

Overwhelmed and Underworked: Inherent Vice, Aproductivity, and
Narrative

Miles Taylor

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Signature Page

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By: Miles Taylor

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_____ Examiner

Luca Caminati

_____ Examiner

Mary Esteve

_____ Supervisor

Martin Lefebvre

Approved by _____

Marc Steinberg

_____ 2020

Rebecca Duclos

Abstract

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Miles Taylor

This thesis proposes an artistic mode called aproductivity, which arises with the secular crisis of capitalism in the early 1970's. It reads aproductivity as the aesthetic reification of Theodor Adorno's negative dialectics, a peculiar form of philosophy that refuses to move forward, instead producing dialectics without synthesis. The first chapter examines the economic history aproductivity grows out of, as well as its relation to Francis Fukuyama's concept of "The End of History." After doing so, the chapter explores negative dialectics and aproductivity in relation to Adam Phillips' concept of the transformational object. In the second chapter, the thesis looks at the Thomas Pynchon novel *Inherent Vice* (2009), as well as the 2014 Paul Thomas Anderson adaptation of the same name. It offers a reading of the two as allegories for life under late capitalism, with particular focus on the breakdown of narrative and the search for something that will make sense of a world where the logics of capitalism no longer function correctly.

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sent back not only the English translation, but also the Portuguese and French editions, just in case I needed them. It is rare to meet someone so brilliant and generous. Phil Rosen's classes introduced me to film theory, and he was constantly patient as I misunderstood he and his colleagues' ideas. Thank you to Yulia Glushneva for leading the thesis workshop and providing feedback on clunky early drafts. Thank you to the rest of the workshop—Patrick Woodstock, Claire Grey, Cole Armitage, and Victoria Berndt—for reading the overly-long passages I kept sending in. Masha Salazkina went above and beyond in her meetings with me about my research proposal, spending hours helping me figure out what exactly I wanted wonder. Special acknowledgement must go to Martin Lefebvre, who was immensely helpful as a supervisor, constantly pushing me in new and interesting directions. Finally, I want to thank my sister for always keeping me honest. I love you, Alix.

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Introduction

“Yet there is no avoiding time, the sea of time, the sea of memory and forgetfulness, the years of promise, gone and unrecoverable, of the land almost allowed to claim its better destiny, only to have the claim jumped by evildoers known all too well, and taken instead and held hostage to the future we must live in now forever. May we trust that this blessed ship is bound for some better shore, some undrowned Lemuria, risen and redeemed, where the American fate, mercifully, failed to transpire . . .”

-Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* (2009)

There is a sound tormenting my generation, a spacey reverb that has infiltrated and overtaken contemporary music, expressing itself in the hazy guitarwork of mainstream rock and the ghostly drums and wavy beats of rap and R&B. The 70’s echo in the noise, George Harrison’s extended riffs and Brian Eno’s ambient albums haunting us. But the sound does not strike me as “hauntology” in Mark Fisher’s understanding of the term. To Fisher, hauntology involves a return to the popular modernism of the seventies because they were the last time an alternative was formulated in culture, when a “popular modernism” built on the structures of social democracy longed for a utopian future that went beyond our world (“What is Hauntology” 18). Hauntology is the product of a world that does not exist. Rather, the *reverb* seems to me an attempt to capture the atmosphere we live in, one where events from the past suffuse the present.¹ It is no surprise that the sound’s dominance coincides with “vibe” re-entering the popular lexicon. As people struggle to explain what current music is expressing, “it’s a vibe” has become a catchphrase. What is the vibe being conveyed? Some mixture of being both engulfed and abandoned, being stuck in a world where things are constantly happening but no one is doing anything. Song lyrics are filled with “again” and “already’s,” reflecting a situation where everything has already happened and the alternatives have been foreclosed.

These two aspects—the 70’s ghostly presence and the “vibe” described above—strike me as linked. The turn to the 70’s in the contemporary moment is a recognition of kinship, that something similar to now was happening then. This provokes two interrelated questions, which together form the basis of my thesis: Why is there this turn to the 1970’s, what connects that

¹ *Reverb*, short for reverberation, refers to when a sound continues on after it has been produced.

decade with our present? And, more importantly for my work (considering I am a film scholar, not a political economist), what happens to film and literature and their narratives in these moments?

In regards to the first question, I follow the work of *Endnotes* to argue that in the late 1960's and early 1970's, we enter into a "secular crisis of capitalism." As I argue in chapter one, at that time, capitalism reaches a point where it seems it can no longer expand. From the 1980's to the late 2000's, this is more or less obfuscated by neoliberalism, which combines finance capital with an ideology Fisher calls "business ontology" (Fisher *CR* 17). The meltdown of 2008 does not lead to a radical restructuring of the economy and finance capital, but does weaken its cultural logic. Because of this, there is a cultural return to the 1970's, to a time where it was apparent that crisis was the permanent state of capitalism, yet there were not any alternatives. In the previous era of industrial capitalism, the forces of production would produce periodic crises, which acted as threats to the system that created them. The secular catastrophe, however, means that the default state of capitalism is now one of crisis. Yet crisis no longer offers an escape; instead, the economy just stumbles forward, unable to die yet no longer living. It is intertwined with the "The End of History," Francis Fukuyama's contentious thesis that with the end of the Cold War, liberalism achieved its telos, and the rest of history would just be non-liberal states transitioning to liberalism. I use Benedict Anderson's work complicating Fukuyama to argue that elements of "the end of history" actually arise with the secular crisis of capitalism in the 1970's, and then are emphasized by the dominance of political liberalism in the 90's and 2000's. The failure of the hippie movement, which was an attempt to conceive of an alternative to capitalism and liberalism, foreshadows the End of History.

Having introduced the economic and political background, I then turn to what happens culturally in the secular crisis of capitalism. I posit the existence of a narrative mode centered around aproductivity. It stands in contrast to both traditional narrative, where characters' actions produce the plot, and also the high-modernist revolt against narrative, where nothing happens. Instead, aproductive narratives are those where things still happen but no one is doing anything. I use aproductivity to emphasize that this is not a full refusal of productivity, but rather a recognition that we are no longer in the era of industrial capitalism, where the forces of capitalist production offered the possibility of their own negation through crises. To further understand aproductivity, I turn to an unexpected source: Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966). I do

so not only because I my intellectual project is centered on arguing for Adorno's continued relevance, but also because aproductivity is the artistic form of his negative dialectics, a mode of philosophy that cannot be standardized or turned into a model. Instead, it coalesces into certain themes, motifs, and reoccurring concepts placed into different constellations, shifting their meaning even as it uses the terms. At its heart, it is a philosophical wandering, a process based on search and negation.² Aproductive art takes up this wandering and negation, desperately looking for the object that will either explain or help us escape the current moment. And like its philosophical counterpart, aproductive works refuse homogenization, never consolidating into a stable genre, style, era, or national cinema.³ Rather, the mode arises in the secular crisis of capitalism, usually after the failure of an attempt to create an alternative, whether the hippie movement in the United States, the student protests in Germany from the same era, or the neoliberal consensus of the 1980's-2008.⁴ What connects aproductive works is not only that they arise out of the same (or similar) economic situations, but also that they tend to share similar themes, motifs, and relationships to narrative. However, none of these three are universal—there is no singular diegetic thing that all aproductive works share. Rather, these themes and narrative approaches point to a set of problematics and aporias that produce conflict within the work, even as they go unmentioned. As I show in chapter two, these issues are fundamentally Adornean, concerning the contradictions and tensions Adorno addresses in *Negative Dialectics*: the relationships between the particular and universal, concept and thing, representation and actuality (particularly with regards to the separate categories of film and utopia), identity and

² Because of its refusal to cohere into a methodology, it is difficult—if not impossible—to use negative dialectics as a mode of analysis. Due to this, I tend to turn to Frederic Jameson when performing concrete analysis, while the lessons of *Negative Dialectics* structure the more abstract question of how I arrive at such an analysis. I use Jameson not only because we follow similar intellectual traditions and examine similar eras, but because Adorno is the skeleton in Jameson's closet (to paraphrase Cornel West); Jameson's mode of analysis could not exist without Adorno, even as it rebels against the German's pessimism. There is a sense in *Negative Dialectics* that Adorno is destroying his project, closing it off from the future in a desire to let it die with him. Habermas and Alexander Kluge (to name two of his most famous students) respect this; though both take up questions dear to Adorno, they do so through modes of thought/production that differ greatly from his. Jameson, on the other hand, wanders around the fragments Adorno left, picking them up and trying to build a new system out of what remains. This is particularly true in *Late Marxism, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (1990).

³ Los Angeles, whether as place or idea, tends to reoccur across many aproductive works, though certainly not all.

⁴ While neoliberalism is usually understood as an intensification of capitalism and its logics, early neoliberal theory was presented as an alternative to capitalism and communism, as Michel Foucault notes in his lectures on bio-power. This is not, however, an endorsement of Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism as he argues that it is an abandonment of the logic of exchange, a claim that this thesis rejects. See, Foucault, Michel, and Michel Senellart. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 88-89.

non-identity, and finally happiness and despair. In short, what these work share is an Adornean worldview, whether or not their creators ever engaged with the German theorist.⁵

In other words, aproductive works are composed of indices pointing to a set philosophical and political issues. These indices are united not by the form they take but what they are pointing at. To understand how this works, I spend the entirety of chapter two offering an allegorical reading of *Inherent Vice*, a Thomas Pynchon's novel from 2009 and its film adaptation, written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson in 2014. Set in 1970 and telling the story of a stoned detective trying to make sense of a broken-down world, the film and novel stand out as paradigmatic of aproductivity, with a plot that unspools even as no one is doing anything except wandering around. I present my argument as a constellation (see below for further explanation) where each section addresses seemingly disparate topics, using a variety of interpretive methods on top of the allegorical reading. As a paradigmatic text, *Inherent Vice* contains many of the aforementioned indices, compared to the one or two found in other aproductive works. Because of this, examining the novel and film allows me to capture the disparate and at times contradictory signs of aproductivity, and also reveal that despite these differences, analysis of any one of them will end up in the same (or similar) place as any other analysis.

The first segment of the second chapter looks at the novel's narration using the framework and terminology Gérard Genette establishes in his examination of Proust, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1979). I argue that Pynchon's use of iterative narrative (when a singular utterance covers multiple occurrences), analepsis (the recalling of events that happen before narrative time), and prolepsis (the foreshadowing of events that occur after the end of the narrative) differentiates it from its generic and stylistic predecessors, particularly Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953). From there, I argue these differences contribute to the sense that plot has been outsourced, no longer occurring in the narrative but outside of it, with the characters wandering about, examining the results. This produces a feeling that action is no longer meaningful and the future has been foreclosed, and also how the seeming chaos of the aproductive era hides that the ordering force of the exchange value and identity is evermore dominant. In the next two sections, I turn to the film and its narrative, using Mary Ann Doane's

⁵ Why exactly aproductive works hold an Adornean worldview is beyond the scope of this thesis, though I suspect it has something to do with Adorno's belief that Western society had hit the limits of concepts such as philosophy, history, and art, and the market had infiltrated and distorted every life and relationship. Looking at the decades since his death, we might quote Bachman Turner Overdrive: "baby, you ain't seen nothin' yet" (Bachman 1974).

work on early cinematic time to analyze the temporal aspect of the film. In the first of these sections, “Voices in Karmic Thermals,” I summarize Doane’s *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (2002) and then analyze the film’s unique narration style, which I argue can be read as an index pointing to the secular crisis of capitalism, representing and discussing the absent thing. Following this, I turn to discussion of the film’s formal characteristics and Christian Metz’s discussion of enunciation, arguing that aproductive narrative foregrounds the tortured relationship between the particular and universal in the era of capitalism’s secular crisis, mimicking Adorno’s back and forth on the topic.

Having established the breakdown of traditional narrative in the first three sections, I use the fourth segment—“Land Plots”—to turn elsewhere, examining the way Pynchon and Anderson attempt to use geography and history to ground characters, even as they reveal the impossibility of doing so. Once again, close analysis reveals the tension undergirding the connection between characters and land to be one of the particular and universal, as well as a question of identity and non-identity. The two segments after this, “Utopia Lost” and “Utopia Banned” turn to the role of utopia in the works. Examining the fictional locales of the novel and film, I argue that utopian failures set the stage for aproductivity, and *Inherent Vice* uses these failures to explore questions of representation, imagination, and the limits of the possible. Furthermore, the failure of these places point to the impossibility of utopia in the present, instead relegating it to an uncertain and infinite future, even as that future appears foreclosed. I conclude with an analysis of the role of Mickey Wolfmann as a real estate developer, which reveals itself once again to be a reflection on the relationship between concept and thing, as well as particular and universal. Moving laterally, the chapter reveals quite different concerns to be interrelated and interdependent, all linked by Adornean concerns.

A Note on Form

Considering a central tenet of Adorno’s thought is the rejection of the traditional structure of philosophical arguments, and aproductive narratives concern themselves with the breakdown of rational temporality, attempting structure this thesis in the form of a traditional academic text would run counter to the content of this essay. Because of this, I want to briefly explain the idiosyncratic structure of this thesis. First, I tend not to define concepts upon their appearance, but rather through their examination and explication. The definition of aproductivity given

above, for example, came out of later analysis of the concept, rather than preceding it. As Adorno notes, “Philosophical contents can only be grasped where philosophy does not impose them. The illusion that it might confine the essence in its finite definitions will have to be given up” (*ND* 13). Definitions can never fully capture a term, the way its meaning shifts and changes when a concept is used in different ways.

Similarly, I want to note that, like Adorno’s peculiar dialectics, in my paper “the crux is what happens in it, not a thesis or a position—the texture, not the deductive or inductive course of one-track minds” (*ND* 33). If the relationship between universal and particular is that they are both false, then it is not possible to start from an example and work to a universal, nor do the opposite. There can be no one paragraph summary of the argument, because there is no culmination; there is only the content itself and the contradictions and aporias that grow out of it. Though I obviously have a thesis, the “proof” of it comes not from a linear argument but rather lies in the composition of various constellations, and how the sections come together to find the truth through the movement between them. “Philosophy can always go astray, which is the sole reason it can go forward”; the eddies and dead-ends I wander into are not distractions nor asides, but rather the price of thought (*ND* 14). In part because of this, dialectics resembles the “procession of Echternach” taking one step forward and two jumps back (Adorno *ND* 157). Despite the disparate focuses of each section, I will often repeat myself, returning to scenes, quotes, and concepts, offering new readings that contradict or negate what was said earlier. There is no straight line within aproductivity.⁶

Finally, I embrace Adorno’s claim that the philosopher must “not deny his clownish traits, least of all since they alone can give him hope for what is denied him” (*ND* 14). No matter how much thought is put forth on an object, it is always distant from the actual object being examined. In fact, the more the object is examined, the further the philosopher drifts from the object. But this does not mean abandoning analysis, or transitioning to a “free play” form of argumentation. Rather, I pretend that I can indeed grasp the object and analyze it, but allow this analysis to reveal the distance the writing denies. This is not an excuse to be imprecise with

⁶ There is the question of whether an analysis of aproductivity must imitate the mode. After all, there is plenty of scholarship about styles that does not imitate them—one would be hard-pressed to find a Joyce scholar imitating the writer. But the intellectual lineage that aproductivity grows out of—namely, the Frankfurt School—is one where the writers tended to mimic the objects they discussed. Furthermore, aproductivity is such a loose-knit concept that in some sense it is more felt than understood. In mimicking aproductivity, I hope not only to convey an understanding of the idea, but also produce an inkling of the experience of aproductivity. That way, the reader can identify the sensation central to the concept.

language—precision and rigor are necessary—but rather understand that no matter how carefully language is chosen, it can never capture the idea in full.

The Constellation

Above, I mentioned that the chapters are formulated as constellations, a form of writing I take from Adorno, who in turn borrows it from Walter Benjamin. It is the two's alternative to traditional philosophical reasoning, one where there is "no step-by-step progression from the concepts to a more general cover concept. Instead, the concepts enter into a constellation" (Adorno *ND* 162). You cannot understand concepts linearly, as that would give it a totalizing element that is false. If you start with particulars and work to universals, you betray the particular, turning it into a synecdoche for a larger idea, stripping it of its particularity. However, starting from universals reconfirms their primacy—and hence the primacy of exchange, the universal that casts a spell on everything in our era. And treating particulars as just that—particular—with no relationship to each other and no universals is rank positivism. Though Capitalism cannot be thought through without rationality, the expansion of capitalism and its increasing totality, makes questions of "cause" more precarious (*ND* 166). The constellation, a pseudo-totality with no definite starting point, offers a "third possibility beyond the alternative of positivism and idealism," taking neither particulars nor universals as given, instead examining and negating both (Adorno *ND* 166).

I take the phrase pseudo-totality from Frederic Jameson, who argues that a pseudo-totality is Adorno's way of addressing the way systemic representation "fatally reintroduces the mirage of system itself, not to speak of the old antithesis between subjective and objective," which cannot be addressed directly (*LM* 50). Instead it must be "provisionally outsmarted by some ruse." (Jameson *LM* 50). This ruse is the constellation, which forms a pseudo-totality, or:

The illusion of the total system aroused and encouraged by the systemic links and cross-references established between a range of concepts, while the baleful spell of system itself is then abruptly exorcized by the realization that the order of presentation is non-binding...so that, in a divinatory cast, all the elements are present but the form of their juxtapositions, the shape of their falling out, is merely occasional (Jameson *LM* 50).

The constellation is made up of segments that are not quite fragments. After all, "The

stars that make up a constellation are not normally thought to be fragmentary” (Jameson *LM* 51).⁷ Rather, they are made up of discontinuous concepts that together add up to something resembling the idea, an unwritable thing that holds truth-content. But the concepts are not stable, rather changing meaning as they are rearranged in ever-new ways, producing the realization that the idea is not a stable universal, but rather an arbitrary construction, its totalization a myth that is nonetheless inescapable. The individual sections are in turn made up of sentences that are “micro-narratives,” that have a mimetic relationship to the larger constellation, autonomous structures holding the concept within them, only for their repetition and reformulation to negate their autonomy, revealing the domination within abstract thought (Jameson *LM* 68). It reveals that “the term corresponding to the totality of social system is not merely presupposed in the form of inert knowledge or preexistent belief: rather it is itself specified by what happens to its opposite number, the individual subject” (Jameson *LM* 71). In holding the totality within it even as it shaped and reformed by the whole, the sentence stands in for the subject which is shaped by the totality yet also shapes it. I try to do something similar in this thesis, albeit to a much less extreme extent, avoiding the never-ending Adornean sentences that seem to hold the history of capitalism within them even as the larger structure falsifies it. Instead, I have discontinuous segments that stand on their own and hold their own histories, but are shaped by the larger constellation they are in. For example, at first glance, the sections on utopia in chapter two seem unrelated what has come before in the constellation, focusing less on narrative and more on questions of mimesis. However, by placing them into the constellation, their autonomy is undermined, it being impossible to read them within the structure without thinking of the other sections and overarching concept, thereby shaping the reflections on utopia and undermining their autonomy from the exterior. At the same time, however, they are within the constellation and therefore shape the concept that shapes them.

To conclude, I might note that to those familiar with post-structuralism and French theory will notice that this mode of construction resembles Gilles Deleuze’s conception of the rhizome and rhizomatic writing. However, I use the older, less fashionable term “constellation” for two reasons. Primarily, Deleuze makes a minor, seemingly inconsequential error, arguing that the

⁷ Both Pizer and Osborne note that Jameson tends to deemphasize the fragmentary in Adorno, as it poses a threat to Jameson’s project. While true (particularly in his analysis of *Minima Moralia*), it is perhaps more accurate to say that Adorno is both fragmentary and discontinuous, the fragmentary carrying with it knowledge that would complete it, while the discontinuous can never capture the whole.

rhizomatic structure is nonhierarchical and has no set beginning or end. However, even rhizomatic plant roots have a beginning: the seed. The constellation, on the other hand, does not deny having a beginning, but recognizes the start as an arbitrary point, with the choice lying not in the content but with the author. Furthermore, considering this thesis is inspired by Adorno and the Frankfurt School, it makes more sense to use their terms.

The Narrative of *Inherent Vice*

As mentioned above, in Chapter Two I will look at the novel *Inherent Vice*, as well as its film adaptation. Before diving into the concept of aproductivity, it is worthwhile to explain the narrative of the novel. In doing so, I hope that the reader will have a sense of what aproductivity looks like in narrative before reading about the concept in the abstract. *Inherent Vice* tells the story of Larry ‘Doc’ Sportello, a permanently stoned private investigator. One night the love of his life, Shasta Fey Hepworth, shows up with a story about her new lover, the real estate tycoon Mickey Wolfmann. She is worried that Mickey’s wife is planning to kidnap him and send him to a mental hospital. Before he can talk to Mickey, however, Doc is knocked out and Wolfmann kidnapped during a training exercise for a private militia (we later learn that it was in fact a cover to kill a hitman turned bodyguard for Wolfmann, and Wolfmann’s abduction was an unintended side effect). Without solid leads, Doc wanders around, driving from place to place, venturing as far away as Las Vegas. He is not even explicitly looking for Mickey, nor Shasta (who has gone missing), but rather just following various threads. But no matter where he goes or what he investigates, it all seems connected back to Wolfmann somehow. Yet despite this, no clarity seems to emerge, except that it all seems linked to a heroin cartel called the Golden Fang, which masquerades as a consortium of dentists. Instead, the connections seem to make the conspiracy more abstract, each new story adding to Doc’s confusion rather than subtracting. Sportello’s search becomes for an object or person that will clear away the accumulated sediment and reveal what is happening, why everything is connected. Yet this object never arrives, even as Doc finds out that the FBI has Mickey and Shasta returns. At one point, Doc meets with a lawyer for the Fang, but this only offers slight clarity. The novel ends with Doc driving in a caravan on the highway, lost in a fog that may never lift.

In adapting the narrative, Paul Thomas Anderson took language and scenes directly from the novel, though he did make some changes to the narrative, which will be discussed in chapter 2.

Chapter One

Introduction

Before describing aproductivity, I want to offer a brief summary of recent economic history. This is obviously not the focus of the thesis, and none of the below is new, but rather the summation of others' research. I am including it for two reasons. The first is a question of clarity. I will be using terms that have a wide range of usage—particularly “neoliberalism,” “monopoly capitalism,” and “late capitalism” —and it is necessary to define how I use them based off my readings of Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism*, David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and the journal *Endnotes*. More importantly, culture is not immutable and independent of the socio-economic system, even if the two cannot be read directly across each other. As Adorno argues, “there is no material content, no formal category of artistic creation, however mysteriously transmitted and itself unaware of the process, which did not originate in the empirical reality from which it breaks free” (Adorno “Commitment” 190). Art's formal laws are always distorted, unrecognizable transmutations of the objective essence of society, the exchange value. In this understanding of the relationship between art and society, there are echoes of something resembling Foucault's epistemes, which “circumscribe the conditions of the possibility of knowledge within a given historical period,” albeit here working from a more material and Marxist position (Doane *ECT* 20). It is only in a certain economic and cultural system that aproductive works can arise. To understand aproductivity, then, we must periodize it, historicize it, and try to illustrate the economic history that is central yet absent within it.⁸ And we do so despite acknowledging that any periodization, historicization, and illustration will always be false and incomplete, because they are representations of totality, which as we will see are always false— one can only accurately represent a whole through particulars, which simultaneously contradict the totality they comprise. This “two-brainedness” (a provisional term) is what Adorno means when he describes the philosopher as needing to embrace their “clownish traits”(ND 14). Or as Frederic Jameson more eloquently argues, Adorno's dialectics propose a “new kind of stereoscopic thinking in which the concept continues to be thought philosophically

⁸ There is a contradiction of sorts here, in that I use Foucault's concept to discuss historicizing aproductivity, even as Foucault did not historicize in the traditional sense.

and cashed at face value, while in some other part of the mind a very different kind of intellectual climate reigns” (Jameson *LM* 28).

This section will introduce the economic background, while the next will examine the ideological situation where aproductive works arise. Following this, I will introduce Adorno’s negative dialectics and aproductivity. When explaining the economic history, I start with Adorno and Ernest Mandel’s conception of late capitalism, then use Mandel’s ending point as a place to introduce David Harvey and the work of *Endnotes*, before moving onto Giovanni Arrighi and concluding with an analysis of the current moment inspired by Mark Fisher. As I trace this left-wing economic history, I will use more mainstream economists to explicate certain specific events.

Outlining an Economic History

In early 2020, the mattress company Casper released their S-1 filings. Part sales pitch and part fiduciary release, the S-1 form is a document required by the IRS before a company has an initial public offering (IPO). It focuses on a corporation’s business plan and elucidates their financials.⁹ In Casper’s case, they tell the story of a mattress company that is—at best—a middleman that spends 2/3rds of its net revenue on advertising; the company does not produce their own mattresses, but rather purchases them from a third party supplier. In these documents, Casper admits that it lost money in both 2017 and 2018 (they do not disclose 2016 numbers), and in fact lost more money in 2018 than 2017 (Casper S-1 2020). This is what those in finance refer to as a “negative trend.” How does a company that seems to exist to lose money garner significant investment? And not only investment, but also respectability, so much so that executives and advisors believe it can exist as a publicly traded company? To understand how we arrived in this frankly bizarre world, we might start by looking at the origins of the term “late capitalism,” particularly in Theodor Adorno and Ernest Mandel. From there, we can trace the development of an economy where up is down and profits are *verboten*.

Often times, I wonder if Adorno’s seeming prescience has a syntactical root: his seeming-anachronistic use of the term “late capitalism,” to designate something we would now refer to as “industrial capitalism” (Adorno “Late Capitalism or Industrial Society”). He was not speaking of the gig economy or the coming digitalization of the world (though several passages in *Negative*

⁹ Within limits. Due to a 2012 piece of legislation (the JOBS act), corporations categorized as emerging growth companies do not have to disclose significant information, including executive compensation.

Dialectics do speak of computers and capitalism), but rather the economic system he was living in during World War II and the years after. The term emphasizes capitalism's tendency to constantly enter ever more spheres; late capital, "describes a world of total capitalist administration, the step before bourgeois society liquidates itself (Adorno *ND* 26).¹⁰ It is the form of capitalism in a world where Auschwitz exists, where rationalization dominates all modes of thought. In its difference from contemporary usages, Adorno's "late capitalism" resembles Ernest Mandel's periodization of the term. Mandel's late capitalism refers to the period from the 1940's to the late 1960's, when it becomes advantageous for capital to move production back to the metropole, since the penetration of capital into war production during World War II updated metropole factories with the newest industrial technologies and methods. These factories produced industrial machinery that was then exported to less developed nations, lowering the price of raw materials. However, in the late 1960's the price of raw materials in relation to finished goods once again begins to rise, signaling new trends in capital accumulation and a new regime of uneven development across the globe (Mandel 70).

David Harvey calls the trend that emerges here "flexible accumulation," a movement away from industrial capital to finance capital (Arrighi 4). This culminates in the global hegemony of neoliberalism—a set of policies, ideologies, and logics that work toward a "restoration of class power" (Harvey 40). Neoliberalism combines widespread financialization with an ideological presentation of it as the only option, as the natural state of things. This requires a rewriting of history, pretending recent theories and modes of understanding are actually timeless.¹¹ While we will return to neoliberalism later, for now we might note that the rise of financial capital is not unprecedented; according to Giovanni Arrighi, the move to finance reoccurs through history, at moments when a capitalist system matured: the Dutch move from commerce to banking in the 17th century, the Genoese move from commodities to banking in the 15th century, and the British move from industry to banking in the 19th and 20th centuries (Arrighi 5-6). What makes the regime of neoliberalism/flexible accumulation unique is in part the scale: rather than isolated nations converting to finance, it seems as though the entire Western

¹⁰ Unfortunately, this was one place where Adorno was too utopian; things can always get worse. Reason's domination and perversion by capitalism has only gotten more extreme in the sixty years since his death. We can only wonder what he might say about Amazon fulfillment centers.

¹¹ For an example of this operation, see David Ciepley's history of the American corporation, "Wayward Leviathans" in Volume 21 of the *Hedgehog Review*, Spring 2019.

economy is now reliant on financial tools. Furthermore, the expansion of the logic of capitalism into ever more private spaces, from healthcare to education to mental health is unprecedented in scope.¹² Indeed, even relationships now obey the laws of capitalism. In the popular press, basic acts of friendship have become “emotional labor” (ignoring the original definition of the term). Despite neoliberalism’s rhetoric of freedom and independence, the move from systems of discipline to systems of control (to borrow Gilles Deleuze’s phrase) has pulled off a difficult trick: decreasing capital’s labor liability (in the financial sense of the term) while increasing their administrative control over it.

Furthermore, there is one more major difference between past turns to banking and the current regime of flexible accumulation, and to understand it we need to return to the late 1960’s. This is the moment where in Europe and the United States the process of primitive accumulation finishes, having more or less completely separated workers from the land, generating total dependence on commodity exchange (*Endnotes* 2010). Over the next fifty years, this process is accelerated across the globe. As the *Endnotes* editors write:

Outside of the US and UK before 1950, the scope for mass production was limited precisely because of the limitation of the size of the market, that is, because of the existence of a large, somewhat self-sufficient peasantry not living primarily by the wage. The story of the post-war period is that of the tendential abolition of the remaining global peasantry, first as self-sufficient, and second as peasants at all, owning the land on which they work.

(*Endnotes* 2010)

Peasants are no longer able to reproduce themselves outside the industrial system. This crisis in reproduction, as the editors call it, causes both a crisis in consumption and production, since they argue that under capital the two are the same. Moving to questions of expanded reproduction, the editors argue that traditionally, the growth of industry creates cycles where labor is pulled into an industry and then expelled when the industry reaches maturation—signaled by falling profitability—with the shed labor then being shepherded into new growing fields, since workers now need these jobs to reproduce themselves. In other words, as industries mature, workers are fired and move into new, maturing fields. Thus, expanded reproduction is

¹² See, for example: Mark Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism*, Stephan Ball’s 2004 lecture at the University of London, or Esther Bloom’s 2015 article in *The Atlantic*

the “continual reproduction of simple reproduction”; this is commonly understood as an aspect of the cyclical crises in capitalism (*Endnotes* 2010). In this understanding, crises arise in the space between when one industry has matured and the next has not yet taken on enough labor. *Endnotes* then presents an alternate reading of Marx where, “through this process of expanded reproduction that the dynamic of capital manifests itself *as its own limit*, not through *cycles* of boom and bust but in a *secular* deterioration of its own conditions of accumulation” (*Endnotes* 2010).

In other words, each cyclical crisis is one part of a larger secular crisis. They argue this through an analysis of Marx’s chapter “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation,” where he argues that as capital grows, it “constantly produces, and produces in the direct ratio of its own energy and extent, a relatively redundant population of laborers,” more than are required for its expansion (Marx 422). The editors at *Endnotes* rephrase this as a “relatively redundant population out of the mass of workers, which then tends to become a consolidated surplus population, absolutely redundant to the needs of capital” (*Endnotes* 2010). Though new industries develop, Marx notes a tendency to move progressively from labor intensive industries to capital intensive ones, so over time total employment decreases, especially because industrial techniques for maximizing labor tend to move across industries (Marx 428). Or as *Endnotes* puts it, “labor-saving technologies tend to generalize, both within and across lines, leading to a relative decline in the demand for labor” (*Endnotes* 2010). In the early 20th century, this tendency was delayed by state spending aimed at ever-new innovations that transformed industrial technologies into consumer ones, but by the 1960’s, this begins to change:

When the car and consumer durables industries began to throw off capital and labour in the 1960s and 70s, new lines like microelectronics were not able to absorb the excess, even decades later. These innovations, like those of the 2nd industrial revolution...emerged from specific process innovations within industry and the military, and have only recently been transformed into a diversity of consumer products. The difficulty in this shift, from the perspective of generating new employment, is not merely the difficulty of policing a market in software — it is that new goods generated by microelectronics industries have absorbed tendentially diminished quantities of capital and labour. Indeed computers not only have rapidly decreasing labour requirements themselves (the microchips industry, restricted to only a few factories world-wide, is

incredibly mechanized), they also tend to reduce labour requirements across all lines by rapidly increasing the level of automation. Thus rather than reviving a stagnant industrial sector and restoring expanded reproduction — in line with Schumpeter’s predictions — the rise of the computer industry has contributed to deindustrialization and a diminished scale of accumulation — in line with Marx’s (*Endnotes* 2010).

Despite this new surplus population, unemployment does not surge because workers, needing wages to reproduce themselves, flee into precarious service jobs, with the result being stagnant “real wages” even as productivity increases, as David Harvey notes (25). In a graph borrowed from *Contours of Descent*, we see that real wages in 1973 were \$15.72 per hour, but by 2000 had fallen to \$14.15 (Harvey 25). And this does not only affect workers; the writers at *Endnotes* remark that “Over the last 40 years average GDP has grown more and more slowly on a cycle-by-cycle basis in the US and Europe, with only one exception in the US in the late 90s” (*Endnotes* 2010). Capitalism has hit a phase where it struggles to expand at a rate necessary for its survival. Importantly, while this effect is especially pronounced in high GDP countries, and begins there earlier, it is not simply deindustrialization due to the shipping of jobs overseas. Up until 1973, “the internationalization of trade was associated with high rates of growth in all industrializing countries,” linking it to Mandel’s theorization of the period, where high GDP nations used their economic strength to industrialize certain low GDP nations. But even in low GDP industrialized nations, the stagnation of industrial employment begins in earnest in the 1980’s and 90’s (*Endnotes* 2010).

Instead, we might say that the maturation of what Arrighi describes as the fourth cycle of accumulation (the American one) is simultaneous with the *maturation of capitalism as a whole*, explaining the sheer scale of the financialization of the economy, why it is not just one nation but rather the global economy that now runs on finance (Arrighi 7).¹³ The economy becomes defined by the stock market, which holds little to no relation to a company’s fortunes—as of writing, Amazon trades at \$2,404 per share, despite not turning a profit most years. Market Cap (the dollar amount of all shares added up) and EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation

¹³ This is not to imply Arrighi does not see/notice this maturation. His argument is precisely that similar things have happened before, but not at such a scale

and amortization) have become the starting point for analysis, rather than profit.¹⁴ EBITDA, after all, reveals what you would be making if not for constant expansion and “pesky” taxes. It is also notoriously subjective; in most large-scale financial transactions, each party has their own EBITDA valuation and the negotiations are over which is the most accurate. The discrepancy arises from depreciation and amortization, somewhat subjective determinations where the interested parties inflate or deflate rates of change to fit their priorities.

However, even as GDP growth rates slow, the myth of constant expansion is necessary to this era of capitalism, for both workers and companies. The rise of credit is central to the financialization of the economy, both on the level of the individual and the corporation. According to the Federal Reserve, American consumer debt was over \$4 trillion in 2018 (Federal Reserve 2019). Corporate debt is a staggering \$15 trillion, or 46% percent of the GDP (Barua and Buckley 2019). As Deleuze succinctly put it, “man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt” (Deleuze 6). Credit, of course, is a stand-in for future earnings, future growth, a statement of “I don’t have the money now, but I will have it.” And so an economy built on credit needs to be constantly growing, or else everyone will realize that the debt at its center will never be paid back. But, as we noted, the growth rates of industrialized nations have been slowing for decades. This leads to an unresolvable contradiction in the modern economy, albeit one hidden by both policy and ideology.

On the level of policy, the switch away from the gold standard eases this contradiction in a few ways. In the late 1960’s, the “adjustable peg” system at the heart of the Bretton Woods agreement begins to falter (Williamson 7). In this system, the dollar is pegged to gold, and the European currencies are in turn pegged to the dollar. At various points in the late 1960’s, there are runs on the lira, the pound, the deutschmark, and the franc (Williamson 6-8). This results in a growing interest in the conservative ideas of Milton Friedman, who advocates greater exchange rate flexibility and reduction on capital controls (Williamson 7). The culmination of this comes in August 1971, when President Nixon takes the United States off the gold standard.

The effects are far reaching, but we might focus on two. First, it allows the government to print its own money, creating profit out of what seems almost “white magic,” without producing

¹⁴ I lack a citation for this claim because here, I am speaking from experience. For a brief period, I worked as an unpaid intern for an investment bank that advises those trying to sell small to medium sized businesses to established players in the industry. EBITDA was a vital tool in our analysis—companies were priced according to EBITDA multiples, not profits.

runaway inflation, to quote the monetarist economist J. Huston McCulloch (70). Looking at the European interwar economies, McCulloch argues that at the time a typical European country could divert 15% of its national income to itself with an anticipated inflation rate of 140% per month without having experienced runaway inflation (McCulloch 72). Even at the much lower rate of the 1970's U.S., an "inflationary economy" can produce an appearance of constant growth, as well as a one-time increase in a nation's wealth when the switch is initially made, because gold reserves can be freed up and used elsewhere (McCulloch 75). The profits from inflationary finance are shared by "the government, the owners of the private banks, and the nongovernmental borrowers from the banking system, such as corporations and homebuyers" (McCulloch 74). While inflation tends to be bad for banks (since the money they loan is worth more than the return they receive later), the switch away from the gold standard facilitates the move to the modern credit economy, which relies on the quantity of money being determined by the government and not physical reserves, and "is accompanied by other complicated and promissory forms of capital based more on fiction than actual monetary reserves" (Haynes 8). Combined with the freeing of gold reserves, the benefits of one-time inflationary finance outweigh the usual damage inflation does to banking. While the Volker shock in 1979 puts an end to the growing rate of inflation and a Keynesian acceptance of inflation, this leaves nine years in which inflationary finance is the norm, setting the basis for coming neoliberalism. It does so by redirecting capital flows away from corporations and to the financial industry. The financial industry then uses this newfound capital to expand into other fields, expedited by the Volker Shock, which sends the United States into a recession. This further reduces the value of various industries, creating the ideal investing situation for finance capital, where they have liquidity in an economy shattered by recession. The principle underlying finance capital is "buy low, sell high"; this is most easily done by investing during a recession, where shortages of liquidity give well-off buyers the advantage.

