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# Pynchon and Place: A Geocritical Reading of Thomas Pynchon

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Pynchon and Place:  
A Geocritical Reading of Thomas Pynchon

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

by

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## Abstract

A special emphasis on artificial or constructed spaces appears throughout Thomas Pynchon's body of work. This thesis explores how Pynchon describes such spaces and their uses to address such weighty topics as social inequity and the struggle against authoritarianism. In examining the role of sheltering spaces in novels such as *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, I argue that Pynchon depicts various "outsider" characters as finding reification of their own forms of alterity within spaces either designed or co-opted with such purpose in mind. Through Pynchon's depiction of spatial transformation in novels like *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*, the author finds the opportunity to address ethical issues revolving around concepts of real estate and private property, such as gentrification. Even graphical depictions of space, such as the maps of *Mason & Dixon* or virtual reality program found in *Bleeding Edge*, present themselves as worthy figures of study in Pynchon's work, as representations of space that seek to establish boundaries or delineated property play an integral role in the authoritarian forces that seek to oppress the downtrodden, or those whom society views as "the Other." A geocritical reading of Thomas Pynchon's work not only provides readers with a clearer understanding of the political thought guiding the author's pen, but also provides his readers with a means of navigating his sometimes-encyclopedic novels.

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
“Who Was Saved?”: Thomas Pynchon’s Sheltering Spaces	9
Changing Spaces: Pynchon’s Representations of Mutable Space	29
Virtual Vistos: Pynchon’s Imaginary Spaces	55
Conclusion	71
Works Cited	73

## Introduction

Ever since the publication of his debut novel, Thomas Pynchon has served as a particularly enigmatic figure in American letters. Simultaneously fascinating and frustrating, Pynchon's work—noted for its dense and allusive nature—remains as difficult to pin down as its creator. Famously elusive (though he bristles at the label “recluse”—which he defined in a statement to CNN as “a code word generated by journalists... meaning, doesn't like to talk to reporters...” [“CNN Report”]), Pynchon still manages to cultivate a public persona that captivates readers and academics alike. In fact, engaging in speculation over Pynchon's whereabouts and activities comprises a significant portion of the fun to be had in Pynchon Studies.

While recent reports locate Pynchon as ensconced in Manhattan's Upper West Side for at least the past couple of decades (Kachka, “On the Thomas Pynchon Trail”), for many years the author appears to have traveled far and wide, rumors and scraps of information placing him in Mexico, California, Texas, Oregon—even traveling the Mason-Dixon line across the country—in service to his own work (presumably both in pursuit of research, and also the solitude needed to write), but seemingly also to escape the pressures and impositions of contemporary society. Indeed, Pynchon's rootlessness may account for the outsized emphasis on real estate, urban planning, and otherwise constructed space in his work. Entire plots of most of his novels (*The Crying of Lot 49*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Vineland*, *Inherent Vice*, and *Bleeding Edge*—to name the most obvious examples) can be said to center (at least on the surface level) around conflicts involving such spaces—the claiming of it by one entity or another, urban gentrification, its conceptualization in the form of maps or computer programs, etc. In my thesis, I will examine Pynchon's use of non-natural, created, or artificial space in order to trace what appears to be a

thematic through-line that threads together his oeuvre. The essential question seems to be one of authority. Who determines what purpose a space may serve? Who has the right to such space—both its creation and its use? Who has the power to change or alter spaces over time? And how might those without power still find a way to construct, establish, or adapt spaces for their own purposes?

Site-specific studies of Pynchon's work have some precedent in academia already. Ecocritical readings, like Thomas Schuab's "The Environmental Pynchon: *Gravity's Rainbow* and the Ecological Context," have appeared in journals such as the now-defunct *Pynchon Notes* (since replaced with a new publication, *Orbit: Writing Around Pynchon*), focusing on the author's use of the natural world as a backdrop against which his fictions play out. More recently, attention has shifted toward Pynchon's *unnatural* spaces—the cities and suburbs that dot (some would say dominate) his landscapes—and the role they play in his work.

Indeed, it has become a common practice among Pynchon scholars to group *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland*, and *Inherent Vice* together as "the California novels"—set apart not solely for their setting, but also for their perceived relative ease of reading (though Pynchon's most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge*, set in New York and similarly considered lighter-than-usual fare, complicates this distinction). A recent collection of academic essays on this group of novels, *Pynchon's California*, edited by Scott McClintock and John Miller, presents a wide-ranging critical assessment of the author's representation of place—sometimes in nature (as in Hanjo Berressem's "Life on the Beach: The Natural Elements in Thomas Pynchon's California Trilogy"), but primarily in the form of constructed spaces both personal (as in McClintock's "The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State of California in Pynchon's Fiction") and municipal (for example, in Stephen Hock's "Maybe He'd Have to Just Keep Driving, or

Pynchon on the Freeway”). Yet, for all the recent scholarship on the significance of place in Pynchon’s fiction, the potential for further examination remains vast.

In this thesis, I build upon such recent work—furthering the current discussion on Pynchon’s Californian spaces while simultaneously extending this approach to encompass many of Pynchon’s other novels. Specifically, I assess the ways Pynchon presents potential uses of constructed space—for instance, how society’s downtrodden might appropriate space as shelter, or how cartographic representations of space might help reify colonialist attitudes. Whether privately owned or publically managed, providing a place of safety or as an extension of authoritarian control, such structures and spaces serve to animate the author’s interest in the struggle between the elect and the abandoned, between dominant sociocultural forces and the counterculture (or, as depicted in *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*, the remnants of an increasingly irrelevant counterculture). Geocriticism, which takes as its focus the human-made or human-delineated spaces within the text, serves as an especially apt lens through which to study Pynchon’s treatment of the seemingly eternal conflict between authority and anti-authority, the powerful and the (relatively) powerless.

The first chapter of this thesis considers how a structure with one intended meaning or planned use might be reconceived as a space hospitable towards forms of alterity or “otherness,” away from the surveillance of authoritarian forces. While positive examples of sheltering spaces come immediately to readers’ minds (such as Roger and Jessica’s secret no-fly-zone love nest in WWII London in *Gravity’s Rainbow*), Pynchon’s work also provides examples of failed or corrupted shelters. At times, such inadequate shelter reflects deliberate sabotage (or at the very least, apathy) on the part of the state (for instance, the dilapidated, abandoned hotel into which the British government shuttles the damned and abandoned during the air-raid nightmare that



opens *Gravity's Rainbow*), sometimes disorder and ruin comes from within the sheltered community itself. This becomes a major theme in some of Pynchon's later novels dealing with the aging remnants of the hippie movement who cannot come to terms with how society has moved on without them. In *Vineland*, for example, aging hippies attracted to the idea of communal living, but unable to find a way to establish a commune in '80s America, find themselves forced to rent space in a motel—a living situation that exposes the seeming incompatibility between maintaining the hippie lifestyle (marked by an anti-capitalist, free love ethos) and living in contemporary American society (in which rent comes due regularly and living with one's current and former romantic partners, along with the resulting combinations of children, in a small space proves difficult). Indeed, Pynchon seems to suggest that the effort to maintain a long-term shelter from the world proves self-defeating and antithetical to the idea of a sheltering space in the first place. As an alternative, he presents the reader with an example of effective personal shelter: British Captain Geoffrey "Pirate" Prentice's greenhouse in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The space serves a specific purpose (it houses the bananas that make up Prentice's famous breakfasts) and provides the Captain with a temporary escape from WWII. A few moments spent gathering bananas allows Prentice enough time to reflect and reorient himself before walking out into the war again. Such temporary shelters, imperfect as they are, may be the most successful sites for Pynchon's characters to nourish their own interior selves, momentary relief offering perhaps the only kind of refuge available in an otherwise antagonistic society.

The second chapter of my thesis addresses the concept of mutable, transformative spaces—specifically, spaces of gentrification or decay (either materially or in other, less tangible ways). Perhaps the most immediately identifiable examples of such spaces occur in Pynchon's

depiction of urban planning and the real estate industry. As far back as 1966, when the *New York Times* published Pynchon's nonfiction piece on the aftermath of the Watts Riots, "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts," Pynchon has examined segregationist land use. Gentrified space serves as the backdrop to the author's 2009 novel, *Inherent Vice*. Set in the early '70s, with the wounds of Watts still fresh, the plot centers on the disappearance of land development magnate Mickey Wolfmann, whose recent destruction of a primarily black neighborhood to build his suburban "chipboard horror" (Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 8) displaces the area's longtime residents (and sparks a well-intentioned, if short-lived, period of self-reflection on Wolfmann's part—the animating force, readers learn, behind his vanishing). The California of *Vineland*, on the other hand, taking place over a decade later, presents a place in which gentrification has fully taken hold: a lumberjack bar boasts "designer barstools" and an upscale, new-age-listening clientele decked out, not in flannels and boots, but "three-figure-price-tag jeans by Mme. Gris, and après-logging shoes of a subdued by incontestably blue, suede" (Pynchon, *Vineland*, 6). Transformed by the infusion of money from Japanese logging interests and the recent film shoot of *Return of the Jedi*, the area seems a natural extension of the increasingly consumerist culture beginning to form in *Inherent Vice*. By the time Pynchon reaches the circa-2001 New York City of *Bleeding Edge*, consumerist spatial anxiety reaches a fever pitch. Independent fraud investigator Maxine Tarnow suffers from "a real-estate envy attack" (4) more than once over the course of the novel, and Pynchon uses the city's hyper-gentrification as a means to explore larger spatial changes occurring at that time, in tragedies both sudden (the attacks of September 11), and slow (Manhattan's transformation into a millionaire's playground).

In Pynchon's work, gentrification serves as an intangible (perhaps unstoppable) force detectable only through the symptoms of spatial change and (at least for those not lucky enough

to profit from gentrification) an ineffable longing for the past. Of all Pynchon's characters, Doc Sportello, the protagonist of *Inherent Vice*, perhaps best represents this. His resistance to spatial change forms the emotional core of the novel, the problem only resolving itself at the end, when Doc—perhaps recognizing some of his own fears of spatial change in the villainous figure of Crocker Fenway, a representative of the white, male, moneyed class that has “been in place forever” (Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 347)—cultivates the desire for new surroundings. Such willingness to adapt to the changing environment and milieu heralded by the advent of the '70s provides the reader with an example of how transformative space can serve as a healing, rather than harmful force in individual cases—something far different from the kind of spatial changes imposed upon society by the likes of Mickey Wolfmann.

But physically realized structures are not the only type of spaces Pynchon addresses in his work. In his later novels, most notably *Mason & Dixon* and *Bleeding Edge*, the author also delves into the idea of delineated and virtual spaces, respectively—the focus of my third chapter. The concept of mapping out a space (as the titular protagonists of *Mason & Dixon* do on their trek to establish their eponymous line)—visual representations being fundamentally distinct and unavoidably different from the thing itself (as the saying goes, “the map is not the territory”)—introduces problems relating to colonialism and ownership. The act of establishing delineated space creates borders, barriers, and artificial zones of ownership. Such demarcation simultaneously erases and “otherizes” the indigenous populations that inhabited the area before the advent of explorers, colonists, and cartographers established claims on the land. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon interrogates the ideas behind colonialism and the frontier myth, both of which depend upon mapped space to take root in society.

The notion that cartography can render the inhabitants of a space nonexistent comes up in *Gravity's Rainbow* as well. When the map that Tyrone Slothrop hangs in his office to keep track of (dubious) sexual encounters, he effectively transforms these sexual partners into conquests, mere objects or tally marks. When the British Armed Forces discover that Slothrop's map seems to predict the location of rocket strikes, the objectification of these women continues, with the dissection and potential weaponization of Slothrop's seeming ability taking precedence over the lives of the women who may inadvertently fall victim to future rocket strikes—assuming Slothrop's map indicates causality rather than mere correlation (a reading that Pynchon scholar Bernard Duyfhuizen rejects). Regardless of whether or not Slothrop's sexual escapades actually cause the rocket strikes, the act of mapping his encounter serves as an example of how cartography can dehumanize or flatten even that which it does not seek to colonize.

Virtual spaces, like the deep-web “sanctuary” (Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 74) of DeepArcher, present their own difficulties. Conceived as an ever-expanding online world created in collaboration with anonymous fellow travelers, DeepArcher proves to be just as susceptible to corruption as the real world of Maxine Tarnow's NYC. Yet virtual spaces can still serve as a haven for those seeking shelter or a place of their own away from the “meatworld” offline. Although authoritative presence may prove impossible to fully escape, the novel presents DeepArcher as infinitely adaptable—prone to destruction, but also capable of rebirth. The user-generated content, including entire cities, as well as the seemingly borderless landscape upon which users can build a space for themselves, seems satisfy the human desire for exploration and establishment of a place of one's own, while simultaneously protecting the powerless from permanent obliteration at the hands of colonialist forces. While some readers may interpret the online world of DeepArcher as a poor substitute for the real thing, Pynchon's

presentation of cyberspace seems ultimately tinged with optimism. Ideas of space, and the ways such spaces are plotted or depicted, can be just as consequential, in Pynchon's eyes, as any physically present space—for both better and worse.

Pynchon's emphasis on spatiality and authority makes his work particularly well suited for geocritical interpretation. Taken as a whole, this thesis serves as an example of how reading with an eye toward spatiality can elucidate Pynchon's fiction—providing a way in for readers perhaps intimidated by the encyclopedic nature of so many of his novels. Regardless of any potentially biographical reasons for Pynchon's interest in constructed space, its sheer presence in his oeuvre is undeniable and all but demands intensive study.

“Who Was Saved?”:  
Thomas Pynchon’s Sheltering Spaces

Pressed to identify one central theme running throughout the entirety of Thomas Pynchon’s work, readers would probably hit upon the author’s depiction of the seemingly eternal struggle between the preterite (a term which appears frequently in Pynchon studies, and sometimes in Pynchon’s work itself, most closely referring to those whom society has left behind—the damned as opposed to the elect) and various forms of authority. The conspiracies detailed in Pynchon’s labyrinthine plots serve to establish authoritarianism as a pervasive, nearly omnipotent force in society. Because of this, Pynchon depicts those who stand in opposition to such authority (the marijuana farmers and radical student organizations in *Vineland*, for instance) or who merely exist on the outer edges of society (the truly oppressed and underprivileged) as creating or appropriating spaces of their own. Such shelters provide an environment in which the downtrodden can not only organize against the forces of authoritarianism, but also substantialize their own identities. However, Pynchon’s portrayal of such communities cannot be read as wholly positive. Indeed, the various communal spaces Pynchon depicts often prove corruptible or prone to failure, indicating the author’s complex or ambivalent relationship with some of the ideals expressed by the ostensibly good or righteous groups inhabiting such spaces. Ultimately, the sheltering spaces of Pynchon’s novels, and the communities that create and attempt to sustain them, serve as a way for the author to reckon with the readership most receptive to his work—a group that may perceive itself, correctly or not, as existing on the fringe of society.

