



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity
Partner Network



Article

How to Cite: Gazi, J 2016 "On Deleuze and Guattari's *Italian Wedding Fake Book*: Pynchon, Improvisation, Social Organisation, and Assemblage". *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, 4(2): 11, pp. 1–23, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/orbit.192>

Published: 18 July 2016

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, which is a journal of the Open Library of Humanities.

Copyright:

© 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Open Access:

Orbit: A Journal of American Literature is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

The Open Library of Humanities is an open access non-profit publisher of scholarly articles and monographs.



ARTICLE

"On Deleuze and Guattari's *Italian Wedding Fake Book*: Pynchon, Improvisation, Social Organisation, and Assemblage"

Jeeshan Gazi

Independent Researcher, GB
jeeshan.g@gmail.com

This article examines Pynchon's literary invention of Deleuze and Guattari's *Italian Wedding Fake Book*. Featured in his novel *Vineland* (1990), previous scholarship has either dismissed the reference as a throwaway joke or argued that Pynchon's invocation of the philosophers is intended to point us towards the author's engagement with *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). Following Charles Hollander's argument that Pynchon's jokes indicate important themes in his texts, this article looks beyond the reference to Deleuze and Guattari and to the author's alignment of these philosophers with a "fake book". A fake book is a book of basic chords, lyrics, and/or melody lines, which allows those who can read sheet music to improvise, or "fake", the performance of compositions. Given that it is Deleuze and Guattari's second collaboration of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) that addresses musicality in various guises, I focus on how Pynchon engages with the concepts of this latter text in terms of improvisation, social organisation, and assemblage. This engagement, I suggest, is less about influence that it is about identification. This is to say that Pynchon has long shared the philosophical outlook of Deleuze and Guattari, as demonstrated with reference to his short story "Entropy" (1960).

"... as in Zen, wisdom cannot always be separated from a peculiar sense of humor."¹

—Thomas Pynchon

This article examines the explicit reference to Deleuze and Guattari found in Thomas Pynchon's 1990 novel, *Vineland*. This is given in a scene in which the Vomitones, a local heavy-metal band led by Billy Barf, have been hired to play at a Mafioso wedding, a gig that could lead to dire consequences if they fail to impress...

Fortunately Ralph Wayvone's library happened to include a copy of the indispensable *Italian Wedding Fake Book*, by Deleuze & Guattari, which Gelsomina, the bride, to protect her wedding from such possible unlucky omens as blood on the wedding cake, had the presence of mind to slip indoors and bring back out to Billy Barf's attention. (*Vineland* 97)²

Molly Hite suggests the inclusion of this 'now notorious reference' is related to the author's meditation on power and gender in the novel, such that 'it may in fact be relevant that Pynchon here invokes the French writers whose *Anti-Oedipus* [1972] is a sustained diatribe against the psychoanalytic event propelling the subject out of the polymorphous garden of the imaginary and into the phallogentric wasteland of the symbolic', though she chooses not to pursue this line of thought (136). Convincingly, James Berger identifies in *Vineland* the presence of both a Heideggerian and a Deleuzian-Guattarian response to the catastrophe of New Left activism, as a quietist and a terrorist position, respectively. The relevance of the reference relates to "these absolute critiques of a phallic economy in the context of that late '60s moment when the counterculture tried utterly to divest itself of 'Amerika' only to find those same forces of power and sexuality in itself" (Berger 181). This is to say that *Anti-Oedipus'* main subject of "an inner fascism that structures sexuality, politics, and representation and

¹ Thomas Pynchon, "Liner Notes for *Spiked! The Music of Spike Jones*," 15. This text will be cited as *LNS* in subsequent references.

² *Vineland* will be cited as *VL* in subsequent references.

that is apparently inseparable from these latter structures" (Berger 179) provides "a theoretical context for the catastrophes of the New Left in the late '60s" and the "political sadomasochism" (180) of the revolutionary characters in Pynchon's novel. Daniel R. White acknowledges the reference as further evidence, following the image of shattering glass that opens the text and which White privileges in importance, that the "narrative fragmentation of *Vineland* is precisely into paranoia in the old Greek sense, ramified by schizophrenia in a defiant new sense" (207). The latter being that of the "schizophrenic discourse" formulated by Deleuze and Guattari, by which the image of shattering glass "metonymically transforms the logic of the plot into a spiral nebula of fragments, a look into any one of which reveals a monadic world itself about to fracture, as if the book were a person thinking beside himself, deranged, deterritorialized, splitting into multiple selves" (White 207). For Hanjo Berressem the *Fake Book*, amongst other instances, signifies the 'schizophrenic' (in the Deleuzian-Guattarian sense of dynamic deterritorialization) moments of *Vineland*—"moment[s] of purely irresponsible (and thus tragically cooptable), mindless counterforce" (50).³ Such moments are rare in *Vineland*, for the text is otherwise a literary space that is analogous to the psychic space described by Lacan, which, in turn, is aligned with the flow of forces in the folded, "möbius space" of the Lorenz attractor, such that the subject is "situated in an uncomfortable middle" (Berressem 50) between the imaginary and the symbolic.