The switch away from the gold standard, then, is necessary to neoliberalism, as it makes it appear that capitalism continues to work even as growth slows, and establishes a material base for neoliberal policies. But it also creates a permanent state of uncertainty, as capital becomes even more ungraspable than before. Currency is, after all, at the center of capitalism. Though it and capital are not synonymous, modern capitalism cannot exist without currency to accumulate and reproduce. The switch away from the gold standard ostensibly means that the strength of the

dollar (which other currencies based their valuation on, due to the Bretton Woods agreement) is related to the strength of the U.S. economy and government. In relativizing the dollar (rather than relativizing European currencies to the dollar, which is then pegged to the gold standard), exchange rates come to be defined by the largest traders of currencies (nations first and foremost, as well as banks and corporations). While they use certain measurements to figure out the relationship between currencies (differentials in inflation and interest rates, trade deficits, relative strength of the economies, etc.), the basis for the economy is now defined by how a set of people feel about the economy (the same is of course true of the stock market, where it is investors' feeling toward a company that determine its stock price, not how the company is actually doing). And so the economy becomes increasingly impossible to grasp. Capitalism's proponents claim that this is the result of increasing complexity stemming from the explosion of data, the rise of algorithms, and globalization. But the truth of it is that one cannot fully grasp the totality of this form of capitalism because it is based on the subjectivity of others, which in turn is based on the economy that is defined by this subjectivity. It becomes an infinite loop, an M.C Escher drawing made violently real. To put it in Adornean terms, the objective truth of the economy is its extreme subjectivity, that it is not governed by immutable laws and mathematics (as mainstream economics argues) but rather on the subjectivity of banks and corporations. Of course, neither of these things is an individual, and as such should not have subjectivity. But the history of late modernity is one of the dissolution of the subject (acknowledging, of course, that the subject is itself the late form of myth), until we reach the point where it becomes impossible to even notice that it is gone. It is when personhood and subjecthood have been separated and the latter destroyed that corporations can be posited as individuals and imbued with subjectivity.

These twinned processes—slow growth and the growing impossibility of understanding the economy—are obfuscated through the combination of five factors. Through the rest of this thesis, I will refer to this confluence as “the ideology of neoliberalism,” though not all of the factors are strictly ideological. First is capitalism's service side expanding into ever more spaces that were previously private and autonomous, producing new spheres and new companies. These companies may be widely used, but rarely—if ever—turn a profit. Instead, they exist for other companies to invest their surplus capital in, acting as shells to hide a stagnant system. This new world is perfectly encapsulated by Softbank, a major investor in WeWork, Uber, and Yahoo! Japan. It began as a software distributor, only to switch quickly to the business to business side,

printing niche magazines and renting space at technology expos (Medeiros 2019) (Webber 1992). Overtime, it invested in evermore companies, notably Yahoo! and Alibaba, and now runs the largest technology-focused venture fund in the world (Medeiros 2019). In short, it is a company that colonizes spaces within corporate spheres, sells these spaces, and now pumps money into other corporations with only vague promises of future earnings. Uber, for example, admitted in its IPO filings that it might never turn a profit (Franklin 2019). The company's "disruption" is that it no longer cares about profit, because its value is based on the promise of a future technological revolution that may never arrive (autonomous cars). This process ties into the commodification of our personal lives, which makes it appear that capitalism is growing even as profit stays stagnant. Our commodification produces data, which is highly valued, even though it is only occasionally useful. WeWork, for example, tracks everyone who enters its buildings, producing reams of data. The practical result of all that data: letting managers know when it is someone's birthday and recognition that space is not always used optimally (Hempel 2017). This data then gets stored on massive server farms, which provides Amazon the vast majority of its revenue. So the process is thus: a company commodifies a previously free relation—giving your friend a ride to the airport, for example. This opens up new market spaces, giving off the appearance of growth, even as there is no profit. At the same time, it produces data—how often you go to the airport, whether you arrive early or late for flights, where you live, etc.—which though mostly useless allows the companies that store it to constantly raise their valuations, giving the illusion of even greater growth.

This massive invasion into our personal lives requires a belief in efficiency in its own sake, which we are less interested in for itself than how it ties into the next two tools of obfuscation, business ontology and epistemology. Business ontology, per Mark Fisher, is a belief that it is "simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business" (Fisher *CR* 17). Related and building off of this is business epistemology, where not only is business the default way of being, but also the default way of knowing. Everything must be applicable to business, or else it is at risk of being deemed superfluous. Ways of knowing that do not follow business logic are deemed inaccurate or relativistic. The logic of exchange finally liquidates its competitors, and stands alone as the privileged way of knowing. The form of positivism whose dominance terrified Adorno has not disappeared, but been reformulated. No longer does it restrict truth to worldly facts and verifiable phenomena, but

instead believes that what is true is only what is provable through business logic and big data (Jameson *LM* 89).

Finally, undergirding all of this is a Leibnizian belief that this is the best of all possible worlds, as expressed and critiqued in Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*. Usually it is framed as capitalism having "no alternative," or that the world has reached "The end of history," in Fukuyama's terminology (we will discuss this term in the next section); at its heart it is a belief that any major deviations from the system will make everyone's life worse. Of course this is untrue, and even as capitalist realism supports the aforementioned tools, they also reinforce belief in it. It is hard to critique capitalism when thought and being have both fully subsumed themselves to the system. Furthermore, neoliberalism's mirage of eternal growth promises a secure and everlasting future, one that will not actually happen. The 2008 financial crisis and the unequal nature of the recovery shatter this pseudo-utopian facade. Though there is not a clear alternative to contemporary capitalism, there is the realization that neoliberalism is not what its proponents sold it as, that it is not the only way, and in fact it was always doomed to fail. While neoliberal policies and structures still rule, the belief in their perpetual dominance has faded and the utopian promise used to manufacture consent to it has been broken.

I bring all this up to argue that we have returned to the 1970's economically and ideologically, albeit with some key differences. The secular crisis of capitalism is upon us; the system has matured. Capitalism is no longer a vampire sucking production from live bodies; it is zombie staggering forward, unaware that by all rights it should be dead. The sense of the end has returned, even if we do not know what will end, when it will end, or what will replace it. Nothing is happening, the future has been foreclosed. But it is not that there are no alternatives, it is that there are no paths at all. We are "beyond the dialects of class which [capitalism] held in its 'productive phase;'" it becomes unclear if there is a road, any road forward (Baudrillard *Symbolic Exchange and Death* 10). Arrighi notes that Fernand Braudel has a three tiered hierarchy for the economy: at the bottom is the economy of self-sufficiency, which as we have seen from *Endnotes* has been mostly erased in the industrialized world, both in high GDP countries and low ones (Arrighi 11) (*Endnotes* 2010). After that comes the market economy, and above that the "anti-market," which to Braudel is where capitalism now lives (Arrighi 11). We might modify this structure ever so slightly, where the anti-market becomes the sphere of finance. There are now two economies, one in permanent crisis and one that hides the other's maturation via

financialized growth. The latter has its origins in and in some ways still relies on the former one, a libidinal economy of consumption that encompasses the last parts of the productive economy. This consumption provides data to be sold and stored, and goods to be advertised. Furthermore, the aproductive economy relies on the remnants of the productive economy both ideologically and materially. Financially, Amazon does not *need* to ship packages for its business to run; ostensibly, it is in its interest to leave the door-to-door retail space. But it continues its deliveries for two reasons. First, it obfuscates the amount of data companies keep and Amazon stores, how billion dollar valuations do not come from exploiting a small subset of workers but rather the ever-expanding administration of our world.¹⁵ Moreover, the online retail sector provides commodities for online advertisements, which in turn produces more data to be stored by Amazon Web Services.

This long explanation, however, does not yet clarify how I will use terms in the rest of the thesis. In short, the following is my general periodization/terminology: By “late capitalism,” I am referring to the entire period of capitalism’s secular crisis, from 1967 onwards. This starting point is arbitrary— I pick 1967 because by then the crisis is relatively clear (hence the wide scale protests that occurred around the globe in the months after). It also fits with Mandel’s claim that the late 1960’s is when we see the end of the capitalism of the 1950’s and early 1960’s, and is around when wages begin stagnating in earnest. Finally, the first devaluation of the pound comes in November 1967, which was a portent of the coming troubles involving the Bretton-Woods system (Williamson 6). I will refer to the period before this as either “late industrial capitalism” or “monopoly capitalism”, unless I am directly quoting Adorno or Mandel. Financial capitalism will refer to the period after the move away from the gold standard, though it mostly will refer to the era after the bankruptcy of New York (1975) and the rise of the Mortgage backed security (popularized by Lewis Ranieri in 1977) up through the present (“Lewis Ranieri” *Wikipedia*). In this it resembles my periodization of neoliberalism. However, because of the importance to my project of the cultural and ideological aspects of these economic structures, I instead date neoliberalism as having a hypothetical beginning at the moment when the majority of Americans accept the Reagan administration’s claim that the Volker shock was necessary, or in other words when, in the mind of the public, control over inflation begins to take precedence over the

¹⁵ This is not to say warehouse workers are not exploited, or organizing for their rights is not warranted. Rather, it emphasizes the brutality of this new regime, that they exploit workers more or less for the sake of it.

importance of full employment. Though the regime of flexible accumulation at the heart of neoliberalism is still dominant, in the post-2008 economy the ideological facade that is central to my understanding of neoliberalism begins to crack. These periodizations are both rough and idiosyncratic, so to make it as clear as possible:

Late capitalism is an era within capitalism. It refers to the current moment, but also stretches all the way back to the late 1960's. Despite its name, it does not imply that capitalism will end soon, but rather that it cannot continue to grow as it has.

The regime of flexible accumulation/financial capitalism exists within the era of late capitalism, but is not synonymous with it. Rather, it is what hides capitalism's slowing growth. It stretches from the mid-1970's to the present.

Neoliberalism is the combination of financial capitalism with a particular set of ideological beliefs. The groundwork for it is laid in the 1970's, but it experiences widespread institution in the 1980's, and its hegemony peaks in the 1990's with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the celebration of Clinton's government surplus. It remains relatively hegemonic until the 2008 financial crisis. Afterwards, it remains the official attitude of most governments and corporations, but public belief in its rhetoric declines somewhat, although its undergirding logics are still ingrained as "common sense".

These definitions and timelines are useful because, as we will see, aproductive works arise under a regime of late capitalism, though mostly commonly at its edges, both before the neoliberal regime was instituted and then again after the 2008 crash. In these moments, the failure of capitalism becomes apparent, and a search begins for an alternative. In the 1960's, this produces the hippie movement, an attempt to build both a new economy and a new culture. However, this breaks down rather quickly, and by 1970 (if not before) it is clear that the hippie movement will not produce substantive change or a better world. This leaves a little less than a decade where there is no transformational object (see the section titled "Aproductivity and the Transformational Object"), a transitional period that resembles the current moment.

The End of History

If you spend enough time on the Internet, you'll eventually come across the phrase "this is the future liberals want." Turned into a joke by leftists poking fun at either American Liberalism or conservatives' baffling belief that the Democratic Party is radical, the phrase was

coined by a right-wing Twitter account bemoaning a photo of a woman in a niqab sitting next to a drag queen on the subway (Crouch 2017). By far the most interesting part of this entire “meme cycle” was that the most radical future conservatives can imagine already exists. In this scenario, the future is only marginally different from the present; it is something that has already arrived, more or less. It echoes “The End of History,” Francis Fukuyama’s famous thesis. This takes me to another potential point of confusion within the thesis, one that may already be apparent to the discerning reader: the relationship between the secular crisis of capitalism and “The End of History.”

Though his version is the most popular, we might note that Fukuyama was not the first theorizer of this concept. Months before “The End of History” was published, Lutz Niethammer, a German historian, released *Posthistorie*, a book that traces a “web of speculations on the end of history” as they developed in twentieth century German thought (Anderson 279). Separately from Niethammer, Perry Anderson’s essay on Fukuyama identifies precursors not only in Hegel and Kojève—Fukuyama’s stated influences—but also in the work of economist Antoine-Augustin Cournot. Cournot, as Anderson notes, was a conservative natural philosopher who pioneered neo-classical economics and game-theory models. To Anderson, Cournot’s work on the end of history and his similarities to Fukuyama reveal the conservative underpinnings of “The End of History.”

Though discussing the concept as defined by Fukuyama, it is Anderson’s essay I will rely on here, especially his identification of “three sequels” in the time between the last of Fukuyama’s precursors and the American’s essay, as these sequels focus not only on the political but also the cultural. There was the German *posthistorie* identified by Niethammer, where “modern civilization was numbed by an institutional massification in which the sheer scale of large organizations precluded any intelligent human direction” (Anderson 325). In this situation, a “crystallization of culture” arises, one where no more general philosophies could be produced (Anderson 326). In its skepticism toward overarching theories, the Germans anticipate the French theorists of post-modernity—and here I am referring mostly to Baudrillard and Lyotard—who declare grand narratives dead and argue that reality has passed into simulation (Anderson 327). The difference is that for the French, this skepticism comes from the failure of 1968 and remains a left-wing skepticism. The leftism of the postmodern accepts the victory of capital after 1968 and declares modernity over, so “history reaches its standstill in the streamlined whirl of a

merry-go-round” (Anderson 327). Interestingly, “the hallmark of the postmodern version of the end of history has been a fusion of the two motifs that Kojève had opposed as alternatives: no longer a civilization of either consumption or style, but of their interchangeability—the dance of commodities as *balls masqué* of libidinal intensities” (Anderson 327). The final sequel, Habermas’ fulfillment of Hegelian reason, explicitly opposes the other two, instead looking forward to a fulfillment of the enlightenment that would come with the creation of a “communicative conception of reason” that has not yet arrived (Anderson 328). Yet his proposed program of “protection and delineation,” paradoxically suggests that something like the Hegelian end of history has arrived, one where “the limits of the existing liberal state and market economy are held unsurpassable, as systems effectively beyond further popular control” (Anderson 330, 331).¹⁶

It is here that Fukuyama arises. Taking Hegel’s optimism toward the end in itself and Kojève’s centering of hedonism and consumption, he ties “liberal democracy and capitalist prosperity in an emphatic terminal knot” (Anderson 332). Fukuyama argues that the West has arrived at the end of development, and future large-scale conflicts are unlikely. Instead, there will mostly be skirmishes among members of the “third world” as they move toward liberal capitalism, which will become the dominant mode of governance. Notably, “the end of history will be a very sad time” to Fukuyama, a time without art and philosophy, with boredom and ennui becoming the dominant (Fukuyama 18). Anderson dispatches the three most common critiques of Fukuyama’s original essay before moving to the full-length book, where he identifies problems with Fukuyama’s use of Plato’s *thymos*—the spirit between reason and desire that resembles ire at frustrated desire—as well as the fact that much of the third world will not be able to emulate the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, which Fukuyama identifies as states that have recently entered into the end of history (Anderson 345-351). Instead, the “conviction that there is no viable economic alternative to the free market owes far more to the failure of Soviet communism than to the success of Korean capitalism” (Anderson 351). Fukuyama’s end of history is based on the failure of liberalism’s “opponents,” not its own success. Following this, Anderson examines the seeming impossibility of socialism in a globalized world and posits several historical analogies for how socialism might be understood

¹⁶ Considering the importance of the Frankfurt School to this project, it is perhaps insulting to gloss over Habermas as I do here. No offense is meant; it is simply that this essay is looking at a fundamentally different space than his work.

in the future, including scenarios where it returns as social democracy (as it has recently with the revitalization of the Labour Party in the U.K. and the popularity of Bernie Sanders in the United States). He concludes by noting that, as we saw in the above section, the “underlying structural malaise of advanced capitalism, revealed in the seventies, has not been overcome,” with rates of profit “no more than half of those of the long post-war boom” even as credit has expanded (Anderson 375).

It is at this end point that we begin. Returning briefly to Anderson’s analysis, we find an offhand comment that in German “goal” and “stop” are not united by a single word, as “end” does in English and French (Anderson 287). Reflecting this, Hegel’s vision of the end of history “was oblique—refracted through the medium of the spirit’s return to itself in the realm of philosophy; and, partly also for that reason, incomplete—leaving significant contradictions unresolved”(Anderson 325). Fukuyama, following the French, uses end to refer to both meanings. But I believe that they remain separate. In the early 1970’s, capitalism hits a permanent malaise. We saw this empirically in the previous section, with stagnating real wages and slowing rates of national growth, though we could equally note that Hegel recognized that capitalism’s survival relied on colonialism, which by the 1970’s was being unraveled globally, even if it was arguably replaced by American cultural imperialism—if not outright military imperialism.¹⁷ But this end point is not the “goal” of capitalism—which is to reproduce itself—but rather the byproduct of how it attempts to do so. In other words, capital does not mean to push the economy into a secular crisis, but its machinations inevitably lead to this. To hide the crisis, as we have seen, relies on debt and neoliberal policies, which allow capital to reproduce itself free from questions of production. So economic liberalism hits a “stop.”

Simultaneously, however, liberalism’s **cultural** aspect does achieve its telos. On the right, the reemergence of authoritarianism is defined by its electoral basis. Trump, Modi, Netanyahu, Boris Johnson, and Bolsonaro all won their elections (though Bolsonaro did need the establishment to jail his opponent to do so). Strongmen are now less likely to seize power and more likely to be elected. On the left, democratic socialism, an integration of socialism and liberalism, is the watchword of the decade. Even the exceptions prove the rule. The resurgence of

¹⁷ This, we might note, is itself a sign of aproductivity, as well as a reason Los Angeles was an early site for aproductive works of all types. In terms of the latter, American colonialism was most apparent—though by no means restricted to—Westward expansion, of which Los Angeles was the culmination and the symbol of, as Mike Davis notes in *City of Quartz*. As for the former, what is more aproductive than reproducing the traditional back and forth of the metropole and colony, except the product being shipped back and forth is ideology?

“tankies” (Western communists who support China and North Korea uncritically while denying the crimes of Stalin) relies on the subconscious knowledge that these regimes will not return in the West. It is only once authoritarian communism is dead and buried that Western teenagers feel safe dressing in its clothes. On right wing forums, there has been a rising obsession with aristocratic monarchism and other bizarre ideas that go by the moniker “the dark enlightenment” (Goldhill 2017). It is easy to fantasize about making Elon Musk—the increasingly erratic and terminally idiotic founder of Tesla—an absolute monarch when European states have not had one in over a century (Matthews 2016). This stretches all the way back to the early 1970’s. As we will see in the section entitled “Utopia Lost,” the failure of the hippie movement grows out of its inability to conceive of an alternative to liberalism, instead simply embracing its logics and attempting to universalize them.

Liberalism, then, is the only structure of governance that can be “realistically” presented as a governing structure within the Western World.¹⁸ This does not preclude imagining alternatives, but rather imagining the institution of them. Thinking of other systems is still possible, but what has been foreclosed is the representation or institution of these daydreams. Fukuyama recasts this dominance of liberalism as the fulfillment of it and of capitalism. In his reading, the consumer hedonism of the 1980’s and onwards is a sign of success, as is the sad boredom of the Western Subject. However, as we will see in the section on the transformational object, in reality it is a signifier of capitalism’s failure, part of the search for thing that will allow to escape it. To put it in Adornean terms, Fukuyama allows the ideological aspect of his thesis to distort its truth-content. The end of history hides the end of capitalism, how the economic system is a zombie staggering forward and we have no real alternatives, in part because of the entanglement of it and political liberalism, which is unlikely to budge. Yet at the same time, the arrival of the climate apocalypse also reveals the impossibility of continuing on with capitalism as is. In this scenario, there are no paths forward, since the alternatives have been discarded and capitalism will kill us all. As terrible and violent as it will be, climate change offers a unique possibility for finally representing the failure of capitalism and its tendency to self-destruct, even if it does not offer an alternative.¹⁹ The malaise of capitalism’s stop is difficult to represent in art

¹⁸I am the first to admit that my own political inclination, a Huxleyian form of left-anarchism where technology operates in the background, connecting small self-reliant communities, is not currently viable

¹⁹ This was originally written before the Covid-19 pandemic, which holds the same potential as catastrophic climate change, but is even more obvious and undeniable. Indeed, I have written about the similarities between Covid-19

and culture. But the destructive force of climate apocalypse is imminently paintable. Yet we should not take this to mean that apocalyptic movies will save us, or adequately present any alternative. As we will see in the section on Adorno's negative dialectics, identity (on which representation and recognition relies) is one with the exchange principle, which predates capitalism yet is also central to it. As such, any representation is bound to reinforce the status quo, even if—perhaps especially if—the goal is to subvert.

This is the situation that modern aproductive works capture, emphasizing the various sub-concepts within the larger “End of History,” and thus revealing both its instability and simultaneous dominance. Aproductive works reify the aforementioned ideological element of “the end of history”—the way it is posited as fulfillment—through their refusal to work toward anything or move forward in any sort of linear fashion. Once history has been fulfilled, it loses any teleological aspect, and this is reflected in the narratives. However, in their desperate search for a transformational object (as will be discussed in the following section), these artworks simultaneously falsify this ideological element which they reify, revealing this end not to be a utopian fulfillment but rather a depressing stagnation. The boredom of the characters within these narratives—and in aproductive works, the characters are always bored—is not one of fulfillment but the lack thereof. Finally, they stress that even if there are no alternatives and the future is foreclosed, the current situation is untenable, that something must be happening even as nothing moves.

To conclude this section, it is worth reiterating and clarifying how this essay understands the end of history. There are two separate phenomena united under Fukuyama's concept. The first is the stagnation/stop of capitalism, the terminal malaise that neoliberalism hides through virtual growth. The boredom and “sadness” that Fukuyama accurately identifies grows out of this aspect, accelerated by the failure of the hippie moment in the late 1960's, as we will examine in greater depth in the second chapter, particularly the section entitled “Utopia Lost.” We can understand the climate apocalypse as related to this malaise, another example of how capitalism's processes endanger it. The other phenomenon is the fulfillment of liberalism, how it becomes the hegemonic system of governance. To Fukuyama, this is the utopian aspect of the end of history, as it guarantees equality. While this is doubtful—the United States was a liberal democracy even when the law explicitly discriminated—it does act as a limitation on our ability

to realistically imagine the institution of an alternative, and thus has an ideological dimension. It works with the aforementioned business epistemology, which forces all articulations of an alternative to cultural liberalism to use the economic language and logic of economic liberalism, foreclosing the possibility of a truly independent alternative. Thus, we can differentiate a material and ideological end of history, even as the two are dialectically intertwined.

Negative Dialectics, Aproductivity, and the Transformational Object

Over a year after Mac Miller's (née Malcolm McCormick) 2018 death, the musician released a new music video. It was not a surprise—his family had announced a forthcoming posthumous album, and the musician was well-known to have recorded hundreds of unreleased songs. In the video (for the song “Good News”), the camera moves through animated spaces constructed through 2D media (photos, drawings, direct animation) overlaid on digital animation. The camera moves slowly into the frame while the environments move in the opposite direction, folding in on themselves. This combination produces a feeling that the world cannot be acted upon by the “protagonist” (which here is the camera), but rather the camera just moves through the space as if on rails, searching for the thing that will never arrive (a live Miller, who is sequestered in archival footage shown before and after the animated segment, and whose photo the camera is chasing within the animation). The viewer has the experience of the protagonist within aproductive works, a sort of paralyzed movement combined with a search for something that cannot be represented.

Or perhaps a more cinephilic example is in order. Wim Wender's *Alice in the Cities* (1974) tells the story of a writer, Philip Winter, tasked with finding the grandmother of a small girl he just met (Alice). However, the girl cannot describe the grandmother's appearance, and does not know where she lives. They wander around various cities based on Alice's spotty memory, searching for this “thing” they might not recognize. Eventually, the police find Philip and tell him that they have found Alice's mother (who abandoned her at the beginning to care for a boyfriend) in Munich. The film concludes with Alice and Philip riding the train to go see her. Here, there is movement, but it is not toward something or even a search based on evidence (the single photograph they have is of a door with no identifiers). Instead the film traces a wandering path based on half-remembered past experiences that are no longer valid—at one point, the girl remembers where the grandmother lives, only for them to discover she has since moved. In each

city, every object is imbued with potential—maybe Alice will see something that helps her remember—only for this potential to be negated. Like all aproductive works, both of these examples are aesthetic reifications of Adorno’s negative dialectics (though Adorno would almost certainly deny this and denigrate the music video!) Because of this, to understand how aproductivity operates and what it looks at (and not just how it feels), we need an explanation of Adorno’s peculiar form of dialectics.

This is more difficult than it first appears, as the structure of *Negative Dialectics* is unique, to put it mildly. Adorno does not start with his own argument, but rather gives a brief overview of German philosophy and expounds on “the concept of philosophical experience” (Adorno *ND* xx). While many philosophical texts begin with background and history, what is unique to Adorno is that he does not follow this with his own addition. Rather, he spends Part I launching an immanent attack on ontology. It is only after he finishes his blitz on Heidegger that he deigns to explore the concepts within negative dialectics, as he believes that the concepts should be created from experience. They should grow out of philosophical critique, rather than be handed down from on high. He follows this with three models, which are explicitly not examples in the traditional philosophical sense; “they do not simply elucidate general reflections” (Adorno *ND* xx). Rather, they are meant to “make plain what negative dialectics is and to bring it into the realm of reality” (Adorno *ND* xx). As Frederic Jameson notes, Adorno’s use of the term “model” strikes us as “aesthetically and philosophically inappropriate,” reflecting a failure to escape the “philosophical example whose optionality immediately disqualifies the authority of the concept it was supposed to illustrate” (Jameson *LM* 60). If this were the case, then these become nothing more than examples of method, would in turn transform Adorno’s chapter on concepts into a methodology “which it sought above all to avoid becoming” (Jameson *LM* 61). However, the term takes on a new valence once Jameson identifies its origins for Adorno not in philosophy but in music (Jameson *LM* 61). To Arnold Schönberg—Adorno’s musical mentor—the model is not simply an “exercise” but rather:

designates the raw material of a specific composition or its thematic point of departure: which is to say, for twelve-tone music, the specific row itself, the particular order and configuration of the twelve notes of the scale which, chosen and arranged in advance, *becomes* [emphasis in the original] the composition, in so far as this last is ‘nothing more’ than an elaborate series of variations and permutations—both vertical and horizontal—of

that starting point
(Jameson *LM* 61).

For the less musically inclined such as myself, Jameson helpfully clarifies that this unites “initial ‘themes’ and their later ‘development,’” two concepts separated in classical music (Jameson *LM* 61). Similarly, in classical philosophy, the “philosophical idea or problem—and its ulterior development—philosophical argumentation and judgment” are separate, forcing the concept to precede the text, which then thinks through and modifies the concept (Jameson *LM* 61). Adorno’s models, on the other hand, attempt to unite problem and *darstellung*—its representation (Jameson *LM* 62). As a result, there are “no ‘arguments’ of the traditional kind that lead to truth climaxes; the text will become one infinite variation in which everything is recapitulated at every moment” (Jameson *LM* 62).

All of this poses a problem: how does one go about recapitulating Adorno’s negative dialectics without betraying them, turning this unique mode of thought into a methodology? One might emphasize that they are always incomplete, never truly synthesizing. As a form of logic, negative dialectics can never have a stable concept explicable through direct language. It is metaphorical and shifting and incomplete and impossible to pin down, raging against a totality it refuses yet calls attention to. My solution is to offer a compilation of descriptions of the conceptual contradictions from which negative dialectics grow out of, as well various metaphors Adorno uses to elucidate his ideas. In doing so, I hope that the reader will understand the “essence” of negative dialectics, the way it structures content through itself, using form and rhetoric as another tool in the search for truth. However, at the same time, my process “orphans” thoughts, taking them from their home and recontextualizing them, sometimes in ways radically different from the original. The result of this process, I hope, is that there will always be a sense of absence, a haunting, produced through the tension between the quotes’ original context and how it is being used here. Furthermore, this structure emphasizes that *Negative Dialectics* is a book composed of infinite variations on an initial theme, as described above. Following this, I will examine the relationship between aproductivity and Adorno’s monads, which will bring us to questions of the transformational object and boredom, and finally a place where we can begin to define aproductivity.

Negative Dialectics

In recent years, Adorno has been co-opted by new materialists such as Jane Bennett, particularly his writings on utopia.²⁰ But in doing so, these “vibrant materialists” ignore perhaps the central constellation in Adorno’s theories, the subject-object divide. Adorno emphatically believes that the subject-object divide cannot be overcome through thought, but is rather the inescapable product of a decayed world where exchange and hence identity reigns (*ND* 10). As he writes, though subject and object are not “positive, primary states of fact but negative throughout...the difference between subject and object cannot be simply negated” (Adorno *ND* 174). Bennett’s moment of “naïve realism,” where she calls for us to imagine the relationships between objects and to momentarily free ourselves from the subject position, would be idealism of the most vulgar sort to Adorno, even as he insists that the subject is “the late form of myth, and yet equal of its oldest form” (Adorno *ND* 186). It is equal to the oldest form because it is tied to questions of the logic of identity, which Adorno argues arises with the logic of the exchange relationship; as Jameson frames it, “exchange value...the emergence of some third, abstract term between two incomparable objects...constitutes the primordial form by which identity emerges in human history” (Jameson *LM* 26, 23). Identity grows out of the exchange principle, which requires an abstraction that allows discordant objects to become interchangeable. To trade three apples for a goat, I first must have to understand the apples as thing in themselves, and then establish an equivalence of this thing in itself for another thing in itself. This equivalence then institutes a sameness between the two, with the apples and goats taking on a relationship between each other.²¹ Exchange is necessary to produce identity and the concept of a ‘concept,’ even as it casts a spell of sameness over the objects to which it has given identity. And so though the myth of the transcendental subject—which relies on identity—arises in the enlightenment, it is not a sudden appearance but rather the germination of a seed planted long ago. However, recognizing this does not allow us to dispose of the myth of the subject and escape identity—it infiltrates our understanding of every object in an era where abstraction and universals reign (Jameson *LM* 20). In modernity, the development of capitalism has erased the subject and philosophy is eager to follow suit, aligning itself with the universal spell of exchange value which destroys individuality—for in its domination, exchange liquidates the myths it uses to establish itself. But

²⁰ See, for example: the end of Bennett’s essay “The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter” in *Political Theory* Volume 32, Issue 3, 2004.

²¹ At the same time, identity also stems from our self-preservation instinct, which acts as a separation of us from the world in order to prioritize the self. See Peter Osborne’s “A Marxism for the Postmodern” p.180.

the answer is not to “place the object on the royal throne once occupied by the subject. On that throne the object would be nothing but an idol” (Jameson *LM* 93). (Adorno *ND* 181). Instead, negative dialectics tries to think while refusing to posit a first, to imagine without prioritization of either the concrete or the abstract (Adorno *ND* 138). It tries to work through both simultaneously, and in so doing reveals how the subject is constructed, how it exists as a myth that imbues every object we mediate on. This is because objects exist without subjectivity, but can only be known through subjectivity (Adorno *ND* 186). As Adorno argues, subjectivity presupposes facts and the objective, while objectivity only presupposes the object (Adorno *ND* 140). In other words, subjectivity stems from the objective existence of the world; we are object before subjects, but we can never regain that status, or think as objects. Through mediating on an object, we experience an objective moment that reaffirms our status as subjects. This experience might be described as realization of the distance between ourselves and the object, the recognition of our constructed position, which reveals the subject to be a mythical construction.

This is then related to the question of the particular and the universal. To Adorno, the concept is “the strong form of identity” in philosophy, the thing that subsumes variety and difference under a single term (Jameson *LM* 20). It is a universalizing construction that wishes to affect the particular even as it remains independent from it. However, universals are affected by the particular, and the two exist in contradiction the modern world (Jameson *LM* 90, 33). The particular always contradicts the universal through its position as an object, since objects always exist for themselves and are never fully subsumed into the exchange relationship, even as the universal “seeks to secure and perpetuate the feeling that it reunites subject and object” (Jameson *LM* 21). “The concept of the particular is always its negation at the same time; it cuts short what the particular is and what nonetheless cannot be directly named, and replaces it with identity”; as soon as something becomes an example of the particular, it loses its status as such and gains identity, becoming a concept (Adorno *ND* 173). Adorno’s interpretive method transforms the particular-universal relationship in philosophy. He starts with particulars that suddenly reveal themselves as universals even as they simultaneously contradict the universal and convict totality through the nonidentity which it denies, revealing that there is always a unbridgeable chasm between concept and thing (Adorno *ND* 147). Or as Jameson puts it, “what the concept cannot say must somehow, by its imperfection, be registered within it...otherwise the powerful force of identity will reign through it unchecked” (Jameson *LM* 30). In other words, it is only through

exploring the moments where the totality reveals that it is not identical with the world that we can open up the possibility of escape, even as it simultaneously emphasizes how dominant the totality is, how it is generally inescapable. It is in this space between what exists and what is claimed to exist where ideas live (Adorno *ND* 150). In this they resemble essence, which is what lies below immediacy and facts yet makes them what they are (Adorno *ND* 167). Essence is not eternal and unchanging, but rather stems from the exchange relationship, which casts a “universal spell” over all individuality and across the frozen landscape of isolated particulars,” even as it creates the appearance of the individual through identity (Jameson *LM* 93). And so identity and exchange become the essence that stems from the material world they lie under and affect. “Dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things,” capturing not the ahistorical, universal state of existence that existentialism promises, but rather the meaninglessness of a world where reason has become irrational, producing Auschwitz (Adorno *ND* 11). In a post-Auschwitz world, philosophy no longer has a place, because it attempts to make sense of a senseless world, and so all we are left with is negative dialectics, a constant negation. But this too is a philosophy, of sorts, albeit one that refuses to turn into a methodology, and eventually destroys itself, because it too is a form of thought that it must undermine (Adorno *ND* 406). Yet thought tends to beyond that which exists, what is “given” and in so doing is one of the few ways of negating the positivist claim that what exists is what is (Adorno *ND* 19). Because of this, we must continue to think and negate, even while knowing it will not deliver us to a stable truth.

This tense situation is where negative dialectics arises. Though, as mentioned, negative dialectics tends to work from experience outward, it does not follow a set path or posit a first. “Dialectics is not ashamed to recall the famous procession of Echternach: one jump forward, two jumps back” (Adorno *ND* 157). Rather, it moves constantly between the stages of thought, as facts cannot be understood from a hierarchy opposed from the outside; non-contradiction cannot be predisposed, especially because the power of history exceeds the isolated fact (Adorno *ND* 140, Jameson *LM* 91). As Phil Rosen puts it, the result is a structure of thought where the object of knowledge is conceived as “a totality of mediations which are its linkage to the social whole” (Rosen 159). What links the various miniature constellations within Adorno’s work is the unmentionable: the overwhelming world of capital. Yet the structured absence calls attention to itself, turning into a presence that reveals the truth of the totality. To do so, negative dialectics must examine the stereotypes and beliefs of the individual “without believing for one minute that

any of them are personal and subjective,” but rather that they reveal the discoloration of the world (Jameson *LM* 248). As Adorno argues:

Mythical is that which never changes, ultimately diluted to a formal legality of thought. To want substance in cognition is to want a utopia. It is this consciousness of possibility that sticks to the concrete, the undisfigured. Utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality; this is why it seems abstract in the midst of extant things. The inextinguishable color comes from nonbeing. Thought is its servant, a piece of existence extending—however negatively—to that which it is not. The utmost distance alone would be proximity; philosophy is the prism in which its color is caught.

(Adorno *ND* 57)

Negative dialectics, then, is a form of dialectics where thought negates itself through auto-examination, a form of commentary on the physical world even as it refuses to comment on that world. It is like tracing a knot backwards to unite it, then following the string to the next knot, repeating the process, ad infinitum. It looks at what is absent in the concept but present in the particular, and in so doing opens up the possibility of a glimpse at something like nonbeing, of a utopia where we are finally free of the universalizing principle of exchange before we fall back and again lose sight (Jameson *LM* 248). Or perhaps not even a glimpse, but rather just a haunting suspicion that it could exist. It does this through the invisible linkages, talking of the particular yet presupposing the universal that the particular contradicts, using the absent antithesis not to produce synthesis, but rather reveal where the concept is wanting (Jameson *LM* 33). Simultaneously, it is the process of using absence as a form of negation. It is a philosophy concerned with what is not there, and in so doing reveals the reality of the abstract concept of the totality whose domination it wishes to negate.

In short, negative dialectics is a philosophical wandering, where the philosopher has no aim but nonetheless searches, looking for something that only exists outside of the philosophical system, or rather cannot be represented by any system. Negative dialectics does not have a monadic relationship to the world, because it cannot be closed off and packaged—as philosophy traditionally attempts to do in its transcendental fields—but is instead nomadic. Though historically dependent, there is nonetheless something atemporal about negative dialectics, both in how it forecloses the future—Adorno holds it out as the last philosophy possible after Auschwitz and yet also calls for its liquidation, suggesting that there is nothing else coming after

it—and how it moves through history, jumping across philosophical movements and eras. What will later be called the “deliberate scandal of [Frederic] Jameson’s method”—the synthesis of competing philosophical movements and refusal to be pinned by a single methodology or mode of thought, but rather moving across eras and cliques to find what it needs—forms the basis of negative dialectics (Arac quoted in Osborne 173). Adorno takes from everyone, even his philosophical enemies such as Heidegger—as mentioned earlier, negative dialectics grows out of his response to the ontologist. If progress is the product of a single catastrophe piling “wreckage upon wreckage,” negative dialectics examines the debris thrown off and intermixed (Benjamin 201). It is this process, a wandering about in a space stuck between a past piling up on itself and a future that has been foreclosed, that aproductive works reify. In doing so, they obliquely reveal the crisis of capitalism and our desire for what we will come to term the transformational object.

Aproductivity and Adorno’s Aesthetics

Before getting there, however, we might note here that aproductive works do not necessarily fulfill the role of art in Adorno’s aesthetics, where individual works are the dialectical counterpoint to philosophy, refusing to speak on anything but themselves and in so doing holding a utopian promise through their negation of the world. This does not mean that they have no similarities to Adorno’s aesthetics; aproductive works and Adorno’s aesthetic monads share an obsession with self-reflexivity and the problem of representation. Moreover, they both expel happiness from the work itself to the not-yet, an outside point.