To be clear, differences exist between the literal and metaphorical “shelters” that Pynchon depicts—spaces ostensibly designed to protect inhabitants from harm versus spaces that serve “merely” to provide the preterite with access to a self-defined interiority. Perhaps the most famous example of literal, physically sheltering space in Pynchon’s oeuvre occurs in the first

pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*, when Captain Geoffrey “Pirate” Prentice dreams (or perhaps merely *envisions*—an important distinction once the reader learns, a bit later, that Prentice has “a strange talent for—well, for getting inside the fantasies of others: being able, actually, to take over the burden of managing them” [Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 12]) of an emergency evacuation occurring in then-present WWII London. But the procedure is “all theatre” (3), providing no real hope of salvation for the remaining evacuees, those without the means or ability to escape the bombing: “drunks, old veterans still in shock from ordnance 20 years obsolete, hustlers in city clothes, derelicts, exhausted women with more children than it seems could belong to anyone” (3). Pynchon uses the phrase “second sheep” (3) to describe these men and women. In his *Companion* to the novel, Steven C. Weisenburger identifies this as a reference to the Calvinist terminology for the preterite, “those predestined for abandonment at the moment of Christ’s apocalyptic return, in contrast to the elect who are predestined for redemption” (17).

This metaphor—a group of the damned hoping in vain for divine salvation—serves as an especially concise summary of the relationship between the state and the lowest rank of its citizenry. In this particular case, evacuation does not even take the preterite away from London, but further into the city (“No, this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive *knotting into*” [Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 3-4]). Taken along with the evacuees on a ride through archways and overpasses, seeming to move underground, “and it is poorer the deeper they go... ruinous secret cities of poor, places whose names he has never heard” (4). At their destination, an abandoned hotel, the evacuees wait in desolate rooms for the end to come, and consider the societal forces that placed them here: “Each has been hearing a voice, one he thought was talking

only to him, say, ‘You didn’t really believe you’d be saved. Come, we all know who we are by now. No one was ever going to take the trouble to save *you*, old fellow...’” (4).

Although ostensibly fulfilling its duty to provide the evacuees with some form of shelter, the state, in this vision as in reality, fails in actually protecting these last few citizens, British society having deemed them dispensable long before the bombs started to drop. Interestingly, Prentice inserts himself into this vision, seemingly among the preterite himself, riding along with them to the hotel, privy to their final gloomy thoughts. If the reader accepts the evacuation as one of Prentice’s own dreams, the sequence can be read as an extrapolation of his own fears of dying while on duty in London—that he views himself as another victim of the state’s mismanagement of the war and its agents. Indeed, critic Vaska Tumor’s reading of the novel’s opening sequence divests the state of divine authority. She argues that “while in Biblical prophetic literature, war and urban destruction are presented as acts of divine correction and selection, here there are no distinctions among the victims of the rocket” (Tumor, 138). Not only does the evacuation drive the preterite underground into a space of darkness, the process takes Prentice along with it. His service to the state won’t protect him, nor, as Tumor states, does the city provide safety to anyone: “Conceived as a place of shelter, now, under the grim unpredictability of the rocket, the city becomes a site of terror rather than protection” (145).

Perhaps even worse, the reader may also interpret Prentice’s vision as one of the surrogate fantasies Prentice experiences on behalf of the governmental officials (which he is expected to do because “at this time mentally healthy leaders and other historical figures are indispensable” and taking on their daydreams helps “cup and bleed them of excess anxiety” [12]). In such a reading, Prentice’s vision would seem to indicate feelings of guilt on behalf of



the State—and perhaps explains why such a daydream would be thrust upon Prentice to experience instead, freeing the ruling class from worries about of the underclass.

While the vision-evacuation may be understood as either Prentice’s nightmare or the daydream of an anxious figure of authority, the novel provides other examples of the State’s relationship with the preterite—particularly with “The White Visitation.” Originally a mental hospital (“asylum” is perhaps more accurate), the space has since been mostly taken over by the Special Operations Executive to serve as the base for PISCES (“Psychological Intelligence Schemes for Expediting Surrender” [35]). Specifically, PISCES seeks to cultivate the supposed abilities of “clairvoyants and mad magicians, telekinetics, astral travelers, gatherers of light” (40) to aid in “psychological warfare” (35). Prentice serves as one of PISCES’ subjects, at their command, and his presence inadvertently complicates the reader’s understanding of “The White Visitation.”

While it may tempt the reader to dismiss the notion of magical or psychic operatives, they do seem to legitimately exist in the world of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Prentice’s telepathic receptivity to others’ fantasies attests to this. However, PISCES *uses* its subjects and denies them access to freedom—much of the novel tracks the progress of Tyrone Slothrop as he attempts to evade PISCES. The organization’s transformation of what was once ostensibly a place devoted to psychiatric wellness into a base of operations for mental warfare represents a marked difference between peace- and wartime London, and speaks to the dehumanizing effects of warfare in general. Of course Foucault scholars would argue that a mental hospital could never *truly* help those whom society has labeled as mentally unwell, and the “The White Visitation” only represents the fulfillment of the state’s true wishes for the preterite. Indeed, the act of forcing

labor from those who may well have been patients before the War began aligns with Foucault's historical understanding of the asylum:

Before having the medical meaning we give it, or that at least we like to suppose it has, confinement was required by something quite different from any concern with curing the sick. What made it necessary was an imperative of labor. Our philanthropy prefers to recognize the signs of a benevolence toward sickness where there is only a condemnation of idleness. (Foucault, 128)

It's worth noting that a relatively small section of "The White Visitation," the D Wing, maintains its original purpose, "still housing a few genuine patients" (Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 141) as a way to mask the facility's true interests. The residents here, however, are of almost no importance to PISCES. For the most part, the PISCES faculty avoids interaction with the "skeleton of regular staff" that remains on the grounds, "only rarely finding opportunity to swap information on therapies or symptoms" (141). But given the fragile state of many of the PISCES operatives (and staff), the division between patient and employee seems based not so much on mental health as usefulness to the state. In either case, the fact that "The White Visitation" maintains its façade as a way to cover for PISCES' presence underscores the state's lack of interest in providing a truly sheltering space for the preterite.

If the preterite cannot depend upon institutionalized authority to provide them with shelter, they have to take matters into their own hands—as evidenced by the Malta section in Pynchon's first novel, *V*. Writing a letter to his daughter, Paola, and drawing from the diaries he kept at the time, Fausto Maijstral recounts life on Malta during the WWII bombing raids. The reader witnesses Fausto's transformation from an optimistic poet-in-training and (metaphorical) "builder," to a man driven to hide with his family in makeshift shelters along with the rest of the island's inhabitants who, like the British preterite of Prentice's dream in *Gravity's Rainbow*, were not able to leave before the bombing started:

I write this during a night raid, down in the abandoned sewer... The only fight [sic] is from phosphorus flares above the city, a few candles in here, bombs. Elena is beside me, holding the child who sleeps drooling against her shoulder. Packed close round us are other Maltese, English civil servants, a few Indian tradesmen. (Pynchon, *V.*, 340)

After some time, Fausto tries to take a more optimistic view of their situation, reading some religious penance, and perhaps safeguard, into the act of constructing and reconstructing what shelter they can manage from the earth:

Surely if war has any nobility it is in the rebuilding not the destruction. A few portable searchlights (they are at a premium) for us to see by. So with pick, shovel and rake we reshape our Maltese earth for those game little Spitfires.

But isn't it a way of glorifying God? Hard-labour surely. But as if somewhere once without our knowledge we'd been condemned for a term in prison. With the next raid all our filling and leveling is blasted away into pits and rubble piles which must then be refilled and relevelled only to be destroyed again...

...but no complaints. Are we not, Maltese, English and the few Americans, one? There is, we are taught, a communion of saints in heaven. So perhaps on Earth, also in this Purgatory, a communion: not of gods or heroes, merely men, expiating sins they are not aware of... (347)

The act of construction, meager though it may be, helps to create a sense of community among disparate people. This unexpectedly beneficial aspect of the War serves, as critic David J. Alworth notes, as a rejoinder not only to the Italian forces that seek to destroy Malta in the novel, but also to certain fears present in the Cold War-era America in which the present-day narrative of *V.* takes place, and in which the novel itself was published in 1961. Alworth argues that Pynchon's depiction of Malta "comes to represent America without resembling it" ("Pynchon's Malta"). Noting the cultural discussion around fallout shelters occurring around the time of the novel's publication, Alworth posits that the Maltese shelters in *V.* present a model of how a society might come together in the face of immediate mortal danger.

The United States' national fallout shelter program had, at the time, been met with skepticism. Alworth points to a particular episode of *The Twilight Zone* that aired that same

year, in which a suburban community, faced with what it believes to be an impending nuclear attack, attacks itself as everyone attempts to secure space in the neighborhood shelter. As with many episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, the plot was seen as a direct commentary on then-contemporary life in America: “This episode dramatized what Kenneth D. Rose calls the ‘new morality necessary for the nuclear age,’ anticipating the failure... of individuals and families to negotiate ‘personal ethics and relationships with [their] neighbors’ in the event of a nuclear attack” (Alworth, “Pynchon’s Malta”). But Alworth recognizes Pynchon’s portrayal of the Maltese citizens’ effort to construct their own communal shelters as the author’s way of presenting another, much more positive, path forward: “The shelters in Pynchon’s novel, limestone caves beneath ruined city streets, hardly resemble fortified basements in suburban homes or high schools, but nevertheless realize the ideals of the national fallout shelter program” (“Pynchon’s Malta”). In Alworth’s reading, the narrative purpose of the Maltese shelters is not simply to advocate for the creation of literal sheltering spaces—the protection the shelters offer the people is not the point. Rather, the most constructive benefit the shelters provide is the creation of a communal space that brings people together, uniting them across difference in service of a common goal: “the shelters, and the social solidarity that they help to sustain, reshape Cold War politics, giving it a decidedly utopian cast” (“Pynchon’s Malta”).

The idea of shelters performing a more community-oriented service, rather than simply serving as a physically protective shell, aligns with the presentation of such spaces in the rest of Pynchon’s work. Indeed, most of the sheltering spaces in the author’s novels exist primarily to allow the subjugated or underprivileged access to communion with like-minded individuals. Pynchon explores this idea in other sections of *V.*, set in the then-nearly-contemporary world of late-‘50s New York City.

Many of the novel's younger American characters spend their days wandering the city streets, half-heartedly looking for work, and riding the subway—"yo-yoing" up and down Manhattan, seemingly without any permanent, fixed location to call home. Benny Profane, having recently been discharged from the Navy, seems particularly rootless. Described as having been "born in a Hooverville" (Pynchon, *V.*, 24) and noted in the first chapter as having recently spent time "road laboring and when there wasn't work just traveling, up and down the east coast like a yo-yo" (2), Profane's transient lifestyle mirrors the attitudes of the other young people he meets in the city. When Profane meets "a crowd of disaffected which someone had labeled the Whole Sick Crew" and learns "[t]hey lived half their time in a bar on the lower West Side," he thinks back to the sailor's bar of his recent past "and could not see much of a difference" (29-30). Although less regimented than the Navy with which Profane served until discharged, the young people of *V.*'s New York City have created a community that comes together in specific spaces set aside for interaction.

Both Profane and the Whole Sick Crew rely on communal sleeping spaces, for instance—and not just in the sense of legitimately splitting an apartment, as Rachel, Profane's erstwhile girlfriend, does with her roommate Esther. Many individuals within this particular scene cannot afford hefty NYC rent, a financial condition that reifies their relative outsider status within society. When Profane arrives in the City, he "found a mattress at a downtown flophouse called Our Home, and a newspaper at an uptown kiosk; roamed the streets late that night studying the classified by streetlight. As usual nobody wanted him in particular" (31). When Profane finds the Whole Sick Crew, he's finally met the people with whom he feels a certain kinship, the people who "want him"—but his living conditions don't change all that much: "Rachel decided to lodge Profane at Winsome's place and feed him at her own. Winsome's was known to the

Crew as the West Side flophouse. There was floor space there for all of them at once, and Winsome didn't mind who slept on it" (240). The communal atmosphere the Whole Sick Crew creates—the transient-yet-together ethos of the group—prefigures the hippie scene that Pynchon would later explore. But while the Whole Sick Crew's attitudes toward communal shelter may seem admirable (and certainly helps those fortunate enough to be "in" with the Crew), their spatial security, when compared to the truly oppressed of the City, indicates that the Crew possesses a somewhat naïve appreciation of shelter.

The complementary (or, some might argue, competing) narrative in *V.*—in which Herbert Stencil attempts to find a mysterious woman (the titular V.) from his late father's past, tracking her through various sociopolitical revolutions around the world—serves as a silent commentary on the Profane storyline and its relative frivolity. While both Stencil and the Whole Sick Crew spend the majority of the novel traveling, the former's journey (and the various documents he finds along the way) expose him to the troubles of the world's preterite, the ones who truly lack shelter (such as the Herero population decimated by genocide), while the latter mostly jump from one "flophouse" to the next, concerned with romantic entanglements or crummy odd-jobs. The juxtaposition between the two narrative strands reveals the transient nature of the Whole Sick Crew as more of a beatnik affectation, their lack of permanent living quarters a choice rather than a condition imposed upon them by authoritarian forces. Pynchon furthers this observation by establishing the presence of the preterite within the City, in the form of New York's homeless.

