

# SECURITY AND SURVEILLANCE: LOS ANGELES POLICE AND LAND ABUSES IN PYNCHON'S *INHERENT VICE*

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## ABSTRACT

On the theoretical backdrop of Foucault's studies about space and Deleuze's inquiry on the society of control, this article aims at questioning the meaning of civil rights and freedom in an ultra-monitored society, within Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (2009). This novel provides not only a precise historical account of Los Angeles in the late Sixties, but also a reflection about police and government policies concerning the process of the reorganization of space in Los Angeles and the several public disorder episodes connected to these policies. In the form of a detective fiction, Pynchon continues the investigation on Los Angeles land abuse carried out by Mike Davis and Edward Soja's essays (such as *City of Quartz* and *Thirdspace*) on the postmodern metropolis *par excellence*. In fact, land speculation, segregation, inequality, and racial violence were just some of the rotted fruits that fell out of the ruthless government tree. On one side, Pynchon explores the relationship between federals and magnates, the urgency of making Los Angeles a theme-park paradise, the supreme utopian city, the dreaming of prosperity and flourishing that created an atmosphere of terror and paranoia. On the other side, the counterculture, hippies, groups, communities, and all those who had been segregated geographically or ideologically, tried to feed their ethnic and cultural identity against the flatland developers. Starting from this ideological battlefield, this article moves to analyze the nature of late capitalism logic consequences in the Los Angeles civil rights era within the novel, and how the countercultural utopia was doomed often on behalf of social injustice and racial restrictions. **Keywords:** Thomas Pynchon; *Inherent Vice*; Real estate; Police; Surveillance; Paranoia.

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary history, the city of Los Angeles has undergone an impressive urban and suburban development linked to a planned reorganization of spaces, and operated not only by architects and governors, but also with the massive help of the police and federals. The developers, so called by Mike Davis in his iconic essay *City of Quartz* (1990), and their financial allies, together with real-estate, oil magnates, and entertainment moguls, have been the driving force behind the public-private coalition which aimed at realizing Los Angeles's emergence as a "world city." Indeed, the seeking and forcing of the golden effect, along with the urgency of a perfect city "with the best police force in the world"—as the scoop reporter Sid Hudgens quips at the beginning of the *L.A. Confidential* film adaptation (1997)—led to a flawed and altered vision of the

city's reconfiguration, exposing a change of criteria which in spite of maintaining a social balance, also reveals a consequential redirection of the government policies. This is one of the reasons why the process of reorganization of space in Los Angeles had always been accurately planned with the collocation of surveillance centers of justice and economics in the city center, such as the Police Department, Hall of Justice, Federal Building, and Security Pacific, a contribution suggesting the extension and design of power and control. As the center of a "carceral archipelago"—a concept first used by Michel Foucault in his famous essay *Discipline and Punish* (1975)—the civic centre "was to house the administrative functions of management, the policing functions of surveillance, the economic functions of control and checking, the religious functions of encouraging obedience and work" (173). This meant that it always had the privileged role of monitoring and watching the population. Particularly, by the 1950s and early 1960s, the city of Los Angeles experienced the process of change that would turn it into the postmodern metropolis par excellence: the esthetic violence of structural operations, along with the implementation of highways, and the resulting systematic destruction of the environment, defined Los Angeles as "a city without boundaries, which ate the desert, cut down the Joshua and the May Pole, and dreamt of becoming infinite" (Davis 1990, 12). Furthermore, the phenomenon of gentrification contributed—at least theoretically—to the regeneration of urban spaces and decaying neighborhoods through capital investments supported by cultural and advertising industries. The tragic outcome of this phenomenon often led to the brutal dismantling of pre-existing and original communities, limiting their cultural diversity; more specifically, Chicanos and African Americans were spatially and socially segregated in many different ways by government policies. As inequality grew together with reconstruction, Los Angeles was ready to be set on fire. From this perspective, "with the benediction of federal lenders and full complicity of the real estate and construction industries, racially exclusive suburbanization was creating a monochromatic society from which Blacks were excluded and in which Chicanos had only a marginal place" (Davis and Wiener, 51). The Battle of Chavez Ravine, which lasted ten years from 1951, was a Chicano vain attempt to resist the gradual removal of their population from the decaying neighborhood of

Chavez Ravine, in order to build the Dodger Stadium. This was one of the several cases of racial housing discrimination, a common practice which lasted, at least officially, until the Fair Housing Act federal law was enacted in 1968. This large phenomenon strongly heightened from the 1950s and 1960s, and was well described by Mike Davis and Jon Wiener in their last historical account *Set the night on fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (2020), along with the other crucial clash of the civil rights era, namely the Watts Uprising of August '65. Watts involved a huge rebellion ignited by the black residents of the Watts neighborhood. The area involved was home to 80.000 of the poorest people in Los Angeles, and it had just been the epicenter of a racial explosion caused by several years of health and public housing problems, police abuses, unemployment, and ignorance by the media. During those rioting days, Watts turned “into neighborhood resistance to military occupation; followed thereafter by what can only be characterized as a vengeful reign of terror by the LAPD” (211). During the years of the Los Angeles civil rights era, several movements appeared, such as CORE, Black Muslims, Woman Strike For Peace, NOI, together with alternative media of communication, such as KPFJ radio and *The L.A. Free Press*. These years were also largely characterized by a *de facto* autonomous government and jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Police Department, strictly connected to the figure of William H. Parker who had been police chief from August 9, 1950 until his death in 1966. Parker significantly changed the face of the LAPD in a significant way—although the department was still rife with corruption. Moreover, its public image and policing methods created an all-white legion protective of its own, and prone to force and racism. Together with police enforcement, mostly illegal federal spy programmes—such as COINTELPRO were conducted in order to disrupt enemy organizations, infiltrating, and surveilling. Concerning the several racial and inequality issues affecting minorities in Los Angeles, Parker’s first attitude was to refuse to admit this condition<sup>1</sup> and move the question of the civil rights problem in his own defense.