Adorno’s monads are works that refuse productivity, sealing themselves off from the world and being for themselves. Yet they do so through techniques and objects that come from the world. In capitalism’s increasing domination, these objects end up reifying the world, as the commodity principle marks all objects (including those within the work), becoming a materially dependent essence. In the artwork’s focus on its own objects, it ends up revealing capitalism’s ever-growing domination, as these objects are blocked from existing for themselves by the exchange value that infiltrates them (Jameson *LM* 180). The artwork is always a failure, unable to exist solely for its form and materials because form and materials can no longer exist for themselves. Art turns away from the world to focus on its forms and materials, but it is exactly those things that smuggle the world back inside the work, making it more than just an empty object, as it would be if were it simply about technique. In other words, it is the world that an

artwork tries to expel from itself that provides the work's essence, what makes it more than the sum of the techniques. At the same time, however, reification within the artwork reveals the distance between the object as conceived—as for itself, holding “similarity with itself” (Cahn 40) where its logic and representation have not been separated—and its actual position in society, the way “use values are transmogrified into abstract equivalencies” or exchange value (Jameson *LM* 180). In doing so, however, it simultaneously reveals that this is not the natural state of things, that this world is a construction, just as the work of art is. However, while the monad holds an alternative in itself, in the difference it holds from the world it nonetheless reifies, aproductive works cannot do so because of ideological, economic, and ecological reasons. Instead, they trace the relationships of the late capitalist world which exists outside the text, yet refuse to identify the connective tissue itself, namely late capitalism.²²

The ideological obstacle stems from business ontology and epistemology. Resistant art is not immune to a world where the logic of business is the only way of knowing and every object must have a business aspect. As Mark Fisher writes, “Nothing runs better on MTV than a protest against MTV” (Fisher *CR* 9). Monads can no longer exist in the same form as they did in Adorno, because there is a “precorporation” of them into the system, a “pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires” by business ontology (Fisher *CR* 9).²³ The ideological claim that there is no alternative, that everything must be business, becomes encoded in artworks, forming a dialectic relationship with the individual works' truth-content, just as the form of Wagner's operas holds both ideological untruth/falsity of their eras and a historically dependent truth-content within them (Jameson *LM* 221). Business ontology, as we have seen, is nothing more than a modification of the positivist ideology, albeit a positivism where the only measurable thing is money. But this slight difference is enough to weaken the monad's resistance. Art negated the positivism of Adorno's time through a self-reflexive interest in its forms and objects, revealing that they all carry the exchange relationship within them, falsifying the positivist claim

²² I purposefully avoid referring to an “aproductive aesthetic,” because I do not believe aproductive works have a unified aesthetic. Rather, they are connected through their connection to negative dialectics. This does not mean no aproductive works look alike; *The Big Lebowski* and *Inherent Vice* certainly share an aesthetic vision. But this vision is not what unites the two under the rubric of “aproductivity.”

²³ The exception to this may be ephemeral art, or works that only occur once. However, while these works cannot be co-opted in the way a Nirvana song can, they are not immune to the logics of the market. The performance work, for example, utilizes the capitalist notion of false scarcity. While the concept is usually used against itself (i.e. the performance work invokes false scarcity to critique the concept), this is increasingly difficult in a time where “experience” is one of the dominant sites of commodification. One now pays for the right to say they had an experience, not for the experience itself.

that they exist solely as objects. But business ontology instead claims that they exist solely because of the exchange relationship, and so monadic abstraction alone is no longer enough, if it ever was. Yet they cannot simply reflect the world as it is—art’s formal aspects will always produce mediation and distance from the world. If they attempt to copy the world, they become concepts, failing to adequately represent the thing they stand for. This is particularly true in the world of late capital, whose enormous complexity makes realist representation a fool’s errand. Aproductive works respond to this by omitting the exchange relationship, pushing it outside the work.²⁴ Yet relationships within cannot be explained without understanding the flow of capital, which is pushed out. The result is disjointedness, which forces a realization on the audience about the dominance of capitalism, how in the atomized world it has created, capital flows offer the only real connection between disparate people and events. As we will see at the end of this section, the narrative in aproductive works is in part the quixotic search for a substitution, for something else that will explain the world. The failure of this search forces the audience to confront the reality of the absent system, since it is the only thing that could make sense.

The second reason the aproductive works can no longer use Adorno’s monadic structure is due to the ongoing nature of the secular crisis of capitalism. The Marxist belief that Capitalism will liquidate itself upon reaching the edges of its growth has been endlessly deferred. We have reached the point where capital produces a surplus population that should threaten the system, except financialization has served to continually postpone and obfuscate the crisis. There is no more outside of capitalism in this situation, because the break that might produce alternatives has come and gone. To understand this, we might look at Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*, where no matter how closed off and desolate the characters are, there is always an alternative, even if it is death. Bran threatens to leave, and “the little thing on which everything hangs is the possibility that something might change. This movement, or its absence, constitutes the plot” (Adorno *NL* 269). In *Happy Days*, a revolver is among Willie and Winnie’s possessions, and so suicide is always a possibility, even as the audience knows that it will never be pursued, because the true terror is that death will not succeed, that the characters will continue to live in this half-dead state forever. The horror and revulsion Beckett inspires comes in part from how the characters fear

²⁴ We might briefly note that in the novel *Inherent Vice*, the aproductive text analyzed in Chapter 2, we never see the protagonist barter, but are told that almost everything he owns comes from this primitive form of exchange. For more on exchange in the novel, see chapter 5 of Sean Carswell’s *Occupy Pynchon*.

“that they will not be able to die,” even as they rely on each other to stay alive (Adorno *NL* 269). The unrealized possibility of freedom is what provides both terror and hope. Now, however, we live after the break; Bran has left and Willie has pulled the trigger on himself, but the open door led back into the room and Willie blinks his eyes while the gun makes an impotent click. Everyone has gone on living as if nothing happened; the crisis of capitalism has not produced new ideas and possibilities, but rather condemned us to wander the desert for eternity.

In response, the monad shifts from an inside/outside dialectic to a structure where the past and future are both outside the text yet nonetheless constantly impinge. For example, *Atlanta*—Donald Glover’s aproductive television show—begins with a shooting the protagonists are arrested for. They are released on bail, and it is not addressed again (at least not within the first two seasons). Yet the absence of repercussions haunts the show, foreclosing future plans. It is only after what should constitute an end—a murder and arrest—that the show truly begins. What should transform their lives changes nothing, yet constantly haunts them. Furthermore, there is doubt whether this is a singular event—as the argument preceding the shooting ensues, the character Darius says he has déjà vu, and even notices a dog he saw the “last time” (Glover 2016). The show then jumps back to the day before and reviews what led up to the moment. But this time it skips the shooting, preferring to show the local news story saying the three protagonists have been arrested. After the transformational moment, the story reboots itself, but now puts the event outside the narrative. We become Darius having déjà vu, but the second instance—usually understood as the “real” event when talking of déjà vu—is not represented. Similarly, in contemporary aproductive films, this effect is sometimes achieved by setting the film in the moment after late capitalism arrives, the early 1970’s, with the characters still believing the moment of change might yet arrive, though the audience knows the truth, that the moment has passed.

The final obstacle to aproductive works taking on the status of aesthetic monads is the upcoming climate apocalypse: not only climate change but also the widespread destruction of ecosystems, the nutrient collapse, and general environmental overshoot (Bane 25). While particularly acute now, this is not new. As early as 1928, the discourse around environmental overuse was so established that it seeped into fiction, with Aldous Huxley’s characters fretting about the redirection of phosphorus away from the soil and into the sea, as well as the disproportionate growth of coal and oil use in comparison to population growth (Huxley *Point*

Counterpoint 57, 129). *The Limits of Growth*, which used computer modeling to argue that humans were overusing our finite resources, was published in 1972. Coincidentally, humanity first reached overshoot—when we use up more resources than the earth can replace—in 1970 (*Earth Over Shoot Day* 2019).²⁵

In his later non-fiction (1959), Huxley argues that in Europe, where nature exists on sufferance, granted conditional survival by the forces of rationality, “the notion ‘river’ implies...the notion bridge...The corollary of mountain is tunnel, of swamp, an embankment,” while in places where enlightenment rationality and industrial capitalism have yet to dominate, these concepts reflect “wading, swimming, alligators...To travel is to hack one’s way laboriously through a tangled, prickly, and venomous darkness” (Huxley *CE* 3).

But as capitalism expands and seeps into ever more areas, this shifts. The transformation is expedited by catastrophic climate change, a phenomenon that is the product of human domination over nature. The desolate background landscapes of Beckett have become increasingly real, but now there is no hope that we will look out the window and see the sea, as *Endgame*’s human husks dream. Nature can no longer be talked about without also talking of climate change. In Adorno’s era, nature was the one site where there was still a possibility of a world free from enlightenment rationality—to rework Huxley, there were places where ‘river’ was not an unconscious signifier for ‘bridge.’ But catastrophic climate change destroys the nature/society dialectic, because nature becomes shaped and defined through climate change. Previous human incursions into nature formatted regions but not the baseline world ecology, or at least so we believed. This is no longer the case, if it ever was. Because of this, to think of nature now is to think of society. And this transformation of nature is not only material, linked solely to climate catastrophe. It is also related to a cultural trend, where the rise of positivism frames discussing “larger, more abstract thoughts” such as natural history as a “kind of social blunder,” a way to repress the nightmare of nature, the violence and death within it and that we inflict upon it (Jameson *LM* 95-96). The abstraction required to discuss nature is suppressed under the guise of positivism, but really out of fear and loathing. And so the last “outside” we had, the one place free from industrial society, is liquidated in practice and in thought. In this

²⁵ Though capitalism’s secular crisis aligns temporally with the onset of the environmental and fuel crises of the 1970’s and the two are inextricably linked, they are not one and the same. At the time of its collapse, the Soviet Union produced 16% of global carbon emissions (CDIAC 2012). Rather, it is a byproduct of the Enlightenment rationality (which of course is intertwined with the rise of capitalism, as Adorno and Horkheimer traced).

world, how can art take on its status as a monad, striving to be free from the world yet reifying it in its forms, as Adorno's monastic artworks do? How can the work imagine freedom and the outside from within, when there is no outside?

But despite all this, we have seen the aproductive work is not separate from the monad, nor does it abandon the concept. Rather, it is an extreme version, a monad for the end of history. Returning to the above claim that there is no longer an outside, we might modify it to say that in aproductive works, the driver of the narrative (whether object, event, or system) is pushed outside, and the narrative becomes about the attempt to break free and reclaim and represent this event, which is the thing that will explain the various relationships (both formal and narrative) within the work. It always fails at this, but in the struggle forces the audience to recognize that something has been excepted, pointing to the world of late capital absent in the texts. Aproductive works turn viewers and characters alike into nomads within monads, wandering around searching for the thing that will reconcile the inside and outside, attempting to tear down the wall separating the two, rather than building it as Adorno's monads did. Yet they never can go beyond the boundary. Rather than accepting this, they struggle vainly, searching for the thing that will reveal the narrative as a reconciled whole and hence allow the viewer to see the work from the outside. They take on the role of philosophy, refusing to grasp at any immediate thing, instead searching in vain for what connects the threads. I call this connective item the "transformational object," working from psychoanalyst Adam Phillip's writing on boredom.

Before diving into Phillips, however, I wish to note that I believe that the search for the transformational object is a displacement of the economic onto the narrative/formal/temporal, as the foreclosure of the future means that there is no longer an obvious transformational object for our economic/material conditions (though as I will explore later in this thesis, the oncoming climate catastrophe may act as a transformational object, albeit in a negative sense). This displacement guarantees that the transformational object will never be found, because the artwork must always look in the wrong place for it, searching everywhere except the incomprehensible world of capital.

Phillips introduces the transformational object in an essay on boredom—appropriately titled "On Being Bored"(1998)—where he recontextualizes the work of Donald Winnicott. Looking at children, Phillips argues that the bored child is "waiting, unconsciously, for an experience of anticipation," in other words, waiting for an excited form of waiting (Phillips 69).

In this situation, the child is “reaching into a recurrent sense of emptiness out of which his real desire can crystallize,” stuck in a “dull helplessness of possibility and dismay” (Phillips 69). However, this moment is quite precarious, as the adult tendency when confronted with a bored child is to assuage their boredom (we will explore why shortly). When this happens, or the child cannot maintain their boredom for some other reason, there is a “premature flight from uncertainty, the familiar orgy of promiscuous and disappointing engagements” that can easily become a “simulation of desire” and the “regressive fabrication of need” (Phillips 70-71). The child indulges in any number of things, searching for what it cannot grasp. Think of those childhood moments where you’d wander around the house, engaging with various things in hope that they will alleviate boredom. Here, boredom places the child on a “threshold of emptiness, a lack...in which his own idiosyncratic, unconscious desire [lurks] as a possibility” (Phillips 71). We will return to this state on the edge of emptiness when we reach adult boredom. For now, however, we should note that childhood boredom is by definition a transitional state, an interruption, where the destination is unclear (Phillips 72).

It is here that Phillips introduces Winnicott, in particular his spatula experiment. In the experiment, Winnicott sits across from a mother and child, with a shining tongue depressor on the table in front of them, setting the scene for Winnicott’s “three stages of the infant’s behavior” (Phillips 72). The child does not know what they are looking for, but will often reach for the spatula and find himself “‘in a fix,’” looking to the mother or withdrawing from the object, unsure if he is allowed to play (Winnicott quoted in Phillips 73). Following this, there is a period of hesitation, where the child holds itself still, and then the mouth becomes flabby as it accepts that it desires the spatula (Winnicott quoted in Phillips 73). After this, the child plays with the spatula, developing self-confidence, even imitating the father by ‘smoking’ the spatula like a pipe (Winnicott quoted in Phillips 73). However, when Winnicott tries to force the spatula into the infant’s mouth during the period of hesitation, he finds it impossible except through brutal strength, which produces acute mental distress in the child (Winnicott quoted in Phillips 73). In this scenario, boredom is:

The set situation before there is a spatula to be found; or perhaps, more absurdly, a set situation full of spatulas in which the child has to find one that really appeals to him. The bored child, asprawl of absent possibilities, is looking for something to hold his attention...For the child to be allowed to have what Winnicott calls ‘the full course of the

experience' the child needs the use of an environment that will suggest things without imposing them; not preempt the actuality of the child's desire by force-feeding, not distract the child by forcing the spatula into his mouth.

(Phillips 74)

The capacity for boredom is a key developmental milestone for the child. It is what allows the child to be "relatively unembittered by his gradual pre-Oedipal disillusionment," the realization that the mother does not exist solely for them (Phillips 75). But at the same time, it also teaches the child the process of reformulating absence as presence, which turns the unrealized good object into the "bad persecuting" object, one that mocks by withholding and calling attention to desire (Phillips 75). The unoffered breast turns into a bad object, actively refusing to let the baby feed. Boredom becomes a "defense against waiting, which is, at one remove, an acknowledgement of the possibility of desire" (Phillips 76). Boredom distracts us from recognizing that we desire. This is the boredom adults experience, one that terrifies us because it always holds the possibility that, like Hamm in *Endgame*, our lives will become waiting for a thing that will never arrive (Phillips 75). Yet at the same time, in boredom there is not only the "lure of the possible object of desire" but also "the lure of the escape from desire, of its meaninglessness" (Phillips 76). Boredom holds in it the hope that one day desire will be vanquished.

And so finally we arrive at the transformational object, a term Phillips takes from Christopher Bollas. This object is the thing that "'promises to transform the self'" (Bollas quoted in Phillips 77). But we cannot know what this object will be, or when it will arrive; anything might be it, and we will not know until well after it arrives. What boredom does is make tolerable the "impossible experience of waiting for something without knowing what it could be" (Phillips 77). But the accompanying risk is that it becomes waiting, where the adult is made aware of their desire for the transformational object. If this happens, we realize we are in a transitional state and desire reveals itself (Phillips 78).

These individual psychoanalytic insights might be translated to society as a whole, where boredom and the aforementioned "orgy of promiscuous and disappointing engagements" that the bored person experiences can be understood as what a more vulgar Marxism would call false consciousness, the things that distract us from the material situation, from realizing that we desire a better world (Phillips 71). We are not vulgar Marxists, of course—it is an epithet never

bestowed on oneself but only imposed from the outside. Besides, in the earlier section on the economy, we saw that the financialization of the modern economy distracts from capitalism's maturation—it is not simply culture and ideology that hides our world's failures, but the economy itself. The line between base and superstructure is thin, if existent at all. In this world, boredom becomes the defining state of existence within the economy, with the neoliberal era being the era of boredom, and the spaces on the border (1970-1979, 2008-now) where it breaks down into waiting, as we become aware of our desire for a transformational object, for something that will produce a better world.²⁶ Or, more precisely, neoliberal consensus declares that neoliberal policies/culture **are** the transformational object, presenting the combination of constant economic expansion and dominance of popular art as utopian. In this scenario, we are in the moment after the transformational object, and so we should no longer desire. Everything will appreciate financially and the scolds who tell us that mass art does not mean art for the masses will shut up. The Internet will allow the people to have a voice in what Hollywood produces, and micro-lending will bring everyone into the middle class. The promiscuity and excess of the 1980's, 1990's, and 2000's is the result of a tension between the accepted ideological claim and the actual facts on the ground, the cultural contradiction between being told this is the best it gets and the nagging sense that we were sold a false bill of goods.

After 2008, however, this has a different valence. Here, neoliberalism as a transformational object has failed, yet no alternatives are forthcoming, and so there is a desperate search for something, anything, that will become the transformational object. This search is what aproductive works reify. In so doing, they bring attention to the fact that we are permanently waiting for the transformational object, destroying the protective shield boredom acts as and making it clear that we are waiting. This newfound awareness can inspire terror and anger in an audience (see, for example, the popular and critical revulsion towards *Inherent Vice*), just as Schönberg's early atonal symphonies, Beckett's plays, and other modernist monads did, even as they operate differently, offering a distorted image of society that no one can deny, even as they refuse to admit it (Adorno "Commitment" 190). Monads close themselves off, reifying the identity principle even as they falsify its 'ontological' claim, the ideological assertion that the

²⁶ We might note that the "bullshit jobs" described by David Graeber as dominant in our economy are in part defined by their boredom, how they hide our desire for meaning through bureaucratic make-work. See Graeber, David. *Bullshit Jobs*. Simon & Schuster, 2018. /z-wcorg/.

essence of the world (the exchange relationship/identity) is inherent to the world. This pushes happiness to a space outside, to a not-yet of the future. It cannot be within the world art reifies, because for Adorno happiness can only be expressed through its renunciation, which “expresses the insufficiency of individual happiness compared with utopia” (Adorno *ND* 353). To imagine happiness within this world is fool’s errand, because the suffering of a single individual invalidates it. “The smallest trace of senseless suffering in the empirical world belies all the identitarian philosophy that would talk us out of that suffering”; as long as the world inflicts pain on some, none can be truly happy (Adorno *ND* 202). This promise of future happiness is why it is “virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without being immediately betrayed by it” (Adorno “Commitment 190). The artwork lets suffering express itself without turning it into a justification of suffering.

Aproductive works push their happiness to the outside as well, but do so through reifying the search for the transformational object, which forces recognition that we desire a transformational object that will improve our world, negating neoliberalism’s claim that it was the object. Furthermore, the continual failure of the search emphasizes the impossibility of a viable alternative within our current exchange-based system, even as it reveals the necessity of such an alternative. But rather than capitulating, aproductive works vainly struggle onwards, negating various untrue transformational objects, falsifying idols. In short, aproductive works construct a new mode of narrative, one defined by two things: first, the untraceable flows of late capital, which are pushed outside the work yet nonetheless influence it. The characters then search for an object that will allow them to understand and transform the world. However, since the actual thing governing the relationships within the narrative space (the logic of flexible accumulation) is excepted from the plot, none of the objects succeed in offering an explanation or alternative for the characters.

Chapter Two

Before starting the second chapter, two explanatory notes. First, I do not wish to merely identify aproductive elements in the film and novel versions of *Inherent Vice* (it is my belief, moreover, that anyone who reads the novel or watches the film can intuitively sense that these texts are aproductive, even if they do not phrase it as such). Instead, I want to build a constellation of out various enclosed micro-analyses and, in so doing, reveal how the film and novel produce aproductivity in any number of ways, as well as the links between seemingly different formations of the concept. I also hope to simulate a technique of the texts, where they put the subject in a position that mimics boredom through bombarding the reader-viewer with possible transformational objects but without identifying any as the actual one. Aproductive works mimic boredom as a form of abstract mimesis, imitating negative dialectics, the philosophy of a broken down world where nothing and everything is imbued with mere potential. I hope that this chapter will similarly draw attention to various objects and seemingly unimportant elements, until over time it becomes evident that the unimportant is in fact what is central.

The first three segments within the constellation will focus on various narrative and formal techniques that produce aproductivity, while the latter ones will perform a sort of narrative analysis, looking at the various false transformational objects *Inherent Vice* negates and their relationship to late capitalism. In “Marlowe and the Doc,” we will examine how the novel diverges from traditional noir tropes without fully abandoning them, instead using them to emphasize an aproductive breakdown of temporality. The next two sections turn to the film and questions of narrative. In them, I argue that the secular crisis of capitalism is reflected in a breakdown of rational, linear time, and explore how this manifests itself in Anderson’s *Inherent Vice*. The segment entitled “Land Plots,” acts as a fulcrum (to mix metaphors), the space where formal considerations (especially regarding mapping) morph into a form of object analysis. Following it, there are two sections on various utopias (one section on the novel, one on the film), their failures, and the relationship to the transformational object. I then conclude with a section on the role of the real estate developer in *Inherent Vice*. What unites these disparate fragments is not only that each constitutes an element of aproductivity, but also that the differing forms of analysis are all informed by Adorno’s negative dialectics, albeit to different degrees.

The individual sections could hypothetically be read in any order; what matters is not the linear flow of the argument, but rather the relationship between segments.²⁷ At times, I flag concepts and then abandon them to later sections—when I do so, there will be a footnote marking this, allowing the reader to then jump to said fragment before returning to where they were reading, though I recommend not doing so. Finally, elements from one section may negate another, in sense of providing dialectic tension.

The other note: In discussing *Inherent Vice*, I will often talk not only about the film and novel individually, but often refer to them collectively under the name *Inherent Vice*. Here I am building on the work of Eric Sandberg, who looks at the origins of the adaptation process for the film to find that the novel and book are intertwined (Sandberg 1). Pynchon was open to adapting the book before the novel was even released, and sent Anderson advance copies (Sandberg 1). Anderson wrote the script by transcribing the novel and keeping the dialogue he liked, as to avoid writing in his own voice (Sandberg 2). The relationship Sandberg analyzes suggests Pynchon imagined the novel having a film counterpart while writing, and emphasizes the difficulty in understanding the film without having read the novel.

Marlowe and the Doc

We might start this analysis by looking at the detective lineage that *Inherent Vice* descends from, the American detective novels colloquially referred to as noir, though noir is in fact just a part of it.²⁸ Yet *Inherent Vice* is neither noir nor neo-noir, but something only tangentially related. It is not noir, strictly speaking because it is not from the noir era, nor does it use the same plot structure, color palate, or tone.²⁹ And neither Pynchon nor Anderson tend to luxuriate in the sex and violence that comes to the forefront with neo-noir in the late 1960's

²⁷ The exceptions to this are the sections entitled “Voices in Karmic Thermals” and “Time Enunciated”; the latter relies on certain arguments put forward in the former.

²⁸ In English, the detective novel is usually referred to as the “harboiled novel,” while the term noir is applied to filmmaking. However, in French noir refers to both, reflecting how intertwined the two are, particularly when set in Los Angeles.

²⁹ In Paul Schrader’s famous essay on film noir, he argues that it is not a genre, but an era of filmmaking, one defined by tone and mood. Schrader argues it is specific to the 1940’s and early 1950’s. It grows out of post-war disillusionment, postwar realism, and the harbored tradition, and is stylistically defined by vertical lines, nighttime settings, and an “almost Freudian attachment to water,” though certain aspects may be missing, depending on the film (Schrader 10-11). Examples of noir would be *The Lady from Shanghai* (Orson Welles 1948), *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks 1946), *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder 1944), and *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder 1950), among others.

(Brook 126).³⁰ They also do not share the neo-noir convention of the protagonist being left for dead at the beginning, nor do they wallow in post-modern sterility (Brook 127). Rather than speaking in broad generalizations, however, we can look at *Inherent Vice* as a descendant the detective novels of Raymond Chandler, perhaps noir's most famous writer. Though Sean Carswell argues that *Inherent Vice* is a complete pastiche of *The Long Goodbye*, I will not be using the term, instead looking at how the work rebels against Chandler's novels (Carswell 124). The reason for this refusal is twofold. First, I believe Carswell plays fast and loose with pastiche's definition. He accepts and uses Jameson's definition of pastiche as "parody's blank mask, the expression through dead language because no other voice is possible" (Jameson 17). But Pynchon's use of Chandler (and in a different context, Paul Thomas Anderson's referential relationship with Robert Altman's adaptation of *The Long Goodbye*) is not just blankly aping past forms. Rather, it is imbued with political considerations—something Carswell acknowledges and indeed centers, albeit in a quite different way than I do. Furthermore, I fundamentally disagree with Carswell's reading of the relationship between Chandler and Pynchon. As evidence for his claim that Pynchon's work is a complete pastiche, he cites "critics" saying so (though the only example he provides is Louis Menand's review in *The New Yorker*), and supports this with the evidence-free claim that "the narrator of *Inherent Vice* borrows so much of both the journalistic style and noir flair of Chandler that he could be, well, not Chandler himself but a fairly convincing impersonation," (Carswell 124). In reality, Pynchon avoids the hard declarative sentences of *The Long Goodbye*, preferring an iterative narrative.

The iterative narrative, according to Genard Genette, is when a "single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same event" (116). Pynchon combines this literary staple with what Genette calls a "partial analepsis," a narrative maneuver that evokes what happened in the past, separated from the current narrative moment by an ellipsis (40, 62). Chandler, on the other hand, talks in the past tense but does not use analepsis, and his use of the iterative is usually to generalize, not describe. To understand this more clearly, we can look at the first lines of each novel. *The Long Goodbye* (Henceforth: *TLG*): "The first time I laid eyes on Terry Lennox he was drunk in a Rolls-Royce Silver Wraith outside the terrace of The Dancers"

³⁰ Neo-noir is a genre that arises in the late 1960's and early 1970's. In contrast to noir, it has a "generic self-consciousness," formal experimentation borrowed from the European new waves (particularly the French), and favors sunny, daytime settings (what D.K Holm called *film soleil*). Furthermore, the loosening of the production code allowed greater expressions of sex and violence (Brook 126). As examples of neo-noir, Brook points to John Boorman's *Point Break* (1967), Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982).

(Chandler 3). *Inherent Vice* (Henceforth: *IV*): “She came along the alley and up the back steps the way she always used to” (Pynchon 1). Since this example does not include a partial analepsis, we might turn to Pynchon’s introduction of how Doc got into the P.I business for an example of how he uses the maneuver:

Just out of Ondas Nudosas Community College, Doc, known back then as Larry, Sportello had found himself falling behind in his car payments. The agency that came after him, Gotcha! Searches and Settlements, decided to hire him on as a skip-tracer trainee and let him work the debt off that way. By the time he felt comfortable enough to ask why, he was in too deep.

(Pynchon 51).

The result of Pynchon’s sentence structure is an overarching feeling that what is important has already happened and is always happening, the present following the path of the past. Chandler, on the other hand, does not use the echoing iterative but rather pins the event to a singular point in time.³¹

This is then emphasized by Pynchon’s occasional use of partial prolepsis—the inverse of the partial analepsis. This is not foreshadowing events in the novel—which Chandler uses often, and can be understood as a form of complete prolepsis—but rather foreshadowing events that come after the novel’s end. Again, it is helpful to compare the two novels. *IV*: “‘Someday,’ she prophesied, “there will be computers for this, all you’ll have to do’s type in what you’re looking for, or even better just talk it in—like that HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey*?—and it’ll be right back at you with more information than you’d ever want to know, any lot in the L.A. Basin, all the way back to the Spanish land grants—water rights, encumbrances, mortgage histories, whatever you want, trust me, it’s coming” (Pynchon 6-7). *TLG*: “Terry Lennox made me plenty of trouble. But after all that’s my line of work” (Chandler 6). One foreshadows a technological “revolution,” while the other foreshadows plot, albeit from a point in the future, after the trouble has been made. Finally, though *The Long Goodbye* is written in the first person, Chandler tends to withhold Marlow’s internal analysis. In fact, the slow revelation of what Marlowe is thinking is more or less what constitutes the plot. In Genettian terms, Chandler uses internal focalization

³¹ The analepsis is also what marks *Inherent Vice* as not postmodern, where postmodernity is defined by Jameson’s temporal schizophrenia, where “the past as ‘referent’ finds itself gradually bracketed, then effaced altogether, leaving us nothing but texts” (Jameson *Postmodernism* 18). Here the past is not bracketed, but rather is constantly seeping into the present. It infects and fills the narrative, rather than abandoning it.

combined with paralipses, or the withholding of knowledge. In other words, though the novel is narrated in the first person, we do not have access to the narrator's interiority. For example, it is clear from the moment Marlowe meets Eileen Wade that he thinks there is some relationship between this second case and the Lennox matter, but does not explain the connection. The reader is waiting for Marlowe to play his hand, and this waiting constitutes the narrative. Doc, on the other hand, is just confused, and the reader know this. The reader does not fully grasp what is going on, but neither does Doc. What he knows is more or less what the reader knows. Perhaps this difference in the internal voice is most obvious if we look at something less important than plot: descriptions of the protagonist getting aroused. *The Long Goodbye*:

A girl in a white sharkskin suit and a luscious figure was climbing the ladder to the high board. I watched the band of white that showed between the tan of her thighs and the suit. I watched it carnally...She opened a mouth like a fire bucket and laughed. That terminated my interest in her.

(Chandler 87).

Inherent Vice:

Straight-chick uniform, makeup supposed to look like no makeup or whatever, here came that old well-known hardon Shasta was always good for sooner or later. Does it ever end, he wondered. Of course it does. It did.

(Pynchon 2)

“a disheveled girl in a tiny skirt, whose eyes after the style of the times were hugely made up not only with mascara but also with liquid liner and shadow almost the color of the smoke from a faulty head gasket, suggesting to Doc as always a deep, unreachable innocence, all of which sent the throbbing idle of his lecherousness into overdrive...Doc had a hardon, and his nose was running. That old cootie food had found him again. Trillium, on the other hand, had dropped into a peculiar silence which, if he'd been in his right mind, he would have recognized as the some-other-guy blues.

(Pynchon 215, 216)

Though there are similarities, Pynchon's narrator tends to explain mental thought processes and responses to settings and situations, while Chandler focuses on the setting and situations themselves. The interest for him is not in interiority, but rather the world interiority responds to. We might say that while Chandler uses *paralepsis* (the sidestepping of information,

withholding knowledge or events, according to Genette), Pynchon uses paralipsis, or the giving of more information than necessary. Interestingly, though *Inherent Vice* uses third person narration, it is still an example of internal focalization, since everything is filtered through Doc—the novel could likely be written in the first person (Genette 189). The result is that the reader gets access to everything Doc notices, becoming as overwhelmed as the detective. In other words, though *The Long Goodbye* is written in the first person, the reader is shut out from Marlowe's interiority, leaving them wondering what the protagonist might do. *Inherent Vice*, on the other hand, is written in the third person but the reader is placed in the same position as Doc. No longer are we wondering what Doc is thinking, but rather are—like him—looking for the object that will help explain what he is encountering.

I also want to flag the iterative in Doc's horniness—"that old well-known hard on" "suggesting to Doc as always" "he would have recognized" (this implying he usually recognizes)—again revealing it is not the particular situation that matters, but rather its relationship to a universal that is now unrecoverable. But in this, it loses its status as a particular. It does not exist on its own, but only as a symbolic token of something that occurs more often. Looking at these formal differences, we see that that the novel is not really a pastiche of Chandler, but rather an homage, a minor yet important distinction. In fact, there are references to Chandler in the maximalist novel, where Pynchon obliquely tells the reader his inspirations: Doc mentions detective Philip Marlowe in one short monologue on the shift from P.I.'s to police as the heroes of crime movies, and one could take Jade's name as an allusion to Mrs. Grayle's Fei Tsui Jade in *Farewell my Lovely*, particularly as both are to be encountered at the end of an unbuilt street. The novel positions itself as a descendant of Chandler rather than a pastiche, since the latter can never go beyond the original text, cannot build on it to create something else; it can only recycle, discombobulating formal tics and reorganizing them in ever more boring ways.

Illusions of Detecting

The novel is not only a descendant of Chandler, but also second wave modernist literature more broadly. As Frederic Jameson notes, "a case can be made for Chandler as a painter of American life," a second wave modernist on the order of Nabokov and Robbe-Grillet, the "chief practitioners of art-for-art's sake," who use the murder story as a way of "organizing essentially plotless material into an illusion of movement" (Jameson *RC* 2, 3). In this scenario murder is no longer emblematic and caused by the nightmare of vacuity, to paraphrase Norman

Klein on the work of James Cain and other traditional noir writers, but rather an arbitrary moment within the nightmare, important only in that it allows the writer to trace the relationship between individuals (Klein 77). Yet even in Chandler there is still a linearity, a connectivity between the various vignettes. Jameson claims that for Chandler, “each dingy office is separated from the next; each room in the rooming house from the one next to it; each dwelling from the pavement beyond it,” but his own word choice falsifies the autonomy he describes (Jameson *RC* 11). “Is separated from the next” reveals that there is still an order, one coming after the other; though this might be an arbitrary point in the nightmare, it is monadic, and sealed off from the rest by a contingent event that the rest of the novel then builds upon, even if at the end the event might as well not have happened. In *The Long Goodbye*, the narrative is dependent on two events: Marlowe meeting Lennox, and the murder. If either event does not happen, there is no narrative. Even if this is just a single arbitrary story within Marlowe’s life, one where he ends in the same space where he begins—friendless and cynical—it cannot be understood as an aproductive monad, because the mystery to be solved happens within the novel. There is a singular event (the murder) that Marlowe is attempting to solve, and everything builds outwards from there. If Marlowe never meets Lennox, he will not be involved in helping him escape, which means he will not be jailed, gaining the attention and admiration of Eileen Wade and various other rich characters.

Inherent Vice, on the other hand, structures itself so that it has no beginning, or rather, everything within it happens whether or not the beginning is there. If Shasta does not go to Doc’s house, he will still stumble onto the murder of Glen Charlock because of Tariq visiting him. Tariq hears about him from Sledge Poteet, a character from Doc’s past we never meet. Even if he had not gone to investigate for Tariq, he would nonetheless be contacted by Hope Harlingen about Coy, which would also pull him into the narrative, since Coy is working for Vigilant California, which is related to both Wolfmann and the Golden Fang. There is no true starting point; what takes on the status as the beginning is arbitrary. The only event that could possibly be considered as a catalyst is Mickey’s decision to give away all his money, which occurs outside the novel’s narrative present. Of course, Mickey’s psychoanalytic namesake, The Wolfmann, was one of Freud’s most famous patients, and his case brought awareness to a difficulty in psychoanalytic case studies: “is the organization of a narrative sequence, such as the case history, the effect of a primal event or its cause?” (Abraham and Torok lv). In other words, is there a

traumatic event that starts narratives, or does the construction of the narrative then retroactively mark an event as the start? *Inherent Vice*'s answer is that it is neither; the narrative negates any claim to an origin. Combined with Pynchon's use of the iterative and partial analepsis, this produces the feeling that the narrative is about characters responding to events happening outside of the present of the diegesis, no longer acting upon the world of the narrative but rather being acted upon, wandering through a space where everything has already happened yet simultaneously has yet to happen.

I must confess that I took the Jameson quote about the separation of offices out of context, choosing to temporarily misrepresent it. For the theorist was not talking of temporal structuring, but rather how Chandler's plots require an "involuntary explorer of society," whose movements and patterns tie the isolated classes of the centerless city together (Jameson 11). They need this because, per Jameson, "the form of Chandler's books reflects an initial American separation of people from each other, their need to be linked by some external force" (Jameson *RC* 11). He contrasts this with European works, where even "solitude is social," as it is governed by a strict class system (Jameson *RC* 11). While I think Jameson somewhat ignores two structuring systems—the racial organization and geographic spaces—that in Chandler produces a sense of *mitsein*, or "being-together-with-others" produced by the European class structure, this is less important for us than how Pynchon plays off of Chandler (Jameson *RC* 11). Doc, like Jameson's Marlowe, is the linking figure within the world of *Inherent Vice*, the only character that can move between government offices (feeling confident enough to smoke marijuana in the bowels of the Hall of Justice), private power (Wolfmann's home, the golden fang offices), and the spaces of the everyday (the beach). And he is ever-present in the novel—there is not a single scene without him.³² Yet at the same time, he is completely unnecessary in terms of linking the various characters: Shasta knows Mickey and the Harlingen's, who in turn know The Boards and had heroin addictions that link them to the Golden Fang. Meanwhile Dr. Blatnoyd, a member of the Golden Fang, is sodomizing Japonica Fenway, the daughter of a high-priced attorney who works as a fixer for the Fang and has in the past hired Doc to find Japonica when she ran away. The Black Nationalist Tariq arrives at Doc's office knowing Glen Charlock, the Aryan brotherhood member who in turn works for Adrian Prussia and Mickey Wolfmann and whose

³² There is one scene without him in the film, which we will return to in the next section "Voices in Karmic Thermals."

sister dated Puck Beaverton, another one of Prussia's employees. Prussia in turn knows Doc from Doc's skip tracer days and works as a hitman for the LAPD. The cops use him to bilk the federal government, which is running COINTELPRO informants (including Coy Harlingen) and is somehow related to Vigilant California, a militia that also has some relationship to the Golden Fang. The federal government, in turn, kidnaps Mickey after Vigilant California panics and takes him during a raid to kill Charlock on behalf of Prussia. The result is that Doc is no longer key to the construction of narrative, as Marlowe is in Chandler, but rather vital to unspooling the connections that have already been made. This is not a seismic shift; already in Chandler some characters are linked before they meet Marlowe. But in those scenarios it is always characters of the same class (cops linked to P.I.s', the rich living in the same neighborhood or connected via marriage). In *Inherent Vice*, every character is connected to every other one, even without Doc. Just like the narrative has no true start, or at least not one within its diegetic present, the thing that links this disparate group is also absent.

