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## **The Vietnamization of World War II in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity's Rainbow***

If World War II was the straightforward movie everyone could be in, Vietnam was the sequel that was so confused that it demanded a review of the original. Perhaps the seeds of a later confusion were present in the midst of seeming clarity.

—George Roeder, *The Censored War*

**O**n November 3, 1969 Richard Nixon announced to a politically divided nation that the war in South East Asia would be conducted according to a new plan of “Vietnamization.”<sup>1</sup> Making good on Johnson’s earlier promise that the United States was not going to send American boys “to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves,” Nixon’s policy of Vietnamization meant that the United States would train the South Vietnamese army to wage the ground war on its own, allowing U.S. troops to withdraw in greater numbers.<sup>2</sup> Despite advocating a plan that placed more responsibility for fighting in the hands of the ARVN, Nixon adamantly declared that the U.S. was not lessening its commitments to the South Vietnamese people or to victory. In televised speeches on April 20 and 30, 1970, Nixon addressed the implications of Vietnamization along with his decision to invade Cambodia, justifying his policies in terms of America’s power and prestige. During the April 20th speech on Vietnamization, Nixon avowed: “We are not a weak people. We are a strong people. America has never been defeated in the proud one-hundred-ninety-year history of this country, and we shall not be defeated in Vietnam” (qtd. in Carroll 11). Ten days later, employing more Cold War rhetoric, Nixon asserted that “the world’s most powerful nation” could not afford to act “like a pitiful helpless giant”; freedom throughout the world was in jeopardy.<sup>3</sup> As historian Peter Carroll has noted, during the ten day period between speeches Nixon “ordered several screenings of the movie *Patton*, a film which celebrated military toughness, high risk attacks, and the disregard of formal channels” (11). While screenings of *Patton* no doubt

offered inspiration for his unauthorized attacks in Cambodia, they also remind us that Nixon, like his predecessors, was haunted by the specter of World War II—a war that offered Americans a clear-cut, decisive victory and positioned the U.S. as global superpower. In contrast to the “bad war” (Vietnam), the “good war” had become “the culminating myth of the American experience and nation character” (Isaacs 7).

While Nixon was touting his new vision and plans for the war, another process of Vietnamization was taking place: the “Vietnamization” of World War II in American literature. Kurt Vonnegut’s 1969 novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Thomas Pynchon’s 1973 masterpiece, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, revealed that the war in Vietnam was shaping representations of World War II just as the legacies and cultural narratives of the Second World War were influencing policy in Vietnam. Following the lead of Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* deconstructed the binary framing of America’s “good war,” offering a “Vietnamized” version, full of discontinuities, fragmented bodies, and multiple shades of gray.

Through readings of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, this essay examines how the Cold War with its specific hot episodes in Vietnam created a prism for reimagining and reconfiguring cultural narratives about masculinity and the Second World War. Vonnegut and Pynchon’s texts, I argue, simultaneously address World War II and Vietnam in an attempt to undermine the privileged space that “the good war” occupies in America’s cultural imagination. While presenting revisionist accounts of World War II, these later postmodern novels also fragment and expand our notions of bodies in and at war, offering a shift away from an exclusive focus on the human body to other types of “bodies” (i.e., bodies of capital, bureaucracy, flows of excrement and technology, etc).

### ***Slaughterhouse-Five*: A New Kind of War Story**

In the late 1940s, “the war film—with a full panoply of flags, insignia, martial music, and expressions of love for country—made a strong comeback” (Marling 127). After reaching a new height in popularity in 1943 when it accounted for approximately 30 percent of Hollywood’s output, the combat film was no longer appealing to a war-weary nation in 1945, and it was virtually abandoned by the war’s end. As the Cold War began to heat up in the Far East and the war against communism spread in the U.S., World War II narratives once again had appeal. Explaining this allure, Marling and Wetenhall write:

World War II seemed clean, straightforward, refreshingly unambiguous in a Cold War world of espionage and ideol-

ogy. In less than a decade, World War II and its symbols came to stand for the postwar ideal, for things as they should have turned out: American valor and know-how supreme; America always victorious. (127)

At the forefront of this wave of new World War II movies was Republic Pictures' 1949 film, *Sands of Iwo Jima*. With John Wayne playing Sergeant Stryker, the film introduced a somewhat troubled and unconventional protagonist, but still managed to celebrate the "hardboiled, blood-and-guts" heroism of American men. Cashing in on the patriotic fervor the movie created, Marine recruiters set up booths in the lobbies of theaters following the movie's March 1, 1950 general release. And in at least one theater, the R.K.O. Keith's in Richmond Hill, New York, where my father saw the film, young men were enlisting enthusiastically. Many of them would no doubt go on to serve in Korea.

Like his World War I predecessors—Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen—Kurt Vonnegut has long recognized the power war stories possess to engender additional armed conflicts. Re-viewing his war experiences through the prism of Vietnam, Vonnegut sets out in *Slaughterhouse-Five* not only to fracture American narratives about the "good war," but also to create a different kind of war story—one that will not produce other conflicts. While the novel clearly charts a larger pattern of violence in Western civilization, linking multiple conflicts from the Crusades to the fictional Tralfamadorian-initiated destruction of the universe, Vonnegut's primary goal is a specific revision of World War II narratives.

Vonnegut foregrounds this process of revision in his self-reflexive opening chapter, where the narrator describes the events leading up to creation of his "war book" (14). During a visit to an "old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare" (11), the narrator receives a chilly welcome from O'Hare's wife, Mary, who resents the idea of the veterans recalling old war memories. Fearing that the reminiscences will lead to another typical war story, Mary chastises the narrator:

"You'll pretend that you were men instead of babies, and you'll be played in the movies by Frank Sinatra or John Wayne or some of those other glamorous, war-loving, dirty old men. And war will look just wonderful, so we'll have lots of more of them. And they'll be fought by babies like the babies upstairs" (14).

With her references to Frank Sinatra and John Wayne, Mary's remarks

are intended as a specific critique of World War II films like *Sands of Iwo Jima* and *From Here to Eternity*, which present rugged, maverick, thoroughly masculine heroes. Reflecting on Mary's comments, the narrator further clarifies the connections between war fictions and actual conflicts: "she thought wars were partly encouraged by books and movies" (15).

Making good on his promise that there "won't be a part for Frank Sinatra or John Wayne" (15), the narrator offers a very different kind of war story—one which combines fact, fiction, and postmodern literary techniques to undermine the conventions of traditional narration itself. Not only does the narrator interrupt the already jumbled fragments of the story with asides about his presence at events or reflections on other characters, but he summarizes the entire story in the first chapter, quoting the opening and closing lines. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, we are told, there will be no "climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations" (5). In short, the novel will provide no fictional material for a glamorous war story.

