included in a passage yet relevant to its interpretation. Herman (1995: 144) describes the ambiguity of the concept: “in discussions of represented discourse, narrower usages of context are regularly and confusingly interchanged with wider usages, precisely because narrative theory has for the most part evolved in the absence of any general theory of context, any pragmatics” (see also Sternberg 2001: 142). This chapter will to some extent con-
tribute to the confusion; the alternate uses of the concept will be made explicit when necessary, however.

6.2. The Formal and the Contextual in Voice Attribution

6.2.1. A Colloquial Narrator?

In what follows, I will consider the narrator’s and characters’ voices in the representation of speech and thought, and, in particular, the relationship between the formal and contextual markers of subjectivity. Gravity’s Rainbow is, perhaps surprisingly, relatively faithful to the novelistic conventions of evoking the illusion of layered or alternating voices, despite the fact that the novel includes a considerable number of situations in which the interpretation of potential DV passages remains problematic. Pynchon’s text includes text-book examples of FID that conform to the tradition that the novel has so often been regarded as transgressing against. I turn first to examine the narrator’s allegedly colloquial idiom in Gravity’s Rainbow in order to demonstrate the extent to which the representation of speech and thought in the novel functions in a fairly conventional manner.

Frequently, Pynchon’s novel seems to obliterate the difference between the narratorial voice and the character-based (or figural) discourse. Fludernik (1993: 329–331) refers to the identification of the narrator’s and the characters’ idioms as the origin of this confusion: “[T]here is a deliberate attempt to erase the stylistic difference, the difference [...] between a neutral narrative style and colloquial deviations from it”. In a similar vein, Michael Levine (2001: 122) discusses the unclear distinction between idioms: “[T]he migrating vocabulary [...] indicates the permeability of the boundaries which otherwise
enable both [Slothrop and narrator] to be identified as separate characters”. This seems to be true of passages such as the following, one of Fludernik’s examples:

Well: he guesses They have euchred Mexico into some Byzantine exercise, probably to do with the Americans. Perhaps the Russians. “The White Visitation,” being devoted to psychological warfare, harbors a few of each, a Behaviorist here, a Pavlovian there. It’s none of Pirate’s business. But he notes that with each film delivery, Roger’s enthusiasm grows. Unhealthy, unhealthy; he has the sense of witnessing an addiction. He feels that his friend, his provisional wartime friend, is being used for something not quite decent. (GR 34–35)

In Fludernik’s (1993: 330) analysis, the voices of the whole quotation are stylistically indeterminate in terms of the opposition narratorial / figural because of the colloquial idiomatic features of the narrator’s discourse (cf. McHale 1992: 100). However, Fludernik’s strategy of determining the general colloquial idiom of a narrating agent should be studied more closely. The idiom of the novel’s narrator is judged as colloquial by a “comparison with other narratorial passages”. This conclusion subsumes two linked presuppositions: first, that the general nature of the narrator’s idiolect can be judged contextually; second, that the narrator’s (colloquial) idiom is more or less stable. Both of these suppositions are problematic.

First, if we take seriously the claim that Pynchon’s novel often denies the use of linguistic or stylistic grounds for voice attribution, the idea of judging the narrator’s idiom contextually, i.e. in the light of other narratorial passages of the novel, becomes logically dubious. In order to become convinced of the overall colloquiality of the narrator, it would seem necessary to study whether passages that are demonstrably both narratorial and colloquial are characteristic of, or dominant
in, the narration of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Nothing of this sort has been demonstrated so far.

The second presupposition concerning the relative stability of the idiom of the narrator is even more troublesome, though from a more practical point of view. The novel is notorious for its obsession with appropriating a plethora of spoken and written styles. Describing merely as “colloquial” the sometimes frantic rate at which the narration proceeds from one pastiche of an idiom to another is an understatement, to say the least. Moreover, on closer inspection it becomes evident that even the most uncontroversially narratorial colloquial passages are not alike. *Gravity’s Rainbow* displays a variety-show of different colloquial idioms: the neutral “This Ludwig, now, may not be completely Right in the Head” (GR 554); the more mimetically conversational “Uh, x? well, what’s x?” (GR 84); the slick “what, a dialectical Tarot? Yes indeedyfoax!” (GR 748); the stage (or radio?) show routine “Well, Captain – yes you, Marine Captain Esberg from Pasadena – you have just had, the Mystery Insight!” (GR 691); the hostile “When’s the last time you felt *intensely lukewarm*? Eh?” (GR 677), and so forth. The ‘telling situations’ evoked by the different registers of narratorial colloquiality are radically different, ranging from the casual office atmosphere of PISCES to the various peculiar stage situations. As a result, one is left with a typically Pynchonian paradox: Of course the narrator is colloquial. Of course the narrator is not colloquial. The latter option refers to the critical usefulness of the category of narratorial colloquiality.

Curiously, Fludernik’s (1993: 330) final interpretation of the above Prentice-passage does not really support (or rely on) the conclusion of general colloquiality of the narrator of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Her initial remark “[t]he Pynchon quotation [...] appears to be more authorial than one might per-
haps have guessed at first sight” is not at all supported by the actual analysis. In fact, Fludernik almost immediately afterwards argues convincingly that the contextual markers of the passage foreground the figural (i.e. Pirate Prentice’s) voice and thus invite a free indirect reading. However, Fludernik deems even the contextual markers inadequate in the interpretation of the last two sentences of the passage: “[P]uzzlement persists on account of the colloquial phrases unhealthy, unhealthy; addiction; not quite decent. This, as one can conclude from a comparison with other narratorial passages, can be narratorial as well as figural [...] , and it is not even possible to align provisional wartime friend with the narrator’s perspective, since Pirate himself may just possibly be aware of the fragility of wartime friendships.” (Fludernik 1993: 330.) Perhaps the dilemma is solvable by examining the textual surroundings of the Pynchon quotation? Immediately after the previously quoted passage one reads:

What can he do? If Mexico wanted to talk about it he could find a way, security or not. His reluctance is not Pirate’s own over the machinery of Operation Black Wing. It looks more like shame. Wasn’t Mexico’s face tonight, as he took the envelope, averted? eyes boxing the corners of the room at top speed, a pornography customer’s reflex... hmm. Knowing Bloat, perhaps that’s what it is, young lady gamming well set-up young man, several poses – more wholesome than anything this war’s ever photographed... life, at least...

This excerpt definitely invites a figural reading: the whole passage is justifiably interpreted as a representation of Prentice’s meditation on Mexico’s peculiar situation. Sentences more vaguely related to Pirate’s idiom or thought processes are “referentially linked” (Ehrlich 1990: e.g. 49, 53; see also Oltean 1993: 701–703) to sequences containing highly idi-
omatic material. The consistency of character-attributable DV before and after the indeterminate sentences can be used as a contextual clue in the interpretation of the Pirate-excerpt as a whole. Moreover, this interpretation is supported by Fludernik’s frame-theoretical model: the principle of cognitive obstination is beautifully at play in the figural reading of the whole passage. According to Fludernik’s concept, the “[s]ubjective elements have to be aligned to a consciousness, the most obvious candidates being the last consciousness introduced” (Fludernik 1993: 451; see also Stanzel 1984: 54–55). This reasoning would justifiably conclude in a view of consistent figural voice in the passage.

Hence, the interpretation of the Prentice-sequence neither supports nor relies on the view of a generally colloquial narrator. The formal and contextual indices of subjectivity in the excerpt were found to complement each other in a figural interpretation. Again, this is not to deny the narrator’s frequent colloquiality. Consider, for instance, the relationship between the narrator’s and Pirate Prentice’s voices in the following:

No, they are making believe to be narodnik, but I know, they are of Iasi, of Codreanu, his men, men of the League, they... they kill for him – they have oath! They try to kill me... Transylvanian Magyars, they know spells... at night they whisper... Well, hrrump, heh, heh, here comes Pirate’s Condition creeping over him again, when he’s least expecting it as usual – might as well mention here that much of what the dossiers call Pirate Prentice is a strange talent for – well, for getting inside the fantasies of others [...]. (GR 11–12)

The two first sentences of the quotation are shortly afterwards indirectly attributed to a Rumanian royalist in exile whose fantasies Pirate has taken to manage in his capacity as a “fantasist-surrogate”. This makes it logical to attribute the rep-
resented paranoid thought to him, or to his provisionally adopted alter ego. The subsequent lexical and onomatopoetic markers of subjectivity, by contrast, cannot be Prentice’s; they belong to the narrator, who is at the time the only consciousness available for voice attribution. The sequence creates the illusion that the narrator takes over while Prentice becomes involuntarily immersed in his dutiful hallucinations which are described at length later on (GR 12–13). In fact, the scene evoke a feeling of hesitation (cf. Fludernik 1993: 335), and the narrator seems not altogether comfortable about having to report Pirate’s strange abilities and assignments.

Interpreting the scene in this way makes tangible the thoroughly illusionistic strategy of narrative analysis. Voices in fiction are attributed both by examining their diegetic context and by studying their linguistic markers. The impression of a clearly personalized narrator, at times conscious of the strangeness of the story being told, is a symptom of the anthropomorphic critical tendency noted by Culler (1988: 206): “[W]e explain textual details by adducing narrators and explain narrators by adducing qualities of real people” (see also Diengott 1987; Stanzel 1990: 811–813; Fludernik 1996: 47; 2001a: 622–623). This interpretation of the colloquial features of the narrator’s discourse does not, however, corroborate the view of the general and stable colloquiality of the narrator: quite the opposite. Rather, it provides a plausible natural explanation for the local display of conversational style. This naturalization of the narrative voice in mimetic terms does not, however, in any way produce a consistent realistic image of a narrator; it merely provides am interpretive means to get through the passage in question. *Gravity’s Rainbow* evokes illusions of anthropomorphic narrative agents strategically and provisionally – only to disintegrate them later. Consequently, generalizations about both the narrator’s and the characters’ voices
in *Gravity’s Rainbow* are rarely legitimate or helpful in the analysis of the novel.

6.2.2. Long-Distance Linking

The discussion of the first Prentice-example suggests that widening the window of observation even slightly, say, to include the immediate textual surroundings of a passage, can have a decisive effect on the interpretation of narrative voices. Encouraged, I will now turn to probe further the extent of the contextual connectedness of the voices of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Frequently, the novel responds well to the efforts of a pedantic reader. The idiosyncratic or dialectal features of character discourse are potential vehicles for distant linking. A particularity of Roger Mexico’s (jealous) speech, set in a frustrated dog-chasing scene with Edward Pointsman, serves as an example:

[Jessica Swanlake:] “I’ve lost my mind. I ought to be cuddling someplace with Beaver this very minute, and here instead I’m with this *gillie* or something, this spiritualist, statistician, what *are* you anyway –” “Cuddling?” Roger has a tendency to scream. “*Cuddling?*” (GR 43)

The slapstick pursuit of the dog resumes and goes on for a while, after which the reader is presented with the following:

“For pity’s sake,” Pointsman thumping after him back into the wreckage. “Don’t frighten him Mexico, this isn’t Kenya or something, we need him as close to normative, you know, as possible.”

Normative? *Normative?*

“Roger,” calls Roger, giving him short-long-short with the flash.

“Jessica,” murmurs Jessica, tiptoeing behind them. (GR 44)
The immediate context of Mexico’s chase does not provide any clues about the attribution of “Normative? Normative?” Perhaps it should be read as the narrator’s passing meditation on the concept of normativity? Only a retrospective consideration of a specific trait in Mexico’s speech, clearly marked by the narrator in the previous excerpt, points toward a figural reading. This makes it plausible to interpret the passage as internal monologue. Thus, “Normative? Normative?” is best interpreted as an antagonistic statement that Mexico would have wanted to scream aloud but is instead forced to utter only internally. Mexico is allowed only an affirmative response, which in turn gets ridiculed by Jessica Swanlake. This interpretation, moreover, is in accord with the thematic content of the scene: the failed attempt at dognapping succinctly illustrates the problems of both Mexico’s professional situation and his love life. Mexico’s inclination to display temper is also briefly touched upon elsewhere in the novel (e.g. GR 634).

The interpretation of the previous example relied principally on the formal features of discourse. Distant contextual connections based on the content of putative utterances or thoughts are equally possible, however. Pirate Prentice furnishes us with yet another complex case of subjectivity attribution. Near the novel’s beginning the reader is presented with a description of London on a winter morning:

The sun is still below horizon. The day feels like rain, but for now the air is uncommonly clear. The great power station, and the gasworks beyond, stand precisely: crystals grown in morning’s beaker, stacks, vents, towers, plumbing, gnarled emissions of steam and smoke […] (GR 6)
Stylistically, the passage is mostly unmarked, albeit Prentice is a probable focalizer of the scenic description. The second sentence, with its conversational *feels like rain* and *for now*, only vaguely evokes an impression of a consciousness affecting the narration: no distinguishable voice emerges. This conclusion is supported by the more conspicuously formally marked passages of Prentice’s free indirect thought presented shortly afterwards (GR 6–7). This interpretation is, however, shown to be dubious in the light of later contextual evidence. Five pages later, the ever-fascinating problematic of weather is returned to, again in conjunction with Prentice. This time, the impression of a subjectivity affecting the narration is stronger:

He’s driven out, away, east over Vauxhall Bridge in a dented green Lagonda by his batman, a Corporal Wayne. The morning seems to grow colder the higher the sun rises. Clouds begin to gather after all. A crew of American sappers spills into the road […]. (GR 11)

Military slang expressions such as *batman* or *sappers* at least moderately motivate a figural reading. Remarkably, “after all” refers to the observation of the “uncommon clearness” of the sky presented five pages earlier. The vague impression of Prentice’s subjectivity underlying the first quotation is thus retroactively confirmed. The web of connections between the scenes is not limited to this: Prentice’s phrase “incoming mail”, referring to a message apparently delivered to him in a German V-2 rocket, is also conspicuously present in both. The subtlety of the markers of subjectivity in the scenes does not, however, warrant a free indirect reading. The passages would be more adequately described as contextually linked instances of internal focalization that evoke a figural subjec-
tivity. Separately, the Prentice-passages above do not constitute clear cases of figural voice: the subjectivity markers are vague in both, moderate at best. Interestingly, the remote linking strengthens the figural reading of both of the linked sequences. In other words, once the reader makes the connection between indeterminate instances, even subtle markers of subjectivity suffice. The observation corroborates Ehrlich’s (1990) view of FID (and, it seems, voice in general) as a distinct textual unit with the power to sustain itself over ambiguous sequences of the narrative text. It is safe to assume, however, that cases such as the above are probably not what Ehrlich had in mind. Proposing, like Ehrlich, an intersentential way to analyze FID, McHale characterizes the reading process in what he terms an integrational model,

whereby sentences give rise to interpretive reconstructions which in turn affect the interpretation of subsequent and even, retrospectively, of preceding sentences, and so on, a global picture of the text’s meaning and intentionality being continually built, unbuilt, and rebuilt at every point. (McHale 1983: 39; quoted in Jahn 1997: 460.)

Obviously, the key notion in the above is the possibility of a retroactive determining of the meaning and structural function of a particular textual sequence. In Pynchon, it seems, the reader has to delay his or her voice attributions, or at least be prepared to alter them to accommodate later evidence (see Perry 1979: 58–61). The thing to note in the examples above is the subtlety with which the links between passages are established. It is at least in part this vague yet discernible internal cohesion that evokes the “feeling of connectedness” that Gravity’s Rainbow is famous for (e.g. Moore 1987; Cooper 1983:177, 198; Seed 1988: 207). While far from clear as examples of speech and thought representation, links like these
provide a mesh of textual connections which functions, almost subliminally, by evoking readerly experiences of déjà-vu that turn out to be more than déjà-vu. In Natural terms, the retroactive voice-attribution entails shuffling between frames of TELLING and EXPERIENCING. Constantly re-adjusting the interpretive framework, the reader learns an important lesson in the art of reading Pynchon: to be prepared to reconsider interpretive conclusions. Let me slowly gravitate toward yet another lesson by examining more troublesome cases of voice attribution.

6.2.3. Indeterminate Speech and Thought

As demonstrated above, apparently stylistically undifferentiated and chaotic sequences of potential DV can, on closer inspection, turn out to permit justified and fairly conventional figural or narratorial interpretations. Furthermore, the contextual clues of subjectivity attribution were found to link even distant sequences together effectively. However, the previously noted intuitive insight that the novel’s speech and thought representation is indeterminate cannot be denied: there must be unsolvably fuzzy cases of voice attribution in the novel. Consider the effect of the voices in the sequence depicting a weekly briefing by Brigadier Pudding:

On he goes, gabbing, gabbing, recipes for preparing beets in a hundred tasty ways, or such cucurbitaceous improbabilities as Ernest Pudding’s Gourd Surprise – yes, there is something sadistic about recipes with “Surprise” in the title, chap who’s hungry wants to just eat you know, not be Surprised really, just wants to bite into (sigh) the old potato, and be reasonably sure there’s nothing inside but potato you see [...]. (GR 80)
The passage has both lexical (gabbing, chap, the old potato), and syntactic markers (you know, you see) of English colloquial idiom, along with “cucurbitaceous improbabilities” that can perhaps be interpreted as belonging to the humorous vocabulary of an educated Englishman. The only problem is that none is directly identified by the text. The last character ‘on stage’ in terms of speech and thought representation is Pudding himself, who is logically ruled out as the source of the remarks. The next to last to speak is the Hungarian refugee Géza Rózsavölgyi, an even more unlikely choice considering his heavy Finno-Ugric accent.

The sequence gives enough formal clues to suggest figural reading, but deficient formal or contextual evidence to attribute the discernible voice to a particular character. A reasonable solution seems to be to attribute the material evoking subjectivity to a prototypical, ‘generic’, member of the audience of Pudding’s ramblings. The interpretation is supported, in addition, by a subsequent comment on the audience itself, supposedly presented from the perspective of a member of the audience: “as if we have a parliament of some kind here” (GR 80). Regarding the precise attribution of subjectivity, the sequence remains necessarily vague. Depending on one’s taste in narratological concepts, the phenomenon could be categorized in various ways. First, the sequence recalls the concepts of indefinite direct and indirect discourse introduced by Herman (1995: 177) to refer to cases which “present discourse attributable not to an individual character but rather to a collective”. By way of analogy, the passage above could be described as an instance of indefinite FID. On the other hand, Fludernik’s (1996: 182) account of reflectorization offers an alternative interpretation. From this perspective, the excerpt would be read as “the narrator’s [...] ironic mimicry of typicalized story-internal opinions.” However, the sequence is not distinctly ironic;
thus it constitutes, in Fludernik’s nomenclature, an instance of consonant reflectorization. Finally, in terms of Genette’s focalization, the passage could be considered as inhabiting the gray area between zero-focalization and internal focalization (see 8.4.2), as indeterminably locatable internal focalization.

The vagueness of the above excerpt is not, however, of real importance in terms of the more general problem of discriminating between the narrator’s and the characters’ voices. The formal and contextual markers were clear enough to make the reader “hear” a figural voice, however unidentified it finally remained. It takes surprisingly little to establish an even more radically indeterminate voice effects. After a dramatic dialogue between the behaviorist Pointsman and Brigadier Pudding, the narrator describes Slothrop’s presumed personal history as a guinea-pig of psychological testing. Some colloquial features are incorporated in the narrator’s discourse:

But a hardon, that’s either there, or it isn’t. Binary, elegant. The job of observing can even be done by a student.

Unconditioned stimulus = stroking penis with antiseptic cotton swab.
Unconditioned response = hardon.
Conditioned stimulus = x.
Conditioned response = hardon whenever x is present, stroking is no longer necessary, all you need is that x.

Uh, x? well, what’s x? Why, it’s the famous “Mystery Stimulus” that’s fascinated generations of behavioral-psychology students, is what it is. (GR 84)

In this case, the linguistic features of the quotation imply only the narrator’s conversational manner, rather low-key at that: later on, the infant Slothrop is referred to as “the little sucker”. The only character contextually available for subjectivity attribution is Edward Pointsman. However, Pointsman,
whose idiolect is elsewhere portrayed as restrained and scholarly, is not a plausible candidate. The colloquial expressions involved in the scene would seem to be necessarily attributed to the narrator, consequently barring a figural interpretation. However, a fair amount of confusion is introduced, as the narrator shortly afterwards refers to Pointsman: “‘[... ] We cannot therefore judge the degree of extinction only by the magnitude of the reflex or its absence, since there can still be a silent extinction beyond the zero.’ Italics are Mr. Pointsman’s.” (GR 85.) The behaviorist’s sudden re-appearance in the ‘credit lines’ of the story of Slothrop’s alleged conditioning makes it difficult to omit the possibility of viewing the whole sequence, including the controversial colloquial material, as Pointsman’s meditation on the psychological oddity. Disturbingly, the formal markers of subjectivity and the contextual evidence point toward opposite interpretations of the passage. If one chooses to disregard the retroactive contextual clue, the sequence ceases to be an instance of double-voiced narration and instead turns into an example of the colloquial idiom of the narrator (cf. 6.2.1). If, on the other hand, one relies on contextual evidence, the passage is a rather indeterminate case of figural voice. Duyfhuizen (1981: 13) seems to opt for the latter choice: he interprets the last sentence of the quotation as an indication of “the very act” of Pointsman’s reading of Pavlov’s text. According to this reasoning, the passage as a whole would be attributed to Pointsman. To my mind, the text of Gravity’s Rainbow does not provide sufficient information to make this judgment.

In cases like this the anthropomorphic illusions of narrative agents cease to be effective, and the inferential ingenuity of the reader is consequently impaired. When both the formal and the contextual clues for subjectivity attribution fail to provide sufficient evidence, the reader is left alone with his or her
exquisite indecision. A similar tension between contextual and formal markers of subjectivity plagues the next example, resulting in indeterminate voice attribution. The excerpt seems to exhibit some narratorial hesitation, as in the example (6.2.1) involving Pirate Prentice’s assignments as a fantasist-surrogate. This time, the apparent cause for hesitation is the strangeness of one of Slothrop’s many amorous performances:

Now something, oh, kind of funny happens here. Not that Slothrop is really aware of it now, while it’s going on – but later on, it will occur to him that he was – this may sound odd, but he was somehow, actually, well, inside his own cock. If you can imagine such a thing. (GR 470)

The passage is apt once again to elicit a competition between the narratorial and figural frames. On the one hand, the hesitant style reminiscent of the previous Prentice-example suggests a narratorial reading. On the other, the conspicuous “it will occur to him” invites one to attribute the subsequent conversational features to Slothrop. Moreover, tense might be seen as playing an essential role in the interpretation of the passage: after the parenthetical reference to Slothrop, the narration shifts from the present to the past tense, as if Slothrop was recounting the situation afterwards (see also Smetak 1989: 101; Duyfhuizen 1991: par. 13). If this formal clue taken into consideration, at least the markers of subjectivity in the later part of the excerpt would be attributed to Slothrop. This interpretation is somewhat vaguely supported by context: Slothrop’s voice persists during the remainder of the scene. Neither narratorial nor figural interpretation seem completely satisfactory, however. The reader is once again left with an overabundance of interpretive suggestions.
To summarize: *Gravity’s Rainbow* proliferates contradictory passages in which it is often impossible to arrive at a justifiable voice attribution. Pynchon’s novel not only habitually obliterates the stylistic difference in DV; sometimes the contextual grounds for discrimination are denied as well. The effect is not one of blatant flouting of the co-operative principle, however. The voices that ultimately remain indeterminate are ‘disguised’ as normal cases of DV. In other words, the ‘perfect paranoiac’ whom the novel has trained to follow the most improbable clues is thus invited to exercise his or her ingenuity, blissfully unaware of the interpretive culs-de-sac just around the corner.

### 6.3. De-Stabilizing Idioms

#### 6.3.1. Uncle Charles Overdrive

The above discussions suggest that *Gravity’s Rainbow* exhibits a paradoxical attitude toward voices: on the one hand, the novel rewards a careful reader by presenting very subtle clues toward an interpretation of indeterminably ‘voiced’ passages; on the other, it is equally apt to make a plausible attribution of voices impossible by presenting formal and contextual markers of subjectivity that invite contradictory interpretations. I turn now to consider in more detail the latter, deconstructive tendency. In what follows, Pynchon’s novel is shown to effectively de-stabilize idioms of both the narrator and characters, sometimes to the extent of making them seem deliberately artificial and implausible.

The narratorial sequences of *Gravity’s Rainbow* are characterized by a variety of stances, guises, and idioms the nov-
el’s narrative agent provisionally adopts. George Levine is not exaggerating:

There is, obviously, no simple way to characterize Pynchon’s prose. […] It is deliberately unstable, parodic, various, encyclopedic, fragmented […] Though capable of traditional decorum, it is characteristically indecorous in its refusal to be locked into a mode. […] It is almost impossible to locate the narrator, who refuses to protect us with his own disgust, or with ironies that don’t cancel each other out. (Levine 1976: 118–119; see also Cooper 1983: 189–201)

In order to analyze this narratorial stream of imitations and appropriations with the narratological armature, I will evoke the concept of the Uncle Charles Principle. Christened by Hugh Kenner (1978) after a character in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, the Uncle Charles Principle (UCP) is normally used in reference to the migration of characters’ supposed verbal qualities into the narrator’s discourse (e.g Fludernik 1993: 332–338). Stanzel (1984; 1990) has used for this purpose the concept of Ansteckung, best translated as ‘contagion’. Since various concepts have been introduced to describe different aspects of the illusion of blending narratorial and figural discourses – FID, focalization, reflectorization, ‘contagion’ – UCP evades Ockham’s razor only if it is defined rather narrowly. Here is Kenner’s (1978: 18) definition of UCP: “the narrative idiom need not be the narrator’s”. This is hopelessly vague. Later on, however, Kenner proposes a more interesting definition: the “Uncle Charles Principle entails writing about someone much as that someone would choose to be written about” (Kenner 1978: 21). This definition is simultaneously usefully narrow and frighteningly broad. Let me first turn to the narrow sense, UCP as the intrusion of a character’s
supposed verbal traits into narratorial discourse in situations which do not involve speech and thought representation.

