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Käkelä, Tiina

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Tiina Käkelä-Puumala, University of Helsinki

"This Land Is My Land, This Land Also Is My Land": Real Estate Narratives in Pynchon's Fiction

Among the numerous binary oppositions recurring in Pynchon's fiction there is one between those who own the land and those who don't. This opposition is played out via landowners and real estate moguls on the one side, and squatters, indigenous peoples, refugees, drifters, hippies and anarchists on the other. The question as to whom the land belongs to is political *per se*, and Pynchon elaborates it throughout his fiction by showing how ownership is created and maintained.

This can be seen most clearly in the figure of the land-owner which keeps reappearing in Pynchon's fiction. Be it a real estate mogul, a venture capitalist or a landlord, Pynchon often uses this character type to represent a wide scale of questions related to land – land as nature, common resource, commodity and property – and the social, political and economic struggles connected to it. The first one of these characters is the Californian real estate mogul Pierce Inverarity from *The Crying Lot 49* (1966), where the sorting out of the dead man's assets by the protagonist Oedipa Maas is the starting point of the novel. In *Vineland* (1990) Pynchon develops this theme further by juxtaposing commercial spaces with mythical spaces, or, the commercial real estate of the fictitious city of Vineland with the sacred land of the Yurok Indians. The Californian developer re-emerges in *Inherent Vice* (2009) as Mickey Wolfmann, and land-owning class figures in both *Inherent Vice* and *Against the Day* (2006). In *Mason&Dixon* (1997) the narrative focus is on two land-surveyors, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, but their scientific work eventually benefits the aristocratic landlords of colonial America. Even in Pynchon's latest novel, *Bleeding Edge* (2013), the question of land and private property has a central role – only this time it is tied to the immaterial spaces of the internet.

As a counterforce to the land-owners in Pynchon's fiction there are always the dispossessed – the people who have been evicted from their homes and their land, or who simply have no property. As Scott McClintock argues with a reference to Pynchon's California novels *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*, there is a constant conflict between the land-owners, who protect their profit interests, and the growing population of the transient, "nomadic" people like drifters, hippies, beach bums and surfers, who rent a dwelling instead of owning it (2014, 107). In novels like *Against the Day* the dispossessed are the landless immigrants who are used as a work force without social and political rights. In *Vineland*, they are also represented by the ghostlike Thanatoids, who continue their living on the margins of society like a haunting memory of past injustices. In *Mason&Dixon* it is the indigenous people and the settlers who have to face the fact that somebody else takes over their abode and declares it their property. These dispossessed, Preterite groups in Pynchon always appear to be on the other side of administrative control, economy, law, and cultural values, thus providing the reader a glimpse of an alternative way of life.

To understand the role of land in Pynchon's work as both common and private, both sacred and commercialized, both material and virtual, I will use in the following the notion of *common* from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (*Commonwealth*, 2009). The word common itself has two definitions. In the early modern usage it meant commonly shared natural resources: "the bounty of nature available to humanity, including the fertile land to work and the fruits of the earth", often understood in religious terms (Hardt&Negri 2009, 139). With Hardt & Negri, the old definition of the common is replaced by what they call the "artificial common" that blurs the distinction between nature and culture: "this common is not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships, and so forth" (ibid.). Hardt & Negri view the common as a "social product" (ibid., 111) – the common wealth – and a form of production that is antagonistic to the notion of private property, and everything that it entails: the social and legal control, and the capitalist valorization process. They call the creator of

the common "the multitude", a radically plural and open political body of those without property (ibid., 39). The multitude is "unbounded, excluded from the dominant political bodies, but [. . .] open, inclusive social body, characterized by its boundlessness and its originary state of mixture among social ranks and groups" (40).

Although the focus in this essay is on landed property, my aim is to point out the moments where Pynchon shows how common, both material and immaterial, is the origin of property, and how the creation of private property starts with the exploitation of the common. However, in his work the common always survives because of its versatility, and it can be seen to recreate its form over and over again.

In the first part of this essay I will focus on the land-owner/developer figures in Pynchon, and the kind of succession they form from conceptual characters like Pierce Inverarity in *The Crying of Lot 49* to the mysterious businessmen like Mickey Wolfmann in *Inherent Vice*. There is always something sinister about these figures: they do not represent only capitalism but the connection between private property and social control that effectively determines the reality of other characters. In the second part, I will discuss the process of creating private land ownership in *Mason & Dixon*. In its eighteenth-century setting in the North American colonies, *Mason & Dixon* shows in detail the progress of acquisition of land – both as the realization of an aristocratic privilege, and the colonization of the American soil. It has often been pointed out that in *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon uses the making of geographical lines as a metaphor of power – both the power over nature by rational measurement, and the political power of dividing people.[1] This power also means taking hold of the land by privatizing natural resources, for Mason-Dixon is both a geographical mark and a "Sort of long Property-Line" (M&D, 234).