Yet this previous scholarship has failed to address the joke itself, if at all, honing in on Pynchon's citing of Deleuze and Guattari, rather than his specific literary invention of Deleuze and Guattari's *Italian Wedding Fake Book*. Elsewhere, scholars who have addressed the *Fake Book* specifically as a joke have tended to underplay its significance for that very reason. Benjamin Noys characterises the joke as "a throwaway reference" that "contains more than a hint of sarcasm" (180). And David Porush suggests, jokingly, that "some New Historicist will put another nail in the coffin of post-structuralism by taking Pynchon's tease a little too seriously" (31). However, a serious look at this joke is useful, for as Charles Hollander has pointed out, "instruction is in

³ By "cooptable," Berressem is describing the struggle between revolution and control in *Vineland* (42).

the subtext" of Pynchon's jokes (205), and "[t]he more elaborate the joke, the more likely it is to be thematically important; the more seemingly removed the passage is from the manifest issues of the text, the deeper we may have to look to find the referent" (206).⁴ I believe this particular reference falls into the former category, and Noys points us in the right direction by highlighting an important, yet neglected, aspect of the joke when he notes that "a fake book is a collection of musical leads to help a performer learn new songs quickly" (180). Whilst previous scholarship on this reference has mostly focused on *Anti-Oedipus*, it is for Pynchon's specific alignment of Deleuze and Guattari with a 'fake book'—a book of basic chords, lyrics, and/or melody lines, that allows those who can read sheet music to improvise, or 'fake', the performance of compositions—that I suggest it is actually their second collaborative work, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980) that is key to identifying the further thematic relevance of the joke, in both the context of *Vineland's* wedding scene and the wider narrative of the book. For Ian Buchanan considers *A Thousand Plateaus* to be "one of the most important and interesting pieces of work ever done on music" (1), and it is by way of this text, "whose authors recommend that you read it as you would listen to a record" (ix), as its translator Brian Massumi has stated, that various thinkers give an account of improvisational music in regards to Deleuzian-Guattarian concepts.

Eugene Holland aligns improvisational jazz and classical orchestration with the nomad science and royal science described by Deleuze and Guattari. This alignment of musical and scientific forms is appropriate given that each chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* features the same concepts discussed in all the others, but within a different context—whether literary, musical, political, mathematical, etc. Each chapter functions like a monad that gives the reader of several, or all, chapters of the text a suitably multiple perspective on the dynamic concepts conveyed by its authors. The two forms of music Holland describes—that of nomad and classical—align with the

⁴ Hollander successfully demonstrates his point with his analysis of the "highly charged" allusions Pynchon makes in the sequence of *Gravity's Rainbow* in which American soldier Tyrone Slothrop is 'treated' to a selection of English candies (204).

specified sciences in regards to both their procedure and the social ordering they imply, and I aim to explain here how both points are communicated in Pynchon's *Vineland*, as well as in his subsequent novel of *Mason & Dixon* (1997). Following this, I will discuss Jeremy Gilbert's take on 'rhizomatic' music, which accounts for how music of any kind may be improvisational, and thus helps to emphasise how the specific performance of Billy Barf's Vomitones at the Italian wedding aligns with Deleuzian-Guattarian thought. I then discuss the nature of assemblage in *Vineland*, and how it points us towards a way of understanding how much of Pynchon's humour works, before closing with thoughts on how one might understand the relationship between the three thinkers in regards to their shared philosophical outlooks.

Eugene Holland casts improvisational jazz as "nomadic music" in accordance with the features of nomad science put forward in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

Royal science proceeds by extracting invariant ('universal') laws from the variations of matter, in line with the binary opposition of form and matter: matter is essentially variable, but 'obeys' formal laws that are universal. [...] Nomad science, by contrast, proceeds not by extracting a constant but by following the variations or 'singularities' of matter. (Holland 22)

The two key features upon which the two sciences of royal and nomad differ are, firstly, their procedures, and secondly, the organisational modes they imply of social order. The first feature of procedure concerns the difference between 'invariant law' and 'variations' given above. Improvisational jazz, as a form of nomad music, is aligned with nomad science, while classical music is aligned with royal science. This is because nomad music, like nomad science, is "a matter of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'itineration' rather than 'iteration' or reproduction according to universal law: it traces a path that can be followed, but not predicted" (Holland 23). Rather than restricting itself to the written score, which constitutes the invariant law in the context of music,

improvisational jazz repudiates 'reproducing' in favour of following or indeed creating. Whereas a classical symphony orchestra merely reproduces

in performance what the composer has already created and written down in the score, jazz bands intentionally depart from what is already known in order to improvise and create something new. Even when working from a chord-chart, for example, jazz-improvisation is far more itinerative than iterative: solos vary in length, there is no set order as to who takes one when, a clever soloist can change keys or tempo unexpectedly and challenge the others to follow his or her lead, and so on. (Holland 26)

Holland's citing of "a chord-chart" is important here as this is just what a fake book is. Further, it is notable that the Vomitones, performing under the pseudonym "Gino Baglione and the Paisans", have been hired by Ralph Wayvone Sr. to replace a "society combo," which itself was chosen due to "the San Francisco Symphony [being] on tour overseas" (VL 94).

The second point of differentiation relates to the social organisations that emerge as the consequence of adopting either invariant laws or iteration. Royal science, Deleuze and Guattari write, "is inseparable from a 'hylomorphic' model implying both a form that organizes matter and a matter prepared for the form; it has often been shown that this schema derives less from technology or life than from a society divided into governors and governed, and later, intellectuals and manual laborers" (ATP 407).⁵ Nomad science "is another organization of work and of the social field through work," yet one which "follows the connections between singularities of matter and traits of expression, and lodges on the level of these connections, whether they be natural or forced" (ATP 407). Given the 'laws' of the composition and the strict direction of the conductor, Holland equates classical music to the hierarchical nature of royal science, while improvisational jazz shares the structure of nomad science, because

in jazz improvisation, there is no need for a band-leader (even if soloists sometimes serve such a function temporarily, and get the band to follow them in a spontaneous key- or tempo-change), whereas classical symphony orchestras always have a conductor as well as a composer. (Holland 24)

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* will be cited as ATP in subsequent references.