This definition makes UCP distinguishable from FID proper (cf. McHale 1992: 273n.5): UCP refers to cases that would be characterized as FID, if they involved the representation of speech or thought. Moreover, of course, UCP may function as a formal clue toward judging a passage as internally focalized. Examples of the character-related ‘contagion’ abound in Gravity’s Rainbow; the novel makes use of UCP flexibly and often. The narrator’s dynamic linguistic identity surfaces most explicitly in the novel’s final one hundred or so pages, in the novel’s allegedly “anti-paranoid” (Slade 1974: 240) phase. This is the narrator, introducing the super-hero rescue team of the Floundering Four:

Rescue team will consist of Myrtle Miraculous flyin’ in here in shoulderpadded maroon dress, the curlers still up in her hair and a tough frown fer dragging her outa Slumberland [...] Maximilian, high square pomaded head and a superthin mustache come zooming here out of his “front” job, suave manager of the club Oogabooga, where Beacon Street aristocracy rubs elbows ev’ry night with Roxbury winos ‘n’ dopefiends, yeah hi Tyrone, heah Ah is! H’lo Moitle baby, hyeah, hyeah, hyeah. (GR 675)

In this short passage, the narrator’s style transforms from the neutral/official “will consist of”, via Myrtle’s dialectal “fer dragging her outa Slumberland”, to Maximilian’s slick hipster idiom. Immediately afterwards, the style for a while becomes noticeably more bookish as the narrator turns to characterize Marcel, the most cerebral member of the four superheroes, at length:
Marcel, a mechanical chessplayer dating back to the Second Empire, actually build a century ago for the great conjuror Robert-Houdin, very serious-looking French refugee kid, funny haircut with the ears perfectly outlined in hair that starts abruptly a quarter-inch strip of bare plastic skin away, black patent-shiny hair, hornrim glasses, a rather remote manner [...]. (GR 675)

While the latter quotation by no means exemplifies the narrator’s maximally elevated style (*funny* and *kid* suggest slight colloquiality), it still illustrates the dynamic of UCP quite adequately: the character who at the moment is the subject of narration, or ‘on stage’, has an effect on the narrator’s style. For a realistic anthropomorphic narratorial agent this is obviously impossible. In terms of reading experience, however, the instance of UCP does not constitute a drastic violation of narrative conventions (for the simple reason that UCP *is* a narrative convention; see Fludernik 1993: 333). True to its tendency of using conventions to their logical limits, however, Pynchon’s novel occasionally applies UCP to the point of utter silliness. This happens, for instance, in an episode of modern-day piracy involving, among others, Frau Gnahb and her son Otto. As Frau Gnahb steers her pirate boat to the side of the continuously partying ship *Anubis*, Otto’s presence infiltrates all layers of narratorial discourse and affects the supposedly onomatopoetic representation of sound effects:

“*OTTO!* slams her boat into the *Anubis*, a most godawful earsplitting *Otto*...” (GR 529; see also 651.)

The choice of “*OTTO!*” as the clash of colliding vessels is not without thematic motivation; the troublesome relationship between the insecure adolescent and his dominating mother looms behind the scene and is dealt at length elsewhere in the novel. (According to this reasoning, in fact, the
instance of UCP might actually relate to Frau Gnahb and her supposed mental disposition.) The ludicrous effect which the Gnahbs have on the scene steers us toward the broader definition of UCP. Let me now return to Kenner. It seems that the full anti-mimetic potential of Kenner’s concept is yet to be discovered. This is evident when he discusses the ‘Eumaeus’ episode of Ulysses. According to Kenner, Bloom’s presence as the subject of narration affects it “as if for these fifty pages he held the pen”. This is visible, for instance, in the representation of speech; Bloom is the only character speaking with polysyllables, while other characters talk realistically. The impression is as if Bloom “could reserve the most stylish lines for himself”\(^{39}\). (Kenner 1978: 38; see also Perry 1979.) Understood in this way, UCP ceases to be mere ‘contagion’ between narrator’s and character’s discourses. Instead, it becomes a structural principle potentially affecting the narration in general. Paradoxically, Kenner’s proposal is at the same time radically anti-mimetic and thoroughly illusionistic (in Fludernik’s sense). It is anti-mimetic insofar as it explodes the notion of a realistic narrator persona, though insisting on a narrating instance\(^{40}\). On the other hand, it is illusionistic in the sense that it bestows on a character the power and responsibility to determine the form and content of narration in many ways. It seems that there is room for two UCPs: one is ‘realist’ and pertains to issues of idiomatic ‘contagion’ between characters and the narrator (the narrow definition); the other is ‘anti-realist’ and goes beyond idiom appropriation to potentially involve a wholesale re-formation of narrative. However unnatural and anti-mimetic, UCP is a vehicle of naturalization; it allows the reader to attribute narrative anomalies to characters’ individual traits.

Clearly, the narrow and more realist definition of UCP – the intrusion of a character’s idiom into the narration – is more
useful in terms of general narratology. However, in the anti-realist narratologies of Pynchon and Joyce, the broad definition can be put to interesting uses. There is a difference, however. While Kenner’s examples of Joyce’s UCP are relatively moderate and require meticulous close-reading, Gravity’s Rainbow includes some rather conspicuous instances. Some of the most blatant formal peculiarities invite interpretation as UCP. The following constitutes an example of this.

The tenth episode of the novel begins with a pair of seemingly meaningless letters, the first addressed to “The Kenosha Kid”, the second to “Tyrone Slothrop, Esq”. Immediately after the letters the reader, without any explanation, is provided with several miniature sociodramas set in different diegetic contexts. The only thing connecting the scenes is the phrase: “You never did the Kenosha Kid”. Finally, an explanation is provided:

These changes on the text “You never did the Kenosha Kid” are occupying Slothrop’s awareness as the doctor leans in out of the white overhead to wake him and begin the session. The needle slips without pain into the vein just outboard of the hollow of the crook of his elbow: 10% Sodium Amytal, one cc at a time, as needed.

Hence, the forays from standard prose format are retrospectively revealed as Slothrop’s dreams or hallucinations induced by the chemical trance. After a couple of further exercises on the “Kenosha Kid”, the narration turns to describe at length Slothrop’s creative reminiscence of a night at the Roseland Ballroom, his dive into the toilet and so forth (see 4.3). For present purposes, the most significant lesson to learn from this scene is that there seem to be no restrictions in Pynchon’s UCP. All of the aspects of the narration, including the choice of the basic format of the narration, are liable to be
influenced by the character’s presence as the subject of narration.

Uncle Charles lurks behind some of the musical scenes of the novel, as well. The “Loonies on Leave” musical scene serves as an example. After his escape from the Casino Hermann Goering, Slothrop begins his pursuit of rocket intelligence in the cafés of Zürich. Before coming across any interesting information and prior to meeting either of the spies, Mario Schweitar (GR 260) or Francisco Squalidozzi (GR 263), Slothrop evidently confronts a number of less plausible spies and agents. This “first wave of corporate spies” (GR 259) is presented in the form of a musical stage-show “Loonies on Leave” that involves dancing, audience participation (provided that Slothrop is considered to be part of the audience), and a chorus line that is “divided not into the conventional Boys and Girls but into Keepers and Nuts”. The scene is easily attributable to Slothrop and his strange situation and disposition, even though the ultimate reason for utilizing the format of musical remains a mystery.⁴¹

Mere consideration of the characters’ potential influence on the narratorial voice is insufficient in the case of Gravity’s Rainbow. The diegetic context is also decisive in terms of the narrator’s stylistic choices. An example of this is the frequently discussed church scene, where Mexico and Jessica Swanlake attend an Advent vesper. After a description of the event, the narrator turns to discuss at length the struggle on the British home front in all its crude reality. The context of the narration, the ceremonial situation, seems somehow to affect the style of narration:

listen: this is the War’s evensong, the War’s canonical hour, and the night is real. Black greatcoats crowd together, empty hoods full of dense, church-interior shadows. Over the coast
the Wrens are working late, down inside cold and gutted shells, their torches are newborn stars in the tidal evening. [...] In the pipefitters’ sheds, icicled, rattling when the gales are in the Straits, here’s thousands of old used toothpaste tubes [...], thousands of somber man-mornings made tolerable [...]. (GR 130)

Or is it the context? Jacqueline Smetak (1989: 96) attributes the elevated style of the passage to Mexico, a “poetic and deeply pained” young man. Thomas Schaub (1981: 124–126) hears in the episode the meditative oratory of a voice identifiable with the narrator (see also McHale 1992: ch. 4). I am more inclined to accept Schaub’s interpretation than Smetak’s; to my mind, the Vesper-episode does not provide enough evidence to be judged as Mexico’s meditation on the war. The narrator’s reverent style is maintained, even though it proceeds to describe the quite mundane process of recycling metal for the purposes of the war industry. Thus the immediate diegetic context seems to override the subject of the discourse in determining the idiom of the narrator. Shortly after the quoted passage the narrator turns to metaphysical considerations of war. In this complex sequence the narration oscillates between everyday glimpses of wartime life and a more serious contemplation of war and its consequences. The diegetic situation, the Advent vesper, envelops the narrator’s meditation and has a unique effect on its style. The contrast between the presented reality of war and ceremony is at its most blatant in the description of the members of the male choir, a group of “piss-swollen men suffering from acute lower backs and all-day hangovers, wishing death on officers they truly hate […] out here performing for strangers, give you this evensong, climaxing now with its rising fragment of some ancient scale, voices overlapping three and fourfold, up, echo-
ing filling the entire hollow of the church […] – *praise be to God!*” (GR 136.)

It is easy to see that the narration of *Gravity’s Rainbow* stretches the traditional understanding of UCP. Certainly the narrator’s voice frequently acquires a particular tone like a character ‘on stage’. However, the phenomenon goes far beyond mere appropriation of tone or idiom: all levels of narration are potential targets of UCP. In addition to character influence, the diegetic context can affect the idiom of the narrator. These observations prompt one to reformulate Pynchon’s UCP: *any feature of the diegetic situation can affect any aspect of narration.* In all likelihood, this is not what Kenner had in mind, though it might also turn out to be true about *Ulysses*. Perhaps we should re-christen the broad definition of UCP as the *Kenosha Kid Principle*.

The Kenosha Kid Principle (KKP) is, like UCP, a vehicle of naturalization. It elevates the local diegetic situation into the position of determining the structural properties of narrative. As such, it is arguably more flexible and useful than global interpretive strategies such as “*Gravity’s Rainbow* is a film”, or “*Gravity’s Rainbow* is a Menippea”, or “*Gravity’s Rainbow* is a dream/hallucination”, or “*Gravity’s Rainbow* is a poststructuralist text”. However, the newly established principle is, still, a naturalizing strategy and consequently cannot explain away all irregularities of the narrative voice. Some features of the narrative voice are not recuperable in terms of the diegetic situation or personage. I will consider the fallibility of the narrator and the apparent splitting of the narrator’s voice.

While the narrator of *Gravity’s Rainbow* generally is presented as an infallible stylistic genius, there are sequences that seem to require a certain amount of narratorial blundering to be most effective. The narrator utilizes both technological jar-
gon and religious or mystic vocabulary in the episode “Some Characteristics of Imipolex G”:

Imipolex G is the first plastic that is actually *erectile*. Under suitable stimuli, the chains grow cross-links, which stiffen the molecule and increase intermolecular attraction so that this Peculiar Polymer runs far outside the known phase diagrams, from limp rubbery amorphous to amazing perfect tessellation, hardness, brilliant transparency [...] (slowly gleaming in the Void. Silver and black. Curvewarped reflections of stars flowing across, down the full length of, round and round in meridians exact as the meridians of acupuncture. What are the stars but points in the body of God where we insert the healing needles of our terror and longing? [...] ) (GR 699)

The beginning of the excerpt is presumably a fair approximation of light chemistry jargon. The impression is, however, betrayed by some unorthodox word choices: would a chemist’s textbook really play with alliteration as in *Peculiar Polymer*? Does not the word *limp* seem a bit crude in scientific discourse, particularly as it is presented in juxtaposition with the high-brow *tessellation*? The characterization of the plastic is rendered even more dubious, of course, by the parenthetical display of ‘polymer mysticism’. A final blow to academic credibility is administered by linking the pseudo-scientific gibberish directly to the novel’s paranoid themes at the end of the episode (GR 700). The ‘flaws’ in the narrator’s command of the jargon of applied chemistry serve as warnings against an innocent anthropomorphic interpretation of the episode. The novel not only presents narratorial appropriations of styles but it also plays with their *failures*. One ‘explanation’ for this has been offered above (3.2): the novel’s strategy of making the narrator trip and stumble to make the hierarchy of narrative seem artificial. Passages such as the above do not call for natu-
ralization. In fact, the only naturalization they allow is a naïve reading that overlooks narrative quirks in order to extract the thematic content of the text.

The most disconcerting cases involve an apparent splitting of the narratorial voice. The narrator’s extreme stylistic variation is mostly horizontal and linear: sequences featuring different narratorial masks alternate, sometimes very rapidly, but usually in succession. The horizontal variation does not allow the reader to construct a coherent and realistically stable teller figure for the whole narrative, but makes reasonably sure that the narrator has only one voice at a time. The vertical splitting of the narrator’s voice, by contrast, presents the reader with brief sequences arguably featuring two competing narratorial voices. This is clearly an explicit metafictional device: it reveals the ‘told’ nature of the narrative by drawing attention to the context of narrating. Consider the following excerpt, featuring Slothrop’s attempts to learn the V-2 rocket by heart:

“Boundary-layer temperature $T_{\text{sub e}}$, what is this? rises exponentially till Brennschluss, around 70 mile range, and then there’s a sharp cusp [...]. Stays pretty steady till re-entry,” blablabla. The bridge music here, bright with xylophones, is based on some old favorite that will comment, ironically but gently, on what is transpiring – a tune such as “School Days, School Days,” or “Come, Josephine, in My flying Machine” [...] take your pick [...]. (GR 222–223)

The narrator turns from the (apparently boring) representation of character discourse to the description of the scene as a theatrical performance or a movie, complete with “bridge music”. As a result, the reader has to accept that the narrator simultaneously tells the story and presents a commentary on it. This is at best a partial interpretation, however: immedi-
ately after the passage above the narrator naturalizes the musical accompaniment of the scene by presenting “a number of musicians in the corner groaning and shaking their heads [...]. Bad gig, bad gig...” (see also GR 538, 713). There is a ludicrous possibility that the playing of the “bridge music” actually transpires in the world of the novel (constituting diegetic music). Thus, the metafictive effect of the dual narratorial voice is fleeting at best.

This vertical split in the narrator’s voice can also serve as a vehicle for implicit narratorial self-criticism. Describing at length the achievements of the architects Albert Speer and Etzel Ölsch, the narrator’s voice splits in a way to suggest that at least a part of the narratorial agent feels it has become overly excited or unhinged: “Imagine his astonishment on finding that the parabola was also the shape of the path intended for the rocket through space. (What he actually said was, ‘Oh, that’s nice.’)”. For a moment, the narrator’s voice seems to consist both of an enthusiastic paranoid and a down-to-earth reporter of facts (see Cooper 1983: 199).

To conclude, I will discuss yet another instance of divided narratorial voice, a surprisingly serious one. Levine (1976: 132–133) discusses the narrator’s voice with reference to a scene depicting Pökler’s journey through the prison camp Dora. Levine aptly calls the following Pynchon’s “high seriousness”:

The odors of shit, death, sweat, sickness, mildew, piss, the breathing of Dora, wrapped him as he crept in staring at the naked corpses being carried out now that America was so close, to be stacked in front of the crematoriums, the men’s penises hanging, their toes clustering white and round as pearls… each face so perfect, so individual, the lips stretched back into deathgrins, a whole silent audience caught at the punch line of the joke. [...]

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Where it was darkest and smelled the worst, Pökler found a woman lying, a random woman. He sat for half an hour holding her bone hand. She was breathing. Before he left, he took off his gold wedding ring and put it on the woman’s thin finger, curling her hand to keep it from sliding off. If she lived, the ring would be good for a few meals, or a blanket, or a night indoors, or a ride home… (GR 432–433)

In Levine’s (1976: 132) view, the passage attests to the “high magic of lowness”, despite the “Pynchonian tricks to short-circuit solemnities”. Subtly, the sequence seems to merge two competing narratorial voices. On the one hand, we have a detached and naturalistic observer capable of appreciating the analogy between decomposing prisoner corpses and an audience, and associating the toes of the dead with pearls. On the other hand, the horrendous graphic descriptions such as “penises dangling” are juxtaposed with quite differently toned “each face so perfect, so individual”, not to mention the beautiful second paragraph of the quotation, of which only the last sentence is attributable to Pökler’s subjective voice. This example points toward a hitherto undiscussed function of narratorial heteroglossia in Gravity’s Rainbow. The narrator’s unstable identity as a ludic “trickster”, apt to play with readers’ expectations and narrative conventions alike, can paradoxically be a source of solemnity. In cases such as the above, precisely the elusive ventriloquist acts of the narrator make it capable of producing “high-serious” passages – at least provisionally.

With the last example we are again knee-deep in anthropomorphic interpretive strategies. Despite Gravity’s Rainbow’s best efforts to de-naturalize any idea of a narrator persona, the reader spares no effort to will it back, even as a split voice belonging to a split personality.
6.3.2. Deconstructing Character Discourse

In the previous section, I analyzed the ways in which Pynchon’s novel disrupts the notion of an idiomatically stable narratorial voice. In what follows, I will discuss the novel’s similar tendencies with respect to character discourse. While characters do not generally perform ventriloquist stunts akin to those of the narrator, the consistency and credibility of their voices are frequently undermined. As a result, the idiomatic indeterminacy of the narrator is not the only variable in voice attribution. The idiom of Slothrop, the most complex character in the novel, is often portrayed as generally casual and heavily colloquial:

“Who’s pretending?” lighting a cigarette, shaking his forelock through the smoke, “jeepers, Tantivy, listen I don’t want to upset you but... I mean I’m four years overdue’s what it is, it could happen any time, the next second, right, just suddenly... shit... just zero, just nothing... and...” (GR 25)

In addition, Slothrop’s speech and thought frequently embraces both military and adolescent slang. Slothrop is definitely not presented as particularly talented, or considerate, in terms of matching linguistic registers to communicative situations (e.g. GR 207, 263, 500). Nevertheless, Slothrop’s idiomatic inertia and oral communication, at times bordering on the incomprehensible, are frequently juxtaposed with remarkably elevated passages of thought representation. Immediately after the above quotation the reader is treated to the following free indirect thought:

It’s nothing he can see or lay hands on – sudden gases, a violence upon the air and no trace afterward... a Word, spoken with no warning into your ear, and then silence forever. Be-
yond its invisibility [...] here is its real horror, mocking, promising him death with German and precise confidence, laughing down all of Tantivy’s decencies... no, no bullet with fins, Ace... not the Word, the one Word that rips apart the day... (GR 25)

The end of the passage very effectively evokes Slothrop’s subjectivity by juxtaposing Slothrop’s ‘real’ spoken idiom with the stylistically more refined part, inviting a reading as a peculiar internal dialogue (see also GR 225; Levine 1999). The serious tone and thematic of the sequence are echoed in numerous contexts throughout the novel, often attributable to Slothrop (e.g. GR 29, 225, 472, 510), but to other characters as well: for instance, Katje Borgesius (GR 97) and Enzian (GR 520). The contrast between the spoken idiom and the presented thoughts is most noticeable in Slothrop’s case, however. The observation that passages such as the above can and should be contextually attributed to characters does not make them in any way standard. There are layers of unnaturalness here.

First, the discrepancy between Slothrop’s speech and thought is quite sufficient to interfere with the construction of a distinction between character discourses. Second, it is very troubling that nearly all of the major characters in the novel appear to have the inner lives of mystics and also tremendous capacities for elevated inner speech. Combined, these observations are enough to de-naturalize the notion of consistent character idioms\(^42\), and not very subtly. Of course, the problem of character discourses is linked with the general overlap of character identities observed, among others, by Duyfhuizen (1991: 27): “characters in GR are semiotic systems as much as they are represented entities produced by characterological reading. Moreover, they are constructs produced by other characters”. The general elevatedness of thought is apt to discour-
age a realist interpretation of passages of character discourse, thus challenging characterological reading.

The novel de-naturalizes characters’ discourse in purely formal ways, too. On a miniature scale, Slothrop’s stutter on the word *a-and* (sometimes also *o-or*) produces the same effect. When inspected more closely, the apparent personal deficiency of oral skills turns out to be very contagious; also Roger Mexico, Richard M. Zhlub and *the narrator* are plagued by it. The frequently altered spelling of the third person singular verb form, *sez*, is more discriminating in this respect; it is found only in the discourses of the narrator, Slothrop, and Thomas Pynchon (see e.g. 1984; also Levine 2001: 122; McHale 1992: 100), perhaps suggesting an affinity among the three?

The idioms of the puzzling “specialists” that occasionally intrude into the narration of *Gravity’s Rainbow* provides a final example of the gross and hilarious de-naturalization of character discourse. This is at its most explicit in the following, apparently verbatim, quotation:

> “It is experienced,” writes Shetzline in his classic study [of the drug Oneirine], “in a subjective sense … uh … well. Put it this way. It’s like stuffing wedges of silver sponge, *right, into*, your *brain!*” (GR 389)

Sequences such as the above contribute to the novel’s project of making scientific and scholarly efforts look laughable (see e.g. GR 77, 275, 353). In addition, they represent the novel’s strategy of transgressing against the conventions of discourse presentation at its most explicit. The reader is urged now to appreciate the difference between the above cases of frolicsome play, and the previously analyzed instances of sub-
tle clues leading to precise voice attribution. Paranoia takes you only so far, as every student of Pynchon knows.

After dwelling on the novel’s somewhat dismaying strategy of frustrating readers’ attempts to distinguish between character discourses, it is perhaps uplifting to conclude with a passage that looks as if it is about to deconstruct the dichotomy narratorial/figural, but instead turns into a mere splitting of a character discourse. Consider the following passage, in which the Hungarian emigrant-scientist Rózsavölgyi becomes the unfortunate target of Roger Mexico’s fury:

“It say,” offers Rózsavölgyi […]
“Your say what,” Roger has been screaming for a while.
“It say,” sez Rózsavölgyi, again.
“You say ‘I say’? Is that it? Then you should have said, ‘I say,
“I say’”
“I did.”
“No, no, – you said, ‘I say’ once, is what you –”
“A-ha! But I said it again. I-said it … twice.”
“But that was after I asked you the question – you can’t tell me the two ‘I say’s were both part of the same statement,” unless, “that’s asking me to be unreasonably,” unless it’s really true that, “credulous, and around you that’s a form of,” that we’re the same person, and that the whole exchange was ONE SINGLE THOUGHT yaaagghhh and that means, “insanity, Rózsavölgyi –” (GR 634)

McHoul and Wills interpret the passage in a clever way by observing a collapse of narrative hierarchy insofar as “the narrator’s ‘own’ speech-quote marks are dropped and interrupted, threatening the very separation between speakers, and between them and the narrator.” As a result, “the text […] is becoming flat as the levels of use and mention, serious and parasitic, normal and citational disappear” and the reader is
left with “only material marks on the page”. (McHoul and Wills 1990: 53.) Now, this is a post-rhetorical interpretation; what would a rhetorical one be like?

Interestingly, McHoul and Wills seem to proceed from the assumption that anything outside quotation marks is narratorial. Granted, this is the unmarked case; however, considering the way in which Pynchon’s novel misuses typographical conventions, this is far from self-evident. No reader of *Gravity’s Rainbow* would on page 634 expect such a convention to be in effect. In fact, the probable reading strategy for the passage is to try to read everything in the last sentence as Mexico’s direct speech. As I understand it, this is how McHoul and Wills (ibid.) finally interpret the sequence. But, of course, it does not add up; the passage does not make sense in this way.

It would seem, by contrast, that dropping quotation marks here serves the simple purpose of distinguishing between character speech and thought. According to this interpretation, the passage actually includes two direct discourses, Mexico’s uttered and unuttered speech. As has been discussed above (6.2.2), the novel also juggles with Mexico’s internal/external speech elsewhere. The present case is quite ordinary in all respects, except for the simultaneous presentation. Both build on the dialogue; the point of divergence is the first “unless”. “Unless” and “that” are repeated, perhaps to create the illusion of the simultaneity of the processes of speech and thought:

Speech:
“But that was after I asked you the question – you can’t tell me the two ‘I say’s were both part of the same statement, that’s asking me to be unreasonably credulous, and around you that’s a form of insanity, Rózsavölgyi –’”
Speech/thought/speech:
“But that was after I asked you the question – you can’t tell me the two ‘I say’s were both part of the same statement,’” unless it’s really true that we’re the same person, and that the whole exchange was ONE SINGLE THOUGHT yaaagghhhh and that means, “insanity, Rózsavölgyi —”

A mimetic, logocentric interpretation, to be sure – it does have some appeal, however.