The final part of this essay focuses especially on Pynchon's latest novel, *Bleeding Edge* (2013), where the theme of private property and estate has been modified again. This time the "real

[1] See, for example, Mattessich (2002, 235), Clerc (2000, 104), and Cowart (1999, 348-349).

economy" of real estate moguls is complemented and partly replaced by the immaterial "new economy" of IT business, and the land, the "crust and mantle" (L49, 123) by the immaterial surfaces and depths of the Internet. However, the antagonism between private property and the common prevails, and is acted out via infrastructures of the internet.

"Money speaks, the land listens": Pynchon's developers

As we remember, the late Pierce Inverarity from *The Crying Lot 49* was a California real estate mogul who owned not only a considerable amount of real estate but also stock holdings, enterprises, and people. The protagonist Oedipa Maas's task to wind up the dead man's estate starts in a journey to the fictitious city of San Narciso, where Inverarity had started his career:

> Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a group of concepts – census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access to roads to its own freeway. But it had been Pierce's domicile, and headquarters: the place he'd begun his land speculating in ten years ago, and so put down the plinth course of capital on which everything afterwards had been built, however rickety or grotesque, towards the sky [. . .] (L49, 14).

But Oedipa's task soon turns out to be too vast to manage, because just like San Narciso, the man himself is a mixture of tangible assets and abstract concepts – shadowy, faceless, impossible to grasp except via his property. Eventually, it seems that every site Oedipa visits belongs in one way or another to Inverarity, who at this point has changed from an identifiable human being into a force, a pure "need to possess, to alter the land, to bring new skylines, personal antagonisms, growth rates into being" (123). Pierce Inverarity has in Pynchon studies often been seen as the

archetypal capitalist, or even as the very embodiment of capitalism and power.[2] While I agree with this view, I think it needs to be added that rather than representing a single idea, Inverarity, or his legacy, is more like a totalizing network of economic and social relations that are too complex to be sorted out. Hanjo Berressem notes that in *The Crying of Lot 49* Pynchon treats the tangled history of the regimes who have determined the possession of real estate and information through an analogous tangle of narratives that involve technology, paranoid politics, and information networks (2014, 41). There is no outside to this totalizing network – only Oedipa's half-frustrated, half-idealistic search for it. Oedipa's quest is doomed to fail because what she's looking for – the totality of Inverarity's property – has changed from a set of tangible assets into an immaterial network of signs and social relations the centre of which is absent. If Inverarity is seen as the embodiment of capitalism, or more precisely, as capitalist control over land, Oedipa's and the reader's situation in trying to figure out Inverarity's true power is reminiscent of how Slavoj Žižek has described the sublime object of ideology. To Žižek, any ideology has an invisible kernel that cannot ever come out as a positive entity. According To Žižek, the kernel, the basis of an ideology can only appear as veiled or as a shadow, because it is in itself pure negativity (1989, 170). Thus, to accept and live in the reality opened up by ideology always requires certain blindness to its proper logic:

> [A] kind of reality which is possible only on condition that the individuals partaking in it are not aware of its proper logic; that is, a kind of reality whose *very ontological consistency implies a certain non-knowledge of its participants* –if we come to 'know too much', to pierce the true functioning of social reality, this reality would dissolve itself (1989, 20–21).[3]

[2] See, for example, Chambers (1992). Inverarity has also been seen as "the Protestant Ethic incarnate" by Joseph Slade (qtd. in Grant 1994, 136), and as the Deleuzian "Despot," the primordial creditor to whom all the flows of capital return by McClintock (2014, 106–107).

[3] It is an open question, whether the metaphors of dissolution that increase towards the end of the novel indicate this process, namely that Oedipa is on the verge of changing her notion of reality.

Scott McClintock points to the passage near the novel's end where Oedipa dreams of Southern California before the land was taken over by the land barons (2014, 108). Before the real estate boom and capitalist control over land there were alternative communities, such as squatters, and the dream of freedom was later revived in the hippie communities (ibid.). Thinking of these propertyless people, Oedipa comes very close to the notion of the common, when she wonders if these people were all communicating, and thus forming a community via the secret network of the Tristero (L49, 124). The highly ambiguous network of Tristero appears in the novel in strange complicity with Inverarity; it is both a counterforce to the social control he represents, and possibly something Inverarity also uses. It is notable that one of the words attached to Tristero is *disinheritance*, which can be seen in the epithet "El Desheredado," of a 16th century Dutch prince who belonged to the organization, or in the many references to people who have not been given their *lot*– who been passed over historically and politically. [4] [5] Finally, there is Pierce Inverarity and his kind with a legacy, i.e. property, to pass on. This antagonism, and the complicity of the opposite poles is something Oedipa is incapable of grasping.