This dichotomy is significant in the context of Pynchon's *Vineland*, given that the author pitches anarchic collectives such as the 24fps against the fascistic federal government. The former attempt to erase any division between the “governors and governed” (*ATP* 407) in their form of collectivism. The 24fps certainly have an organisation of labour in the group, with Frenesi Gates specified as cinematographer, Zipi and Ditzah as editors, and DL Chastain as producer—yet there is no director, no member of the crew who would sit at the top of the hierarchy and ultimately bear responsibility, or authorship, for the film produced.⁶ “They went looking for trouble, they found it, they filmed it, and then quickly got the record of their witness someplace safe”; their method of film production is improvisation (*VL* 165). In contrast, the hierarchical structure of the federal government is exemplified by the fact that the main villain of *Vineland*, Brock Vond, is not even of great importance in the wider context of that organisation. Brock, we are told, desires to be at “that level where everybody knew everybody else, where however political fortunes below might bloom and die, the same people, the Real Ones, remained year in and year out, keeping what was desirable flowing their way,” and he is in “stubborn denial” of the fact that “no one of those among whom he wished to belong would ever regard him as other than a thug whose services had been hired” (*VL* 276).

This description of “the Real Ones” of the upper echelon further echoes royal science in the operation of its hierarchical structure, which, Holland notes, works “to extract abstract concepts from the concrete operations of productive practice, conception and execution become distinct activities, and each gets assigned to a distinct status group” (24). This is to say that royal science disempowers manual labourers by taking their results and empowering intellectuals to formalise scientific laws on the basis of them. The analogue in *Vineland* is seen in Vond being just a thug hired by those at the top to keep “what was desirable flowing their way” (*VL* 276), but

⁶ This is to suggest that the director is usually the key author of a filmic text, hence the person at the top of the labour hierarchy. Less idealistically, in terms of commercial filmmaking the producer or studio head would be at the peak of the labour structure, yet the producer does not take this position in the 24fps either, as, rather than acting as the enabler of the production through the attainment of funding, DL's role is specified as “tactics and timetables” (*VL* 195).

the specific theme of scientific production is present in Pynchon's subsequent novel *Mason & Dixon*, which recounts the hard labour the two astronomers undertake in an assignment that takes them across North America for a number of years, only for the expedition's leader, Charles Mason, to be denied fellowship with the Royal Society, in favour of Reverend Dr. Nevil Maskelyne (already aligned with the hierarchy thanks to his being the brother-in-law of Clive of India). (*Mason & Dixon* 436–37).⁷

This reading of *Mason & Dixon* as in dialogue, or convergence, with *A Thousand Plateaus* provides another facet to understanding the role of music in that text. John Joseph Hess provides a detailed examination of how the novel “offers Pynchon’s sustained investigation of the domestic, political, and theoretical dimensions of musical harmony” (4). The figure of harmony here is used by Pynchon to highlight “connections between musical and social orders” (Hess 7), and Hess cites a particularly good example in which the characters Ethelmer and Euphrenia bring the theme of the “joint transformation of musical forms and social visions” to the fore (14). In regards to this passage, Hess emphasises Pynchon’s explicit invocation of Plato’s *The Republic* within the wider exchange, yet the equation of types of music and types of social order is also aligned with the social orders ascribed by Deleuze and Guattari to the sciences, which is further aligned to music by Holland.

“Just what I keep listening for, ‘Thelmer,” Euphrenia nods, “in the songs and hymns of your own American day, yet do I seek in vain after madness, and Rapture,— hearing but a careful attending to the same Forms, the same Interests, as of old,— and have you noticed the way everything, suddenly, has begun to gravitate toward B-flat major? That’s a sign of trouble ahead. Marches and Anthems, for Triumphs that have not yet been made real. Already ‘tis possible to walk the streets of New-York, passing among Buskers and Mongers, from one street-air to the next, and whistle along, and never have to change Key from B-flat major.” (*MD* 262)

⁷ *Mason & Dixon* will be cited as *MD* in subsequent references.

In this passage from *Mason & Dixon* the “martial” music is a “sign of trouble ahead”, of homogeneity and striation, everyone singing the same song—a song that provides the seeds of a fascism to come. This finds its equivalence in the procedural and organisational mode of royal science, whilst the music of “madness, and Rapture” (*MD* 262), which Socrates warned against (Plato 94), is music that aligns with Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of “nomad science, which presents itself as an art as much as a technique,” and in which “the division of labor fully exists” but “does not employ the form-matter duality (even in the case of biunivocal correspondences)” (*ATP* 407). In fact, Pynchon’s characterisation of the kind of “madness, and Rapture” that Euphrenia seeks is very much aligned with nomad science, which “involves all kinds of deformations, transmutations, passages to the limit, operations in which each figure designates an ‘event’ much more than an essence” (*ATP* 399). For as Euphrenia recalls, “most of the pieces us’d to be one Dance-Tune after another, or, for the Morning Next, a similar Enchainment of Hymns,— no connection, Gigue, Saraband, Bourrée, la la la well a-trip thro’ the Zinnias of Life, and how merry, of course” (*MD* 263). Yet now she finds that the music being produced in the nation is akin to Mason and Dixon’s line across America, which “shares this modern Quality of Departure and Return, wherein, year upon Year, the *Ritornelli* are not merely the same notes again and again, but variant each time, as Clocks have tick’d onward” (*MD* 263). This latter sentiment of course invokes Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ritornello, which Arjen Kleinherenbrink explains is vital to understanding the philosophers’ concept of territory, the constant modulation of which is perfectly encapsulated by the musical term (209). For a territory is an assemblage of components that is identifiable, or “consolidated”, through a repetition that nevertheless alternates in accordance with its coming into contact with other territorial assemblages. In this respect, it is arguably *A Thousand Plateaus*, rather than Plato’s *The Republic*, that better frames the content of the exchange cited above. Ethelmer’s invocation of Plato is used by Pynchon to characterise his naivety; like Plato with his essentialist forms and metaphysics of transcendence, the college-aged character conceives of political progress as a continuity which merely becomes jagged by revolution but nevertheless persists. Ethelmer’s stance is thus equivalent to