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<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of 1960, when the US Commission on Civil Rights tried to shed some light on the police abuse of minorities in Los Angeles, Chief Parker claimed, “There is no segregation or integration problem in this community, in my opinion, and I have been here since 1922. There may be an assimilation problem, I think that is inherent. But

Accordingly, in 1960, he stated: “I think the greatest dislocated community in America today are the police . . . blamed for all of ills of humanity . . . there is no one concerned about the civil rights of the policeman” (40). While enforcing laws within the ghetto,<sup>2</sup> he was able to create a mythic and powerful aura around the image of the cop and of LAPD, selling it through a wide advertising campaign, thanks to the Hollywood publicity machine. Parker had a real professional publicity bureau to safeguard his public image like a T.V. star, which, indeed, he was. Chief Parker had been Jack Webb’s advisor in 44 episodes of the TV Series *Dragnet*<sup>3</sup>, that widely increased his popularity and respect in the entire nation. In fact, vetting the scripts of such a famous television program was pure propaganda: the erotization of the police was obtained through the representation of the LAPD macho ethos in movies that exalted “its icy and unnerving attitude toward the general citizenry” (42). Furthermore, I believe that this propaganda aimed at eroticizing power and supremacy, and white masculinity, in which the police tried to configure their aesthetics.

Contributing to the social and political tensions of the 60s was a foggy atmosphere of collective chaos and conspiracy theories with a double social role: on one hand, the police used this atmosphere for its own interests, often as a way to control citizens, through corruption and targeted killing programs; on the other hand, the police reacted to its fear of the community and the collective, raising Mansonoid cult paranoia and anti-communist crusades. It is clear that the *paradise on earth* concept is now purely disintegrated and unmasked right as in Nathanael West’s *Day of Locust* as well as in all that noir production which “beginning in 1934, with James M. Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [sic], . . . repainted the image of Los Angeles as a deracinated urban hell. Writing against the myth of El Dorado, they transformed into

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from the standpoint of integration, while there have been dislocations, this doesn’t present any serious problems.” (United States Government Printing Office 1960, 325).

<sup>2</sup> Many police academy graduates in 1959, such as Glenn Souza, “described the department as completely segregated and by any definition extremely racist . . . he was amazed at the scope of LAPD power over the Black Community” (Davis and Wiener, 46)

<sup>3</sup> Started as a radio show, *Dragnet* aired from 1951 to 1959, and then again for a revival during the 1960s. *Dragnet* was one of the most famous police procedural dramas in TV history.

its antithesis . . . puncturing the bloated image of Southern California as the golden land of opportunity and the fresh start” (Davis 1990, 36). What was supposed to be the L.A. endless summer, turned out to be a doomed utopia.

This brief historical introduction may be helpful to move within the multilayered setting that underlies Thomas Pynchon’s *Inherent Vice* (2009) in order to shed some light on the several dynamics of power and social conflicts affecting both the characters and the plot of this novel. In fact, it is important to understand how Pynchon focuses on the socio-political and capitalistic aspects within his work to bring out the issues previously introduced from the point of view of a writer who lived in Los Angeles in the 1960s, and who personally experienced the countercultural and civil rights era.<sup>4</sup> Already a central topic in the two other California novels—*The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Vineland* (1990)—Pynchon returns to the narration of Los Angeles in the late Sixties,<sup>5</sup> maintaining a keen eye on the new century, and setting up a redemption story, but not without a touch of nostalgia. *Inherent Vice* indeed must be necessarily seen as a critique of how capitalism and its operators—from developers to policemen—took their way toward logical extreme, leading to segregation, inequality, with the active participation of LAPD, the federals and their policies. Furthermore, it is worth considering the social and historical context in which *Inherent Vice* is written: on one hand it is published in 2009, right at the end of George W. Bush presidency, when Pynchon’s perspective is not only post 1965 Watts riots but also post L.A. riots and the arrest of Rodney King in 1992.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, in writing *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon continues the investigation of capitalism’s social consequences, already explored within the previous novel *Against the day* (2006), particularly with the character of Darby Suckling. In addition, the choice of

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Pynchon lived in Manhattan Beach, California for much of the 1960s, where he wrote part of his most famous novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973), dedicated to Richard Farina, a protest folk singer and novelist, icon of the counterculture.

<sup>5</sup> There would be much space for further investigation on how this representation of L.A. shifted (both in terms of ideology and narratology) within Pynchon’s California Trilogy.