To reinforce the importance of undermining traditional war narratives, Vonnegut mocks ideals of heroism and honor through his scenes describing the British POWs. In a rather Heller-esque passage, filled with dark humor, absurdity, and startling contrasts, the reader encounters a group of English officers in the middle of a concentration camp for Russian prisoners. Although it is late in the war and people all over Europe are starving, the Englishmen are "clean and enthusiastic and decent and strong" (94). (Because of clerical error, they are receiving five hundred Red Cross parcels of supplies each month instead of fifty). For the Englishmen, the war is another game, to be mastered like "checkers and chess and cribbage and dominoes and anagrams and charades" (94).<sup>4</sup> It is also, like the play they put on, a scripted performance that involves "manly blather," "brotherly rodomontades," and other forms of male bonding (95). Although the Englishmen are themselves rendered absurd in their Cinderella costumes and half battle-half croquet dress, they clearly embody pre-World War I ideals. They even have *The Red Badge of Courage* in their library for authenticity. As the narrator explains, "They were adored by the Germans who thought they were exactly what Englishmen ought to be. They made war look stylish and reasonable, and fun" (94). Through this quote Vonnegut once again reveals the power of self-generating war fictions. The Englishmen perform gallant war roles from the past while simultaneously creating new ones for future wars.

While reconfiguring war narratives generally, *Slaughterhouse-Five* also revises World War II specifically by linking it explicitly to events in Vietnam. By employing the vehicle of time travel and a fractured narrative that juxtaposes the firebombing of Dresden with reference to Vietnam, the

narrator's story of World War II presents a narrative primarily about civilian deaths and concentration camps—not heroic assaults and flag raisings. Vonnegut utilizes the morally ambiguous, fragmented lens of Vietnam to highlight the seedier, incomprehensible elements of the “good war.”

At first glance, references to the Vietnam War in *Slaughterhouse-Five* seem to serve as signposts for historicizing Billy Pilgrim's position in time/space travel or as vague specters of the then-current conflict. When examined more carefully, however, they reveal particular parallels and continuities between the wars. In the narrator's description of Billy's trip to and luncheon at the Lions Club, for example, World War II and Vietnam are linked in several important ways. Vonnegut first establishes the parallels between the wars by noting the odd results of Billy's time travel: “Billy's smile as he came out of the shrubbery was at least as peculiar as Mona Lisa's, for he was simultaneously on foot in Germany in 1944 and riding in his Cadillac in 1967” (58). Not only are the two wars linked through Billy's presence in both time/space dimensions, but the reassembled fragments of narration create a new narrative in which World War II flows directly into Vietnam. On his way to the Lions Club meeting, Billy drives through the burned-out, wrecked neighborhood of “Illium's black ghetto” (59). Invoking race riots of the 1960s generally and the D.C. riots following King's assassination more specifically, the scene of destruction reminds Billy of “Dresden after it was fire-bombed— [when it looked] like the surface of the moon” (59).<sup>5</sup> Immediately following this depiction of a firebombed Dresden, the narrator describes the speaker's keynote address at the Lions Club, offering the following summary:

He said that Americans had no choice but to keep fighting in Vietnam until they achieved victory or until the Communists realized that they could not force their way of life on weak countries.... He told of many terrible and wonderful things he had seen. He was in favor of increased bombings, of bombing North Vietnam back into the Stone Age, if it refused to see reason. (59-60)

Although supposedly a Marine major, the speaker is a thinly disguised Curtis LeMay, the general and commander of the Air Force who originally suggested that the U.S. should bomb the North Vietnamese “back to the Stone Age” (qtd. in Karnow 41, 400). With the allusion to LeMay, Vonnegut sets up multiple parallels and continuities between World War II and Vietnam. “A pioneer in strategic air warfare,” LeMay played a key role in Allied bombing campaigns during the Second World War; he started the combined RAF and U.S. daylight bombing plan, “developed pattern bomb-

ing from lower altitudes...[and] the Norden bomb sight,” and turned bombing raids on Japan “from nuisance to catastrophe” (Boatner 315-16). Credited with starting incendiary runs in the Pacific Theater, LeMay ordered the bombings of some 66 Japanese cities, including the firebombing of Tokyo.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, along with other top Air Force commanders, LeMay selected the targets for the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and later advocated the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam. Like Billy’s earlier moment of straddling two time/space dimensions, the LeMay figure embodies continuities between World War II and Vietnam. Perhaps more than any other military figure, LeMay and his actions symbolize the trend of incorporating civilian targets in waging war. Through strategic “innovations” like LeMay’s, civilian casualties comprised forty-four percent of war deaths in World War II (up from five percent in World War I) and ninety-one percent of war-related fatalities in Vietnam.<sup>7</sup>

The LeMay figure offers Vonnegut an ideal vehicle for graying America’s black-and-white, clear-cut narratives about the Second World War. Once associated with his 1968 suggestion to “use anything that we could dream up, including nuclear weapons” to win a decisive victory in Vietnam, LeMay’s earlier World War II actions seem morally suspect and cruel.<sup>8</sup> To reinforce parallels between the wars established in the Lions Club scene, Vonnegut scatters other references to Vietnam throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five*, allowing additional connections between Dresden and bombings in South East Asia to emerge in the cut-and-paste narrative. We are told, for instance, that Billy treats a boy whose father had been killed in the “battle for Hill 875 near Dakto” (135) just before we hear of Billy’s arrival in Dresden (136). Dakto, of course, was site of “the largest engagement of the war to date” in 1967 and the target of over “two thousand fighter-bomber assaults” (Karnow 539). Through artillery shells and chemical weapons, the area was turned into “a bleak landscape of crater and charred tree stumps” (Karnow 538-9). This reference to destroyed jungle terrain in Vietnam once again blurs the space/time boundaries between the craters of Dakto and lunar-like surface of Dresden.<sup>9</sup> Other allusions to Vietnam, like the napalm-dropping robot in Kilgore Trout’s *The Gutless Wonder* reinforce these connections, further exposing the reprehensible burning of civilian bodies and buildings in both wars.