that of the Dithyrambists “who were not changing the Forms of Song [...] so much as mixing up one with another, or abandoning them altogether, as their madness might dictate” (*MD* 262). The older Euphrenia, on the other hand, recognises the forging of an American territory as a process that is in constant modulation, yet in danger of striation. Euphrenia's characterisation of Mason and Dixon's “West Line” as sharing in the ritornello's quality of becoming variant with every departure and return, as if it is a zone in which change is trapped within progress stunted, aligns with the “slowness that suggests eternal stability to human eyes” that Kleinherenbrink attributes to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of ritornello as territory (221). And it is this “slowness” as perceived by living beings that is also enforced by them, through their tendency to striate the modulation of territory—“the fundamental *openness* of a home” whose “continued existence is a matter of *work* and *change*”—into homogeneous, or *harmonious*, wholes:

Such an idea of openness opposes our human tendency to hypostatise and universalise territorial assemblages, for example when the free market, the nation, ‘our’ people, or parts or even all of Nature are imagined as harmonious wholes that ought to forever exist in a certain way by some divine, historical or natural right. (Kleinherenbrink 221)

Further, as with Euphrenia's complaint that contemporary American music is falling into a conformity of “Marches and Anthems” (*MD* 262), Kleinherenbrink notes that the modulation of territorial assemblage is referred to by Deleuze and Guattari as “rhythm” to “emphasise that transcoding is characterised by contingency and elasticity” (214). In this characterisation, rhythm is contrasted with the “military march”:

There is rhythm whenever there is a transcoded passage from one milieu to another, a communication of milieus, coordination between heterogeneous space-times. Drying up, death, intrusion have rhythm. It is well known that rhythm is not meter or cadence, even irregular meter or cadence: there is nothing less rhythmic than a military march. (*ATP* 345)

On a final note concerning this exchange, in response to Euphrenia's use of the term "West Line" for Mason and Dixon's endeavour, Reverend Cherrycoke relates the "journey west" as being "in the same sense as the Sun," "to live, raise Children, grow older, and die," while "to turn Eastward, is somehow to resist time and age, to work against the Wind, seek ever the dawn, even, as who can say, defy Death" (*MD* 263). This aligns with the notion of forward momentum described in the passage from Deleuze and Guattari above, yet it also recalls their characterisation of American literature itself as rhizomatic, in contrast to that of Europe, as "directions in America are different: the search for arborescence and the return to the Old World occur in the East. But there is the rhizomatic West with its Indians without ancestry, its ever-receding limit, its shifting and displaced frontiers" (21). Here, the Westward forging of America is a forging into the unknown given that its natives had not (yet, at least) striated their activity into a history, hence their being "without ancestry", whilst to return to the East is to fall back into the Old World of stability and norms, of homogeneity.⁸ That Mason and Dixon's West Line is said to share the quality of the ritornello is to say that Pynchon's account of their journey is one which exemplifies America's struggle to forge a wholly original identity against the persistence of their European roots, and to resist falling back on the conceptions of nation already established in Europe.⁹

Returning to the *Italian Wedding Fake Book*, Jeremy Gilbert offers a different Deleuzian-Guattarian take on improvisational music, which he refers to as "rhizomatic" music (124). I believe that Gilbert's conception of improvisational music is compatible with Holland's and offers an elaboration that is useful for two major reasons. Firstly,

⁸ For Deleuze and Guattari, all smooth spaces eventually become striated: "the integration of the nomad into the State is a vector traversing nomadism from the very beginning, from the first act of war against the State" (*ATP* 436). The Natives of North America eventually form their own "history" – fixing their identity and culture in opposition to that of the European settlers, given the Europeans' writing of their own history in a manner that erases their presence. As Stefan Mattessich writes, addressing *Mason & Dixon* under Deleuzian-Guattarian theory: "The analogy between writing and colonizing rests on an act of defection that, as it writes *over* the black space, also articulates it as blank—it both detaches the space and detaches itself from it in a dual movement of projection and capture that catches up the 'West' in a specular autonomy" (232).

⁹ For an alternative, detailed, examination of the concept of the nation and its deconstruction in *Mason & Dixon*, see Pöhlmann 177–276.

Gilbert provides a more detailed examination of the role of composition in Deleuzian-Guattarian thought in relation to performance, which is significant given the nature of a fake book; secondly, he points out how improvisational music is not limited to jazz, thus allowing for the performance of Billy Barf's Vomitones to be "rhizomatic" (120).