Interestingly the City's homeless seem almost more settled, more in place, than citizens with ready access to stable or guaranteed shelter. Interestingly, the homeless in *V.* show up primarily in bus stations and subway cars—spaces associated with movement and transportation,

almost as if to emphasize the idea of constant transience without destination. In *V.*, the homeless are only “permanent residents” (32) of the subway, as seen in this depiction of the post-rush hour scene: “Since sunup all manner of affluent have filled the limits of that world with a sense of summer and life; now sleeping bums and old ladies on relief, who have been there all along unnoticed, re-establish a kind of property right, and the coming on of a falling season” (32). A bit later, Profane, while out job-hunting, notices another homeless man:

On the Lexington Avenue downtown he saw a bum lying across the aisle, diagonal on the seat. Nobody would sit near him. He was king of the subway. He must have been there all night, yo-yoing out to Brooklyn and back, tons of water swirling over his head and he perhaps dreaming his own submarine country, peopled by mermaids and deep-sea galleons; must have slept through rush hour, with all sorts of suit-wearers and high heel dolls glaring at him because he was taking up three sitting spaces but none of them daring to wake him. If under the street and under the sea are the same then he was king of both. (231)

Profane attempts to attribute to the homeless man his own affinity for “yo-yoing,” spinning dispossession into a kind of sovereignty, conflating the other passengers’ distaste for the man as a kind of respect (“king of the subway... none of them daring to wake him”), but it doesn’t quite stick. Using a close third-person perspective to indicate Profane’s naïve, patronizing view of the City’s homeless, Pynchon indicates to the reader the myopia of the Whole Sick Crew. What appears to Profane as a kind of freedom to which he might aspire, is in reality an indication of larger systemic inequality under capitalistic forces. Though many members of the Whole Sick Crew may not have a space of their own, they certainly have access to a more private space (shared amongst themselves) than the homeless riding the subway do.

Albert Rolls, writing about Pynchon’s later NYC-set novel, *Bleeding Edge*, emphasizes the difference Pynchon places between property and shelter. The novel’s opening, in which private investigator Maxine Tarnow walks her sons to school, provides a mini-panorama of the Upper West Side circa 2001. Against the backdrop of trees and storefronts, “Unsheltered people

sleep in doorways” (Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 2). Yet, as Rolls’ research indicates, Pynchon’s language here does not match the excerpt that originally appeared in the publisher’s catalogue. Originally, the line read: “[u]nhoused people sleep in doorways,’ but by the time the Advanced Reading copy had reached reviewers, ‘unhoused’ had been changed to ‘unsheltered,’ an edit that remained in place...” (Rolls, 1). Rolls argues Pynchon changed the wording for reasons potentially more significant than an improvement in the sentence’s sound. Although the words “unsheltered” and “unhoused” may seem nearly synonymous, Rolls reads Pynchon’s edit as hinting toward some of the questions of authority and space the author has been pondering over throughout his career: “Could Pynchon be asking us to make a distinction between the ‘unhoused’ and the ‘unsheltered,’ between those who are without homes and those who are without beds in shelters and hence as far outside the system as it is possible to get in the city?” (1-2).

Interestingly, although the opening scene of *Bleeding Edge* comes to the reader filtered through the close third-person perspective of Maxine, Rolls notes that the word “unsheltered” hardly fits into the standard NYC vocabulary. Instead, “the colloquial term that New Yorkers most often use to talk about those asleep in doorways, on subway cars, on park benches, or in any other unsanctioned sleeping areas... is, “homeless” (1). In Rolls’ reading, the unusual, jarring word choice indicates the presence of an obvious authorial hand—one perhaps guiding the reader towards a closer examination of the forces that control space in the City and determine who has access to shelter. The distinction that Rolls reads into Pynchon’s specific word choice in *Bleeding Edge* could also apply to broader depictions of the preterite in *V*. The community the Whole Sick Crew creates, in part, by their repudiation of traditional engagement in the real estate market (for the most part rejecting both private ownership and legitimate rental arrangements in



favor of “crashing” in flophouses or Winsome’s place), encases them in a kind of social bubble that preserves their own relative innocence of the outside world.

Pynchon plays with the idea of space creating a seal around its inhabitants, closing them off from the outside world—often for the worse—in his other works. Perhaps most notably, *The Crying of Lot 49* begins with Oedipa Maas returning to her suburban California home from, of all things, a Tupperware party—a gathering in which housewives invite friends and neighbors into their homes to sell them the ubiquitous plastic leftovers containers, effectively transforming the sacred living room into a site of potential engagement with capitalist forces beyond even the hostess’ recognition or control. But the reader can suppose that Oedipa *enjoys* Tupperware parties (aside from this particular hostess having “put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue” [Pynchon, *Crying*, 1]). After all, Oedipa’s surroundings reflect all the trappings of contended ‘60s domesticity: a downtown grocery market just sophisticated enough to play muzak over its PA system; a living room of her own, outfitted with a TV and issues of *Scientific American*; a kitchen in which she can make lasagna from scratch... All of which comes together to create a façade that shatters into pieces when she receives word that her ex-lover, real estate mogul Pierce Inverarity, has died and named her executor of his will. The journey that Oedipa takes from there frees her from her hermetically sealed suburban existence and exposes her to another side of America—an America stranger and more frightening than she realized could exist. The novel ends on a cliffhanger, never resolving the central mysteries of its byzantine plot, but Oedipa herself has changed. A certain comfortable innocence, represented and reified in her mundane existence in Kinneret-Among-The-Pines, has vanished.

But the executorship only represents the latest instance of Inverarity attempting to get Oedipa to pop her spatial bubble. After receiving news of his death, Oedipa remembers a time in

their relationship when they went to an art gallery in Mexico City. Taking in Remedios Varo's triptych, "Bordando el Manto Terrestre," Oedipa finds herself overcome by emotion. The painting depicts "a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void... and the tapestry was the world" (11). The image resonates with Oedipa, who had lately come to view herself as playing "the curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret" (10). But not Kinneret alone—Oedipa realizes she carries her metaphorical tower with her wherever she goes, that "Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there'd been no escape" (11). This is true—Inverarity doesn't completely "free" Oedipa during their relationship. He does, however, lead Oedipa, however indirectly (like taking her to see the Varo triptych, or imposing a quest upon her as executor of his will), to become aware of her own sheltered existence. The suburbs are Oedipa's tower made real. By removing Oedipa from her suburban surroundings, Inverarity's quest takes her out of that *figurative* space as well.

Another example of space serving to preserve a kind of innocence or escape from one's surroundings can be found early in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in the form of the abandoned house Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake find in bombed-out London's stay-away zone. The two lovers must keep their romance a secret: not only is their romance adultery-adjacent (Jessica has a boyfriend), it seems almost unpatriotic. Roger works in the Psi Section of The White Visitation, and Jessica's boyfriend, Jeremy Beaver, also serves the State as part of Operation Backfire, a rocket retrieval unit—this sort of interoffice affair could be seen as a deliberate blow against morale. The site of their shelter compounds the transgressive nature of their romance. As critic Heikki Raudaskoski points out, "not only is their relationship illicit, or semi-illicit; their

love nest is illegal too” (121). More importantly, the clandestine meeting space Roger and Jessica create serves as a place where the two lovers can, to a certain degree, act out a kind of defiance against the state and other forces that perpetuate conflict—a union that, although briefly and imperfectly (both Roger and Jessica find wartime anxieties creeping in), allows them the space to distance themselves from obligations to the war machine: “They are in love. Fuck the war” (Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, 42).

Interestingly, while domestic space served as a kind of prison for Oedipa (albeit, one in which the prisoner was at first not fully aware of her captivity), Roger and Jessica choose to furnish the abandoned house with some familiar comforts in an attempt to transform the space into a kind of pre- or postwar oasis: “Roger’s managed to scare up a few chickens to nest in the empty garage... one always remembers to bring a fresh flower or two. Day begins with a hot cup and a cigarette over a little table with a weak leg that Roger has repaired, provisionally, with brown twine” (42). Even though the very nature of the stay-away zone means that the two lovers place themselves in proximity to physical danger, the temporary possession of a home allows them to act out, and therefore reify, their own fantasy of a stable life together.

Unfortunately, this sort of fantasy cannot last. When the war ends, so does their relationship, and, with it, the temporary shelter of the abandoned house. While this particular shelter space allowed Roger and Jessica expression of a certain kind of interiority, it depended upon the exterior condition of the war in order to work. In other words, Roger and Jessica’s love nest was always due to collapse, either physically (due to bombing) or metaphorically. Pynchon plays with this idea of the inevitable failure of sheltering spaces in later works as well, most notably in his examination of Californian counterculture in his novel *Vineland*.

By the time Pynchon published this novel in 1990, more than enough time had passed to allow for a somber reflection on the failure of the hippies to enact lasting changes in American society. While the obstacles posed by authoritarian and capitalist forces receive some of the blame, Pynchon makes sure to address what he perceives as inherent flaws in the hippies' communal lifestyle that may have precipitated their social collapse. *Vineland*, set in 1984, presents Zoyd Wheeler as an archetype of the aging hippie: jaded and half-heartedly bowing to the pressures of capitalism by picking up some landscaping work here and there (while also collecting government-issued benefits for a perceived mental disability—for which to continue he must commit one “publicly crazy” [3] act each year). One thing that separates Zoyd from some of the other former flower children in *Vineland* is the fact that he owns a house. Among a few of the diehards attempting to hold on to their youth, Zoyd's friend Van Meter among them, the idea of communal space still seems more appealing. However, since the true communes have mostly disappeared in the years since Woodstock, these hippies have to settle for a pay-by-the-week motel. The strain of this living situation reveals some less than flattering characteristics that contradict the ostensibly peaceful atmosphere the hippies professed to enjoy:

[Zoyd's] old bass player and troublemaking companion had been living here for years, in what he still described as a commune, with an astounding number of current and ex-old ladies, ex-old ladies' boyfriends, children of parent combinations present and absent, plus miscellaneous folks in and out of the night... Instead of a quiescent solution to all the overpop, the “commune” chose an energetic one—bickering. Unrelenting and high-decibel, it was bickering raised to the level of ceremony, bickering that soon generated its own house newsletter, the Blind-Side Gazette, bickering that could be heard even out on the freeway by drivers hurtling eighteen wheelers, some of whom thought it was radio malfunction, other unquiet ghosts. (9-10)

The close physical proximity supposedly desired by proponents of communal living has become the very thing threatening to tear the shelter apart. Rather than providing access to the kind of self-defining otherness the hippies need in an America that has moved past the idealism

of the sixties toward the capitalist fever of the eighties, this attempt at creating a communal space has merely exposed their inability to embody the characteristics they preached to others. Critic Hans Gumbrecht, writing about the moods and cultural climates that cultivate *stimmung*, recognizes the danger that close physical proximity poses to the hippies, how attempts to recreate the idealized communes of their twenties inevitably fail, arguing that his own cohort “has dragged on for more than four decades since the late Sixties, condemned to an eternal youth” (94), and that “we have become a generation of often infantile old people” (99). Van Meter and his roommates don’t seem to realize that their quasi-commune has only exacerbated the complications of living with another person tenfold—a situation made even more complicated when each member seemingly shuns realistic personal growth or a willingness to adapt to the changing outside world.

Zoyd avoids communal life in the present, perhaps because he experienced its frustrations during the hippie heyday of the sixties. During Zoyd’s lunchtime meeting with longtime foe DEA agent Hector Zuñiga to discuss the whereabouts of Zoyd’s ex-wife Frenesi, the conversation turns to memories of stoner vs. cop interactions in the ‘60s. In those days, “Zoyd was living down south... sharing a house in Gordita Beach with elements of a surfer band... along with friends more or less transient” (Pynchon, *Vineland*, 22). Much like the ‘50s NYC crash pads of the Whole Sick Crew in *V.*, the shacks on Gordita Beach serve as a sheltering space for a group of like-minded individuals who separate themselves from what they view as an authoritarian mainstream. Ironically, the nearly suburban uniformity of the houses within the surfer village also serve as a sort of limited protection against DEA shakedowns (“all these identical-looking beach pads beginning to blend together, resulting in more than enough mistaken addresses [24]), while the arrangement of the structures themselves provide spaces for

the hippies to run for cover (“The arrangements of hillside levels, alleyways, corners, and rooftops created a Casbah topography that was easy to get lost in quickly” [25]). Because the shelter makes itself difficult for an authoritarian presence to penetrate by force, Hector and the other DEA agents had to find an interior weakness to exploit:

“Situations back then,” Zoyd hammered it on in, these many years later, “relationships, sure got tangled up in that house, with more and also less temporary love partners and sex companions, jealousy and revenge always goin’ on, plus substance dealers and their go-betweens, narcs who thought they were undercover trying to pop them, couple-three politicals fleein’ from different jurisdictions, good deal of comin’ and goin’ ‘s what it was, not to mention you [Hector] actin’ like it was you own personal snitch Safeway, just drop in, we’re open 24 hours.” (25)

Because the close living quarters inflame various tensions, alliances, and betrayals, the hippies serve as relatively easy targets for Hector, or any other representative of authority, to flip. Even spaces explicitly reclaimed by more activist-minded hippies are prone to self-destruction—for example, *Vineland*’s depiction of the revolution at the fictional College of the Surf. Located between “the two ultraconservative counties of Orange and San Diego” (204), the College presented itself as a place devoted to authoritarian studies, “offering courses in law enforcement, business administration, [and] the brand-new field of Computer Science” (204). A giant statue-in-progress of then-governor Richard Nixon looms from the nearby cliff “gazing not out to sea but inland, towering above the campus architecture” (205). The students themselves are appropriately straight-laced, reflecting the conservative atmosphere of the college, until the day the phantom scent of marijuana wafts its way into Dewey Webster Plaza, instigating a campus-wide epiphany and subsequent revolt against both the campus authorities and the police. The students soon discover that the college’s true nature:

It came to light that College of the Surf was no institution of learning at all, but had been an elaborate land developers’ deal from the beginning, only disguised as a gift to the people. Five years’ depreciation and then the plan was to start putting

in cliffside vacation units. So, in the name of the people, the kids decided to take it back, and knowing the state was in on the scheme at all levels... they chose to secede from California and become a nation of their own, which following a tumultuous nightlong get-together on the subject they decided to name, after the one constant they knew they could count on never to die, The People's Republic of Rock and Roll. (209)

Of course, the dramatic irony here (by the time Pynchon published the novel, rock music had "died" multiple times, supplanted by disco, rap, and a host of other genres) hints at the hubris and shortsightedness of the newly formed commune. When Frenesi (secretly working as a double agent for Brock Vond, a federal agent with whom she carries on a torrid affair) arrives on the scene with the rest of her film-based activist group, 24fps, she finds it easy to infiltrate the suddenly liberated communal atmosphere and, through a series of romantic liaisons, turn the students against one another and their leader, Weed Atman, resulting in Weed's death. The People's Republic of Rock and Roll collapses, naturally, allowing for the authorities to swoop in and round up the students.

The ability for authoritarian forces to use the communes' inherent disorganization as an opportunity for infiltration and destruction indicates Pynchon's skepticism regarding such ostensibly sheltering spaces. Indeed, the freedom these communities sought provides the framework for their downfall—in rejecting nearly all forms of authority, such spaces fail to function as a cohesive unit. Theorist David Harvey, writing about communities, recognizes that communities must organize some control, or their sustainability remains doubtful:

This means that systems of authority, consensus-formation and 'rules of belonging' must be set up and these inevitably become exclusionary in certain respects and even controlling of the social processes that grounded solidarity in the first instance...