Perhaps one of the most important links between wars in the novels, though, is the familial connection between Billy and his son Robert, “a sergeant in the Green Berets—in Vietnam” (61). Realistic in the sense that many men who fought in Vietnam were sons of World War II veterans, the familial connection also symbolically represents the cycle of one war engendering another. Vonnegut emphasizes this cycle of war begetting war in the description of Robert’s conception on Billy and Valencia’s honey-

moon. After consummating their marriage, Valencia asks Billy to tell her his war stories. As the narrator explains, “It was a simple-minded thing for a female Earthling to do, to associate sex and glamour with war” (121) because her expectations and associations are constructed by war films and books. While Billy tells her a few selected stories from the war, however, the figurative becomes literal. As Billy recounts his war experiences, simultaneously “in a tiny cavity of [Valencia’s] great body she was assembling the materials for a Green Beret” (121). Vonnegut seems to suggest that Billy’s war fictions contribute as much to Robert’s creation as his and Valencia’s genetic materials. It is interesting to note, then, that later in 1967—around the same time that Robert goes to Vietnam—Valencia is described as not having “ovaries or a uterus any more” (72). In addition to breaking the cycle of war begetting war, Valencia’s sterility introduces other relationships between war and bodies.

Like most war fiction, *Slaughterhouse-Five* explores the impact of modern armed conflict on the body. Departing from conventions established in earlier World War II novels like Norman Mailer’s *Naked and the Dead*, James Jones’s *The Thin Red Line*, and Heller’s *Catch-22*, *Slaughterhouse-Five* does not rely on “realistic” description as a means of presenting the corporeal horrors of the Second World War.<sup>10</sup> The novel offers no detailed accounts of rotting Japanese corpses, wounded American bodies, or the stewed tomatoes an airman had for lunch that are now visible through his wound. Although we do encounter “hundreds of corpse mines” (214) in the novel’s final pages describing the destruction at Dresden, *Slaughterhouse-Five* depends primarily on other techniques to dramatize war’s terrible effects on bodies. As literary critics Peter Freese, Cremilda Lee, and Peter Reed have observed, Vonnegut recognizes the failures of language to truly capture the horrors of war or to convey a shared “reality” in a postmodern age.<sup>11</sup> After all, “there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre” (19). Moreover, in a world saturated with graphic violence in the media, any narrative accounts of war’s impact on bodies either pale in comparison or get lost in a sea of other images.

Not wishing to contribute to this sea of violent images, Vonnegut refuses to detail the spectacle of battle. Instead of re-creating moments of corporeal destruction or recalling the primal space of the wound, which might glamorize war, Vonnegut explores World War II’s bodily legacy through already damaged bodies. Naturally, Billy Pilgrim is the locus for this exploration. Through the fantastic vehicle of time travel, Billy is fragmented throughout space and time. Somewhat like a cubist painting, his body exists in multiple space/time dimensions simultaneously, allowing him to experience his birth, death, and World War II days over and over again. While Billy’s body is never literally dismembered or scattered as many bodies at

war are, his symbolic fragmentation is manifested in physical and mental ways. When we first encounter Billy behind German lines during World War II, for example, the narrator describes him as “bleakly ready for death” (32). His body is “preposterous—six feet and three inches tall, with a chest and shoulders like a box of kitchen matches” (32). As one of the Englishmen later remarks, it’s not the body of “a man[;] It’s a broken kite” (97). While the narrator’s descriptions of Billy as a tall, lanky, ridiculously clothed figure emphasize his status as an anti-hero, they also provide a fitting state of embodiment for a war-damaged individual. Through references to Billy’s stay as a mental patient at a VA hospital in 1948 (99) and the fact that “the war had ruined his stomach” (46), we see that the war has reterritorialized Billy’s body, leaving lasting physical and mental legacies. To cope with these war legacies and to unify the fragments of his life, Billy is forced to turn to the numbing, passive philosophies of the Tralfamadoreans.

As the novel unfolds, we see that Billy Pilgrim’s body is not the only already damaged body in *Slaughterhouse-Five*’s accounts of the war in Europe. Roland Weary’s overweight body is also unfit, and though supposedly a fresh replacement, it turns out to be “weary” on the long forced march. Moreover, Paul Lazzaro’s gangly, sore-infested body is no better than those of the German soldiers and civilians who are “armed and clothed fragmentarily” (52), starving, and “crippled” (150). Offered as further commentary on the war’s widespread impact on soldiers and civilians, this array of marred bodies provides a different cast of characters. With the exception of well-fed Englishmen and their “washboard” stomachs and muscles “like cannonballs” (94), the bodies in *Slaughterhouse-Five* are largely physically incapable of waging war. Thus their destruction seems even more senseless, heightening the cruelty of targeting non-combatants.

The novel’s most incisive critique of war’s impact on the body, however, is its examination of the dehumanizing lens through which bodies are viewed during war. This vision of bodies is perhaps captured most clearly in the narrator’s comment about body counts in Vietnam: “And everyday my Government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam” (210). Once again establishing continuities between World War II and Vietnam, *Slaughterhouse-Five* links this contemporary view of bodies with Nazi bureaucracy, racial hygiene theories, and other militaristic conceptualizations. By offering cool, detached analyses of bodies in terms of their use-value or social worth, the novel enacts the militaristic vision it hopes to critique. Many of the book’s descriptions of women, for example, measure their potential reproductive value. Valencia’s hysterectomy is noted because it prevents her from creating additional Green Berets; Montana Wildhack is brought to Tralfamadore to have a baby with Billy; and Maggie White is described as “a sensational invitation to make babies” (171). Other



women like Billy's mother meanwhile, are characterized in more militaristic terms: "She was a perfectly nice, standard-issue, brown-haired, white woman with a high school education" (102). We hear little about these women, in part because the novel resists offering any "real characters," but also because of the vision of bodies *Slaughterhouse-Five* enacts.

The most striking examples of militaristic, wartime views of bodies occur in the scenes depicting Billy's experiences as a POW. In these descriptions of German extermination camps, individual bodies blur into one another, becoming part of a larger, Nazi death-making machine. Describing American POWs on a train bound for the concentration camps, the narrator remarks:

To the guards who walked up and down outside, each car became a single organism which ate and drank and excreted through its ventilators. It talked or yelled sometimes through ventilators, too. In went water and loaves of black-bread and sausage and cheese, and out came shit and language. (70)

This de-individualized, dehumanizing view of bodies is further reinforced by the Nazi guards at the extermination camp for Russian prisoners of war. These guards, we are told, "had never dealt with Americans before, but they surely understood this general sort of freight" (80). By reducing the American POWs to a single "it" comprised of biological functions, a flow of human "freight," the narrator recreates the militaristic vision that led to the Holocaust and other mass death scenes of World War II. Like the bodies being counted in Vietnam, these people are reduced to numbers, who can be rendered "legally alive" (91) or "theoretically dead" (31) through military records or war games.<sup>12</sup>