6.4. Voices, Frames, and Textual Analysis

Not surprisingly, the novel provides a fairly accurate metaphorical representation of the simultaneous subtlety and deconstructiveness of its vocal qualities. It is inscribed in an analysis of a particular rendition of the “suppressed quartet from the Haydn Op. 76”. The voices of Gravity’s Rainbow, in musical terms:

The viola is a ghost, grainy-brown, translucent, sighing in and out of the other Voices. Dynamic shifts abound. Imperceptible lifts, platooning notes together preparing for changes in loudness, what the Germans call “breath-pauses,” skitter among the phrases. Perhaps tonight it is due to the playing of Gustav and Andre, but after a while the listener starts actually hearing the pauses instead of the notes – his ear gets tickled the way your eye does staring at a recco map until bomb craters flip inside out to become muffins risen above the tin, or ridges fold to valleys, sea and land flicker across quicksilver – so the silences dance in this quartet. A-and wait’ll those kazooos come on! (GR 713)

Discussing the multiplicity of voices in Gravity’s Rainbow, one must at least provisionally suppress obvious insights about the novel’s narration in order to be able to hear the “im-
perceptible lifts” and “changes in loudness” of the narrative voices. The subtle and often remote contextual clues linking the passages of dual voice narration indeed make the reader at times “hear the pauses instead of the notes”; sometimes the connections between the voices are as important as the voices themselves. Nonetheless, the novel betrays its refined craft by unveiling the artificiality of both narrator’s and characters’ discourses – the kazoos!

What is the meaning of Pynchon’s voices? Perhaps they serve a political purpose? This is what Smetak (1989: 101) argues. According to her view, the multiple voices try to make readers respect the true complexity of things. This seems plausible enough. From an alternate point of view, Fludernik (1993: 331–332) attaches a political significance to the democracy of voices that refuse to be organized into a hierarchy and thus produce a true Bakhtinian polyphony. For present purposes, it is enough to note the patently Pynchonian attitude of “approach and avoid” (V. 55) toward the convention of narrative voice. Again, the familiar deconstructive logic looms behind the text, stretching narrative conventions and narratological concepts alike.

The point of departure for this discussion was Fludernik’s frame-theoretical account of speech and thought representation. Gravity’s Rainbow supports Fludernik’s holistic account in many ways. The novel underscores the status of narrative voices as interpretive phenomena by forcing readers to alternate between interpretive frames. It cunningly leads readers into interpretive culs-de-sac that make tangible the processes of inference that are involved in the reading of double-voiced narration. It illustrates the artificial nature of all speech and thought representation by blatantly de-naturalizing the narrator’s and characters’ discourses alike.
The analysis also demonstrated the virtues of more traditional narratological scrutiny. While the cognitive schemata of Natural Narratology provide a plausible explanation for the attribution of narrative voices, they do not provide sufficient tools for narrative analysis. This is not a flaw; cognitive narratology programmatically builds on the reader’s capacity to infer meanings, voices and worlds from a text. The process of inference can be made at least partially visible by examining both the formal and contextual clues the reader is likely to use in his or her interpretive task. This is, with some reservations, the way in which Fludernik proceeds in providing textual evidence for Natural Narratology. Fludernik even goes so far as to characterize Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology as a “last-ditch effort to make linguistics meaningful within a wider narratological and critical arena” (Fludernik 1996: 373). This sums up the ethos of both of Fludernik’s groundbreaking studies (1993, 1996), the simultaneous construction of a holistic theory of narrativity and reliance on meticulous textual analysis.

In the light of the above analysis it is fitting to revisit Fludernik’s distinction between illusionistic and theoretico-analytical approaches to fiction (ch. 7). This discussion has openly endorsed an illusionistic approach in its reliance on a communicational model of narrative, and by assuming the pseudo-existence of the various textual agents that that model entails. In a sense, then, this chapter has willingly “repeat[ed] the readers’ interpretive moves on a theoretical level” (Fludernik 2001a: 623) and been unwary of the “ever-present danger” of “slipp[ing] from abstract terms to personalized narrative instances” (Fludernik 1996: 197). It has become abundantly clear, however, that there is no other way to analyze and interpret the voices echoing in the novel. In Gravity’s Rainbow, the formal markers of voice attribution are hope-
lessly deficient. However, whereas Fludernik is content to designate the voices of *Gravity's Rainbow* as fundamentally indeterminate, it has been argued that a deliberate emphasis on contextual, even thematic, information can still provide satisfactory analyses of many passages. The interpretive clues that the novel’s narration (at least provisionally!) provides the reader are not merely intersentential idiomatic linkages or contextual attributions of expressive textual elements. Coming to terms with the heteroglossia of the novel is possible only through a fundamentally illusionistic yet rigorous textual analysis.

The variety of ways in which *Gravity’s Rainbow* makes the attribution of narrative voices simultaneously possible and impossible poses significant challenges to narratology. Nonetheless, narratology is the only form of scholarly activity that has even a meager chance of producing good analytical results. While one cannot definitely describe the voice qualities of *Gravity’s Rainbow* with the mixed bag approach of traditional narratology tentatively married to Natural Narratology, one certainly can produce useful probabilistic readings.
7. Narratology and the Worlds of Fiction

The preceding theoretical and practical assessments of cognitive narratology suggest that new narratological models are still inescapably tied to the structuralist tradition of narrative analysis. The analysis of the voices of *Gravity’s Rainbow* has demonstrated, furthermore, that this linkage is nothing to be worried about. From the purview of Pynchon criticism, the juxtaposition of Natural Narratology and *Gravity’s Rainbow* has illustrated, once again, the novel’s tendency to creatively undercut all kinds of theoretical conceptions of narrative, holistic or featurist. The following two chapters will consist of a theoretical discussion of possible world narratology, and a *theorypractical* (Phelan and Rabinowitz 1994) attempt at its application.

Marie-Laure Ryan’s study *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (1991) is to date arguably the most significant attempt to build a comprehensive narratological theory utilizing the insights provided by possible world semantics. While theorists such as Pavel (e.g. 1986) and Dolezel (e.g. 1998) have produced influential theories of narrative semantics and fictional worlds, their works have not specifically aimed at the development of sophisticated narratological tools of textual analysis. Ryan (1991) not only reinterprets the semantics of fiction, but also propounds alternative accounts of the *structural* make-up of narrative literature in the framework of possible worlds. In this respect, her strategy of incorporating possible world semantics to literary study is diametrically opposed to Ronen’s (1996): Ryan does not merely utilize possible worlds as a broad interpretive metaphor, or acknowledge the shared philosophical presuppositions
of modal semantics and literary theory. Instead, she “makes it literary” by creating a version of possible world semantics suited for the analysis of fictional worlds.

In what follows I will discuss in some detail Ryan’s contributions to solving traditional narratological problems with the apparatus of possible world semantics. In particular, I will explicate Ryan’s views of narrativity, *tellability*, and unreliable narration. Along with Ryan’s analysis of the fictional universe, the topic of unreliable narration will be returned to in chapter 8. Furthermore, Ryan’s views of the make-believe nature of fiction and the concepts of narrativity and tellability will be revisited in chapter 9. The most fundamental insight of Ryan’s account of fictional universes is the concept of *fictional recentering*. Reflecting the difference between real and fictional systems of possible worlds, fictional recentering shifts the center of the narrative universe from the actual world (AW) to the world presented as actual in the narrative, the textual actual world (TAW):

For the duration of our immersion in a work of fiction, the realm of possibilities is thus recentered around the sphere which the narrator presents as the actual world. This recentering pushes the reader into a new system of actuality and possibility. As a traveler to this system, the reader of fiction discovers not only a new actual world [TAW], but a variety of APWs [later to be identified as *textual* APWs] revolving around it. (Ryan 1991: 22.)

The concept of fictional recentering is the basis of Ryan’s (13, 28–29) *intensional/illocutionary* approach to fictional worlds. In this account, fiction is interpreted as a pretended embedded communication in a “fictional game” no different from games of make-believe. In short: as readers of fictional narratives, we are invited to pretend that the text is an utter-
ance of a narrator to a narratee, both of whom are members of the fictional world, or the author’s substitute speaker and substitute hearer in Ryan’s nomenclature. (Ryan 1991: 23, 75–76.) Thus Ryan describes fictional communication, with important amendments, in Searlean terms, as pretend speech acts.

The bold project of propounding a comprehensive description of “voices and worlds” of fiction in the framework of speech act theory and possible world semantics prompts Ryan (1991: ch. 4) to invent anew the categories of traditional narratology. Since Ryan bases her account on the theory of fiction as pretend speech acts, the terminology she proposes only partially overlaps with the concepts used in the ‘fictional communication’ model of Genette. For the most part, this is to the advantage of Ryan’s conception; frequently, it provides more nuanced interpretations of the communicative structure of narratives. Before examining the analytical input of Ryan’s theory, permit me to discuss her accounts of the linked problems of narrativity and tellability.

From the perspective of the intensional/illocutionary theory of fiction, being a narrative means “bringing a universe into life, and conveying to the reader that at the center of this universe resides an actual world where individuals exist and where events take place”. In addition to this requirement, Ryan contends that narratives have to be rooted in history and must represent temporal relations. These considerations of narrativehood do not wholly separate fictionality and narrativity. Fictionality, for Ryan, is a special case of narrativity, one in which the fictional recentering of the projected narrative universe is obligatory. (Ryan 1991: 259.)

Discussing the problem of narrativity further, however, Ryan gravitates toward an account of narrativity as a purely interpretive concept. In this later definition, narrativity relies on the reader’s ability to infer a “rationalized sequence” from
the text: “The rationalized sequence is the plot of the text, and a text is narrative to the extent that it invites its reader to interpret is by organizing its contents in a narrative network [...] A mere numeration of physical events, without statements of mental events or of logical connections, can be read as narrative text if the reader is able to supply the missing links and nodes”. (Ryan 1991: 265; see also Kearns 1999: 40.) In an ingenious move, faced with the apparently non-essential and elusive nature of narrativity, Ryan (ibid.) proposes a distinction between literal and figural narrativity in order to explain the possibility on “extrapolating narrative structures from both narrative and nonnarrative discourse”. The notion of figural narrativity underlies “the efforts to find a dramatic development in the fragment ‘Ithaca’ of Ulysses”. (Ryan 1991: 265–266; see also Ryan 1992b.)

However, even figural narrativity has its limits, according to Ryan (1991: 267; Ryan 1992b), narrativity is “exploded” in the anti-narrative “collages of the postmodern novel: underlying the text is a proliferation of incomplete narrative graphs which tease the reader with the promise of an intelligibility never to be achieved”. Interestingly, Ryan’s view of narrativity is reminiscent of the experiential interpretation proposed in Fludernik’s Natural Narratology (see ch. 2.2; Fludernik 1996).

First, almost trivially, Ryan’s notion of “narrativity as universe-projecting” is largely compatible with Fludernik’s view that narrativity is the result of a “ruling consciousness” reflected in a text. We should, after all, recall that Ryan considers fiction a game of make-believe involving the reader’s postulation of a substitute speaker and a substitute hearer in a pretend speech act. Thus the texts that Ryan’s model judges as narratives by definition allow for an experiential reading à la Fludernik, as well.
Second, more interestingly, both Fludernik’s and Ryan’s accounts of narrativity ultimately resort to the postulation of an event structure underlying the (potential) narrative discourse. As was argued in chapter 5, Fludernik does this by stretching the explanatory potential of the experiential model of narrativity too thin. Ryan, by contrast, proposes a composite definition of narrativity: some texts provide formal indices of their narrativity and therefore are literally narrative; some texts rely on the readers’ ability to infer stories on the basis of what objectively seems to be a nonnarrative text. This train of thought, finally, leads Ryan to a rather pragmatic and relativistic view of narrativity: “As an interpretive structure, narrativity is not a discrete category like fictionality but a model admitting various degrees of realization” (Ryan 1991: 266). Bluntly, then, in the truly marginal cases of narrativity such as the ‘Ithaca’-episode of Ulysses, both Fludernik and Ryan turn to story, either inferred or recognized by the reader, as the core of narrativity.

Possible world semantics is not the only “non-literary” theoretical framework evoked in Ryan’s study. She also proposes a detailed account of plot-grammar utilizing concepts of the theory of artificial intelligence and computer programming (Ryan 1991: chs. 8–11). Ryan’s discussion of the concept of tellability is particularly interesting, synthesizing as it does the theories of artificial intelligence and possible world semantics. For Ryan, tellability is linked to the notion of narrative “point”, the motivation behind the production and reception of narratives:

Some configurations of facts present an intrinsic “tellability” which precedes their textualization. This is why some stories exist in numerous versions, survive translation, and transcend cultural boundaries. (Ryan 1991: 148.)
Tellability is therefore to be distinguished from narrativity: while narrativity, for Ryan, concerns the question “what constitutes a story?”, tellability seeks to answer “what is a good story like?” Following this reasoning, Ryan insists that tellability is principally a plot-structural category: the properties of performance (narrative discourse, for instance) are not of the utmost importance in determining the tellability of a particular sequence of facts. This is not to say that the performance of a plot potentially has no bearing on the amount of perceived tellability: “a good joke can fall flat because of poor telling”. (Ryan 1991: 149.) The contrast between the plot-structural tellability of a sequence and its blatantly ‘untelling’ performance is reflected in the reading experience of Gravity’s Rainbow, as will be demonstrated in chapter 9, focusing on game as a narratological metaphor.

For Ryan, the most crucial formal index of tellability is the diversification of possible worlds of the narrative universe. Since “conflicts are necessary to narrative action and […] conflicts arise from incompatibilities between TAW and the private worlds of characters”, the diversification of a narrative universe forms the formal basis of tellability. In other words, the more potential clashes between the TAW and the private worlds of its inhabitants that a sequence involves, the more tellable the configuration that it yields. Ryan describes the private possible worlds (wish-worlds, belief-worlds, predictions or the like) of characters as “purely virtual embedded narratives” that underlie the plot and determine the amount of its tellability by a simple algorithm: virtual narratives in, tellability out. (Ryan 1991: 156.)

Ryan revisits the question of virtuality in literature and in other arts in her study Narrative as Virtual Reality (2001). In addition, as Ryan (1991: 166; see also Dolezel 1998: 150–151) herself observes, the notion of the virtual in narrative
echoes in the work of other narratological theorists. Of particular interest is the similarity between Ryan’s concept of virtuality and Prince’s (1992: 30) notion of the *disnarrated*, defined as “all the events that do not happen though they could have and are nonetheless referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text”. Ryan’s (1991: 166–169) analysis of Prince’s notion of the disnarrated in the light of virtual narration demonstrates a significant overlap between the concepts. Both virtual narration and the disnarrated will be returned to in the discussion of Herman’s (1994) account of hypothetical focalization in the next chapter. So far, it has become evident that Ryan’s possible world narratology provides novel interpretations of the central questions of narrative theory. What then is the relationship between possible world narratology and structuralist narratology in terms of the tools of textual analysis?

The intensional/illocutionary account of fiction falls back on traditional narratological views, at least with respect to the question of unreliable narration and the concept of the *implied author*. During her discussion of speakers and hearers, Ryan rarely uses the concept of the implied author (to the extent that the concept does not even warrant an entry in the subject index). Accordingly, the question of unreliable narration is discussed relatively briefly. This is Ryan on the difference between impersonal and personal (first-person) narration:

> Personal narrators may be unreliable; impersonal narrators may not: since they are not individuated, the gap between the truth and their declarations could not be justified on psychological grounds. From this it follows that the declarations of personal narrators stand in a variable relation to the facts of TAW/TRW [textual reference world], while impersonal narrators have absolute narrative authority: their declarations yield truths, either directly or after a metaphorical or ironic transformations. […]
Impersonal narrators can only relay the position of the implied author. (Ryan 1991: 68.)

Judging from the preceding quotation, it would seem that Ryan does not distinguish between an impersonal narrator (or a non-individuated substitute speaker) and the implied author. This interpretation is, moreover, supported by Ryan’s (1991: e.g. 71) references to the sole function of an impersonal substitute speaker, namely that of “relieving the author of the responsibility of fulfilling the felicity conditions of the textual utterances”. In a more traditional narratological view, by contrast, the implied author is the agent postulated with that responsibility in mind (e.g. Chatman 1990; Nelles 1997).

Dolezel (1998: 149) presents a somewhat more refined discussion of the problem. Initially, he seems to concur with Ryan in insisting on the difference between impersonal and personal narrators (Er-form and Ich-form in his nomenclature); in his view the authoritative impersonal narrator “cannot lie or err”. The lot of a personal narrator, by contrast, is to “prove” his or her reliability in order to be taken as a provider of fictional facts (ibid. 154). However, Dolezel’s discussion of the distinction quickly blurs the neat separation between the narratorial types. He observes that in modern literature the personal (homodiegetic) narrator is conventionalized to the extent that it is possible to produce “first-person discourse[s] with the semantic features and the performative force of the authoritative Er-form” (Dolezel 1998: 156). Dolezel endorses a strongly conventional and anti-mimetic attitude toward the authentication of fictional worlds: the conventions of modern fiction (at least since Proust) have taught readers to separate the personal characteristics of homodiegetic narrators from their world-creating credentials. As a result, we are relatively comfortable with the fact that a homodiegetic narrator such as
Marcel seems to know more than he realistically should. On the other hand, we do not consider the fictional world created by a blatantly unreliable narrator as fundamentally dubious. Dolezel’s examples of this ‘conventionally authorized’ personal narration include both Nigel Williams’s novel *Star Turn* (1985) and *Gravity’s Rainbow* – the first is narrated by an overtly unreliable homodiegetic narrator, the second by a prominent yet anonymous heterodiegetic narrator.

This comparison is very revealing. Not only have the conventions of modern fiction taught us to consider homodiegetic narrators as authoritatively (almost) equivalent to heterodiegetic narratives; they also suggest, conversely, that we take the propositions made by heterodiegetic narrators with a grain of salt. Thus, to turn Dolezel’s (1998: 154) initial argument upside down, it seems that all narrators should be made to “earn” their credibility. Just as no narrator is utterly unreliable merely by being homodiegetic, no narrator receives its (or his or her) “authentication authority by fiat”.

Discussing the process of authentication of the TAW, i.e. the “what the case is” of the narrative universe, Ryan (1991: 113) briefly analyzes Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* in order to demonstrate that in the case of personal (and overtly unreliable) narration the reader has to “sort out, among the narrator’s assertions, those which yield objective facts and those which yield only the narrator’s beliefs”. After all, not everything an unreliable narrator states is false. Consequently, Ryan (ibid.) concludes that there is a potential discrepancy between the facts of the TAW and the version of TAW presented by the narrator, the *narratorial actual world* (NAW).

But, notably, Ryan is here analyzing personal unreliable narration; she does not explicitly state whether the above stipulation of the implied author is applicable to impersonal narration as well. Logically, Ryan’s analysis of the relationship be-
between a personal narrator and the implied author is analogous to the case of impersonal narration. Moreover, if we are to believe Dolezel, the difference in authenticity between personal and impersonal narration is dwindling as we speak. Hence, just as an implied author (or ‘author’) is needed in distinguishing between the fictionally true and false statements of an unreliable personal narrator, it is also needed to distinguish between those of an unreliable impersonal narrator. The mechanics of the hierarchical functioning, and the ontological status of the implied author are similar in both cases. In neither case is the implied author to be considered as a real existent but only as a necessary logical function needed to make sense of the dynamics of a text.

Inescapably, then, Ryan is drawn to the relatively traditional view that a logically stipulated higher agency, the implied author, determines what part of the narrator’s discourse is to be taken at face value and what is unreliable:

In fiction, the narrative actual world is determined by what the author wants the reader to take as fact (or rather, the implied author, since the authorial intent is always inferred on the basis of the text.) Fictional role-playing opens the possibility for the substitute speaker to assert facts and to be overridden by the authorial projection of the factual domain. (Ryan 1991: 113.)

Uri Margolin (1991: 541) does not think so; according to his view “there is no higher instance above the DN [discourse of the narrator]”. Thus to present unreliable narrators, authors have to situate the narrator inside a frame story or introduce an editor figure that constitutes a higher authority than the narrator. In a sense, Margolin’s position is quite defensible; again, there certainly is no room for an implied author as a communicative agent. To evoke once again Fludernik’s distinction between the theoretical level of narratology and the
illusionistic level of reading experience, one could perhaps with good reason consider the implied author a definitely illusionistic entity. It is however, hard to describe unreliable heterodiegetic narration without its ghostly presence.

The case of unreliable narration can be considered as an area of overlap between the traditional structuralist model of narratology and Ryan’s version of possible world narratology. In a manner reminiscent of Fludernik’s Natural Narratology, Ryan’s intensional/illocutionary approach to fiction provides a significant rethinking of narrative theory, however without being able to escape some of the thorniest traditional problems that do not allow easy solutions in any theoretical context whatever.

To conclude: Ryan’s discussions of narrativity, tellability, and unreliable narration illustrate the manner in which theorists seek to apply the concepts borrowed from modal semantics, along with other disciplines, to reinterpret questions of literary theory. In some cases, such as the problems of narrativity and unreliable narration, possible world narratology furnishes narratology with novel ways to articulate old questions; in others, such as the question of tellability and virtual narration, it goes further by providing convincing new answers, as well. Most importantly, possible world narratology is an organized and adaptable analytic framework with which to approach both the fictionally real and fictionally virtual in narrative. The next chapter will utilize possible world narratology to further survey the virtual, the hypothetical, and the doubtful in narrative.
8. Potential Perspectives: Hypothetical Focalization and Pynchon

One of the most vexed concepts of narratological theory, focalization has been the subject of lively critical discussion. The main targets for celebration and criticism alike have been Genette’s classic formulations in *Narrative Discourse* (1980/1972). Similarly, the work of the earliest narratologists to reassess Genette’s concept, such as Bal (1997/1985), Chatman (1978, 1990), and Rimmon-Kenan (1983), has provoked a lot of controversy. Consequently, the theory of focalization has, in a piecemeal fashion, been revised in order to make it truer to its object, narrative discourse. By no means has it been altered beyond recognition, however (e.g. Edmiston 1989; Nelles 1990; 1997; 2001).

Precisely the fact that the concept during its history has not undergone fundamental transformations has inspired some theorists to project their ingenuity, not toward ever more complicated revisions of the Genettean focalization, but toward an altogether new interpretation of the phenomenon. Indications of this tendency are found in the work of Jahn (1996), Herman (1994) and Fludernik (1996; 2001c). Narratological work based on both cognitive science (Fludernik, Jahn) and possible world semantics (Herman) has contributed to the discussion of the problem of focalization.

In this chapter I intend to discuss some of the characteristics of a new conception of focalization, one that David Herman has sketched out in an article titled “Hypothetical Focalization” (1994; a revised version in Herman 2002: ch. 8). The perspective is both practical and theoretical; theoretical overtones are
inevitable, since the fresh start on focalization has not yet yielded a comprehensive conceptual apparatus. This chapter is not actually a practical application of a specific method of describing focalization; it is more a meditation on what an alternative account would accomplish, were it chosen. An important part of this chapter will be a tentative sketch of a more comprehensive account of focalization based on Herman’s idea of hypothetical focalization.

Discussing the account of hypothetical focalization vis-à-vis Pynchon’s novel implies an underlying assumption about the capabilities of a successful theory of focalization: it ought to be able to come to terms with experimental fiction. In fact, Herman’s conception seems to anticipate its being tested in the context of non-traditional postmodernist fiction, as will be seen below. An additional reason for assessing Herman’s conception of focalization in the context of Gravity’s Rainbow is the lack of any comprehensive account of the phenomenon in the novel.

As has been demonstrated in preceding discussions, Gravity’s Rainbow exemplifies convention-breaking fiction in many ways: most importantly, it hosts a vast repertoire of non-traditional features of narration. Yet, I would argue, it is not too obvious an example, or a deliberate limit-case for narrative theory. Pynchon’s novel pushes the analytic concepts far enough to make them bend, yet lacks the heart to break them altogether. One of the main attractions of Gravity’s Rainbow as exemplary material is its dynamic way of varying the modes of narration and using conventional narrative techniques for novel purposes. This has definite consequences for the study of its perspectival characteristics in the light of possible world semantics.

Exposing myself to accusations of traditionalism, I will now and again in this chapter invoke the Genettean frame-
work of focalization as a comparison structure of sorts. It is against this ‘orthodox’ model that I observe the features and capabilities of the alternative account. I refer the reader to existing literature for detailed information about the corrections and additions proposed over the years to Genette’s original theory (Nelles 1990 and Jahn 1996 include comprehensive surveys). These will be taken into account as supplementary parts of the Genettean scheme. Because of the fundamental differences between the traditional conception of focalization and one proposed for cognitive narratology, I will not attempt to incorporate the perspectives of Fludernik and Jahn into the construction of ‘possible world focalization’. Instead, I will only briefly comment on how the question of hypothetical focalization might be approached in the context of cognitive narratology.

In the first section, I summarize the relevant aspects of Herman’s hypothetical focalization. Two sections, encompassing analyses of hypothetical focalization in Gravity’s Rainbow, follow this brief overview. The textual analysis is followed by another theoretical section involving a critique of Herman’s model, and a sketch of a proposal for its extension. In conclusion, I discuss the implications of hypothetical focalization and its possible extensions for practical criticism and the interpretation of narrative.

8.1. Focalization on the Continuum of Doubt

Herman’s point of departure for investigating the notion of focalization is the marginal phenomenon of hypothetical focalization. Roughly, the concept refers to representation of a virtual perspective in a narrative, a perspective in which the perceiver or the act of perception cannot be assumed to be part of the fictional world. In other words, hypothetical
focalization “entails the use of hypotheses, framed by the narrator or a character, about what might be or have been seen or perceived – if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective on situations and events at issue” (Herman 1994: 231; cf. Prince 2001: 45). Thus, hypothetical focalization belongs to the domain of Ryan’s (1991) virtual narration.