This points to a singular and important conclusion: although community "in itself" has meaning as part of a broader politics, community "for itself" almost invariably degenerates into regressive exclusions and fragmentations. (192-193)

When, years later, during their lunchtime rendezvous, Hector asks Doc, mockingly, “Who was saved?” (Pynchon, *Vineland*, 29) by all the hippies’ idealism and half-baked plans for communal living, the reader can be forgiven for thinking that Pynchon himself has soured on the idea of sheltering space. However, while Pynchon may accept what he sees as the inherent failure of the commune, he still provides the reader with an example of effective *personal* shelter. Early in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, after Prentice wakes from his dream/vision of the purposefully inadequate evacuation of London’s unprivileged, he makes his way through his sleeping comrades-in-arms onto the roof of the maisonette he and his fellow servicemen have commandeered (serving, yes, as a kind of flophouse). There, Prentice seeks temporary refuge, from both his peers and the war itself, in a glass hothouse he constructed himself. The soil within the hothouse consists of generations worth of tenants’ contributions to compost: manure from livestock quartered, improbably, on the roof; dead plants; even “the odd un stomachable meal thrown or vomited there by this or that sensitive epicurean—all scumbled together, eventually, by the knives of the seasons, to an impasto, feet thick... in which anything could grow, not the least being bananas” (Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, 6). The hothouse replicates an environment—“another season, however falsely preserved” (7), someplace warm, a place where bananas grow—so completely unlike wintery wartime London that it provides Prentice with a temporary respite from his life. Even when he sees an incoming German rocket on the horizon, the hothouse provides him with just enough semblance of purpose—he’s there to gather fruit for one of his famous banana breakfasts—that he’s able (just barely) to manage to carry on and not completely give in to his fear of obliteration. It’s an imperfect, temporary shelter, indeed, but one that grants Prentice a space for reflection and confrontation with his fears—which, paradoxically, provides him with the fortitude to return to the war.



Such temporary shelters may be the best one can hope for in Pynchon's works. Any attempt to leave the outside world permanently, to remain sheltered for too long, runs the risk of insulating oneself in a destructive "bubble." Pynchon *does* present the reader with examples of sheltering space, allowing his characters access to alternate modes of being as well as an escape from authority. Eventually, however, both reader and character must confront the world from which they sought escape. The struggle between the preterite and systemic authority cannot be won in hiding.

### Changing Places: Pynchon's Representations of Mutable Space

While the previous chapter focused on Pynchon's depiction of sheltering spaces—structures that enable or cultivate communion—readers familiar with Pynchon's body of work should recognize that the author devotes at least as much attention to more mundane spaces that fail to provide the preterite with an escape from antagonistic forces. Indeed, narratives concerning private property and land use provide Pynchon with the opportunity to make explicit the conflict between the underprivileged members of society and authoritarian forces. Often, this struggle manifests itself through transformed or transforming space—as seen through the effects of gentrification, for example. Pynchon's focus on the possession or ownership of property, as well as the mutable nature of constructed places invites further study into ethical considerations of spatiality.

Transformed space has been a topic on Pynchon's mind since at least 1966, when he wrote about the aftermath of the Watts riots in a non-fiction piece for the *New York Times*. In the article, "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts," Pynchon examines the atmosphere of racial tension through a guided tour of the neighborhood, perhaps a necessary service for the *Times*' readership, given that "Watts is country which lies, psychologically, uncounted miles further than most whites seem at present willing to travel" ("Journey"). Although Pynchon details the "lots whose buildings were burned off them... still waiting vacant and littered with garbage," ("Journey") he also presents what might be considered a potential path forward for the residents: the Watts Towers. Pynchon describes how, from decades of detritus found in the Watts neighborhood, "both the real and emotional one" ("Journey"), artist Simon Rodia was able to create a space of freedom and hope: "his own dream of how things should have been: a fantasy of fountains, boats, tall openwork spires, encrusted with a dazzling mosaic of Watts debris"

(“Journey”). The article ends with a glimpse at a neighborhood “‘Renaissance of the Arts,’ a kind of festival in memory of Simon Rodia” (who had recently died), including local work inspired by the Watts Towers: “a roomful of sculptures fashioned entirely from found objects—found, symbolically enough, and in the Simon Rodia tradition, among the wreckage the rioting had left. Exploiting textures of charred wood, twisted metal, fused glass, many of the works were fine, honest rebirths” (“Journey”). Importantly, this potential for rebirth turns away from the white establishment’s idea of capitalist creation (for the Watts Towers themselves serve as works of pure art—anti-capitalist space that cannot be rented out as commercial or residential property). From the tangible fragments of a consumerist society (“busted glass, busted crockery, nails, tin cans, all kinds of scrap and waste” [“Journey”]), those who follow Rodia’s example years after his contribution to Watts work toward the creation of a new space—one striving toward freedom from exploitive systems of control.

But in the fictionalized California of Pynchon’s 2009 novel, *Inherent Vice*, the author presents no such example of spatial liberation. The Watts riots haunt the narrative, as does the segregationist real estate industry that sought to deny the dream of homeownership to African-Americans and other members of the subjugated classes. Ostensibly a ‘70s-era riff on the classic L.A. detective genre (in which private detective Larry “Doc” Sportello attempts to track down both his ex-girlfriend Shasta Fey Hepworth and her married lover, development magnate Mickey Wolfmann), *Inherent Vice* maintains a strong focus on the movement of twentieth-century real estate—particularly as it relates to gentrification and the destruction of community.

Channel View Estates, one of Wolfmann’s latest real estate ventures, serves as the novel’s primary example of unethical land development. Described by Doc’s real estate agent Aunt Reet as an “assault on the environment” and a “chipboard horror” (Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*,

8), the “Concept” turns out to be something both more mundane and insidious. A former resident of the site upon which Channel View Estates now sits under construction, Black Guerilla Family member Tariq Khalil hires Doc to find Glen Charlock, one of Tariq’s old prison acquaintances, currently employed by Wolfmann. Tariq cannot approach the developer’s sites to look for Glen himself because Wolfmann has hired members of the Aryan Brotherhood for protection. Another reason for Tariq to fear Wolfmann: he’s responsible for the obliteration of Tariq’s old neighborhood, and the displacement of its residents, to make way for Channel View Estates (“Nobody and nothing. Ghost town. Except for this big sign, ‘Coming Soon on This Site,’ houses for peckerwood prices, shopping mall, some shit. Guess who the builder is on it.” [17]).

Doc checks a map and notices the site is located near Artesia Boulevard, which surprises him, given Tariq’s black ethnicity. Tariq explains: “Before the war a lot of South Central was still a Japanese neighborhood. Those people got sent to the camps, we come on in to be the next Japs” (17). In Tariq’s eyes, the new development is an act of retaliation by “The Man” for the Watts riots. But authoritarian forces behind the real estate industry may need no motivation for such displacement other than “business as usual.” Channel View Estates represents only the most recent effort from land developers to gentrify California. Even beloved cultural institutions have a dark history behind their construction “as Aunt Reet never tired of pointing out. 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, *Inherent Vice*, 17).

Doc’s own neighborhood, Gordita Beach, has its own problems with segregationist land use. Upon meeting Tariq, Doc thinks about how unusual it is to see a black man in the area

(“black folks were occasionally spotted west of Harbor Freeway, but to see one this far out of the usual range, practically by the ocean, was pretty rare” [14]), and remembers a specific anecdote—again from around the same time as the Japanese Internment:

...shortly after the Second World War... a black family had actually tried to move into town and the citizens, with helpful advice from the Ku Klux Klan, had burned the place into the ground and then, as if some ancient curse had come into effect, refused to allow another house ever to be built on the site... where the youth of Gordita Beach, by the laws of karmic adjustment, were soon gathering at night to drink, dope, and fuck, depressing their parents, though not property values particularly. (14)

While the residents of Gordita Beach may have felt depressed, the black family chased out of the neighborhood surely felt worse. Although the former residents of the site where Wolfmann intends to build his latest “Concept” may not have been forced out through physical acts of violence and terror, the gentrification process that displaced them has its roots in the same discriminatory beliefs that animated the Klan and, indeed, has haunted California development as a whole. In the introduction to their anthology of criticism, *Pynchon’s California*, editors Scott McClintock and John Miller note:

California has a complex history of repeated settlement and resettlement, of successive uses of the land superseding and attempting to erase preceding uses. The state is often represented as a place in which the new is privileged over what little history there might be, and this process of erasure and reconstruction always seems to resurface in Pynchon’s California. (McClintock and Miller, “Introduction”)

True to this tradition, Wolfmann has removed every recognizable trace of Tariq’s old neighborhood (“Not there. Grindit up into li’l pieces. Seagulls all pickin at it,” as Tariq puts it. [Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 16]). Uninterested in even a cursory attempt at architectural palimpsest, Wolfmann has replaced the existing buildings with prefabricated structures. Pynchon juxtaposes the reaction of the displaced black ex-residents against the white, prospective homeowners Doc observes when he sees Channel View Estates for himself:

There were the expected local couples who couldn't wait to have a look at the next OPPOS, as Aunt Reet tended to call most tract houses of her acquaintance... Doc spotted black pedestrians, bewildered as Tariq must have been, maybe also looking for the old neighborhood, for rooms lived in day after day, solid as the axes of space, now taken away into commotion and ruin. (19)

Of course, the new houses that have taken the place of the old neighborhood aren't meant to be of high quality: "Commanding filtered views of an all-but-neglected branch of the Dominguez Flood Control Channel... more or less Spanish Colonial with not-necessarily-load-bearing little balconies and red-tile roofs, meant to suggest higher-priced towns..." (20). Much as Wolfmann transformed the site (and swept away its former residents), the language with which he advertises the site ("Channel View," "Estates," "Concept") transforms the shoddy construction into something desirable for a white, middle-class market. The reality beneath the Estates' veneer seems almost a metaphor for the illusory nature of the middle-class American dream circa 1970 (and perhaps equally applicable at the time of the novel's publication). This would fall in line with what critic Margaret Lynd identifies as one of Pynchon's recurring themes in his California-based novels:

As America, at least in the popular imaginary, has been "exceptional," the last best hope for the world—the rich, innovative, freewheeling, anything-goes space of infinite possibility—so California is to America. It is this myth that Pynchon addresses and both undermines and restates: California is not so much a fictional space with a real analogue as it is a kind of ruined—or almost ruined—Paradise. (Lynd, "Situated Fictions")

Channel View Estates represents a dream manifest as parody—for both the old community forced out of their homes and the prospective buyers lining up for what are, essentially, imitation goods. Critic Bill Millard notes that Wolfmann's homes also serve as exemplars of the negative transformation that tract housing brought to American society: "a shift to a future where generic and commodified building forms replaced those grounded in local materials, climates, and traditions. A central component of this transformation was the lateral

spread of new suburbs outward from central cities, demographically fueled by white flight and ethnic fears” (Millard, “Pynchon’s Coast”). Though Channel View Estates may appear all too familiar to readers used to suburbs and gentrification, examples of mutable space become more specific, literal, and stranger as the novel progresses.

The mythical island of Lemuria serves as the novel’s most fantastical example of transforming space. Though Doc only encounters Lemuria through the intervention of LSD, Pynchon’s treatment of the scene, as well as Doc’s prior history of drug-induced visions, gives an air of legitimacy to the episode. Seeing Doc struggle with his investigation into Shasta Fey’s disappearance, his friend Sortilège advises him to seek the counsel of her spiritual teacher, Vehi Fairfield. Doc’s reluctance to do so stems less from his skepticism in Vehi’s abilities and more from his memory of just how real his previous experience with the guru felt.

The last time Doc ingested some of Vehi’s especially potent acid, he caught a glimpse of his former life “some 3 billion years ago, on a planet in a binary star system quite a good distance from Earth” where Doc, going by the name Xqq, served as a janitor to a “labful of scientist-priests” who selected him as the first test subject to experience “intergalactic time travel” (106).

In present-day 1970, Doc knows this memory was a hallucination, but he feels legitimately, physically changed by the experience—to such a degree that it is difficult for him to determine that Vehi didn’t really send him on a trip across time and space. Before sending him into the future, the aliens warned Xqq about some transformations the universe would undergo as time passed (curiously rendered in California Valley-Girl uptalk): “...it’s been, like, expanding? So when you get there, everything else will be the same weight, but bigger? with all the

molecules further apart? except for you... you'll be about a foot shorter than everyone else, but much more compact. Like, solid?" (106).

At the time, Xqq mostly wondered if he would be able to pass through walls, and this curiosity appears to have stuck with Doc for some indeterminate time after landing/returning to Gordita Beach:

As it turned out, he was able to go through drywall construction with little discomfort, although, not having X-ray vision, he did run into some disagreeable moments with wall studs and eventually curtailed the practice... Slowly the Gordita Beach of his trip merged with the everyday version, and he began to assume that things were back to normal, except for when, now and then, he'd forget and lean against a wall and suddenly find himself halfway through it and trying to apologize to somebody on the other side. (107)

To Doc, the fact that Vehi's acid *explains* the entire experience doesn't mean that it didn't actually happen. The "trip" provided by the LSD is as real for him as a literal journey taken between two points on a map. By impressing upon the reader how fully Doc accepts the first vision, he prepares the reader to accept the second along with him. This time, however, the vision Doc sees isn't about himself, but more about a connection between California and Lemuria, "the Atlantis of the Pacific" (101).

After falling under the acid's spell (to the tune of Tiny Tim's "The Ice Caps Are Melting" on a loop—an especially appropriate song to accompany a vision of environmental disaster), he lands in a familiar-looking space:

Doc found himself in the vividly lit ruin of a city that was, and also wasn't, everyday Greater L.A.... At first he thought he recognized the people he ran into, though he couldn't always put names to them... Doc and all his neighbors, were and were not refugees from the disaster which had submerged Lemuria thousands of years ago. (108)

As he continues wandering through this alternate L.A., Doc begins to understand the then-current war in Vietnam as a continuation of the aggression between Lemuria and its rival on



the other coast, Atlantis: “The U.S.... was the middle term in their ancient rivalry, remaining trapped in that position up to the present day, imagining itself to be fighting in Southeast Asia out of free will but in fact repeating a karmic loop as old as the geography of those oceans” (108-109). The vision ends soon after with the city sinking under Doc’s feet, Doc himself whisked away by “the Lemurian spirit guide Kamukea” (109) and shown Shasta Fey gazing longingly out at the sea from the deck of the mysterious schooner, the Golden Fang. But the idea of geographic karma lingers long after the LSD wears off. Sortilége herself believes Gordita Beach, with its beaches polluted from spilled oil, will face destruction similar to what Doc witnessed during his trip: “‘Earth has an immune system too, and sooner or later she’s going to start rejecting agents of disease like the oil industry...’ It was the belief of her teacher Vehi Fairfield that both empires had sunk into the sea because Earth couldn’t accept the levels of toxicity they’d reached” (105).