As part of his process of Vietnamizing World War II, Vonnegut demonstrates that these dehumanizing views of bodies were not unique to the Nazis. Through excerpts from historical texts and speeches, Vonnegut reminds his readers of the mass civilian deaths caused by Allied bombings at Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and their necessary role in "hasten[ing] the end of the war." (180). Bertram Rumfoord's opinions about war and the expendability of certain lives are perhaps the greatest example of American militaristic conceptions of bodies. Following his 1967 plane crash, Billy wakes up in a hospital room with Rumfoord, "a retired brigadier general in the Air Force [and] the official Air Force Historian" (184). As the narrator explains, Rumfoord not only views the bombing of Dresden as "a howling success" (191), but he thinks "in a military manner" (192), which allows him to see certain lives as disposable. Blurring the lines between the

Nazi ideology and militaristic conceptions of bodies, Rumfoord often remarks to Billy and his companion Lily “that people who are weak deserve to die” (193). German or American, Second World War or Vietnam, militaristic conceptions of bodies are integral to the wholesale slaughter of civilians.

While Vonnegut’s tools for telling his “war story”—his fragmented narrative, self-reflexivity, parody, pastiche, and black humor—are decidedly postmodern, his anti-war vision is distinctly humanist. Throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five* he contrasts militaristic views of bodies with frequent reminders that these bodies are indeed “human beings.” And although he employs modernist and postmodern conceptions of bodies, in the end, he rejects metaphors that envision the body as a machine or as a cog in a larger social or military system. When human beings are envisioned in mechanistic ways, they become “targets” for napalm-dropping robots or fragmented, passive bodies like Billy’s that take delight in “feell[ing] nothing and still get[ting] full credit for being alive” (105).

### **Redefining History/ Rethinking the Body: *Gravity’s Rainbow***

Published four years after *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* offers a more extensive Vietnamization of the Second World War as well as a more in-depth exploration of relationships between war, bodies, and technology. Whereas Vonnegut’s project of Vietnamization concerns itself primarily with breaking the cycle of armed conflict engendered by war narratives and reframing World War II as an event that killed millions of civilians, Pynchon’s novel reconfigures multiple aspects of the “good war.” Set primarily in Europe during the final months of the war and early postwar period, *Gravity’s Rainbow* weaves together historical “fact,” fiction, and the utterly fantastic to create a text that is at once encyclopedic and anarchistic. Often described as the postmodern novel par excellence, *Gravity’s Rainbow* problematizes notions of history (along with other master narratives) while simultaneously offering a provisional revisionist account of World War II. The text not only explores the seeds of the Cold War sown in treaties, conferences, and the race for German technologies, but it also examines almost every facet of the war—from racial tensions and propaganda to the complex flows of capital, information, and technology that bridged national borders. This reexamination of World War II, however, is not merely a product of temporal distance; it is a specific reexamination of the Second World War through the prism of Vietnam.

As literary critics Fredericke Ashe and Eric Meyer have noted, despite its meticulously researched and historically accurate treatment of World War II, *Gravity’s Rainbow* “is a novel of ‘The ‘60s’—not only because it is *about*

that now mythic period, but because it is demonstrably *of* it as well” (Meyer 81). Indeed, one can find echoes of the American youth, black power, and feminist movements as well as the “disparate discourses” of the 1960s “social text” (Meyer 81).<sup>13</sup> What has been largely glossed over in these examinations of *Gravity’s Rainbow* as a novel of the 1960s, though, is the haunting presence of Vietnam. While many scholars have noted the novel’s passing references to prisoners “back from Indo-China” (132) and the “eyes from Burma, from Tonkin” (132) in a description of London during the Blitz, few critics have seen these as anything but vague allusions to the war in South East Asia. Even Myer, who offers the most extended treatment of references to Vietnam, still views the war in South East Asia as the “Absent War” in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Meyer argues that Vietnam’s status as the “Absent War” in Pynchon’s text speaks to “the difficulty activists had in making Vietnam a reality to a mediatized public” as well as to “the generalized derealization of cultural production in the postmodern period” (92). I would contend, however, that the Vietnam War is *quite* present in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Like a “second shadow” in Gerhardt’s *Alpdrücken*, Vietnam serves as World War II’s double or surrogate in the novel, complicating its narratives and reconfiguring its representations.<sup>14</sup>

Because evocations of Vietnam are often subtle and because, as Steven Weisenburger and Khachig Tololyan have noted, *Gravity’s Rainbow* fastidiously reconstructs details from events during the final stages of the war in Europe, it is worth examining the ways in which Vietnam is present in the novel.<sup>15</sup> I would suggest that we must examine the text’s anachronistic elements closely because they offer such radical departures from the otherwise carefully woven fabric of late war and postwar periods. While the first overt reference to Vietnam does not occur until the mention of prisoners “back from Indo-China” and eyes “from Tonkin” (132), the novel’s opening epigraph recalling Von Braun’s remarks before the 1969 Apollo 11 launch helps establish a more contemporary lens through which to view the war. The epigraph coupled with the late war setting, which itself suggests a narrative about the Cold War rather than the “action” of World War II, prepare us for the more specific evocations of Vietnam in part one. During the séance scene in Snoxall, for example, the reader encounters a war in which ghosts are participants and the enemy is ambiguous. As the narrator remarks, many of the séance participants are from “the agency known as PISCES—Psychological Intelligence Schemes for Expediting Surrender. Whose surrender is not made clear” (34). Although the ghosts and unclear enemy and war aims speak to other motifs in the novel such as trafficking in the occult, conspiracies, and general paranoia, these characterizations of “the enemy” are more in keeping with Vietnam than World War II and its Frank Capraesque framing. In Vietnam the Viet Cong were not only physically indistin-

guishable from their South Vietnamese counterparts, they were often invisible, “ghosts” that moved through the jungles and attacked unseen. Roger Mexico’s reflection in the following episode that he should be “graphing Standardized Kill Rates Per Ton for the bomber groups” (40), is likewise more appropriate to Vietnam and its concepts of body counts and kill ratios.