McClintock views all of Pynchon's California novels as "narratives about real estate and the control of the state's history by property developers" (2014, 96). Even in *Vineland*, the real estate business lurks somewhere in the background. William D. Clarke, who has analysed the role of property relations in *Vineland,* notes how the novel comments on the emergent financialisation of all investment in the early 1980's in America (2010, 201–202). With this he refers to the increasing role of investment banks and hedge funds in financing, which in the novel is manifested in the movie business and commercial real estate (ibid.). The central setting of the novel, the fictional Vineland City in Humboldt County, consists mostly of commercialized spaces such as malls,

[4] One of the meanings of the much-discussed word "lot" in the novel and in its title is "a piece of land" – land as a commercial property.

[5] Kerry Grant, in his *Companion to The Crying of Lot 49* even names Tristero as the "champion of the world's disinherited" (1994, xvi).

restaurants, fast-food stores, hotels, and so on. Moreover, these spaces, like the Hollywood-themed "Noir Center" shopping mall, already use cultural simulacra that effectively efface the consumers' sense of real time and space. On the other hand, Pynchon draws a parallel between these unreal commercial spaces and the Yurok Indians' mythical and sacred places, which are found along a river that runs through Vineland City.

> Once past the lights of Vineland, the river took back its older form, became what for the Yuroks it had always been, a river of ghosts. Everything had a name—fishing and snaring places, acorn grounds, rocks in the river, boulders in the banks, groves and single trees with their own names, springs, pools, meadows, all alive, each with its own spirit. (VL, 186)

The sacred land of the Yuroks also contains the element of the common that blurs the distinction between nature and culture.[6] The indigenous people are absent from *Vineland*, but their land functions as a site with no exact boundaries and the current inhabitants of this land are equally heterogeneous. Among them are the zombie-like Thanatoids, who remain in a transitional state between life and death because of the injustices they have suffered – mostly related to the exploitation of their propertyless status – while they were still living. They will tell anyone who'll listen "tales of dispossession and betrayal [. . .] of land titles and water rights, goon squads and vigilantes, landlords, lawyers, and developers [. . .] injustices not only from the past but also virulently alive in the present"(VL, 172).

The sinister aura around developers and landlords is underscored even more in *Against the Day*, where Scarsdale Vibe, the tycoon and patriarch of the wealthy Vibe family, is a clear

[6] *Inherent Vice* also contains references to the sacred places of the American indigenous peoples. Gordita Beach, the central setting of the novel, is build on top of an Indian graveyard. As soon as Doc Sportello learns this, he considers it a crime: "the worst kind of bad karma, though developers, being of evil character, didn't care where they built as long as the lots were level and easy to get to" (IV, 355).

archetype of an owning-class baddie. Vibe and his kind also live off the land – in this case from the profits of mining in Colorado. Scarsdale Vibe is not a property developer, but what links him to those characters is the way he describes capitalism primarily as a way of taking control over the land and making it profitable.

> [W]e fishers of Americans will cast our nets of perfect ten-acre mesh, leveled and varmint-proofed, ready to build on. Where alien muckers and jackers went creeping after their miserable communistic dreams, the good lowland townsfolk will come by the netful into these hills, clean, industrious, Christian, while we, gazing out over their little vacation bungalows, will dwell in top-dollar palazzos befitting our station, which their mortgage money will be paying to build for us. (*ATD*, 1001)

Vibe meets his fate in Trinidad, Colorado, but his prognosis of how things are going to change in the area has a timeless quality. While in the past mining has been the most profitable way of turning land into money, in the future it will be something else, for example recreational use (winter sports): "When [. . .] the coming of snow is no longer the year's curse but its promise, awaited eagerly for its influx of moneyed seekers after wintertime recreation [. . .]." (ibid.)

Hardt&Negri argue that private property creates subjectivities that are at once individual in their competition with one another and unified as a class to preserve their property against the poor, but that the multitude of the propertyless creates a social subjectivity that is radically plural and inclusive (2009, 39–40). It is notable that the people whom Scarsdale Vibe mocks in his longish monologue as adversaries of him as his kind – the people that he calls "us"– belong to diverse social and ethnic groups: "alien muckers and jackers," "communists," "the jabbering Union scum," "the frozen corpses whose names, false in any case, have gone forever unrecorded," the miserable women and children of the miners, and so on (ATD, 1001).