This "thing" is, of course, the capital flows that undergird relationships in late capitalism, that define how we relate to one another. But, as we saw in chapter one, these flows are no longer traceable, because the undergirding logics of capitalism have broken down or hit their limits, leaving only the contradictions. Eventually, neoliberalism and the era of financialization will establish a new ordering logic, but even then, tracing it will only get you halfway to satisfaction—to paraphrase Wesley Morris on trying to understand the film's plot—since it is little more than a way of hiding that capitalism has reached its terminus. So the linkages are unspooled, while simultaneously the "explorer" of this society is revealed to not be the actual linker, forcing the reader to think outside the text for what will knit it together. This is emphasized by Pynchon's use of the iterative, as discussed above, which reiterates that this plot is not happening because of Doc, but rather Doc is moving through an already established world. But the thing outside the text cannot fully explicate, because the relations within capital no longer cohere, but rather contradict. Furthermore, the logic of capital is now so deeply imbedded within our relationships that we do not notice it, but rather accept it as the natural state. In other words, the reification of the exchange value is complete. The search becomes for the object that would offer an alternative, that would free us from the broken-down world Doc wanders through.

This narrative construction reveals the truth of class in Los Angeles, namely that the geographical separation between classes is a façade that hides their interdependence. In

Chandler, this interdependence follows both a racial and class structure—the rich pay the poor and non-white to do what they cannot or will not do. In *Inherent Vice*, on the other hand, the relations are no longer so clearcut. The rich pay other rich people, or have the federal government act on their behalf, or use a semi-public state militia. How these groups relate to each other is never truly revealed; all the novel divulges is that they exist and are interconnected. The revelation is underwhelming; everyone already knows this is happening.³³ As Bigfoot Bjornson tells Doc, “Try to drag your consciousness out of that old-time hard-boiled dick era, this is the Glass House wave of the future we’re in now” (Pynchon 33). Yet though everyone knows these relationships exist, no one within the diegesis can accurately identify them as part of a larger structure, as anything beyond coincidence or conspiracy.

At the same time, however, these chaotic relationships point to the ever-growing dominance of institutions within late capital, how every aspect of our lives is now administered. “the more immense the power of institutional forms, the more chaotic the life they hem in and deform in their image”; the mayhem that is the narrative points to what it cannot represent, namely the institutional structures of late capital (Adorno *ND* 88). In capitalism’s secular crisis, the institutional structures that support it become more powerful, with the exchange relationship infiltrating everywhere. The bedlam of aproductive works, their myriad of relationships that are never fully explicated, act as the negative image of how the exchange value regulates and distorts everything, its rigidity turning the world defective. Through representing the pure chaos that is individual relations in late capitalism, we begin to see what is not there: the ordering force of capital. Yet within the novel, the revelation of what everyone already knows teaches nothing, even as the reader learns about the relationships more concretely. This is because without the outside knowledge that these relationships reflect the abstract flows of late capital, the chaos hides that “in place after place the world is set to shift to the horrors of order” (Adorno *ND* 89). To the characters, it seems like structure and meaning are disintegrating. But it is the opposite that is true; everything will become overdetermined. And so even as Doc stumbles over what everyone already knows, no one really learns anything beyond the particular.

The result is that the plot is no longer the “formally satisfying arabesques of a puzzle unfolding” of Chandler or Nabokov, nor is it the revolt against narrative found in modernism’s

³³ There are echoes here of the relationship between boosters and the industries of vice in pre-war Los Angeles. For further exploration of this, see Klein’s chapter on noir in *The History of Forgetting* and Davis’ *City of Quartz*, particularly the “Sunshine or Noir” and “Power Lines” chapter.

first iteration (Jameson RC 3). Rather, it is a mixture of the two that refuses to cohere into synthesis. Things are happening in the world, and the protagonist is moving through it, yet no new knowledge is being produced; at most, what was previously felt in experience (the interlocking logic of late capital) begins to be sketched, but only in the most abstract strokes possible. Despite all the movement and interdependence, nothing quite coheres; every new connection leaves a remainder, some relationship that does not fit into the already acquired knowledge. The tension comes not from Doc's actions or the actions of others, but rather the dawning realization that the entire time the reader has been waiting for a transformational object, the discovery that will make everything click into place.

Uncertain Endings

Without an origin event whose resolution would close the narrative, the novel's conclusion might rely nonetheless on the revelation of the transformational object which will unite the contingent events into a coherent narrative. In its absence, there can be no resolution, no closure. The ending holds transformational potential to an audience used to detective novels, where everything is put in a bow. But it refuses to do so, forcing the reader to search outside the diegesis for the object/system/information that would supply coherence. The novel concludes with Sportello in a caravan on the highway, driving through the fog with a multitude of options of what could happen:

Doc figured if he missed the Gordita Beach exit he'd take the first one whose sign he could read and work his way back on surface streets. He knew that at Rosecrans the freeway began to dogleg east, and at some point, Hawthorne Boulevard or Artesia, he'd lose the fog, unless it was spreading tonight, and settled in regionwide. Maybe then it would stay this way for days, maybe he'd have to just keep driving, down past Long Beach, down through Orange County, and San Diego, and across a border where nobody could tell anymore in the fog who was Mexican, who was Anglo, who was anybody. Then again, he might run out of gas before that happened, and have to leave the caravan, and pull over on the shoulder, and wait. For whatever would happen. For a forgotten joint to materialize in his pocket. For the CHP to come by and choose not to hassle him. For a restless blonde in a Stingray to stop and offer him a ride. For the fog to burn away, and for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead.

(Pynchon 368-369).

We will examine this passage in greater depth again later, when we discuss mapping, but for now we might see this as an explicit rebuke to the closure of the classic detective novel. While Nicholas Frangipane argues that this conclusion reveals Pynchon's move away from pessimism with respect to interconnectedness to a belief that it is "the only hope we have in a world obscured by fog," it is more accurate to say the caravan is a temporary protection against a fog that may never recede, a small constellation moving through a world trying to separate it (Frangipane 521).³⁴ Refusing the closure detective narration usually supplies, Pynchon's narrator opens up any number of possibilities for what may happen with Doc in the coming hours and days. And not only Doc; the novel does the same with Bigfoot and Coy Harlingen, refusing to offer true closure to their stories. Even as missing characters reappear and certain antagonists are arrested or killed, offering more closure than Pynchon's earlier detective stories, the narration refuses and refutes Frangipane's reading.

The narration in the above passage is reliant on modal verbs, on the possibility, emphasizing the lack of closure within the world of the novel even as it points to the impossibility of imagining a different world, and representing this imagined utopia. The future is uncertain, the ending is uncertain, all that is certain is that unless something unimaginable happens, nothing will become clear, nothing will change. There is a utopian possibility within this lost fog—a place where identity has broken down, where no one is anybody and we are free from exchange relationships. But equally, if not more likely, is that Doc gets stuck before this utopia can ever be realized, sequestered on the shoulder, waiting for the object that will allow advancement again. But he has no idea what it will look like, or even if it will come. Maybe its sex, maybe its drugs, maybe its freedom (not being hassled by the cops), or maybe it is just clarity, the fog evaporating and revealing a new world, one that is comprehensible. All he knows is that the current situation cannot continue. And so we are left with two possibilities—the unrepresentable utopia sequestered in the fog (we will dive into utopia and representation later), a goal we cannot see and will never be sure is even real or achievable, or the sense of stuckness, where we imbue various objects with transformational potential, even as they are unable to free us. After all, a joint doesn't provide fuel, even if the marijuana is—to use common parlance—

³⁴ See: "Freeways and Fog: The shift in Attitude between Postmodernism and Post-postmodernism from *The Crying of Lot 49* to *Inherent Vice*" in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 57:5, 521-532.

gas. The blonde offers a ride, but who knows where to. Caught in the crisis of capitalism, we dream of something else, but cannot represent or see that dream, and so instead falsely imbue other objects with transformative potential to get us a better world, when in reality they are little more than distractions from the terror and depravity of our system.

Computational Futures

To conclude this section, I want to return to Pynchon's use of partial prolepsis, which we mentioned earlier. It is rare in the novel, and almost exclusively appears when Doc encounters computers, Pynchon using it to produce dramatic irony that will not be resolved. I already quoted the narrator recalling Aunt Reet speaking on real estate and computers, which is somehow both partial prolepsis and analepsis, since it is recalling a past event (Aunt Reet telling Doc) and a future event (the arrival of computers). The future and the past are tied together, inseparable. But this is not the only example of the partial prolepsis. Later, Sparky (a computer whiz kid who works for Doc's old employer, Gotcha! Searches and Settlements) tells Doc that with computers, "it all moves exponentially, and someday everybody's gonna wake up to find they're under surveillance they can't escape. Skips won't be able to skip no more, maybe by then there'll be no place to skip to" (Pynchon 365). In these moments, the gulf between when the book was written (2009) and when it is based (1970) becomes clear. While Jade's anachronistic reference to late capital—"What I am is, is like a small diameter pearl of the Orient rolling around on the floor of late capitalism"—forces association of the economy of the 1970's with the present one, the discussions of computers reveal to the reader the dominant difference between then and now (Pynchon 136).³⁵

But the anachronism of a non-institutional entity (Gotcha!) having access to ARPANET in 1970 reduces this difference, or rather reveals that the chasm is smaller than imagined. Already, in certain places, among certain people, the future has arrived, except it looks a lot like the present. The computer becomes a possible transformational object, imbued with future possibilities. But the reader sees that, for all the computer has changed (and the world is significantly different because of them), they have not yet produced the radical break the

³⁵ Credit must go to Doug Haynes's essay "Under the Beach: The Paving Stones! The Fate of Fordism in Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*" in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 55:1, 1-16 for bringing the anachronistic character of Jade's quote to light. Though Adorno had used late capitalism much earlier to refer to administrative Fordism, the contemporary usage would not be popularized until 1972.

transformational object supposedly brings about, but have rather been part of a historical process unfolding, another chapter in our quest to dominate nature. Uber “disrupts” our world only in rhetoric. In reality, nothing is different; for most, the economy is stagnant, and for all tech’s talk of saving the world, the ice sheets are still melting and the oceans are still rising. Although some in the novel already possess computers and use them constantly, the world is not significantly different than it was before. As we will see in the second half of this chapter, this dance of possibility of transformation and its negation is performed with every transformational in the novel.

Voices in the Karmic Thermals

In the previous section, I touched on the breakdown of the novel’s temporality, how the past seeps into the present while the future is foreclosed. However, even as the narrated time in the novel collapses, the time of narration stays constant. The narrator is always narrating from after the events of the novel have occurred. This stable structure is not found in Anderson’s film adaptation, where the narrator participates in the narrative and narrates as if the narrative events have both happened and are in the process of happening.³⁶ To understand this new temporal structure, I want to temporarily abandon the film and turn to Mary Anne Doane’s work on early cinematic time and modernity. I use Doane’s work on cinematic time because her mixture of historical analysis, philosophy, and interest in questions of indexicality aligns closely with my project’s approach.³⁷

Modernity and Universalized Time

According to Doane, at the beginning of the twentieth century, time was “felt—as a weight, a source of anxiety, and as an acutely pressing problem of representation” (Doane *ECT*

³⁶ In the film, the character Sortilège acts as the narrator, existing both outside and inside the narrative she is telling

³⁷ While Domietta Torlasco’s writing on cinematic time, the detective story, and the collapse of linear narrative in Italian film could also be used to analyze *Inherent Vice*, it is more psychoanalytically inclined. While my project involves certain concepts drawn from psychoanalysis—namely the transformational object—it is less interested in Lacanian questions of desire and death than Torlasco. Deleuze also has a theory of cinematic time, however, it is one more focused on movement and time, something this project tends to avoid. Furthermore, Deleuze tends to use the existential terminology (being, becoming, etc) so hated by Adorno.³⁷ To use Deleuze would require using jargon that sidesteps the dialectic of language, which runs counter to this project’s Adornean bent. This is not to say Deleuze or Torlasco’s accounts of cinematic time are incorrect or worse than Doane’s, but rather they simply do not fit within this thesis’ intellectual context as neatly as the American theorist’s work does. See: Torlasco, Domietta. *The Time of the Crime : Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Italian Film*. Stanford University Press, 2008. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), *EBSCOhost*.

4). Time is no longer the æther that suffuses the universe around us, but rather something we can conceptualize, measure, and regulate.³⁸ The rapid diffusion of pocket watches and the refinement of the Second law of Thermodynamics produces a “conceptualization of time as the tightness of a direction, an inexorable and irreversible linearity” (Doane *ECT* 5). This linearity is tied to a process where time becomes “increasingly reified, standardized, stabilized, and rationalized,” particularly with the arrival of railways, which forces standardization within and across nations and eventually on a global scale (Doane *ECT* 5). Time can be viewed and managed, but is now seen as going in only one direction, at a constant rate, able to be turned into measurable units, standardized into what Walter Benjamin calls “empty homogenous time” (Benjamin 205).³⁹

We can see this process happening in how the mechanical watches that proliferate in this era cannot go backwards without “going out of time,” pausing their operation to move the hands. Their internal gears throw the second hand forward, and any attempt to get in the way of this process is likely to break the watch. This standardization takes several forms, such as the universalization of time zones at a national (and then global) level. As Doane notes, before 1880, London time was four minutes ahead of Reading’s clocks (Doane *ECT* 5). But for railroads (and eventually planes) to run with maximum efficiency, the two cities must agree on a shared understanding of time, destroying the “uniqueness and isolation of the local” (Doane *ECT* 5). One can only imagine the chaos of trying to catch a train when its terminal points cannot agree on what time it is. We also see this process in the rise of cross-country and long distance racing in industrial modernity.⁴⁰ Such races require a universalized and standardized time across disparate locales. And the entertainment they hold is not in seeing how fast someone can go or the high speed crashes (as in Nascar or chariot racing), but rather the thrill of knowing that you are watching and experiencing time in the same way as the rest of the nation or continent. Time is centralized and bureaucratized, becoming part of a system of administration.

Simultaneously, time is rationalized in such a way that it becomes a value, part of the larger rationalization and standardization within capitalism. Abstracting time and moving it from

³⁸ We might note that the Micholson-Morley experiment, whose failure disproved the concept of the æther, occurs in 1887. Before this, it was widely accepted that there was a substance that filled the universe, explaining how light waves could move through space, as waves need a medium to move through. The idea of something we cannot see or touch suffusing our world and shaping our experience takes a major blow with the experiment.

³⁹ Doane rightly draws a link between the articulation of the second law of thermodynamics—that entropy always increases—and the understanding of time as linear.

⁴⁰ For example: the Tour De France is founded in 1903, the Peking to Paris race is held in 1907, the Targa Florio race across Sicily originates in 1906, and the Mille Miglia from Brescia to Rome is first run in 1927.

experienced to contained within pocket watches turns it from lived experience to something externalized, transforming it into discrete units, and hence a commodifiable value, something tradeable, subject to exchange. Doane rightly notes that this is central to Marx's writings, where time is tied to labor value and hence given a price. We also see it in the rise of phrases like "time is money," which only makes sense when time is universalized and quantifiable. In becoming a value, time begins to "share the logic of the monetary system—a logic of pure differentiation, quantifiability, and articulation into discrete units" (Doane *ECT* 8). Following Adorno's work in uniting the exchange and identity principle, we can say that time takes on a stable identity, no longer being the indescribable æther we experience but a packageable thing with exchange value. Time becomes another victim in capitalism's march to rationalize and externalize more and more spheres, part and parcel of the rationalization we see in industry at the same time. For example, in Taylorism, the management system undergirding Fordism and industrial capitalism, every move is meant to be meaningful—every action the worker takes should contribute to their work, as to minimize wasted time. "Time becomes the measure of [the body's] efficiency," with stopwatches measuring the efficiency of every action the worker takes (Doane *ECT* 10). Time becomes a way to measure how efficient the workforce is and make sure that productivity is maximized.

Modernity, the Contingent, and Film

However, at the same time, there arises an interest in the contingent and random, the moments that have not been standardized and made part of the industrial system; the rationalization of time disrupts historical understandings of time as a continuum, as something that is not divisible. This is obvious in science with quantum mechanics (where the contingent becomes central to understanding the actions of atoms), as well as in literature and art, in modernist novels such as *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway* that attempt to capture and "freeze" a single day within the character's lives and futurism's attempts to capture the randomness of motion through still sculptures and paintings. Before its regulation and subsumption to the exchange value, time was understood as a substance that cannot exist in a single moment, in isolation, but rather a whole, a totality that could only be understood as a perpetual sequence, with each instance inseparable from the others, all tightly linked. "The dilemma of discontinuity and continuity becomes the epistemological conundrum that structures the debates about the

representability of time at the turn of the century,” and becomes the source of the “insistent fascination with contingency, indexicality, and chance” that also arises in this moment (Doane *ECT* 9, 10). In an era where uncertainty reigns about the identity of time, it is natural that there would be an obsession with the indexical, since as Doane notes, “the promise of indexicality is, in effect, the promise of the rematerialization of time,” the possibility that the random moment can be recovered and made real again, can be deabstracted (Doane *ECT* 10). Cinema holds the hope that it can register contingency through the index’s imprint of the “once present and unique moment” (Doane *ECT* 16). It supposedly represents the contingent, providing “the pure record of time” (Doane *ECT* 22). And so in the modernist dialectic of time’s homogenizing rationalization and contingency, it ostensibly is on the latter’s side, standing for the random and not yet rational. However, as soon as an image is filmed, it loses some contingency, because the event it captures takes on a new valence as an event to be filmed (Doane *ECT* 23). Editing further undermines film’s ability to capture the arbitrary, as when images are cut for length and put in order, they further lose some of their contingency, the arbitrary time they capture becoming rationalized in service of film production. “The Cut is the mechanism whereby temporality becomes a product of the apparatus,” repudiating the cinema’s claim to the contingent (Doane *ECT* 224).

In the early days of cinema, this dialectic is relatively balanced; the minor edits and film’s phenomenological aspect (how the experience of watching the film retroactively imbues the act of filming the contingent with meaning it nominally opposes) remove some contingency, but the focus is still on the everyday act. As early cinema evolves into Classical Hollywood, however, film’s relationship to time starts to echo Adorno’s criticism of the culture industry and the products of free time, offering the illusion of freedom of contingency, allowing the audience to believe that not everything is administered, even as it reinforces the subservience of time to rationalization. As Doane notes, narrative is an attempt to tame and stabilize the image, creating unity within contingent moments, subjugating them to the whole (Doane *ECT* 159). The movement from “actualities,”—short films that show images from day to day life—to narrative films ameliorates fears that cinema is “too representative,” that it could somehow capture the instant (Doane *ECT* 68). Each shot is no longer contingent, but rather subservient to the larger narrative, existing not on its own but for a totality it does not resemble. In these narratives, time is produced as an effect, one tied to standardization.

As Peter Verstraten notes, editing allows time to be manipulated and causal relationships

to take shape, moving cinema from the micro-narrative “monstration,” as described by André Gaudreault to the narration found in classical Hollywood film (Vertraten 16). In this second form of narrative, the juxtaposition between images produces causal relationships in the minimum amount of time, creating narrative without having to wait until the end of the film to see what it is, as in the cinema of monstration (Vertraten 16).⁴¹ As Doane notes, “‘Economy’ is a fundamental value of the developed narrative film” and its linearity and efficiency ties it to scientific management and the maximization of industrial labor (Doane *ECT* 162). Linear narrative film allows determination and chance within the individual images, but then each image takes on an identity, exchangeable with the others in that they all matter only in relation to the larger narrative. “The achievement of Modernity’s temporality...has been to fuse rationality and contingency, determination and chance,” allowing the dream of chance without its realization (Doane *ECT* 208). This is epitomized in early television, where every shot is instrumentalized, there to move the episode forward, the contingent becoming subservient to what Raymond Williams identified as the segmentation that undergirds televisual “flow.”⁴² This form of time resembles what Benjamin calls messianic time, except instead of each moment having meaning because it is linked to the end of the world/rapture, meaning is imbued due to the linkage to the narrative end. This representation of time then becomes the collective understanding of time; in Joan Didion’s essay “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream,” we find her describing San Bernardino as “the country in which a belief in the literal interpretation of Genesis has slipped imperceptibly into a belief in the literal interpretation of *Double Indemnity*,” where “the future always looks good...because no one remembers the past” (Didion *STB* 4). We might call this structure “ideological time,” presenting an image of time that takes from and reinforces the systemic time of capitalism.

Time after Industry

Readers here will be justified in asking what this long digression has to do with

⁴¹ To clarify: if the narrative of *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* is exactly what the name implies, this “narrative” can only be seen as such after the film is finished, once the workers have left. During the film, the narrative is not obvious.

⁴² In personal correspondence I have called this phenomenon “television time,” and have sketched plans for a future essay further exploring the topic, particularly in sitcoms, which abandon temporal linearity in service of narrative symmetry. Two plots taking places at different times (often one at night and one during the day) are presented as simultaneous, allowing both to be resolved at once in the episode’s conclusion. The term is exchangeable with the ‘ideological time’ mentioned below.

aproductivity and *Inherent Vice*. I theorize that when capitalism hits its secular crisis, there is a sense the rational narrative time that dominated in the short period between the end of WWII and 1967 is no longer adequate. This does not mean “ideological time” collapses or rational narrative time is no longer the hegemonic mode of American cinema/media, but rather it is separated from its material source, causing a crisis in how we understand and perceive time. The economic structures that produced linear narrative time are no longer working as they traditionally did, leaving narrative time as an ideological production without a material base. By material base, I mean that the economic structures of industrial capitalism that arose with narrative time in the early twentieth century. In her seminal essay “The White Album,” Joan Didion says that in the years between 1966 and 1971, she began to “doubt the premises of all the stories [she] had ever told [herself],” that she no longer interpreted what she saw, no longer could impose “a narrative line upon disparate images,” was unable to “freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience” (*WA* 11). Though she finds there is no script but instead “images with no ‘meaning’ beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a cutting-room experience,” she cannot quite accept this, instead operating on Dice Theory, or the belief that there is no chance without pattern (Didion *WA* 13). The linear narrativized time that comes about in modernity has broken down, but nothing has taken its place.

In response, aproductive works attempt to find a new mode of temporal representation but fail, unable to imagine a true alternative. We are left with a representation of time that is no longer rational, the dialectic counterpoint to what is absent in the narrative, the secular crisis of capitalism. As Doane argues, the rationalization of time is intertwined with capitalism’s larger standardization. We saw in chapter one that this pursuit of ever-greater efficiency is what drives capitalism into a secular crisis, where capital produces so much surplus labor that the economy stagnates, as workers can no longer adequately reproduce themselves. And so the breakdown of narrative time—in other words, the breakdown of the representation of time—becomes an index of the secular crisis of capitalism. C.S. Pierce refers to the index as “anything which...makes the junction between two portions of experience. Thus a tremendous thunderbolt indicates that *something* considerable happened, though we may not know precisely what the event was” (Pierce *Essential Pierce Volume 2* 8). The breakdown of narrative time in aproductive film becomes an index to the larger breakdown, a symptom telling us that something is wrong even if it does not tell us exactly what has happened. Later, we will return to questions of the index, the

contingent, and the aproductive, complicating this notion of narrative time as index, but for now let us look how the voice-over in *Inherent Vice* (the film) collapses the narrative's time.

Sortilège's Seconds

Earlier, I mentioned that in Anderson's adaptation, there is one scene without Doc: The first one of the film. It begins with a shot of the beach, sandwiched between two houses typical of Manhattan Beach (and by extension, Gordita Beach). The address of the leftward house is 4210 The Strand, a real place in Manhattan Beach, but not where the scene was actually shot. A fog is blowing in from the Pacific, and surfers are bobbing up and down on the waves. Pseudo-cursive writing fades onto the screen, telling the viewer that this is Gordita Beach in 1970. There is the sound of the waves lapping, louder than one might expect considering the camera's distance from the water, and near the end of the shot Sortilège begins her narration. The film cuts to Sortilège in close-up, her head blocking what we assume to be the sun. Golden light filters through her dirty blonde hair, tinting the scene with an angelic yellow light.⁴³ The camera is slightly below head height, looking up at Sortilège as she stares off into the distance, like a child listening to a babysitter's story. Here, her narration takes straight from the first lines of the book: "she came along the alley and up the backs steps the way she always used to" (Pynchon 1). The narration is in the past tense, though as we will see this is not consistent. As she moves her head while speaking, light leaks through her hair and begins to create a lens flair, which Anderson uses to fade into the interior of Doc's house, as if we are falling into her memories, albeit her memories of events she did not witness. At the same time, the scene establishes that Sortilège is in the film's diegetic space, but also outside of the narrative, telling it from the outskirts even as she appears as a character. Later, we will return to these scenes to examine Sortilège the character, as well as how Anderson uses the camera in the film. For now, however, let us focus on the voiceover that the first of these scenes establishes.

As Jameson notes, a narrator's voice or a voiceover is central to hard-boiled detective novels and noir films, and said voiceover "signals in advance the closure of the events to be narrated" (Jameson *RC* 61).⁴⁴ What we find in Anderson's adaptation, however, is a voiceover

⁴³ In his use of golden and blue tints, Anderson does indulge in the neo-noir concept of *film soleil*, where the sunny aspect of Los Angeles is played up, rather than refused as in traditional noir (Brook 126).

⁴⁴ Jameson's use of the term "voice-over" in reference to detective novel narrators is idiosyncratic, to say the least. That he does points to the inseparability of noir literature from its film equivalent, that to speak of one is always to

that is retelling the story without closing it off or marking it as having finished. The novel uses analepsis and prolepsis to produce a feeling of the narrative happening outside of its present, both having already happened and not yet happened; the film, on the other hand, uses what Genette calls metalepses—which refers to any intervention or appearance of the extradiegetic narrator within the diegesis—to break down the narrative time of the film, throwing doubt on the distance between the past and present (Genette 235). Or more precisely, the film does so, only to simultaneously negate the intradiegetic/extradiegetic divide that makes metalepsis possible. To understand this process, I will first assume that metalepsis is possible in the film, and read the voice-over narration as producing it both through tense and Sortilège’s body. Having done so, we will then consider how the film complicates an extra/intradiegetic divide and makes talking of metalepsis impossible.

To Genette, the metalepsis is any transgression by the extradiegetic narrator into the narration (Genette 235). In the film, this occurs in both voice and body. As mentioned above, the voice-over begins in the past tense, with the camera position and lens-flair transition emphasizing that what we are seeing occurs sometime in the past, though possibly recently (after all, the chyron that tells us it is 1970 appears in this scene, not once we are in her memories). This sets the general tone for the film as using what Genette calls “subsequent narration,” and I have so far called past-tense voiceover (Genette 220). However, this is not consistent; at moments throughout the film, Sortilège talks in the present tense. This first occurs when the audience finally meets Bigfoot Bjornsen in person (having earlier seen Bjornsen in a TV commercial turned paranoid delusion), a police detective who is Doc’s nemesis/ally. Quoting from two different points in the novel’s narration, Sortilège identifies Bigfoot:

Well morning Sam, like a bad-luck planet in today’s horoscope, here’s the old hippie-hating maddog himself, in the flesh, Lt. Detective Christian ‘Bigfoot’ Bjornsen, SAG member, John Wayne walk, Flattop of *Flintstones*’ proportion, and that little evil shit-twinkle in his eye that says ‘Civil Rights Violation’
(Anderson 00:21:02).

But this present tense switch is only temporary. Next time she narrates, it is in the past tense again, “Doc could never figure out what Shasta might have seen in him” (Anderson 00:26:53), followed shortly after by a past-tense narration that starts with a deictic (terms like

be thinking of another.

“these,” “now,” “here,” etc.) which relies on some form of presentness to work: “these were perilous times, astrologically speaking, for dopers” (Anderson 00:31:30). Three minutes after that, the present tense returns when Doc visits Wolfmann’s wife, Sloane, at the developer’s home. As Doc tries to make sense of what is happening in the house, Sortilège narrates what he and the camera is seeing, with some (albeit minimal) commentary of her own—or is it Doc’s, or is it the novel’s? “So this is Riggs, the spiritual advisor. And there’s Sloan, maybe not so much English rose as English Daffodil, and this is LAPD, busy as ever...getting in some last minute free catering before the feds show up...and there’s Luz, the sexy Chicana housekeeper, or, pretending to be?” (Anderson 00:34:30). Notably, the last description (of Luz), is not a quote from the novel, suggesting that Sortilège cannot simply be understood as the embodied version of the book’s narrator, but is rather a separate narrator. The camera looks at each while cutting back to Doc, as if both it and Doc are trying to figure out what is happening, and it is turning to Doc to see what his reaction is. Notably, in the film Luz does not appear again, and so Sortilège’s skepticism is misplaced, implying that though she is telling the story she does not have a full grasp on it.⁴⁵ These metalepses are interspersed throughout the film, breaking down the narrative time; the scenes come one after the other, but the voice-over contradicts this.

At first glance, it appears this aporia can be resolved through reading the moments of present tense narration as a filmic version of free-indirect discourse, a literary device where the author takes on the voice of the protagonist, though not through either quotation nor as an interior monologue.⁴⁶ It certainly seems fitting, at least in some of the examples. The aforementioned present-tense narration when Doc is looking around Wolfmann’s home certainly could be from his perspective and still make equal sense (indeed, it would even explain the voice-over’s uncertainty about Luz). Later, When Doc wonders whether “Was it possible, that at every gathering—concert, peace rally, love-in, be-in, and freak-in, here, up north, back East,

⁴⁵ Briefly, we might mention that Luz does appear again in the novel, in a mostly unnecessary scene in which she and Doc have sex and she tells Doc that Sloane would skim money off Mickey’s projects. I bring it up only to mention that they meet in what Pynchon calls an “ex-neighborhood, its houses all condemned for an airport extension which may have existed only as some bureaucratic fantasy” (Pynchon 143). What might we make of such a location as geographic aproductivity? Furthermore, Doc compares Luz to *The Enquirer*, the only mention of newspapers in the novel. Considering how newspapers help construct a unified time and imaginary nation (Anderson 35), what can we make of this disappearance, particularly when the newspaper is central in traditional noir, such as Chandler or Dorothy B. Hughes’ *In a Lonely Place*?

⁴⁶ The most famous discussion of filmic free indirect discourse is likely Pier Paolo Pasolini’s lecture on the topic. However, his conception of filmic free indirect discourse is quite different from how it is discussed here. It was more formal, focusing on how director’s could use techniques to produce the protagonists’ interior state visually. Here, the free indirect discourse is much more similar to how it is used in novels.

wherever—those dark crews had been busy all along, reclaiming the music, the resistance to power, the sexual desire from epic to everyday, all they could sweep up, for the ancient forces of greed and fear? ‘Gee,’ he thought, ‘I dunno . . .’” it is Sortilège who describes it (Anderson 00:59:07). Furthermore, in the novel the first part of the quote is free indirect discourse that Doc then responds to aloud, further suggesting the metalepses within the film could be a translation of free indirect discourse from the novel.

However, the vocabulary used during these metalepses suggests that these present tense intrusions are not only examples of free, indirect discourse. To return to an earlier example, when Doc wakes up to find Bigfoot leering above him, Sortilège comments “like a bad luck planet in today’s horoscope” (Anderson 00:21:12). But Doc is not into astrology, certainly not enough to use it as an internal metaphor. Sortilège, the character, is. In the film, we know this indirectly, through her interest in Ouija boards and other supernatural spiritualisms, while the novel makes her interest in the field even more clear. This suggests the metalepses within the voice-over hold a “testimonial function,” which is “when the narrator indicates the source of his information, or the degree of precision of his own memories, or the feelings which one or another episode awakens in him” (Genette 256). In the above example, Sortilège is commenting on how the episodes she is recounting affect her. But this does not explain why she does so in the present tense. Perhaps it is affecting her as she narrates, and therefore the present tense refers not to the image on the screen but rather present to the time of narration. If this is the case, then these moments of present tense highlight how the time of the narrative and the time of the narration do not align. While this paradox is true of all forms of what Genette calls “subsequent narration,” the film version of *Inherent Vice* uses bodily metalepses to breakdown the separation between narrative time and narration time (Genette 223).⁴⁷

Here it is necessary to clarify that by “bodily metalepses” I do not simply mean the appearance of Sortilège within the film’s diegesis. She is, after all, a reoccurring character in the novel and film. Rather, I mean specific moments where Sortilège the narrator not the character appears. These are almost entirely confined to when Doc is driving. As he travels from place to place, she sits next to him, not quite narrating but also not talking to Doc. For example, when he is on his way to Channel View Estates, she sits next to him and monologues on the “long, sad

⁴⁷ “Subsequent narrating exists through this paradox: it possesses at the same time a temporal situation (with respect to the past story) and an atemporal essence (since it has no duration proper)” (Genette 223).

history of L.A. land use”—a quote from the novel’s narration, where the book-narrator is paraphrasing Aunt Reet (Pynchon 17). Yet when Sportello arrives at Channel View, he is alone. When he drives to Chryskylodon later, she is in the car again. This time, she has a direct conversation with Doc. He says that Chryskylodon is an ancient Indian word for serenity, relaying what Sloan Wolfmann told him. Sortilège responds by saying it means “Golden Fang” in Greek, and knows because she studied classics in college (01:31:09).⁴⁸ But once again, when he arrives at his destination, she is gone. Sortilège leaves the space she occupies at the beginning to intervene in the narrative, using metalepsis not necessarily for testimonial function, but rather for narrative purposes.

Inside/Outside

Sortilège-as-narrator’s entry into the narrative, however, undermines the intra/extradiegetic dialectic that metalepsis relies on. What is intradiegetic concerns the story as it is happening, while what is extradiegetic concerns the narration of the story (Genette 228). As we saw earlier, metalepsis takes place when the two levels interact with each other such that intradiegetic elements (such as characters) become aware of the extradiegetic level. However, in Anderson’s film the line between extradiegetic and intradiegetic is blurred, if it exists at all. The extradiegetic narration collapses into the story, even as the latter pushes against the limits imposed by the former. Sortilège as narrator is not just narrating, but also actively participating in the narrative. The line between the narration and the narrated blurs. Even Sortilège’s bodily relationship to the voice-over undermines the divide. As Pascal Bonitzer notes, there are two types of voice-overs: one is the bodiless one of classical documentary, which “can be criticized by nothing and no one” because it cannot be localized (Bonitzer 322). The other, what he calls a “voiceoff,” is when the voice of the character is assumed to come from off screen. This is the narration of *Inherent Vice*, and is common to narrative fiction films. In contrast to the voice-over, the audience knows that the voice-off “comes from a place homogenous with that of the scenographic lure...in accord with realist physical space” (Bonitzer 323). Furthermore, Doane argues, the voiceoff is submissive to the body because it “belongs to a character who is confined to the space of the diegesis, if not to the visible space of the screen” (*ViC* 340). But Sortilège

⁴⁸ In the novel, Doc’s friend Tito (a Greek limo driver) tells him this, drawing not on academic knowledge but memories of growing up in a Greek family.

both is and is not confined to the diegesis. She mostly exists within the film's diegesis and yet not the narrative's diegesis (while the two usually align, they do not in the film adaptation of *Inherent Vice*), though she can enter the latter at will. In other words, she exists on both the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic levels, though the extradiegetic level is paradoxically possibly diegetic, since it is within the world of the film, even as it is outside the temporal diegesis. She is in a realist physical space, but not necessarily the realist space of the story. She is neither fully an outside narrator nor interior narrator, and because of this there is a collapse of the competing temporalities, narrative time and narration time, the two not becoming one but instead each trying and failing to impose itself on the other. The result is that the distinction between past, present, and future is degraded, undermining the film's ostensible linear narrative. It is not that the film is explicitly nonlinear, but rather that it undermines the rationality and structure which linear film relies on, pointing to a larger breakdown. Furthermore, this breakdown forces a sense of aproductivity. When the linear, rational time starts malfunctioning, narrative productivity flounders; how can the protagonist's actions move the plot forward when the future keeps intervening in the past and past memories keep floating into the present? Instead, one can only move geographically, letting the world act upon the protagonist (see the sections entitled "Land Plots" for further exploration of geography and aproductivity).

One final example will clarify the relationship between the voice-off (which I originally referred to as voiceover) and aproductivity. Near the center of the film, Shasta—now missing—sends Doc a postcard where she mentions a day from near the end of their relationship. As Doc stares at it, eyes full of confusion, Sortilège remarks, "you don't remember the Ouija board, do you Doc," and then remembers for him (Anderson 01:13:44). "It had been one of those prolonged times of no dope," she explains, as the camera makes a sudden cut into the past, to a day where Shasta, Doc, and Sortilège were hanging out on a screened porch.⁴⁹ Shasta and Doc leave on a wild goose chase to find marijuana, abandoning Sortilège, though she continues to narrate even when the images are showing events she does not witness. As the flashback comes to a close, Sortilège notes that it was one of the days that stuck with Doc from his and Shasta's relationship (Anderson 01:15:30). This directly contradicts the present-tense comment that begins the flashback, and suggests that she is able to shape the narrative through her voice-over.

⁴⁹ In an inversion of the traditional structure, the straight cut here takes us to the flashbacks, while the film's myriad dissolves tend to maintain linear, though elliptical, time. See the next section of this chapter for further discussion of transitions.

The metalepsis here not only provides additional information, but actively shapes the narrative, destroying the distance between the time of narration and that of the story. These interventions are not merely free indirect discourse or for testimonial function, but also part of a larger collapse of linear, rational time. Except there is no replacement, no new temporal structuring, or even an abandonment of the old decrepit system. Instead, there is only moving around and through a space where the underpinning logics have degraded but the ideological structure produced is still the same. In such a scenario, narrative closure requires the construction of a new representation of time, except the film is unable to imagine such a construction.