Concerning the first point, Gilbert, like Holland, writes that "[i]mprovised music does not have 'composers' and 'performers': it is composed and de-composed as it is performed, even when it takes place within pre-arranged parameters" (121). Such "pre-arranged parameters" can include, of course, a fake book. However, Gilbert also points out that "Deleuze and Guattari generally write in such a way that the terms 'music' and 'composition' can be read as entirely synonymous. When writing about 'music', they almost invariably write about composers: music, it is implied, is something that composers do" (121). The significance of this is, contra-Holland and his distinction between nomad music and classical music, the suggestion that Deleuze and Guattari are affirming a social hierarchy in the process of music-making:

they seem happy to perpetuate [...] the ordering which places composition clearly above performance in terms of importance to the process of music-making, implicitly maintaining a rigid separation between the two: a product of the capitalist division of labour virtually unknown prior to the advent of European modernity and still quite alien to many living traditions of musical practice. (Gilbert 121)

Gilbert, however, offers an elaboration, useful to Holland, when he writes that, in any case, the performance of music—meaning *the music itself*—can transcend its composition to be considered a dynamic entity in its own right. This is to recognise

that musics from many periods and many places are characterised by a high level of collective and/or individual improvisation on the part of their performers, and that despite their differences, all of these musics share certain affective similarities. This suggests that the specific arrangement of force — the 'assemblage', in Deleuzian terms — which generates them does in fact have some bearing on the forms of affect which they can generate. As Deleuze and

Guattari themselves put it: “orchestration – instrumentation brings sound forces together or separates them, gathers or disperses them.” (Gilbert 122)

This is useful to us also, as it explains why “the parameters” of a fake book do not stop Billy Barf’s performance from “sharing a certain ‘rhizomatic’ quality” (Gilbert 119); the band’s performance itself is an arrangement of force that is produced by their collective improvisation. And this leads us to the second point, that it is not only improvisational jazz that constitutes “[m]usic made through a non-hierarchical process of lateral connections between sounds, genres and musicians, which aims always to open onto a cosmic space” (Gilbert 124). Gilbert cites a passage written by music journalist Simon Reynolds, who suggests the range of rhizomatic music to be diverse both in genre and technical manifestation:

The [image of the] rhizome – meaning a network of stems, like grass or ferns, that are laterally connected, as opposed to ‘hierarchical’ root systems like trees – is used by Deleuze and Guattari to evoke a kind of polymorphous diversity of the body politic. ‘Rhizomatic’ music might include the fractal, flow-motion funk of Can and early seventies Miles Davis (based around the ‘nobody solos and everybody solos’ principle), dub reggae (with its dismantling of the normal ranking of instruments in the mix), and the cut’n’splice mixology of hip-hop, house and jungle DJs. (Reynolds 388)

Gilbert supports Reynolds’s suggestion as to the vast array of genres and techniques of musical production that might constitute rhizomatic music, because whether produced via band, sampler, turntable, or sound mix,

in all cases a similar set of structures is destabilised, similar lines of flight are plotted, and a similar exercise in desiring-production is enabled. [...] The lines between composers, producers, performers and audiences are all deliberately blurred in these contexts, and the relationship between authorial intention and sonic product is radically destabilised.¹⁰ (Gilbert 120)

¹⁰ By “destabilised” Gilbert is putting forward a neologism which implies a simultaneous movement of establishing a sound whilst destroying any claims to an intended sonic structure.

Regardless of genre, the “technicalities of musical production” do not obstruct the music itself from being rhizomatic, and, further, the blurred lines described in the passage above not only accommodate the inclusion of the Vomitones as rhizomatic music-makers, but also gives an account of how Pynchon's depiction of the wedding performance is rhizomatic in itself. It is suggested by Gilbert that Evan Parker, for example, is not the sole author of the “pseudo-polyphonic solos” he produces, presumably because of the interaction of the band and the audience in directing where he goes with the solo (120). (Recall Kerouac's accounts of the crowd urging on the be-bop saxophonists in *On the Road*. [185]) This kind of interweaving of audience and musician is reflected in *Vineland* by way of the impromptu performance given by DL Chastain as the wedding gig progresses. That it is not clear how the Vomitones manage to provide a (successful) musical backing to DL's performance of her own, autobiographical, composition, “Floozy with an Uzi” (VL 104), marks what Gilbert describes as a “deliberate subversion of any simple process of composition, expression and interpretation,” one which generates “a continuous experience of trans-personal intensity—a body without organs” (121).¹¹

The allusions to rhizomatic music in Pynchon's writing will be revisited at the end of this article, but for now we will move on to Pynchon's play on the Deleuzian-Guattarian notion of assemblage in what could be described as the Vomitones' ‘becoming-Italian’ for the gig. Buchanan writes of Deleuze's concept that, rather than dressing up in a full bee costume, to dress as a bee by simply attaching black and yellow ribbons and an antenna is

successful because it calls to mind not someone in a costume, but what Deleuze and Guattari would call a ‘becoming-bee’. This strategy works by showing that the bee's essential characteristics are not intrinsic as such, but

¹¹ The ‘Body without Organs’ is another term for Deleuze and Guattari's ‘plane of immanence’ – it is upon such a plane that assemblages exchange components, such that there is a body/plane that functions without any fixed organs/concepts but rather dynamic organs/concepts that are in constant modulation. “A body without organs is not an empty body stripped of organs, but a body upon which that which serves as organs (wolves, wolf eyes, wolf jaws?) is distributed according to crowd phenomena, in Brownian motion, in the form of molecular multiplicities” (ATP 34).