The most compelling evidence for Vietnam’s presence as a shadow or surrogate for World War II in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, though, lies in Pynchon’s October 8, 1969 letter to Thomas Hirsch, a graduate student interested in Südwest material in *V*. Commenting on the role of the Herero in “the novel I’m writing now,” Pynchon remarks:

But I feel personally that the number done on the Herero head by the Germans is the same number done on the American Indian head by our own colonists and what is now being done on the Buddhist head in Vietnam by the Christianity minority in Saigon and their advisors... I don’t like to use the word but I think what went on back in Südwest is archtypical of every clash between the west and non-west, clashes that are still going on right now in South East Asia” (qtd. in Seed 241-2)

Given the parallels Pynchon draws between the situations in South West Africa and Vietnam here, it is hardly surprising that *Gravity’s Rainbow* depicts the Zone Hereros as living “down in abandoned mine shafts” (315) and as the victims of “Search-and-destroy missions” (362) both in Südwest and Europe. Invoking U.S. military raids on South Vietnamese villages and the elaborate networks of tunnels used by the VC and NVA, these references further reinforce Vietnam’s shadowy presence in the book. In many ways the amorphous “Zone” of the novel is more like the “free fire zones” of Vietnam than the clearly demarcated occupations zones of World War II. As various episodes in the Zone make clear, the Herero are open targets for Americans, Germans, and Russians alike despite the fact that there are no clear political motivations for these assaults.

The novel’s more obvious anachronisms—the rampant drug use among members of the military, the Counterforce spokesman’s reference to “the years of grease and passage, 1966-1971,” (739), allusions to Nixon’s “Silent Majority” speech, and numerous other late 1960s and early 1970s details in the final episode—likewise provide connections to Vietnam. As Pynchon scholars have widely noted, the use of pot, hash, acid, cocaine, hallucinogenic mushrooms, opium, and numerous other drugs along with characters with names like “Geli Tripping” and “Acid Bummer” all highlight an element of “sixties radicalism” woven into the novel’s “narrative fabric” (Ashe

69). Narcotics use in the novel, however, is especially reminiscent of the latter part of Vietnam, where drugs became an inoculation against the war. Faced with an increasingly unpopular and morally ambiguous war, in 1969 over half the soldiers serving in Vietnam admitted to using marijuana. By 1971, drugs like heroin, pot, and opium were claiming four times as many casualties as the war.<sup>16</sup> Given Vietnam's shadowy presence in the novel, then, it is not surprising that images of "human bodies" in "carefully tagged GI" body bags (368) and "big white bundles" that look "like Graves Registration back there" (643) are linked to drug use and that companies like Du Pont are working to dull the "real pain" produced by wars (348).

As *Gravity's Rainbow's* final section highlights, Vietnam is also present through suggestions of the domestic conflicts and anti-war movements that occurred in the U.S. The most obvious embodiment of these conflicts is, of course, the textual opposition between The Counterforce and Richard M. Zhlub, a thinly disguised Nixon described as "fiftyish and jowled, with a permanent five-o'clock shadow" (754). Depicted as activists trying to jam the corporate machinery of The Force, Counterforce members Pirate, Roger, and Bodine use their bodies, wit, and language (with all their abject imaginings) instead of violence as oppositional strategies. It is no wonder that Bodine has kept a fragment of Dillinger's bloody shirt as a "relic" to remind the Counterforce of the "blood of our friends" (739). While John Dillinger certainly signifies in his own right as an outlaw figure, one cannot help but hear echoes of David Dellinger, a leading anti-war activist and member of the Chicago Seven, who was also "ambushed" in Chicago for his involvement in the 1968 Democratic Convention anti-war demonstration. Like their Vietnam counterparts, the Counterforce is also characterized as "only a small but loud minority" (755). An allusion to Nixon's famous November 3, 1969 "Silent Majority" speech, this reference evokes the political rhetoric that clouded any clear understanding of the war in Vietnam.

But what do all these evocations of Vietnam in *Gravity's Rainbow* mean? One could argue that with its hard-to-determine plot, countless flashbacks and anachronisms, Pynchon's text speaks to the broader poststructuralist project of decentering master narratives. Certainly "history" becomes but one of many fragmented narratives, a set of discourses and practices better understood in terms of Foucault's notions of archeology and genealogy. *Gravity's Rainbow* is, after all, filled with comments about "the end of history" (56), history/war as a "set of points" (645), "human palimpsests" (50), and the disruption of history as a "the idea of cause and effect" (56). Within Pynchon's broader project of exploring the general constructedness and process of history, however, there is also a narrower task of re-visioning World War II, of creating a provisional "history" of that war to make sense of Vietnam's madness. While Pynchon does not seem to suggest as

Vonnegut does that a reframing of the “good war” and its cultural narratives can prevent future Vietnams, he does recognize the importance of re-visioning World War II in order to come to terms with the present.

Pynchon registers the inadequacies of World War II’s binary framing early in the novel through one of Roger’s facetious reflections on “The War,” “the great struggle of good and evil the wireless reports everyday” (54). Writing during the conflict in Vietnam, where not only were enemies and objectives unclear but the beginning and ending dates of the war were as well, Pynchon recognizes the problems of trying to frame any war in binary terms. To combat singular or monolithic framings, *Gravity’s Rainbow* constantly shifts its characterizations of “the War.” World War II is variously described as: “a *laboratory*” (49), “a celebration of markets”(105), “a long-time schiz... who believes that *he* is World War II” (131), a larger force “reconfiguring time and space into its own image”(257), “theater” (326), “fucking...done on paper” (616), a “set of points” (645), “Roger’s mother” (39), etc. These shifting definitions highlight World War II’s complex dimensions and establish a more fitting precursor to Vietnam—a conflict that still isn’t universally recognized as a war or considered to be over by certain Americans.

Pynchon’s reference to the Frank Capra-esque framing of the war likewise highlights the carefully controlled flows of information present during World War II. Although efforts were taken to curtail negative coverage of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the sea of lies surrounding the war and its atrocities came to light through television coverage and a freer press in the 1960s. Re-viewing World War II through Vietnam’s hazy and fractured lens, Pynchon exposes the fact that “the Home Front [was] something of a fiction and a lie” (41). In one stinging indictment of home front portrayals of World War II, for example, the narrator describes the bodily costs behind the propaganda:

Maybe [you] just left behind your heart at the Stage Door Canteen, where they’re counting the night’s take, the NAAFI girls, the girls named Eileen, carefully sorting into refrigerated compartments the rubbery maroon organs with their yellow garnishes of fat ... Everybody you don’t suspect is in on this, everybody but you: the chaplain, the doctor, your mother hoping to hang that Gold Star...the lads in Hollywood telling us how grand it all is over there, how much fun Walt Disney had causing Dumbo the elephant to clutch to that feather like how many carcasses under the snow tonight among the white-painted tanks (134-135, ellipses mine)

With its allusions to Disney's propaganda cartoons, USO events, the Gold Star program, and Hollywood interpretations of the war, the passage highlights the ways in which World War II was turned into a "children's story" (135) in the 1940s. What *Gravity's Rainbow* makes abundantly (and sometimes nauseatingly) clear is that the Second World War was anything but a "children's story." Like Vietnam, Pynchon's version of the World War II is for "Adults Only"; his war is a series of pornographies—both literal and figurative.