Swimming Circles in the Sea of Time

The first time I watched *Inherent Vice* was with my mother. As we listened to Owen Wilson and Joaquin Phoenix whisper to each other in the Boards' haunted mansion, she asked me how much was left. Upon learning there was well over an hour remaining, she announced she was leaving. The film lacked any sort of coherence, and she had no clue what was happening or who any of the characters were. She was not alone—there have been entire articles about critics and viewers leaving the theater halfway through this borderline incomprehensible film (Rose 2015). However, this is not because the film fails to produce a linear narrative. Rather, the temporal disjunction discussed in the last section infects the alignment of the images on the screen, how the shots come together to form a narrative. Or rather, how they do not cohere. While in classical Hollywood narratives the contingent is made subservient to the narrative, in *Inherent Vice*, the opposite is true. The narrative becomes subservient to the contingent, not a cohesive whole but rather a collection of individual moments that point to something larger that cannot be represented, something that impacts the text even as it hides. Yet even as it cannot be represented directly, the film somehow represents it, not through a realist mapping of this larger structure, but rather through invoking and making odd the experience of existing within this structure.

In doing so, Anderson “translates” the formal aspects of the novel mentioned in “Marlowe and the Doc,” how Pynchon uses anachronies to produce a peculiar sense of time and history. He does so through foregrounding the contingent, which in turn means foregrounding the index. After all, the index is on the side of the contingent, is the sign in Peirce’s taxonomy that comes closest to the “ideal limit” of the instant (Doane *ECT* 91). Indices rely on the

contingent and arbitrary and are “characterized by a certain singularity and uniqueness” (Doane *ECT* 92). At the same time, however, *Inherent Vice* plays the contingent and index off of each other, even as it foregrounds both. The film establishes the priority of the random and arbitrary in opposition to narrative, but this contingency is undercut by attention to the film’s camera and enunciation, the indexical apparatus explaining away the contingent. However, in one last dialectical twist, the refusal of actors to cede to the camera undermines its explicatory power, leaving a group of images that is neither fully arbitrary and contingent nor fully narrativized and rational. Instead, they are aproductive images, unable to use old structures yet also incapable of conjuring anything new.

Broken Down Linearity

A central tension within the filmic adaptation is that while Anderson ostensibly linearizes the narrative, the way he does so leaves viewers unacquainted with Pynchon’s bizarre universe confused and alienated. No longer has the FBI taken Mickey to Vegas, having stolen him from Vigilant California (a militia possibly run by Bigfoot Bjornsen) and “reprogrammed” him at Chryskylodon, the mental health facility he endowed. Instead, someone takes him directly to the facility.⁵⁰ The revelation that the entire Vigilant California raid was a cover to kill Glen Charlock is erased, as is the side plot about the fake Nixon dollar bills the *Golden Fang* drops as lagan. Yet Anderson chooses not to fill in the gaps in the narrative these erasures create. The relationship between Sloane’s plot and the FBI’s plan is unclear, considering it seems the feds take and send him to where Sloane also planned to send him, but for seemingly different reasons...if they were the ones that originally kidnapped him, which is never confirmed. The choice of what to include and emphasize is seemingly arbitrary—characters appear with only mumbled introductions drowned out by extra-diegetic music, having been alluded to in earlier portions of the novel. Others simply disappear halfway through. The ostensible antagonist, Adrian Prussia, is not even mentioned for the first hour of the film. People appear out of the marijuana smoke only to be reclaimed by it before their purpose becomes clear. At one point, Doc tries to trace the various occurrences (what we are calling the narrative) on a chalkboard. The audience gets a momentary glimpse at it, but it reveals nothing, looking like gibberish, the work of a madman. The construction of the plot is revealed, how the occurrences that compose it

⁵⁰ It is revealed Wolfmann has bought land in Las Vegas through images of a newspaper.

are less a linear series of inter-dependent events and more baroque decorations adorning an absence. One is reminded of Montaigne's description of his Essays as "grotesques" adorning the empty space where the thing that would connect them should be (De Montaigne 206). They only cohere and connect to each other through an absent object—in Montaigne's case, his friend's political essay. In *Inherent Vice*, the events are ornaments on a broken down logic, not unlike a form of capitalism whose contradictions have brought it into permanent crisis.

Here, we might note that the film makes heavy use of cross-dissolves as a transition between scenes. In contemporary Hollywood film, the cross-dissolve is usually used sparingly to indicate the passing of time, creating a "firewall" of sorts between scenes. In classic Hollywood, on the other hand, it was used more often as a way to mark an ellipsis. Anderson returns this function, with the cross-dissolve marking that some undetermined amount of time has passed between scenes. Unlike in classic Hollywood, however, nothing happens in the invisible time; we can assume Doc is probably just stoned on his couch. To use it nearly constantly, as Anderson does in *Inherent Vice*, is dissociative, undermining the sense that the narrative is whole or linear. Instead, it sets the scenes off from each other, distancing them temporally and spatially. It is the visual equivalent of individual words (or perhaps sentences) separated by ellipses so they cannot be "read" as a unified sentence or paragraph or work, but rather as fragments pointing to something not there.⁵¹ The scenes included seem arbitrary, emphasizing the contingent, because scenes that could equally be included (considering they still affect the narrative) are not shown, and vice-versa. In the "White Album" passage brought up in the previous section where Didion writes that in the early 1970's, her life was no longer the narrative she believed it should be, "not a movie but a cutting room experience" where the images do not cohere into a whole (Didion *WA* 13). Aproductivity is the aesthetic representation of this, where the images are cut from an absent plot, namely the movement of capital. The plot becomes the subjective ordering of various images cut-off from the thing that would provide meaning, the mimetic impulse focusing on the degraded logics of an objectivized, totalized world that is absent. Instead, the contingent sits, pointing at a broken-down, unrepresentable ordering totality even as it fights against it. Furthermore, this narrative of contingency tells us something about the totality and universal, namely that it is not just the sum of its particulars but rather something greater. The exchange

⁵¹ This description is indebted to Miriam Hansen's and Getrude Koch's writings on Adorno and film, which will be discussed further in the section "Utopia Banned."

relationship casts itself over all particulars while remaining invisible, turning films into shell-games of the ever same. Because the particulars cannot fully embody the exchange relationship, there is always a distance between said particulars and the universal. It is what is not apparent, the scenes that drive the film yet are never shown, that reflect the truth, that reveal how the universal violently dominates the particular (Jameson *LM* 90). However, dialectically the particular comes to enforce itself on the universal and shape it, as we are about to see.

Uneventful Particulars

The particular reasserts itself through the film's emphasis on "uneventful" scenes and details.⁵² As Doane notes, cinema divides time into "eventful and uneventful time" in service of containing contingency (Doane *ECT* 144). The latter is ellipsed in Hollywood narrative film, marking it as unimportant, while the former is elevated and given a reason for existing (it is filmed), in turn suppressing the randomness that threatens linear, rational time. But in *Inherent Vice*, uneventful scenes are included, moments that do not establish setting, move forward the plot, or do any of the other "work" images are forced to perform in Hollywood film. These include both shots of Doc driving from place to place (which will be discussed in depth later) and instances where tension is created yet nothing happens. The most obvious example of this occurs shortly after Doc learns Shasta has been seen on the Golden Fang Schooner (1:12:07-1:13:00). Doc pulls into his tiny garage bathed in red light, and struggles to fit his car inside and then get the garage door closed as faceless people walk by. Just after he succeeds, Doc hears the diegetic sound of a bottle rolling to his right, which distracts him (there's an unimportant visual pun here, where some line about "rolling on" is written on the wall behind him as he hears the bottle). A few seconds later, several skateboarders fly down the hill, nearly colliding with him and building tension through their astoundingly loud wheels. Doc eventually reaches his front

⁵² In this, Anderson converts Pynchon's obsession with information as form, in which he provides so much as to overwhelm the reader until the line between what is useful and what is not is erased, into a narrative aspect. In the novel, one does not know which band name or obscure film actor or fictional television show will end up being important, but cannot keep track of all them, because the references overwhelm. In the film, on the other hand, one never knows which scenes actually matter and which are trivial. The result, however, is the same: the line between the concrete and abstract within the work becomes blurred. If "every symbol symbolizes nothing but another symbol, another conceptuality, their core remains empty," then these concrete scenes, in their lack, become abstract in the negative sense (Adorno *ND* 399). But rather than showing us nothing, they reveal in their emptiness the true, absent story of the work, namely the construction of late capitalism. Anderson reveals that in a world where capital flows are increasingly untraceable and the link between material production and profits have been broken, the system is sketched not through material occurrences, but rather through the arbitrary linkages between separate events

door, where he finds a postcard from Shasta (which, as he examines it through a shot glass, starts off the flashback discussed earlier) and enters his home. This entire sequence, best described as something resembling a “slapstick-thriller,” has no narrative value, and is absent from the novel. The skateboarders never return, and the rolling glass is forgotten. Instead, it is on the side of the contingent, showing us a moment from Doc’s life that has no connection the mystery he is unraveling. Yet at the same time, including it reduces its contingency, as the scene becomes ‘useful’ as an insight into Doc’s mental state and the world of the beach, reflecting the paranoia that bathes everything like the unreal red light. Though the scene has no connection the larger narrative, it does connect to the film’s form, particularly the sense of disconnectedness from scene to scene. It becomes useful not in terms of story, but atmosphere. Yet in so doing, it paradoxically becomes important to the plot, since it emphasizes the breakdown of linear narrative. And so the contingent becomes part of the rationalized time of the narrative.

Combined with the plot points which are erased but still echo, these unnecessary scenes reveal the exchangeability of shots, how the contingent is given identity and put under the sway of the exchange value. The underlying character of the Hollywood film is revealed, how it relies on the sameness of scenes and the repression of the arbitrary in favor of the rational. In so doing, it shapes our understanding of the universal, as we can only know the totality through these particulars, the contingent scenes that exist outside of the rational, even as they fail to capture the universal. But in taking on status as a particular—in other words, existing as an example—the particular paradoxically loses its status as such, its symbolism universalizing it. The dialectic nature of the universal/particular divide is revealed, how the two are inseparable yet often in tension or outright opposition (Jameson *LM* 90). At the same time, the breakdown of linear, rational time—itsself a particular that tells us about the slowing of capitalism in a larger sense, how the domination of the exchange relationship endangers the system it builds—leaves us unanchored and floating, unable to recover an understanding where the contingent is once again free of the systemic, yet also recognizing that the logic undergirding linear, rational time is in crisis.

False Subjectivity and Filmic Enunciators

In this dialectic without synthesis, how can narrative be constructed? Didion’s answer is to center the authorial subject and hence their subjectivity. She declares that during the crisis of

the 1970's "all narrative was sentimental...all connections were equally meaningful, and equally senseless," reliant on authorial appearance to link them (Didion *WH* 44). She offers an example, how the dress she bought the day Kennedy was killed was ruined at a dinner Sharon Tate was at, and then how she bought a different dress in 1970, not for her but for Linda Kasabian (a former Manson girl) to wear while testifying about the murder of Tate. Didion explains that she "[believes] this to be an authentically senseless chain of correspondences, but in the jingle-jangle morning of that summer [1970] it made as much sense as anything else did" (Didion *WH* 45). What connects these disparate "scenes" is, first and foremost, that Didion is in all of them, while the thematic connections are secondary. However, the same form of narrative is seemingly not possible in film; the camera is an eye, not a mind, and has no memory or consciousness. But this changes if we consider that for the reader what unites the disparate moments Didion wishes to link is not only Didion the person being there, but also her enunciation of them as intertwined in Didion the person's head. As readers, we do not know of the events or their psychic connection unless Didion enunciates it.

Understanding this mode of narrative as a narrative of enunciation allows us to introduce Christian Metz's concept of filmic enunciation, where enunciation is performed through formal mechanisms.⁵³ In the summarizing conclusion of his dense tract, Metz clarifies that he is making six points about filmic enunciation. The first three are meta-commentaries about the state of enunciation theory more generally, while the latter are about enunciation in cinema and literature. In the latter, he notes that the filmic enunciator is never extra-diegetic, shaping the text from the outside, but rather embedded within the narrative "producing" the images (Metz 768). These enunciators are visible through "enunciation markers," or moments where the film image seems to correspond to either author or spectator (Metz 768). These markers are in the text, but usually understood in relationship to either author or addressee (Metz prefers the impersonal terms source and target) (Metz 769). These markers are created when "metadiscursive folds of cinematic instances [pile] on top of each other," when the film talks to us about its production (Metz 769). "The film talks to us about itself, about cinema, or about the position of the spectator" (Metz 753). It can do so not only through literal reflexivity (subjective shots and those that interpellate) but also in a slightly more indirect way, through authorial flourishes, those moments where the director reminds spectators that the images do not simply appear out of

⁵³ In this, it also establishes a genealogy, connecting intra-crisis narratives to the modernist interest in form.

nowhere. As it happens, Anderson's directorial signature is in fact also directly reflexive: it is the steadicam follow shot, often (though not always) through a crowded space. According to André Crous, these shots are one of the signatures of Anderson's auteurist image (2007). As Jason Sperb describes in *Blossoms and Blood*, they "are distinctive for their lack of any particular character's point of view, attempting the perspective of an order always just out of reach" (Serb 17). Instead, they ground the camera and the "search" for images, hunting for a narrative, desperately trying to find something that will provide meaning. To concretize this, we might look at two of these steadicam shots in *Inherent Vice*.

The first is when Shasta leaves Doc's house at the beginning of the film. The camera follows the two to the car and eavesdrops on their conversation. When Shasta pulls away, it turns to face Doc, eager to see his reaction, only for Doc to ignore it and walk to follow the car for a moment. When he stops, the camera catches up and frames Doc in a close-up, and then tracks Doc as he turns the in the opposite direction and begins walking. He reaches a stairwell where Denis is waiting in the shadows and the two walk down the stairs. It follows in their footsteps, finally cutting as they go fully down the stairs and away from the street. Extra-diegetic music plays from when Shasta leaves through past the cut, and Denis and Doc mutter to each other, their words barely audible to both camera and audience.

Another one of these shots comes an hour into the film, when Doc and Denis visit the Boards up in Topanga Canyon. After providing an establishing shot of the house (during which, once again, Doc and Denis mumble while extra-diegetic music plays), the camera cuts to a medium shot behind the two of them as they walk into the house. They are bathed in dark neon blue light as they enter, embodying the negative atmosphere that Sortilège tells us the two feel. As Sortilège narrates Doc's interior monologue, the camera follows them. When Doc and Denis split up, the camera follows Doc, circling around to the left when Bambi walks up so both are in the frame. Their conversation finishes and the camera waits for Bambi to leave before following Doc again, drifting so it is behind his right shoulder when he introduces himself to the keyboardist for "Spotted Dick," a British band staying at the house. As he does so, the camera rack focuses from Doc to the keyboardist, then back to Sportello when he begins walking again. Doc crosses back across the screen to go into a different part of the house, with the camera continuing to follow him. As he notices some "dark forces"—bikers in Nazi jackets—ahead of him, the camera racks to put them in focus, and then racks back to Doc and cuts.

In both of these scenes, we find two things. First, there is a reflexivity that calls attention to the filmic construction, with the camera both modeling the spectator (searching the scene for what provides meaning) and doing what the spectator cannot (moving freely within the scene). In doing so, the film enunciates, though its enunciator has no established subjectivity (it is not necessarily the director nor a character). Returning to Sperb's quote above, we might modify it some. The perspective of these shots is the perspective of cinema in the age of crisis, when the logics undergirding linear, rational narrative time have broken down, yet cinema is unable to rely on authorial subjectivity to produce meaning, because unlike in literature, the enunciator must always come from within the diegesis itself (Metz 768). Without an enunciator on the outside, the meaning and connection between disparate moments cannot be fully ascribed. In *Didion*, it requires *Didion* the person being there at the moments she lists, and then *Didion* the enunciator putting the times in conversation. But the enunciator in film can only do the former. It reduces contingency through enunciation (these are the scenes that appear because they are the scenes that are enunciated) but cannot take the next step and unite the scenes, which remain sealed off from each other through the dissolve. No longer able to rely on the temporal logic of industrial capitalism, the film strives towards a subjectivity that would provide meaning and fully negate the contingent, but can never reach it, because industrial capitalism liquidates the myth of the subject, and even if it had not, the enunciating subject in film is impersonal and unable to adequately convey subjectivity, as Metz argues is the case with all films.⁵⁴ Yet despite this, the film works to achieve perspective, the camera using "being there" to reduce the contingent and produce meaning. It produces a fake camera-subjectivity through enunciative markers, not only in the steadicam shots but also moments when the camera "wakes up" and when it "takes" drugs. These second two forms of markers try to subjectivize the enunciator. This false-subjectivity echoes a mechanism discussed in chapter one, where corporations and capital are given subjecthood even as the myth of the individual subject dissolves into the aether. Just as the economy now relies on a sham corporate subjectivity, the film's narrative can only be constructed through acting as though the enunciator is a proper subject, one with a memory and personhood. Deleuze writes that "we are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most

⁵⁴ We might note here that while *Didion* does appeal to subjectivity to provide meaning, she does so only after shattering any idea of the aligning subject as a conscious whole, through her describing her psychological breakdown. This breakdown marks her subjectivity as a fragmented, contradictory space constantly affected by the world around it—she notes that her symptoms do "not now seem to me an inappropriate response to the summer of 1968") and not the mythical transcendental subject that can no longer be believed in (*Didion* 15).

terrifying news in the world” (Deleuze 6). In *Inherent Vice*, we are told the camera has a memory, a personhood. This is an equally terrifying development. However, this subjectivity is a trick, a construction. No matter how hard the camera works, no matter how high it gets, it cannot make the disparate scenes cohere.⁵⁵

The first of these humanizing enunciations occurs after Doc learns Shasta is out at sea aboard the Golden Fang. He looks out his window, presumably at the ocean in hopes of seeing the ship (00:52:15-00:53:55). The light upon his face is bright and white, simulating strong daylight. It then cuts to a shot of the Fang heading out to the open ocean as Seagulls squawk in the San Pedro fog, a dark and grey shot that does not match the sun filtering into Sportello’s window. The film cuts again, this time to a dark screen. As the gulls continue their crying, the camera raises its exposure, revealing a close-up shot of Shasta bathed in soft red light. The film then cuts back to Doc staring out the window with binoculars, shot through a filter that makes him look almost electric blue, suggesting he is working during some apocalyptic witching hour. The camera shakes a bit, causing Doc to jump and look around in surprise. Doc does not seem to be daydreaming, as he looks alert and awake when he turns to look around. Rather, he has been searching, and in the meantime the camera has drifted into a daydream, only to jolt awake. Sportello notices this jolt, but not the camera itself, suggesting it is both there and not, a moment of reflexivity where the enunciative marker refers both to the current image and the previous one (the daydream). In this, the camera tries to posit itself as an extradiegetic enunciator as well as an internal enunciator, though as we will see later this fails. In doing so, it reduces the contingency of the images—they are not random, but enunciated by the camera, which is in turn ordering them to its own logic.

The other way the camera creates a false subject is through its drug use. At least twice in the film, the camera gets noticeably high. The first is when Doc meets Nancy Charlock, Glen Charlock’s sister (01:07:20-01:10:50). He is in his office, huffing laughing gas while sitting in a hospital chair, the light above his head giving him a heavenly glow, laughing at a TV we cannot see. After providing some exposition, Nancy asks “are you going to keep holding onto that tank or are you gonna marry it.” Doc hands her the mask, which passes in front of the camera. As it does, a high-pitched ringing begins and Doc leans into the light, again providing a hazy

⁵⁵ Of course, subjectivity alone does not guarantee coherence. There are plenty of incoherent subjects. But subjectivity does mark the incoherence as having an originary point, stemming from someone rather than reflecting a lack.

afterglow around him. In other words, there is a hint of what is a head high (the type of high laughing gas produces, often accompanied by a sense of vertigo, which is simulated by the camera's low angle, where all one can see behind the characters is the white nothingness of the wallpaper). As Nancy inhales, the ringing continues; Doc slaps himself to come back to earth, but the camera remains as if stoned, staring at him in the blurry light. The effects are subtle in this scene, but less so the second time the camera finds itself drugged out, when Doc visits the Golden Fang dental offices (01:17:17-01:22:55).

Doc and the dentist Rudy Blatnoyd do some cocaine (or possibly amphetamines) together, before Blatnoyd leaves to sleep with his secretary. After Doc has explored the dental operating room some, the two meet in the office, this time joined by Denis, who has crashed Doc's car, and Japonica Fenway, another of Blatnoyd's lovers. As the four prepare to drive back to the beach, the camera films them from just above the desk where a pile of cocaine sits, as if it is sitting with its nose on the table. The four decide to do some cocaine for the road, and as they approach the desk their movement speeds up. This did not happen when Doc and Dr. Blatnoyd first did the cocaine, and none of the four have reached the desk to do more yet. Instead, it is as though the camera, upon hearing that it was time to do more cocaine, sits behind the desk and snorts some itself. Furthermore, the angle of the shot is identical with an earlier Point of View shot from Doc's perspective when he sat behind the desk and took the drugs. It is as though the enunciator is participating, establishing a sort of "being there-ness" that reduces the contingency somewhat re-established through the arbitrary nature of scene selection. The enunciator is enunciating what it sees and "remembers," just as Didion does. The scenes are not included or ellipsed because of their importance to the plot or to establish a linear, rational time, but rather whether the enunciator was there.

However, this new ordering logic is undermined by the film's tendency to ignore the enunciator. Characters whisper at a volume that is barely audible for the addressee, whether that is the camera-enunciator or the audience. For example, Denis, Doc's sometime assistant, appears in the title sequence, introduced only by a nearly inaudible "Hey Denis" (pronounced Deenis) mumbled while non-diegetic music is playing and Sortilège is narrating. He is then unaddressed for almost an hour, fading into the background and being little more than an extra before returning with no re-introduction. Later, just before the aforementioned cocaine scene, Doc yells for Denis while they are both off-frame, talking under music (which turns out to be diegetic,

coming from a car stereo) as the camera stares at the Golden Fang offices. And scattered throughout the film are shots where the characters look at something that the camera never sees. Often times, these looks are paired together—we never see the photo of the Harlingen’s child that makes Doc scream, and then seconds later, we see Doc react to a bank slip which again we cannot see. Then there is the aforementioned shot of Doc staring out onto the ocean, only for the camera to cut to an image of the Golden Fang that does not correspond to Doc’s look. This is followed (as mentioned) by the dreamlike shot of Shasta staring at someone who we never see. When Sportello receives Shasta’s postcard, he stares under the light, looking for a hologram/watermark, but the audience never knows if he finds it. In these shots, there is a twofold reminder: first, that the camera-enunciator cannot truly perform the same operation that enunciator-Didion does, because what it is capturing is fiction and so it can never truly “be there,” because there is no “there.” But beyond this, it reminds us that for all the talk of film as capturing truth and the real, the camera can never indexically capture social relations, the way the exchange value lies under real objects, the essence that explicates relationships in late capitalism. We might note that even more common are shots where the object of the look is revealed. In these long shots, usually from below, the camera searches characters’ faces for a hint of what the object is, turning human expression into an index, pointing at something we cannot yet see, though the camera eventually gets a glimpse of the lightning to the face’s metaphorical thunder. Here, there is the reminder that this world of late capital can only be represented indirectly, through its effects on people; in these moments, the thing itself never tells the audience nearly as much as the facial expressions in response.

If it seems I strayed far afield from the original discussion of the contingent vs rational (and even further from any discussion of aproductivity), let me now bring it back. In the permanent secular crisis of capitalism, we are left with images that are neither rational nor contingent; the ordering logic of industrial capitalism has given way to the bizarre world where a corporation’s goal is not profits but maximizing share price, which is based not on objective economic rules but on a false subjectivity (See Chapter one). Rationally ordered time breaks down, leaving us with snapshots of the crisis, moments that gain meaning only through what is not there, namely the Byzantine world of late capital.

Land Plots

If there is a central trope in academic writing on Los Angeles and its cultural texts, it is the idea of using film and literature to “map” the city. Sometimes it is explicit, part and parcel of the theorist or historian’s intellectual project, as with Jameson and his chapter “Mapping Space” in *Raymond Chandler*. Sometimes it is done as a response to Hollywood’s tendency to make its understanding of the city the only one, focusing less on a single text and more on countering the simulacrum of the city found in films, as is the case with Norman Klein’s chapter on movie locations in *The History of Forgetting*. And sometimes it is coincidental, a rhetorical move natives unconsciously make even when they are trying to explain the city through a temporal or class-based lens, as in Mike Davis’ *City of Quartz* and Vincent Brook’s *Land of Smoke and Mirrors*. There is any number of reasons for this. In part, it is due to the fact that Los Angeles was developed through real estate speculation in way few other American cities were. As Davis writes, the city is “a creature of real-estate capitalism”; from its earliest preindustrial days, before the harbor and the defense plants and shipyards, it was built on boosters convincing the midwestern middle class to move there, causing “population, income, and consumption structures seemingly out of all proportion to Los Angeles’s actual production base” (25). The result is that real estate and geography are the default mode for understanding the city, informing our modes of interpretation.

Relatedly, as Michael Sorkin argues, Los Angeles is the most mediated city in America (Davis 20). This is emphasized by a historical lack of scholarship on the building of the municipality, so that “Los Angeles understands its past, instead, through a robust fiction called noir” (Davis 36). Finally, the “imaginary maps that [movies about Los Angeles] generate are repeated throughout the world,” becoming the dominant image of the city and erasing what is not shot (Klein 103). Hollywood captures some parts of the city and not others as part of its ideological project.

Here, however, I will do the inverse of these writers: rather than using *Inherent Vice*’s L.A. as a way to understand the space of the real city, we will do the opposite. We can do so because, as Bill Millard notes, “A sense of place is more than atmospheric in the world of *Inherent Vice*; it is pervasive” (69). What we find is that, while earlier Pynchon novels offer a the “ultimate freeway map” of Los Angeles, presenting the city as a radically decentered, rhizomatic space, *Inherent Vice* (both film and novel) is a new sort of highway novel, a world where the real L.A. haunts its simulacrum, calling attention to the very futility of mapping through culture

(Davis 67).

At the same time, however, some sort of mapping is necessary to comprehend the characters in the novel and film, as they are explicitly defined through their relationships to land. But this mapping does not offer full explanations of the characters because L.A. is less planned than “infinitely envisioned,” and the main envisioner, Mickey Wolfmann, is mostly absent within both the film and novel (Davis 23). Furthermore, to understand the characters through their locations requires abstracting the populations of neighborhoods into generalities (which are abstractions and rely on the logic of identity to exist) and then applying these archetypes onto the characters within the work. Yet archetypes are never concrete or real, but rather ideals (which can be positive or negative). Importantly, this is not the only way Pynchon (and, to a lesser extent, Anderson) uses the space of Los Angeles to create a productive tension within the work. As one might expect from Pynchon, the highway does factor in heavily, as do the locations of specific moments of the plot. As is becoming clear, this section will be particularly long. For ease of reading, I will explain its order here:

1. I will begin by briefly summarizing how characters in the novel are introduced through relations to land, and then reveal the incompleteness of such an interpretation. In doing so, I argue that the move to geographic mapping is a reaction to narrative breakdown, albeit one that cannot fully replace narrative.
2. Mapping key elements of the novel’s plot and examining the novel’s conclusion
3. Traveling on the highway, and how it produces a sense of aproductivity
4. Turning to the film and looking at how it maps, particularly its relationship to the real physical space of Los Angeles

In doing so, I hope to reveal how the film and novel use geography to posit the desire for a transformational object, only to reveal the object’s absence. As discussed in chapter one, the transformational object is a psychoanalytic concept that Adam Phillips pairs with boredom. It is the object that will transform the self, that will finally free us from our waiting and desire. However, it can never be known positively, and the bored subject does not know what it might look like. I argued that this concept can be applied socially, where we are waiting for the thing that will finally free us from the zombified system that is late capitalism, where the structure is in permanent crisis yet shows no sign of ending. What aproductive art such as *Inherent Vice* does is allegorize this search for the object that will allow us to understand and change the world around

us. For example, *Inherent Vice* searches for the thing that will save it from its broken temporal aspect, that will once again provide narrative or something like it. And one of the places it looks for this is geography, producing the illusion that mapping a city will save us from boredom, substituting place for narrative.

We might begin with the beginning; when Shasta arrives back to see Doc, she explains that she is now living in Hancock Park, a neighborhood in central Los Angeles bordered by Hollywood on the north and built around a private country club.⁵⁶ A historic upper-middle class neighborhood, we understand its position as mimicking Shasta's; no longer on the beach but not quite on the hills, marking her as what Pynchon refers to as a "flatlander." She has yet to make it as an actress, though a breakthrough seems closer than when she was at the beach. A few pages later, Aunt Reet is introduced as living "down the boulevard on the other side of the dunes in a more suburban part of town with houses, yards, and trees" having "moved here from San Joaquin with the kids" (Pynchon 6). San Joaquin is a county in Central California that in recent years has become part of the San Jose-San Francisco-Oakland region. However, it is also the name of a valley that runs through the center of the state, from the center-north to the center-south. We might understand it as somewhere between Didion's Sacramento Valley and San Bernardino, a state separate from Los Angeles and San Francisco, the type of place where children are asked how "the Holy Land resemble[s] the Sacramento Valley" (Didion *STB* 171, 174). Indeed, the San Joaquin Valley is located directly between the two regions Didion speaks about. It is a place that was once wild but has now become suburban; the kind of place where "a belief in the literal interpretation of Genesis has slipped into a belief in the literal interpretation of *Double Indemnity*, the country of the teased hair and the Capris and the girls for whom all life's praise comes down to a waltz-length white wedding dress...and a Tijuana divorce and a return to hairdresser's school" (Didion *WA* 4). We can then mark her as someone who has fled the suburban ennui that so often defines the outer limits of cities, running to the beach, her knowledge of real estate not only a job requirement but a way of trying to regain an understanding of the world around her, a rebuttal to the existential confusion of the suburban housewife. At the same time, however, she bolts to a vaguely suburban part of the beach, reflecting that she has not completely abandoned her roots (she also talks to Doc's parents—her siblings—often). And her exact origins are unclear: though both are decidedly exurban, there is

⁵⁶ All of the location data here is taken from the L.A. Times project "Mapping L.A."

still a difference between San Joaquin and the San Joaquin Valley. This inexactitude points to the impossibility of defining fictional characters through land; the Central Valley (of which the San Joaquin Valley is a part) is 18,000 square miles (amnh.com). To generalize about an area of this size is to falsify, and so to accurately understand Aunt Reet requires absent information, namely where in the Valley she is from. Even then, however, to understand her character through the land would require generalizing and falsifying. Aunt Reet's introduction offers the first hint that this geographical mapping will fail, that understanding the novel through land is an impossibility, even as it is necessary.

The other character who understands real estate, Mickey Wolfmann, is introduced as Westside "Hochdeutsch" mafia (Pynchon 7). Los Angeles was one of the few places in the United States where a non-protestant elite, among them German and Prussian Jews, originally had power (Davis 102). However, with the rise of Otis Chandler and the downtown elite in the 1920's, these German Jews were pushed out of the companies they started.⁵⁷ In the post-war years, Jewish builders (which Wolfmann symbolizes) came to dominate the development of tract housing on the Westside and developed their own power centers, but this was separate from the downtown elite they were once part of (Davis 125). Being part of the Westside German Jew community marks him as having wealth and certain trappings of power, but having lost his status as one of the true power brokers, who now run him. These power brokers—the FBI, Crocker Fenway, even Sloane, who is identified as an "English Daffodil"—become manifestations of the WASPs who pushed the Westjuden into the Santa Monica Mountains, segregating them from the power centers of the city (Pynchon 57). Because of his status as a Westjuden, Wolfmann is a threat to Fenway's narrative, how he tells Doc that, "it's about being in place...we're in place. We've been in place forever. Look around. Real estate, water rights, oil, cheap labor—all of that's ours, it's always been ours" (Pynchon 347). Beyond the obvious objection—for most of history these things belonged to the indigenous people who lived on the land, and no matter what the mural at Fenway's club depicts, the Catholic conquistadors who massacred the locals had no relation to the American WASPs who came later—the Western European Jews like Wolfmann were "in place" long before Otis Chandler and the rise of Los Angeles as the white Mecca, the

⁵⁷ Notably, they also tended to feud with the Eastern European Hollywood Jews, who they saw as "an embarrassment and a threat," particularly because they did not assimilate (Brook 70). This explains both Wolfmann's desire to not be Jewish and also why the FBI in the novel treats him as a WASP despite his Jewishness.

restructuring of the city as “the utopia of Aryan supremacism” (Davis 30).⁵⁸ Before moving on from Wolfmann, we might note that later he will be “seen” at his house in a portrait where he is “scanning the L.A. Basin to its farthest horizons for buildable lots,” marking him as the “envisioner,” whose full understanding of the land means he could offer clarity about characters and plot (Pynchon 58). This imbues him with transformational potential, only for the energy to dissipate as it becomes clear that not even Wolfmann can explain everything that is happening.⁵⁹

Doc’s sometime assistant, Denis (pronounced Deenis), is introduced disoriented as always, wandering in from “down the hill” where he lives (Pynchon 10). A product of the fictional Gordita Beach, he has no referent in our geographic knowledge to ground him, something Anderson plays with in the film by having Denis drift in and out of the narrative like an apparition. This is particularly true when Wolfmann is missing; after, there is no one who can envision the creation of the fictional beach neighborhood, turning it real. Doc then meets Tariq, a member of the Artesia Crips who got out of jail to find that that not only is his gang gone, but “the turf itself” is as well, ground up to little bits in preparation for Channel View Estates (Wolfmann’s newest housing project). When Doc learns the location, he asks Tariq if he’s Japanese, since the location is ““closer to Gardena than Compton”” (Pynchon 17). Tariq explains that when the Japanese were sent to internment camps, African Americans were moved in, only to be moved along as “white man’s revenge” for the Watts Insurrection (Pynchon 17).

With Tariq, the slippage between the real place and the novelistic one begins. When Doc arrives at what will be Channel View Estates, he parks at “Kaufman and Broad.” But as Millard notes, no such intersection exists. Rather “What did exist in 1960s Los Angeles was the firm of Kaufman & Broad, later KB Home, a national leader in the construction of what were then called tract houses” (Millard 71). The grounded history and geographic specificity of Tariq and his neighborhood is being destroyed, replaced with a universal style that standardizes and simultaneously atomizes. As this progresses over the next couple of decades, geographical mapping will become ever more difficult as each place becomes the same as every other place, suburban schlock as far as the eye can see. The past which allows us to understand characters is erased, ground up into bits. What we are seeing is the beginning of a post-modern “world without landmarks,” the cities found in films such as *Heat* (Fisher 31).

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that Fenway’s club is mission revival style, an architectural movement used by early boosters, particularly the cadre of intellectuals supported by Otis Chandler, to sell Los Angeles. See: Davis, pg 26-27

⁵⁹ For more on Wolfmann as a transformational object, see the section entitled “Lost capitalists.”

Doc and Bigfoot's relationship—described in the film as “history and all” (Anderson 00:11:11)—is explicated in the novel through where Bigfoot hassled Doc: “stop-and-frisks up and down Sepulveda” that escalate with a squalid matrimonial in some house with a “red-tile roof” (a signifier of early Los Angeles’ boosters whitewashing of the Spanish colonization of California and marking the location as cheap housing similar to Channel View Estates) (Pynchon 25). When Doc gets taken in for Glenn’s death, they do not go downtown but to Compton, due to “cop protocol forever obscure to Doc” (Pynchon 24). This suggests Bigfoot is somehow separate from the rest of the LAPD, foreshadowing what we learn later about the organization’s hit on his partner. He is not welcome downtown; he does not even have a desk at the homicide department, much less an office as one might expect a police lieutenant to have. But we never learn where he lives or where he is from—geographically, he defined only through his places of work, making fully mapping him as a character difficult.

Finally, the office of loan shark and hitman Adrien Prussia, the closest thing the narrative has to an antagonist, is located between South-Central and the Los Angeles River, slightly southeast of downtown. This is miles inland from the Pacific. Yet when Doc awakens after Puck sedates him, he hears waves and escapes by “using the sound of the surf as a guide,” moving in the opposite direction toward the street (Pynchon 327). He enters what appears to be a house, which we later learn to be Prussia’s apartment on Gummo Marx Way, a fictional “hard-luck boulevard,” that is uphill both ways and separates the residents of South Bay beach towns from “other places they thought at some point in their lives they needed to be” (Pynchon 284). Prussia’s two locations straddle South Central Los Angeles, reflecting his specialty as a hitman: “political—black and Chicano activists” (Pynchon 323). They become barriers on either side of the predominately PoC neighborhoods of Central and South Los Angeles, a firewall separating People of Color from the whites of Palos Verde and the beach. No wonder his loan company is called AP Finance, reflecting the role various financial firms played in segregation, not to mention a high school understanding of finance as something separate from politics, which Prussia’s actions undercut.⁶⁰

So far, we have not discussed Doc and his relationship to the land. Like Chandler’s Marlow, he is the character who can move between these spaces with ease. Like Denis, his only

⁶⁰ AP is also short for “advanced preparatory,” a type of class offered in high schools across the United States.

geographic home is the beach. It is unclear where he grew up—at one point he tells Hope Harlingen that he is from surf music's "native land" (Southern California), but his parents Leo and Elmina seem to be from San Joaquin like Aunt Reet (Pynchon 37). And while the San Joaquin Valley does stretch almost all the way down to Southern California, when Elmina asks Doc about Shasta, she mentions that there were "Hepworths over by Manteca" a town within the more northern part of San Joaquin County (Pynchon 114). To know about the Hepworth family in Manteca suggests that they are from the more northern part of the county as well. Rather than being defined as a place within California, he can more properly be understood as a product of California as a whole, able to move through any location.