The notion that constructed space can serve as the site of karmic retribution of course recalls the anecdote from earlier in the novel, about the rebellious teens congregating at the site where a black family had been forced out in the 1940s. But characters from other Pynchon works have tied karma to the possession of private property as well. For instance, in *Vineland*, aging hippie Zoyd Wheeler, who works as an off-the-books landscaper and self-described “gypsy roofer” (20), looks for quick work at a lot of a local contractor, the Marquis de Sod. As the two men make their way to the office, Zoyd notices something unusual:

Half the equipment lot today was filled by a flatbed rig from someplace down in the Mojave, whose load was a single giant rock, charred, pitted, streaked with metallic glazes. ‘Wealthy customer,’ explained the Marquis, ‘wants it to look like a meteorite just missed his house.

Zoyd eyed it gloomily. ‘Askin’ for trouble, those folks. Messin’ with fate.’ (47)

Importantly, Zoyd ties the threat of fate's intervention to a conspicuous display of wealth, as if those fortunate enough to possess material wealth and prime real estate cannot help but taunt both the lower classes and the personification of luck itself. To take such property for granted portends the risk of self-destruction, much as a rapacious draining and excessive use of oil threatens the existence of Gordita Beach. Arguably, the mere existence of private property spacious enough to accommodate a faux meteorite signifies that some form of property damage has already occurred elsewhere.

In Pynchon's 2013 novel, *Bleeding Edge*, private investigator Maxine Tarnow investigates the mysterious activities of Gabriel Ice, who runs a profitable computer security firm. Working a tip about a makeshift pornography studio operating out of a house in Long Island, Maxine stops into a local bar to ask the residents some questions. She learns the residence in question burned down a couple of weeks before, but also finds out that Ice has an ostentatious mansion under construction nearby—already the source of several complaints: “As if at some point having had a fateful encounter with tabloid figure Donald Trump's cost accountants, Ice is now applying the guiding principle of the moneyed everywhere—pay the major contractors, blow off the small ones” (Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 188). As for the fire, the locals believe that Ice had something to do with it: “‘Real-estate karma,’ somebody suggests. ‘A crib as out of scale as Ice's would mean a lot of smaller houses somehow have to be destroyed, part of maintaining the overall balance’” (189). The idea that karma might indiscriminately punish the (relatively) innocent while rewarding an unrepentant capitalist like Gabriel Ice points to the potential for karmic fallibility—an idea that *Inherent Vice* also plays with.

To Vehi and Sortilège, the sinking of Lemuria represents the Earth's attempt to correct a problem—a natural and morally justifiable reaction to humanity extending its reach too far.

Indeed, as Hanjo Berressem writes in his essay on Pynchon's California-set novels, real estate and human shelter have long been sites of contention between humans and nature in the Golden State:

While it would have been possible to accept California's catastrophic ecosystem and find ways to live with and within it, the history of California settlement is filled with attempts to subject this ecology to a relentlessly operational and often antagonistic logic... to completely control and contain... to commodify it by turning it into an engineered site. (Berressem, "Life")

And yet, the Earth's reaction to Lemuria somewhat mirrors Wolfmann's reaction to finding a black community sitting on prime real estate. Both Lemuria's destruction and Channel View Estates' construction displaced countless residents, and both events drastically altered the surrounding environment. Looking at it this way, the sinking of Lemuria seems excessive, an overcorrection. This might account for Sortilège's sense of Lemuria's eminent return—an act of atonement on the Earth's part, perhaps, or at least a second chance for humanity. In her own words: "I dream about it, Doc. I wake up so sure, sometimes... We can't find a way to return to Lemuria, so it's returning to us. Rising up out of the ocean..." (Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 167).

Pynchon's first California-set novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, features another godlike figure possibly seeking atonement for destructive land use. In the novel, '60s housewife Oedipa Maas unexpectedly finds herself named executor of her former lover's will. The late Pierce Inverarity, "a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million dollars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary" (Pynchon, *Crying* 1), from beyond the grave leads Oedipa on a quest that may reveal his involvement in a centuries-old postal service conspiracy, or drive her mad, or both. In one of the novel's more famous scenes, Oedipa arrives in the city of San Narciso, "Pierce's domicile, and headquarters: the place he'd begun his land speculating in ten years ago, and so put down the

plinth course of capital on which everything afterward had been built, however rickety or grotesque, toward the sky” (13). Pausing atop a hill, looking down on the city, Oedipa at first sees nothing unusual, but then the landscape seems to transform itself for her benefit:

She thought of the first time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this angle, sprang up at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. (14)

San Narciso's layout, shaped by Inverarity's involvement and influence, seems to Oedipa freighted with significance. Inverarity's estate plan (the term works in both a figurative and literal sense) serves as a guide for Oedipa to follow on her journey toward enlightenment. As she travels through San Narciso, she becomes more aware, as Berressem notes, of just how much “Inverarity owns and what he has taken from the disinherited” (“Life”). This knowledge both intrigues Oedipa and sickens her, reveals to her a ruthlessness she didn't know Inverarity was capable of in life. For Berressem, the establishment of such an estate represents an inherently harmful, selfish, and corrupt personality—though one entirely in keeping with American history:

In very general terms, the creation of real estate can be defined as the—mostly violent—conversion of free, anonymous, and communal landscape into parcels of private property. Pynchon finds the origins of real estate in the human desire for mastery over the earth, such as in Pierce Inverarity's ‘need to possess, to alter the land’ (*Crying* 134). Finding this desire sanctioned in the Bible's admonishment not only to be ‘be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth’ but also to ‘subdue it’ (Genesis 1:8), the European settlers parceled off the virgin, undifferentiated American continent into separate lots, which then formed the basic units for a relentlessly rational, gridded logic of real estate and commerce: Puritanism. (“Life”)

By sending Oedipa on her journey around San Narciso, Inverarity, in a sense, uses his property holdings to atone for their own creation, exposing to Oedipa the hidden mechanisms of power

and influence that animate the country (“She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America” [147]).

The idea of constructed space as atonement for the builder and enlightenment for the dweller recurs in *Inherent Vice*. Wolfmann establishes his own attempt at apology—his other major constructed development in the novel, the ethical opposite of Channel View Estates—in the Nevada desert. Arrepentimiento (“Spanish for ‘sorry about that’” [Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* 244]) serves as the culmination of twin passion projects for both Wolfmann and his business partner, Riggs Warbling. For Wolfmann, Arrepentimiento represents “his penance for having once charged money for human shelter” (249). As with Channel View Estates, Wolfmann bases Arrepentimiento around a concept for planned, communal life. But unlike the privatized, suburban spaces found at the first site, Wolfmann’s new construction hues closer to a hippie ideal Doc himself might even endorse. As one of the developer’s former bodyguards explains, “His idea was, anybody could go live there for free, didn’t matter who you were, show up and if there’s a unit open, it’s yours, overnight, forever...” (248).

While Wolfmann’s vision emphasizes the populist, shared nature of the project, Riggs’ enthusiasm lies more in the individual dweller’s personal, transformative experience. Doc first meets Riggs at the Wolfmann residence during the start of his investigation into the developer’s disappearance. Riggs serves as Mrs. Wolfmann’s lover, though officially he advises her as a “spiritual coach” (61) so naturally his interest in architecture leans more toward the mystic and supernatural. Upon meeting Doc, he explains: “I design and build zomes? That’s short for ‘zonahedral domes.’... Zomes make great meditation spaces... Do you know, some people have actually walked into zomes and not come back out the same way they went in? And

sometimes not at all? Like zomes are portals to someplace else. Especially if they're located out in the desert" (62).

This idea of structure acting as an entrance to some otherworldly place repeats throughout *Inherent Vice* in subtle ways. For instance, Pynchon describes the Chick Planet massage parlor (set up at the Channel View Estates worksite to serve Wolfmann's employees) as "bigger inside than out" (21). And when Doc visits the phony dentists' office serving as a front for the mysterious Golden Fang, he peers into a mirror reflecting back a face that "did not seem to be his own" (168) and notices an absence of "room echoes" (170). Unlike these previous examples of psychedelic spaces, however, Arrepentimiento becomes less strange the more Doc observes its environs.

Doc visits the Arrepentimiento site himself, along with Tito, his gambling-addicted friend who knows his way around the Nevada desert. At first, the uncanny nature of the construction resists comprehension: "Later Doc and Tito wouldn't be able to agree on what they'd been looking at. There were several what Riggs Warbling had called zomes... Doc counted six, Tito seven, maybe eight" (249). The two men share "a wake-up joint" when they arrive, perhaps enhancing for them the otherworldly nature of the structure, which seems almost a hallucination manifest in reality: the immediate landscape "strewn with giant almost-spherical pink rocks, though they could also have been man-made... The zomes ahead, like backdrop art in old sci-fi movies, never seemed to come any closer" (250). Arrepentimiento appears even to transform the organic atmosphere in the area, with "the sun overhead, the star of an alien planet, smaller and more concentrated than it should have been, zapping them with hard radiation" (250). This description of the sun's denser, extraterrestrial quality recalls Doc's visions of himself as Xqq from earlier in the novel, suggesting a similarly altered reality in store for the detective. But then

Doc's perception of Arrepentimiento skews back toward everyday reality ("After a while it began to look more like an abandoned construction site" [250]).

Doc and Tito enter one of the structures and find an apparently unbalanced Riggs, the sole resident of the conceptual neighborhood. While Riggs has outfitted the place with food, drink, and some entertainment, a pervading sense of loneliness exists which seems inherent to the structure itself—"more space, judging from the outside, that there could possibly be in here" (251). Riggs tries to spin the emptiness in a positive, albeit nonsensical way ("Groovy, ain't it? Kind of a switch on Bucky Fuller, basically—instead of few dollars per cubic foot enclosed, this is more cubic feet per dollar" [251]), but the irony of his solitary life in what was once envisioned as a communal Eden bleeds through. Riggs fears for Arrepentimiento's eminent destruction, revealing that Wolfmann's kidnappers have "reprogrammed" the developer and returned him to his former life of capitalism and unrepentant greed. But, though threatening squadrons of fighter jets periodically fly over the abandoned site, physical obliteration appears unnecessary—the idea itself has died, doomed perhaps since its inception.

The creative act of constructing a self-sustaining communal space in the middle of a desert—in effect creating something from nothing—may seem implausible, but Pynchon provides an example of such a place: nearby Las Vegas, which Doc visits just before arriving at Arrepentimiento. Tracking down one of Wolfmann's former bodyguards, Doc spends most of his time in the small locals casinos, such as the Kismet. Unlike the glamorous gaming halls of the Strip, these smaller establishments cater to a community of workaday regulars who sustain them, fostering a sense of fraternity Arrepentimiento could unfortunately only dream of achieving. Of course, the very nature of a casino—the materialistic quest for private wealth, both guest and house determined to take from each other what they can—limits the Kismet's

opportunities for altruism. But when Pynchon compares the slot machines' "openhanded generosity or tightfisted meanness" to "small-town businessfolks" and mentions that "drinks here weren't free, but by way of real-life civility they were cheap enough" (236), he reveals a spirit of familiarity absent from Wolfmann's abandoned site.

During the post-WWII boom years, the Kismet "represented something of a gamble that the city of North Las Vegas was about to be the wave of the future. Instead, everything moved southward... and places like the Kismet languished" (235). Just like Arrepentimiento, the Kismet never fulfilled its ambitious purpose. And yet, the casino lingers on while the commune further out in the desert faces the threat of annihilation. The persistence of Las Vegas' gambling establishments baffles a "visiting Marxist economist" whom Doc watches on TV shortly before his visit to the Kismet, and who notes that the city, located "in the middle of the desert, produces no tangible goods, money flows in, money flows out, nothing is produced. This place should not, according to theory, even exist, let alone prosper as it does. I feel my whole life has been based on illusory premises" (232).

Upon seeing Arrepentimiento a short time later, Doc perhaps finds himself agreeing with the economist. Although arguably mutable (in a superficial way) with regard to its surroundings, the site's most defining feature may well be its inability to inspire any societal transformation. The free-to-all housing revolution Wolfmann temporarily envisions never comes to pass. Concerns regarding the project's long-term sustainability aside, the very ideology behind the commune seems on its way out. Writing about the treatment of Las Vegas in *Vineland*, critic William D. Clarke notes "there can be no enduring shelter from the same irrepressible, creatively destructive wind that blows across all property" (Clarke, 'House' 193). True, individual structures like Arrepentimiento and even the Kismet will crumble with time. But the cultural



milieu Pynchon depicts suggests only suburbs and shopping malls will rise in their place.

Arrepentimiento's failure to reify sustained transformation in the culture reveals a larger change occurring in the West Coast and the rest of America as a whole.

1970's post-Manson atmosphere has shifted the cultural pendulum away from collective experiences and shared possessions back toward private property and personal interests. Wisely, Pynchon acknowledges this transformation isn't necessarily for the worse. For instance, Hope Harlingen, an ex-junkie who hires Doc to find her missing (and presumed dead) husband Coy, mourns the "end of a certain kind of innocence" that once allowed the married couple to go "cruising straightworld neighborhoods picking out strange houses at random, asking to use the bathroom, going in and shooting up" (Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* 38). The homeowners in California no longer open doors to hippies, dopers, or any other representatives of the counterculture. But Hope herself has now settled into suburban life as a mother, kicked heroin, and, as Doc later reports to her still-living husband, she's working in "public health, drug awareness, something like that" (191). At the novel's end, when Doc manages to reunite Coy with Hope and their daughter, Amethyst, the family looks forward to a future not as the freewheeling junkies of their past, but as an average suburban family. California's shifting cultural backdrop—its creeping abandonment of the hippie lifestyle in favor of something more restrained—has a positive effect on the Harlingens. But it only inspires paranoia in Doc.