The concept of hypothetical focalization (HF), as well as Herman’s discussion of narratology in general, is rooted in the tradition of model-theoretical, i.e. possible world, semantics. In these terms, HF can be described as a special case of incongruence between the narrative’s expressed and reference worlds (Herman 1994: 246). Herman follows William Frawley in his terminology: the reference world of fictional narrative corresponds to Pavel’s (1986) fictional world, Dolezel’s (1979: 196) primary narrative world and Ryan’s (1991) textual actual world. The expressed world is the world asserted by the text. Consequently, the expressed world can either faithfully represent the reference world or a particular possible world. A point worth stressing is that this definition of focalization makes HF a relatively inconspicuous subspecies of focalization. In fact, Herman performs an almost deconstructionist act by exposing the implicit ‘hypotheticality’ of all focalization (Herman 1994: 246), as will be demonstrated below. This is in some degree of contrast to the status of HF as an almost overlooked anomaly within the Genettean paradigm.

Focalization can be hypothetical in a number of ways. Herman makes a distinction between two main kinds: direct and indirect HF. The distinguishing feature is the explicitness of the perspectival agent: HF is direct if a “counterfactual witness” (Herman 1994: 237) is explicitly pointed out in the narration. On the other hand, HF is indirect if no virtual holder of perspective is specified. In the latter case, the reader has to
“infer the presence or at least functioning of HF, if the scenes and descriptions falling under this heading are to go through – to make sense – at all” (ibid. 242).

Another axis in the description of HF is that of the ‘strength’ of the phenomenon. With the aid of this metaphor Herman points to the expressed ontological status of the agents of focalization; focalizers (focalizors in Herman’s nomenclature based on Bal’s). A strong case requires both the focalizer and the act of focalization to be virtual. By contrast, a weak case allows for the focalizer to be an actual entity in the reference world of the narrative, insisting only on the virtuality of the act of focalization (Herman 244).

What makes Herman’s conception of HF more than a novel interpretation of a marginal narrative phenomenon is that the model-theoretical tools used in its description are arguably applicable to all kinds of focalization. According to Herman’s thesis, all focalization can be defined as the narrative expression of congruence (or incongruence) between the narrative’s expressed and reference worlds. Thus Genette’s zero focalization is rewritten as “maximal congruence between the expressed world and the reference world of the narrative” and internal focalization as “belief context anchored in a particular possible world” (Herman 1994: 246). Herman (ibid.) is not, however, very specific about the description of Genette’s external focalization: “The expressed world when focalized internally features different degrees of doubt, which figures even more prominently in [...] external focalization”.

Types of focalization, then, are re-defined according to the degree of ontological doubtfulness that they convey. This definition of focalization furnishes the critic with the obvious advantage of discarding the “quasi-primitive” (Herman 1994: 233, 244) dichotomy of external/internal altogether. With a theory of focalization amplified from the discussion of HF it
seems possible to analyze focalization with a flexibility previously unheard of.

As if the above implications of HF for the concept of focalization in general were not enough, Herman proposes tentatively that HF functions as an important formal clue to generic distinctions: “[C]areful description of the stronger and weaker versions of both direct and indirect HF may ultimately help us capture, in turn, the *differentiae specificae* of novelistic genres”, and later on: “[A]mong the repertoire of narrative devices typically exploited by texts that question or resist the norms and presuppositions of realistic genres, HF may upon further investigation prove to be a particularly important technique” (Herman 1994: 239). Both the alleged flexibility and descriptive force of Herman’s concept of focalization and HF’s tentative status as a prime indication of narrative experimentality more than justify testing the ideas through an analysis of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

### 8.2. Pynchonian Hypotheses

Approaching HF and its implications first specifically, and then in more general terms, I will in this section consider some of the occurrences of HF in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. First, however, I will present an explanatory note on the novel’s overall attitude toward narrative worlds.

As has been demonstrated in Pynchon criticism, one of the essential narrative techniques of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is play with the worlds of fiction. Indeed, whole plotlines can be interpreted as canceling themselves out in a process that McHale (1992: 69–71) has called “retroactive world-making and unmaking”. The novel is filled with sequences (and thus with subworlds) whose ontological status is uncertain and fictional beings whose existence in the reference world of the novel is
dubious. In other words, substantial parts of the narrative of *Gravity’s Rainbow* prove to be virtual in Ryan’s sense.

From a certain perspective, this ontological ambiguity is a specific feature of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. However, play with worlds is widely understood to be a prominent trait in the postmodernist tradition. An account of focalization utilizing possible-world semantics should therefore be able to come to terms with subtly differing varieties of manipulation in the representation of worlds.

It might, therefore, be useful to distinguish provisionally between *global* (or macrostructural) and *local* (or microstructural) varieties of incongruence within the expressed world and the reference world of the narrative. The global variant would, then, refer to situations in which a relatively lengthy sequence is judged ontologically dubious by contextual evidence. Local, by contrast, would denote a more textually limited discrepancy between the world of fiction and its subworlds, HF being a representative case of the localized variety of noncongruence. In the latter case, it could be assumed, the inter-world discrepancy is mainly established with reference to grammatical factors. The problem of interpreting local incongruence between worlds will be revisited during the following discussion of problematic cases of HF in *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

Herman’s four-part scheme of HF will be used as a schematic guide to the analysis of occurrences of the phenomenon:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Weak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct HF</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect HF</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above yields four types of HF to be found in Pynchon’s narrative, here ingeniously symbolized as A, a, B
and b. I will limit this discussion to occurrences of direct hypothetical focalization, strong and weak. Herman’s four-part scheme will be reconsidered below.

*Gravity’s Rainbow* contains few, if any, prototypical instances of type A, in which the narration would explicitly identify a counterfactual focalizing agent. Perhaps the following could, at a pinch, serve as an example, though it is far from being a standard case. It has been taken from an episode titled “Shit’n’Shinola”:

A stranger to the English language, a German dopefiend such as Säure, not knowing either word, might see “Shit” as a comical interjection, one a lawyer in a bowler hat [...] might smiling use, “Schitt, Herr Bummer” [...] or *Schitt!* down comes a cartoon guillotine on one black & white politician, head bouncing downhill, lines to indicate amusing little spherical vortex patterns, and you thought yes, like to see that all right, yes cut it off, one less rodent, *schitt ja!* (GR 687)

The modal auxiliary *might* provides a grammatical ground for a HF-interpretation. Moreover, the directness of HF is established by designating the focalizer as “a stranger to the English language / a German dopefiend”. Interestingly, the verb *see* is used metaphorically, in the meaning of ‘understand’ or ‘interpret’. Nevertheless, the cognitive activity of the focalizer is shown to be hypothetical. This brings about an important feature of HF: it encompasses both perceptual and cognitive focalization.

Representative of the playfulness of Pynchon’s novel, the discussion of the possible ramifications of a German understanding of the expression goes on for about a page, becoming increasingly serious. Curiously, the whole sequence is logically subordinate to the above occurrence of HF. The excerpt
demonstrates in a condensed form the “speculation-upon-speculation” technique so characteristic of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

The next example represents a problematic case, if not an outright puzzle:

From overhead, from a German camera-angle, it occurs to Webley Silvernail, this lab here is also a maze, i’nt it now... behaviorists run these aisles of tables and consoles just like rats’n’mice, but who watches from above, who notes their responses? (GR 229)

Two textual features warrant an interpretation of this passage as involving direct strong HF. First, the counterfactuality of the act of focalization is achieved by embedding focalization in the thought of a character. This interpretation is supported by the speculative “occurs to”, and the dialectal “i’n’t it now” and “rats’n’mice”. Second, the directness of HF is (somewhat artificially) established in the last two clauses of the quotation: the focalizer is more or less explicitly identified through the interrogative pronoun *who*. Describing the above passage as an instance of HF would rely purely on interpretation of contextual evidence and not on grammatical features. Nevertheless, the quotation does exhibit a fair amount of hypothetical perception. In order not to get ahead of myself, I will now turn to clearer instances in an another category.

The weaker version of the direct hypothetical focalization (type a), a situation in which an actual person or entity in the reference world is the agent of a non-verifiable, yet possible, focalization, is relatively frequent in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. In fact, the novel makes use of the variant of HF in very subtle ways, making the most of the technique. In a sense, *Gravity’s Rainbow* exhibits a strong attachment to the convention: creating
radical ontological uncertainty is not generally the aim of the novel’s use of weak direct HF\textsuperscript{44}.

This morning it looks like what Vikings must have seen, sailing this great water-meadow south, clear to Byzantium, all eastern Europe their open sea. \textit{(GR 549)}

Direct HF – the Vikings are pointed out as the focalizers; weak HF – only the act of seeing is in doubt. (It is assumed that the Vikings in fact were present in the past of the reference world of the narrative). Although the HF in this case seems to be a simple representation of a hypothetical visual perception, the last clause of the quotation is apt to introduce an ideological twist. The excerpt is followed by a description of the movements of nationalities across the zone of occupied Germany (GR 549–550). The Viking-HF is thus used as a metaphor referring to the state of postwar Germany (see also GR 567). Hypothetical focalization, then, serves as a vehicle for ideological speculation and illustration.

Weak HF is shown in Pynchon to be equally adept at conveying hypotheses about higher mental processes. This is to be expected, of course, since the weak direct variety is in a way the most realistic variant of HF: it is by definition attributed to a character with supposedly normal psychological capacities. Hence, speculation about mental life is not in any way strange. Neither the focalizer nor the act of perception is hypothetical in the following:

\begin{quote}
It must astonish her, Nora-so-heartless, Cherrycoke kneeling, stirring her silks, between his hands old history flowing in eddy-currents. \textit{(GR 150)}
\end{quote}

Only the psychological condition of being astonished is in doubt. The example calls for a more subtle conception of
HF: the focalization is not, as a whole, hypothetical, only a certain (emotive) part of it. The obvious point of comparison here is Rimmon-Kenan’s concept of facet (77–82; cf. Herman 1994: 249n.10). Indeed, defining focalization as representing a belief-context associated with a particular possible world does not in principle limit the range of expressed perceptual, cognitive or emotional features (or facets) of focalization in any way (cf. Toolan 1988: 72–76).

More generally, Herman draws tentative lines of correspondence between HF and the representation of mental acts: “Given the vast importance of hypothesis and contrary-to-fact speculation in our mental lives, we might predict that HF will be found to play an especially important role in texts with a high concentration of interior monologue” (1994: 242). Interior monologue is of course used and abused extensively in Pynchon’s novel. The conditional structure of the next example brings about its hypothetical nature. This occurrence of HF is closely tied to the novel’s thematic content; it introduces the narrative’s peculiar obsession with the reversed nature of the V-2-rocket blast.

He takes some time lighting a cigarette. He won’t hear the thing come in. It travels faster than the speed of sound. The first news you get of it is the blast. Then, if you’re still around, you hear the sound of it coming in.

What if it should hit exactly — *ahh, no* — for a split second you’d have to feel the very point, with the terrible mass above, strike the top of the skull....(GR 7)

The quotation involves the use of the speculative conditional for two separate HF’s. In the first one, for the focalization to be actual, the rocket has to blast elsewhere, missing the hypothetical focalizer. The second, by contrast, insists on a bull’s-eye for the (very short) focalization to be in congruence
with the reference world. This rapid turn of direction in HF supports Herman’s supposition about the frequent use and effectivity of HF in representing the trails of speculative thought. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, however, the use of HF and related narrative techniques to express speculation is not limited to representation of a characters’ thought. In fact, the representation of narratorial speculation is one of the key elements in creating disparity between the expressed world and the reference world, as will be discussed below.

A secondary effect, hypothetical focalization can be used to signal recurring activity (see Herman 1994: 240–241). In addition to being a stunning example of the subtlety of textual clues that can point toward HF-interpretation, the next example also exhibits the ambiguity achieved by second-person narration.

One by one men step into this perfectly black rectangle of night and disappear. Gone, the war taking them, the man behind already presenting his ticket. [...] Soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen. One by one, gone. Those who happen to be smoking might last an instant longer, weak little coal swinging in orange arc once, twice – no more. You sit, half-turned to watch them, your soiled sleepy darling beginning to complain, and it’s no use – how can your lusts fit inside this same white frame with so much, such endless, departure? (GR 51)

At first glance there is nothing doubtful about this vivid representation of vision. The only thing formally signaling the hypotheticality of at least some part of the focalization is the auxiliary *might*. By referring to the possibility of seeing “coal swinging in a yellow arc” the whole focalization is made to some extent non-verisimilar. The effect is not one of negation, however. In fact, the HF gives the passage an air of typicality, say, “on a typical night watching the soldiers depart, you might
see a little longer the ones who happen to be smoking”. Moreover, this interpretation is corroborated by an earlier passage depicting the same scene: “You have waited in these places in the early mornings, synced in to the on-whitening of the interior, you know the Arrivals schedule by heart, by hollow heart.” (GR 50): nevertheless, the auxiliary might is all that is needed to create incongruence between the possible world represented in the focalization and the reference world of the narrative.

8.3. HF and Related Doubtfulness in Gravity’s Rainbow

Gravity’s Rainbow includes quite a few instances where the nature of focalization is difficult to judge. I will now turn to examine these problematic cases of HF as well as expressions of ontological doubt akin to HF, at least in spirit. Instances such as those discussed below could perhaps be more safely interpreted as examples of Prince’s disnarration, defined as “all the events that do not happen though they could have and are nonetheless referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text” (Prince 1992: 30). Nevertheless, the perspectival features of the events qualify them as less clearly marked cases of HF (see Herman 1994: 247n.4; Dolezel 1998: 150–151; Ryan 1991: 166). Consider the instance of HF in the following passage:

When he wakes she is gone, completely, most of her never-worn clothes still in the closet, blisters and a little wax on his fingers, and one cigarette, stubbed out before its time in an exasperated fishhook... She never wasted cigarettes. She must have sat, smoking, watching him while he slept... until something, he’ll never be asking her what, triggered her, made it impossible to stay till cigarette’s end. (GR 226)
The second sentence with its modal auxiliary gives the sequence an air of great probability. Nevertheless, the act of focalization is only hypothesized, one cannot be sure if “she” (Katje Borgesius) really watched “him” (Slothrop) sleep. To be literal, of course, one cannot be sure that Katje even sat there. However, the alleged focalizer has left behind evidence (the prematurely stubbed cigarette) that makes the act of focalization seem more doubtful than the focalizer’s presence. The contextual evidence provided by the text suggests that the hypotheticality achieved by the auxiliary must applies primarily to the act of focalization. The contextual evidence of the passage, arguably, overrides the grammatical indication of doubt.

The thing to consider next in more detail, then, is the relationship between the grammatical and contextual markers of the hypotheticality of the focalization. The following example seems rather straightforward, describing the aftermath of an erotic scene:

[S]miling quietly, unplugged at last, she returns the unstiffening hawk to its cold bachelor nest but kneels still a bit longer in the closet of this moment, the drafty, white-lit moment, some piece by Ernesto Lecuona, “Siboney” perhaps, now reaching them down corridors long as the sealanes back to the green shoals, slime stone battlements, and palm evenings of Cuba... a Victorian pose, her cheek against his leg, his high-veined hand against her face. But no one saw them, then or ever. (GR 169)

The whole sequence describing the pose struck by Maude Chilkes and Edward Pointsman constitutes what Genette would call zero focalization. The narrator moves freely in time, space and, interestingly, through the history of art in order to achieve the illusion of a “Victorian pose”. The last sentence of the excerpt, however, is apt to turn everything inside out. The
elaborately described scene turns out to be something a witness would have seen, had one been present. Thus the sight of the couple is retroactively designated as HF, or in this case actually impossible focalization.

If we were to accept this, we would have to allow for a fairly wide variety of textual markers of HF. In the passage above, there are no grammatical markers (auxiliaries, conditional phrases or the like) to act as clues of hypotheticality. Only the later contextual evidence suggests a complete incongruence between the expressed world and the reference world of the narrative. Furthermore, this interpretation subsumes two options: 1) only the perception of the amorous couple is hypothetical (that is, attributed to someone who could have been watching but was not), and 2) both the perception and the cognitive activity (judgment as Victorian, references to art) accompanying it are hypothetical (that is, attributed to a counterfactual witness). Option 1 seems to lead into complicated questions about the origins of the commentary, were it not identified with the hypothetical focalizer. Option 2 is not easy to grasp, either. If no one saw the couple and meditated on the nature of their pose, the sequence logically erases itself. The perceptions and thoughts are attributed to no one. This is reminiscent of the effect of what Lubomír Dolezel (1988: 491) has called self-voiding fictional worlds. The excerpt also qualifies as an instance of Brian Richardson’s (2001) denarration.

The hypothesis-eliciting situations of Pynchon’s novel do not resort to contextual markers of doubt in a haphazard way. A significant amount of the text’s epistemic indeterminacy is achieved by asking questions. Often the questions are more or less self-evidently deemed to remain unanswered, and thus function as rhetorical questions. As a consequence, they create ontological doubt. While the question-form certainly is a grammatical feature of the text, it is not a very prototypical

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marker of HF. In the following excerpt the hypothetical asking of questions is exhibited in a particularly exaggerated and condensed manner:

The true king only dies a mock death. [...] Will he show up under the Star, slyly genuflecting with the other kings as this winter solstice draws on us? Bring to the serai gifts of tungsten, cordite, high-octane? Will the child gaze up from his ground of golden straw then, gaze into the eyes of the old king who bends long and unfurling overhead, leans to proffer his gift, will the eyes meet, and what message, what possible greeting or entente will flow between the king and the infant prince? Is the baby smiling, or is it just gas? Which do you want it to be? (GR 131)

The multiple acts of inquiring build layers of doubt into the scene. It could be rewritten in a skeletal conditional form: “IF the king came, and IF the child gazed into his eyes and IF their eyes met, what message would flow between the king and the infant?” Thus the infant’s act of focalization is at least doubly hypothetical. The problem of interpreting the last sentence of the quotation has been a mainstay in Pynchon-criticism (see McHale 1992: ch. 8; Levine 1999). Sadly, describing the scene as HF does not solve the problem of whom the “you” refers to. What the example does show, however, is once again that the HF-interpretation can rely on a number of contextual markers as well as grammatical markers used in specific ways in order to invoke ontological doubt.

An extreme case of the question-induced feeling of hypotheticality is the lengthy and ontologically uncertain interlocution between Russian officer/agent Vaslav Tchitcherine and the “Verbindungsmann” Wimpe (GR 344–349, 701–703). The whole scene springs from an assumption: “Certainly he could have known Wimpe.” (GR 344), after which the sup-
posed conversation is represented in a fairly normal manner. Its ambiguous ontological status is maintained, however, by intrusive questions:

How could they have failed to be observed? […] What did Tchitcherine have to say? Was Tchitcherine there at all? sitting back in the dingy room while the lift cables slapped and creaked through the walls, and down the street, rarely enough to matter, a droshky rattled whip-snapping over these black old cobbles? […] How far, in the eyes of those who would send him to Central Asia, was too far: would his simple presence in these rooms have gotten him death automatically… or was there still, even at this stage of things, enough slack to let him reply? (GR 344–345, see also 349)

Remarkably, the third question of the excerpt merges with the focalization that it simultaneously makes doubtful. This is disturbing: the narration goes on pedantically despite its object’s unlikely status. Capable of rendering whole scenes as well as individual perceptions hypothetical, rhetorical questions are a powerful vehicle of doubt in Gravity’s Rainbow (see Herman 1995: 131–133).

8.4. Genettean Focalization Re-Hypothesized

In this section I will outline a more comprehensive account of focalization on the basis of the implications of hypothetical focalization discussed do far. In other words, I will try to make more explicit the possible characteristics of a theory of focalization based on possible-world semantics. In addition, lines of comparison will be drawn to Genette’s conception of focalization. During the discussion, I will refer to troublesome Pynchon examples for support and illustration.
First, Herman relies mainly on grammatically marked cases of ontological incongruity. The use of modal auxiliaries, conditional phrases, modal adverbs and similar forms is presented as the standard method of achieving doubt (e.g. 237, 239, 242 cf. 243; cf. 1995: 131–133; Margolin 1999: 146). The examples from Gravity’s Rainbow, deviant yet illustrative, call for a wider perspective to be analyzable at all. Especially the use of contextual evidence in conjunction with the grammatical features of the text makes HF a flexible and useful interpretive tool.

Second, Herman’s four-part scheme of HF, despite its elegance, strives for too much symmetry and strict distinctions between types. The dichotomies direct/indirect and strong/weak would be closer to the reality of texts if envisioned as continuous parameters labeled explicitness and verisimilitude, for example.

On the scale of explicitness, the most direct version of HF would be the point of maximum explicitness. Indirect HF would be positioned somewhere between maximum explicitness and maximum implicitness. Accordingly, on the scale of verisimilitude, the strongest version of HF would be positioned at the point of minimal verisimilitude and the weaker variants somewhere between maximum and minimum. Why should we replace categories with continua?

The function of explicitness: While it is true that in a reading experience the focalizer usually either can or cannot be identified, there is a great variance in the amount of certainty with which the distinction is drawn in the text. Directly naming the focalizer “Slothrop” would be the most explicit case, while describing the focalizer as a “a plump American lieutenant standing nearby” would leave a little more room for doubt. To approach the other end of the scale, there really is only a slight difference between the explicitness of, for in-
stance, the made-up examples “anyone sitting on the park bench would have considered the house pretty” and “viewed from the park bench, the house would have been considered pretty.” Yet in the categorical scheme the former would be a representative of direct HF and the latter of indirect HF.

The function of verisimilitude: again, it is true that the reader usually deems the focalizer either actual or counterfactual in relation to the reference world of the narrative. However, as suggested above, the textual clues informing this distinction can be plentiful, or few and far between. Consider the following examples:

(1) A passerby might have seen the robbery; sadly, no one was around.

(2) A passerby might have seen the robbery; the police are still searching for witnesses.

(3) A passerby might have seen the robbery; they are interviewing one at the moment.

Example 1 is definite about the counterfactuality of the focalizer. In contrast, example 2 gives no clue whether there was a witness or not: the counterfactuality or actuality of the hypothetical focalizer cannot be determined. Example 3 is a case of maximum verisimilitude. The usefulness of redescribing the directness and strength of HF as continuous functions will come more evident as I turn to speculate on HF’s implications for focalization in general.

Let me begin by examining the implications of HF for internal focalization. As mentioned earlier, Herman discards the controversial dichotomy external/internal by positing types of focalization on a continuum of epistemic modalities. He
rewrites internal focalization as a “belief context anchored in a particular possible world” (Herman 1994: 246), which seems to describe the phenomenon well. He goes on (ibid.) to describe the traditional trio of fixed, variable and multiple internal focalization with similar success.

By interpreting internal focalization as tied to belief contexts associated with specific possible worlds, Herman invites his reader to designate HF a special case of internal focalization, provided one wants to stick to the traditional nomenclature. According to this view, the incongruity between the expressed world and the reference world in HF differs only in degree from that of internal focalization (Herman 1994: 246). With HF thus established as fundamentally similar to internal focalization, it is tempting to try to apply newly-found features of HF to internal focalization.

Herman’s distinction between weak and strong varieties of focalization seems logically inapplicable to non-hypothetical focalization. By contrast, direct and indirect internal focalization seem to apply well. By analogy: in direct internal focalization, the focalizer is explicitly identified as representing a belief-context anchored in a particular possible world. In an indirect variant, the focalizer’s relationship to the reference world has to be inferred from the text without explicit notification. Both options ring true. Let us be satisfied with this for a moment, and turn to what Rimmon-Kenan calls external focalization and Genette zero focalization.

Herman rewrites zero focalization as “maximal congruence between the expressed world and the reference world of the narrative.” Since all focalization is in Herman’s model fundamentally alike, distinguishable only by the amount of epistemic doubt, I will apply the distinctions of HF to zero focalization, too.
Again, by analogy: in direct zero focalization, the focalizer is explicitly identified as representing the belief context of maximal congruence to the reference world of the narrative. In contrast, the indirect variety requires the reader to infer the focalizer’s relationship to the belief context of the reference-world. Again, both seem plausible. (Nothing prevents the reader from disbelieving the pledge of truthfulness-to-fact in direct zero focalization, however.) Nonetheless, there is a potential problem: how should one distinguish between indirect internal and indirect zero focalization?

There is indeed the possibility of a text involving focalization that is so vague that it is impossible to judge it either as zero focalization or internal focalization very subtly attributed to a focalizer (see O’Neill 93–95). In other words, it is undecidable whether the focalization represents the belief context of a particular possible world or whether it represents the belief context of the reference-world. Consider the following passage from *Gravity’s Rainbow*:

Teddy Bloat is mincing bananas with a great isosceles knife, from beneath whose nervous blade Pirate with one hand shovels the blonde mash into waffle batter resilient with fresh hens’ eggs, for which Osbie Feel has exchanged an equal number of golf balls, these being even rarer this winter than real eggs, other hand blending the fruit in, not overvigorously, with a wire whisk, whilst surly Osbie himself, sucking frequently at a half-pint milk bottle filled with Vat 69 and water, tends to the bananas in the skillet and broiler. Near the exit to the blue patio, DeCoverley Pox and Joaquin Stick stand by a concrete scale-model of the Jungfrau, [...] socking the slopes of the famous mountain with red rubber hot-water bags full of ice cubes [...] . With their night’s growths of beard, matted hair, bloodshot eyes, miasmata of foul breath, DeCoverley and Joaquin are wasted gods urging on a tardy glacier. (GR 9)
Is the sequence focalized internally or is it an instance of zero focalization? On the one hand, contextual evidence points vaguely toward Osbie Feel: the narration focuses for a while on his habitus (“surly”) and personal characteristics (consumption of Vat 69 and water). One could, then, interpret especially the last sentence of the quotation as an observation motivated by Feel’s eccentric personality or his present condition / state of mind. On the other hand, the whole “Banana breakfast” scene could be assumed to be zero focalized; the narrator is known to interpret events in idiosyncratic ways, as well.

Replacing the opposition direct/indirect in internal and zero focalization with continua of explicitness allows for more subtle variations. In other words, I propose to extend the amendment made earlier to the description of HF, applying it to the description of all focalization. This makes more explicable the instances of undecidable focalization, seemingly hovering between zero and internal focalization.