<sup>6</sup> The 1992 Los Angeles riots were a series of racially motivated episodes of violence and uprisings that occurred in the Los Angeles County in April and May 1992 when George W. Bush sent the 7th Infantry Division and the 1st Marine Division to put an end to the uprising, and when Rodney King was a victim of police abuse and brutality. During the riots, 34 people were killed.

the noir genre for this novel is arguably indicative of the author's intention of revising and representing power dynamics, often parodying a world typical of Los Angeles noir storytelling. He makes this happen with a stoned and doomed private detective he calls Doc Sportello, a lieutenant like Bjornsen who inevitably reminds him of Chief Parker and of a developer, namely Mickey Wolfmann, a real estate mogul who echoes Howard Hughes' models of capitalism and philanthropy.

While keeping this background in mind, this article aims to decode Pynchon's awareness and criticism concerning these historical and social dynamics within the complex apparatus of the novel, investigating how it presents such issues, beginning with questioning the notions of freedom and civil rights in an ultra-monitored society, on the nature of their real meanings and how they were, and still are, shaped in the name of social injustice and racial restrictions.

#### FREEDOM AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN *INHERENT VICE* (2009)

It is worth remembering that already in June 1966, Thomas Pynchon published an article on the New York Times—"A Journey Into The Mind of Watts"—which contained a reflection on the troubled co-existence of black and white cultures, the cops' violent approach, and the economic issues affecting some black communities in Los Angeles such as Watts. As a clear example of class and racial revolt against inequality and social discrepancy, this issue is also part of the essential background and literary material in Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (2009). The character of Tariq Khalil, a former member of the gang Black Guerrilla Family,<sup>7</sup> sets a strong example to this end. The Black Guerrilla Family is one of the several street gangs mentioned by Pynchon in the novel; it formed during the 1960s and early 1970s in Los Angeles, likely as a result of the police fury against the Black Panthers and other civil rights movements. In fact, "As even the Times recognized, the decimation of the Panthers led directly to a recrudescence of gangs in

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<sup>7</sup> Black Guerrilla Family is an African-American street gang founded in 1966 by George Jackson, also mentioned in the novel, "Big Jake" Lewis, and W. L. Nolen while they were incarcerated at San Quentin prison.

the early 1970s. ‘Crippin,’ the most extraordinary new gang phenomenon, was a bastard offspring of the Panthers’ former charisma, filling the void left by the LAPD SWAT teams” (Davis 1990, 76). These gangs intensified the revolts through guerrilla wars prompted by territorial issues and unresolved tensions. As previously discussed, land abuse and segregation were the most repeated practices used by LAPD and government to face racial matters, a process that is well described in *Inherent Vice*. In particular, Tariq Khalil expresses the fear of his community to receive the same treatment as the one given to Japanese communities during and after the WWII:

“WW Two,” said Tariq. “Before the war, a lot of South Central was still a Japanese neighborhood. Those people got sent to camps, we come on in to be the next Japs.”

“And now it’s your turn to get moved along.”

“More white man’s revenge. Freeway up by the airport wasn’t enough.

“Revenge for...?”

“Watts.”

“The riots.”

“Some of us say ‘insurrection.’ The Man, he just waits for his moment.” (IV, 17)

Tariq Khalil’s choice of using the term “insurrection,” and the contrast the word creates with “riots,” leads to another problem concerning the interpretation of reality already disputed between the police, the government, mass media, and groups of rebellion.<sup>8</sup> The words used to identify these events—such as “riot,” “revolt,” “race riot,” or “uprising”—absorb shades of meaning behind which particular ideologies lie. According to Doc, “riots” are both violent public disorders, and the disturbance of public peace, two renderings that open up the term to multiple meanings. The federal Anti-Riot Act (1968) defines “riot” as “a public disturbance involving an act or acts of violence by one

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<sup>8</sup> The recent assault on Capitol Hill shed some light on the meaning of the words that have been used to identify these events: “attack,” “march,” “insurrection,” “storming,” were the most used by mass media and political forces, confirming the tendency to frame anti-Black racism protests as “riots” more than any other form of protest. News media also used euphemistic labels like “protests,” “rallies,” and “demonstrations” while describing what was happening. A recent study (Damon T. Di Cicco, 2010) examined coverage of protests in five major newspapers in the United States between 1967 and 2007, and found that during that time period, protests were depicted as a nuisance more often than the conservative ones were.

or more persons part of an assemblage of three or more persons, which act or acts shall constitute a clear and present danger of, or shall result in, damage or injury..." (18 USC, Ch. 102); "riot," whose meaning is quite oriented toward an image of mindless violence and destruction, or little morality, is also the word that was mainly used by the press and mass media at the time; in particular, the *Los Angeles Times*, used the term to identify and label the events. In opposition, the word "insurrection" implies a status that is uneasy to overturn and reverse, therefore close to "rebellion," "revolt," and "uprising" by synonym, and the terms mostly used by civil rights activists during the Sixties in Los Angeles to imply an act of morality, a manifestation of ideology, and, of course, the willingness to improve not only their personal condition, but also human rights at large. According to Soja, "those who are territorially subjugated by the workings of hegemonic power have two inherent choices: either accept their imposed differentiation and division . . . or mobilize to resist . . . These choices are inherently spatial responses, individual and collective reactions" (Soja 1996, 87). It is also important to consider that Watts was not even "primarily a 'race riot,' since Mexican neighbors were for the most part left undisturbed, and . . . Despite lurid stories in the press of rioters chanting 'Kill! Kill!' there were few, if any attempts to actually murder whites, apart, perhaps, from attacks on police" (Davis and Wiener, 211). In fact, if the Watts Uprising formerly originated from a condition of segregation caused by developers markets and government policies, at a later stage, the reasons of the revolt are to be found in the military occupation of the neighborhood, and in the regime of terror enacted by the L.A.P.D. This leads to a discrepancy in the identification of violence, which the narration points out: also, the militarization of the ghetto is defined as the way in which the government exercises its statehood; its violence is never primordial, but always *functional* for implementing control over the opposing violence. "State can in this way say that violence is 'primal,' that it is simply a natural phenomenon, the responsibility for which does not lie with the State, which uses violence only against the violent, against 'criminals'—against primitives, against nomads—in order that peace may reign" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 448). As a majoritarian subject, the State, through the police, does not struggle to create a power relationship because it is already on the side