Doc comments on the transitory nature of the era at various points in the novel, but perhaps most powerfully at a specific passage about halfway through. As the psychotic Japonica Fenway takes Doc, Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd (her dentist and one-time lover, heavily involved with the Golden Fang syndicate), and Doc's friend Denis on a joyride through Los Angeles, their car passes by a record store. Through the windows, Doc sees "hippie freaks" (a group with which he

self-identifies) listening to music through headphones at individual stations. The image bemuses him:

Doc was used to outdoor concerts where thousands of people congregated to listen to music for free, and where it all sort of blended together into a single public self, because everybody was having the same experience. But here, each person was listening in solitude, confinement and mutual silence, and some of them later at the register would actually be spending money to hear rock ‘n’ roll. (176)

Watching his fellow hippies submitting to the apparent commodification of what used to be their culture only solidifies Doc’s growing concerns: “More and more lately he’d been brooding about this collective dream that everybody was being encouraged to stay tripping around in. Only now and then would you get an unplanned glimpse at the other side” (176). The individual stations at which the shoppers listen to records, alone, prefigures what Millard identifies as an increasing physical and mental solitude to come: “The combination of spatial isolation with private homes and television proved through the later twentieth century to be conducive to popular autoanesthesia, narrowing people’s access to independently sourced information and to each other” (“Pynchon’s Coast”). Private space provides the opportunity for non-communal, “read-only” forms of entertainment, which potentially forms a buffer between the individual and the rest of society—preventing the downtrodden from uniting in solidarity against capitalistic or authoritarian forces.

The idea that members of the preterite would bring such an unwelcome transformation down upon themselves, that they would become complicit in their own cultural destruction, assisting “The Man” to achieve his capitalist goal to divide and commercialize once-communal space, recurs in other Pynchon works. In the opening scene of *Vineland*, Zoyd travels to the Log Jam, a lumberjack bar, with the intention of committing a carefully choreographed “publicly crazy” (*Vineland*, 3) act—in this case, revving up a chainsaw and jumping out a window, all

while wearing a dress selected for its “number of colors that would look good on television” (4). But when he arrives at the Log Jam, Zoyd notices that the bar has undergone renovation, bringing with it a change in the clientele: “Dangerous men with coarsened attitudes, especially toward death, were perched around lightly on designer barstools, sipping kiwi mimosas. The jukebox... was reformatted to light classical and New Age music... lulling this roomful of choppers and choker setters who now all looked like models in Father’s Day ads” (6). At its root, the bar’s transformation came from a sudden influx of outside money, the result of global capitalism. Zoyd thinks of “the Japanese buying up unprocessed logs as fast as the forests could be clear-cut” (6), and the bar’s owner, Buster, acknowledges that “...since George Lucas and his crew came and went there’s been a real change of consciousness.’ They were talking about *Return of the Jedi* (1983), parts of which had been filmed in the area and in Buster’s view changed life there forever” (7). The transformation of the Log Jam points to an altered sense of self in the area’s residents. Once a communal space for the working class to gather and commiserate, the Log Jam now serves as a place to be *seen*, to affect a middle-class persona seemingly more appropriate for a site of major capitalist interest. Although Bust tries to convince Zoyd that “underneath, we’re still country fellas,” Zoyd doesn’t buy it: “From the looks of your parking lot, the country must be Germany” (7).

*Bleeding Edge* presents additional, slightly more nuanced, instances of capitalist complicity among the subjugated and working-class. Maxine Tarnow, who rolls her eyes at the residents of what she describes as “the Yupper West Side” (166), still experiences pangs of “a real-estate envy attack” (4) when she visits a wealthy friend’s brownstone. She submits to the humiliation of taking the non-residents’ back entrance and freight elevator to get to the health club at top of an exclusive apartment complex, having gazed longingly at the building since

childhood (27-28). Maxine possesses a New Yorker's eye for real estate, what comes across as grudging admiration, even when she ought to know better than to play into the hands of the landlords and speculators who control the city's residential space.

March Kelleher, a friend of Maxine's and the mother of Gabriel Ice's wife, provides a sharp foil to Maxine's blinkered appreciation for NYC real estate. The two once protested together (during "the co-opping frenzy of ten or fifteen years ago, when landlords were reverting to type and using Gestapo techniques to get sitting tenants to move. The money they offered was contemptuously little, but some renters went for it..." [51]), but only March seems to have retained her agitator's consciousness. She's old enough to remember the City's long pattern of abuse in the name of urban planning:

She hated Lincoln Center, for which an entire neighborhood was destroyed and 7,000 *boricua* families uprooted, just because some Anglos who didn't really give a shit about High Culture were afraid of these people's children... "Culture attracts the worst impulses of the moneyed, it has no honor, it begs to be suburbanized and corrupted." (55-56)

March also disabuses Maxine of any notion that capitalism respects the City's landmarks and institutions, that any space can be considered safe from their reach. When the two women meet for coffee at a long-standing diner, Maxine shrugs off March's concern that the place is "living on borrowed time" (115). March provides her with a reality check:

"What planet are you from again? Between the scumbag landlords and the scumbag developers, nothing in this city will ever stand at the same address for even five years, name me a building you love, someday soon it'll either be a stack of high-end stores or condos for yups with more money than brains. Any open space you think will breathe and survive in perpetuity? Sorry, but you can kiss its ass good-bye."

"Riverside Park?"

"Ha! Forget it. Central Park itself isn't safe, these men of vision, they dream about CPW to Fifth Avenue solid with gracious residences. Meanwhile the Newspaper of Record goes around in a little pleated skirt shaking pompoms, leaping up in the air with an idiot grin if so much as a cement mixer passes by. The only way to live here is not to get attached." (115-116)

But March isn't the hero of the novel, and it's not her consciousness that the reader follows, but Maxine's. Maxine, like many New Yorkers, may possess some nostalgia for the NYC of her youth, before "Giuliani and his developer friends and the forces of suburban righteousness... swept the place Disneyfied and sterile" (51), yet she cannot help but fall victim to a complicit longing for access to the high-rent real estate which signifies the City's transition from diverse urban center to millionaire's playground.

The fact that Pynchon wants the reader to identify, at least on some level, with Maxine's aspirations complicates the author's portrayal of complicity in the forces that animate gentrification. Writing about *Inherent Vice*, Scott McClintock views Doc's Aunt Reet, in her role as a real estate agent, as part of the capitalist system that divides and parcels out space to consumers, although "on a much smaller scale" ("Origins") than Wolfmann. And Doc himself benefits from Aunt Reet's position. McClintock notes that she serves as "one of his inside connections with the straight world who provides him with crucial information" ("Origins"), and Sean Carswell speculates that Doc "appears to be living rent-free in an apartment owned by Aunt Reet" (*Occupy Pynchon*, 134). While it can be argued that Doc behaves somewhat hypocritically by taking advantage of his familial connection to the real estate industry, it is important to note that he does not *actively* engage in the sort of gentrification that Wolfmann or the prospective homeowners at Channel View Estates enact. Doc seems to have been in place at Gordita Beach for some time, at least since the hippie heyday of the '60s. Indeed, Doc's resistance to change, his fear of transforming space, becomes its own problem in the novel.

Pynchon hints at Doc's immutability at the novel's beginning, when Shasta Fey stops by Doc's place to ask for his help in finding Wolfmann. Hoping to rekindle his and Shasta's relationship, Doc almost asks her to stay, but notices her "looking at everything that hadn't

changed,” including various tacky collectibles and stoner paraphernalia, “with an expression of, you would have to say, distaste” (Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 4). Shasta has changed, moved up in the world thanks to her wealthy boyfriend, and now lives in a much higher-rent area than Gordita Beach. Doc, meanwhile, remains stuck in place.

At times, his resistance to changing places seems almost pathological. As Doc edges closer to his thirtieth birthday, his Aunt Reet presses upon him to consider buying a house, advising him to “get a lot while you’re young” (112). Doc demurs, but in a later scene, when unexpected visitors stop by his place, a paranoid twinge tells him “that it was Aunt Reet, secretly resolved to sell his place out from under him... to some flatland couple especially selected for their pain-in-the-ass qualities” (113). It turns out just to be his parents, but the fact that Doc would jump to thoughts of conspiracy hints at the extent of his concern.

The intensity of Doc’s fear actually appears to induce a mild nervous breakdown at one point. After their adventure in the Nevada desert, Tito drives Doc back to Gordita Beach, and to the detective it feels “like landing on some other planet” (256). Places look the same, but the people are different, unfamiliar. Doc tries the neighborhood bar, and finds only strangers “acting like longtime regulars” (256). He almost heads to his apartment, “but started worrying that he wouldn’t recognize it either, or, worse, it wouldn’t know him—wouldn’t be there, key wouldn’t fit or something” (256). The simile “some other planet” recalls Doc’s hallucinogenic experience with Vehi’s LSD earlier in the novel, as well as the bizarre landscape surrounding Arrepentimiento. But this latest confusion, arguably even more frightening, provides Doc with a brief window into a state of mind perhaps not altogether dissimilar from how renters displaced by gentrification feel. The same concern Doc felt gazing into the record store manifests itself even more strongly here. As Millard notes, “the specter of a Gordita Beach interchangeable with

other places, the idea that locations could become modular and undifferentiated, brings Sportello as close to a freak-out as anything in the book” (“Pynchon’s Coast”).

Eventually, Doc runs into Denis and, after convincing himself it really *is* Denis and not some pretender, learns the locals are simply staying indoors, riding out spring break until the college crowd leaves. This calms Doc down, but his underlying fear of spatial transformation remains. Only a confrontation with the novel’s flesh-and-blood stand-in for the forces of gentrification can resolve Doc’s anxiety.

Toward the end of the *Inherent Vice*, a large shipment of the Golden Fang’s heroin comes into Doc’s possession (planted surreptitiously in the trunk of his car by his rival, Officer Bigfoot Bjornson—himself a figure of authoritarian control and, as Berressem points out, “a barbed wire aficionado and collector” (“Life”)—in other words, a fan of the tools of geographical constraint). In an attempt to resolve the situation and remain alive, Doc agrees to meet with a “fixer”/go-between for the Golden Fang, Japonica’s father, Crocker Fenway. Fenway, a member of California’s landowning class, tells Doc to meet him at the Portola, an exclusive club named after the eighteenth-century explorer. The club’s lobby features a tribute to its namesake:

...a mural depicting the Portolá expedition in 1769... near downtown L.A.... The view was northward, toward the mountains, which nowadays people at the beach managed to see only once or twice a year from the freeway when the smog blew away, but which here, through the air of those early days, were still intensely visible. (343)

Making the direct comparison to contemporary Los Angeles, highlighting the difference between the polluted environment of 1970 and the unspoiled, natural state the expedition encountered hundreds of years earlier, also allows Pynchon the opportunity to point toward the root of such destructive behavior, perhaps depicting the moment of conception for the current Los Angeles real estate industry. One member of the expedition stands out to Doc: “On the face

of one of them—maybe Portolá himself? there was an expression of wonder, like, What’s this, what unspoiled paradise? Did God with his figure trace out and bless this perfect little valley, intending it only for us?” (333-334).

Peeking into the mind of someone who views unfettered development as not just an opportunity, but a right reserved for him from no less an authority than God sets up an interesting comparison with Fenway. Fenway looks down upon the low-income/no-income crowd that resides in places like Gordita Beach and potentially Arrepentimiento, telling Doc, “People like you lose all claim to respect the first time they pay anybody rent” (346). Croker views himself as part of a lineage of power that can potentially trace itself as far back as civilization itself:

“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 sunny Southland, eager to be bought off with a car of a certain make, model, and year, a blonde in a bikini... a chili dog for Christ’s sake.” He shrugged. “We will never run out of you people. The supply is inexhaustible.” (347)

The connection between consumerism and dignity somewhat complicates the idea that the downtrodden can be complicit in their own subjugation through gentrification (or other forms of capitalist oppression), and also recalls a scene in *The Crying of Lot 49* which relates the feelings of guilt that Oedipa’s husband, Mucho, feels when he sells broken-down used cars to families that can’t afford anything better: “...he could still never accept the way each owner, each shadow, filed in only to exchange a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projection of somebody else’s life... To Mucho it was horrible. Endless, convoluted incest” (5).

This idea that the preterite might be willing-but-unwitting participants in their own economic exploitation comes up in Millard’s writing on *Inherent Vice*, and perhaps explains the



psychology behind the continued persistence of forces like those behind Fenway: “Some of the ways an economic system operates are fostering varieties of false consciousness; convincing people to believe they are freer than they are; substituting trivial forms of freedom (Fenway’s car, bikini, and chili dog [and one could include cheap housing here]) for substantive ones” (“Pynchon’s Coast”).

Of course, Fenway looks down on the burgeoning middle class interested in sites like Channel View Estates as well. He views himself as locked in an ongoing battle against the real estate market: “residential owners like me against developers like Brother Wolfmann. People with a descent respect for preserving the environment against high-density tenement scum” (347). For Fenway, and other like him, preserving the establishment of home ownership takes on an almost moral imperative, a view descending perhaps from the days of the Spanish conquistadors. A through-line connects the explorer who views his possession of the land as a God-given entitlement and Fenway, when he says, “it’s always been ours” (347).

Eventually, Doc and Fenway arrange for the safe return of the Golden Fang’s drugs, and for Coy Harlingen’s release from the far-right group Vigilant California (for whom he’d been doing undercover work in exchange for help in kicking his heroin habit, but which actually had been operating to a certain degree on the Golden Fang’s behalf). An unsettling melancholy seems to settle over Doc, however. He has every reason to feel satisfied—every missing person found, the heroin back in the hands of its owners, Coy reunited with Hope and Amethyst—but Doc simply cannot return to his life as it was. In Fenway, he’s seen a mirror of himself. Although they have their own reasons, both men resist spatial change (Fenway due to a fear of losing power, Doc due to his anxiety over transforming into a flatland-type with no connection to his hippie sense of self). But while the control Fenway and the rest of his class wield over the

real estate market undoubtedly harms the disenfranchised seeking shelter, or those striving for upward class mobility, Doc's opposition arguably only harms himself. Perhaps for this reason, the end of *Inherent Vice* sees Doc considering a change of scenery.

In the novel's final scene, a fog rolls in as Doc drives along the freeway. Reduced visibility causes Doc and the drivers in front of and behind him to form a "convoy of unknown size... a caravan in the desert of perception" (368). Whatever disillusionment Doc may have felt after his meeting with Fenway, his experience as a member of this vehicular chain seems almost a corrective, an affirmation of humanity's existence. He even envisions a future in which computer-equipped drivers "exchange names and addresses... form alumni associations... to remember the night they set up a temporary commune to help each other home" (368). Notably, such reunions would take place at "a different freeway exit each time" (368), emphasizing the interpersonal nature of the gathering over the memorialization of a particular place.