The final category in Genette’s focalization triad is external focalization. This could be described as a special category of zero focalization, in which the focalizer is anchored in the belief context of the reference-world without access to the belief contexts corresponding to the possible worlds of characters’ beliefs, wishes, desires, and intentions.

From the vantage-point of possible world semantics, focalization is the expression of varying degrees of incongruence between the expressed world and the reference world of the narrative. It is, in principle, a continuous parameter.47

In practice, however, the cases of what used to be called internal focalization are character-bound: the partial discrepancies between the expressed world and the reference world are attributed to fictional persons (or beings, see GR 42; also Nelles 2001). Genette’s prefocalization – the focalization of a homodiegetic narrator – is thus an instance of constant dis-
crepancy between the expressed world and the reference world (Genette 1988: 78; see Edmiston 1989: 731–732). Accordingly, focalization implying maximal congruence between the expressed and the reference world is in practice attributed to the narrator. The conventions of narrative literature seem to open the back door for the dichotomy of outside/inside, even in first-person narration, as William Edmiston (1989: 739–740) has demonstrated.

The case of unreliable narration constitutes a counter-example, however. As has been discussed above, the expressed world of an unreliable narrator (Ryan’s narratorial actual world NAW) potentially differs from the reference world (Ryan’s TAW). The focalization of a heterodiegetic unreliable narrator is thus both zero focalization and also involves a discrepancy between the expressed world and the reference world of the narrative.

Narratorial slant, proposed by Chatman as a more theoretically sound alternative to narrator-focalization, is apt to open a new can of worms in terms of incongruence between the expressed world and the reference world. According to Chatman (1990), narratorial focalization is impossible because the narrator, unlike the characters, does not perceive the events of the story; the narrator’s function is to narrate the events. Chatman’s solution is to replace Genette’s zero focalization with the concept of narratorial slant and internal focalization with the concept of filter. Chatman’s slant is thus not a perceptual point of view but the narratorial attitude toward the story. This invites one to conclude that all narrators are (more or less) biased and thus slightly ‘unreliable’. To utilize Ryan’s (1991; see chapter 7) terminology, Chatman’s notion of narratorial slant underscores the potential difference between TAW and NAW. Thus Chatman’s account of focalization (if he were to use the term) would therefore be augmented by
Herman’s continuum of ontological doubt (see Herman 2002: ch. 8).

Zero focalization could, finally, be termed free focalization (following Nelles 1990: 369). This would emphasize the fact that in zero focalization the focalizer indeed represents the belief-context of the reference world and is not limited to a particular possible world. Genette’s external focalization would be a contradictory category in this respect, however: free focalization with limited or no access to the belief-contexts of possible worlds.

The above discussion of HF has demonstrated that possible world narratology provides a useful theoretical context for rethinking the perspectival concepts of fiction. Indeed, by following Herman in considering all focalization as potentially ‘hypothetical’ or doubtful in varying degrees, the emphasis of the preceding analysis has shifted from HF to more general considerations of focalization. Let me now briefly return to the problem of HF proper vis-à-vis cognitive narratology. There is a local affinity between Fludernik’s concept of figuralization and HF. Figuralization, defined as the “evocation of a deictic center of subjectivity in a reflector-mode narrative that has no ruling figural consciousness attached to it” (Fludernik 1996: 197), can be used to provide an alternate description for at least some of the cases of HF discussed above. In fact, one of Fludernik’s examples of figuralization includes HF:

It looked as though the sea had beaten up softly in the darkness, as though one immense wave had come rippling, rippling – how far? Perhaps if you had waked up in the middle of the night you might have seen a big fish flicking in at the window and gone again. (Katherine Mansfield, At the Bay: 441; quoted in Fludernik 1996: 200, italics are Fludernik’s.)
The main difference between the interpretation of the passage as HF and reading it as figuralization lies in the assumed consistency of viewpoint. From the basically Genettean vantage point of HF, only the last sentence constitutes HF: it has grammatical and contextual indices of doubt. The beginning of the sequence could well be interpreted as zero focalization. By contrast, in the more holistic interpretive frame of Natural Narratology, the whole sequence – ostensibly the whole text – is to be attributed to the “empty deictic centre” of figuralization. According to Fludernik, this vacuum of subjectivity is then filled by the reader who projects his or her perspective into the scene. This local interpretive divergence is a miniature scale-model of the fundamental difference between “top-down” and “bottom-up” narratology. While the structuralist impulse is to analyze bottom-level textual phenomena, the cognitivist approach seeks to attribute the processing of narratives into larger interpretive frames.

8.5. HF, Generic Distinctions, and Narratological Criticism

In the course of this discussion, I have tested Herman’s concept of hypothetical focalization in practice. Furthermore, I have speculated about the implications of his thesis that HF is, from the perspective of possible-world semantics, similar to all focalization. Let me now discuss Herman’s (1994: 239, 242, 245) suggestions about the potential genre-distinguishing features of HF.

Herman (1994: 245) designates HF tentatively as “the formal correlative of skepticism, detachment, even paranoia.” Continuing, he remarks that “HF helps put the actual in the service of the virtual, formally marking doubts about whether we can determine, in every case, where we stand in a world
we only thought we knew.” The findings of the examination of HF in the context of Pynchon’s novel provide ample support for this claim. Obsessed with all kinds of speculation, *Gravity’s Rainbow* indeed capitalizes on the potentiality and doubtfulness, even on the impossibility of its characters’ and narrator’s perceptions and mental processes.

In fact, drawing on Herman’s interpretation of Kafka, one could presumably argue that *Gravity’s Rainbow* blurs the distinction between the reference world and possible worlds altogether, creating “radical semantic indeterminacy” (1995: 129; see also Ryan 1999: 119). In fact, the statement that “the reference world of the novel is at times impossible to distinguish from subordinate possible worlds” is a commonplace of the Pynchon industry, merely recast in terms of possible-world semantics. Nevertheless, stipulating at least provisionally a primary fictional world (TAW) above all the numerous possible ones helps in the interpretation of the local cases of expressed doubt and hypothesis.

The preceding inquiry has made it evident that HF is by no means an isolated device in the production of ontological doubt. *Gravity’s Rainbow* proliferates tactics of doubt, for example by rendering logically impossible a scene it purportedly narrates as actual (e.g. GR 169). However, Pynchon’s novel does not utilize ‘pure’ HF to the extent that it is displayed in, say, the first few pages of Beckett’s *Molloy* (1955), or the opening of Hawkes’ *Lime Twig* (1961), in which the marginal phenomenon indeed is a routinely used and thus a “formal correlative of detachment.” The description of the numerous instances of epistemic doubt in *Gravity’s Rainbow* thus demands more than analysis of the grammatical markers of HF. In this respect, it is easy to join Herman (1994: 246) in calling for “pooling the resources of linguistics, philosophy and the theory of narrative” (see also Margolin 1999: 164).
While macrostructural ontological indeterminacy has indeed been shown to be a central trait of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, HF and related phenomena emphasize the more localized instances of inter-world incongruence. They invite the critic to scrutinize the text for evidence for and against hypotheticality from the complementary perspectives of text-linguistics, possible world semantics, and structuralist narratology.

Above, I have sketched out a speculative account of a typology of focalization amplified from HF. While a concept of focalization based on possible-world semantics rids itself of the dichotomy external/internal, it is doubtful that this will figure prominently in narratological criticism.Attributing the belief-context maximally congruent with the reference world of the narrative to the narrating agent is – at the very least – a strong convention. In practice, this procedure re-introduces the opposition. However, extending to a description of all focalization the category of directness (the function of explicitness in my proposed revision) might further enhance the descriptive power of the concept of focalization.

While the analysis of both the macrostructural and the local varieties of ontological doubt illustrates the viability of possible world semantics as an analytical frame for *Gravity’s Rainbow*, it again became evident that Pynchon’s fiction refuses to function merely as an illustration of the concepts of narrative theory. The complex cases of HF in *Gravity’s Rainbow* suggest that one should retain a moderately skeptic view of the categories and concepts under consideration. In other words, Pynchon’s novel insists on making visible the conventional and relative nature of all concepts of literary analysis and interpretation. This conclusion will become even more evident as I turn in the next chapter to discuss *Gravity’s Rainbow* from the perspective of ludic narratology.
9. Playing Pynchon: The Immersive and Ludic Gravity’s Rainbow

Possible world semantics and the cognitive study of narrative do not constitute an obvious “fellowship of interests” (GR 164). This chapter seeks to provide an example of a complementary relationship between the approaches. Below, I will discuss yet another potential source of new narratological ideas, namely ludology, the study of games. Both cognitive and possible world narratology will be found useful in assessing the theoretical and practical input of the ludological concepts. Conversely, metaphors originating in the domain of game studies serve as potential extensions of both traditional narratology and its recent rivals.

Intuitively, playing games and reading narrative literature seem to have something in common. The contents of the inaugural issue of Game Studies (July 2001), a journal devoted to the study of computer games, illustrates this: many articles concern themselves with the relationship between games and narratives. Is storytelling or the inference of stories involved in the act of playing games? Are the concepts of the study of narrative applicable to the study of games? The articles’ answers to the latter question vary from Ryan’s (2001c) cautious “maybe” to Markku Eskelinen’s (2001) emphatic “definitely not”.

This chapter will attempt to come to terms with the concepts of narrative and game in a more literary context by analyzing the intuitive (and almost trivial) observation that Pynchon’s novel invites both highly immersive ‘reading for the world’ and playful ‘reading as a game’. Most important, in the course of the analysis, a tentative typology of textual games will be sketched. The discussion below could be character-
ized as narratological sharpshooting: the goal is to provide a set of tools for the analysis of experimental, playful fiction. It is argued, moreover, that *Gravity’s Rainbow* does not present its world-eliciting and ludic features as necessarily opposing each other. In an apparent contradiction, these features overlap in the interpretation of the novel.

The principal impetus for the discussion is Ryan’s view of narrative and interactivity as represented in her recent monograph *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001b). Throughout her study, Ryan utilizes narratology, possible world semantics, cognitive psychology, and theories of artificial intelligence and virtual reality in order to examine the immersive and interactive characteristics of various cultural phenomena, ranging from baroque architecture to hypertext fiction. In terms of aesthetic theory, the most significant of Ryan’s claims is that the ultimate goal of art is a synthesis of immersion and interactivity (Ryan 2001b: 12). She cites children’s plays of make-believe and the as yet technologically unavailable experiences of computer-based virtual reality as putative examples of a synthesis of this kind. The range of the examples reflects the scope of Ryan’s account: interactivity and immersiveness are discussed with reference to a truly comprehensive collection of cultural products.

While Ryan’s general aesthetic insight should be borne in mind during the discussion, this chapter will concentrate principally on the more literary part of her study. In particular, what follows is a meditation on the metaphorical use of the concept of *game* in narrative theory and the practical study of literature. Ryan’s thesis about the interactive and immersive characteristics actualized in total art can perhaps serve as a yardstick, relative to which the figural synthesis of immersiveness and interactivity in literature can be measured. The reading of *Gravity’s Rainbow* presented below suggests
that printed literature has relatively good chances of at least simulating the effect of Ryan’s total art.

In a recent article Ryan discusses narratologists’ tendency to adopt metaphors from other fields of research. She demonstrates that the vocabulary of narratology consists to a significant extent of metaphors drawn, for instance, from geometry, optics, the cinema, and sexuality. For Ryan, this is a welcome development: “Thinking is analogical as much as it is logical, and it is by recycling words and extending their scope that language and thought can map new territory” (Ryan 1999: 114–115). In the light of Ryan’s statements, it seems fitting to analyze her use of the metaphors world and game as concepts of literary theory. Moreover, Ryan’s view of the importance of the metaphorical expansion of the conceptual toolkit of narratology encourages one to develop her ideas further, or rather, to develop ideas which Ryan leaves undeveloped, to my mind prematurely.

Ryan’s account of the immersive and interactive qualities of narrative will be briefly summarized in the first section. The next follows discussions of several theoretical and practical questions arising mainly from Ryan’s conception of the typology of textual games. In particular, issues pertaining to the limitation of the metaphor game in the study of literature, and the opposition of the readerly attitudes text as world / text as game are of interest in the attempt to operationalize the metaphor game as a narratological concept. The problems are discussed in detail with reference to the immersive and/or ludic features of Gravity’s Rainbow. In conclusion, the potential narratological implications of the tentative encounter between ludology and various kinds of narratology will be explicated.
9.1. Starter Terms: Worlds and Games of Fiction

In terms of positive ideological connotations, there is no competition between the concepts of immersion and interactivity. One could well argue that at the heart of the recent craze for interactivity lies a desire for a literalized metaphor. Being able to point-and-click, we no longer have to talk figurally about participating in the production of meaning, or about filling the gaps of literary texts. Ryan (2001b: 6–9) acknowledges this and refers to the heavily-exploited analogies that have been drawn between electronic texts and postmodernist thought. Interactivity has, according to Ryan (ibid. 8), been “hyped as a panacea for evils ranging from social disempowerment to writer’s block”, and the hypertext genre considered as “an instrument of liberation from some of the most notorious bêtes noires of postmodern thought: linear logic, logocentrism, arborescent hierarchical structures, and repressive forms of power”.

However, before turning to hypertext and other non-metaphorically interactive forms of art, Ryan discusses at length the opposition of the metaphors text as world / text as game in printed literature, and, respectively, textual immersion and interactivity. Ryan presents interpretations of the phenomenon of immersion from various disciplines: cognitive psychology, possible world semantics, and phenomenology.

In terms of possible world semantics, as discussed previously (chapter 2.3), immersion in a fictional world involves fictional recentering, a re-organization of the fictional universe around the possible world stipulated as the ‘actual’ by the text (TAW). Ryan (2001b: 103) uses space travel as a metaphor to illustrate this process; in the process of reading fiction, the reader is transported into the stipulated ‘real’ world of a virtual universe: “Insofar as fictional worlds are, objectively speaking, non-actual possible worlds, it takes recentering to
experience them as actual – an experience that forms the basic condition for immersive reading” (Ryan 2001b: 103).

From the perspective of cognitive psychology and the phenomenology of reading, the immersive transportation to the counterfactually actual world of fiction has been variously described as being “lost in a book” (Nell 1988, quoted in Ryan 2001b: 96), or experiencing “mental simulation” (Walton 1997, quoted in Ryan 2001b: 110–114). To be borne in mind is Ryan’s acknowledgment of the fact that mere willing suspension of disbelief is not always all that is needed in immersive reading: “immersion can also be a result of a process that involves an element of struggle and discovery [...] it is through hard work that we reach the stage of effortless performance. The most forbidding textual worlds may thus afford the ‘easy’ pleasures of immersion, once the reader has put in the necessary concentration.” (Ryan 2001b: 97.) While this insight is corroborated by the following discussion of the opposition of the metaphors world and game, it is to some extent at odds with Ryan’s conception of the dynamic of reading playful texts.

As one might expect, Ryan’s discussion of the notion text as game emphasizes even more strongly the participatory nature of reading. She presents a diachronic glimpse into the history of the metaphor, referring to the nineteenth-century realist novel as the epitome of textual world-building. After its heyday, “a process of shrinking, fissuring, splitting, and multiplying worlds within a larger textual universe reduced big worlds to little worlds or dismantled them into heterogeneous fragments. Their scattered remnants could no longer build a coherent imaginary space and time, but they provided the perfect material for play.” (Ryan 2001b: 176.) The historical accuracy of the above analysis is beside the point; most important, it sums up eloquently the basic idea of considering literature as a game to be played. In the course of this discus-
sion it will be argued, however, that fictional play, understood more flexibly, is not merely a simple antithesis to “build[ing] a coherent imaginary space and time”.

Postmodernist fiction is relevant to Ryan’s discussion of both immersion and interactivity. In terms of the former it is a marginal case: postmodernist novels tend to deliberately resist immersion. At the most extreme, they have “conducted a daring and dangerous exploration of the limit between world aesthetics and game aesthetics, for there is everything to lose – in terms of readership – if the limit is transgressed” (Ryan 2001b: 353). Beyond the limit, they are figural examples of the textual games. This attribution is manifest, for instance, in the fact that canonized features of postmodernist fiction (and postmodernist thought in general) loom behind the features Ryan (2001b: 192) ascribes to game as a literary metaphor: opaque language, reflexive and illusion-refusing attitudes of the reader, emphasis on arbitrary formal constraints, and so forth.

The most striking feature of Ryan’s account is the contrast that she establishes between the metaphors game/world. She describes the process of reading a text ‘for the world’ as a fundamentally different activity from reading ‘as a game’. In an anti-essentialist vein, however, Ryan contends that textual features do not definitely exclude either of the reading attitudes; nearly all texts can conceivably be read either way. This obviously corroborates Ryan’s account of narrativity. As has been discussed above (Chapter 7), narrativity in Ryan’s intensional/illocutionary approach to fiction is ultimately an interpretive concept. Accordingly, there are no objective means of distinguishing between ludic and immersive texts. The decisive difference between immersive and ludic literature therefore resides in the reader’s attitude to the texts. Ryan’s strongest argument concerns the dynamic between the two
readerly stances: a text cannot be read both immersively and interactively at the same time. Play and immersion are sequential phenomena; they may follow each other, as the reader oscillates between the attitudes, but never overlap. (Ryan 2001b: 199.)

The text of *Gravity’s Rainbow* offers a challenge to Ryan’s conception of literary worlds and games. It definitely represents canonized postmodernism and certainly is playful. However, it falls short of providing a clear-cut illustration of the dichotomy *text as world / text as game*. Instead, it suggests that one should renounce the strong opposition between the metaphors in the study of literature. At the same time, it indicates that the metaphor *game*, properly operationalized, constitutes a viable concept for the textual study of narrative fiction.

### 9.2. The Family of Textual Games

Ryan does not consider *game* an unproblematic concept in the study of literary texts. Utilized as a broad metaphor, it almost completely loses its explanatory potential. In more literal senses, on the other hand, the concept of game is only very marginally applicable to literary study. (Ryan 2001b: 178–181.) In its most general and watered-down incarnation, the metaphor teaches us hardly anything interesting about literature: “A good metaphor is supposed to provide an original perspective on its tenor, but we do not learn anything that we did not know before by being told that reading literary texts, like playing games, is for most people a pleasurable, nonutilitarian activity” (Ryan 2001b: 181). Indeed, playing games and reading literature have only very vague and uninteresting general similarities; the concept of game seems to function best in literary criticism as a metaphor used with caution. O’Neill (1994), by
contrast, employs the notions of play and game in a very flexible and broad way by adopting the ludic metaphors in his narratological theory. He writes, among other things, about the games of theory, and the games that authors can be considered as playing with readers. In this respect, O’Neill’s use of the metaphors has little bearing on this discussion. In the absence of a significant fundamental similarity between games and narratives, Ryan (2001b: 182–191) proceeds to examine “local similarities” between literary texts and different kinds of games with the aid of a four-category model originally conceived by Roger Caillois (1961). Below is a summary Ryan’s (2001b: 182–183) account of the typology:

*Agon.* Games based on competition (sports, board games, TV quiz games).

*Alea.* Games of chance (roulette, lottery).

*Mimicry.* Games of imitation and make-believe.

*Ilinx.* Transgressions of boundaries, metamorphosis, reversal of established categories, and temporary chaos (drug experiences, masquerades, amusement parks scary rides).

Cutting across the above categories, Caillois (1961: 13, 27–35) in addition presents a continuum between the concepts *paidia* and *ludus.* The former designates the “frolicsome and impulsive exuberance” of free play, the latter the strictly rule-governed and disciplined play of institutionalized games.

As may be expected, Ryan finds resemblances between certain types of extreme literary experimentation and particular game types: the combinatorial text-games of OuLiPo as well as John Cayley’s algorithm-produced poetry turn out to
have affinities with *alea*; the hypertext novels can be viewed as *agon*, presenting themselves to the reader as puzzles to be solved. Ryan’s example of the latter is Michael Joyce’s ‘classic’ hypertext novel *Afternoon: A Story* (1989). The competitive aspect of *agon* is, in addition, particularly well represented in Stuart Moulthrop’s hypertext novel *Hegirascope* (1997). By setting temporal limitations for reading, *Hegirascope* forces the reader to compete against the computer’s clock. To this list of examples of *text as game* one could well add the even more obviously ludic texts that Ryan (2001b: 180) calls “metonymic” and “narrowly metaphorical” literary applications of games of *alea*: for instance, *I Ching* and Calvino’s *Castle of Crossed Destinies*, respectively. Hence, The ‘genres’ of *agon* and *alea* seem relatively well represented at least in the margins of literary experimentation. However, the perceived similarities between types of games and types of literature become more problematic in Ryan’s discussion of *mimicry* and *ilinx*. Both categories threaten to make the typology problematic as a conceptual scheme of literary study. *Mimicry* will be discussed in detail later in this section; let me first turn to the relations among *ilinx*, *alea*, and *agon*.

The ethos of *ilinx* seems suitable enough for the postmodernist frame of mind. Ryan (2001b: 186) acknowledges this, contending that “[m]ore than any other category in Caillois’s typology, *ilinx* expresses the aesthetics, sensibility, and conception of language in the postmodern age”. One cannot avoid again finding the canonical features of literary postmodernism in Ryan’s (2001b: 186) characterization of the category. Among others, figural displacements, puns, disruptions of syntax, transgressions of ontological boundaries are included. Thus *ilinx* seems to have a distinguished (not to mention fashionable) “locally similar” counterpart in the literary realm. This seems too good to be true.
Indeed, the similarity between games of *ilinx* and the aesthetics of literary postmodernism is logically troublesome because of the resulting indeterminacy of *ilinx*. It could be argued that Ryan (2001b: 186) in part *creates* the strong resemblance between the game category and postmodernism, for instance, by associating the literary *ilinx* with Bakhtin’s concept of the *carnivalesque* and thus with anything transgressive. This re-fashioning makes *ilinx* a plausible local game-counterpart for aesthetic postmodernism, but reduces the descriptive power of the typology.

In Caillois’s original formulation, *ilinx* is defined in considerably more restricted manner, as the pursuit of vertigo and “surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness” (Caillois 1961: 23). I think that Ryan extends the descriptive span of *lixir* too far. Most important, the over-extension of the game category has detrimental pragmatic ramifications. This effect of conceptual broadening is evident in Ryan’s (2001b: 185–186) use of children’s games of make-believe as examples of the free play typical to *lixir*; if broadened in this direction, *lixir* occupies the core territory of *mimicry*. Ryan’s definition of *lixir* also imposes itself on the domains of *alea* and *agon*. Are not “creative anarchy” and “destabilization of all structures” also characteristic of *alea*? Similarly, the competitive features of *lixir*, the deciphering of puns, for instance, arguably also invite *agonistic* reading/playing. Furthermore, Ryan’s concept of *lixir* is nearly indistinguishable from the notion of *paidia*; this is evident in Ryan’s (2001b: 186–191) attribution of the deconstructionist views of language and literature to *paidia*, which she defines as “play defined as the subversion of rules” (cf. Caillois’s definition above).

The broad conception of *lixir* makes it incompatible with the rest of the categories: its distinguishing principle no longer
relates to the dominant function of play, as in the other types (see Caillois 1961: 12). Instead, it is defined in terms of an indeterminate set of formal characteristics more or less corresponding to the established characteristics of postmodernism. Thus *ilinx* ceases to be a functional member of Caillois’s family of games and becomes the prime model for postmodernist free play in both literature and language.

In general, Ryan does not regard Caillois’s typology of games a particularly useful analytical aid for the study of narrative. Despite demonstrating the previously mentioned affinities between experimental literature and *alea* and *agon*, and attributing the “postmodern sensibility” to *ilinx*, she is quick to judge the categories trivial and problematic as interpretive concepts. For instance, Ryan (2001b: 183) finds the application of *agon* troublesome because of its inherent competitive aspect: it is silly to consider reading literature as literally a matter of winning and losing. Granted, a literal application of Caillois’s typology to literary study hardly yields remarkable results. Nevertheless, Ryan abandons too hastily the metaphorical adaptation of textual games. In the light of Ryan’s definition of the category of *ilinx*, this is quite understandable: privileging one member of the ‘family’ of textual games makes the rest appear useless. In addition, as will be seen below, Ryan does not discuss the category of *mimicry* as a variety of textual play. Adopting a significantly more ‘relaxed’ yet systematic attitude toward Caillois’s categories, I will in what follows present an emphatically metaphorical account of textual games.

In an attempt to transform Caillois’s categories into terms of narratological criticism, one has to first establish a division of labor between the types. Let me again turn to *ilinx*: should one limit the span of the concept and retain the descriptive power of other members in Caillois’s typology, or make use of
the broad conception of *ilinx* as a comprehensive analytic tool for literary postmodernism? A textual analysis will help to illustrate, and perhaps solve, the problem.

A quick glance at Pynchon criticism is enough to convince one of the usefulness of the category. The vague metaphorical expression “Pynchon’s novel is a textual game”, rephrased as “Pynchon’s novel is a textual game of *ilinx,*” would indeed seem more than acceptable. The novel certainly features parody and absurdity and displays mixing of genres; it definitely involves serious crossings of ontological boundaries and heteroglossia – all items in Ryan’s (2001b: 186) list of characteristics of *ilinx.* In terms of the novel’s thematic content, perhaps the most strikingly fitting trait of Ryan’s postmodernist *ilinx* is the “treatment of identity as a plural, changeable image”. This ludic element is both explicitly thematized and implicitly inscribed in *Gravity’s Rainbow.*

The sometimes frantically changing external markers of identity of the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop (aka Ian Scuffling, Max Schlepzig, Rocketman, and Plechazunga) constitute a case of an overt thematization of *lixir.* The novel seems to celebrate the absurd ethos of the game by making Slothrop the player (or perhaps the plaything) in a vicious game of identities. The ludicrousness of the rapidly changing identities confuses Slothrop, newly-established as Rocketman, who is expected to perform heroic acts merely by virtue of “the act of naming”:

Holding out a fat roll of 100s [Säure Bummer says], “You could be back tomorrow. No job is too tough for Rocketman.”