of power for being a State; this implementation of control is the condition thanks to which tolerance towards otherness becomes possible for the majoritarian subject. From this perspective, *Inherent Vice* seems to show the direct consequence of what Deleuze called “society of control:” in a society regulated by capitalistic markets, along with a de facto police regime, “control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explosions within shanty towns or ghettos” (Deleuze 1992, 3), where ghettos or alternative spaces inhabited by minoritarian subject become a sort of tolerance zone, as in the case of the beach, in this sense a minoritarian space, namely the only place in which the presence of minoritarian subjects—and of the alterity—is tolerated by the majoritarian culture (defined here by capitalism and control societies). Indeed, Doc not only is often told to come back to the beach by lieutenant Bigfoot, suggesting a pressing physical restriction<sup>9</sup> but the beach is also Doc’s primordial condition. Not surprisingly, throughout the novel,<sup>10</sup> the word “beach” is always accompanied by the word “back.” Thus, Doc’s “coming back to the beach” actually shows his returning to a sphere of identity, and temporary calm and safety—at least until paranoia eventually comes up or Bigfoot appears smashing Doc’s “door down like he usually does” (Pynchon 2009, 13).

This regime of terror led by the police is widely reconstructed by Thomas Pynchon in the novel, in a way that seems to be constantly questioning the role and the meaning of freedom. Through the lens of a writer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who lived the George W. Bush era in its whole, the figure of Nixon serves as a narrative double to examine modern times restrictions of freedom. Indeed, the feeling of being deprived of one’s liberty, and of living in fear during a war popularly felt as pointless or at least avoidable – Vietnam War in the novel and Iraq war in the 2000s – are conditions that belong both to the fictional novel’s world and to Pynchon’s world at the time the novel is written. Nixon actually makes his appearance in the novel at the Tube while Doc is watching, stating that “There are always the whiners and complainers who’ll say, this is

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<sup>9</sup> This spatial and ideological restriction is brilliantly represented in Paul Thomas Anderson’s movie adaptation (2014); Bigfoot’s claim “There’s places you don’t want to go, Doc—better get back to the beach” (Anderson 2013, 57), for example, evokes a sort of moral and spatial code in the film’s story world that also Pynchon aimed to describe.

<sup>10</sup> (E.g. 154, 165, 193).

fascism. Well, fellow Americans, if it's Fascism for Freedom? I... can... dig it!" (2009, 120). It becomes clear that Pynchon wants to underline a different and flawed idea of freedom carried out by Richard Nixon administration, and by his forces, which of course include Ronald Reagan, at the time governor of California: this "law and order" concept along with another idea dear to Nixon, the one of "prosperity," resulted in the concrete status of surveillance and freedom in the Los Angeles society in the Sixties, controlled by the logic of developers or, more precisely, of late capitalism. Therefore, in *Inherent Vice*, Nixon's idea of freedom eventually coincides with neoliberal interests, and so do civil rights applications, radically opposed to the way the counterculture tried to feed its utopian meaning of freedom. It's clear that this dream of freedom can only work within a general capitalist logic, directly depending on its will. A crucial example of this situation in the novel is the representation of a fake protester at a Nixon rally—Coy Harlingen, whose wife denounces his disappearance to Doc, and a former heroin addict who works as a spy for the government as a member of a Nixonian GOP group called Vigilant California. This ambiguous organization is both a LAPD's civilian militia and an arm of the Golden Fang—an enigmatic business concerning real estate, a heroin cartel, dental clinic, evil and cure. It also represents Coy's assimilation in a world to which he formerly did not belong to at all, and within which he assumes the shape of a redeemed ghost. Despite refusing the proposition to preserve his work as PI and its hippie morality, Doc is also offered to become a spy for COINTELPRO programmes. Coy, instead, becomes a chess piece which the government eventually moves for its purpose, as a harmless counterpart: at the Nixon rally, as he is dragged away from the crowd by the police, Nixon humorously suggests: "Better get him to a hippie drug clinic" (2009, 122). Once Coy appears as an agitator at the TV, the Red Squad and Public Disorder Intelligence Division can infiltrate him in any groups: here is a parodic and extreme case of how the government—with neo-liberal capitalist purposes feeds its needs using an enemy of its system as an integral part of it, an example of pre-corporation rebellion and protest. This can be seen as an early expression of a process described by Mark Fisher in his *Capitalist Realism* (2009): Coy's assimilation is not the "incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but

instead, their precorporation: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture” (9). Despite the fact that *Inherent Vice* brings out the tone of a utopian hope for an alternative reality to a preexistent system, Pynchon still shows, to some extent, his awareness and acceptance of an inherent vice, something that seems impossible to avoid. The historical epilogue of the Sixties experience, results in a doomed counterculture and in the end of the endless summer. Indeed, the hippie dream of an alternative system, namely a different way of life, ceases to exist from the moment in which the institutions and the police do not even consider hippies as civil persons—especially because of their reluctance towards the Vietnam war. To provide an example, when Bigfoot warns Doc Sportello, he says: “Yes, I can almost pity your civilian distress—though if you had been more of a man and less of a ball-less hippie draft dodger” (22).