Doc imagines himself missing the exit back to Gordita Beach, driving on through the state, toward Mexico—and the idea doesn't seem to bother him as it once might have. The novel ends with Doc envisioning himself running out of gas, pulling over on the side of the road and waiting "for whatever to happen... For the fog to burn away, and for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead" (369). This willingness to accept new surroundings—to even desire this change—serves as a transformation within Doc himself. Whatever future Doc faces, he'll do so with a newfound sense of freedom.

Through his exploration of mutable space, Pynchon makes room for deep questions concerning the ethics of private property and the economic forces that enable the exploitation of the working- and middle-class. At times, the lower classes may even be unwittingly complicit in their own oppression, or oppress those on a lower socioeconomic rung via gentrification. The

concept of private property necessarily excludes those who cannot access the means to obtain stable, permanent housing in their own name. The idea of private property has its roots in cartographic space, which seeks to delineate public or disputed land into bordered, private or semi-private space, and serves as the main focus of the following chapter.

### Virtual Vistos: Pynchon's Imagined Spaces

While any geocritical reading of literature will necessarily focus on tangible, three-dimensional structures physically set in the world of the novel, readers must also reckon with those not-yet- or never-to-be-constructed, un-built places “present” only as representations of delineated space. Maps and the idea of cartographic space feature significantly in the novels *Mason & Dixon* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. By the time Pynchon publishes his most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge*, he has moved on to consider virtual reality as well. Through his depiction of such “unreal” spaces, Pynchon addresses the same concerns that his physically extant structures embody: the reach of authoritarian forces and the displacement of an established, comparatively preterite population. What Pynchon sees in the cartographic establishment of territory in *Mason & Dixon* and *Gravity's Rainbow* is the beginning of control, the wresting away of autonomy and individual freedom. Conversely, *Bleeding Edge* presents a more optimistic depiction of representative space. Although Pynchon understands the problematic aspects of virtual reality, the possibilities for self-expression and the creation of one's own space—an ability shared by both the authority and those typically excluded from power—provide Pynchon with the opportunity to speculate on a more equal future, free from the struggles over occupied space. Whether delineated on a map or created within a virtual realm, depiction of representative space serves as an area worthy of critical consideration in Pynchon's oeuvre—building upon the spatial concerns expressed in the author's other works, as well as establishing fertile ground for study in its own right.

Pynchon's 1997 novel, *Mason & Dixon*, deals most emphatically with issues concerning cartographic space. A fictionalized retelling of the duo's efforts to first chart the Transit of Venus (both at sea and on land) and then to establish their namesake line in America, the novel

provides for the reader a window into the mindset of the colonizing forces that sought to subjugate native populations and parcel out conquered lands. A strong example of the effects of such colonization occurs early in the novel, when Mason and Dixon travel to South Africa during the astrological phase of their journeys. Staying in the Dutch colony of Cape Town, the two surveyors witness the racist mania into which the settlers have worked themselves. Interestingly, within the colony itself, this preoccupation with the native population most often takes the form of sexual fetishization of the Other. Specially coded places exist to allow the colonists to exercise some limited form of sexual agency, primarily in the form of flirtation. One such space is the front porch of the family residence. The Vroom family, with whom Mason and Dixon reside while in Cape Town, make a habit of sitting out on the “Stoep” each evening, while the family’s slaves continue about their work. Such a tableau brings to mind images of America’s plantation-era South and the Civil War to come approximately one hundred years in the future, and Pynchon recognizes the reader’s association. As the novel’s narrator, Reverend Cherrychoke, notes “There is something irresistibly perverse... about a young white woman sitting upon a Stoep in the evening, among a steady coming and going of black servants meant, as in the Theater of the Japanese, to be read as invisible, whilst she poses all a-shine, she and her friends” (Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 80).

Yet the young white women *do* acknowledge the black preterite at times, particularly within the context of flirtation with white men, or sexual jealousy of those whom they have subjugated: “Some Belles like to ‘boss’ their male Slaves about in front of the young men, whilst others wish to be caught gazing after Girl-slaves with unconceal’d envy” (80). In the case of either such interaction, the girls further dehumanize the slaves, treating them as pawns in some romantic game or as bodies onto which they cast their own sexual insecurities. The stoep

enables such treatment because it serves as one of the few places in the colony in which figures of authority (even somewhat curtailed authority, such as the white women of the colony possess compared to the near-absolute authority enjoyed by the white men) brush up against the artificial barrier between the black and white populations of Cape Town. The stoep is not the home proper, but neither is it the worksite or the field. This liminal space engenders its own set of rules regarding behavior for the white women:

Over the Range of their Desires, they are shameless, these Dutch girls of all ages, for they are the Girls of the end of the world, and the only reason for anyone to endure church all day Sunday is to reminded of the Boundaries there to be o'erstepped. The more aware of their Sins as they commit them, the more pleas'd be these Cape folk... (Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 80)

That the stoep should represent a straddled boundary or borderline in which the girls feel free to act “shameless” should come as no surprise in a society that places great value on artificial borders. The “end of the world” feeling that enables the girls to flirt more openly hints at the boundary that circumscribes their own thinking, as well as the mindset that drove the Dutch to colonize South Africa in the first place. The stoep’s true power over the girls derives not so much from anything intrinsic to the physical structure itself, but from the boundaries charted on the colonizers’ map of South Africa, placing an artificial barrier between the settlers and the Other—indeed, *creating* the Other as the colonizers know it. Naturally, this creates a borderline beyond through which no native person would cross to enter the colony (since doing so would result in their capture and forced servitude), but also establishes an other-ized space that simultaneously frightens and fascinates the colonists.

Reverend Cherrychoke draws a parallel between the Dutch colonization of South Africa and “The British in India [who] encourage the teeming populations they rule to teem as much as they like, whilst taking their land for themselves, and then restricting parts of it the People will

be permitted upon” (153). While “People” here most likely refers exclusively to the native population of India, it may also apply to the colonists themselves, curtailed from free movement outside of the colony by the cartographic barrier. This leads to a fetishization of both the perceived wilderness of the uncolonized territory, as well as the sensation of artificial or imposed confinement itself. There are some areas of or adjacent to Cape Town that Mason and Dixon visit which are “prohibited” (77). Specifically, the “Malay quarter, a protruded tongue of little streets askew to the Dutch grid” (82) holds some fascination (especially for Dixon) for the music and food offered by its residents. When Dixon brings a bottle of “*ketjap*” back to the Vroom household, his taste for the condiment seems to both intrigue and repulse the Dutch family. While Johanna Vroom, the matriarch, refers to *ketjap* (perhaps euphemistically) as “another Cape delicacy,” her husband Cornelius warns it away from their daughters: “Girls, don’t even want you looking at it. Filthy Asian stuff” (79). When Dixon has trouble “with its slender Bottle, out of whose long neck he finds he has trouble getting the stuff to flow” (79), one of the Vroom daughters, Els, advises him to “Striker her upon the bottom... and perhaps she will behave” (79). This advice comes not as a friendly tip but as one of many double-entendres intended to work Mason and Dixon into an erotic frenzy which they would then exercise upon one of the Vroom’s slaves—part of Johanna Vroom’s scheme to produce more slaves. That Els would know how to release the *ketjap* from the bottle suggests a familiarity with the “Filthy Asian stuff,” and therefore, the part of Cape Town from whence it comes—evidence of a cartographic and social boundary crossed. This connection between the Other and eroticism appears in other aspects of the novel’s Cape Town section, perhaps most fully realized when Cornelius Vroom takes Dixon on a trip to the local brothel.

Officially sanctioned as part of the Dutch East India Company's Lodge, the brothel serves as a place where figures of authority in the colony (which is to say, landowning white men) can engage in sexual activity with "women... of all races, sizes, and specialties"—a feature for which Cornelius, despite (or because of) all his fears of the Other, seems "gravely giddy" (149). The Lodge itself consists of many rooms offering different themed encounters. Cornelius chooses for himself a room that seems especially crafted to appeal to colonial power: "the Room of the Beasts, 'A peculiarly Afrikaner Taste,' he pauses to advise Dixon, '—you might not enjoy it!' A slender dark Arm, full of Bangles, emerges from the Door-way, and a practis'd Hand removes his Hat. 'Let's go, Simba'" (153). Much like the stoep provides his daughters with both access to the Other (usually separated by the artificial barrier of the cartographic line) and permission to engage in otherwise "shameless" behavior, the Lodge sanctions such behavior on the part of Cornelius and other figures of authority. "The Room of the Beasts" and other such rooms in the Lodge permeate the border imposed by the colonizer—albeit in a way that reifies colonialist beliefs regarding the Other. Strikingly, the "dark arm" seems in control in this situation, or at least as much "in control" as a subjugated (presumably) African woman likely forced into this line of work can be. A trope exists within Pynchon's work in which figures of authoritarianism submit to masochistic sexual practices (think, for instance Weissman/Blicero in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*), and Cornelius Vroom continues in this tradition. Apparently, so do other colonists who visit the Lodge, as evidenced by a supposedly hidden room deep within the brothel...

Although it remains unclear as to whether or not Dixon heard of such a thing, Cherrychoke briefly stops the narrative to report rumors of another room in the Lodge—"a room nine by seven feet and five inches, being with Dutch parsimony reduc'd to a quarter-size replica



of the cell at Fort William, Calcutta, in which 146 Europeans were oblig'd to spend the night of 20-21 June 1756" (152). The physical dimensions of the room provide only part of the erotically appealing experience for the colonists. The rest comes from the context of the situation:

Residents, visitors, even a few Seamen of elevated sensibility have return'd, whenever possible, to be urg'd along by graceful Lodge-Nymphs in indigo Dhotis and Turbans, dainty scimitars a-flash, commanding their naked "Captives" to squeeze together more and more tightly into the scale-model cell with as many Slaves,--impersonating Europeans, --as well make up the complement, calculated at thirty-six, best able to afford visitors an authentick Sense of the Black Hole of Calcutta Experience. (152)

The idea animating the "Calcutta Experience"—that gradually, as the room fills to capacity, the visitors would cease to exist as individuals and become "immobiliz'd in a bondage of similarly bound bodies, lubricated with a gleaming mixture of their own shar'd sweat, piss, and feces, nothing to breathe but one another's exhausted breaths, moving toward some slow warm Explosion" (153). The room serves as more than just a sexual outlet. It also works as a space to access a perverse kind of alterity, where the colonists can take on the sensation of physical (if not mental) subjugation. Although the room purports to recreate the events endured by a number of *Europeans*, the forced confinement and loss of agency, if only temporarily, perhaps more closely resembles the ordeal of the Other whom the colonists subjugate. The colonists' fetishization of the Other extends beyond a sexual desire for their bodies, but also for their experiences. The cartographic boundary not only marks an entire people as the Other, but also creates in the mind of the colonists an "othered" space in which different experience is possible. While the colonists who visit the brothel for the "Calcutta Experience" seek a specifically niche sexual experience, this desire for new encounters also manifests itself in more familiar ways.

Still in the Lodge, Dixon waits in "a small on-Premises Tap-room" (153) and happens upon an acquaintance from Cape Town, former police agent Bonk, who tells Dixon of his plan to

quit the colony and strike out on his own, chaffing under the surveillance of the East India Company: “Tomorrow I put my Family in an Ox-waggon, and start North. Perhaps over the Mountains. Out of the reach of the Company, who desire Control over ev’ry moment of ev’ry Life here. I could not for them longer work. The Mountains beckon’d... the vast Hottentot Land beyond...” (154). Critic James J. Donahue identifies Bonk’s desire to settle beyond the boundaries of the Cape Town colony as representative of a certain American mindset, arguing that “Bonk has invested the African frontier with all of the positive aspects that remind the reader of the American frontier mythology” (73). What attracts Bonk to the “frontier” of the uncharted land outside the colony encompasses more than just freedom from Company surveillance and oversight. Bonk envisions “green rolling Leagues of farmland and Range, Bushmen for the most part docile... wild Game ev’rywhere...” (Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 154). Such imagery should call to mind the visions of plenty that drew American settlers toward the Pacific Ocean in the era of Manifest Destiny. But, as Donahue points out, several inconvenient holes exist in Bonk’s dream:

With no experience as farmer or hunter, he expects an easy time given the abundance of land and game. However, as police chief, one of his previous duties was to quell native unrest; he is perhaps the last person who should anticipate the docility of the natives, demonstrating how easily one can be seduced by this mythology. (Donahue, 73)

Indeed, considering Bonk’s former line of work, the reader can anticipate his interactions with the natives, regardless of how “docile” he finds them, will inevitably further colonialist imperative. Although Bonk’s attraction to the “vast Hottentot Land beyond” may stem, in part, from its literally uncharted nature, his movement further into the native territory outside of the colony’s borders will essentially extend the boundaries of the map and colonial reach. Bonk may slip from the control of the East India Company, but his actions mark him as still in service to the

much larger authoritarian control of colonialism. Of course, Bonk likely neither possesses awareness or concern for the natives or the land they inhabit. In envisioning uncharted South Africa as land to claim for him and his family, Bonk reflects what the reader might consider a cartographic mindset. Already he has plans to possess and parcel up the land for a homestead and farmland.

The problem with this map-centric thinking, as spatial theorist Robert T. Talley Jr. puts it, “is that the view afforded by the map enables one to detach oneself from the phenomena studied, as with the general poring over maps rather than trudging through the battlefields, and this abstraction alters the underlying reality” (26). Cartographic thinking, in other words, tends to flatten the area under consideration—reducing real space to the *idea* of space (whether one actually sets foot in that space or not) and diminishing the humanity of its residents. This problem manifests itself most clearly in the novel as the driving force behind the establishment of Mason and Dixon’s eponymous Line. As Donahue points out, the two surveyors’ mission in America is to correct the cartographic mistake of a disinterested and incompetent governing body—“to settle disputes about the location of the border between the two states [Maryland and Pennsylvania], which had been hotly contested by the Calvert and Penn families, which had each received grants from King Charles II for overlapping pieces of land” (71). Charles II not only refuses to recognize the native population whose land becomes colonial territory, he also remains detached from his subjects to whom he bequeaths the stolen land. While the reader may not hold much sympathy for the Calvert and Penn families in this situation, or the colonists who inhabit the disputed land, this confusion over boundary lines illustrates the arbitrary nature of delineated space. The mental separation between map and territory (and the people residing therein) not only allows such sloppy cartography to occur, it also animates the racist ideology that

perpetuates colonialism in the first place—an ideology possessed even by those without the authority to establish colonies of their own, such as the novel’s ostensible protagonists.