A day or two later, it will occur to Slothrop that what he should have said at that point was, “But I wasn’t Rocketman, until just a couple of hours ago.” But right now he is beguiled at the prospect of 2.2 pounds of hashish and a million nearly-
real marks. Nothing to walk away from, or fly or whatever it is, right? (GR 371)

Slothrop’s ludicrous identity-drill does not necessarily entail a playful attitude on the part of the reader, however; the game is thematized by the text. The reader does not have to “play the text” in order to acknowledge its ludicity. However, *Gravity’s Rainbow* also involves more implicit play with identities. The characterization of Pynchon’s novel is also structurally indeterminate; analogies and unclear allusions between characters that logically should have no similarities or connections force the reader into re-assessments of the ontological status of Pynchon’s fictional personage. McHale (1992: 78–80; see also Duyfhuizen 1991) has referred to the phenomenon as “mapping” – moreover, the unnatural inter-personal analogies are commented on in the novel itself. The psychic medium Carroll Eventyr is particularly aware of the game: “If there are analogies, here, if Eventyr does, somehow, map on to Peter Sachsa, then does Nora Dodson-Truck become the woman Sachsa loved, Leni Pökler?” (GR 218). The characters of the novel thus, once again, become tokens in a transgressive game of mixed identities. Most important, however, the analogous overlap of the identities of the characters of *Gravity’s Rainbow* invites the reader to partake in the play. Coming to terms with the characterization of the novel presupposes playful involvement in the novel. The mapping between characters is thus a more concrete example of textual gaming than Slothrop’s overtly changing identity. The novel actualizes the game, and literalizes the metaphor of game, by forcing the reader to adopt a playful, interactive attitude toward reading.

According to Ryan’s account of Caillois’s typology of games, the presupposed readerly attitude would thus beauti-
fully exhibit the spirit of *ilinx*. In addition, this conclusion is to some extent supported by Caillois’s concept of the category; he considers changing identities and guises typical of an amalgamation of games of *mimicry* and *ilinx* (Caillois 1961: 87–97). The above analysis of thematized and actualized games of *ilinx* in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is, therefore, an example of a relatively moderate application of the category. So far so good.

Disturbingly, however, it could be argued that almost all of Pynchon’s structural or thematic particularities could be analyzed in the manner presented above, were one to accept the feature-matrix of Ryan’s *ilinx*. Again, if the game-type is found to represent the sensibility of postmodernism in a near one-to-one correspondence, the category threatens to become redundant, and the metaphor of *text as a game of ilinx* almost completely loses its meaning. Proceeding from this position, one would expect that an analysis based on a more moderate conception of the typology of games would yield more refined results. Let us, therefore, tentatively define *ilinx* as a thematized or actualized textual game that involves the pursuit of ‘narrative vertigo’, induced by disorienting either the characters or the reader, for instance, with transgressions of narrative conventions such as clearly distinguishable character identities. The following passage provides an example of actualized textual *ilinx*:

The story here tonight is a typical WW II romantic intrigue, just another evening at Raoul’s place, involving a future opium shipment’s being used by Tamara as security against a loan from Italo, who in turn owes Waxwing for a Sherman tank his friend Theophile is trying to smuggle into Palestine but must raise a few thousand pounds for purposes of bribing across the border, and so has put the tank up as collateral to borrow from Tamara, who is using part of the loan from Italo to pay him. But meantime the opium deal doesn’t look like it’s going to
come through, because the middleman hasn’t been heard from in several weeks, along with the money Tamara fronted him, which she got from Raoul de la Perlimpinpin through Waxwing, who is now being pressured by Raoul for the money because Italo, deciding the tank belong to Tamara now, showed up last night took it away to an Undisclosed Location a payment on his loan, thus causing Raoul to panic. Something like that. (GR 247)

The sequence is the narrator’s condensed version of the “romantic intrigue”, supposedly told to Slothrop by the black-market agent Blodgett Waxwing. The flat yet complex brevity of the narrator’s presentation creates the impression of the reader sharing Slothrop’s perplexity before the complicated story. There are two main strategies for coming to terms with the passage. On the one hand, the reader can conscientiously sort out the circular relationships among the agents of the silly plot. This reading strategy would involve taking the intrigue for real and trying to incorporate it into the story so far. However, the emphasized habitualness of the presentation (“Something like that”, “just another evening at Raoul’s place”) is apt to the make the reader consider the passage as deliberately playful, as inducing an enjoyable feeling of being confused.

If the reader chooses (as the present reader always does) to consider the passage an instance of textual ilinx, he or she might be taken by surprise, since Tamara, the typical WW II intrigue heroine, immediately afterwards crashes into Raoul’s restaurant in the Sherman tank that is part of the plot. Gravity’s Rainbow thus delivers a rap on the knuckles to the ludic reader by making the intrigue plot very real indeed. This unexpected activity is very momentary, however. After having provided a pretext for yet another carnivalistic stir at Raoul’s, Tamara and her tank disappear, never to be mentioned again.
The brief overlap of two intrigue plots (Slothrop’s and Tamara’s) is likely to emphasize the ludicrousness of both. What about other textual games?

Pynchon’s novel provides a variety of examples of the textual game of *alea*. As in the case of *ilinx*, it is possible to find overt thematization of the game of chance, as well as more implicit, structurally inscribed occurrences. The most conspicuous and thoroughly discussed (both in the novel and in its criticism) thematization is involved in the novel’s central dilemma of randomly striking V-2 rockets. The fundamental dispute between causally-minded Pavlovian Edward Pointsman and the relativist statistician Roger Mexico concerns, in fact, precisely the question of whether the inhabitants of London were during the rocket raids of 1944–45 involuntarily the tokens in a game of *alea* or *agon*:

[Pointsman:]”But surely –”
“Every square is just as likely to get hit again. The hits aren’t clustering. Mean density is constant.” […]
“But squares that have already had several hits, I mean –”
“I’m sorry. That’s the Monte Carlo fallacy. No matter how many have fallen inside a particular square, the odds remain the same as they always were. Each hit is independent of all the others. Bombs are not dogs. No link. No memory. No conditioning.” (GR 56)

Pointsman’s perspective on the distribution on the rocket hits points toward an interpretation of the bombing of London as a game the rules of which are to be learned simply by observing the preceding ‘moves’ on the map. As a result, it would be possible to beat the opponent by being one step ahead; this reasoning points toward a game of *agon*. The enlightened reader is, obviously, painfully aware of the hopelessness of such an approach, and considers the phenomenon as a par-
particularly grim thematization of al"e"a\(^49\). The exaggerated intellectual clumsiness of Pointsman’s arguments further justifies interpreting the passage as an overt thematization of textual play (among other things).

As in the case of Slothrop’s changing identities, however, the episode does not, as such, necessarily presuppose readerly participation. The playing of the game is thematized and thus internalized by the text itself; the reader is expected to be the spectator, not the player. The reader is invited to take part in the textual play in somewhat more concrete fashion, however, in the episode depicting the drinking-game *Prince*.

I have argued earlier (4.3) that the scene is an embedded metaphor that refers to the interpretation of the novel itself and thus constitutes an enunciative *mise-en-abyme*. Reading and interpreting the novel is like playing the game. In addition to this function, the game illustrates both textual *alea* and *agon*.

“[E]verybody takes a number, and you start off the Prince of Wales has lost his tails, no offense now, the numbers going clockwise from that Prince, or whatever number he wants to call out actually, he, that’s the Prince, six or anything, see, you pick a Prince first, he starts it off, then that number two, or whoever that Prince called, sez, but first he goes, the Prince does, Wales, tails, two, sir” [...]

“Yes yes but –” giving Slothrop the most odd look, “I mean I’m not quite sure I really see, you know, the point to it all. How does one win?”

Ha! How does one win, indeed. “One doesn’t win,” easing into it, thinking of Tantivy, one small impromptu counter-conspiracy here, “one loses. One by one. Whoever’s *left* is the winner.” (GR 212)

The passage obviously thematizes the nature of games as rule-governed activity, manifest in Dodson-Truck’s puzzlement
in the face of the apparently senseless rules of *Prince*. Owing to Slothrop’s cryptic presentation of the rules, the game hovers between a game of *alea* and a game of *agon*. The game is (counterfactually, one would argue\(^5\)) presented as a highly complicated intellectual challenge to the players, particularly later on, when it switches to “rotating Prince”, and “it is impossible to tell who is making mistakes and who isn’t” (GR 213). The shift from the simple to the more indeterminate version of the drinking game makes the rules complicated enough to become, in practice, oblique. Consequently, the players move from the domain of *agon* into that of *alea*.

This is a very literary shift; one thinks of the textual play of Raymond Roussel – absolutely rule-governed, yet as good as aleatory from the reader’s perspective\(^5\) because of the obliqueness of the rules of the textual play (see Hutcheon 1980: 123–124; McHale 1987: 159–160; 1992: 184). *Prince* as an enunciative *mise-en-abyme* not only suggests that interpreting *Gravity’s Rainbow* is like playing a game; it frustrates the reader further by implying that the ‘rules’ of the interpretive game might be forever out of reach. The reader sets out to read the novel as a textual game of *agon* – probably suspecting all the while the possibility of its being a game of *alea*. The drinking-game thus both thematizes and actualizes the game categories of *alea* and *agon* by making the reader aware of the ludic features of the scene, both on a thematic level and in his or her actual reading process.

To summarize: how does one make the most of Caillois’s typology of games in the interpretation of ludic literature? Ryan’s conception of *ilinx* as postmodernist gaming par excellence proved to be overly comprehensive in the analysis of the postmodernism of Pynchon. Ryan’s broad interpretation of *ilinx* makes it difficult to consider the type a functional member of the typology. Moreover, the rich interpretive po-
tential of the interplay of the categories *agon* and *alea* in the novel suggests retaining a relatively moderate view of the typology. As a result, *ilinx*, *alea*, and *agon* constitute a trio of relatively distinct types of textual play. Furthermore, it seems useful to distinguish between *thematized* and *actualized* textual play: the ludic element of a text may either be observed on the story level or become ‘acted out’ by the reader (cf. Hutcheon 1980). Jurij Lotman’s (1978) account of the theme of the card game in Russian literature illustrates the interdependence of the thematic and actualized interpretations of textual games. On the one hand, Lotman discusses different card games as overt literary themes; on the other, he (ibid. 480–485) considers ways in which the thematized card games affect the structural aspects of narratives: the theme of the card game as a “plot machine”.

Finally, Caillois’s continuum between *ludus* and *paidia* can, in addition, be taken into account, should it provide interpretive insights. In other words, the textual games either represent play as unrestricted activity (‘free play’) or more organized play ‘by the rules’. Having thus provisionally operationalized three of Caillois’s game categories – *agon*, *alea*, and *ilinx* – in terms of practical criticism, I will now set out to examine the usefulness of the opposition between the metaphors *text as world / text as game*, in the process also discussing the hitherto undiscussed game type of *mimicry*.

As mentioned above, Ryan (2001b: 199) insists on a sharp distinction between the realms of textual worlds and games: “because an observer cannot simultaneously occupy two different points in space, the complementarity of the two metaphors also means that we cannot experience both dimensions at the same time. We must therefore immerse and deimmerse ourselves periodically in order to fulfill, and fully appreciate, our dual role as members of the textual world and players of
the textual game”. According to this logic, the reading of fiction that invites both immersion and play is an experience akin to enjoying optical tricks such as Gombrich’s duck/rabbit figure or, to evoke Pynchon’s metaphor, “staring at a recco map until bomb craters flip inside out” (GR 713).

Ryan’s insistence on the stark distinction between the immersive and interactive approaches to literature follows from her conception of total art: the synthesis of immersion and interactivity. Printed literature, far from attaining such a distant goal, is very good at eliciting immersion, somewhat able to metaphorically evoke interactivity – and utterly unable to synthesize the two perspectives. Perhaps the funniest of Ryan’s illustrations of the sharp distinction between the alternatives is one based on the operating systems of personal computers: the text as game is like Macintosh (or Windows), whereas the text as world is exemplified by MS-DOS. As Ryan (2001b: 197–198) herself notes, the attribution could go either way: the text-based DOS is immersive to a hacker who is comfortable with the jargon of the operating system; the visual nature of Mac appears more immersive to the naive user ready to accept the WYSIWYG doctrine. Most important, it is not possible to be immersed and remain aware of the materiality of the screen simultaneously.

Despite the very persuasive juxtaposition of worldly vs. ludic features in Ryan’s discussion, I find her account of the opposition between the immersive and ludic approaches to literature too reductive. It very effectively corroborates Ryan’s central notions of immersion and interactivity but proves to be problematic in both theory and practice. To demonstrate this, let me turn to mimicry. A fundamental typological issue is virtually present in Ryan’s discussion of the category in the literary realm. The problem is only virtual because Ryan does not directly assess mimicry as a type of textual play:
The importance of games of mimicry for the theory of fictionality has been discussed in the previous chapters. Since these games presuppose a world, they offer a potential reconciliation of immersion and interactivity, and they transcend the aesthetic ideals that literary theory of the past twenty years seeks to express through the game metaphor. I do not, therefore, include mimicry in my discussion of the game aesthetics. (Ryan 2001b: 185)

True, Ryan comprehensively discusses the creation of fictional worlds for immersive purposes in the first chapters of her book; she does not, however, consider this activity as a game that falls into the category of *mimicry*. In other words, Ryan does not address (or make any use of) the remarkable fact that the readerly strategy of immersive reading is embedded in Caillois’s typology of games. This is an additional reason for Ryan to dismiss prematurely the potentially useful typology of textual games. To be sure, Caillois’s description of the game of *mimicry* suggests a strong affinity with Ryan’s concept of immersion:

The rule of the game is unique: it consists in the actor’s fascinating the spectator, while avoiding an error that might lead the spectator to break the spell. The spectator must lend himself to the illusion without first challenging the decor, mask, or artifice which for a given time he is asked to believe in as more real than reality itself. (Caillois 1961: 22.)

This is a more or less accurate description of what Ryan’s intensional/illocutionary theory of fiction considers as the core of fictional ‘communication’, the *fictional game* of make-believe (see chapter 7). Hence, if one is to take seriously the implications of Caillois’s typology, the opposition between *text as world* / *text as game* is found to have no basis. Reading ‘for
the world’ proves to be a subcategory of reading ‘as a game’, instead of being its opposite counterpart.

Ryan (2001b: 185) is cautious for a good reason: textual play conceived of at this level certainly goes above and beyond anything that is usually meant by the metaphor game in literary study. It would therefore seem reasonable to discuss textual play conceived of on this level separately from the metaphorical domain of text as game in order to retain the strict opposition of the metaphors of world/game in Ryan’s formulation. This is, however, not the only alternative for coming to terms with the question; I see no reason not to “transcend the aesthetic ideals that literary theory of the past twenty years seeks to express through the game metaphor”. In the above textual analyses, as well as in Ryan’s discussion, Caillois’s ‘family’ of games has proved to offer useful concepts for the analysis of playful texts, in particular of experimental fiction; thus it seems reasonable to explicate the relations between the members of the typology and thereby harness its whole descriptive input to the uses of narrative analysis.

As a result, instead of two interpretive options (game/world) one would have four interrelated analytic concepts. In what follows, I will further demonstrate the interpretive potential of this scheme both by examining the relationships between the members of the typology and by explicating ways in which it can be used to further refine Ryan’s concepts of world/game and to alleviate the unnecessary contrast between them.

9.3. Dynamics of Textual Play

The above analyses of Gravity’s Rainbow have demonstrated that the four-part typology of games as such yields a relatively
sophisticated system for the analysis of the ludic characteristics of a text. Furthermore, the model is a system that involves combination, interplay, and overlap of the game categories. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Caillois (1961: 12) himself considers the categories to be distinguishable in terms of the *relative dominance* of the “the role[s] of competition, chance, simulation, or vertigo”. The dynamic among the members of the family of textual games reflects this: texts are governed by a particular variety of textual play, though not so as to exclude characteristics of other types.

Therefore, by analogy, the dominant game category of *Madame Bovary* would be *mimicry*, with very few or none of the characteristics of other types; the dominant game category of *Jacques the Fatalist* is, similarly, *mimicry*, but with additional characteristics of *agon* (manifest in the ‘competitive’ relationship between the of the narrator and narratee); the dominant game category of Mark Saporta’s novel-as-a-deck-of-cards, *Composition No. 1*, is *alea*, with frequent but nearly inconsequential characteristics of *mimicry*. And, as has already been demonstrated, the dominant game category of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is *mimicry*, with important characteristics from all of the other types of textual games.

This interpretation of Caillois’s typology is apt to eliminate the strict contrast between the worldly and ludic approaches to literature; Ryan’s dichotomy *world/game* is merely a special case, albeit an essential one, of the many possible “permutations’n’combinations” (GR 275) that the family of textual games can generate. Again, the above discussion of *Gravity’s Rainbow* illustrates the matter: the episodes of the novel were found metaphorically to hover among the *various* game-types, not merely between the two more general options of world-evoking and playful reading of the text.
While seemingly incompatible with Ryan’s conception of the fundamentally separate activities of immersion and textual play, the above conception can be used to illustrate and refine her position as well. Surveying the boundary between literary immersion and interactivity, Ryan makes a distinction between “medium-aware immersion” and radical textual play. The former, she contends, is possible because “we can at the same time, without radical change in perspective, enjoy the imaginative presence of a fictional world and admire the virtuosity of the stylistic performance that produces the sense of its presence” (Ryan 2001b: 351). In the case of textual interactivity or “hypermediacy” (Ryan’s examples are hypertext fictions and Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*), by contrast, the spell of immersion is broken, because “every time the reader is called on to make a decision, the projector that runs the ‘cinema of the mind’ comes to a halt [and] it takes a while to get the projector running again” (ibid.).

For Ryan, the awareness of the medium is only partially compatible with the notion of reading ‘for the world’: too much medium-awareness, and the reader is no longer able to immerse himself/herself into the represented fictional world. The obvious question is where to draw the line between subtle and radical interactivity. In Ryan’s view the subtle medium-awareness that does not yet efface immersion “grow[s] almost spontaneously out of the text, rather than being forced on the reader by emphatic devices such as metafictional comments or embedded mirror images” (Ryan 2001b: 352). It seems that the acceptable amount of ludicity cannot be precisely measured, or even described. Moreover, the expression “forced on the reader” cannot but suggest an ideological motivation behind the insistence on the strict *world/game* separation; reading for the world is presented as the natural alternative in fiction, while reading as a game is made necessary by “emphatic devices”.
This is where the proposed application of the typology of textual games is useful. The gray area between immersive and interactive texts can easily be analyzed in terms of the relative dominance of textual games.

At its subtest, an awareness of the medium of literature, say, the appreciation of the author’s style in a typically well-written realistic novel, would correspond to the basic dual nature of all games of fictional make-believe, *mimicry*: the reader is simultaneously aware of the evoked fictional world and of the “spectrally present” (Ryan 2001b: 351) substance of language. After all – to evoke Ryan’s (and Walton’s) favorite illustration of make-believe – children immersed in a game of baking mud-cakes rarely actually put the cakes in their mouths. (Children eat dirt out of curiosity, without pretending that it is anything else.) However, even in the case of primarily mimetic texts, the reader might confront textual puzzles (from deciphering long sentences to sorting out interwoven plotlines) that invite the application of reading tactics other than mere participation in a game of fictional make-believe.

Furthermore, texts that present more challenging structural devices can be described as more conspicuously involving characteristics from other types of textual play. For instance, in Calvino or Joyce’s *Afternoon: A Story* (or *Ulysses*, for that matter!), the text involves characteristics of both the categories of *mimicry* and *agon*, thus making the reader both read ‘for the world’ and emphatically perceive the mediatedness of the represented world. According to this interpretation there is only a difference of degree between the form of textual play Ryan calls “medium-aware immersion” and radical textual interactivity. Arguably, this view reflects the (almost) infinitely varied reality of literary texts better than setting up an arbitrary boundary between “natural” and “forced” medium-awareness – immersion and play, in other words.

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Replacing the dichotomy of *world/game* with a four-member typology encourages one to further analyze the dynamic among the categories. Two main interpretive alternatives arise: the reader either oscillates among the different game categories, the perspectives remaining distinct, or applies multiple perspectives to the text simultaneously. In the former the processes complement each other; in the latter there is only one multi-perspectival process. The dynamic among the categories of textual games in *Gravity’s Rainbow* serves as a complex illustration of Ryan’s notion of tellability, the fundamentals of which have been discussed above (chapter 2.3).

In order to support of her notion of medium-aware immersion, Ryan (2001b: 351) paraphrases Bob Witmer’s and Michael Singer’s claim that “the mind is fully able to focus on several objects at the same time if the focus on at least some of these objects remains diffuse or backgrounded”. Can readers, then, focus simultaneously on the ludic and the immersive elements of a given text? In other words: how flexible are we as readers/players? Let me turn to an episode of *Gravity’s Rainbow* in order to demonstrate the way in which the immersion typical of *mimicry* and the problem-solving characteristic of *agon* are interdependent parts of the process of the reading of a complicated, yet tellable, literary text.

Fairly early on in the novel, shortly after the reader has for the first time been familiarized with the problematic of Slothrop’s erotic performances and the V-2 rocket strikes, the novel treats the reader with a circular episode, set in Corydon Throsp’s maisonette and spanning some twenty pages (GR 92–113). It introduces the inscrutable Dutch double agent Katje Borgesius, who is later to become one of Slothrop’s many significant erotic conquests. The sequence depicts the secret filming of Borgesius for the purposes of a Pavlovian conditioning of one Octopus Grigori; thus it links up with the ‘Slothrop’s
relationship to V-2 strikes’ plotline. The episode consists of embedded narrative levels that shift from one to another almost imperceptibly, prompting Weisenburger (1994) to designate the episode a manifestation of the “hyper-embedded narration” of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Indeed, the sequence involves no less than eight nested narrative levels, enough to make even the most pedantic reader lose count.

The number of embedded narratives is not the most problematic feature of the scene, however; the shifts between the levels are made in a series of mind-to-mind movements that transgress the conventions of narrative embedding. Thus, for example, Borgesius’ remembrance of Captain Blicero subtly shifts into the description of Blicero’s thoughts about Gottfried, his sado-masochistic partner/slave (GR 96; Weisenburger 1994: 77). This is just as impossible in real life as it is in conventional realist fiction: the effect of the ‘illicit’ embedding is alienating.

The complex and subversive nature of the episode is apt to evoke a ludic attitude; the reader literally has to play the text in order to comprehend it, even in the most basic sense of figuring out the relationships among the narrative levels. The game of *agon* programmed into the sequence is thus very actual: the reading process of a first-time reader is likely to consist of a series of backtrackings and tentative conclusions typical of games involving problem-solving. However, an ‘agonistic’ approach is not all that is required of the reader in order to grasp the significance of the scene.

In addition to being an exercise in confused narrative hierarchy, the episode presents in embryo many essential themes and characters of *Gravity’s Rainbow*: the Hansel and Gretel fairytale, sado-masochism, Captain Blicero, Gottfried, Enzian, Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*, Octopus Grigori, and so forth (cf. “The Story of Byron the Bulb” discussed in chapter 3.2). The “hyper-
embedded” episode is overdetermined in terms of information (supposedly\textsuperscript{53}) relevant to the interpretation of the novel. Presented early on, the episode functions by furnishing the reader with a set of at best vaguely interconnected bits of knowledge to be borne in mind for further use.

While providing a plethora of interpretive clues for the reader, the Maisonette-episode is also essential to the progression of the novel’s plotlines. The passage is saturated with narrative information; the sequence explodes the hitherto relatively stable and confined “Allied intelligence activities in London” plot into numerous interlinked plots, many of which are to become central later on in the novel. The episode constitutes not merely a game of \textit{agon} to be played by the reader, but also a source of thematic and narrative information necessary for the construction of the peculiar fictional world of Pynchon’s novel and thus a game of \textit{mimicry} in potentia. The condensed makings of a fictional world are, nevertheless, given to the reader in the form of a narrative riddle: in order even to make tentative sense of it, the reader has to engage in the textual play of \textit{agon}.

In this respect, it is useful to recall Ryan’s account of tellability. The Maisonette-episode exemplifies tellability by its very playfulness. It exemplifies Ryan’s (1991: 155) principles of both \textit{functional polyvalence} and the \textit{diversification of possible worlds} – both essential indices of tellability. This is Ryan on functional polyvalence:

\begin{quote}
Narrative highlights are formed by events entering into several distinct functional units [,] grouping[s] of states and events (not necessarily adjacent) presenting special strategic significance for the story as a whole. […] An example of functional polyvalence is the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta. This particular event functions as solution of a problem (the desire of Oedipus for Jocasta); as fulfillment of a prediction; as violation of as
\end{quote}
interdiction (the prohibition of incest); and as an infraction justifying the punishment to come. The principle of functional polyvalence is what accounts for the intrinsic elegance – and consequently, for the tellability – of certain ways of solving problems. (Ryan 1991: 155.)