At first glance, Pynchon's use of geography to define characters seems like a way to concretize them, grounding them in real places and material facts. Pynchon even references this obliquely in the novel, when Doc mistakenly claims that Sherlock Holmes is real, since "he lives at this real address in London. Well, maybe not anymore, it was years ago, he has to be dead by now" (96). However, the fictional aspects of the city undercut this. For example, it is unclear where exactly Prussia's office is, beyond somewhere near the L.A. River. To fully understand the systems of power in Los Angeles requires mapping, but an accurate mapping requires understanding the systems of power, the organizations that built L.A., not to mention knowledge of fictional geographies and intuitions. We are caught in a tautology, going back and forth without producing anything. Wolfmann might be able to help, but he is absent for most of the narrative, and when he does appear, he has been brainwashed and is in no state to offer clarity. Furthermore, the above explanations rely on the logic of identity and exchange that reduces everyone within a designated neighborhood as interchangeable, falsely reducing them. This is most evident with regards to Tariq. Originally defined by a gang affiliation rooted in geography (the Artesia crips), he finds out that identity is not stable and permanent, but rather intertwined with the exchange value and hence liable to be destroyed by it. Exchange creates identity and liquidates it. In the failure of mapping, Pynchon reveals the tension between the abstract and concrete, refusing to resolve it in favor of one or the other. Indeed, we might say he further complicates it, concretizing through abstraction and vice-versa. The result is a situation in which the characters can never truly inform us about the city, nor can the city tell us about the characters.

Scenic Moves

However, despite this failure, characters are not the only thing in the novel identified through their location; so too are moments of plot. Pynchon constantly mentions what street or intersection Doc is driving on or where he is headed, quite often as a way of starting a scene. An idle flip-through of the novel produces at least a half dozen examples, though there are certainly more: “Doc’s office was located near the airport, off East Imperial” (Pynchon 13); “Doc went automotively groping in this weirdness east on Olympic” (Pynchon 50); “On the Coast Highway halfway to the Wolfmann residence” (Pynchon 56); “He showed up at a peculiar skid-row eatery off Temple” (Pynchon 68); “Driving down the San Diego and Harbor freeways” (Pynchon 78); “heading east on Sunset Road to Boulder Highway” (when Doc is in Vegas) (Pynchon 219). Pynchon even performs the maneuver with fictional places, such as Gordita Beach. Doc and his neighbor Denis get food by walking “up to Dunecrest and [turning] left into the honky-tonk part of town” (Pynchon 10). The fictional world is grounded by points within the real world. Doing so is a desperate bid to create a new mode of narrative. In a system where temporal organization has broken down, where every moment calls forward the past and future simultaneously, the iterative and analepsis and prolepsis and the general breakdown in how time is felt coming together to force a turn outwards, the novel reaches towards the real and grounded as a way to explicate what is happening.

But the real Los Angeles and the fictional one are different, if only because there’s a fairly large fictional town (Gordita Beach) that exists somewhere between Manhattan Beach and Venice Beach, shifting and reformulating the city into something new. But this new is no different from the old, Gordita being an obvious copy of Manhattan Beach (where Pynchon lived), an ever-exchangeable beach town, no different from its neighbors, something Pynchon acknowledges. At one point Sportello is dropped off in downtown Gordita, only to find no one recognizes him and vice versa. He begins to panic and worry that he was dropped in Redondo or Manhattan Beach, and “that the bars, eateries, and so forth he’d been walking into were ones that happened to be similarly located in this other town—same view of the ocean or corner of the street, for example” (Pynchon 256). The dominance of the exchange relationship turns every place and moment into an eversame interchangeable, differentiated only in name; yet history that echoes in that name, holding the promise of individuality. The streets and locations carry connotations that tell the informed reader that each place is unique, has its own culture and

history. But then, just before you think that perhaps this detemporalized world can be navigated through the past inserting itself, providing information, Gordita Beach steps in, carrying with it a fictional history and marking characters just as the real locales do, only it is knowledge the reader can never truly understand, because the place is not real. And suddenly the truth of these local histories is revealed, that their identity is not ontological or inherent, but a construction that allows exchange, this place is like that, capitalism's primordial form infiltrating geography. The particular holds the possibility of identity free from exchange only in its name. The name holds the promise of individuality, of experience without squinting toward a universal, beckoning with the promise that what is found there exists nowhere else, even as reality betrays this (Adorno *ND* 373). At the same time, of course, the name pulls the place into the exchange relationship, encapsulating a history and hence separating a place's past from the place itself.

The Highway

However, the nature of the roadways mentioned above forces an alternate reading, albeit one that reaches similar conclusions. Over half of the streets listed in my random selection are highways of one type or another, roads which have a special valence in Pynchon, particularly in the so-called "California novels" (*The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland*, and *Inherent Vice*). Stephan Hock convincingly argues all three books constitute road narratives of a sort, with Pynchon's questing protagonists traveling by road...in search of the objects of their quests" (Hock 201). The plot becomes ordered by the highway, which knits scenes together, since the narrative no longer does. However, at the same time, the highway is associated with death, conformity, and standardization. Hock points out that in both *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Inherent Vice*, the construction of the highways in the novel is intertwined with dead bodies. In the former, ancient indigenous burial grounds are uprooted and displaced; in the latter, Adrien Prussia hides his victims in the concrete supports for the highway (Hock 212). He then argues that this aura of death is also reflected by how people drive on the highway, whether its Oedipa (the protagonist of *Lot 49*) drunk driving with her lights off or Bigfoot speeding and weaving in "traditional freeway style" (Pynchon 332). However, I think these moments point elsewhere, particularly if we return to Didion and her writing on the highway.

Didion sees driving on the highway as an almost spiritual experience, one that requires "a total surrender, a concentration so intense as to seem a kind of narcosis, a rapture-of-the-

freeway” (Didion *WA* 83). In her novel *Play it As it Lays*, the protagonist Maria spends the autumn after her husband leaves driving on the freeway, where she never thinks about “Les Goodwin in New York and Carter [her ex-husband] out there on the desert with BZ and Helene and the irrevocability of what seemed already to have happened” (Didion *PIaLL* 18). While in both her non-fiction and fiction Didion attributes this blankness of the mind to the concentration required of the freeway, we can trace it to the construction of the freeway itself. As Hock notes, the freeways do not connect neighbors and neighborhoods, but rather run through and destroy, leaving only the possibility of commerce on their edges, constructing a city based on an “unnatural’ mapping of land by some arbitrary and fundamentally artificial network” (Hock 207). It is the allegorical reflection of an economic structure that destroys the individual subject, rejecting the transitions that rely on their movement, instead linking between places the way capital does, through flows and inhuman systems. A country road signals freedom, changing with the topography of the land, working in service to the communities they connect; the interstate highway produces a blank conformity, driving through everything—tunneling the mountains and bridging the rivers and bulldozing the communities that get in its way, building new towns according to its needs, reducing us to appendages on the edges of capital. Didion visits the bureaucrats who run the California highways and finds that every moment on the highway is monitored, at least on the 42-mile loop created by the intersections of the Santa Monica, San Diego, and Harbor freeways. On it, individuals are not treated as such, but rather as interchangeable, as discrete units. To CalTrans (the governmental agency that runs California’s freeways), the 260,000 people who travel on the Santa Monica freeway everyday matter only in that they use 240,000 cars, and the planners want them to instead use 232,000 vehicles (Didion *WA* 82). The freeway becomes the site of a productivity par excellence, allowing people to move and search, but only along a monitored, reconstructed route. On the highway, one is stuck until the next exit, unlike the surface streets.⁶¹ On the freeway, Maria is able to forget her history not because of her concentration, but rather because she becomes an object of pure exchange, abstracted from the world around her, from all history, just another car on the road no different from all the rest of the cars. The freeway highlights how exchange both creates identity—see Didion referring to it as Los Angeles’s secular communion, the thing that marks Angelenos as

⁶¹ But the early dominance of highways in Los Angeles (building of freeways started in 1933) means that “going surface” in Los Angeles is “generally regarded as idiosyncratic” (Didion *WA* 81). See: Nathan Master’s “L.A.’s First Freeways” via KCET

Angelenos (Didion 83)—yet also reveals it to be a farce, turning everything into the eversame.

Pynchon is well aware of the way the freeway tends to reinforce a false sense of agency, as well as the political implications of this. As Hock writes, “When they take on a prominent role in Pynchon’s work, roads continue to serve as venues by which the intertwined forces of modernity, power, and capital map their will onto the land” (Hock 204). We can see this by looking at an early description of the highway:

“Doc took the freeway out. The eastbound lanes teemed with VW buses in jittering paisleys, primer-coated street hemis, woodies of authentic Dearborn pine, TV-star-piloted Porsches, Cadillacs carrying dentists to extramarital trysts, windowless vans with lurid teen dramas in progress inside, pickups with mattresses full of country cousins from the San Joaquin, all wheeling along together down into these great horizonless fields of housing, under the power transmission lines, everybody’s radios lasing on the same couple of AM stations, under a sky like watered milk, and the white bombardment of a sun smogged into only a smear of probability, out in whose light you began to wonder if anything you’d call psychedelic could ever happen, or if—bummer!—all this time it had really been going on up north.”

(Pynchon 19)

In this breathless sentence, Pynchon plays with his syntax so that the cars are the subject, relegating the passengers to whither in various clauses and phrases, carried along by the vehicles wheeling down the highway independent of them. The individuals’ agency is stripped; having “chosen” to take the freeway, they no longer navigate where they wish to go. But even the choice to take the freeway is a false one, since, the highway is ingrained so deeply that it is the default. Besides, as anyone who has driven in Los Angeles knows that the city has been more or less designed to funnel people on the highways rather than taking surface streets. The ability to move freely and explore the city is restricted through the highway, which offers an ideal of freedom—one can go anywhere! In cities there are exits every two or three miles, allowing quick transportation through a metropolis without being a slave to where planners placed bus and metro stops, as if these are not the same planners that decide where the exits will be—even as it limits where one can travel. Or, in the words of Hock, “the freeway functions as the ‘perfect Corridor over the Land’ that aids and abets the free flow of capital and power by shooting it straight into the heart of cities like ‘the mainliner L.A.’” (Hock 208).

Then, before the sentence can end, Pynchon pirouettes into politics, the sun giving way to the pollution the cars create, offering a moment of realization that wait, maybe there was no revolution happening along this highway, nor out by the beach. Perhaps it is all happening up north, though Pynchon later expresses doubt about that—“Was it possible, that at every gathering—concert, peace rally, love-in, be-in, and freak-in, here, up north, back East, wherever—those dark crews had been busy all along, reclaiming the music, the resistance to power, the sexual desire from epic to everyday, all they could sweep up, for the ancient forces of greed and fear?” (Pynchon 130). Didion’s essay from San Francisco at the height of the hippie movement answers this rhetorical in the affirmative. At a music event in San Francisco in 1967, a man named Chet Helms tells Didion there are three things to know: “God died last year and was obitted by the press. The second is, fifty percent of the population is or will be under twenty-five...the third...is that they got twenty billion irresponsible dollars to spend” (Didion *STB* 104). Even in the early days of the hippie movement, even in San Francisco—the center that is not holding—exploitation is the name of the game. The highway represents this moment, the foreclosure of meaningful alternatives to our current system. You cannot turn around or stop on the freeway, only keep driving until the road deigns to offer an exit onto some connector road covered in gas stations and fast food, no different from the exits before or after. Furthermore, in the context of the novel, they force disparate places and scenes onto each other, providing the connective tissue necessary in an era where narrative has broken down. The plot becomes ordered by the highway, which knits scenes together, since the narrative no longer does so. Yet at the same time, they do so as symbols of capital and power, turning each place into the same as the last and destroying any sense of spatiality. Narrative locations become an archipelago of sorts, a collection of independent scenes, connected only by the freeway, that symbol of capital, which paradoxically turns them into one another. Driving along the highway, nothing seems to exist between you and your destination, or if it does it exists compressed and ignored, unimportant.

Before continuing on with the discussion of the novel, I want take a brief detour to look at how Anderson “translates” Pynchon’s transitions. We will return to the novel momentarily, but this discussion of the highway necessitates a discussion of transitions in the film. As discussed earlier, Anderson leans heavily on the dissolve, a transition more commonly associated with American cinema’s classical area. Here, he uses it to bring attention to the distance between

scenes through an elimination of the signifier of this distance—the absence of the cut forcing recognition of its usual existence. By using them so consistently, Anderson makes it seem as if each scene is set off from the one before it, with spatial continuity evaporating as each space stands on its own yet fades into the next, the film calling attention to the absence of the “realistic” transition.

Furthermore, though it places shots on top of each other in physical space, the dissolve tends to signify the passing of time in classical continuity editing. In so doing, it makes each scene seem disconnected from what comes before or after, undermining any linearity in the narrative. The dissolves are why the film, though notionally straightforward and linear, so often feels otherwise to those who have not read the novel. Anderson’s translation of Pynchon’s transitions give off the sense of a character drifting through the world, trying to figure out things when he can, time passing even when the camera is not on. It certainly is not the plot of the typical detective story, with our hero working around the clock to solve the crime. If the highway in the novel forces disparate locations and events onto each other, offering a sense of ordering even as it precludes navigation or movement through other methods, then these cross-dissolves are the cinematic equivalent. They reflect a world where rational, linear time has broken down, and these scenes are only connected by some plot no one can fully understand or trace. Furthermore, the dissolves call attention to film’s “lost time,” the darkness between frames that takes up 40% of a film’s runtime. In the dissolve, this lost time is both doubled and erased. In analogue film editing, an optical printer is used to double expose a film strip. When this happens, there is technically the lost time of both frames, yet the lost time aligns, so the duration of the lost time is the same. And the blank space we would notice between scenes, the darkness between discrete plot points, is erased, replaced by the overlay of two moments in one. In this doubled absence, the viewer realizes that the “lost time” apparent in the jump cut is not actually empty, but filled with narrative importance, suffused with happenings we cannot see. The dissolve reveals that things are happening outside of the viewable narrative, within what the cinema has designated useless time. The dissolve performs the same function as driving on the highway, which the novel reveals is not empty time, but rather tells us about the politics and structure of Pynchon’s world even as it effaces its own importance.

Learning From Las Vegas

Returning to the novel, it necessary to look at two distinct locations with regards to their importance to the plot. The first of these is Las Vegas, where Doc finally finds Wolfmann and Puck Beaverton, who works as muscle for both Wolfmann and Prussia. As what Pynchon regards as a real place that should not exist, Vegas acts as the negative image of the three utopias of the novel—the beach, Arrapentimiento, and Lemuria. These three and their relationship with utopia will be discussed later. For now, suffice to note that they are fictional places within the otherwise realist space of the novel, and by dint of this seem almost real themselves. Vegas, on the other hand, exists in our world even though it seems profoundly unreal, something Pynchon notes. The former gambling addict Tito comments, “[l]ook at this place. How real can any of this be?” (Pynchon 228). A few pages later, a Marxist economist is seen on TV having a nervous breakdown. ““Las Vegas...sits out here in the middle of desert, produces no tangible goods, money flows in, money flows out...This place should not, according to theory, even exist, let alone prosper as it does” (Pynchon 232). None of this is particularly groundbreaking—in terms of ink spilled on places and simulacra, only Disneyland rivals Vegas. Notably, however, Pynchon avoids the more famous Southern strip, preferring to explore a Vegas filled with “elfin geezers,” (Pynchon 226) bands playing some mix of psychedelic and greaser music, casinos “much dimmer than anything to the South,” run-down antiques shops pretending to be from the Old West, as if Vegas were not founded in the twentieth century (Pynchon 239). This is the sort of “real” Vegas that the FBI is trying to turn into a “Disneyland imitation of itself,” (Pynchon 240) free of the mob and violence, but also without the “real-life neighborhood civility” (Pynchon 236). Mr. Fazzo, the bookkeeper at the Kismet—the casino the FBI wants Mickey to buy—comments that “the half-dollar coin...used to be ninety percent silver, in ’65 they reduced that too forty percent, and now this year no more silver at all” (Pynchon 240). This quote is of particular interest when paired with Doug Haynes’ argument that the Nixon lagan dropped by the Golden Fang is an allusion to the abandonment of the Bretton Ellis agreement:

...It seems justifiable to assume that the reader of 2009 knows that in 1971, after a year of arbitrage of the dollar on the international markets, President Nixon took the U.S. off the gold standard, abandoning the Bretton Woods agreement that had shaped global trade and altering the geopolitical order utterly. Such a telos, although outside the novel’s frame, may provide a good reason why Nixon, as pictured on the greenbacks, is “staring wildly at something just out of sight past the edge of the cartouche” (*Inherent Vice* 117).

The fall off the gold standard, as has been widely suggested, coincides with the modern phase of the U.S. credit economy, dependent henceforth on the much “softer” currency of “fiat money,” or pure paper money, the quantity of which is decided upon governmentally, not by relation to the money commodity, and is accompanied by other complicated and promissory forms of capital based more on fiction than actual monetary reserves. Indeed, since such paper money is synonymous with inflation, or the reduction in value of commodities, we see in it that necessary “bust” required to clear the way for a new phase of accumulation.

(Haynes 8).

This transition has already happened in Pynchon’s Vegas, where the half-dollar that reigns supreme on slot machine floors has been “debased,” turning into a fiat currency. But we might note that these half-dollars were not actually pegged to the silver within them, but rather were “expensive token coins,” exchangeable for gold-backed dollars. They were symbols mistaken for the thing itself, holding value not because of their inherent worth but because of their relationship to other currency. Nonetheless, they were popularly understood to contain their worth in their weight (McCulloch 79). In such a scenario, Vegas, a city created during the United States’ colonization of the West, becomes a surrogate for the imperialism of the 1970’s, how in places like Chile the United States would support right wing coups to test the policies that would become known as neoliberalism. The U.S. did not just send just send C.I.A. advisors and green berets to Pinochet. They also thoughtfully shipped him the finest minds from the University of Chicago’s economics department (Harvey 8). We can modify Fazzo’s complaint that the city is turning into a Disneyland version of itself: in the novel, it becomes a Disneyland version of the post-war imperial system. This is the “rising flood” Doc feels in the desert city, the foreclosure of the future. The Kismet will be renovated, the beach will be bulldozed, and neoliberalism will hide the secular crisis of capitalism, masquerading as the transformational object to take us permanently out of “stagflation.” It is in this city that acts as a synecdoche for the system as a whole, that Doc gets a glimpse of the future, one where everything is the same, except the poor and downtrodden have been pushed out of their last hangouts so the rich can play act as them.

No wonder that Vegas is where the Feds stash Mickey, not to mention where they start shooting at Doc, chasing him through dark passages and out of back exits. Equally unsurprising is that Vegas is also the peak of the novel’s aproductivity; Doc does not “do” anything, yet the

plot keeps unwinding. He sleeps, eats, and wanders to wherever others tell him to go, from bars to casinos and back. When he does try to take action and talk to Puck at a casino, fate intervenes, inducing chaos that chases the bisexual skinhead away and leaves Doc with a pile of nickels. When he finds Mickey and the FBI it is not because he is looking for them, but rather because he quite literally runs into them while searching for an exit, having been sent that way by Fazzo. Even when arriving he is surprisingly aproductive, choosing to fly, where one is always a passenger at the mercy of the pilot, rather than drive. In this moment, Doc sees the construction of a new reality, the background of the future put together block-by-block, ground zero for the switch from Corleone to Neil McCauley, to borrow Fisher's analogy (Fisher *CR* 31). At the same time, however, the change has already arrived—the silver coins were already a fiat currency, the city is already a copy of place that never existed, revealing the truth. Neoliberalism is a construction, and Vegas in the novel is ground zero for building this new system, but it can only happen because the old system has outgrown itself, throwing the economy into a permanent crisis, creating a world where the things we thought had inherent value are in fact worthless on their own, imbued with value only through relationships to other objects, turning inherent value to inherent vice. In this reading, neoliberalism is not constructed to save a dying capitalism, but rather created in response to the contradictions produced by an already dead system. In other words, it is not a defibrillator reviving a stagnant economy, but a way of hiding that the system has died, the Larry Wilson and Richard Parker to the economy's Bernie Lomax.

May Day

The other location I want to discuss is the intersection at Artesia and Hawthorne where the Golden Fang and Doc make their hand-off. They do so in the parking lot of the May Company California department store, a subsidiary of the May Company. The store is still there, though it is now a Macy's, the latter having acquired and rebranded the May Company. It worth noting that I am simplifying the chain of ownership. More fully: The May Company California was originally A. Hamburger & Sons Incorporated until the May Company acquired it in 1923—though the Redondo Beach location at which the drop happens was not built until 1959. In 1993, May Company merged with J.W. Robinson, another local chain. J.W. Robinson, in turn, was an independent chain until Associated Dry Goods (ASD) bought it in 1955. In 1986, the May Company (the May Company California's parent company, based out of St. Louis) acquired

ASD, and then waited six years before merging the two. The May company was eventually bought by Federated Department Stores Incorporated in 2005. FDSI changed its name to Macy's Incorporated in 2007. So this parking lot is not only representative of the "shopping plazas of Southern California" and traditional consumer capitalism, but also the craze for takeovers and mergers that becomes dominant in the 1980's, one of the key ways investors made money without growing productivity. Companies would follow the advice of consulting firms like McKinsey, constantly reorganizing, growing, or shrinking, depending on whatever would be best for stock price, ignoring the needs of consumers. The intersection reflects the financialization of the economy and the growth of Wall Street, holding an entire economic history in its location. It is the site of capitalism's past and future, even if Doc and Denis do not realize it.

The history of this intersection is why I have a much more pessimistic reading of the novel's end than others, notably Hock and Frangipane. If we turn to the final paragraph of the novel, the road names appear again. "He knew that...at some point, Hawthorne Boulevard or Artesia, he'd lose the fog, unless it was spreading tonight, and settled in regionwide" (Pynchon 368-369). If that happens, he wonders if he will keep driving, all the way down to Mexico, or if he will run out a gas and have to wait "for whatever would happen...for the fog to burn away, and for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead" (Pynchon 369). While not referring to the exact location as before—here Pynchon is talking about exits 40 (Hawthorne) and 42 (Artesia) on the 405—the choice to reference them and not the exit in-between suggests that the overlap is purposeful. It is the fog of economic aproductivity spreading out from Los Angeles, the site of capitalism's past and future, but the spread is not yet guaranteed. The fog might clear at this intersection, the crossroads between an older capitalism and its future form. It is only here—in this space where one reality has broken down and another is not yet built—that a better world might be possible.⁶² If not, however, the fog will spread, crossing borders and becoming multi-national. Then, even if Doc is not doing anything—indeed unable to do anything but struggle onward vainly doing nothing, just waiting for the transformational object—things will still be happening in the fog, unbeknownst and invisible to Doc and the viewer. The final scene of Theo Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) comes to mind, an entire world and

⁶² This is reminiscent of Fisher's hauntology, which I glossed over in the introduction. I note it here because though I do not use the term, a reading of *Inherent Vice* as hauntology is possible, if incomplete (though all readings of aproductive works will be incomplete by their very nature. Exploring the relationship between it and aproductivity is a possible site of future research.

ecosystem happening in the fog, from which we can only see shadows, waiting for the object we desire to reveal itself to us.

Public Space

To conclude this long section, let me turn back to the film. In it, characters are rarely defined explicitly through location, despite Anderson's abiding interest in the geography of Los Angeles.⁶³ At first blush, this seems to support Jason Sperb's argument that Anderson is a quintessential postmodern filmmaker (Sperb 10). Central to postmodernism is a sense of depthlessness and schizophrenia, the turning of the city into set through the two-dimensionality of buildings (Jameson *PM* 13). Just as the schizophrenic in Jameson's account cannot link the school they pass everyday with what they see, the Los Angeles audience cannot recognize their home on the screen, since it has been made so generic (Jameson *PM* 27). But a few characters are still defined by location, complicating this claim. Tariq, Shasta, and Crocker Fenway are still introduced through where they live, and Anderson, like Pynchon, makes it clear that the Boards' house is in Topanga Canyon, north of Santa Monica. When Jade leaves Doc a note to meet him at Club Asiatique, it explicitly says that it is in San Pedro. This differentiates the film from the aforementioned postmodern "world without landmarks" found in *Heat*, the "endlessly repeating vistas of replicating franchises," thereby demanding we find an alternate reading (Fisher 31).

The difference between the film's geography and the novel's could be chalked up to different geographical knowledge on the part of the authors, though such a reading is profoundly uninteresting. Anderson was born in the San Fernando Valley, a Los Angeles suburb often used as a stand-in for "Anytown, USA" in film and television. His films set there are so detailed that one can create a travelogue of the Valley based on his films (as the critic Molly Lambert does). *Inherent Vice* is the first of Anderson's L.A. Films not set in the San Fernando Valley where he grew up. Rather, it is set on the other side of Los Angeles, across the Santa Monica Mountains and the artificial range that is downtown, in a much less wealthy part of the city. Pynchon, on the other hand, not only lived in Manhattan Beach but also spent time in Watts and other parts of

⁶³ Indeed, the critic Tom Carson argues that Anderson's films tie together as one large scale epic telling the story of Los Angeles, from the oil boom days of *There Will be Blood* to 70's disco era in *Boogie Nights* to the turn of the millennium city of *Magnolia*. See: <https://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/paul-thomas-anderson-inherent-vice-magnolia-boogie-nights-california-history/>

South Central.⁶⁴ Such a reading, however, is not only uninteresting but also limited. Instead, I propose that Anderson uses the generic to call attention to the difficulty of mapping a post-Fordist Los Angeles in film. This difficulty stems from the reduction in public space in the city, which is not unique to Los Angeles but highly pronounced there.⁶⁵ To quote Davis:

“In Los Angeles, once-upon-a-time a demi-paradise of free beaches, luxurious parks, and ‘cruising strips’, genuinely democratic space is all but extinct. The Oz-like archipelago of Westside pleasure domes—a continuum of tony malls, arts centers, and gourmet strips—is reciprocally dependent upon the social imprisonment of the third-world service proletariat who live in increasingly repressive barrios and ghettos” (227).

The film is set during this shift, and features characters that would be greatly impacted by it. Anderson reflects it through formal choices, such as when, early on the film, Doc asks Tariq to show him on a map where his old neighborhood is. The camera cuts to a map of South Los Angeles that shows a number of neighborhoods. It begins to zoom, but quickly dissolves into an image of Sortilège and Doc driving. This shot is lit so that the outside of the car is barely visible, and what the viewer does glimpse is quite generic. Rather than establishing a firm physical location as Pynchon does—“closer to Gardenia than Compton”—Anderson leaves it vague (Pynchon 17). The characters are unable to recognize their neighborhoods after their conversion by outsiders, even as they try to hold on to and locate them. This is the world of late capitalism, where the dominance of the exchange relationship and capitalism has given every place an identity yet also reduced them all to sameness. When working in the middle-class Valley, the shift is not as much of an issue for Anderson. His porn executives and small business owners can eat at Le Petit Château and the Fox Fire Room and hang out in disco clubs with famous signage (though we should note the club in the film does not correspond to the place in real life). Even the private spaces in Anderson’s “Valley Trilogy”⁶⁶ are distinctive, whether singularly (the Bryson Apartment Hotel), or as signifiers of the county—the drug dealer’s house that “[i]f you grew up in the fuckin’ Valley and you ever went up to any of those houses in the

⁶⁴ See: Pynchon, Thomas. “A Journey Into The Mind of Watts.” *New York Times*, 12 June 1966, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-watts.html>.

⁶⁵ The term public can mean different things within philosophy and media studies. Here, we are not talking of “public” as in Arendt’s public sphere, something entirely separate from government, but rather how it is used colloquially, referring to government run parks and streets where loitering is not illegal.

⁶⁶ *Boogie Nights* (1997) *Magnolia* (1999) *Punch Drunk Love* (2002)

Hills, y’know, it makes sense for you. With the rocks on the wall,” as Anderson describes it, or Jack Horner’s house, which to Lambert “is a quintessential Valley house” (Lambert 2014).

Furthermore, the temporal setting for all three Valley films is well after the slow demise of public space began, and so the characters have begun to adapt. *Inherent Vice*, on the other hand, is situated on the cusp of this change, with poorer characters much more likely to spend time in the public spaces than the middle and upper-class people found in Anderson’s Valley trilogy. And so just like Pynchon’s mapping reveals its own impossibility, Anderson’s geographic process tells us mostly of its futility. Public spaces that might help distinguish become closed off from the characters, privatized and policed, leaving the characters to wander around anonymous strips and generic tract housing. And so understanding the narrative through location becomes impossible, the abstraction of modern life overwhelming any geographic specificity.

Interestingly, if most of this essay has focused on aproductivity as the shadow of a certain political moment, here we find that the relationship has been changed, with explicit political developments producing aproductive tension in the film. Even Anderson’s signature tracking shot can be understood as playing with this. These shots move not only vertically and horizontally, but also into the diegetic space itself. In doing so, they ground the location as physically “real” even as the exact location is abstracted. The camera begins to explore the space; the tracking shot becomes a mapping shot. But the space is not fully real, often being a constructed setting if not a fictional locale all together. So the camera drifts aimlessly, looking for the public space that would tell it where it is, only to find it absent. All it finds is private homes and offices, which can only be understood through the envisioner, Mickey, who is also gone. And so the film wanders through this space that is no longer the regulated, systemized space of industry capitalism, nor the world without landmarks of postmodernity and the end of history—how can landmarks be constructed when there is no history for them to mark—searching desperately for the transformational object that will open up alternatives, that will allow us to pursue a world besides the coming neoliberal dystopia.

Utopia Lost

Having dealt with real spaces in the novel, I now wish to turn to three “false places,” sites where Pynchon’s imagination runs up on Los Angeles. We might understand *The Beach*,

Arrapentimiento, and Lemuria as three versions of utopia, which as Jameson writes are “non-fictional, even though they are also non-existent,” fake places inserted into an otherwise real world (Jameson “Politics of Utopia” henceforth “PoU” 54). In discussing this, it will seem we have moved quite far afield of discussions of aproductivity. However, through this analysis of utopia I hope to clarify the ideological and historical aspects of aproductivity, as well as its relationship to a world that is just like ours, only different.⁶⁷

But before doing so, I must clarify that when speaking of utopia, I am referring to two separate concepts, one political and one philosophical, or more precisely, one short-term and one long-term. This is necessary because, as Frederic Jameson notes, the term seems passé in our era; the suffering of the poor is so extreme that talk of utopia seems obscene even while the wealth and lives of the rich make our old utopias seem quaint (Jameson “PoU” 35). The result is that in the everyday, “The term alone survives this wholesale obsolescence as a symbolic token” less a designation of some ideal and more of a “code word on the left for socialism or communism” (Jameson “PoU” 35). In this sense, utopia is how we speak of an alternative to capitalism without using terms “dirtied” by real life experience, the left’s attempt to conjure communism without invoking images of Stalinism since Utopia, as Jameson notes, is a place beyond history. Broadly construed, utopia here means something like representations of alternatives to capitalism. And even this may be too specific. As we will see, there is a way in which the discourse of late capitalism frames neoliberalism as a sort of utopian project, in how it situates our world as a “place outside all history” (Jameson “PoU” 36). The excision from history is a prerequisite for utopia in the more classical sense—it is only after history has “ended” that a perfect, equal place can exist.

But this practical definition, utopia as a “better world” outside or after history, is not the only way I use the term, nor (as we will see) really the utopia that is Lemuria within *Inherent Vice*. Rather, Lemuria—the Pacific counterpart to Atlantis—calls to mind utopia as used by Adorno, where the concept is tied to the secularization of Jewish Messianism, the ban on graven images, Gnosticism, and nostalgia. As S.D Chrostowska notes, nostalgia and utopia stand in dialectical tension: reflexive nostalgia’s desire for a lost home forces recognition of the possibility of a better world, even as it rejects the idea that we can return to such a world (94).

⁶⁷ There is something ironic, admittedly, in using a concept that relies on it existing after history to elucidate a material and historical relationship between things

Looking at Thomas Levin and Miriam Hansen's writing on Adorno, I believe the unattainable world that Adorno pines for is that of prehistory, a time when sign and referent overlapped and humans were not banished from the understanding the "hieroglyphics of nature."⁶⁸ Lemuria becomes the messiah, carrying in it nature's inimicality, which threatens to overtake and destroy the world as we understand it. However, this is getting ahead of the task at hand. For now, let us bracket this more metaphysical utopia and return to the political.

What we find when we look at utopia in the novel (we will not examine the film in this regard until the next section), is that a failed utopian impulse is a prerequisite for aproductive works to arise, as the aproductive work is interested in the crisis from which the utopian impulse is fleeing. If we accept the understanding of utopia I posit, then we find aproductive works of the 1970's grow out of the failure of the hippy movement while the aproductive works after 2008 are a post-neoliberal hangover.⁶⁹ In both situations, the promise of creating a better world, which would then supersede our own through the sheer force of its goodwill, has failed. Individuals are left waiting in a crisis, counting on either a total collapse or a revival of the utopian impulse, both of which are imagined as transformational objects.⁷⁰ But as we know from Phillips, the

⁶⁸ For further discussion and analysis of this concept, see the next section "Utopia Banned" as well as Levin's "For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility."

⁶⁹ We can understand neoliberalism as a type of class-exclusionary utopia, a phrase at first contradictory. Neoliberalism is utopian not in creating a perfect world for all, but rather an ideal world for some. While the rest of the world might be suffering, people like Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg's live as kings could only dream of. But as Jameson reminds us, "all utopias spring from a specific class position," and so this seeming contradiction between utopia as understood (a better world for all) and utopia as I use it here is not so vast ("PoU" 47). Neoliberalism attempts to recreate the economic structures of the 1920's while denying those same structures' historical links with fascism, disenfranchisement, and violent battles between capital and labor, not to mention the Great Depression which followed. [By "economic structures of the 1920's" I refer to the lack of federal regulation and oversight during the period, as well as the lack of a minimum wage and other worker protections. See Vietor "Contrived Competition: Economic Regulation and Deregulation, 1920's-1980's" in *Business History* October 1994, page 2.] We might also keep in mind the centrality of "trickle-down economics" to the manufacturing of consent in neoliberalism, the promise that the creation of this "new" economic system that benefits the elite will eventually lift all boats. Finally, the rhetoric of neoliberalism's proponents is that any more than incremental change to the system will make everything worse. If that were actually the case, then the neoliberal system has to the best of all possible worlds, otherwise known as a type of utopia. Of course almost every economic and political system presents itself as utopian in one way or another. Neoliberalism is certainly not unique, except perhaps in its success as framing itself as existing after history has ended, as discussed in chapter one.

⁷⁰ Perhaps the most famous aproductive work is also the first. *Easy Rider*, Dennis Hopper's 1969 counter-cultural road movie, is the story of two hippies who have begun to recognize the movement has failed. Strip away Jack Nicholson's soliloquy on freedom and the movie becomes oppressively dark. The commune they visit is failing, the two hippies are doing drug deals with men in Rolls Royce's, and not even the rednecks are working. As Peter Fonda's character tells Hopper near the end of the movie, this is the story of a world that has missed its chance to be free. The only real stability and freedom in the movie is when they visit the homestead in Arizona, where the farmer and his family live cut-off from the world. Though the film is popularly understood as a celebration of counter-culture, it offers a pessimistic outlook on the hippie movement.

transformational object cannot be known positively, indeed we cannot even know if it exists. The aproductive work of art, in capturing this moment after utopia, confronts the desires that structured the utopian impulse. In doing so, it reveals that desire is a Trojan horse, which smuggles in what Adorno considers our original sin, self-preservation. It is the original sin because the identitarian impulse in thought is equally an expression of a Nietzschean will to self-preservation as well as arising out of the exchange value (Osborne 180).⁷¹

Having floated in the abstract, let us return to the concrete ground of the novel. What we discover is that the Beach and Arrapentimiento⁷² can be read as allegorically about the struggle of positively describing utopia, offering two different possibilities of representing utopia—on the level of the individual and on the level of the systemic—as well as their failure. The Beach, as we will see, is a representation of utopia on the level of the individual, a utopia of “being,” while Arrapentimiento is a systemic utopia that renounces similarity to utopia as experienced, more in the vein of Thomas More’s utopian systems.

I identify these two spaces as having a particular relationship to utopia for two reasons. First, they are two spaces that are fictional within the real space of Southern California, and so are immediately marked as different from the rest of the novel’s geography. Furthermore, each resembles “real” Utopian moments and movements at the time, whether the hippy communities on the beach or various communes built around zones.⁷³ Pynchon explores the desires and failures of both before offering the possibility of a “real” utopia whose transformational object masquerades as the opposite, the dystopic end of the world. Pynchon does not fully describe Lemuria, offering only momentarily glimpses of its emergence and dream-like LSD trips through its last days. The lost continent becomes a metaphor for the coming climate catastrophe, which is both a transformational object and the thing that brings awareness to our own waiting. If the first two utopias point to the difficulty (if not outright impossibility) of representing alternatives to our world after the “end of history,” Lemuria offers another conception of utopia.

Gordita Beach: Site of Searching

In his unfinished book *Acid Communism*, Mark Fisher claims that the sixties haunt us

⁷¹ While I find most of Osborne’s critique of Jameson to be a misreading of both Jameson and Adorno, his point here is nonetheless accurate.

⁷² Pidgin Spanish for “Sorry about that” (Pynchon 248).

⁷³ See, for example: the Lama Foundation in New Mexico and the Libre Community in Colorado

“not because of some unrecoverable and unrepeatable confluence of factors, but because the potentials it materialized and began to democratise [sic]—the prospect of a life free from drudgery—has to be continually suppressed (*K-Punk* 756). According to Fisher, the sixties were a time when “things really happened,” (*K-Punk* 755) a time of “experiments in democratic socialism and libertarian communism” (*K-Punk* 754). In contrast to the dominant narrative that neoliberalism grew out of the hippie movement and its obsession with the individual, he argues that neoliberalism was created in opposition to the hippies, rather than its nominal enemies of Soviet Communism and Keynesian liberalism, which the hippies also stood in opposition to. This, as we will see, is quite different from the recollections of those who lived through the era. What we find instead is that in their shared enemies, the dialectic nature of the relationship between neoliberalism and the hippie movement is revealed; Fisher is right that one does not grow out of the other, except it is not that they are opposed but are rather expressions of the same process and impulses. Indeed, they act as images of the dialectic of enlightenment in miniature, the extreme rationalism of neoliberal market theories and the irrational return to myth of the hippies as one in the same process. But that is less important for us than the fact that both rely on the logics of liberalism even as they attempt to build something new.