Mason and Dixon, though considerably less blind to the horrors of colonialism, nonetheless maintain some of the attitudes toward the Other common among their fellow countrymen at the time—a view informed by their own creative “filling-in” of the information not provided on a map. One particularly clear example of such imaginative speculation presents itself in the form of a game Mason and Dixon play “call’d ‘Sumatra’... their Board a sort of *spoken Map* of the Island they have been kept from and will never see” (Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 57). The two men create an idealized portrait of a space they only know from imperfect renderings on a map. Notably, they extend their daydreams of this fictional “Sumatra” to an imaginary populace, specifically attractive women: “Ev’ry woman in ‘Sumatra’ is comely and willing, though not without attendant Inconvenience, Dixon’s almost instantly developing Wills and Preferences of their own despite his best efforts to keep them uncomplicated...” (57). Though both men know this fantasy of Sumatra necessarily differs from the actual island, Pynchon never makes it clear to the reader the extent to which they appreciate the distance between their creation and the real thing. Mason and Dixon, provided only with the blank space on the map, project their own fantasy upon Sumatra, thinking not of the real women who live there, but of objectified dream-women. Cartographic representation helps Mason and Dixon (as well as larger colonialist forces) to flatten the island’s true population out of existence.

A similar map-assisted detachment occurs in Pynchon’s 1973 novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Early in the narrative, Pynchon establishes American lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop’s workstation in the London intelligence unit ACHTUNG. A map of London hangs on the wall, to which Slothrop affixes little colored stars labeled with women’s names, ostensibly representing sites of

sexual encounters. The map and its stars greatly interest PISCES, a secret British intelligence unit researching psychic activity, because it seems to correlate with the sites of future rocket strikes. Slothrop pastes a star onto his map and, invariably, a rocket falls on that exact spot (“The strike can come as quickly as two days, or as slowly as ten. The mean lag is about 4½ days” [Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, 87]). Teddy Bloat, working on behalf of PISCES, tries to get Slothrop’s friend and office-mate, Tantivy Muffer-Maffick, to reveal any special information he might know regarding Slothrop or his map, but Slothrop has left Muffer-Maffick nearly as in the dark as anyone else: “If there’s a reason for putting up the paper stars every few days the man hasn’t explained it—it doesn’t seem to be for publicity, Tantivy’s the only one who even glances at the map and that’s more in the spirit of an amiable anthropologist” (19-20).

Indeed, Slothrop may not even have a reason for pasting the stars on the map. Although the stars do reflect encounters (real or perhaps merely imagined) with various women, the color of the star does not correspond to any code or ranking of the women themselves, but Slothrop’s own mood—seemingly separate from any sexual activity that occurs. Pynchon provides evidence of this himself by taking the reader into Slothrop’s head via close third-person perspective: “Both young ladies happen to be silver stars on Slothrop’s map. He must’ve been feeling silvery both times—shiny, jingling. The stars he pastes up are colored only to go with how he feels that day, blue on up to golden. Never to rank a single one—how can he?” (22). Furthermore, as Slothrop reveals to the reader later in the novel, the stickers on the map represent less a literal accounting of sexual encounters and more a fictionalized recounting of possible dalliances. He references “the gentlemanly reflex that made him edit, switch names, insert fantasies into the yarns he spun for Tantivy back in the ACHTUNG office” (307). The phrase “gentlemanly reflex” possibly implies a tendency to downplay sexual encounters, a reluctance to

kiss and tell, but such reticence hardly makes for good “fantasies” and “yarns.” Consequently, critic Bernard Duyfhuizen reads Slothrop’s confession as evidence “that the ‘yarns’ involve fantasies and misinformation rather than mere exaggerations, as one would expect with sexual bragging, and therefore many if not all of the stars reflect a spatial equivalent to the ‘yarns’ (20). For this reason, Duyfhuizen posits, the reader cannot reasonably accept (as many critics had) that Slothrop’s map “as a denotative sign system” presenting any solid proof of causation between Slothrop’s purported sexual activity and the rocket strikes. Rather, Duyfhuizen views the map hanging in Slothrop’s workspace as a metafictional tool Pynchon uses to advance the narrative: “The map, though finally exposed as a fiction, spatially represents the picaresque ‘yarns’ Slothrop has been spinning in the ACHTUNG office, and it becomes the motivating device behind Slothrop’s eventual fleeing into the Zone and actually becoming a picaresque hero” (25).

Yet, regardless of the map’s intended purpose (by either Slothrop or Pynchon), the “star system” Slothrop uses traffics in problematic cartography similar to that found in *Mason & Dixon*. If the reader accepts at least some of the stars as truly representative of Slothrop’s sexual encounters, then Slothrop reduces the women to mere conquests, flattening out fully-formed identities into glittering trophies entirely reflective of his own perceived seductive prowess. If, on the other hand, the reader considers the entire constellation of stars as representative only of Slothrop’s fantasies, his map becomes no better than Mason and Dixon’s fictionalized dream-version of Sumatra, with its inherently objectifying orientation. One character convinced of some correlation between Slothrop’s map and the rocket strikes is Roger Mexico, a PISCES operative looking into the Slothrop case and who keeps his lover, Jessica Swanlake, abreast of the latest theories. “Roger... what about the girls?” (Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, 88) she asks, quietly horrified. Indeed, such a question never seems to come up in the minds of Mexico,

Bloat, Muffer-Maffick, or Slothrop himself. Indeed, the fact that Slothrop's position at ACHTUNG requires him to visit places hit by rocket strikes and still remains ignorant of any connection, even coincidental, between his map and the destroyed sites reveals how little the women whose names he's labeled on the stars actually mean to him—if they ever existed at all.

With such examples of problematic cartography, readers may interpret Pynchon's position on maps and other invented or represented space as skeptical, viewing such renderings as inherently flawed to an extent that fosters exploitation or dehumanization. However, Pynchon's latest novel, 2013's *Bleeding Edge*, presents a more complicated and potentially optimistic view of rendered space within the realm of virtual reality. Unlike the maps of *Mason & Dixon* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, the representation of space in *Bleeding Edge* takes the form of an interactive, online program called DeepArcher. In the novel, independent fraud investigator Maxine Tarnow comes across the game while tracking down leads concerning possible illegal behavior at one of New York City's many dotcom-bubble-era web businesses, hashslingerz (which also seems involved in a byzantine 9/11 conspiracy with the U.S. government). When Gabriel Ice, hashslingerz's CEO, offers to buy out DeepArcher from its creators, Justin (the husband of Maxine's friend, Vyrva) and Lucas, Maxine tries the program out herself. What she experiences alters and expands upon Pynchon's earlier depictions of "unreal" or simulated space.

Existing (at first) only on the Deep Web, and therefore relatively hidden from the rest of the Internet ("No way for surface crawlers to get there, not to mention the encryption and the strange redirects," one of Maxine's clients tells her [Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 10]), DeepArcher appears as a kind of digital oasis of sorts. Lacking the violence and set directives of the program's closest digital relative, video games (for example, the first-person shooters Maxine's sons, Ziggy and Otis, and Vyrva's daughter, Fiona, enjoy playing), DeepArcher opts to allow its

players to wander relatively aimlessly, at their leisure. Indeed, “leisure” is the animating force behind the program, an opportunity for people to venture out of the real world and into a kind of virtual resort, offering users a sampling of both safety and adventure:

Originally the guys, you have to wonder how presciently, had it in mind to create a virtual sanctuary to escape from the many varieties of real-world discomfort. A grand-scale motel for the afflicted, a destination reachable by virtual midnight express from anyplace with a keyboard. Creative Differences arose, to be sure, but went strangely unacknowledged. Justin wanted to go back in time, to a California that had never existed, safe, sunny all the time, where in fact the sun never set unless somebody wanted to see a romantic sunset. Lucas was searching for someplace, you could say, a little darker, where it rains a lot and great silences sweep like wind, holding inside them forces of destruction. What came out as synthesis was DeepArcher. (74)

At first, this mechanic disarms Maxine—its like nothing she’s encountered before.

Without a clear objective to meet, she begins to feel strangely paranoid: “She’s lost. There is no map... only a feeling she recognizes from dreams, a sense of something not necessarily pleasant just about to happen” (77). But Maxine persists, and eventually loses entire swaths of time exploring DeepArcher. Which is not to say that she enjoys it, exactly—she refers to it as “a meretricious geeks’ paradise” (319)—but the possibilities for exploration draw her in. Indeed, some critics view DeepArcher’s addictive nature as an inherent, insidious feature easily exploited by outside interests—and that appears to happen when Justin and Lucas, in an attempt to thwart Gabriel Ice’s designs on DeepArcher, make the source code available to the public at large. Suddenly, the milieu of the program’s virtual streets changes:

What was once a train depot is now a Jestons-era spaceport with all wacky angles, jagged towers in the distance, lenticular enclosures up on stilts, saucer traffic coming and going up in the neon sky. Yuppified duty-free shops, some for offshore brands she doesn’t recognize even the font they’re written in. Advertising everywhere. On walls, on the clothing and skins of crowd extras, as pop-ups out of the Invisible and into your face. (354)



Critic Jason Siegel, in an essay on depictions of the posthuman in Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* and Gibson's *Neuromancer*, views this public turn within DeepArcher as a mistake on its creators' part, arguing that instead of the program serving as "a refuge from late capitalism, it has become just another instrument of it, and because its security system is no longer secure, all traffic on it is potentially being monitored by security firms like hashslingerz that are arms of the U.S. government" (19). Siegel fears that, because "*Bleeding Edge*... asserts that cyberspace and meatspace are increasingly indistinguishable, that meatspace *is* cyberspace" (10), DeepArcher's users sacrifice not just their virtual avatars, but also themselves to the forces of capitalistic authoritarianism. According to Siegel, the game-like nature of DeepArcher mollifies its non-elite and preterite users and, in doing so, works to "contain their subversive impulses, funnel them into capitalistic enterprises, and allow the 'bad guys'—who for Pynchon are always large corporations, governments, and their law enforcement agencies—to gain a further stranglehold over ordinary citizens" (14).

But Siegel's concerns for DeepArcher's status as a refuge from authoritarian forces, while reflective of a serious problem, ignore the inherently positive features of the program that conceivably protect it from a complete corporate takeover. The first such aspect is freedom. DeepArcher provides its users to create their own content, shaping the program's environment as they see fit. The power of this feature becomes evident toward the end of the novel, when a disenchanted Maxine, wandering through DeepArcher, spots her sons' creation, a city of their own: "With a whole expanding universe to choose from, among the global torrents somehow the boys have located graphics files for a version of NYC as it was before 11 September 2001... reformatted now as the personal city of Zigotisopolis" (Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 428). Even as DeepArcher drowns in advertising, and the real-world "meatspace" NYC reels from the terrorist

attacks of 9/11, the boys have established a virtual version of the City as a kind of digital paradise, a sheltering space different from the places Maxine has explored (“the cityscapes of Maxine’s DeepArcher are obscurely broken, places of indifference and abuse and unremoved dog shit, and she doesn’t want to track any more of that than she can help into their more merciful city” [428]). While Siegel views Ziggy and Otis’ creation as perhaps portending doom—opening the door to another, more personal 9/11 to come, if only online (“Now she must also worry that her sons—like the Twin Towers they resemble—may be blown ‘to pixels’” [26])—he neglects the fact that DeepArcher’s “expanding universe” seems to indicate an ever-growing spatial field for ostensibly infinite building and rebuilding. Even if Zigotisopolis should fall, either from some digital terrorist attack or through the corrupting presence of capitalist authoritarianism, Maxine’s sons can conceivably escape further into the virtual frontier and start over again. This ability to establish virtual space for oneself, seemingly without limit, highlights another advantage DeepArcher has over “meatspace”—the fact that such construction neither subjugates a preterite population, nor takes space away from anyone else, effectively neutralizing the most problematic aspects of real-world colonizing. Unlike the maps in *Mason & Dixon* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the virtual space in *Bleeding Edge* refers only to itself, with no actual land to lust after or claim. Ironically, the purely artificial nature of DeepArcher removes the need for the arbitrary, circumscribing boundary lines that serve as hallmarks of colonialism. The Other does not exist in the freedom of cyberspace.

Representations of space—whether cartographical or virtual—prove as consequential as any physically constructed space in Pynchon’s work. The strong anti-authoritarianism in Pynchon’s novels lends itself to criticism not only of colonialism enacted, but also to the colonialism planned and plotted, starting with the way maps establish territories and borders. It

may surprise the reader, then, to encounter Pynchon's optimism concerning virtual reality, even when such space finds itself pursued by commercial interests. But in cyberspace, Pynchon finds a potential solution to further colonizing, a way to mediate the conflict between human desire for exploration and human tendency toward subjugation. In creating the virtual world of DeepArcher, Pynchon provides his readers with a possible path forward.

## Conclusion

In reading the works of Thomas Pynchon through a geocritical lens, several key aspects of the author's work become clear. Pynchon's deep concern with access to shelter (indeed, access to adequate space in general) seems of particular importance. While readers may associate this emphasis on private, safe space with Pynchon's notorious anxiety toward public appearance, such an interpretation only partially accounts for its presence. Rather than solely attributing Pynchon's interest in constructed space to autobiography, readers may find it illuminating to consider the author's use of space within the broader context of the struggle against authoritarian forces.

Central to this reading is the idea that space can be claimed or reclaimed by one side or another in this struggle. For instance, capitalist real estate developers, such as Inherent Vice's Mickey Wolfmann, might wrest property out from under its downtrodden renters, but these renters can then conceivably appropriate a new communal space for themselves (the fact that this becomes increasingly difficult as those in a position to manage property continue to gentrify communities out of existence remains an issue—one that Pynchon perhaps attempts to address in the virtual world of DeepArcher in *Bleeding Edge*). In this way, a geocritical reading lends itself to further consideration of Pynchon's work through other theoretical lenses—for example, readers might reckon with the author's portrayal of the real estate industry from a Marxist perspective, or unpack the role of the unsheltered female victims of rocket strikes in *Gravity's Rainbow* ("What about the girls?" [88]) from a feminist standpoint. Even though geocriticism serves as a powerful interpretive tool in its own right, its adaptability serves well to assist in strengthening additional layers of reading.

Geocriticism also provides readers new to Pynchon with a pathway into his novels. Pynchon's (overstated) reputation as a "difficult author" can intimidate even the most seasoned reader. Because concerns involving shelter, real estate, private property—constructed space in all its forms—appear at the surface level in each of Pynchon's works, readers may find it easier to maneuver their way through his encyclopedic texts knowing they can use such thematic repetition as a guide. Whether assisting experienced scholars in furthering their appreciation of Pynchon or welcoming new readers to the fold, the geocritical approach serves as an excellent theoretical lens through which one may (indeed, *should*) reckon with the author's work.

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