#### POLICE PARANOIA AND ARPANET

“It increases my paranoia  
Like looking at my mirror and seeing a police car”  
*Almost Cut My Hair*, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

The decade of endless summer finds its emotional and metaphorical peak in the Manson Murders, and, as Joan Didion states in her famous book *The White Album*, “Many people in Los Angeles believe that the Sixties ended abruptly on August 9, 1969” (776). In fact, the Manson Murders contribute to creating the background of the novel, and become essential to understanding the process of polarization of the forces on this field made up by the police: it is not by chance that the lieutenant Bigfoot and the LAPD are always haunted by Manson, Mansonoid conspiracies—a situation particularly emphasized in the *Inherent Vice* movie adaptation—and by “Charles Manson fantasy material” (2009, 292), so much that Doc ends up calling Bigfoot “LAPD’s own Charlie Manson” (332). LAPD paranoia for conspiracies, gangism, and insurrections—along with the government logics to preserve them—made the police intolerant for any *alternativeness*

or dissent, leading to the fashioning of a unique enemy with multiple faces (African Americans, Mexicans, hippies, cults, communists<sup>11</sup>). Whether it is Watts riots or Manson murders, or LAPD, detective Bigfoot does not make any social or moral distinctions. Pynchon wants to enlighten the ruthless and paranoid attitude of the police, eventually represented in the novel as being extreme and ridiculous. To provide an example, Doc, Denis, Japonica, and Blatnoyd are stopped by some rookie cops, who warn them with the following statement: “New program... they’ re calling it Cultwatch, every gathering of three or more civilians is now defined as a potential cult. . . . Criteria... include references to the book of Revelation, males with shoulder-length or longer hair” (179). This leads to another reflection on the omnipresence of the police in the society represented in *Inherent Vice*; indeed, the police, apart from entering the public sphere of street life, intrude in the the private sphere as well, an act that is exemplified by Bigfoot knocking down Doc’s door or metaphorically reigning in his house through the TV. Bigfoot, “like many L. A. cops” (reminiscent of *Vineland*’s Hector Zuñiga, who becomes a movie producer) “harbored show-business yearnings” (Pynchon 2009, 9) and, reminding of Chief Parker or Jack Vincennes in *L.A. Confidential*, he stars in the television series *Adam-12* and makes also his appearance in the advertisement campaign for the real estate site Channel View Estates. Bigfoot strives to be macho, showing the ordinary values of police masculinity—established with the rise of Chief Parker—enough to repress his own homosexuality and hide his past relationship with his former partner Vincent Indelicato, considering the hippie era as “the erosion of masculinity values” (IV, 263). Moreover, Doc is aware of the media hurricane of police erotization triggered by the early 1960s that, as previously discussed, was a vehicle for police propaganda and for the actualization of control. In fact, he claims that “nowadays it’s all you see anymore is cops, the tube is saturated with fuckin cop shows, just being regular guys, only tryin to do their job, folks, no more threat to nobody’s freedom than

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<sup>11</sup> In *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon exposes a peculiar homonymy, “that Charles Manson and the Vietcong are also named Charlie” (IV, 119). In point of fact, Charlie was a common name referred to communist forces at large, both Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. It is interesting that both the obsessions of the government—communists and cults—take the same name.

some dad in a sitcom” (Pynchon 2009, 97). Police power tends to grow amorphous and omnipresent at the same time: “its power is formless, like its nowhere-tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states” (Benjamin 1966, 243), and, for this reason, it amplifies Doc’s paranoia. In this case, however, we are not dealing with the old Pynchonesque paranoia. Here, paranoia is really part of that world inhabited by Doc, and for this reason it is much more horizontally experienced by the detective, than vertically imposed by the author; in this case, unlike *Gravity’s Rainbow* or *V.*, a classic Pynchon narrative device becomes less artificial but more realistic and political, by mirroring the precise reality of those years. Paranoia in *Inherent Vice* has a specific space and time dimension: it is often drug induced—a *paranoia trip*—for what concerns countercultural characters, and it reconciles with what Pynchon calls “ordinary paranoia” (248), where “ordinary” takes on an historical and social meaning. Here the possibility that everything is connected is strictly related to the fact that events take place in the paranoia era *par excellence*—which begins probably with the shooting of Kennedy—and these connections, unlike *Gravity’s Rainbow*, are concretely reflected within the *Inherent Vice* plot, where paranoia assumes a collective dimension.