In contrast to Fisher, Pynchon is cynical about the beach and hippie culture from almost the opening lines of the novel. For example, Doc does not ask Shasta whether she loves Mickey, because he knows that she would say yes, “With the unspoken footnote that the word these days was being way too overused. Anybody with any claim to hipness “loved” everybody, not to mention other useful applications, like hustling people into sex activities they might not, given the choice, much care to engage in” (Pynchon 5). The novel establishes from the outset that the hippie movement has already failed to produce a better world, instead just being a reformulation and broadening of the logic of American individualism. Being set after it is clear that the movement has failed is necessary for the novel’s aproductivity, as it produces a sense that there are no longer alternatives twenty years before the fall of the Soviet Union ushers in the “The End of History.”⁷⁴ The failure of the hippies to produce an alternative to the failures of the U.S. and Soviet Union leaves Doc wandering, searching for something else that will transform his life and world.

To understand why Pynchon is so critical of Gordita Beach (which from here on out I

⁷⁴ Indeed, one could hypothetically say that in the West, history really ended in the 1970’s.

will use interchangeably with “The Beach,” emphasizing the way it stands in for the universal) and the hippie movement, I want to turn to Didion once more. She opens her famous essay on San Francisco and the hippies by discussing the U.S., touching upon the situation we will later realize is the secular crisis of capitalism:

It was a country of bankruptcy notices and public-auction announcements and commonplace reports of casual killings and misplaced children...It was a country in which families routinely disappeared, trailing bad checks and repossession papers. Adolescents drifted from city to torn city, sloughing off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins, children who were never taught and would never now learn the games that had held society together...It was the United States of America in the cold late spring of 1967, and the market was steady and the G.N.P. High (Didion *STB* 84-85).

While 1967 is before the secular crisis is apparent in the numbers, Didion reveals that the effects are already visible. Young people unable to see a future flee to San Francisco, where they dream of something happening, of finding something that will change their lives (Didion *SLB* 92).⁷⁵ Adam Phillips writes that boredom always holds danger, in that it might turn into waiting and the awareness that we are desiring a transformational object (75). As the secular crisis begins, the realization that all is not right starts dawning, with capitalism’s contradictions and exploitative nature becoming harder to deny. In such a situation, boredom is especially liable to turn into waiting; as Didion notes of one hippie, “his standard technique for dealing with boredom being to leave” (Didion *SLB* 88). They flee their families, giving anything and everything a chance in hopes it will be the transformational object, even if they do not realize this is what they are doing. However, over time there is a dawning realization that whatever they hoped to find is not appearing, no matter how free of “Freudian hang-ups” they believe themselves to be (Didion *SLB* 88). And the older hippies (by this I mean mostly those in their twenties instead of teenagers), already begin to recognize this. As Steve, a former RISD student, explains to Didion, “At least [on the East Coast] you expect that it’s going to *happen*...Here you

⁷⁵ It should not be lost on the reader that these children are moving to the same city as the gold miners a century before them. As mentioned when discussing Las Vegas, westward expansion into indigenous lands acted as a driver of economic activity for 19th century America, just as colonializing Africa did for the Europeans. The very idea of “Manifest Destiny” was that the West would be America’s transformational object. The hippies perpetuate this belief, unable to escape American ideology. Indeed, what might we make of the hippie tendency to appropriate Native American clothes and customs while looking West? Furthermore, Hollywood also performed this move from East to West; the movies act as a shadow of the transformational object.

know it's not going to" (Didion *STB* 98 emphasis in original). When she asks what, exactly, he is expecting, he responds, "I don't know...Something. Anything" (Didion 98). By 1970, it is clear that LSD and free love do not change the world. Or rather that they change the individual's world, but that changing individual experience is not the same as changing the collective one. But the alternative, that they are waiting for something that may not come—the object that brings about a better world—is too painful to accept. In a move that resembles Freud's false substitute, the Beach is then imbued with a false utopian promise; the idea becomes that the lifestyle at the beach is the result of some transformational object that is part of the hippie lifestyle, rather than the lifestyle being an act of searching for said object. The lifestyle is good because something in it makes it good. It is in service of itself. Reckless consumption is seen as inherently positive because it distracts from the realization of waiting. The search for the thing becomes mistaken for the thing itself. In philosophical terms, the Beach takes on an identity, and hence exchange, since as Adorno notes, the two are inseparable. Didion talks to two teenage runaways, who tell her that they are "just gonna let it all happen...you can't pre-plan it" (Didion *SLB* 92). These are adolescents who, as children never thought about what they might become, unable to imagine a future (Didion *SLB* 92). No longer searching, they believe that this life of consumption, of throwing coke bottles out the window and not doing chores and wearing mini-skirts is utopia in itself, rather than tools in the search for the object that will bring about the better world. Socialist and communist politics no longer seem viable after the crimes of Stalin (or, as in France during this time, the Communists aligning themselves with the ruling government), but the secular crisis of capitalism also reveals the current system cannot continue. The hippie movement—which as Didion notes has no clear political goals—becomes the mode of left-wing politics, replacing labor unions and socialist parties, which seem to be outdated in the secular crisis of capitalism. But as will we are about to see, the hippie Movement is an extension of the logics of liberal capitalism, not a break from it, and so the attempt to create an alternative fails, eventually mutating into neoliberalism.⁷⁶ Its existence grows out of the crisis of capitalism, and its failure points to the intractable march of liberalism towards its telos, connecting the two "ends of history" discussed in chapter one.

In the three years between Didion and when the novel is set, the hippie movement takes

⁷⁶ Or rather, the hippie support for individual freedom as one right among others is co-opted by capital and raised into a position of dominance, as Harvey notes (41). Or as Mark Fisher puts it, parts of the movement were "repurposed as precursors of 'the new spirit of capitalism'" (Fisher *Acid Communism* 756).

on an identity, turning from individuals searching for the transformational object to a failed utopia. This is why though the novel has a nostalgic longing for the end of the 1960's and the countercultural current that disappeared along with it, it also is a ferocious critic of the decade and movement. Even when Doc is deep in the desert, Pynchon takes potshots at the "utopia" of Gordita Beach. He describes driving in Los Vegas as similar to life there, where "you lived in a climate of unquestioning hippie belief, pretending to trust everybody while always expecting to be sold out—but he didn't have to enjoy that either, especially" (Pynchon 225).

When Bigfoot offers Sportello a job as an informant, he tells the stoned detective "“You'd be surprised how many in your own hippie freak community have found our Special Employee disbursements useful. Toward the end of the month in particular...we could certainly offer compensation in a more, how to put it, inhalable form”" (Pynchon 33). The beach is the site of people who claim to desire nothing, but in reality are defined by their appetites. Beyond the marijuana consumption—or more accurately, related to it—is the characters' tendency to eat prodigious amounts. A sampling: "“Soon everyone was wandering around drinking cans of supermarket soda and eating homemade peanut butter cookies”; “they ordered a lengthy combination of enchiladas, tacos, burritos, tostadas, and tamales... ’wow Trillium, what happened to our food man, it's taking them an awful long time to bring it?’ ‘We ate it already?’”; the pizza at Pipeline, where on cheap pizza night any size unlimited topping pie is a “flat \$1.35” and Denis orders it with a mix of toppings even he finds confusing and disgusting (Pynchon 44, 222, 225, 11). Even the beach's name is imbued with its excess—in Spanish, gordita is feminine diminutive of “gorda,” or fat.

Doc and other characters in the novel are equally insatiable when it comes to sexuality. In his analysis of sexuality and gender in the novel, Simon Cook writes, “women dressed like porn stars, and with their sex-positive approach and versatility, drive the narrative through sexual agency...They do not seek commitment and their sexual stories come with enthusiasm, but also insouciance about power relations” (1144). Sexuality is traded freely, but it tends not to produce much actual freedom. Free love occurs not only at the beach, but also among the “flatlanders”—Pynchon's term for the middle class and above—calling attention to the fact that the sexual revolution did not need to be co-opted, because it stemmed from the same impulse that drove various mid-century modernists to cheat on their wives. Or, as Kris Kristofferson sardonically put it in 1970, “Father's at the office nightly, working all the time/Trying to make the secretary

change her little mind/And it bothers him to read about so many broken homes/blame it on those Rolling Stones” (Kristofferson and Wilkin 1970). The difference is that consumption moves from being an affirmation of masculinity to being an end in and of itself, allowing people of all genders to consume freely but without revolutionary potential. Here is the utopian of the particular as well as its falsification. Everyone can do what they want, but the systemic issues that prevent a better world are left untouched. Ideologically, it is the culmination of liberalism and the freedom of the individual subject, but to believe this requires ignoring the way power and capital still shape supposedly “free exchange.”

When Doc brings Denis around as a way to help him “desire to not desire” at the shopping mall, Denis is “pigging on the joint as always,” desiring something, just not new clothes or novelty gadgets (Pynchon 348-349). The imaginary image of a “good life” is imbued with “the very fetishism of commodities which in bourgeois society brings with it inhibition, impotence, the sterility of the never-changing” (Adorno *MM* 156). Surfers do act as an ascetic counterpoint to the beach’s excess, which might allow “utopian oppositions” that “grasp the moment of truth of each term” through negation (Jameson “PoU” 50). Except they appear much more rarely than the over-consuming hippie, existing almost as forgotten asides. In Pynchon’s focus on the hippies, he reveals that desires are “conglomerations of truth and falsehoods,” (Adorno *ND* 93) stemming from both a natural state—think of his description of the sound of Gordita Beach as “wildlife taking care of nighttime business on an exotic coast”—but also the ideological product of an economy that prioritizes overproduction and overconsumption (Pynchon 4). In *Inherent Vice*, the desire for a full life is inseparable from “a desire in which violence and subjugation are inherent,” and so the “fullness of life, is therefore not the utopianism one mistakes it for” (Adorno *ND* 378).

Individual happiness always pales in comparison to utopia and universal happiness. The Romantic valorization of the individual was central to the hippie movement, even as it is remembered as the last major attempt to establish a collectivity. We might look at Didion’s description of Max, a hippy in his early twenties. He is obsessed with living a life free of “Freudian hang-ups”, or as he tells it: “‘I’ve had this old lady for a couple months now...I come in three days later and tell her I’ve been balling some other chick...I say ‘that’s me baby’...I mean if she comes in and tells me she wants to ball Don, maybe, I say ‘O.K. Baby, it’s your trip’” (Didion *STB* 88). It should be clear that this is not at all out of step with the celebration of

the individual that sits at the heart of American culture, and as such does not hold in it a truly better world. But we should also not discount the collective impulse of the hippy movement that Fisher attempts to rescue in the posthumous introduction to *Acid Communism*. Rather, we should understand it as bogged down in the positive image of utopia, which links back to the problem of identity and exchange. Unable to imagine an actually better world, yet refusing to recognize this, the hippies simply exchange one form of consumption for another. Indeed, Pynchon often identifies the bartered origins of Doc's possessions, as if emphasizing that this space has not freed itself from the logic of exchange. Representing utopia on the level of the particular fails, because it still relies on exchange and identity, indeed is the stretching of identity to utmost limits; the beach is defined only in its difference from "normal" society, in the different aesthetics, even as the undergirding logic of overconsumption remains the same. The individual subject can do whatever they want, but are unable to free themselves from subjecthood, whose origins lie intertwined with the origins of capitalism. So instead they lean into subjectivity, into prioritizing individual happiness rather collective contentedness.

Beyond the internal contradictions that undermine the beach as utopia, there is also the threat of the outside. The Santa Ana winds blow "the smog out of downtown L.A., funneling between the Hollywood and Puente Hills on Westward through Gordita," ruining air quality in Gordita (Pynchon 98). Living there "was like living on a houseboat anchored in a tar pit. Everything smelled like crude. Oil spilled from tankers washed up on the beach, black, thick, gooey" (Pynchon 104). The hippies desire a return to nature—an admirable goal—but are unable to give up the tools we use to dominate nature (cars and motorcycles, to use Pynchon's examples), and so are unable to escape the side effects of said domination—including the fact that the domination of nature is intertwined with the domination of the self (Jameson *LM* 101). The social and economic totality is produced in part by the impulse for self-preservation within identity and exchange, which is of course natural, and so one cannot have an unmediated "return" to nature without producing ideological falsity. This is because without explicit mediation, one will just see echoes of the self within the other, and so identify nature's concurrences with society, ignoring all the ways it is inimical to us. By mediation, I refer to a reflexive reflection on the experience and language that conveys said experience, anything that forces recognition that there is an unbridgeable gap between us and nature, even as nature continues to reside within us. As Adorno notes, objects precede the subject, but only take on

their status as objects once the subject recognizes them (Adorno *ND* 140).⁷⁷ Furthermore, upon recognition of them as objects, they turn into concepts, which are always mediated, since they are their own transmission (Adorno *ND* 171). To talk of “nature” is turn nature into a concept, inserting a mediation. Instead nature can only be experienced through art that inscribes the “historical disfigurement of human, social relations to nature” (Hansen 53). To represent nature as untouched is impossible, for it requires the translation of nature’s language (incomprehensible to those of us in the modern era) into either system of social signs or as imitation, and can never be related directly. The Romantics returned to nature and found an Anglican god, a reflection of themselves (Huxley “Wordsworth in the Tropics” 4). The hippies find the idea of “being,” which is an answer to the ontological need provoked by the “will of people to be safe from being buried by a historical dynamics they feel helpless against” (Adorno *ND* 93). But even if they were to free themselves of the desire to rule over nature and find some dialectic synthesis that allows recognition of what is inhuman and what is not, they cannot escape a history where productivity (and hence dominance over nature) is the driving force of progress, the universal history which “leads from the slingshot to the megaton bomb” (Adorno *ND* 320).

In short, the beach stands in for a system where individuals search for their own individual transformational object, though over time this shifts into the search itself becoming seen as a transformational object. Attempts to represent the search backfire, as they become models for living a better life, rather than representing the search for the object that will bring this life about. This shift acts as a guarantor of failure, as it identifies utopia positively and so gives it identity and places it under the spell of exchange. In its failure, it reveals the shortcomings of thinking of utopia on the level of the particular and personal. Furthermore, the failure of the Beach as a site of utopia and the failure of the hippy movement more generally helps contribute to the novel’s aproductivity, contributing the sense that it is set after a utopian impulse has failed and before the next has arisen. Doc and those like him turned to this new lifestyle as a way of searching for an alternative, not as positing an alternative in itself, recognizing its logics do not differ significantly from the flatlander world’s. But others understand it as an alternative, and so it fails, leaving Doc in a space where he is still searching but no longer has a framework, just as Adorno is unable to give up the search for understanding

⁷⁷ The subject, we should note, is also always object as well—the brain is ontical, and so subjectivity always springs from the object, just as the object springs from the subject even as it exists as non-object before this mediation. While one can argue that the mind is not ontical, the very concept of the mind relies on the existence of the brain.

even as he recognizes traditional philosophical frameworks have collapsed. The failure of Gordita Beach as a transformational object is central to producing the novel's aproductivity.

Arrapentimiento: Systems of Collapse

Arrapentimiento, Mickey Wolfmann's planned apology development, stands in direct opposition to Gordita Beach and the hippies' desire to return to nature. For one, it was built by Mickey, the type of developer who makes "Godzilla look like a conservationist" (Pynchon 7). It is also made up of zonohedral domes, or "zomes," structures filled with "'vector spaces' and 'symmetry groups,'" that act as "'portals to someplace else'" (Pynchon 62). When Doc finally arrives at Arrapentimiento, he finds a number of zomes connected by covered walkways. The inside of the zome has "more space, judging from the outside, than there could possibly be in here" (Pynchon 251). At first, all of this calls to mind Jameson's reading of the architect John Portman. In Atlanta, Portman built elevated walkways above downtown, strangling the city center by sealing off the various buildings from the life of the city. The zomes repudiate the external through having the interior larger than the exterior, just as the Westin Bonaventure minimizes its exits as if to deny any relationship to the world outside (Jameson *PM* 40). The outside of the zome does not coincide with the interior, finally rendering a sort of space sealed off from the desert around it, the realization of post-modern architecture's dream. It also echoes Portman's aesthetic signature those massive atriums that "[make] it impossible for us to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these are impossible to seize" (Jameson *PM* 43). All of this suggests a reading of Arrapentimiento as related to the upcoming neoliberal era. Such a reading is possible, and quite likely accurate on more than one level. However, it would take us far outside of this thesis. Instead, I propose Arrapentimiento's architecture marks it as a space which the individual can no longer comprehend, and indeed is not really built for the individual as a person (they have no say in what their home looks like) but rather for the individual as a member of the population. It stands as an allegory for the failure of various communes and other attempts to build systemic alternatives during the hippie movement, a cornerstone of Southern California history. It acts as the linkage between Llano (a failed socialist commune of the early 20th century) and neoliberalism. In its failure, it reveals the difficulty of systemic representations of utopia.

To understand Arrapentimiento, we therefore have to go back to 1914, when a group of

socialists fled to the desert, founding Llano del Rio (Davis 9). Though successful at first, this socialist commune was eventually brought down by wartime xenophobia toward the heavily German settlement and anti-socialist broadsides by Otis Chandler's *Los Angeles Times* (Davis 11). To this, Aldous Huxley adds the leaders' lack of concern with nature's limits, as the river they relied on was fickle, and the land suited only for supporting one hundred souls (Huxley "Ozymandias: The Utopia that Failed" 100). It focused on the ideal, without any interest in the actual location it was built. Nonetheless, it set a precedent, one that would be taken up by the hippies in the 1960's and 1970's.

Five decades later, as the secular crisis of capitalism revealed to a larger audience what the dedicated socialists of Llano already knew, communes and co-operatives popped up across the country. As Timothy Miller notes, thousands of these utopian projects dotted the United States landscape in a myriad of forms, and Los Angeles was no different (Miller xiii). A great many were about returning to the land and becoming one with nature (an impossibility, as we have already seen). Others were less agrarian. Some even used zones, like Arrapentimiento, such as the Libre commune in Colorado, which used money inherited by Rick Klein, founder of the New Buffalo commune, to buy the land and finance its first days (Miller 82).⁷⁸ Other communes with zones include the Lama Foundation in New Mexico and the Drop City commune in Colorado (which inspired the Libre community) (ibiki.com). Commune-fever eventually died off—or perhaps was murdered, another victim of the Jonestown massacre which gave the concept a deadly sheen—but Arrapentimiento fits right into the era. This being the case, we can interpret its failure as an allegory, the novel speaking of the failures of these hippie utopias, as well as the dangers of imagining utopia systemically.

In the novel, Arrapentimiento is condemned by the FBI reprogramming Mickey. As Riggs (Sloane's exercise coach/lover and designer of the zone) explains to Doc, someone has gotten to Mickey and gotten rid of the "acid-head philanthropist" and swinger, turning him back into a rapacious developer and family man (Pynchon 252). Without him, Arrapentimiento is bound to fail, for two reasons. First is that, as Huxley notes, "the presence among the faithful of some dominant and fascinating personality...human magnets, in relation to whom ordinary men and women behave like iron filings" are key to the creation of these utopian places (Huxley

⁷⁸ In a bit of symmetry, the commune in *Easy Rider* is based off the New Buffalo commune, though it was not filmed there.

“Ozymandias” 97). As Shasta explains, Mickey was “powerful,” with an aura that made people flock to him even as he made you feel invisible (Pynchon 305). Without Mickey, there is no one besides an unstable Riggs to bring people together at Arrapentimiento.

More important than his magnetism, however, is Mickey’s capital. Arrapentimiento relies on his charity to exist. This foreshadows how neoliberalism adopts the rhetoric of the Christian right, replacing government protections with individual charity (Harvey 50). Yet philanthropy relies on government deregulation to produce levels of wealth in such large amounts that it can be donated without risking loss of class power, as well as tax exemptions and other government incentives. The word philanthropist calls to mind people like Andrew Carnegie and Warren Buffett, individuals who built their wealth through exploiting their eras’ lack of regulation. Similarly, though Mickey wants to apologize for making people pay for housing, his apology relies on his class position and history, not to mention environmental destruction. There can be no Arrapentimiento without exploitation—notably, Wolfmann stiffens his contractors when he cancels the project (Pynchon 251). One does not imagine utopia as built on the back of capitalism’s violence. In this, there is a reminder of the double bind of utopia: it must come from our world and yet have such a break that it escapes the history it grows out of.

Individual charity also fails because it fails to account for how class power operates. Mickey may wish to create a better world through his individual actions, but doing so threatens the interests of the class he is part of. He becomes a peculiar sort of class traitor, and the assorted forces not only of his class (Sloane, Crocker Fenway) but also the government oppose his actions.⁷⁹ Here there is a reminder of the impossibility of a few individuals trying to build a new world within this one. To do so relies on the systems and resources of the imperfect world, whether it is a conception of power as selfishness or initial capital provided from the exploitation of others. Even representing utopia requires the language of our world, infecting the utopian space as it is described.

This turn to representation allows us to discuss the other failure of Arrapentimiento,

⁷⁹ In this, the truth of neoliberalism is revealed. Though neoliberal theory calls for a minimal state, in practice state power is not abolished, but rather acts on behalf of the ruling class. Furthermore, as a movement to restore upper-class power, neoliberalism is fundamentally at odds with attempts to strengthen the position of those exploited by capitalism. A strong working class poses a threat to capital, and the actions of individuals cannot overcome this class divide. The ideological promise of neoliberalism and its unstated goals are in constant opposition. The latter falsifies the former, but in its falseness the former can reveal the latter. In other words, the failure of the promise is what allows a glimpse at its operation. Any remainder reveals the ideology of the world, the difference between the real and reality.

namely that it is represented systematically, in the vein of Thomas More, where the individuals are ignored in favor of organizational structure. Arrapentimiento is built on speculation (that people will move there) and seems to pay no attention to the actual people who will live there or the geography of its location (the middle of the desert). As Jameson notes about More:

The citizens of utopia are grasped as a statistical population; there are no individuals any longer, let alone any existential ‘lived experience’. If More tells us that the utopians are ‘easy-going, good-tempered, ingenious, and leisure-loving’, or that, following Aristotle, ‘they cling above all to mental pleasures, which they value as the first and foremost of all pleasures’, this simply enhances the statistical impression rather than individualizing it. The whole description is cast in the mode of a kind of anthropological otherness, which never tempts us for one minute to try to imagine ourselves in their place, to project the utopian individual with concrete existential density, even though we already know the details of his or her daily life.

(Jameson “PoU” 40).

While Jameson spins this utopian approach in the positive, as a “plebeianization” of the subject, it strikes the contemporary reader as a McKinsey-utopia (McKinsey being the consulting firm famous for theorizing ideal corporate management structures without considering the human aspect of the process) (Jameson “PoU” 41). Efficiency and ideal systems are equally central to the idea of Arrapentimiento, where square footage per zone is maximized, as they are to McKinsey and consulting firms famous for maximizing shareholder returns. But as Horkheimer and Adorno traced some seventy-five years ago, rationality and reason also regress back into myth, reason turning into the thing it wishes to banish. Any utopia that relies on the ratio (rationality) will smuggle irrationality and myth into the project, guaranteeing its imperfection. Furthermore, theorizing utopia logically and on the level of systems echoes how governments and power plan and organize based on population.⁸⁰ It is adopting the logics that created this system, but not in the way of Nietzschean counter-history, where those logics are turned critically back on the system. Instead, it just idealizes the current system, imagining it without all the flaws that constitute it, free from material conditions. Again, we run into the issue of how we can think through or represent an alternative of the current system while using the tools and language of the system we wish to abandon. Representing utopia positively either

⁸⁰ See Foucault’s lectures in February 1978, in *Security, Territory, Population*, edited by Michel Senellart

regresses into a view of personal enjoyment as social perfection (as at the Beach), or into a systemic organization that relies on capital and its logics even as it seeks to escape (Arrapentimiento).

Lemuria, The Absent Alternative

The novel, however, offers an alternative, imagining utopia negatively through the lost continent of Lemuria, though it does not correspond to any particular utopian moment, nor does it ever truly “appear” to the masses. Rather, Lemuria threatens to return from the deep, causing strange weather patterns and psychedelic waves. According to Sortilège and her spiritual mentor Vehi Fairfield, Lemuria and Atlantis sunk into the sea because the Earth “couldn’t accept the levels of toxicity they’d reached” (Pynchon 105). While on an acid trip a few pages later, Doc visits its refugees:

Doc found himself in the vividly lit ruin of an ancient city that was, and also wasn’t, everyday Greater L.A.—stretching on for miles, house after house, room after room, every room inhabited. At first he thought he recognized the people he ran into, though he couldn’t always put names to them. Everybody living at the beach, for example, Doc and all his neighbors, were and were not refugees from the disaster which had submerged Lemuria thousands of years ago. Seeking areas of land they believed to be safe, they had settled on the coast of California.

(Pynchon 108).⁸¹

Before continuing to other mentions of Lemuria (whose first and last letters spell L.A.), we might note that ‘an L.A. that is not L.A.’ is surprisingly close to Adorno’s conception of utopia as a world just like ours, only different. There is also an echo of the idea that Los Angeles is capitalism’s past and future, its heaven and hell to paraphrase Brecht, a place filled with people who have seen the disaster of environmentally destructive capitalism yet nonetheless are on the road to repeat it again (Davis 18). Angelenos live on a fault line that could lead to their destruction and return to the sea if the “big one” ever happens. Yet though the threat of environmental catastrophe constantly threatens them, natives tend to pretend it is not there, that it will not happen. As Neil Young sings in “L.A.”: “While the ground cracks under you/ By the

⁸¹ An interesting but unimportant tidbit: According to various nineteenth century occult authors, the former inhabitants of Lemuria still live on top of Mt. Shasta in California, suggesting that Shasta Fey is a survivor from the lost continent.

look in your eyes/You'd think that it was a surprise/But you seem to forget/Something somebody said/About the bubbles in the sea/And an ocean full of trees” (Young 1973). Interestingly, the song on the stereo during Sportello’s acid trip is Tiny Tim’s “The Icecaps are Melting,” a seeming anachronism, but which is in fact a real song released in 1967. As the high continues, the structure begins to sink, falling into the sea like Lemuria before it, eventually leaving him “to find his way out of a vortex of corroded history, to evade somehow a future that seemed dark whichever way he turned...” (Pynchon 110). Here, Doc confronts the danger of the utopian impulse, the forgetting of history in a bid to escape, only to realize that this just leaves you unable to navigate the current world. The final sentence sums up the aproductive moment perfectly, beautifully describing a mode of existence where the past is collapsing yet also suffocating us, blocking any vision of the future.

After this, Lemuria continues to emerge, turning from a golden age long past to something threatening to rise again in the future. (We should note that it was a golden age that destroyed itself). It is a past utopia no one remembers or recognizes, and its return could be the transformational object that allows the world to change before it also collapses. When Shasta sends him a postcard, she reminisces of the time when Sortilège was first gaining interest in Lemuria and said that the torrential rains were a way of Lemuria “returning to us,” flooding Los Angeles to warn us of the coming danger (Pynchon 167). Later, when driving to Prussia’s office to confront the hitman, Sportello notices a “dark metallic gray promontory about the size of Gibraltar” that no one else notices because “people in this town saw only what they’d all agreed to see, they believed what was on the tube or in the morning papers half of them read while they were driving to work on the freeway” (Pynchon 315). Finally, near the end of the novel, something arises from the depths as Doc and Sauncho track the Coast Guard’s interception of *The Golden Fang*. As the sound of surf overwhelms them and waves buffet the boat, the weather changes, thickening the air and making it difficult to see. Though not explicitly Lemuria, it is described as “St. Flip of Lawndale’s mythical break,” the rumor of which is the impetus for Pynchon’s original discussion of the lost continent. It appears as a possible transformational object, one of the many the book proposes, yet only one notices. Everyone is searching for it, but they are looking in the realms of the economic or the social, and so cannot find it, for it is visible only in the negative effects of those categories. Earlier, I claimed that in the secular crisis capital

is no longer a vampire, but a zombie staggering forward.⁸² We might note that the vampire has to act to stay alive, and in that action opens up the possibility for its destruction—it can be caught outside in daylight, or its murderous habit can turn villages against it. Awareness of its existence threatens the vampire—it relies on secrecy. The zombie, on the other hand, simply exists unless it is killed by an outside force, and zombies do not hide.⁸³ Industrial capitalism relied on obfuscating its operation, hiding how value is produced through alienated labor. This meant that, were the system revealed, there would be the possibility of freeing ourselves and producing an alternative. In industrial capitalism, each moment of crisis menaced the system, threatening to throw daylight on it. But the secular crisis of capitalism changes this. No longer hidden, it cannot be destroyed except from the outside. But none of us are outside capitalism. The only thing that still holds the possibility of freeing us then, is climate catastrophe, nature reclaiming its independence from human domination. Lemuria is the glimpse of a future transformational object, one that holds the potential to radically reshape society from outside, in response to our push to dominate everything, even nature. The lost continent is symbolic of nature's self-preservation instinct kicking in, threatening the system we have built for our own preservation. At the same time, however, it is original sin, the establishment of identity, the whole history of capitalism enclosed, how it needs to extend its domination until it kills us. We give the ungraspable aspect of nature a name and stable identity and insert it into a dialectic: Lemuria vs. Capitalism. In so doing, we instrumentalize the continent, attempting to extend our domination over it as it threatens us. Even if it destroys our world, the system will live on in Lemuria's identity, since identity holds within in the exchange principle and our will to self-preservation. Pynchon resists this act by refusing to represent Lemuria positively, as existing. No one can grasp or hold an element of the content, but instead only see its effects, the waves it throws and the rains it causes.

This why after Doc and Sauncho go chase the schooner, there is no more mention of Lemuria. Pynchon lets it fall aside as Doc wraps up his personal errands, and so Lemuria is never

⁸² We might note that when Doc visits the Boards and Spotted Dick, he becomes convinced they have been turned into zombies, and when Shasta returns he forgets to look for tell tale zombie symptoms. The zombie story, we might note, not only comes from the Caribbean but also grows out of the vampire story, as in *I am Legend* (Barba-Kay 30). When the Golden Fang murders people, it leaves fang marks on their neck, like a vampire. *Inherent Vice* could likely be read as a monster novel, about the transformation of capital from vampire to zombie.

⁸³ The relation between capitalism and zombies is famously explored in George Romero's 1978 film.

defined positively.⁸⁴ It can only be viewed obliquely, in the waves it creates flooding a sinking city, or in the rainfall that threatens houses in the Hollywood Hills and Gordita Beach. This absence reveals the truth of utopia, that outside the most general statements, it cannot be described positively in the work of art, even as its emergence remains a constant possibility. It cannot be described positively because our imagination of a better world is too influenced by contemporary conditions and by a refusal to think dialectically. To define something through its difference from our world inextricably attaches it to our world—its identity relies on capitalism’s existence. Even the arch-utopian Jameson admits, “the utopian can never express itself directly” (Pizer 132). Furthermore, representation blocks an artwork’s attempt to “project a conceptual domain of satisfaction and release, and thus approximate the utopian” (Pizer 136-137). It is only in non-representation that the nonidentity between “word and thing,” is maintained, opening up possibility of a better world, one free of the exchange principle (Pizer 136). By non-representation, I mean it is within the novel’s world, but not explicitly described, instead just haunting the work. Just because utopia cannot appear explicitly within the work does not mean it is fully absent. Rather, it infuses and overhangs the work, even in its non-existence.

This is a peculiar form of ontology, an ontology of the “wrong state of things,” to reuse a quote from Chapter One, where being has been perverted (Adorno *ND* 11). It resembles Fisher’s form of Hauntology, where what haunts the work is not what is dead in the past but what may come in the future, the promise of a better world. But it does not try to capture this alternative positively, as Fisher’s hauntological music does. Instead, aproductivity is the search for the thing that will bring the better world into existence, a reflection of the desire for a transformational object, yet at the same time can never represent this succeeding. Rather, it defers happiness and satisfaction to an indefinite point in the future, even as that point haunts and infuses the work. This future point then casts a spell over the rest of the novel, revealing our suffering in this current world in comparison, even as we cannot know what actual happiness feels like.

There is an objection here that Lemuria seems like no sort of utopia, whether or not it is present in the work. In this argument, it is at best a past utopia here to destroy us, not a modern utopia. Torrential rains and mega-waves are not commonly imagined as the trumpets announcing a better world, after all. However, if we understand Lemuria as nature’s moderating force, a

⁸⁴ The closure of the personal is the reason that Frangipane misreads the end of the novel as more “optimistic” than Pynchon’s other work, even if there is no real resolution of the plot.

reminder of the threat of non-identity that nature constantly holds, it helps clarify its relationship to utopia. As Peter Osborne notes, there is a Nietzschean “will to self-preservation” at the heart of Adorno’s conception of identity (180). Lemuria’s return is a warning to humanity through the actions of a society similar to their own. This place has been destroyed by nature before, a nature we believed we had conquered, erasing the difference between it and us. “Under total domination, any difference between nature and society ceases to exist since society posits itself as nature” (Koch 212); or “Uphill and invisible, traffic out on the boulevard to and from the freeway uttered tuneful exhaust phrases which went echoing out to sea, where the crews of oil tankers sliding along, hearing them, could have figured it for wildlife taking care of nighttime business on an exotic coast” (Pynchon 5). But Lemuria’s return is unexpected, a place most do not notice returning because it would be a reminder of the non-identity of nature, its unimaginable power to swallow us. If self-preservation is at the heart of identity, which is intertwined with exchange principle that capitalism grows out of (see Chapter One), then we might say that the will to self-preservation eventually leads to the imperilment of the self (climate catastrophe caused by enlightenment-driven growth). When entangled with the exchange relationship, the will to self-preservation becomes as contradictory as capital itself is. But in this moment, there is the possibility that we see the relationship and abandon the principle of self-preservation for something new, or redirect it toward a self-preservation based on mutual thriving, rather than exchange and competition. But this new thing is not known, cannot be known. In this moment, awareness of the longing for the transformational object is possible. Except this awareness is as likely to inspire terror and resignation as it is to provoke struggle toward the unknown, and so the emergence of utopia from this moment cannot be guaranteed. This is why, though signaling the return of a previous society that was in a “golden age,” this moment of post-utopian possibility is ambiguous.

We might conclude here by mentioning that it is notable only a few people see the signs of Lemuria returning, noticing this possible transformational object arriving, even as it imposes itself on the physical space of the city. In Winnicott’s spatula experiment discussed in chapter one, a spatula is placed in front of the bored child. But if it is forced onto the child, the youth rejects it vehemently (Phillips 73). And telling the museumgoer which painting will hold his attention is a fool’s errand. Or, rather, now it is. Before, the critic could help, pointing to aesthetic and dramatic meaning. But both have been destroyed, as embodied in Beckett’s plays

(Adorno *Notes to Literature* 244). Yet it is not enough to simply admit this and go on; the search for meaning continues, but now individuals must do it themselves. All the critic can do is ask them to slow their march through the museum, to pay attention to each work. And once the one that holds the museum-goer's attention is found, the job of the critic is to hold them still and ask why, to call attention to what echoes in the work, whether it be history, philosophy, or utopia. But even this is no guarantee the critic will be effective. The world of *Inherent Vice* is so saturated with objects falsely imbued with transformational potential that even when a real transformational object appears, the vast majority of the novel's population would not recognize it as such, having been tricked into believing that the object is the lifestyle at the beach, or the restructuring of the economy (without, of course, threatening the primacy of exchange), or something on the TV or in the newspaper (Pynchon 315).

Utopia Banned

A surfer starts hitching rides out to the middle of the ocean, coming back in the evenings talking of mythical waves geologically impossible before going silent and smiling as only those who've seen god can. A grey promontory the size of the Rock of Gibraltar appears in downtown L.A., only for the sun-soaked citizens ignore it. Coast Guard boats chasing a mysterious drug-running schooner find themselves engulfed in "heavy" weather, thrown about by waves that shouldn't exist. A drug-addled Private Eye hallucinates a mythical continent drowning, its citizens overtaxing the earth and forcing their demise. These are just a few examples of the reoccurring motif of the return of Lemuria, the Pacific counterpart to Atlantis that, according to the novel, destroyed itself through mistreating the earth. The lost continent sits at the brink of resurfacing, ready to show us the error of our ways even at the risk of our catastrophic destruction. Yet there is no mention of the mystical continent in the Anderson's film. What should we make of Lemuria's absence in Anderson's adaptation? Doc never sees something rising out of the sea, a lost continent reemerging; a search of the leaked script turns up no mention "Lemuria." I believe this absence reveals the impossibility of utopia in American mass-produced film, due to mainstream cinema's unique class position, its material limits, and status as a good produced within an industrial context, namely the American film industry. Thus, in a dialectical twist, Anderson's erasure of utopia offers recognition of the work's guilt within the

social system, which Adorno argues is central to the artwork's promise of utopian future happiness. This dialectical ambivalence is further mediated by Lemuria's relationship to climate catastrophe.

As seen in the previous section, utopia has two different dimensions in my work. The first is a practical utopia, the concept as representing an alternative to capitalism. But the term also has a theoretical, almost spiritual aspect, related to questions of natural beauty and the hieroglyphics of nature. I have not yet explored this latter dimension in significant depth, and though I will later, for now I wish to stick to the first of these definitions, as to examine whether a practical utopia can be represented on film.

Profit Perversions

Though Anderson's films rarely make money—According to Box Office Mojo, domestic box office returns total about \$153 million, while his the combined budgets exceeded \$192 million—they are nonetheless consistently produced and distributed by mainstream production companies (boxofficemojo.com). *Inherent Vice*, for example, was distributed by Warner Brothers and financed by them and by Ratpac-Dune entertainment. The latter was a business funded and controlled by Access Industries, a player in the oil and gas markets, and Steve Mnuchin, an investment banker who serves, as of this writing, as U.S. Secretary of the Treasury in the Trump administration. Even when including its international returns, the film did not come close to recouping its costs. This was not unexpected. The American film critic Wesley Morris tells an anecdote about Anderson and producers:

Anderson came up in conversation between two Hollywood studio executives. “How did I get stuck making a Paul Thomas Anderson movie?” one asked. The other replied: “Because it’s your turn.” The charitable interpretation of that exchange is that no one wants to be the studio that denies someone like Anderson a home to make movies. Profitability isn’t his aim — nor his problem. Neither is prize-winning. (Morris 2014).