extrinsic and detachable, and that man's fixed exterior is permeable. As such Deleuze and Guattari give the suggestive name 'assemblage converter' to these decoded fragments. (11)

In its purpose as an introduction to the concept its characterisation here is somewhat basic, yet it could be said that Pynchon, like Buchanan, provides us with a very basic take on the notion of becoming in this scene in *Vineland*.¹² For similar to the latter's "becoming-bee," the Vomitones' assemblage of an Italian's characteristics include "glossy black, short synthetic wigs, the snappy mint-colored matching suits of Continental cut, the gold jewelry and glue-on mustaches"—but they avoid employing "an ethnic accent" which would be noticeable "not only in [its] inauthenticity but also its potential for insult" (VL 94–95). That they do not end up calling to mind "someone in a costume" (Buchanan 11) is seen when the band is only found out to be frauds after an altercation in which "Billy's 'Italian' wig had begun to slide off, revealing his real hairstyle, dyed today a vivid turquoise. 'You guys ain't Gino Baglione and the Paisans!' Carmine shook his head, cracked his knuckles" (VL 96). As part of his attempt to defuse the violence, Isaiah Two Four, the band's drummer, explains how "the bruises on Gino aka Billy here's neck, [...] will have him wearing bandannas for weeks, with crossover implications musically" (VL 97), further reinforcing the Deleuzian notion of assemblage, perhaps here a 'becoming-jarocho.' Pynchon's depiction of assemblage in this scene works to subvert the notion of ethnic essentialism by presenting it as a performance, but it also tells us something about Pynchon's approach to music in *Vineland* and about the author's approach to humour across his canon of works.

This becomes clear when we recognise that this Paisan act is reminiscent of Spike Jones and the City Slickers. In his liner notes for the compilation CD *Spiked! The Music of Spike Jones*, Pynchon writes that their "Musical Depreciation Revue" tour

was always as much a visual as an audio act, with Spike running around deploying his pistol shots like a symphony conductor waving a baton, giants,

¹² For a more complex take on the concept of assemblage, outside of Deleuze and Guattari's own writing, see Massumi, *Parables*, and Kennedy.

midgets, animals, and tapdancers chasing on and off the stage, Slickers in fright wigs, chicken outfits and suits of reckless plaid that did not come cheap, and the lady harpist on "Holiday for Strings" smoking a cigar. (LNS 15)

One of the few non-fiction articles Pynchon has published during his career, I believe these liner notes point us towards a way of understanding the specific notion of assemblage present in *Vineland's* wedding scene, and also his sense of humour in regards to acronyms; the latter of which, Manfred Pütz argues, the author has developed "into a literary art with sophisticated functions and effects" (371). In his *Spiked!* notes, Pynchon relays the "often re-worked story" concerning the origins of Spike Jones' unique musical style (LNS 8). The story, as told by Jones, concerns his going to see Igor Stravinsky conduct *The Firebird* in Los Angeles.

Stravinsky is wearing some new patent leather shoes, and Spike is sitting close enough to notice that every time the composer-conductor goes up on his toes just before a downbeat, the shoes squeak. "Here would go the violins," as he told it, "and 'squeak squeak' would go his shoes. He should have worn a pair of sneakers. And the pseudos who went down to see the ballet, they didn't know what they were looking at anyway. They thought, Stravinsky's done it again. New percussive effects."

But then later, driving home, Spike gets to thinking— "...if you made planned mistakes in musical arrangements and took the place of regular notes in well-known tunes with sound effects, there might be some fun in it." (LNS 7–8)

If the absurd aesthetic of Jones's band remind us of the Vomitones' shoddy suits, glue-on mustaches and wigs, the Stravinsky story reminds us that Billy Barf's band are replacing the San Francisco orchestra, the "regular notes" of classical music being substituted for the "sound effects" provided by the electric instruments of a metal band. It is the notion of "planned mistakes" that defines much of Pynchon's humour in the wedding scene of *Vineland* and elsewhere, for, like Jones's replacement of regular notes with sound effects, Pynchon creates humour through the creation of what

in Deleuzian and Guattarian terms could be described as 'absurd molar aggregates.'¹³ This is very much the foundation for much of Pynchon's extensive use of acronyms. In his article on the presence of this literary device in Pynchon's work, Pütz maps several functions of the author's use of acronyms (as parody through its calculated over-use; the blurring of distinctions between authentic examples and literary hoaxes; the acronym and abbreviation as an index towards totalitarian tendencies; metaphorical and symbolic functions), as well as their possible purposes in his texts (a subversive challenge to authority; his favouring their "enigmatic and semantically open structure") (379). My notion of the absurd molar aggregate relates to Pynchon's employment of the acronym in the form of "what Alvin Gregg calls the 'acrostic acronym,' fashioned after the 'Principle of semantic Appropriateness,' or what another linguist [John Algeo] alternatively calls the 'prefabricated acronym,' which is chosen for its 'catchy suitability'" (Pütz 373). Such an acronym is formed on the basis of a 'target word', one which is often, though not always, already homonymous with an existing word—for example 'waste'/W.A.S.T.E in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965)—for which a search is instigated to find "a suitable larger phrase or combination of words that would serve as the ideal supplier for the elements of the intended target word" (Pütz 373). The way Pynchon uses the form of the prefabricated acronym is such that he turns "certain ideas or phrases into telling formulas which reveal their blatant contradiction, or satirically denounce their pretentious content" (Pütz 375). This is the formula of the absurd molar aggregate—the molar target word is made absurd by its incongruous constituent parts. Such examples are the acronym C.I.A for "Conjuración de los Insurgentes Anarquistas" or AC-DC for "Alameda County Death Cult" in *The Crying of Lot 49* (82, 84). Sometimes Pynchon reverses the formula, so that the constituent parts are made incongruous and absurd by the word they assemble:

¹³ According to Deleuze and Guattari, "molar aggregates" are the result of "stratification"; in other words they are the larger objects or concepts that we consider at the macro level; they are our perceptual or intellectual conception of the constituent components of the "molecular," or micro, level, in their assembled forms (*ATP* 45). In the case of the molar aggregate of an acronym, this is a concept as understood by the intellect.

for instance, True Worshipers of the Ineffable Tretracys, or T.W.I.T, in *Against the Day* (219), and the reference to those working for the Public Disorder Intelligence Division as the P.D.I.D.ies, evoking one of the many monikers of contemporary rapper/producer Sean Combs in the 1970-set *Inherent Vice* (122).

Pynchon produces humour, then, with his absurd molar aggregates that take the form of incongruous acronyms, metal musicians who constitute a high society wedding combo, and with the very concept of an 'Italian Wedding Fake Book' that has been authored by poststructuralist philosophers. Yet, as this article has argued, the absurdity is only manifest on the surface. Beneath the joke examined in this article, we find that the musical aspects of a fake book—which itself invites its components of intentionally basic chords to be expressed in alternative ways and to thus form a range of versions of the composition that is their aggregate (cf. Kernfeld 2)—very much aligns with Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy, which, it has been further argued, feed into important themes of Pynchon's text.¹⁴

This article has examined the substance behind what has often been considered a "throwaway reference" to Deleuze and Guattari in *Vineland* (Noys 180). Yet while Pynchon explicitly invokes the duo here, it is arguable that his engagement with them is less about influence than it is about what Benjamin Noys terms "convergence" (180). The term suggests an alignment between all three cited thinkers—the author, the philosopher, and the psychoanalyst—on the basis that each writer shares in the same pool of concepts, albeit conceived in their own organic movements of thought, which includes interactions through the reading of one another's works,

¹⁴ The history of the fake book itself is somewhat Pynchonian and further demonstrates Deleuzian-Guattarian observations. Barry Kernfeld writes of how, upon the refusal of the "music publishing industry to authorise such a book, asserting that it would undermine sheet music sales[,] [g]angsters stepped into the gap, filling a new niche in our musical economy" (4). An FBI investigation into these "bootleg fake books" began in 1951 and, in the 1960s, "led to full-blown trials for criminal copyright infringement in Federal District Court in Manhattan" (Kernfeld 4). While this adds a further ironic dimension to the gangster Ralph Wayvone, Sr. having such a fake book in his house, we also find here another example of how smooth spaces tend towards striation. For Kernfeld points out how the underground distribution of fake books ended up being absorbed into the regulated market of the mainstream when, in "the mid-1970s, the music industry began to put out legitimate, copyrighted collections of pop-song fake books. Almost immediately, bootleg pop-song fake books faded away" (4).

and which are expressed in ways that may differ. After all, according to those forging schizoanalytic readings of literature, "Pynchon's most schizoanalytic novel is one published before his encounter with Deleuze and Guattari and, appropriately, only 1 year after *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). This is, of course, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)" (Noys 180). It was only with his subsequent text of *Vineland* that Pynchon could explicitly express identification with Deleuze and Guattari, who had, in the meantime, published the second part of their collaborative *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project, the work I believe most resonates with Pynchon's own thought as expressed through his fiction. And it is identification, rather than influence, that I believe the literary invention of 'Deleuze and Guattari's *Italian Wedding Fake Book*' is expressing.

This is why assemblage is present, yet in a much different manner, in *Vineland* than it is in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Pütz writes that it is "noteworthy that in Pynchon the higher or more sophisticated functions" of acronymy, such as its intertextual and symbolic uses, "generally embody part or all of the lower functions," such as its parodic or satirical uses (374). As such, when Pynchon writes that, "[u]nable to respect highbrow audiences, Spike [Jones] nonetheless wanted to claim inspiration from highbrow music," and that "[b]oth wanting and rejecting these connections at the same time seemed to generate a useful energy" (*LNS* 9), we certainly find that the same energy is found in Pynchon's own humorous prose. And we find the same energy, formed by the crashing of intellectual thought into low humour, in *A Thousand Plateaus* also, with its expressions of "[f]lying anuses, speeding vaginas" (*ATP* 36) for instance, and the sentiment that its rhizomatic contents have been placed in the structure of "a circular form, but only for laughs" (*ATP* 24). *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Gravity's Rainbow* are certainly masterworks of intellectual stature—but both are also funny as hell. This shared stylistic trait in regards to their prose further suggests itself as a reason for Pynchon finding kinship with Deleuze and Guattari, beyond shared conceptual outlooks.