Moreover, it is worth considering that precisely in that period, starting from 1969, the government and the Department of Defense began to use networks through systems such as ARPAnet to improve police surveillance and control over citizens. *Inherent Vice* presents the Internet at its very embryonic phase, a theme that Pynchon will extend in *Bleeding Edge* as a form of much larger social control. Nevertheless, also in this novel, Arpanet becomes another vehicle of paranoia, as Fritz tells Doc that Sparky, “gets on this ARPAnet trip” and he swears “it’s like acid” (2009, 195). It is made clear that Arpanet belongs to that series of investments—“it’s government money,” says Fritz, Doc’s old PI partner—made by the Department of Defense and aimed to increase surveillance in terms of speed. Fritz is afraid that the FBI is monitoring his activity online and at the end of the novel he complains about the time he has spent at the computer. In this sense, the novel offers a reflection on the use of the Internet with the awareness of a 21st century writer, but from the point of view of a late 60s and 70s character. In fact, on one hand Sparky predicts that “someday everybody’s gonna wake

up to find they're under surveillance they can't escape. Skips won't be able to skip no more, maybe by then there'll be no place to skip to" (IV, 365); on the other hand, Doc wonders if the government will make the Internet illegal—like it had already done with acids—giving access to another world: Doc ignores that, for the same reason, the Internet will become the most important resource of the National Security Agency. However, as his article in *The New York Times* "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" confirms, there is no nostalgia about his critique of the use of the Internet. The question that both Pynchon and Guattari seem to pose, "does not concern technological progress, but rather the use to which this progress is put" (Berressem, 443), or, again, its use as a weapon of extreme surveillance over citizens, worsening those "mechanisms of control as rigorous as the harshest confinement" (Deleuze 1995, 178). Furthermore, there is no doubt that the Internet or its prototype can be considered another real example of heterotopia within the novel. It is reasonable to think that according to Pynchon, at a certain point, the Internet could have served as a powerful tool for the counterculture to front the surveillance system. At the end of his "Postscript on Control Societies," Deleuze claims that in this society of ultrarapid forms of control, "one of the most important questions is whether trade unions still have any role: linked throughout their history to the struggle against disciplines, in sites of confinement, can they adapt, or will they give way to new forms of resistance against control societies?" (Deleuze 1995, 182). Considering the countercultural groups as an example of social trade union of the Sixties' dream—at least in terms of opposition to government policies—within *Inherent Vice*, and later with *Bleeding Edge*, Pynchon seems to refer to Deleuze's question of the possibility of creating a virtual space as a means of resistance for the counterculture, an alternative, in a neo-liberal society, ruled by the simulation of free movement. The author (once again through his protagonist Doc) seems to reflect on what the future of democracy may bring to the digital reality, believing that "it's not a question of worrying or of hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons" (Deleuze, 178). In fact, as Doc himself supposes toward the end of the novel, "Someday... there'd be phones as standard equipment in every car, maybe even dashboard computers. People could exchange

names and addresses and life stories... to remember the night they set up a *temporary commune* to help each other home through the fog” (IV, 368, emphasis mine).

## REAL ESTATE AND LAND ABUSE

“Religious freedom is my immediate goal  
but my long-range plan is to go into real estate.”  
(Donald Reilly’s cartoon, *The New Yorker*, 1974, p. 46)

Real estate and land speculation appear to be the real leitmotifs of the novel, through which the corrupted world of institutions and the exploitation of Los Angeles land are investigated. In fact, Mickey Wolfmann, a ruthless real estate developer, is the character around which *Inherent Vice*’s plot revolves. Most of the characters of the novel face Mickey’s disappearance after his attempted redemption, a philanthropist deed to be read in relation to Howard Hughes, a character mentioned several times in the novel; after having lived a past as ruthless estate mogul, Wolfmann had planned to build a dream city called “Arrepentimiento” (a Spanish word for “I am sorry”), with the intention of offering free homes in the desert, an inconvenient operation for his wife and for all the developers connected to him, including the mysterious Golden Fang, a huge business corporation standing for Capitalism, that apart from real estate, trades in heroin and weapons. As its name suggests, the Golden Fang, because of its connection with real estate, is “the embodiment of this vampiric exploitation of nature” (Berressem 2019, 436). While FBI and LAPD are looking for the real estate magnate, Doc finds out that Mickey Wolfmann also invested their money: “What’s with this FBI interest in Mickey Wolfmann? Somebody’s been playing Monopoly with federal housing money? no, couldn’t be that, ‘cause this is L.A., there’s no such thing here. What else, then, I wonder?” (2009, 75). In fact, both the federal agents and Golden Fang share the same capitalist values and organizational structure: together they lead to a saturation of social and geographical resources, typical of capitalism logics. In addition to Pynchon’s awareness of historical facts, this passage not only shows the secret dynamics between

institutions and private investors during the extreme development of urban Los Angeles, but also what the postmodern geographer Edward Soja wrote about the processes of production in Los Angeles, at least from 1930-40 decades onwards: “In the past half century, no other area has been so pumped with federal money as Los Angeles, via the Department of Defense to be sure, but also through numerous federal programmes subsidizing suburban consumption (suburbsidizing?) and the development of housing...” (Soja, 1989, 228). The novel, in fact, seems to constantly investigate the consequences of this process, focusing not only on the ecological disaster of Los Angeles, but mostly on the increase of social polarization and fragmentation, as well as spatial dispersion. Aunt Reet expresses this issue calling the Channel View Estates last Wolfmann’s “assault on the environment—some chipboard horror,” and she reminds Doc of the “Long, sad history of L.A. land use... Mexican families bounced out of Chavez Ravine to build Dodger Stadium, American Indians swept out of Bunker Hill for the Music Center, Tariq’s neighborhood bulldozed aside for Channel View Estates” (Pynchon 2009, 17). It is immediately clear that Mickey and the federal government have cooperated for the reorganization of space in Los Angeles, continuing racially discriminatory housing policies; it is worth remembering that the California Proposition 14 of 1964, which nullified the Rumford Fair Housing Act,<sup>12</sup> had already increased racial inequality in the sale of houses, aiming at confining black and Mexican people to their urban ghettos. Real estate “covenants” made it illegal to sell houses in certain developments to non-white buyers (McClintock, 42). Although it was declared unconstitutional in 1966, this event only partially stopped the segregation of minorities. Moreover, after Watts Riots, with Nixon and Reagan, the process of restructuring Los Angeles—especially the suburbia—was aimed precisely at the “diffusion of minority populations” (Soja 2014, 206), implementing policies of social control in order to geographically limit potential riots. The post-Watts society in this sense represents the shift from a Foucauldian disciplinary and repressive society, to the society of control