If the producers are expecting neither a financial windfall nor an award, why might they fund Anderson's stoner comedy? We can safely assume that the charitable interpretation Morris offers is not the full picture—studio executives are not in the business of giving away \$20 million out of the goodness of their own heart. Part of it is certainly due to U.S. tax write-offs.

Up until 2016 (and then again after the 2018 tax law), film investment for high-net worth investors was 100% tax deductible, up to \$15 million. A 100% deduction means that for every dollar invested, 37 cents can be written off (Blake 2018). On a \$20 million budget, this means investors get \$5.5 million in tax write-offs. One can get a tax reduction, possibly see some eventual returns (though not in the case of *Inherent Vice*), and give their money to someone besides the government.

Beyond this, there is also a fetishistic element, where the producers take on a role similar to the patron of the Toscanini concert, who worships the “money he himself has paid for the ticket,” and not the work itself (Adorno “On the Fetish Character of Music” 38). Part of the point of financing a film that loses money is to show that one can. In such a scenario, the film becomes important to the capitalist not as an investment vehicle, but as a class signifier. Indeed, it becomes a celebration of economic aproductivity and cultural productivity, how in some perverse way it is no longer necessary to produce a profit to make money. With cultural goods, such as film, there is an illusory idea that they only have a “pure use-value,” even as this use-value is replaced by exchange-value, where the worth of the work is determined solely by its price, and its symbolic value, with the works signifying that the owner can afford the price and has a certain class position (Adorno “FCM” 39). In other words, it is traditionally seen that an artwork’s value stems from the experience it provides, but this is untrue, and hides that an artwork’s value comes from its price, which then imbues the work with a symbolic meaning. This is particularly clear in the contemporary world, where non-reproducible art is seen as an investment opportunity, its limited existence and symbolic value turning it into a clear commodity whose use is determined by price. But the film that loses money occupies a peculiar position—its unlimited reproducibility strips it of a long-term investment value for consumers of the work, unlike paintings, sculptures, even numbered prints. One does not buy a DVD as an investment, the way one might with a Degas. The film that loses money would seem to be the only good that has pure use-value, making it the last “cultural” good. Except this use-value is based on the arbitrary cost of what “respectability” is worth to the investor, as well as the total tax write-offs one can receive for funding a film. Certain producers have higher or lower tolerance for losses. This myth of pure use-value imbues cultural goods with a particular position as signifiers. The use-value of the money-losing film is really its symbolic value.

Furthermore though earlier I mentioned Anderson’s films are not viable as an investment

vehicle, they are still somehow a financial instrument, acting as the only site of “production” in an economic chain. We might note that though Mnuchin and his investors ostensibly lost as much as \$80 million in their deal with Relativity media, Mnuchin’s bank, OneBank West, was able to drain Relativity of \$50 million before the latter’s bankruptcy (Rainey 2015), and the investors likely received tax write-offs for each film they helped fund. Even as he and his investors lost, they also won. The film has a very precise use-value, then. It exists to be the visible element that explains the contradictions and confusions of late capital. The myth of cultural exchange is invoked to explain the losses—looking at the Morris quote above, the losing of money is viewed as almost a gift exchange, billionaires giving away money in return for this particular object to be shared with the world—turning attention away from an economy in which profit and value are unlinked and production is ignored, even as it acts as the unacknowledged base on which companies are leveraged. Amazon loses money on every package it ships, and *Inherent Vice* exists in the same space, as what is essentially a front. There is a doubling of the film’s fetish character. Not only does it stand-in for the money spent to see it made—the actual thing being prioritized—but also acts as a distraction for the new nature of the economy. The film hides the economy as it is (built on debt and tax write-offs used to circulate capital among the same small group to create an illusion of growth) through existing as a product that could possibly turn a profit, and simply did not, even as the truth is that it does not need to break even for the producers to come out ahead.

Any political utopia in the film, then, would be tainted by the film’s relationship to the market, its status as a particular form of commodity, one that exists as such irrespective of its traditional exchange value. Utopia’s emergence in the work is foreclosed, because the work cannot escape its commodity aspect, making it what Peter Osborne calls a “dependent art” (182). However, the film’s status as an adaptation offers it a unique opportunity. In erasing utopia, Anderson recognizes film’s guilt in a class society, creating a productive circularity—film cannot represent utopia, so utopia is erased, which is then a recognition of guilt that dialectically suggests the existence of a better world, albeit one unrepresentable in mass-market American film and hence absent here. To those skeptical of the claim that the work recognizes its own guilt, we might note that the film explicitly implicates Hollywood in the unnamable structure that is “much, much more...vast,” than previously imaginable, the Golden Fang, which as Doug Haynes convincingly argues acts as a stand-in for late-capitalism (Pynchon 213). For example,

during a tour of Chryskylodon (a mental institution whose name is bastardized Greek for “Gold Fang,”), Doctor Threeply shows Sportello the institute’s movie theater, which is showing anti-communist films by the fictional actor Burt Stodger. As they watch, Threeply whispers along with the film, awestruck at the beauty of its ideology. Stodger is first mentioned earlier in the film, when Doc and his attorney Sauncho are eating at a cheap seafood restaurant, and Sauncho explains that Stodger was blacklisted during the McCarthy era, only to make a return several years later having denounced his old views. When Sauncho mentions the name, Doc stands up and takes the picture off the wall above them—it turns out it is a photo of (the fictional) Stodger. Hollywood surrounds everything, is everywhere in the film, always leering over the characters, positioned as both within and reinforcing the vast conspiracy that is late capital.

Messianic Waves

But this practical definition, utopia as a “better world,” is not the only way I use the term, nor really the utopia that is Lemuria within *Inherent Vice*. As I wrote then set aside in the last chapter, utopia is also tied to a reflexive nostalgia for a better world, an unattainable time when sign and referent overlapped and humans could understand the hieroglyphics of nature.

Before discussing nature and hieroglyphics, however, I want to recapitulate the “familiar argument,” about Adorno’s struggle with film, as well as Miriam Hansen’s complication of it. Adorno is commonly understood to have an issue with film’s “indexically grounded iconic character, that is, a form of signification based in the perceptual likeness between sign and referent” (Hansen 44). This is problematic for Adorno not only because it allows film to “function as an advertisement for the world ‘as is’” and also contravenes his historically grounded belief in *bilderverbot* (the ban on graven images), a regulative idea in his aesthetic theory (Hansen 45). In this reading utopia on film would be impossible because, in contrast to the novel’s indirect representations of Lemuria’s return, the aforementioned character of film would change the nature of the transformational object, turning Lemuria from the promise that the glean of a spatula holds (to paraphrase Phillips) to an adult stuffing the spatula in the child’s mouth. It would impose a transformational object, presenting itself as the answer, as something that exists and will change everything, rather than something a few people see approaching and hoping others see it as well.

However, Hansen complicates this, arguing that for Adorno it is film’s phenomenological

aspect that is problematic more than its indexicality, how the images on the screen are experienced as real. Hansen uses the example of the Jewish gnostic tradition, where any image of god takes on some form of godliness, and hence forces idolatry. Similarly, utopia on film becomes a sort of “real” utopia. The film always strikes the viewer as having a mimetic component, trying to represent its referent. Any image of utopia on film is a betrayal of the concept, relegating it to the past and present (since the image on the screen has an indexical relationship to objects in the past, when it was filmed, and is seen in the present by the audience), rather than the future where it belongs. Representing utopia on film would be moving happiness from a future possibility to something that has happened or is happening elsewhere.

To clarify what I mean here, I want to introduce a concept from German Romanticism called the “hieroglyphics of nature” (Levin 38). Broadly construed, this refers to the idea that “all of nature speaks through its form,” while a more restricted understanding is that there are certain features of nature that could be read as hieroglyphs (Levin 38). This language is an ur-language humans have long forgotten, but as the original language it needs no code, because sign and referent are the same (38). The romanticists believe that this language is recoverable either directly but ephemerally through poetry or indirectly through the scientific exploration of nature. This division of labor results in two different languages aiming at the same thing. “In the division of labor between science and arts, language degenerates, on the one hand, into a ‘mere system of signs,’ into an instrument of recognizing nature by renouncing any similarity with it; as image (*Bild*), on the other, language is made to resign itself to the function of copy, imitation or reflection (*Abbild*), to become all nature but renounce any claims to recognize it” (Hansen 49).

Hansen argues that in tracing this genealogy of the split, Adorno suggests that language’s mimetic capability stems from its origin in hieroglyphics, not spoken language as is more commonly argued. Much like the phonograph, film complicates this divide, being non-ephemeral yet also able to ensnare the language of nature more directly through the index. Film captures moments of natural beauty through a technological medium, nature “writing” on the film through technology, which disfigures nature into something like a grapheme.

So images of nature are turned into letters that do not add up to words, the representative dimension negated through being turned into hieroglyphics. I should clarify that it is not that you can “read” the film and its language, but rather that you are reminded that nature’s language exists but is no longer graspable, the mimetic impulse turned towards the irrecoverable voice of

nature, incomprehensible signs reminding us of the natural world's inimicality and beauty and terror. At the same time, when film transforms the beauty of nature into a system of signs, it reflects the "historical disfigurement of human, social relations with nature" (53). The beauty of nature can only be seen in the negative, in absence.

Of course, incomprehensibility is usually *verboten* in the Hollywood hills; Anderson is no Werner Herzog. Hollywood narrative film, when it includes nature, captures the world's objective beauty through technological means and then orders it according to the rational structure that is narrative film. In so doing, nature becomes dominated by technology and subservient to the logic of capitalism (the ratio). The narrative film's structure emphasizes the experience of what's on the screen as something real. The image in film has an identity to the viewer—it is "exchangeable" with an equivalent scene in real life. At one point in the novel, a seemingly magical surf that brings with it "thick" weather threatens to overwhelm the Golden Fang schooner, as well as Doc and Sauncho tailing it (Pynchon 357). Though not explicitly positioned as Lemuria, Pynchon calls it "St. Flip of Lawndale's mythical break," which Sortilège says is caused by Lemuria's re-emergence. In the novel, Pynchon can emphasize its unreality, how this wave break is occurring in the middle of the ocean, baffling Coast Guard and Doc alike. It is like nothing they have ever seen, making "the north shore of Oahu at its most majestic look like Santa Monica in August," a reminder of nature's inimicality (Pynchon 357). But to film it would make it comparable to real waves, comprehensible and viewable to the audience. It would become representative of nature, imitation. Film is inadequate for when the hyperbolic becomes real. One could use special effects (digital or analog), but even here, the audience is likely to understand the fake waves not as nature's non-identity, but rather a slight exaggeration of what they imagine large waves are like. In this scenario, the iconographic character is used to obfuscate the indexical writing, rather than the iconographic using the indexical to lie (as Adorno on film is traditionally understood) or the indexical offering a "determinate negation" of the iconographic (As Gertrude Koch reads Adorno). It is only this second form that leaves open the utopian dream "of a non-objectifying interchange with the Other; and a fluid, pre-individual form of subjectivity," (Hansen 52) where true happiness is possible, free from the "identitarian philosophy" that denies the "senseless suffering" of our empirical world and existing happiness (Adorno *ND* 203).

So what we find is that the utopian is both foreclosed by film's "indexically grounded

iconic character,” and yet, contradictorily, only possible through said character. However, at the same time, mass film cannot escape its economic status that would pervert any appearance of utopia, no matter how absent. In the industrial capitalism of Adorno’s time, the domination of nature and life was not as total, and so almost all had an experience of nature’s non-identity, how it could be inimical and terrifying and beautiful and ecstatic and claustrophobic and open and hellish and idyllic all at the same time, and if they looked close enough could see the traces of this in humanity as well. However, climate apocalypse, business ontology, and the entry of capital into ever more spheres destroys this. Everything is business or affected by business. There is no nature separable from climate change, and so its language is now ever more perverted and inaccessible. The dream of understanding nature, the utopian hope that film in industrial capitalism still held, is dead. And so the experience that filmic utopia relied on is seemingly gone, erased by the voraciousness of capital. Utopia becomes absent, the non-existent thing in this aproductive moment where the future seems foregone, doomed by climate apocalypse and the secular crisis of capitalism. Paradoxically enough, however, it is climate catastrophe that holds the possibility of being the transformational object that will save us, as we will see through looking at the absence of Lemuria through this lens.

Lemuria is inextricably linked with climate catastrophe.⁸⁵ In the novel, Doc sees Lemuria in his acid trip as the Tiny Tim song “The Ice Caps Are Melting” plays. As discussed in the last section, he finds himself in an ancient city that:

was and also wasn’t, Greater L.A.—stretching on for miles, house after house, room after room, every room inhabited. At first he thought he recognized the people he ran into, though he couldn’t always put names to them. Everybody living at the beach, for example, Doc and all his neighbors, were and were not refugees from the disaster which had submerged Lemuria thousands of years ago. Seeking areas of land they believed to be safe, they had settled on the coast of California.

(Pynchon 108).

This not-L.A. L.A., however, is also sinking, suffering the same fate its refugees first experienced in Lemuria. Here, we might note that climate catastrophe is the logical endpoint of The Enlightenment’s reversion into myth, a process identified by Adorno and Horkheimer in *The*

⁸⁵ I have been using “climate catastrophe” instead of “catastrophic climate change” to emphasize the fact that the upcoming apocalypse is not only due to global warming, but also nutrient collapse and the destruction of the ecosystem due to the sixth mass extinction

Dialectic of Enlightenment. There is no climate change if we do not instrumentalize elements of nature such as oil, turning them from part of nature into a tool for our domination of the world. Narrative cinema relies on this same objectification and instrumentalization to create itself, subjugating the contingent, random image and instrumentalizing time. The result is that in the age of climate catastrophe, film is uniquely guilty among the arts. As such, there must be a strong ban on images of climate catastrophe as a possible transformational object. This is because the transformational object still holds (and yet also conceals) the possibility of something better, and while climate catastrophe may reopen the possibility of a better world, it will likely be at great human cost, and there is something revolting or perverse about the forces producing this destruction also representing it as the object that might stoke a utopian transformation. It brings to mind Adorno's line that even though all "are equally suspended above the possibility of nothingness," this is "generally not so uncomfortable for the executioners" (Adorno "Commitment" 189). Climate change is real to all, yes, but it is much more real to the 600 million people in India already facing water shortages than it is to Hollywood producers who lose a vacation home to wildfires. Furthermore, film's iconic character can easily present an image of nature destroyed by climate change as an ideological "this is the way nature is," imbuing human destruction with a teleological and an almost ontological aspect. Finally, directly representing catastrophic climate change through the metaphor of Lemuria could easily end up producing the "interpassivity" that Mark Fisher identifies as a key element of capitalist realism, where art's production of anti-capitalist critique allows us to continue to consume with impunity (Fisher *Capitalist Realism* 12).

Instead, the absence of Lemuria haunts the work, the erased explanation for the crazy amount of rain in a key flashback and the various apocalyptic color tints Anderson indulges in throughout. The style seems contingent and arbitrary, but is in fact caused by a structural absence, something we cannot yet see but nonetheless feel. In the incomprehensibility of these tints and weather systems, in how one moment may be sunny and the next storming like the end of the world, in how the world is blue and then "normal" and then red and always unnatural, we have a reminder that nature's language still tries to speak even as it is disfigured and ever-more invisible. The utopian aspect of climate change is that we so disfigure nature it once again becomes free and inimical. But rather imagining and representing what this new inimicality will be (an impossible task), the film chooses to show the shadow this disfigurement throws over the

social, how it will make even the human unrecognizable, even if we are not sure how. This is not the index offering a determinate negation of the icon (as in Koch's Adorno), but an index that can also serve as an icon, though in a peculiar fashion, as a pointing finger aimed at something Hollywood film cannot show. We might even link it to the film's narration. After all, it is Sortilège, the film's narrator, who is obsessed with Lemuria in the novel, yet despite apocalyptic rains and auras, she refrains from bringing it up in the film. Her choice to not mention the topic seems purposeful; the absence of it becomes its appearance in some convoluted way, refusing to remember the thing that could bring our salvation and destruction, recognizing that representing it would destroy its status as a possible transformational object even as it keeps the utopian dream alive.

Besides, even if the film could recognize and comment on what it lacks, doing so would be a betrayal of the age. We live in a time where everything is obvious, but no one can admit it, an era of jobless recoveries and billion-dollar companies that will never turn a profit, of accelerating climate catastrophe. We can all see it, but no one dare comment. The causes are economic and social, yet it seems we only see them in the effects, elsewhere, in the storms that batter Puerto Rico and the flooding and droughts that put millions at risk. Yet the extremity of nature's reprisal reminds us of a world we first expelled ourselves from and then destroyed in our quest for ever-greater rationalization. In this new-found awareness, there is the revelation that the world could be better, that we are waiting and desiring something that which will bring it about. The aproductive work does not directly comment on this world, but rather recreates it through narrative and form and has the characters move through it, searching for the absent thing that will finally resolve the contradictions and provide clarity. The audience is put in the position of the bored subject, searching the screen for clues about what is going on, but each new revelation produces nothing but more confusion. In so doing, *Inherent Vice* forces a moment where one realizes that we are waiting for something to surrender ourselves to, but that we do not know what the object is. It calls attention to the waiting and the risk that one is "waiting for nothing," which then acts as an index, pointing to what is not there—an economic system where production is unmoored from profits, where the alienation of labor is so complete that awareness of it offers little to no revolutionary potential (Phillips 75). The experience of being brought to awareness in this roundabout way reveals that the world could be better, since we are waiting for something. In this, there is a critique of the present; after all, those living in the best of all

possible worlds have no need for transformational objects. We, however, do. Without it, there can be no dreaming, no future, no utopia. Anderson's Lemuria keeps the dream of future happiness alive, but only in the negative sense, through absence. Aproductive works always speak of utopia. It is the thing that drives their "narratives" even as it exists only outside the works' telos.

Lost Capitalists

Steve Mnuchin is not the only capitalist whose gravitational pull shapes the film, marking the limits of the possible; Mickey Wolfmann is another absent capitalist. I wish to conclude this chapter by looking at him and his job—the real estate developer—as a possible transformational object. To start, we might return to the psychoanalytic overtones of the name Wolfmann. Earlier, we touched upon its relationship to questions of Freudian narratology, citing Abraham's and Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*. Now, I wish to turn to Jacques Derrida's preface to that work. In the actual text, Abraham and Torok propose a form of analysis they call variously, "crypt, cryptonymy, or the broken symbol" (Abraham and Torok lviii). In the foreword, Derrida links the crypt to the question of first, arguing that to the wolf man, "the Thing is to be thought out starting from the Crypt," where the crypt "hides as it holds" (Abraham and Torok xiv). The wolf man and his way of understanding resemble the transformational object in aproductivity, something that hides itself through abstraction, even as it holds transformational potential. However, to dive into Derrida and psychoanalysis would take this thesis in a different (and albeit interminably longer) direction. Instead, I bring up the idea of the first to note the difference in how Wolfmann is first "seen" in the novel and film. In the book, Doc does not see an image of Wolfmann until he visits Sloane, where he encounters a "looming portrait" of Mickey (Pynchon 57). In the film, however, Doc's first glimpse of Wolfmann is in the newspaper (Pynchon 58). The newspaper, as Benedict Anderson famously argues in 1991, is a key tool in creating the "imaginary community" through which we understand our nation (Anderson 35). In moving Doc's encounter from the private painting to the public photograph, the film insists Wolfmann is central to our understanding of the nation. Yet at the same time, this marks Wolfmann as reproducible and replaceable; he is no longer embalmed in oils, but instead endlessly reproduced in ink, on paper that will be thrown out by the end of the day. But this reproducibility points to why he is still important, that he matters not for who he is but what he does. Wolfmann is

important only as the real estate developer, as the particular who takes on status as symbolic of the universal and hence loses his position as a particular. Per Adorno, “Only as a personification of capital is the capitalist respectable”; but in personifying capital, the capitalist offers a false image of how capital works (Adorno *ND* 305). Capital needs capitalists, yes. But the power in capitalism comes not from capitalists, but from capital itself.

Nonetheless, the real estate developer (referring here to the profession at large, not just Wolfmann) is symbolic of how financialization has changed the larger economy. In the 1940’s and 1950’s, developers began building the suburbs, a project which required constant expansion of the capitalist system into spaces that were previously either farmland or untamed nature, the commodification of what was previously outside the realm of capital. As developers approach critical suburban mass, the point where outward expansion is no longer the most profitable option, there is a radical shift in developer’s focus. The use-value of a house no longer drives the developers’ profits. In Vancouver, 25,000 homes sit empty (Rees 2018). Yet the prices in the city continue to go up, and developers continue to build more condos. While not technically abandoned, they exist almost entirely as investment properties for the wealthy and sit vacant for most of the year. The use value of their developments has shifted—recently built “Supertalls” in New York City often have hundreds of feet of “mechanical voids,” empty floors dedicated to equipment (Russell 2019). These floors do not count toward the city’s height limit, and so making these as large as possible allows taller buildings and higher prices, even as it lessens the use-value of these buildings. Finally, modern real estate development relies on a variety of financial instruments that come into being in the era of financialization. Syndicated mortgages minimize the developer’s risk by creating an investment fund from many smaller investments. The developer and banks are no longer at risk of losing money in such a scenario. They also use municipal rivalries to convince towns and counties to give them subsidies, tax cuts, and other profit-boosting instruments, leveraging fears and prejudices for their own ends.⁸⁶ Developers use the promise of construction jobs to get municipalities to offer them benefits, then employ builders on a project by project basis so when the project ends, the jobs disappear. Having disappeared, the developer can then claim the next development will create jobs, when in reality it is just rehiring those who were previously let go. Developers were always speculators of a sort,

⁸⁶ For a particularly infuriating example of this, look at the Atlanta Braves—a baseball team that according to their chairman is equally a “real estate company”—and their move to Cobb County based on white fan’s racism (deMause 2016).

but they are now speculating on other speculators. Wolfmann senses this change, and finances the Kismet in a way that would make modern activist investors proud. As Riggs explains:

‘Mickey buys this tiny parcel on the Strip, too small to develop even as a parking lot, but right next to a major casino, and announces plans for a ‘mini-casino,’ like those little convenience stores you see next to gas stations? fast in and out, one slot machine, one roulette wheel, one blackjack table. The Italian Business Men next door think of all the downscale traffic this will bring in right under the noses of their refined clientele, and they go crazy, threatening, screaming, flying their mothers in first class to stand and glare at Mickey in silent reproach. Sometimes not so silent. Finally the casino gives in, Mickey gets his asking price, some insane multiple of what he paid, which will now go to finance the renovation and expansion of the Kismet Casino and Lounge, where he’s become an active partner.’

(Pynchon 252).

The former suburban developer transitions to the new system seamlessly, turning a profit without doing anything, a pure expression of real estate speculation. In this situation, the real estate developer naturally becomes marked as a possible transformational object, considering they have the knowledge of how the modern economy works. This is particularly true in Los Angeles, a city built on real estate development as opposed to industry, natural resources, or transportation (Davis 25).⁸⁷ We might recall our discussion of the characters through knowledge of land. We found that this understanding was limited, due to the impossibility of total comprehension of land and history, particularly when parts of the space are fictional. Aunt Reet, the broker, offers the closest to full understanding of the world through knowledge of land-use, and there is an implication that Mickey knows even more, since he helped build the world as it is. He is one of the envisioners that made Los Angeles, and the method he uses to purchase the Kismet reveals that he understands where capitalism is going—toward a system where the product only matters in how it allows you to leverage it. However, though in the novel his economic maneuvering reveals something about the future of capitalism, he is not a transformational object, and in the end Doc finding him does not clear anything up. He is shuffled from place to place at the whims of others, namely the Golden Fang. It turns out that

⁸⁷ While there is a common belief that Los Angeles was built on oil (see, for example, Paul Thomas Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood*), Davis argues convincingly that the origins of Los Angeles lay in real estate speculation, with wealthy boosters selling land to middle-class midwesterners.

Vigilant California accidentally kidnapped him during the raid at Channel View, and so finding him will not actually tell Doc that much about what happened there or why. He is posed as central to the entire detective story, only to be revealed as collateral damage. He is the capitalist, but the Golden Fang is capital and so controls him, bringing him back to the fold he wants to escape.

The film truly kicks off when Sportello goes to search for Wolfmann, and as the story gets more and more complicated he is one of the few characters who is completely absent. But when Doc finally encounters Wolfmann, he reveals very little. He does not tell Sportello who kidnapped him, whether the FBI is involved, what role Sloan plays, or where Shasta has gone. He tells him only that someone is helping him get over his “bad hippie dream” (Anderson 01:37:03). He seems medicated and scared, at the mercy of something “much more vast” than himself (Anderson 01:29:59). It serves the same purpose as Doc’s response to Fenway’s mini-soliloquy in the novel, revealing that in late capital there is no one who truly understands what is happening, that even those on the front page of the business section are at the mercy of the system they helped build. Fenway seems to believe he and the other capitalists are still in control, that by acting as midwives and consiglieri to the Golden Fang (capital), they can harness its power. But as Sportello points out, Fenway and his ilk cannot see the full scale of what is happening, because they are blind to the “bad-karma level” getting jacked ever higher, the class hatred “slowly building” under Fenway’s nose (Pynchon 347). *Inherent Vice* presents Mickey as yet another transformational object, this time as the person who will explain the contemporary economic shift. But he is flying blind like the rest of us, revealing how even those in power no longer understand how the economy functions. Instead, they just tinker around the edges, working to hide the truth, that the system has collapsed, and we are just stumbling forward.

Looking at all these various threads of aproductivity in the two works, how they posit any number of transformational objects, putting the audience in the position of the man who “walks as quickly as possible through a gallery until a picture actually arrests his attention,” we begin to see that for Sportello and the viewer the transformational object is the search itself (Phillips 74). In calling attention to the incoherent density (to paraphrase Pynchon) of neoliberalism, it reveals that it is a distraction from a secular crisis, an ideological and economic smokescreen that hides the truth of contemporary life. The work of art becomes the thing that provokes a new understanding of the world, but it does so through refusing any synthesis, in not coming together.

The remainder, what is left unresolved, forces us to recognize how much of existence does not fit within the concept. In one last dialectical twist, however, this recognition is revealed not as a permanent transformation but rather a momentary glimpse at a system that then hides itself again; though Doc and the viewer for a moment seemed to start unraveling the mysteries around them, this passes. All this is symbolized in the last shot of the film. Doc drives off with Shasta, and for a brief moment looks at the camera that has been following him, only for the screen to cut to black. He sees the truth of the narrative only at its end, how meaning comes not through his experiences but rather through what has been excerpted, through the whims of any number of actors vainly searching for synthesis, often in tension with each other.

Earlier, I mentioned Adorno's quote that art makes "itself resistant to meanings", while negative dialectics "refuses to clutch at any immediate thing" (Adorno *ND* 15). What we find in *Inherent Vice* is the latter, the refusal to grab any one thing and imbue it with particular meaning. Instead, it is only in how the individual parts are constructed and aligned that produces an understanding. One's life does not have a plot, but is rather simply searching for the transformational object, the thing that will imbue it with meaning. The construction of *Inherent Vice's* narrative resembles "a cutting room experience," baroque details shaved off a story that we do not see (Didion *WA* 13). It is what remains when individual existence within late capital is totalized into the concept of Life under Late Capitalism. As such, it reveals the non-identity between the two, that the former cannot be cleanly subsumed into the latter. The absence of narrative reconciliation forces a dawning realization of the distance between economic signifiers and the economy itself, the awareness that for all the movement surrounding us nothing is being added or subtracted, that it is all an elaborate shell game. It is only in ideology that exchange does not leave a remainder.

Conclusion

“The mobile spins to its collision”; the constant exchange of sweet nothings that constitutes the contemporary economy keeps breaking down, impossible to pay debts and pandemics revealing that it was all a facade, flows of fictitious capital built on top of a stagnant system it hates and hides (Bowie 1971). This all sounds like Baudrillard, though it is not meant to. It is not that truth and the system and everything else do not exist or are virtual or simulacra. If that were the case, we could abandon it all without a second thought, discarding the fakery. Rather, in vulgar terms, the base has become the superstructure, hiding its truth through its existence and operation. Its dominance is so total that no alternative can be realistically imagined, even as its failures become ever more apparent.

Linear narratives have collapsed in on themselves, the unreachable past and the foreclosed future pressing in until the present becomes a permanent liminal space, the stage in-between two unreachable times, a seeming contradiction. Narratives try to recover, wandering through this not-so-new wasteland like the frequent flier whose plane has been canceled, leaving them to stagger about among the duty-free shops and fast food joints. Maybe mapping the airport will replace the linear, teleological narrative that once pulled us into the future. But no matter how hard we work, the map is never accurate, much less complete. So we turn to utopian movements, the Hare Krishna monks handing out literature, hoping they have the way out of this Byzantine space. But they are stuck in the terminal like the rest of us, and so we stagger forward, haunted by a past that got us here, unable to imagine a future elsewhere.

Where does this leave us?

All we can do is soldier on, dreaming of alternatives we do not believe, desperately searching for the thing or person that will allow us to free ourselves from the end of history and open up the possibility of a better world. So we examine each object, negating its utopian potential and declaring it false without losing hope or letting it lead us to despair. Instead we move on to the next, doing the same thing, unraveling ideological fiction after ideological fiction, slowly learning about how we got here and why we understand the present as we do, until there is a dawning awareness that maybe the search itself is the object; in pessimistic analysis and demoralized seeking, a better world is palpable.

Perhaps this is all too poetic, inappropriate for the context, imprecise, the crude ramblings

of an academic who has “gone native,” appropriating the voice he studies. Forgive me if so. How else can an essay such as this end? It cannot cohere into a singular realization, a definitive statement of what exactly aproductivity is. Aproductivity is an absence that takes many forms, an atmosphere of negativity, described through causes (the secular crisis of capitalism), metaphors and allegories (the aesthetic form of negative dialectics) and indices that simultaneously produce and point at it (the breakdown of narrative, the failure of utopia).

I could summarize the various discontinuous sections, the leaving behind the telescope through which we analyzed the various stars as individuals and instead looking at the whole. In chapter one, I examined the secular crisis of capitalism and the way neoliberalism acts as both economic structure and as an ideology, hiding what everybody instinctively knows. Then I turned to questions of the End of History, the way Fukuyama’s thesis hit a truth even as it missed the mark. History has ended, not only due to the failure of the U.S.S.R, but also because of the failure of the youth movements of the 1960’s. It was only then that we arrived at Adorno and his peculiar dialectics, a process of constant negation, a refusal to synthesize but instead falsify both thesis and anti-thesis. This is the structure of aproductivity, which does the same in art, and differs slightly from Adorno’s traditional aesthetics, which are centered around the monad instead of the nomad.

To start chapter two, I turn to *Inherent Vice*, a work of aproductivity par excellence as both a novel and film. The first section positioned the novel as a descendant of Chandler and second-wave modernism, and argued against understanding it as a pastiche. I did so through adopting Gérard Genette’s terminology, which also allowed me to argue that its differences from lineage are due to its interest in the relationship between the particular and the universal. From there, I turned to the film, with the next two sections reading its broken narrative temporality as an index pointing to the secular crisis of capitalism, as well as a way of examining the tortured connection between concept and thing. We found a scenario where the contingent is no longer subservient to rational time yet unable to fully free itself and produce something new, instead standing on its own, with the false-subjectivity of the camera striving and failing to produce a new form of narrative. In this scenario, there is naturally a turn to space and geography, so that is where the thesis went. The novel and film attempt to use geography to replace linear temporality in different ways, but both fail, foiled by the inability to talk about the particular without it transforming into a universal.

Having exhausted discussion of the narrative aspects of aproductivity in *Inherent Vice*, I then opine on the relationship between aproductivity and utopia, how a failed utopian impulse is a prerequisite for aproductivity to arise, yet at the same time aproductive works reveal the impossibility of representing utopia, in part because of philosophical difficulties and in part due to our position within the secular crisis of capitalism and the dominance of liberalism. I conclude by looking at Mickey Wolfmann as a possible transformational object, which once again leads us back to discussions of the particular and universal, as well as the way financializing the economy has produced a system that has gotten away from those who created it and benefit from it, a last-ditch slider that spins away from both pitcher and catcher.

Or perhaps, in the spirit of negativity, the conclusion should point out the gaps and absences within the project, the different directions an analysis of aproductivity can take. For example, the thesis talks of the 1970's and after 2008, but skips the decades in-between, the seeming boom years of the 1980's and 1990's. And relatedly, what is the relationship between aproductivity and post-modern art? After all, Pynchon and Anderson are commonly understood as post-modern artists, and post-modern art seems to arise around the same time as aproductivity. I tend to dance around the question, as it would require expanding the scope of an already long thesis. I do hint at the topic, suggesting at times that post-modernism is the logic not of late capitalism, as Jameson famously claims, but that of neoliberalism. This solves the temporal issues that plague Jameson (he uses Mandel's version of late capitalism, which begins in the 50's, yet postmodernity as an artistic category arrives later, in the 1980's, not with the mid-century modernists), and offers an explanation why aproductivity tends to disappear during this time. But perhaps the most famous example of aproductive film—*The Big Lebowski* (directed by the Coen Brothers)—comes out in 1998, complicating this schematic periodization. Certainly further investigation on these years and aproductivity is necessary.

I also did not go in the opposite direction, looking backwards to find aspects of aproductivity already within modern art. We might start with *Easy Rider*, which as I mentioned in a footnote might be the first aproductive film. But as we saw in chapter one, according to Marx each crisis prior to the secular crisis contributes to the latter. This being the case, it should be possible to do a Foucauldian genealogy on the concept, identifying glimpses of it in the art of previous crises. For example, modernist art and philosophy deals with similar themes as aproductive works, particularly a belief that they are positioned at the end of art and philosophy,

as well as the individual searching for meaning in a broken world. Obviously, modernism and aproductivity are already linked through Adorno, whose philosophy and aesthetic theory is thoroughly modernist. Can we find aspects of aproductivity in modernist art, particularly authors such as Samuel Beckett (someone touched upon in chapter one) and Nathanael West (whose *Day of the Locust* I originally considered aproductive *avant la lettre*)? If this is the case, however, then would aproductivity actually be linked to the secular crisis, or would it just be a mode that arises anytime capitalism is in crisis, destroying the periodization I set up in the thesis? Finally, if modernism has some relationship to aproductivity, then it would be worth exploring reification theory and its relationship to the concept.

Moving away from the questions of the economic and periodization, for all my talk of Los Angeles' relationship to *Inherent Vice*, I did not draw any larger conclusions from the section. Los Angeles is often a site of not only aproductive film (which would be explicable through Hollywood's tendency to navel-gaze) but also literature and music. And what of aproductivity and the South? In chapter one, I mentioned Donald Glover's *Atlanta* as aproductive and then abandoned it for the rest of the essay. As someone who grew up there, I think that the show's aproductivity grows out the city's aproductivity. This would be another avenue to explore, especially with regards to race and Southern studies.

At the beginning of chapter two, I explored the relationship between *Inherent Vice* the novel and Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*. One thing I touch on but did not explore is that Robert Altman adapted Chandler's novel in 1973. Considering Altman's famous influence on Paul Thomas Anderson, it would be interesting to explore the four works together, comparing the adaptations in concert and in so doing investigating the detective story's relationship to narrative aproductivity, or in another constellation altogether.

Finally, there are affinities between what I have described as the aproductive mode and European art cinema of the 1960's and 1970's, particularly New German cinema, such as Wim Wenders' road trilogy,⁸⁸ one of which was referenced in chapter one. As Michel Foucault notes, neoliberalism originates in pre-war Germany and becomes the governmental mode after the war. Does it bear a relationship to the New German Cinema that comes later?⁸⁹ The relationship

⁸⁸ *Alice in the Cities* (1974) *Wrong Move* (1975) *Kings of the Road* (1976)

⁸⁹ German writers working in English tend to refer to the movement as Young German Cinema, while Americans use the term New German Cinema, associating it with the new wave in France. Nonetheless, both refer to the same movement.

between neoliberalism, aproductivity, and Germany is another possible site of investigation. This is an especially enticing direction because Adorno wrote on New German Cinema (in “Transparencies on Film”), a former student of his (Alexander Kluge) became one of the organizers of the movement, and the directors were heavily influenced by American culture, particularly Hollywood, turning Los Angeles into a privileged place even as they filmed in Germany. As one character explains in *Kings of the Road*, “America has colonized our subconscious,” and it is Hollywood who is responsible (Wenders 1976).

All of these are possible ways to explore aproductivity in ways this thesis fails to do. But there is also a risk of over-expanding the term, that asking it to cover too much terrain will empty it of meaning, or that the opposite happens, that the constant exploration and negation ends up shrinking the concept until it is just a description of *Inherent Vice* and a few other scattered artworks.

Again, then, where does this leave us?

It leaves us stuck in a “corroded past” we can never escape, striving toward a foreclosed future, hoping that somehow it will be something new, even as in our heart of hearts we know otherwise (Pynchon 110). It leaves us sitting in a broken-down system staring down the apocalypse, a house on stilts already shaking in the wind thrown off from an incoming hurricane. We wander around, grabbing various objects and shaking them, checking to see if they will save us or free us, even as we are unsure what we want to be freed and saved from. It leaves us with that damn sound. I hear it now, coming from my speaker, enveloping the words as Mac Miller sings of how nothing has changed yet everything seems different, as he dreams of happy endings even while recognizing his future is already foreclosed, his death preordained, symbolic of a generation whose present is bleak and future bleaker. I could turn the stereo off, but what difference would it make? The woozy synth cannot be contained; it is the background noise to our life, emanating from every half-empty mixed-use development, the musical expression of our failed world. So I continue to listen to it, looking in the sound for the negative image of some “undrowned Lemuria, risen and redeemed, where the American fate, mercifully, failed to transpire” (Pynchon 341).

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