Functional polyvalence seems self-evident: the episode as a whole, as well as particular events in it, have multiple narrative functions. This is not only a result of the multiply embedded (or stacked, in Ryan’s reversed terminology; see also Weisenburger 1994; Jahn 1999) ‘Matrushka’ narratives involved in the passage. Observing merely the levels of extradiegesis and first-level diegesis, one finds multiple functions. On the extradiiegetic level, the episode is a predictive textual mise-en-abyme; for the Allied intelligence it is a part of an elaborate scheme to study Slothrop’s rocket-reflex; for Katje Borgesius it constitutes an act of self-contemplation; for Pirate Prentice the episode involves coming to terms with both Borgesius and his supposed haunting of Katje’s ancestor Frans van den Groov; for Octopus Grigori it is a session of Pavlovian conditioning; and for Osbie Feel, at the most mundane, it constitutes merely a sequence of manufacturing and using various kinds of drugs. Moreover, to explode the notion of functional polyvalence altogether, one could add to the list the functions the episode fulfills from the perspective of the embedded plotlines: what it means for Captain Blicero, for Frans van den Groov, for Gottfried, for Enzian and so on.

What about the diversification of possible worlds, according to Ryan the most fundamental formal requirement of tellability? Ryan describes the principle in the following manner:

The demand for a diversified semantic universe also determines what kinds of resolutions and outcomes present the greatest
narrative interest. My contention is that tellability is rooted in conceptual and logical complexity, and that the complexity of a plot depends on an underlying system of purely virtual embedded narratives [i.e.] story-like constructs contained in the private worlds of characters. (Ryan 1991: 156; see also chapter 2.3)

In the light of the dizzying plurality of private possible worlds of remembrance, imagined history, hallucination, and make-believe generated during the episode, the principle seems to be vigorously in play. The virtual private worlds of wishes and expectations of both characters and agencies directly or indirectly involved in the scene create a complicated constellation of potential outcomes. According to Ryan’s conception, therefore, the circular episode yields a very tellable configuration (Ryan 1991: 157).

The passage seems to betray its tellability, however, since it does not resolve any of the embedded plotlines it presents to the reader. In short, nothing really significant ‘happens’ in the Maisonette-episode. The conflicts between the private worlds of the characters introduced to the reader are not solved during the 20 pages of the sequence. In fact, many of the plotlines remain without closure forever (the supposed haunting of Pirate Prentice, or the fate of Captain Blicero, for instance).

For present purposes, the most crucial thing to note is the interplay between the tellability and playfulness of the episode. Curiously, it seems that the playful and transgressive narrative strategies of Gravity’s Rainbow allow it to include embedded plot-sequences that dramatically enhance its tellability. While certainly alienating the reader, the game of embedded narratives in addition (and by contrast) seduces the reader into digging deeper. As a result, the reader, definitely aware of the medium, enjoys the very good story that is the
surprising outcome of the radical textual play. The reader in search of instant gratification is in for a disappointment, however. The long-distance linking strategy typical to Gravity’s Rainbow (see chapter 6.2.2 above; McHale 1992) once more reveals the condensed or ‘implicit’ tellability of the passage in its totality only in retrospect. The thematic and structural relevance of the episode can be fully appreciated only after receiving more narrative information. From very different perspectives (neo-Proppian function analysis and cognitive narratology), both Emma Kafalenos (1999) and Jahn (1999: 186) emphasize the relationship between provisional, processual, and final interpretation of a text. This is Kafalenos’s view on the matter:

During the process of reading a narrative, I propose, we interpret events according to two simultaneous procedures [:] we interpret events as functions in relation to the configurations we have established at the moment that the event is revealed to us. The other procedure is the thought process that traditional narratology has taught us to perceive: we construct a fabula by arranging in chronological sequence all the events that the texts we are reading reveals. (Kafalenos 1999: 57.)

Applying the principle of Kafalenos’s account to the reading of the Maisonette episode, the reader simultaneously interprets the events represented in the “hyper-embedded” narration with reference to the immediate situation of nested narrative levels, and as contributing to the construction of the overall fabula of the novel. To extrapolate in terms of the game typology, it seems that playing the textual game of agon (i.e. coming to terms with the complex embeddings) and playing the game of fictional make-believe cannot be separated from each other. In other words, the narrative world, the outcome of the game of make-believe, is constituted just as much by the
reader’s playful (or painful) attempts to fathom a particular sequence, as it is by surrendering to immersion.

The above interpretation of the Maisonette-episode suggests that the agonistic approach to Pynchon’s novel is not merely a complementary alternative to reading it as a game of make-believe. The reader is required to play the text in order to become immersed in the bizarre world of illegitimate narrative transitions in the first place. And once happily immersed, he or she is likely to discover that the outcome of his or her struggles, a more or less coherent fictional world, presents itself as yet another puzzle to be played with and, hopefully, solved. In reading Gravity’s Rainbow, Ryan’s “projector of the mind” is not only frequently interrupted by textual games. The reader is, rather, the projectionist whose constant actions keep the reel rolling. Playing the textual game does not hinder the creation of fictional worlds; it is an activity required in order for immersion in the first place. (The projectionist-metaphor is obviously deficient: real-life projectionists generally lose interest in watching the same movie over and over again. This does not happen while reading Pynchon.)

Hume interprets the relationship between the immersive and interactive qualities in a similar vein: “Pynchon’s realities are assimilable only by those who mingle themselves with the events at various levels, and they depend upon the reader/actor’s creative participation to become fully real. [...] The more the reader is immersed in the text, especially during subsequent readings, the more participatory the relationship” (Hume 1987: 207–208).

As noted above, Ryan (2001b: 97) herself acknowledges and describes a situation similar to this, and writes of immersion as the “result of a process that involves an element of struggle and discovery”. Nevertheless, the complicated interplay of different readerly strategies involved in the decipher-
ment of a novel such as Gravity’s Rainbow cannot be satisfactorily analyzed within the confines of her dualistic world/game account of fiction. While, in all fairness, it remains impossible to be certain about what happens in the psychological process of reading/playing, the discussion presented above suggests that insisting on a strict opposition of the notions of immersion and play does not necessarily yield satisfactory interpretive results. Rather, certain textual situations seem to invite viewing immersion and (other kinds of) textual play as interdependent and overlapping processes.

In a prototypical literary situation, the reading as mimicry clearly dominates the field of textual play, the other types serving as marginal or supplemental phenomena. The inevitable difference of emphasis between the two fields does not make Caillois’s typology any less useful for narratology, however. It merely makes the application of the typology of games to literary study markedly different from the use that game studies have for it.

This divergence of attitudes is reflected in a delicious pair of statements from representatives of the disciplines. According to Eskelinen, “stories are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games, and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing tools is just a waste of time and energy” (Eskelinen 2001: sec. 8 par.1). By contrast, from a literary point of view, Ryan contends that interactivity is “a supplemental feature tacked on to an art form that did very well without it”. Disagreement of this magnitude cannot but point toward a useful exchange of ideas.

9.4. Worlds, Frames, and Games

How does the approach to textual games outlined above relate to the narratological conceptions of Fludernik’s Natural
Narratology and Ryan’s possible world narratology? It seems that strategically considering all reading potentially playful extends both approaches.

For Fludernik (1996), a text is narrative to the extent that it reflects the experience of a ruling consciousness. Fludernik herself notes that this definition precludes considering certain varieties of radical experimental fiction as narrative. Moreover, I have argued earlier (Chapter 5) that Fludernik’s account runs into problems even before she acknowledges it, resorting to a more traditional, story-based model. Consequently, the problematic cases of a chapter of Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology, aptly titled “Games with Tellers, Telling, and Told”, prompt Fludernik to propose a search for models of postmodern[ist] narrativity elsewhere. The typology of games arguably provides one such model, on the levels of both cognitive parameters and illusionistic textual analysis.

First, on a Natural level, Fludernik’s concept of narrativity can be augmented with the interpretive notion of game in order to make sense of the apparent non-sense of experimental narratives. To be sure, this addition to Fludernik’s conception of narrativity does not constitute a new basic cognitive parameter of natural storytelling; in Fludernik’s four-level system of reading fiction (see Chapter 5), the interpretive notion of textual games functions as part of the conscious narrativization process on level IV. In other words, the reader more or less consciously perceives the analogy between the troublesome reading of a ludic text and games, and consequently makes sense of the idiosyncrasies of the text with an interpretive macro-frame of play. It is questionable, however, whether one should continue to refer to this attribution as “narrativization”. According to Fludernik’s expressed views on narrativity, textual comprehension in terms of games is clearly not a narrative experience. In cases like these one should
perhaps turn to Culler’s (1978: 134) more general concept of naturalization, to distinguish between narrativity proper and other strategies according to which strange texts are “recovered or naturalized, brought within our ken”. The naturalization of a text vis-à-vis the notion of game could, in effect, be regarded as attributing the experience of reading to a ‘foreign’ cognitive frame. A ludic text could conceivably be comprehended by utilizing essentially nonnarrative natural cognitive parameters (or scripts) of problem-solving, competition, or riddle (see Jahn 1999: 180–181).

The possible integration (or rather agglutination) of game-naturalization to Natural Narratology, however interesting, has little to do with the analytical concepts proposed in the course of this discussion. The typology of textual games functions best on a purely conceptual (and illusionistic) level, as a coherent set of metaphoric concepts with which to analyze experimental works of literature. The obvious advantage of the typology of textual games is its ability to come to terms with fiction that transcends any notion of real-life storytelling.

The definition of narrativity in Ryan’s intensional/illocutionary approach to possible world narratology is somewhat broader than Fludernik’s. It does not insist on the experientiality reflected in a narrative but simply on plot or “rationalized sequence” (Ryan 1991: 264–265; see also Ryan 1992b) inferred from a text. Nevertheless, discussing postmodern[ist] literature, Ryan (1991: 267) introduces the concept of anti-narrativity, a “rejection of plot as principle of textual unification”. Ryan (ibid.) is not particularly worried about the possible effects of this rejection on the conception of narrativity: “it simply turns narrativity into an optional ingredient of the genre [of the postmodern novel].” The principles of narrativity remain intact.
It is easy to see that the typology of textual games is an extension of Ryan’s plot-oriented account of narrativity, even though Ryan does not see a desperate need for such a supplement. When the narrativizing hypothesis of an underlying event structure (story, *fabula*) no longer seems convincing, the typology of textual games might still provide a viable frame for intelligible reading.

9.5. Margins of Metaphoricity Revisited

The redefinition of the notion *text as game* that has been suggested in the course of this chapter has powerful implications. Most importantly, it significantly broadens the use of the metaphor: it invites one to consider most pieces of narrative literature as essentially ludic, because they, like games of mimicry, “presuppose a world” (Ryan 2001b: 185). This seems to be strongly at odds with the cautious use of the metaphor that Ryan endorses. The limited practical use of the metaphor is not necessarily incompatible with the more general notion of the playfulness of all literature, however.

Ryan’s endorsement of a relatively limited conception of the metaphor *text as game* is most evident in her discussion of the alleged affinities between free play (or *paidia*) and the poststructuralist view of language. According to Ryan, it is tempting to broaden the metaphor to refer to the most fundamental levels of literary signification: “In the paradigm that currently dominates literary studies, if literature is a game, it is because language itself is one; and if literature is a game, it is because its rules form a self-enclosed system that determines,
rather than reflects, our experience of reality.” (Ryan 2001b: 187.) Ryan does not consider this reasoning sound: the reader is not really playing a game while decoding linguistic structures. The free play involved in signification is not to be mistaken for the ludic activity of a reader faced with computer games or hypertexts – or postmodernist novels. (Ryan 2001b: 190–191.) Ryan’s (2001b: 17) view that “postmodern narrative deepens the reader’s involvement with the text by proposing new reading strategies, or by drawing attention to the construction of meaning [and] stand[ing] as the illustration of a strong figural version of interactivity” suggests that a particular text is a game in a figural sense only if it is marked as such. Ostensibly, if the reader is not aware of being faced with a playful text, it makes no sense to use the metaphor *game*.

This conclusion is corroborated by the analyses of *Gravity’s Rainbow*: Pynchon’s text indeed “draws attention to the construction of meaning”, for instance, by presenting Pointsman’s and Mexico’s debate over rocket strikes, and thus the thematization of *alea* and *agon*, as conspicuously significant. The ludic interpretation is supported by the text; it does not stem from an all-encompassing statement about the ludicity of all literary discourse. Similarly, the twistedly logical system of the changing and overlapping character identities of *Gravity’s Rainbow* markedly presents itself as a game of textual *ilinx* to be played by the reader.

In most cases, therefore, the metaphor *game* functions best when the broad interpretation “literature is essentially playful” and the poststructuralist contention “all signification involves *paidia*” are subtly overlooked. Unlike Ryan, however, I do not feel that there is a natural basis for either of these exclusions; the pragmatic demands for analytic and interpretive effectiveness make both sensible. It is trivial, superfluous, and silly to talk about realistic novels as constituting games
of mimicry, if nothing indicates that the typology of textual games has consequences for their interpretation. Essentially non-ludic narratives sensibly suggest reaching for Ockham’s razor. As the above discussion of Gravity’s Rainbow illustrates, however, there is no reason not to make use of the concepts provided by the model of literary games if the textual situation invites it. This is what makes the typology of textual games “narratological sharpshooting”. In the interpretation of Gravity’s Rainbow, considering mimicry as merely one among the many possible textual games, for instance, is indeed a source of novel insights.

The above critique of Ryan’s conceptions of both Caillois’s typology and the opposition of the metaphors text as world / text as game make explicit the conventional nature of literary metaphors. Despite the fact that world-creating immersion and ludic interactivity are real, observable, and to some extent researchable psychological phenomena, the interpretation given to the concepts in criticism also has a logic of its own. Ryan bases her poetics of immersion and interactivity more firmly on psychological and phenomenological interpretations in order to come to terms with the experiential characteristics of different forms of art. Furthermore, the ultimate goal of Ryan’s study, the justification of the claim that total art consists of a synthesis of immersion and interactivity, makes it natural for her to choose to emphasize the distinction between the immersive and ludic attitudes in the case of printed literature.

Setting its aim considerably lower, the present discussion aims to make the most of game as a concept of literary criticism. As a substitute for the dichotomy world/game, an application of Caillois’s game typology has proved to provide a more refined system for the analysis of immersion and other varieties of textual games, thematized or actualized. This is not to imply that the findings of cognitive psychology or pos-
sible world semantics that Ryan utilizes in her account would lose their explanatory (or at least descriptive) potential; the most crucial difference lies in the interpretation they are given. Ultimately, in dealing with metaphors one is left with the responsibility (and freedom) to choose the amount and variety of conceptual metaphoricity that one finds most practical. Again, the text of Gravity’s Rainbow succinctly illustrates the situation. Emil “Säure” Bummer and Gustav the young Weberian discuss music in the following terms:

“You’re caught in tonality,” screams Gustav. “Trapped. Tonality is a game. All of them are. You’re too old. You’ll never move beyond the game, to the Row. The Row is enlightenment.”

“The Row is a game too.” Säure sits grinning with an ivory spoon, shoveling incredible piles of cocaine into his nose [...]

“Sound is a game, if you’re capable of moving that far, you adenoidal closet-visionary. That’s why I listen to Spohr, Rossini, Spontini. I’m choosing my game, one full of light and kindness.” (GR 622)

In the most general sense, in addition to exemplifying the relevance of both cognitive psychology and possible world semantics for the narratological analysis and interpretation of literature, the preceding discussion implies a fruitful interchange between narratology and ludology. In this respect, the metaphorical incorporation of the concepts of ludology partakes in the recent enthusiasm for literary interdisciplinarity, most clearly exemplified by the explosive dissemination of the ideas of cognitive science.

Herman is quick to praise such a development. For him, the communication between research into the socio-cognitive factors of play and fictional games of literature promises fresh insights for the study of narrative and games alike: “just as
research on social play can help integrate (fictional) storytelling into a broader context of practices of make-believe [...], narrative analysts can help identify a fuller range of play behaviors, and a richer repertoire of play-indexing cues, than those hitherto recognized” (Herman 2001b: par. 20). Therefore, while Eskelinen (2001) is perhaps rightly worried about the alleged colonizing attitude of art criticism with its predilection for ‘storifying’ and interpreting all cultural phenomena, tentatively and metaphorically applying the concepts of ludology to narratological criticism hardly constitutes a threat to either discipline.
10. Conclusion: Pynchon the Narratologist?

In one respect, this study has disregarded its structuralist heritage (again, some would say burden): by considering ways in which Pynchon’s fiction implicitly takes part in the discourse of narrative theory, the preceding chapters have repeatedly implied the notion of an individual aesthetic will that becomes visible in the text, yet also transcends it. This is in stark contrast to orthodox structuralist (not to mention poststructuralist) ideas about authorship and textuality. To play devil’s advocate, one could claim that this study, for its part, contributes to the myth of genius, or at least to the myth of the Author, that has plagued Pynchon criticism from the very beginning. Therefore, before attempting to pull together the threads of the above interlocutions between Gravity’s Rainbow and narratology, I feel compelled to address two questions that concern the author of that novel, Thomas Pynchon. Is he a genius? A narratologist, perhaps?

True, the conclusions reached about the inscribed narratological positions of Gravity’s Rainbow have not simply implied that the text and the text alone speaks (the study has refrained from all kinds of authorial, or biographical, explanation, though). Now, in terms of institutional aesthetics, Gravity’s Rainbow is an instance in the ongoing implicit aesthetic discourse that constitutes the art world, no differently from any other work of art. What causes it, nonetheless, to be irresistible to consider Pynchon a genius is the fact that his fiction simultaneously, and forcibly, contributes to theoretical discussions of the novel on several fronts. Gravity’s Rainbow is an exploration of the margins of the possible regarding both
the specialized discourse of narratology and the more general ‘great tradition’ of the novel.

Furthermore, as has been amply demonstrated in Pynchon criticism, Pynchon’s contribution to the art of the novel is not merely the result of an implicit commentary on narrative conventions. The thematic aspects of Pynchon’s novel, Pynchon’s public figure, Pynchon lore, and Pynchon’s tremendous significance for the study of literature must be taken into account when assessing the true effect of the author and his works. However, if *Gravity’s Rainbow* has in this study been considered a work of genius, this is so only in terms of its relevance to literary criticism and theory. The genius of Pynchon is thus determined by discourses: narratology, the aesthetics of the novel, and so on.

The same conclusion is valid with respect to the question of Pynchon’s status as a narratologist. The dismaying fact that Pynchon is in reality probably no more a narratologist than the author of these pages is a novelist – though who’s to know? – in no way diminishes the valuable input of the narratology-in-practice woven into his texts.

As was mentioned in the introduction, Pynchon’s narratologies are emphatically plural. *Gravity’s Rainbow* suggests many, often contradictory, views of its narrative functioning. The incompatibility of many of the narratological concepts considered in the course of the study thus prevents one from seeking a truly detailed synthesis of the results of the examination. As was promised in the introduction, however, there are fundamental observations to be made about the relationships between *Gravity’s Rainbow* and the various narratologies seeking to come to terms with the novel. Let me discuss different aspects of these relationships separately. First, a word on the relations of cognitive narratology, possible world narratology, and *Gravity’s Rainbow*. 
A substantial part of this study – chapters 5–8 – has been devoted to the theoretical and practical assessment of cognitive narratology and possible world narratology. What conclusions can one draw from these discussions? In the chapters devoted to the theoretical discussion of the approaches, I have repeatedly emphasized the principal difference between possible world narratology and cognitive narratology, i.e. that of analysis and explanation. To recapitulate: possible world narratology provides the student of literature with novel ways to look at, and think about, literature; cognitive narratology provides an explanatory framework for its study. Now we are in a position to assess this general distinction – is it reflected in the practical applications of cognitive narratology and possible world narratology?

The analysis of the voices of Gravity’s Rainbow in chapter 6 made use of Fludernik’s account of the cognitive schemata, while utilizing fairly traditional tools of narrative analysis. In a sense, the discussion sought to marry “illusionistic” categories of structuralist narratology to the explanatory framework of Natural Narratology. The attribution of narrative voices was studied in terms of the reader’s strategy of utilizing either the cognitive schema of TELLING (the narratorial voice), or EXPERIENCING (figural voice). It was argued that the analysis of the minutiae of voice attribution is possible only with the armature of illusionist narratology. To utilize Jahn’s (1997) terminology, “top-down” (cognitivist) and “bottom-up” (structuralist) approaches to texts were interpreted as complementing each other. The study of the linguistic, contextual, and thematic characteristics of narrative provides clues about the probable adoption of interpretive frames instead of functioning as their definite indices. Again, however, this should not be a source of despair for featurist students of narrative. Without the featurist, “bottom-up” approach, an essential aspect of lit-
erary study all but disappears into the black box. To be sure, this mixed strategy of narrative analysis has potential problems. First, its relationship both to Natural Narratology and to structuralist narratology might be considered ambiguous. If the textual analysis utilizes traditional means of textual analysis, why link it to Natural Narratology at all? Second, are not the fundamental presuppositions of Natural and structuralist narratology at odds with each other? Both questions can be addressed by recalling the discussion of Fludernik’s distinction between theoretical and illusionistic approaches to literary analysis. Textual analysis in the context of Natural Narratology is analysis of both textual features and readerly illusions, while the cognitive schemata of Natural Narratology provide the fundamental explanation for narrativity. ‘Applying’ Natural Narratology, one has to make explicit the different functions and goals of the two. In this way one can enjoy both the analytical details of featurist narratology and the processual insights of holistic narratology.

The discussion of hypothetical focalization in chapter 8 recalls the role possible worlds play in modal semantics: the analytic tool of the analysis of anomalous, problematic cases. The analysis of the marginal narrative phenomenon of HF was significantly augmented by viewing fictional narrative as a constellation of possible worlds. However, the discussion of HF is also symptomatic of the way the concept of possible worlds has been domesticated in literary studies. In addition to providing an analytic tool for HF, the possible world framework was used to outline a comprehensive account of focalization. For literary scholars, a possible world is not merely an abstract structure provisionally stipulated in order to come to terms with special cases such as HF. Quite the contrary, it is the full-fledged imaginative world of fiction. While this interpretation is not faithful to the philosophical origins of the con-
cept of possible world, it is precisely its slightly heretical character that allows one to comprehensively reconceptualize the issue of perspective in the framework of possible worlds. Again, possible worlds have to be made literary if one wishes to make use of them as literary concepts. The final analytical input of the concept of focalization based on possible world narratology remains to be assessed. Whatever the case, the discussion demonstrated that the possible world approach provides new ways to conceive of the perspectival qualities of narrative.

In this study, cognitive narratology and possible world narratology have generally been discussed separately. Is it possible to find areas of intellectual overlap? Despite the fundamental theoretical differences between cognitive narratology and possible world narratology, Fludernik’s Natural Narratology and Ryan’s intensional/illocutionary theory of fiction were found to raise similar questions. In particular, Fludernik’s and Ryan’s discussions of narrativity resemble each other. This is not to suggest that their definitions of narrativity were similar; it is, rather, the attitude toward the limit-cases of narrativity that creates the affinity. Fludernik (1996), it should be remembered, interprets extreme postmodernist challenges to experiential narrativity as rare phenomena that do not pose a serious threat to the model of Natural Narratology. In a similar vein, Ryan’s (1996) concept of postmodernist antinarrativity leaves the model of narrativity intact by viewing radical experimentation as a mere deviation from it (see also Carroll 2001: 36). Furthermore, the discussion of game as a concept of textual analysis (chapter 9) demonstrated that both Fludernik’s and Ryan’s theories of narrativity need to be complemented with more specialized accounts of narrative comprehension.
Ryan’s (1991) work on possible world narratology and artificial intelligence points further toward viewing possible world narratology and cognitive narratology as complementary approaches to fiction. For instance, Ryan’s revision of traditional plot models combines the analytical potential of the possible worlds of fiction with the concepts of computer programming and thus provides a flexible and powerful framework for the analysis of the dynamics of plots. In Ryan’s model, the possible worlds (wish-worlds, dream-worlds, belief-worlds and the like) provide indispensable tools for the description and representation of the virtual and actual events of the plot. The assumed cognitive processing of the plot can, in turn, be described using the concepts of artificial intelligence. In this respect, Ryan’s approach bridges the methodological gap between cognitive narratology and possible world narratology.

Moreover, Herman’s work on both possible world and cognitive narratologies constitutes a deliberate attempt to synthesize the approaches. For instance, in his revised version of the notion of hypothetical focalization Herman (2002: ch. 8) links the analytical power of possible world semantics to cognitive accounts of narrative, such as Fludernik’s Natural Narratology. In his study Story Logic Herman approaches narrative from various methodological perspectives in order to construct a comprehensive view of the logic of narrative. Whether or not Herman’s heady optimism (2001b; see also Fludernik 2001c: 112) regarding the bright future of the “sciences of the text” is justified, remains still to be demonstrated, however. Of course, in the most pragmatic sense – regardless of their theoretical validity – the new approaches offer valuable new interpretive frameworks for the study of narrative. Let me turn to the challenges that Pynchon’s fiction poses for all kinds of narratology. What can one conclude about Pynchon’s deconstructive intent?
Many critics have noticed the affinity between Pynchon’s texts and poststructuralist notions of textuality. McHoul and Wills (1990) seek to ‘bookmatch’ the novels to critical theory, Duyfhuizen (1991) perceives a poststructuralist theory of reading inscribed in the text of Gravity’s Rainbow, while Berressem (1993) considers the novel, among other things, a parody of the poststructuralist notion of text. However, linking Pynchon’s works to poststructuralist ideas is just as risky a strategy as attributing them to structuralist ideas. To my mind, Pynchon’s novel is best understood as reflecting the logic of deconstruction very loosely, almost sufficiently so as to make the connection trivial. Gravity’s Rainbow certainly is not a practical application of poststructuralist theory.