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<sup>12</sup> The Rumford Fair Housing Act was passed in 1963 by the California Legislature in order to end racial discrimination by all the owners who refused to sell or rent their properties to African American and Mexican people.



described by Deleuze and Guattari, wherein “money best expresses the difference between the two kinds of society,” and where “societies no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication” (Deleuze 1995, 174). This is a lesson that Doc Sportello gets to learn at the Hall of Justice, after accidentally noticing a federal file with his name: “A federal file? on me? Wow, man! The big time!” Agent Borderline closed the folder abruptly and slid it into a pile of others on a credenza, but not before Doc saw a blurred telephoto shot of himself out in a parking lot” (Pynchon 2009, 73). As the federal investigators are watching the private investigator Doc Sportello (watching a watchman), they are actually monitoring the activities of Tariq Khalil, and “investigating Black Nationalist Hate Groups” (Pynchon 2009, 73). This way, Doc finds out to be part of a large and dense invisible web made out of monitored people. Moreover, he finds out that the real aim of the federals is to discover what happened to Mickey Wolfman and to the federal money.

As previously discussed, Pynchon distinctively insists on the narration of power dynamics, of the creation of spatial and social conflicts; these are themes that belong to all of his late novels. Above all, especially through his protagonist Doc, he is able to analyze the conflict won by capitalism to the detriment of the counterculture he experienced firsthand. In the novel, this conflict often takes the shape of a social and generational debate between minorities and majorities, namely between the “official” culture and the counterculture, while insisting on the real disruption created by capitalist policies and logics. In fact, in the world depicted in *Inherent Vice*, minorities try to create an alternative reality with respect to the “majoritarian” from which it is socially rejected: what Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze call the “minoritarian subjects” are described by the narrator as always being in contrast with flatland subjects—intended as developers and institutional members—with the exception of his former girlfriend Shasta, who undergoes a kind of capitalistic mimicry when after her affair with Mickey Wolfmann, she reappears “all in flatland gear...new package,” and not in the old “faded Country Joe & The Fish t-shirt” (Pynchon 2009, 1). There is a highlighted contrast between the men of power of the flatland, and those who come from the beach, as Shasta tells Doc: “Mickey could have taught all you swingin beach bums a thing or

two” (Pynchon 2009, 305). In their confrontation with the world of power, the latter are bounced towards the beach, as if it were their only suitable place. For this reason, the beach takes on a dual role: the first being that of concrete utopia, and the second having to do with what Foucault called heterotopia, a counter-site “in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1986, 24). The beach—in this case the fictional Gordita Beach that probably stands for Manhattan Beach—also represents a temporary absence of the capitalist superstructure, a break from city surveillance. It is no coincidence that Foucault indicates the beach as one of the places for “temporary relaxation” (ibid.). As Berressem suggests, the conflict within the novel involves the “heterotopia of ‘the beach’ and its finite ecologies on the one hand, and the infinite economies of the ‘the flatlands’ on the other” (8). Here, one can notice the presence of the ideology describing the contrast between Doc, who lives on the beach, and the various men of power, such as Bigfoot, Mickey Wolfmann, Crocker Fenway. In fact, Doc’s confrontation with Fenway, the “Prince of Palos Verdes” (2009, 341) is symptomatic not only of a generational debate, but also of a real disruption created by capitalist policies. A *we-and-you* opposition still concerns a spatial dimension in which the unavoidable decline of the counterculture utopia lies. This opposition also represents the epilogue of the novel, in which the ideological confrontation finds its definition during the last class-warfare conversation, recalling the struggle between the “Elect” and the “Preterite” from *Gravity’s Rainbow*, a central allegory of Pynchon’s oeuvre, and a struggle that in *Inherent Vice* is ruled by political and social status rather than by religion. The developer Fenway states: “We’re in place. We’ve been in place forever. Look around. Real estate, water rights, oil, cheap labor—all of that’s ours, it’s always been ours. And you, at the end of the day what are you? one more unit in this swarm of transients who come and go without pause here in the sunny Southland...” (IV, 347). “Being in place” and “being a transient” are opposite conditions Pynchon presents throughout the novel: from this perspective, social and class positions are to be understood in terms of displacement. On one side we have the flatland “being in place,” the hegemonic category, while on the other side, “being a transient” serves as a

counter-hegemonic category created by the former in order to maintain its authority, much like a Foucauldian “heterotopia of compensation,” within which the access to the California “paradise on earth” utopia is denied. In this sense, the transient category is always struggling for identity, a continuous act of becoming (or creating), against the well-established hegemonic category. In fact, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, “there is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian” (106).