In addition to exposing how World War II propaganda often hid the bodily costs of war, *Gravity's Rainbow* emphasizes the ways in which it concealed domestic racial tensions and contributed to racist perceptions of the Japanese enemy. One of the more overt examples of Vietnam's haunting presence in the narrative, the novel's reexamination of racial issues recasts the Holocaust as one part of a larger pattern of racial conflict during World War II. While the novel seems to establish the "archtypical" clash between white, westerners and racially marked non-westerners that Pynchon forecasts in his letter, *Gravity's Rainbow* also specifically examines the dynamics of American racial tensions. In a description of America's involvement in Operation Black Wing, a propaganda campaign designed to undermine Nazi racial theories by showing Germany's "dark, secret children" (75), for example, the narrator reminds readers that the program will have an added benefit: "Black Wing has even found an American, a Lieutenant Slothrop, willing to go under light narcosis to help illuminate racial problems in his own country" (75). American involvement in Operation Black Wing highlights the complex and contradictory elements of U.S. homefront racial discourses. During the war, the U.S. government presented pluralistic, ethnically diverse images of itself—especially in contrast to the hateful, racist Nazi enemy—while it was simultaneously imprisoning Japanese Americans and maintaining a Jim Crow military. Re-viewing World War II from a late 1960s perspective, *Gravity's Rainbow* constantly reveals the shortcomings of the Office of War Information's "strategy of truth" (74) policy. Not only does Pynchon's text recall the Zoot Suit riots of 1943 and weave figures like Malcolm X and Ishmael Reed into its narrative, but it also calls attention to the intense racism surrounding the Pacific War. Sardonicly recalling U.S. wartime popular culture, the narrator asks, "Who can ever forget the enormously popular Juicy Jap, the doll that you fill with ketchup then bayonet through any of several access slots" (558). Shortly after this passage, the narrator reminds us that it was "100,000 little yellow folks" (588) who were killed at Hiroshima. Once again, the novel fractures cultural narratives of the "good war," creating a more fitting precursor to "American Death" and the "death-colonies" (722) in Vietnam.

Perhaps the most important rewriting of World War II that Pynchon's late 1960s perspective provides is *Gravity's Rainbow's* examination of war's impact on the body. Like most World War II fiction, *Gravity's Rainbow* records the war's tremendous destruction of human bodies. As we have seen so far, the novel exposes the countless corpses left out of OWI presentations of the war as well as the human costs of genocide programs in Nazi Germany and colonial situations. *Gravity's Rainbow* moves beyond this focus on human corporeality and broadens the very concept of a "body" in war. In Pynchon's text the increasingly fragmented late modernist body becomes "scattered," assuming the form of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have called the "body without organs" (BwO).

Drawing on their earlier notions of "desiring machines" and Antonin Artaud's writings, Deleuze and Guattari suggest in *A Thousand Plateaus* that we must move beyond notions of the body as an organic, unified entity. They offer instead a conception of the body, emptied of its interiorities (organs), in which it becomes a surface "populated only by intensities" (153). As Elizabeth Grosz explains, this "notion of the body as a discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, corporeal substances and incorporeal events" forces us to imagine body in terms of "its connections with other bodies, both human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, linking organs and biological processes to material objects and social practices" (165). In short, the body becomes a site establishing links with other "bodies." Always in the process of "becoming"—forming assemblages with other entities—the BwO is understood in terms of what it can do rather than what it is. While Deleuze and Guattari posit the BwO as a locus of a "positive libidinal driving force," they nonetheless acknowledge that the body is "the surface of intersection between libidinal forces...and 'external' social forces" (Lash 277).<sup>17</sup>

More so than any World War II novel before it, *Gravity's Rainbow* undermines a relationship between war and bodies in which the forces of the former act on the latter. While earlier works suggest, often in passing, that war dissolves lines between soldiers and their weapons and machines, *Gravity's Rainbow* provides a web of complex assemblages and flows between organic and non-organic bodies.<sup>18</sup> "The White Visitation," for instance, creates in the name of war, an odd alliance that includes spirit mediums, Pavlovian scientists, a statistician, a senile masochistic World War I general, clairvoyants, a man who thinks he is World War II, a patient who can change the pigmentation of his skin, stolen dogs, an octopus, and countless other beings. Many of the members of this agency, we learn, are valued primarily for their ability to form linkages with other bodies. As we discover early in the novel, Pirate Prentice has a career in the agency as "a fantasist-surrogate" (12). He can get "inside the fantasies of others," experi-



ence their emotions, “get their erections for them” (12), dream their dreams. Like a BwO, Pirate’s body becomes a surface of physical and psychological intensities and flows; he is no longer a separate entity but part of a larger systems of bodies connected through dreams and emotions. These connections, however, are not always full of freeing libidinal energies. The scene involving Pirate’s decoding of a message written in “Kryptoplasm” (an invisible substance made discernible through seminal fluid) serves as a reminder that even “private” sexual desires are still shaped by the movies, pornography, and other cultural images.<sup>19</sup>

As the novel goes on to explore, many of the linkages between bodies are not restricted to human surfaces. The “schiz” who believes that he is the war, for example, becomes a site of intensities linked to the battles in Europe. “He gets no newspapers, refuses to listen to the wireless,” the narrator informs us, “but still, the day of the Normandy invasion somehow his temperature shot up to 104°” (131). And whenever rockets fall, “he smiles, turns out to pace the ward, tears about to splash from the corners of his merry eyes” (131). Emptied out of a normal organizing system, his body becomes a surface on which the ebbs and flows of the war speed up and slow down. Other sites of “becoming” in the novel offer more concrete connections between organic and non-organic bodies. In the “Byron the Bulb” story, for example, we see numerous flows and connections between assholes, light bulbs, flows of shit and power, revealing an array of strange assemblages.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, these assemblages are overshadowed by the novel’s central connection between animate and inanimate bodies—the attempts to “become rocket.”

From Enzian’s wet dream about coupling with the rocket to fraternity boys’ jokes to Rocket limericks, *Gravity’s Rainbow* is littered with men’s desires to fuse bodies and machinery. These collective desires culminate, of course, in the novel’s final description of the launch of the 00000 rocket. Encased in Imipolex and attached to the rocket, Gottfried is the only character to achieve a true (though short-lived) merging with the rocket. The novel’s treatment of this linkage is hardly celebratory, though. Gottfried does not ride to the moon, as Franz and others have hoped, but instead falls back to earth like “a bright angel of death” (760). Once again, *Gravity’s Rainbow* provides a more fitting version of World War II to suit the present situation in Vietnam. As Susan Jeffords, Arnold Isaacs, and others have noted, one of World War II’s chief legacies for the Vietnam generation was a blind confidence in and association with American technology. World War II was “such a triumph of American resources, technology, and industrial and military genius,” Isaacs contends, that “Americans came to think the success of their society was guaranteed” (7). Indeed, “It was almost as if Americans were technology” (14) (Phillips qtd. in Jeffords 8).