It may be disappointing to find that “having your narrative conventions and discarding them too” articulates the essence of Pynchon’s deconstruction vis-à-vis narrative conventions. However, what Pynchon’s deconstructive project may lack in general theoretical finesse, it more than regains in the depth and diversity of its subversive textual praxis. All textual analyses have focused on Pynchon’s strategy of utilizing narrative conventions to their logical limits. In the first of these, Gravity’s Rainbow was found to make the conventions of narrative hierarchy look arbitrary and artificial. Consequently, fundamental narratological categories such as narrative level and the narrator were subject to suspicion. Gravity’s Rainbow is, to be sure, not alone in abusing narrative hierarchy – Pynchon’s novel, however, is particularly exciting because of its tendency to project irony also toward the conventions of narrative transgression. Pynchon’s attitude toward the clichés of metafiction exemplifies this ‘double’ deconstruction of narrative.

In the introduction, the first text-analytical chapter was described as the “intellectual blueprint” for the rest of the tex-
tual analyses. Now we are in a position to see more clearly what this means. In the course of this study, *Gravity’s Rainbow* has been found to exhibit its deconstructive logic on many levels: formal categories of speech and thought representation, the categories of textual games, and the cognitive parameters of narrative comprehension are equally susceptible. This is why the theoretically vague talk about the deconstructive intent of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is intelligible; the novel really seems to function according to a particularly evasive logic. In fact, a good way to think about *Gravity’s Rainbow* is to consider it a textual machine that has been ingeniously designed (!) to deconstruct classifications of all kinds.

Now, the ardently formal approach of this study has been clear from the outset. Issues that transcend the confines of narrative conventions or problems pertaining to the analysis of textual structures have generally not been addressed. The deconstructive logic of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, nonetheless, obviously extends beyond the scope of this inquiry. This has been amply demonstrated in the studies of the ideological and political dimensions of Pynchon’s work. In this respect, the textual and thematic traditions of Pynchon criticism share a mutual interpretive standpoint. There is no reason not to continue the tradition of Pynchon criticism and utilize the findings of the above analyses for the purposes of thematic and ideological criticism. But, again, there is relatively little to say in general about Pynchon’s deconstructive strategy, formal or ideological. The most satisfying strategy consists of studying the various ways in which Pynchon’s novel fulfills its paradoxically subversive mission of utilizing and overturning narrative conventions, or ideological conceptions and beliefs.

The discussion of the deconstructive attitude of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is, essentially, an example of “yielding to the interpretive temptation”, according to Prince (1996: 164) a ques-
tionable narratological strategy (cf. Lanser 1995). While the analyses have sought the notorious narratological objectivity, it is clear that an initial hypothesis of an implicit, vaguely deconstructive narratology inscribed in Pynchon’s text has informed the pursuit as a whole. In retrospect, the logic seems very simple: read a text, form an intuitive interpretation, look for textual evidence to support it – this is the logic of all research. Surely rejecting this cannot be what Prince had in mind? Here is Prince in context:

In short, without yielding to the interpretive temptation and without renouncing the ideal of a description of narrative and its possibilities that would be explicit, systematic, and universal, narratology should and can take into account calls for more self-awareness, flexibility, and attention to the concrete. Indeed, it is on this condition that it will perfect the fit between its models and the texts they strive to characterize and that it will find a place in a generalized semiotics. (Prince 1996: 164.)

It seems that yielding to interpretive temptation is precisely what is needed in narratological criticism – a real distinction should be made between yielding strategically to the interpretative temptation and renouncing altogether the ideals of narratology. While discarding the difference between the particular and the general does not seem like a viable strategy, one should be prepared to adjust preconceived notions of narrative to make them truer to the real world of narratives as well as to “generalized semiotics”. The strategy of narratological criticism applied throughout this study consists of a twofold procedure: first, for strategic purposes, rigidifying the narratological concepts in order to make the most of their descriptive power; second, concentrating on what remains undescribed by the concepts in order to re-assess their validity. Granted, this procedure is a traditional one; the presuppo-
sitions of the narratological models continue to inform the analysis even in its inverted incarnation. Thus the advancement of narratological criticism is always already (as the saying goes) prescribed by previous positions. But only partially.

A truly deconstructive strategy of creating narratological concepts would, of course, proceed further by situating the inverted terms in a more general conceptual frame, thus demonstrating the illusory basis of the dichotomies. This is what Gibson (1996; 2001) proposes for narratology, and McHoul and Wills (1990), hilariously, for Pynchon criticism. As a result, however, the role of narratological concepts would have to be reconsidered. Concepts such as textual force are no longer analytical tools but avowedly tentative interpretive metaphors with which to approach literature. Indeed, in the most radical form proposed by Gibson, deconstructionist narratology severs all meaningful links to traditional narratology. In short: ‘deconstructionist narratology’ is much more of an oxymoron than ‘interpretive narratology’. Of course there are gradations; for instance, narratologists such as Peter Brooks (1984) and Chambers (1984) have sought to operationalize the metaphors of narrative desire and seduction, respectively. There is, nonetheless, a significant difference: while Gibson seeks to form a new paradigm of poststructuralist narrative theory, the analyses of Brooks and Chambers are still to a significant extent continuous with the textualist strategies of structuralist narratology.

The analysis of the ludic identity of Gravity’s Rainbow in chapter 9 most explicitly addressed the problem of metaphors as concepts. Extending and refining Ryan’s (2001b) account of textual games, the chapter outlined a thoroughly metaphorical conceptual typology for the analysis of playful narrative. In what sense, if any, are the game categories compatible with narratological concepts? In terms of genealogy, the typology
is obviously non-literary, based as it is on Caillois’s (1962) categories of games. By contrast, narratological concepts such as narrator and narrative level seem to spring more directly from the reading experience. They are, nevertheless, also metaphors. In fact, there is no qualitative difference between metaphoricity of the proposed game categories and most of the traditional concepts of narratology; as Ryan (1999) points out, only the neologisms of Genettean terminology are non-metaphorical. The continuum-model of description has been evoked or alluded to several times during this study, and perhaps it would be fitting to consider the metaphoricity of narratological concepts as a scalar phenomenon. The inherent metaphoricity of most narratological concepts alleviates the distinction between theoretical and illusionistic concepts. There are limits, of course: a successful metaphor has to make sense.

Both the operationalization of a metaphorical system of textual games and the discussion of Fludernik’s notions of theoretical and illusionistic approaches to narrative analysis invite one to think further about the role of metaphors and illusionistic concepts in narratology. The analyses of Pynchon presented above suggest that traditional narratology provides indispensable tools for augmenting new narratologies precisely because it is capable of relatively rigorously considering the illusionistic aspects of narrative literature, in addition to providing an established, not to mention well-recognized, apparatus for textual analysis.

The point of departure for this study was a reference to Genette’s Narrative Discourse (1980). It was claimed, somewhat brashly, that the analytical chapters straddle theoretical conceptualizations and attention paid to the particularities of the object text, in a way akin to Genette’s famous textual analysis. It was further argued that the proper way to conduct narratological criticism in general is to consider the analysis
as a bi-directional process of influence between the theoretical concepts and the explicated text. In the light of the above analyses, one could well argue that monsters such as *Gravity’s Rainbow* permit no other procedure. It has proved simply impossible to force the narrative peculiarities of Pynchon’s work into pre-established categories of narrative theory; too much would be lost in translation. Moreover, *Gravity’s Rainbow* works its slightly subversive magic just as much on cognitive and possible world narratologies as it does on the structuralist variety. This is an empowering and liberating observation, not a cause for distress. It confirms that the multiple approaches, regardless of their theoretical and methodological differences, do the best that they conceivably could: together, they succeed in providing a partial explication of Pynchon’s practical yet immensely intricate narratologies. Needless to say, it is what still remains outside *all* of the narratological models (and there is so much!) that we should be particularly attentive to – now and in the undoubtedly bright days of future narratologies.
Notes

Introduction & Chapter 1:

1. Of course, the plural form also alludes (and not very subtly) to the title of an anthology of narratological essays edited by David Herman, *Narratologies* (1999).

2. Moreover, the critical community apparently anticipated *Vineland* as if it were *Mason & Dixon* (see Bloom 1986: 9; Siegel 1977: 122).

3. It should perhaps be noted that “narratological criticism” bears, for Prince, slightly negative connotations. Prince (1996) uses the term to make a distinction between criticism of specific texts and narratology proper. Thus, for instance, questions of gender are questions pertaining to narratological criticism, not to narratology. In this study, “narratological criticism” has a thoroughly positive meaning.

4. Early studies coming to terms with Pynchon’s fiction include monographs by Slade (1974), Plater (1977), and Siegel (1978); and critical anthologies edited by Levine and Leverenz (1976), Mendelson (1978), Clerc (1983), and Bloom (1986).

5. ’Bookmatching’, despite its capacity to turn nicely into ‘matchbook’, is an unfortunate choice for a metaphor describing intertextual relations. A standard method in luthiery and other fine carpentry, bookmatching minimizes the detrimental effects of the warping and shrinking characteristics of individual pieces of wood, as the quotation from David Russell Young in McHoul and Wills (1990: 11) makes clear. Thus, structurally, in a bookmatched instrument soundboard, for instance, the warping and twisting forces
and tendencies of one ‘bookend’ are (ideally) neutralized by the equal yet opposite forces and tendencies of the other ‘bookend’, both being cut from a single piece of wood and glued so that the grain patterns oppose each other. This neutralizing of the forces of individual pieces of wood hardly provides basis for seeking “the space between covers […], between the bookends” (McHoul and Wills 1990: 12). In terms of aesthetics, the metaphor functions equally poorly: precisely the symmetry of the preferably subtle grain patterns and sapillary rays in a well-matched soundboard is apt to please the eye of, say, an average luthier; it is an implicit promise of sound characteristics and structural stability. Bookmatching, at least in the light of its original context, does not evoke any connotations with (positive) difference, complex relations, or the like. It is logical that the vocabulary of woodwork should not provide useful metaphors for poststructuralist criticism: carpentry is, at least on the level of techniques, an ardently non-relativist pursuit. In this respect, McHoul’s and Wills’s metaphor does not make sense. (For a further discussion of the adoption of metaphors for the uses of literary study, see chapters 7–8, Conclusion and Ryan 1999; Ronen 1996.)

6. Other critics who consider Menippean satire or genres akin to it in conjunction with Gravity’s Rainbow include Morgan (1977), Mendelson (1976), and Safer (1989). Curiously, Keith Bocker (1989: 66) argues for the novelistic nature Gravity’s Rainbow on the basis of roughly the same features as other critics consider it a Menippea.

7. To be sure, Pynchon’s novels have been included in the most selective canons of literary postmodernism; if a critic considers postmodernism a viable concept of literary criticism in the first place, Pynchon is likely to figure as an example representing it. However, postmodernism remains
today at least as elusive a generic concept as it was in the
days of its introduction to the literary scene. Hence, despite
the fact that critical texts that consider Pynchon a
postmodernist have a great deal to offer in terms of analyses
and interpretations, postmodernism cannot be considered a
satisfactory formal generic concept.

Chapter 2:

8. Gibson would probably disqualify any use of the term
narratology because, as Richard Aczel (2001a: 614) has
observed, narratology’s -ology still refers to the “the logos of
knowledge, of science; legein in the sense of counting and
reckoning”. Etymology, however, is not everything. To my
mind, narratology does not as such evoke scientific connota-
tions: instead it is situated (rather deliciously) on a discipli-
nary continuum inhabited equally by, say, pathology and
astrology. Of course there are other alternatives: narratosophy,
perhaps? Narrative theory is the least inter-
esting alternative.

9. The debate concerns Seltzer’s and Bender’s Foucauldian
interpretations of the conventions of realism, free indirect
discourse in particular.

10. Proteus Principle, for Sternberg (1982: 148), is a many
to many correspondence between literary forms and their
functions; a form can fulfill many functions, a function can
utilize many forms. Thus, for instance, expressive features
can signal both free indirect discourse and direct discourse,
depending on context. Jahn (1997) uses the principle to
describe the way in which “bottom level” textual features
can be used to fulfill different functions in different interpre-
tive frames.

11. “Possible world narratology” is used in this study in a
rather unproblematic manner to designate the work of literary scholars who utilize the concepts of modal logic in their theorizing. A comprehensive survey of the “school” being impossible, I refer the reader to existing literature on the detailed history of the approach (e.g. Ryan 1992; Ronen 1994; Dolezel 1998). The following works represent the most important contributions to possible worlds narratology by their respective authors: Dolezel (1998); Eco (1979); Pavel (1986) Ronen (1994); Ryan (1991).

Chapter 3:

12. According to this view, the true subject of irony would be the narratee, whose gullibility would make the implied author and reader (and perhaps the latter’s representative in the real world too, cf. Nelles 1997: 23) feel superior.

13. Focalization and FID, among other concepts of narratology, are of course subjects of continuing theoretical discussion (see Jahn 1996 and Oltean 1993, respectively, for surveys). I do not think that current narratology is able to analyze Pynchon’s narrative comprehensively, but it is the best apparatus available.

14. Weisenburger (1988: 240) traces the origins of this statement to a public exclamation an American nightclub manager / dancer made after being deported from France despite the apparent success among the French (male) audience. In the context of Pynchon, the only thing to notice is the obvious non-relevancy of this historical episode regarding the story of the novel.

15. The characters’ and the narrator’s speech contain quite a few obvious, or transparent, puns, too. These are largely motivated by the narrative situation: “’Girl in distress, Jess?’ — ’Got a fag, Mag’ pretty automatic by now, you guess,
Jess?” (GR 127) or “‘Slip the talcum to me, Malcolm!’” (GR 64). Plays on words like these are far more innocent than ones requiring pages of preparation.


17. The narrator’s quip about the limitations of the analysis of Freemasonry is ironic: the reader has probably grasped that additional information would not be of much use in interpreting the novel. The mention of Ishmael Reed refers, undoubtedly, to the novel Mumbo Jumbo (1972), in which Freemasonry is indeed discussed extensively.

18. Hutcheon does not analyze Gravity’s Rainbow, however.

Chapter 4:

19. There is, of course, also explicit didacticism in fiction: Julio Cortázar’s Hopscotch (1966), for example, gives the reader directions for its decipherment. Works like this can be interpreted as exposing the notion of implicit didacticism, playing with the conventions of reading. (Hopscotch, however, is in its own way quite serious about the guidelines it offers.) Ronald Sukenick’s narrator in Out pleads ignorance in the face of apparent didactic clues for reading (and writing) the novel (Out 162–164).

20. I hasten to acknowledge that the concept of mise-en-abyme is used in this chapter to refer to cases that do not fulfill the conditions set by Dällenbach (1989 e.g. 50, 108; see also McHale 1987: 124–128; Ron 1987: 422–423, 426–427, 436–437) for the phenomenon. An interpretive mise-en-abyme, in the present discussion, is an embedded sequence of text that refers to the assumed interpretive process of the reader.

21. As discussed in chapter 3, the “De Mille” -episode (557–
Chapter 5:

22. Fludernik bases the concept of narrativization on Jonathan Culler’s notion of naturalization, a strategy whereby readers attempt to come to terms with strange and irregular features of literature by a process of recuperating them into something more familiar. (Fludernik 1996: 31; Culler 1978: 134.)

23. In addition to the views of narrativity explicated in this study, Fludernik’s and Ryan’s, Meir Sternberg has also recently presented a comprehensive account of narrativity. Sternberg’s theory, based on the temporality and “plot dynamics” of narratives, will not be further discussed here. (See Sternberg 2001: 158 for further references).

24. Fludernik’s (1996) way of judging a particular text as narrative relies, however, on more holistic criteria: a text can involve a significant amount of non-experiential, formally non-narrative material, and still be considered a narrative.

25. Fludernik is not particularly worried about her conception of narrativity possibly becoming obsolete because of narrative experimentation. While the radical playfulness of postmodernist literature presents insurmountable difficulties to the narrativity as experientiality model, she considers explorations of limit narrativity largely marginal and passé: “[T]exts which maximally resist a realist or mimetic process of narrativization are important but rare examples [...] the recent trend in experimental writing (in Pynchon, Umberto Eco and even in Josipovici) has been towards [...] a ‘soft’ experimentalism, and in particular towards a literature that
is again *engagé*” (Fludernik 1996: 306). Brian Richardson (2000: 29–30) disagrees; he sees “postmodern transgression” of narrative conventions as an important challenge to narratology and predicts that radical experimentation will increase instead of fading out. Curiously, however, Richardson (ibid.) builds his tentative concepts of postmodern[ist] narrative transgression in part on Fludernik’s Natural Narratology, or rather on Fludernik’s discussion of the limit cases of narrativity.

26. Granted, in these situations the reader ostensibly resorts to the “rock bottom schema of actionality” (Fludernik 1996: 44); this cognitive explanation has, at least in some cases, nothing to do with experientiality.

27. The question of the presence or absence of covert narrators in reflectoral narratives is a controversial issue that cannot be comprehensively discussed here. For recent accounts, see e.g. Chatman 1990; Genette 1988; Jahn 1997; 2001; Nelles 1997; Walsh 1997.

28. Other theorists of cognitive narratology present accounts of narrative perspective that are somewhat more directly adaptable to narrative analysis, and rely more on traditional narratological ideas: Nünning’s (2001) concept of perspective-structure might provide tools for a constructivist/cognitivist analysis of focalization. Similarly, Jahn’s (1996) cognitivist account of the “windows of focalization” combines the theory of interpretive frames with a text-analytical approach that is fundamentally illusionistic.

29. Fludernik’s denial of a general narrator should not be over dramatized, however. In *Fictions of Language* (1993), Fludernik actually subscribes to a continuum model of narratorial presence. Fludernik does not want to call covert ‘narrator functions’ narrators proper. Thus the difference has
at least in part to do with nomenclature.

Chapter 6:


31. Herman (1995) has also recently presented an alternative conception of speech and thought representation based on the metapragmatic insights of the Prague School functionalism. The conception differs fundamentally from the frame-theoretical model and as a result is not a good point of comparison with Fludernik’s view of FID and DV.

32. Richard Aczel (1998: 476–477; cf. Jahn 1994: endnote 3) argues that Fludernik’s account of dual voice makes the distinction between the voice of an extratextual authority (such as the implied author) and that of a character instead of between the narrator’s and the characters’ voices. This is true of Fludernik’s discussion of ironic dual voice; however, Fludernik’s conception does in fact allow for a dual voice effect consisting of the interplay of inferred voices the narrator and a character (see Fludernik 1993: 452–453). Although Fludernik does not present such an option, an ironic narrator could presumably be possible in her account, provided that the narrative situation makes such an inference sensible.

33. In fact, elsewhere in her study Fludernik (1993: 326) interprets the narrator of *Gravity’s Rainbow* as essentially non-colloquial, to illustrate narratorial focalization that employs character’s idiom. The idiomatically indeterminate
narrator makes the novel excellent exemplary material (see also Fludernik 1996: 215).
34. Disturbingly, the typographic rendering of Mexico’s short-tempered speech is also once echoed in Slothrop’s represented thought (GR 199).
35. “Batman” is military slang for an officer’s aide. As Donald Larsson (2002) observes, the first name of this particular batman is in all likelihood Bruce!
36. “Incoming mail” is a military slang expression referring to unforeseen (and unpleasant) assignments (Weisenburger 1998: 17).
37. The relationship between focalization and speech and thought representation is troublesome and remains unspecified; Fludernik (1993: 326; see also 1996: 343–346; Aczel 1998: 467–472) rightly chastises Genette because he “never really specifies how precisely voice and focalization interact” and Bal for her “near silence on the issue of representational speech an thought”. As a result, designating a passage such as the one discussed as internal focalization does not say much. William Nelles struggles with the same problem while discussing a passage D.H. Lawrence’s “The Blind Man”: “This passage is internal focalization, and certainly there is no shift of focalization when Stephen closes his eyes (although the movement between what Dorrit Cohn has termed ‘quoted monologue’ and ‘psycho-narration’ does suggest that different degrees of internal focalization might be distinguished here)” (Nelles 1997: 78; emphasis mine; see also O’Neill 1994: 83). Again, rethinking the whole issue of focalization and voice in terms of Stanzel’s / Fludernik’s reflectorization, would be one possible approach (see also Nünning 2001).
38. Interestingly, on the narrative macro level of Gravity’s Rainbow McHale’s integrational model corresponds to his
notion of retroactive worldmaking and -unmaking (see McHale 1992).
39. Kenner’s example of UCP illustrates, in addition, an anti mimetic view of speech representation; see note 39; it is one of Fludernik’s examples (1993: 399–400).
40. In fact, Kenner’s description of the phenomenon, “as if for these fifty pages [Bloom] held the pen” implicitly aban-
dons the idea of a pseudo-oral narrator persona. The imag-
ined source of the narrative is no longer a narrator but a writer (see also Fludernik 1996: 216).
41. “Loonies on Leave” is a significant instance among Pynchonian musical interludes because of its narrative quality. Unlike most of the songs or musical scenes of Gravity’s Rainbow, “Loonies on Leave” tells a part of the novel’s story.
42. Though not essential to the present inquiry, the de-
naturalizing of characters’ discourse has considerable impli-
cations for Fludernik’s as well as Banfield’s (see 1982: 26–28) accounts of speech and thought representation: it is evidence supporting the refutation of the idea that cases of indirect speech representation are transformations of originary direct utterances (see also McHale 1978: 256–257; Sternberg 1982; 2001: 170; cf. Cohn 1978: 100–103; Herman 1995: 172–173).

Chapter 8:

43. Again, the concept of context is inherently problematic in the discourse of literary studies. It has traditionally been used to refer both to the non-linguistic features of a narrative situation, and to linguistic features not included in a passage yet relevant to its interpretation (see Herman 1995: 144). In this chapter, I will use the concept of contextual when
referring to non-linguistic features of narrative situation, and *grammatical* when referring to linguistic markers of HF, however distant.

44. This type of HF is also displayed in Pynchon’s earlier fiction. In *V.*, the externally focalized episode VIII of chapter 3 ventures briefly into HF at the very end: “Vision must be last to go. There must also be a nearly imperceptible line between an eye that reflects and an eye that receives” (*V.*, 94). (My thanks to Brian McHale for pointing out this scene.)

45. Furthermore, the passage is embedded in an extended metaphoric meditation on (ostensibly) Edward Pointsman’s yearning for human subjects of psychological testing. Thus, in terms of the story-world of the novel, the events do not take place. This does not stop readers from processing them as real events, however.

46. The term explicitness might seem to echo Dolezel’s 1979: 207–208) intensional function *explicitness/implicitness*. There is, in principle, nothing wrong with this; the uses of the term are roughly identical. (See also Dolezel 1998: 137–143.)

47. In fact, many parameters involved in focalization could be described as independent scalar functions, much like Joseph Ewen’s three-function approach to character description (summarized by Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 41). More recent points of comparison are Margolin’s (1999: 145–146, 164) model of narrative description based on Tense-Aspect Modality linguistics, and Ryan’s (2001a: 147–148) account of narratorial functions. Both Margolin’s and Ryan’s conceptions would ostensibly subsume the problematic of focalization. The nature of focalization could be described in great detail, for example, by observing the following functions:
1) congruence between the expressed world and the reference world,
2) explicitness of focalizer,
3) actuality of focalizer in the reference world,
4) focalizer’s access to the belief-contexts of possible worlds, etc.

It is easy to see that this approach, though not assuming preset categories, would hardly be the most economical or illuminating in practice. After all, it is very easy to say “character x is the focalizer in passage y”, whereas executing a multiple-function analysis of focalization is not.

Chapter 9:

48. In her essay “Beyond Myth and Metaphor; The Case of Narrative in the Digital Media”, Ryan emphasizes, however, also the role of textual features in warranting playful reading: “The external/exploratory mode [of interactivity] is therefore better suited for self-referential fiction than for narrative worlds that hold us under their spell for the sake of what happens in them. It promotes a metafictional stance, at the expense of immersion in the fictional world.” (Ryan 2001b: ch. 3, par. 10.)
49. The non-random interpretation of the rocket strikes is also flirted with elsewhere in the novel. According to one Thomas Gwenhidwy, for example, the poorer areas of London are particularly vulnerable to hits (GR 171–172). In addition, the well-known coincidence of rocket strikes and Slothrop’s erections (and, according to Gwenhidwy, babies born in London) casts a supernatural suspicion on the randomness of the hits.
50. An obvious natural reason for the difficulty of the “Prince” in all its variations is the increasing intoxication of (most) participants. This is evidently the case in the game conducted by Slothrop: some of the participants blunder deliberately in order to get free drinks (GR 212). In terms of a moderate account of Caillois’s typology, then, real-life drinking games should perhaps be considered games of *ilinx*, being “based on the pursuit of vertigo and consist[ing] of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic on an otherwise lucid mind” (Caillois 1961: 23). Curiously, Caillois (1961: 51–54) interprets drug abuse and alcoholism as social symptoms of the “corruption” of the game of *ilinx*.

51. This phenomenon can be interpreted in many ways: in terms of the structural principle of the text, the text obviously is a game of *agon*, regardless of whether or not the reader knows the rules of the game; from the perspective of the attitude of reading/playing, the game is *agon* or *alea* depending on the reader’s interpretation of its structural principle. The difficulty of forming such an interpretation is precisely what keeps the readers of *Gravity’s Rainbow* on their toes.

52. WYSIWYG is a pseudo-acronym in computer jargon: What You See Is What You Get.

53. The reader has obviously no clue of the relevance of the information at this point in the novel, unless he or she recognizes the themes and embedded plotlines from Pynchon criticism or lore (which is probably the case).

54. Of course, in the passage Prentice is most likely acting in his capacity as fantasist-surrogate and thus mediating a haunting ‘belonging’ to someone else; Katje Borgesius, perhaps. This possible ‘host consciousness’ adds yet another layer to the functional polyvalence of the scene.
55. The relevance of the causal/non-causal dispute is also underscored elsewhere in the novel. As I have argued elsewhere (chapter 4.2), the numerous opposing explanations of random phenomena are part of the novel’s faux-didactic scheme.
References


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