As another textual manifestation of this type of heterotopia—and as one that can help us better explain its narrative function—the myth of Lemuria, too, is part of the allegorical imaginary Pynchon developed for the novel<sup>13</sup>. The lost continent of Lemuria, submerged beneath the Pacific Ocean, represents a heterotopia of compensation, a mythical dream place that existed before California’s capitalistic and environmental exploitation: the embodiment of the stainless world. Lemuria is connected to the *real places* “in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 1986, 24). Both Shasta<sup>14</sup> and Doc dream of it: “I dream about it, Doc. I wake up so sure sometimes. Spike feels that way, too. Maybe it’s all this rain, but we’re starting to have the same dreams. We can’t find a way to return to Lemuria, so it’s returning to us. Rising up out of the ocean” (Pynchon 2009, 167). Shasta expresses a collective feeling, the dream of a return to a land at its primordial status, where the counterculture could profess and realize its beliefs. By contrast, her expression becomes more significant in her relationship with Mickey Wolfman, an exchange that both represents and informs her experience on the side of power. Lemuria symbolizes both the past and the future of L.A., the greed and the destiny of a consumed and saturated land. Its survivors became the new residents of Los Angeles, now affected by the same greed, and the fog is part of the lost continent’s

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<sup>13</sup> The myth of Lemuria is mentioned throughout the novel and it also appears in Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973, 564).

<sup>14</sup> In line with Pynchon’s research of a mythical landscape, the choice of the names are also suggestive of such an interest. “Shasta” is name-connected to Mt. Shasta, long believed to be where the Lemurians came after Lemuria sunk into the sea. A common belief is also the presence of bigfoots (Bjornsen’s nickname) in this area, as well as wolfmen (Mickey’s surname).

heterotopic consequence. Furthermore, the sunken continent of Lemuria is both accessible to Doc through his acid trips (utopia, no-place), allowing it to stand as a physical (according to postmodern aesthetics) manifestation of a mythical past and as the hippies' hope for the possibility of its return. Both these pre-conditions represent the shades of meaning that eventually get to the "something else" (Pynchon 2009, 369) at the end of the novel, when this *something* extends its semantic field (ideologically) from utopia to heterotopia, and this is the transition in which Doc's resistance to spatial change lies (from Lemuria to Channel View Estates). Likewise, "somewhere"<sup>15</sup> appears 24 times throughout the novel, therefore showing its connotative meaning in all its uncertainty, mirroring the structure of the text and the way in which it spreads horizontally.

Moreover, this "something else" is sharply opposed to the "fog" or the "smog" that pervades the narration at Doc's own expense. In fact, it is worth claiming that there is an absence of awareness and deep understanding of the events on Doc's part. From the beginning of the novel, Doc is "doomed" both as detective, and as a minoritarian subject. From this perspective, the fog (signified in all of its representations), is a disruptive and disorienting agent that dominates him from the collective chaos of the era, to the lost continent's heterotopic effect upon reality. Also, as the narrator places Doc in a position of weakness, he makes him incapable of understanding history. "In symbolic terms, degrees of visibility correspond to degrees of conscious knowledge" (Chicosz 2017, 8). In this regard, the awareness of the narrator doesn't fit with Doc's, revealing an incongruence that is telling of the novel's narrative progression. While for the most part of the novel ideology can be traced back to Pynchon's experience in the counterculture and to his criticism in "Journey into the minds of Watts," the postmodern narrative tools of irony and allegory are used by Pynchon to split the narrator's voice from that of his characters'. However, in this case, postmodern allegory

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<sup>15</sup> It would be also interesting to investigate how this "somewhere" often occurs for Doc in relation to Shasta and to their past relationship, as it emerges from the beginning of Chapter 11: "I wish you could see these waves. It's one more of these places a voice from *somewhere* else tells you you have to be" (IV, 163, italics mine).

is always mediated by a noir realism, meeting the needs of the narrative of a realist capitalism. The narrator's awareness of ironically displaying a poetics of uncertainty, again, helps to create an overall condition of displacement and confusion, which is also exemplified by the detective's state of alienation, a theme already investigated by the hard-boiled writers and detectives. In this regard, the deep intertextuality of the text along with the amount of references to the Californian noir imaginary proves to be particularly significant: by echoing novels such as *The Long Goodbye* and *Farewell, My Lovely*, and not only for the locations he resorts to, Pynchon recalls the Chandlerian fragmentation of the individual beneath the intricate puzzle of the narration.

Ultimately, once again displacement seems to be a central theme of American noir. It provides evidence for readers to explain the centrality of real estate in many noir novels and movies. In fact, this feature is not only an example of land abuse and exploitation, but it is also a fertile ground for power dynamics analysis. Examples of such investigations are James M. Cain's *Mildred Pierce* (1941) and its 1945 film adaptation; Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) for what concerns the public transportation system, and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988) by Robert Zemeckis. In a similar way, the representation of police brutality and corruption, characterizing the Chandler's novels, are now represented almost as a parody, by showing its most extreme logic, which is also the logic of capitalism as Pynchon writes in the novel, "Everything in this dream of prerevolution was in fact *doomed* to end and the faithless money-driven world to reassert its control over all the lives" (Pynchon 2009, 130, italics mine). Keeping a strong sense of history in mind, this statement reveals the inherent vice of Western culture, without renouncing the pursuit of utopia to escape the "gathering fog" of late capitalism.

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