Behind this “intense fascination with technology,” Jeffords argues, is a desire to unify the fragments of the male body through weapons and technology (14). Jeffords writes, “In Vietnam representation, technology does not ‘stand in for’ the (male) body but *is* that body, because the body has ceased to have meaning as a whole and has instead become a fragmented collection of disconnected parts that achieve the illusion of coherence only through their display as spectacle” (14). Moreover, “because technology is the (male) body, that body achieves not only the illusion of coherence, but its power as well.” (Jeffords 14). In keeping with its Vietnam-centered revisioning of World War II, *Gravity’s Rainbow* captures this overwhelming male desire to unify the body through technology generally and the rocket specifically. Enzian speaks for most of the central male characters when he reflects, “He was led to believe that by understanding the Rocket, he would come to understand truly his manhood” (324). Indeed, throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow* men from various nations literally and figuratively converge around the 00000 rocket, striving to “belong to the Rocket” (325).

Although *Gravity’s Rainbow* generally resists assigning values or positing clear enemies, it is difficult to read the novel without viewing this particular coupling between masculinity and technology as harmful. Not only does the process of “becoming rocket” foreclose other possibilities of connection by unifying and sealing up the phallic male body, but it reifies binaries between male/ female and technology/nature. Whether discussing the Rocket’s “victory” “over the feminine darkness” (324), the triumph of plastics because “chemists were no longer to be at the mercy of nature” (249), or Major Marvy’s obsession with “thrust, impact, penetration, and such other military values” (606), the novel highlights the negative effects these relationships produce. This is not to say, however, that Pynchon’s text offers a broad indictment of technology. There are after all at least two Rockets, “a good Rocket to take us to the stars, and an evil Rocket for the World’s suicide, the two perpetually in struggle.” (727). Like Pynchon’s provisional notion of history, the values of technology are never fixed.

Nonetheless, the question of the body’s status in a technologized, post-modern world still remains. Whereas Vonnegut seemingly advocates rejecting late modernist notions of the body and adopting individualized, humanist conceptions instead, Pynchon finds potential within postmodern discourses. Although subject to widespread surveillance and cultural conditioning, Slothrop finds a way to empty himself of the desire to become rocket and de/reterritorialize his body. In addition to changing his identity repeatedly, Slothrop becomes a BwO through his drug-enhanced encounter with Trudi. The narrator describes their encounter:

Trudi is kissing him into an amazing comfort, it’s an open

house here, no favored senses or organs, all equally at play... for possibly the first time in his life Slothrop does not feel obliged to have a hardon, which is just as well because it does not seem to be happening with his penis so much as with...oh mercy, this is embarrassing but...well his *nose* actually seems to be erecting, the mucus beginning to flow yes a nasal hardon" (439)

While perhaps a bit revolting to our own culturally conditioned desires, Slothrop's ability to reinscribe the site of his pleasures and desires from his penis to his nose offers an important instance of agency in the novel. Because Slothrop's body has been the culturally conditioned, heterosexually territorialized body par excellence, his ability to divest his body of these territorializations offers the hope of alternative libidinal economies and non-destructive becomings. Likewise, we can read Slothrop's later scattering as another site of possibility. As Jeffrey Nealon suggests, "Slothrop's scattering disrupts a kind of subjectivity that is part and parcel of the contemporary war state" (126). Instead of unifying his body through the rocket or other forms of destructive technology, Slothrop is "scattered all over the Zone" (712), assuming a form that is no longer recognizable "in the conventional sense" (712). In his new form of fragments, Slothrop survives well into the future, and we learn that he has appeared as "The Fool" on a Rolling Stones' album cover. The exact status of Slothrop's body is never pinned down. The text offers speculations ("Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own" 742), but it resists offering a firm description of Slothrop's new embodied subjectivity. What *Gravity's Rainbow* seems to imply is that we need not determine what Slothrop *is*; what's more important is focusing on what his body can do. The potential for developing more positive relationships between bodies and technologies lies not in denying relationships or rejecting modernist and postmodern conceptions of the body but in thinking differently about them.

Many who fought in or experienced the war first-hand have long understood that World War II can not be neatly summed up in binary terms like good/evil, combatant/noncombatant, and truth/propaganda. Nevertheless, despite the unfathomable and terrifying elements of the war such as the Holocaust, the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the large-scale destruction of lives and property worldwide, a general binary framing of the war persisted as America moved into the postwar period. In fact, as the Cold War heated up in Korea and Vietnam, World War II seemed to become even more clear-cut and emblematic of American success. Soldiers, politicians, and civilians alike nostalgically looked to "the last good war" as the lack of moral purpose and clear goals in Vietnam tore the nation

apart instead of unifying it. While Vietnam in many ways reified World War II's mythical status in the national imagination, it also opened the door for important revisions of the "good war"—revisions that showed there are no "good" wars, no matter what the spoils of victory are. Through their amalgam of fantasy, fiction, and history, *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity's Rainbow* offer two such important revisions. The novels not only address the idea of war as a way of seeing and the power of war narratives to engender other conflicts, but they open new doors for envisioning different relationships between bodies and technologies.

