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Orbit: Writing Around Pynchon

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Abstract:

Preface to *Orbit* 1.1.

Preface

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Vorstufe... Ist durchgeschaltet... Belüftung klar... Zündung klar... Hauptstufe ist gegeben... And so we launch, into *Orbit*, Volume 1, Issue 1. Just what the world needs, right? Another journal. Well, we happen to think that there are some pretty good reasons for setting this venture up. Critical material on Pynchon continues to proliferate. There have been three print collections published in the past year and a half alone, with no signs of slowdown. Communities of readers and scholars brought together by the web (and indeed more corporeal methods) are developing and mutating. Databases, blogs and various collective knowledge projects add layer upon layer to an already complex picture. In recent years, ‘International Pynchon Week’ has touched down in Valetta, Munich and Lublin. In 2013, a further conference will be held in Durham, neatly coinciding with the 50th anniversary of V. and the 250th anniversary of Mason and Dixon’s arrival on American shores. We are also still coming to terms with a series of major events in the Pynchonosphere — the hot-off-the-press announcement that Pynchon’s entire back catalogue is now available in digital form; the much-debated narration used to promote 2009’s *Inherent Vice*; the news that this latest novel might be adapted for the big screen by Paul Thomas Anderson. As Pynchon writes in his essay on Luddism (which holds up to scrutiny very well after almost thirty years), “all the cats are jumping out of all the bags and even beginning to mingle.” The heroically rigorous *Pynchon Notes*, of course, has provided a long-standing service to the field and will continue to do so. We have benefited immensely from the expertise, insight and decency that have come to define *Pynchon Notes* and we have been inspired by its remarkably high standards. With the ground shifting beneath our feet, however, *Orbit* attempts to do some new and distinct things for our area of scholarship.

Firstly, a journal like *Orbit* helps to avert the phenomenon known as the Serials Crisis. These words capture some tough issues that affect and implicate us all in one way or another. Since 1986, for example, the UK Consumer Price Index has risen, in terms of inflation, by 80.1%. The amount that libraries have to spend, however, on journal subscriptions has risen by 380%. In these times of financial hardship for higher education, we must do everything we can to ensure that our own publication practices do not harm our institutions and friends. Open Access publishing, using the power of the internet to distribute peer-reviewed work at no cost to the reader, mitigates against

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the exhaustion of subscription budgets. A revolution, you say? It's not impossible. But let's not be too hasty. As Pynchon scholars and enthusiasts, we should understand better than most that quick-fix utopian claims about sticking it to the Man must be treated with a certain suspicion. Moreover, combating the entrenched credentialist systems of hiring and firing that promote *journal brand* over quality of scholarship, often a tick-box exercise in funding allocation, is never going to be a straightforward task. At the same time though, we feel passionately that this situation needs addressing and we hope that our launch can become part of a broader transition within the arts and humanities. Magic, Pynchon states, is "hard and honorable work" that "cannot be deployed at whim, not without consequences." This is the magic we believe in.

Secondly, *Orbit* is designed to open out the existing scholarly field. Our subtitle, "*Writing Around Pynchon*", aims to encapsulate the interrelated nexus of work that has emerged as a result of, or in parallel to, Pynchon's extraordinary fiction. We therefore hope to encourage scholarship that looks beyond the well-worn comparisons with DeLillo or the meta-fictional traits he shares with Barth. We hope, in the fullness of time, to provide a home for fresh, unexpected and unlikely combinations. We hope to foster productive reassessments of Pynchon's legacies, influences and creative processes; to ask imaginative questions about his relationship to the canon and cultural value systems; to seek out Trans-Atlantic, Trans-Pacific and Pan-American connections; "to boldly go"... and so on. If Pynchon is recognised as, perhaps, the foremost figure in American writing after WW2, then we are still a long way from reaching any kind of critical consensus. Here in what Pynchon calls our "corrupted and perilous day, when everybody's heard everything and knows more than they wish they did", it is our contention that the room to manoeuvre might be bigger than it first appears.

So what are we offering in phase one? Besides our reviews and notes (which will be a regular feature), this first issue provides some subtle and engaging revisitations, alongside some striking discoveries and exercises in forward-thinking. Sean M. Carswell re-reads *Vineland* through Hardt and Negri (surprisingly under-represented in Pynchon scholarship) and finds a rich theoretical context within which to explore notions of power and resistance. Meanwhile, Timothy Gilmore examines Lacanian psychoanalytic tropes in *V*. Moving away from speculative readings about the nature of the *V*. object, the essay instead places a new emphasis on *V*'s actual function in the novel. Emma Miller probes deeper into the naming of Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, taking the analysis of biblical resonances beyond those already established whilst also querying the possibility of a feminist Pynchon in this work. In a different mode, Albert Rolls contributes two fascinating archival pieces on Pynchon's editorial correspondences. In the first, Rolls details the history of the "pirate" volume *Of a Fond Ghoul* and confirms Herman and Krafft's assumptions about the contents. In the second, Rolls explains the story behind the publication of *V*. and conclusively demonstrates that a corrupt

version of the text has been in circulation from the first edition onwards. Finally, Simon Rowberry gives a detailed network analysis of the Pynchon Wikis (in comparison/dialogue with Steven Weisenburger's invaluable *Companion*) and explores the future directions that online collaborative book wikis might take.

Our referencing style is a fusion of APA style with parenthetical citations of Pynchon's novels. We do not expect submissions in this format, but would welcome reader feedback on whether this is followable. The primary reason for its adoption at present is that this was easiest to adapt for the technical systems of typesetting. In terms of standardisation of styles, we have erred on the side of internal consistency. Both British and American spelling conventions and punctuation are welcome, so long as each article deploys its style consistently. Our proofreading and editorial procedure is designed to be light-touch. Authors have their own voices that will be preserved if the content merits attention.

Although we are only just starting out on our mission, there are many people to whom we are indebted for guidance and assistance in getting this far. Our largest thanks must go to John Krafft and Bernard Duyfhuizen, for their generosity and warm spiritedness towards our enterprise. We must also reserve special thanks and praise for Sascha Pöhlmann. Without his enthusiasm, encouragement and hard graft, this issue would not have been possible. Indeed, Sascha's contribution has been such that he will now become part of the senior team. We would also like to thank those esteemed members of our field who have graciously supported *Orbit* by agreeing to join its editorial board: Hanjo Berressem, David Cowart, Luc Herman, Zofia Kolbuszewska, Jeff Severs, Birger Vanwesenbeeck and Steven Weisenburger. Xavier Marco del Pont assisted with proofreading and Kathryn Hume provided some important early advice. Finally, our thanks go to the English department, and particularly Vicky Lebeau, at the University of Sussex, whose support and initial funding allowed us to purchase the CrossRef membership and CLOCKSS archive services.

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