Finally, and further to the point of convergence rather than influence, one can identify the conception of rhizomatic music, which I have argued is also present in *Vineland*, in a work by Pynchon that precedes any joint collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari. This is the short story "Entropy", originally published in 1960,

which features a bedraggled band by the name of “the Duke di Angelis quartet” who are “engaged in a historic moment”:

Vincent was seated and the others standing: they were going through the motions of a group having a session, only without instruments. [...] Vincent began to fling his arms around, his fist clenched; then, abruptly, was still, then repeated the performance. This went on for a few minutes [...] Finally at some invisible signal the group stopped tapping their feet and Duke grinned and said, “At least we ended together” (*Slow Learner* 94).¹⁵

As with Gilbert's conception of rhizomatic music, though Vincent acts as a conductor of a performance within pre-arranged parameters (here it is the composition of “Love for Sale”), the relationship between conductor and musicians is radically disrupted by the fact that there are no instruments and no sound. That this is rhizomatic music, albeit one of silence (John Cage resolved *that* issue), is further impressed by Duke's statement that it was a performance of the composition in the style of “[Gerry] Mulligan, Chet Baker and that crew”, the great improvisers (*SL* 94).

“[...] it occurred to me, in one of these flashes of insight, that if that first quartet of Mulligan's had no piano, it could only mean one thing.”

“No chords,” said Paco, the baby-faced bass.

“What he is trying to say,” Duke said, “is no root chords.

Nothing to listen to while you blow a horizontal line.

What one does in such a case is, one *thinks* the roots.”

A horrified awareness was dawning on Meatball. “And the next logical extension,” he said.

“Is to think everything,” Duke announced with simple dignity. “Roots, line, everything.” (*SL* 95)

This is a music of the imagination, one which, to restate Gilbert's sentiments on rhizomatic music, is a dynamic arrangement of force that is a “deliberate subversion of any

¹⁵ Thomas Pynchon's *Slow Learner* will be cited as *SL* in subsequent references.

simple process of composition, expression and interpretation" (121). A maddening performance of gesture and intimation amongst the band members that generates "a continuous experience of trans-personal intensity—a body without organs" (Gilbert 121).

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Reference

- Berger, J** 1999 *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Berressem, H** 1994 "Strangely Attractive: The Topology of Psychic and Social Space in Vineland." *Pynchon Notes*, Spring – Fall, 34–35: 38–55.
- Buchanan, I** 2004 "Introduction: Deleuze and Music," in *Deleuze and Music*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1–19. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-7870-5_1
- Deleuze, G** and **Guattari, F** 1987 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi. London and New York: Continuum.
- Gilbert, J** 2004 "Becoming-Music: The Rhizomatic Moment of Improvisation," in *Deleuze and Music*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 118–139.
- Hess, J J** 2014 "Music in Thomas Pynchon's Mason & Dixon". *Orbit: Writing Around Pynchon*. 2(2). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7766/orbit.v2.2.75>
- Hite, M** 1994 "Feminist Theory and the Politics of Vineland," in *The Vineland Papers*, ed. Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner, and Larry McCaffery. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 135–153.
- Holland, E** 2004 "Studies in Applied Nomadology: Jazz Improvisation and Post-Capitalist Markets," in *Deleuze and Music*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 20–35.
- Hollander, Charles** 2000–2001 "Jokes and Puns in *Gravity's Rainbow*", *Pynchon Notes* 46–49, 204–207.
- Kennedy, B M** 2000 *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Kernfeld, B** 2003 "Pop Song Piracy, Fake Books, and A Pre-history of Sampling." *Copyright and the Networked Computer: a Stakeholder's Congress*, University of California Washington Center, Washington, DC, November 6.
- Kerouac, J** 1972 *On the Road* [1957]. London: Penguin.
- Kleinherenbrink, A** 2015 "Territory and Ritornello: Deleuze and Guattari on Thinking Living Beings", *Deleuze Studies*. Volume 9, Issue 2, 208–230. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/dls.2015.0183>
- Massumi, B** 1987 "Translator's Forward", in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi. London and New York: Continuum, ix–xvi.
- Massumi, B** 2002 *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822383574>
- Mattessich, S** 2002 *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822384137>
- Noys, B** 2015 "'Love and Napalm: Export USA': Schizoanalysis, Acceleration and Contemporary American Literature", in *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature*, ed. Ian Buchanan, Tim Matts, and Aidan Tynan. London: Bloomsbury, 175–190.
- Plato** 2003 *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee. London: Penguin.
- Pöhlmann, S** 2010 *Pynchon's Postnational Imagination*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Porush, D** 1994 "'Purring into Transcendence': Pynchon's Puncutron Machine," in *The Vineland Papers*, ed. Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner, and Larry McCaffery. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 31–45.
- Pütz, M** Fall 1991 "The Art of the Acronym in Thomas Pynchon", *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 371–382.
- Pynchon, T** 1979 *The Crying of Lot 49*. [1965] London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd.
- Pynchon, T** 1990 *Vineland*. London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited.
- Pynchon, T** 1994 Liner Notes for *Spiked! The Music of Spike Jones*. United Kingdom: BMG Catalyst.
- Pynchon, T** 1997 *Mason & Dixon*. London: Jonathan Cape.

- Pynchon, T** 2000 *Slow Learner*. [1984] London: Vintage.
- Pynchon, T** 2006 *Against the Day*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Pynchon, T** 2009 *Inherent Vice*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Reynolds, S** 1999 *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture*, London: Picador.
- White, D R** 1998 *Postmodern Ecology: Communication, Evolution, and Play*. Albany: SUNY Press.

How to cite this article: Gazi, J 2016 "On Deleuze and Guattari's *Italian Wedding Fake Book*: Pynchon, Improvisation, Social Organisation, and Assemblage". *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, 4(2): 11, pp. 1–23, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/orbit.192>

Published: 18 July 2016

Copyright: © 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Orbit: A Journal of American Literature is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

OPEN ACCESS The text 'OPEN ACCESS' followed by a circular icon containing a padlock, symbolizing open access.