### Notes

1. As George Herring has pointed out, Nixon's "new" plan for the Vietnamization of the war was not so cutting edge; by November 3, 1969, "the program had been in effect for more than a year and a half" (230). The term itself was not Nixon's invention either; Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird coined the term in March 1969 as a euphemism for American troop withdrawals. For additional background on Nixon's policy of Vietnamization, see Peter Carroll's *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, George Herring's *America's Longest War*, Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History*, and William O'Neill's *Coming Apart*.
2. Johnson's famous remark of 1964, turned out to be one of a web of lies that led to the famous "credibility gap" that haunted his and later administrations. See O'Neill's *Coming Apart*, pages 120-122, for the full text of Johnson's campaign quote.
3. Quoted in Herring's *America's Longest War*, page 236. See Herring and Nixon's public papers for additional background on these quotes and speeches.
4. Clearly, Vonnegut seems to be playing with the idea of the "war game" here as well.
5. Although the scene is supposedly set in 1967, the destruction from the riots and the intervention of "National Guard tanks" is far more characteristic of riots in 1968.
6. The damage caused by LeMay's incendiary runs on Japanese cities was immense. As Mark Boatner details, "some 100,000 tons of incendiaries on 66 cities killed about 260,000 people, injured more than 412,000, left 9,200,000 homeless, and destroyed an estimated 2,210,000 dwellings" (316).
7. This figure comes from page 1 of David Craig and Michael Egan's *Extreme Situations* (1).
8. LeMay made this remark during a televised press conference on October 3, 1968 while explaining his goals as George Wallace's running mate on the American Independent Party ticket.
9. Throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five* the key simile for illustrating the destruction at Dresden is that it "looked like the moon" (179).
10. I am not suggesting, of course, that *Catch-22* relies on conventionally realistic narration.
11. See Peter Freese's "Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* or, How to Storify an Atrocity," Cremilda Lee's "Fantasy and Reality in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*," and Peter

Reed's "Authenticity and Relevance: Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*."

12. The novel also highlights the "use value" of bodies in German concentration camps. Describing the candles and soap in the British compound, the narrator remarks, "The British had no way of knowing it, but the candles and soap were made from the fat of rendered Jews and Gypsies and fairies and communists, and other enemies of the State" (96).

13. See Eric Meyer's "Oppositional Discourses, Unnatural Practices: *Gravity's* History and 'The '60s'" and Frederick Ashe's "Anachronism Intended: *Gravity's Rainbow* in the Sociopolitical Sixties" for further study of 1960s cultural elements in Pynchon's text.

14. While the "lighting scheme of the two shadows" in *Alpdrücken* is designed to give each character specific shadows—Cain and Abel—the pattern of doubling it presents reoccurs throughout the novel. The multiple pairings of the Franz/ Schlepzig/ Slothrop, Greta/Leni/Katje, and Bianca/Ilse/Gottfried relationships, for example, demonstrate a broader scheme of shadowing—one in which the "shadows of shadows" begin to double back on themselves (429). In terms of The War, I would argue that World War II likewise has two shadows in the *Gravity's Rainbow*, Vietnam and World War I. Because of the scope of this essay, however, I will only examine the former of these shadows. Please see Paul Fussell's conclusion to *The Great War and Modern Memory* for a discussion of World War I's legacy in the novel.

15. Both Khachig Tololyan and Steven Weisenburger provide excellent, thorough examinations of the complex web of texts used to recreate details from the late war period. See Toyolan's "War as Background in *Gravity's Rainbow*," Weisenburger's *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion*, and McLaughlin's "IG Farben's Synthetic War Crimes and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*" for further study.

16. In 1971, for example, only 5,000 U.S. servicemen were treated for wounds while approximately 20,000 were hospitalized for drug addiction. This figure is cited in Peter Arnett's *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*.

17. Elizabeth Grosz's chapter "Intensities and Flows" in *Volatile Bodies* and Scott Lash's "Genealogy and the Body: Foucault/ Deleuze/ Nietzsche" provide excellent analyses of Deleuze's writings on bodies.

18. Mailer's *Naked and the Dead*, for example, contains several comments about the extension of men's bodily surfaces to incorporate their weapons or gear into notions of "self." The narrator comments that Croft "could not have said at that moment where his hands ended and the machine gun began" (122) and, describing a march, remarks "the weight of their packs was crushing, but they considered them as part of their bodies, a boulder lodged in their backs" (393).

19. The cultural programming of desire and sexuality is a recurring motif in the novel. While Slothrop's conditioned erections provide the most notable example, the text calls attention to other instances of culturally managed desire and sexual response. Katje's careful applications of cosmetics to make her look like "the reigning beauties of thirty or forty years ago" (233) for her encounters with Brigadier Pudding and remarks like "How the penises of Western men have leapt, for a century, to the sight of this singular point at the top of a lady's stocking, this transition from silk to bare skin and suspender!" (396) are just two of many examples. For further discussion of Pirate's sexual conditioning see Timothy Melley's "Bodies

Incorporated: Scenes of Agency Panic in *Gravity's Rainbow*.”

20. Because so much scholarship on *Gravity's Rainbow* describes the flows of technology and capital between nations before and during the war, I will not discuss them here. See Weisenburger, McLaughlin, Toyolan.

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Vonnegut tells the story of World War II through the mind of Billy Pilgrim, a soldier who has become "unstuck in time." Pilgrim travels through different events "before, during, and after the Second World War" and Vonnegut uses this device to frame the different events of his narrative. There's a certain irreverence to his prose, as Vonnegut never appears to take any societal institution or belief seriously. The human deaths in the war never fall prey to this irreverence, though. Slaughterhouse-Five is so original, so compelling, that it almost creates its own genre on what the best ways are to remember human tragedies. Academic historians do a wonderful job of historicizing the narratives and importance of events, and the world of academic history is incredibly valuable. Gravity's Rainbow is a 1973 novel first published by Viking Press by the American writer Thomas Pynchon. The narrative is set primarily in Europe at the end of World War II and centers on the design, production and dispatch of V-2 rockets by the German military. In particular, it features the quest undertaken by several characters to uncover the secret of a mysterious device, the Schwarzgerät ("black device"), which is slated to be installed in a rocket with the serial number "00000.". The differences between the World War II era and the Vietnam era are easily identified in the music, television shows, and literature of the two time periods. One of the greatest texts published during the Vietnam era, Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut, encompassed many of the anti-war ideas feeling that were involved with the Vietnam War. Although Vonnegut began writing Slaughterhouse Five as soon as he arrived home from World War II, it was the time that he allowed himself to write the novel that helped him compose and reflect his post-war ideas through the main character, Billy Pilgrim. In Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut he tells a story about the effects war can have on a person by telling a story about Billy Pilgrim. Read More. Words: 1650 - Pages: 7. Jarvis, Christina. 2011. The Vietnamization of World War II in Slaughterhouse-Five and Gravity's Rainbow. In Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut: Critical Insights, ed. Leonard Mustazza, 80-108. Pasadena and Hackensack: Salem Press. Originally Published in 2003. War, Literature, and the Arts 15 (1-2): 95-117. Google Scholar. Kellogg, Catherine. 2015. Plasticity and the Cerebral Unconscious: New Wounds, New Violences, New Politics. Cite this chapter as: Giannakopoulos G. (2019) Out of the Ruins of Dresden: Destructive Plasticity in Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five. In: Mitsi E., Despotopoulou A., Dimakopoulou S., Aretoulakis E. (eds) Ruins in the Literary and Cultural Imagination. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26905-0\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26905-0_9).