The same emphasized divide between the land-owning class and the transient propertyless people reappears in *Inherent Vice* along with the developer figure Mickey Wolfmann. The main plot of this novel revolves around the disappearance (or possible kidnapping) of this "real estate big shot" (*IV,* 4), and the private eye Doc Sportello's attempts to find him. It turns out that before vanishing, Wolfmann has announced to his immediate circle that he wants to give away all of his money, and this seems to be the reason his wife and her boyfriend scheme against him – to prevent this drug-induced plan from happening (150). Wolfmann's background[7] is connected to mobsters and Las Vegas businessmen, and like them also he "had this dream about putting up a whole city from scratch someday, out in the desert" (240). But there is a curious twist in this dream, for Wolfmann, the former venture capitalist, somehow seems to have been influenced by the countercultural values of the late sixties. This becomes apparent when Sportello meets federal agent Flatweed, who has tailed Wolfmann, and who quotes him with a marked sarcasm in his tone:

> Do you know what he said? We have it on tape. "I feel as if I've awakened from a dream of a crime for which I can never atone, an act I can never go back and choose not to commit. I can't believe I spent my whole life making people pay for shelter, when it ought to've been free." (243)

Later, Sportello and his friend Tito Stavrou find in the Death Valley desert the abandoned construction site of Arrepentimiento, Wolfmann's actual model for a city where housing would be free: "anybody could go live there for free, didn't matter who you were, show up and if there's a unit open it's yours, overnight, forever, et cetera et cetera" (ibid.). However, Wolfmann's utopian and anarchist dream to create a common soon falls apart, because people around him want to

[7] McClintock gives an interesting account of real-life developers that Pynchon has used as models in his California novels (2014, 105–106).

prevent it; indeed, he is placed in an institution and medicalized back to his former self.[8] As McClintock argues, Wolfmann's plan represents a threat to the whole ideology of private property as the basis of capital, and is therefore not allowed (2014, 107). A more apt spokesman for that ideology is Crocker Fenway, a rich California landlord who gives Doc Sportello the bottom line defining his class: "Real estate, water rights, oil, cheap labor – all of that's ours, it's always been ours." (IV, 347).[9] Crocker Fenway sounds here almost identical to Scarsdale Vibe and other "rentier capitalists" (McClintock 2014, 104). As Doug Haynes has pointed out, to Fenway the patrimonial land rents and ownership of utility rights are the source of a wealth he backdates to the beginning of time, as do all ruling elites (2014, 10). And like Scarsdale Vibe, he addresses his words not only to Doc, but to the multitude he represents: "And you, at the end of the day what are you? One more unit in this swarm of transients who come and go without pause here in the sunny Southland [. . .] We will never run out of you people. The supply is inexhaustible" (IV, 347).

A certain degradation in Pynchon's developer figures can be traced from *The Crying of Lot49* to *Inherent Vice.* While Pierce Inverarity was a conceptual character with metaphysical dimensions, and Mickey Wolfmann at least an ambivalent character – a venture capitalist with a vague social consciousness – Scarsdale Vibe and Crocker Fenway are more like ideological mouthpieces, and therefore easily classified as villains. The question of property, however, is not restricted to these kind of characters, as can be seen when we turn focus on the very process of taking the land into possession in *Mason & Dixon*.

[8] Wolfman has some affinity with Inverarity in being a mysterious shadowy figure at the beginning of the novel. After his disappearance people see Wolfmann appearing everywhere, and the descriptions of his fate and whereabouts vary beyond belief (IV, 76).

[9] By bringing out the uneven distribution of natural resources and means of production Pynchon continues a tradition in Californian realist literature, where the uneasy relations between capitalism and agriculture has been a central theme since late 19th century (Henderson 1999, xii). The land and the water were both farmer's means of production and developer's means of extracting rent without having to produce anything themselves. Into this contradiction arrives the bourgeois, urban dream of owning real estate, and the businessmen willing to speculate on it (ibid. 161–166).

The making of property in *Mason & Dixon*

Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, the two land-surveyors and protagonists of *Mason & Dixon*, are historical figures best known from the Mason–Dixon line that was made between 1763–1767 in colonial America. The line – actually a set of five different but continuous lines – separated Pennsylvania from Maryland, and both of them from Delaware. According to Charles Clerc, the starting point for the marking of the line by cutting trees and putting a stone on every mile was a territorial dispute: the Penn family and the Calvert family had both been given charters for two adjacent territories by the British royalty, but due to lack of accurate maps the families disagreed about correct boundaries, routes of access to the seashore, and so on (Clerc 2000, 43). At the time of the narration, the legal dispute had been going on for eighty years, and the land-surveying was the last attempt to solve it (ibid.).

The novel is for the most part centred around Mason and Dixon's four-year project, and it again addresses the real estate theme, as Pynchon elaborates the basic philosophical and political questions about what it means to own land – ethically, economically, juridically, culturally – and how nature is turned into money. In the protocapitalist colonial America, a person's right to land was based primarily on privilege. As Niall Ferguson has noted, real estate and the ensuing political rights have for most of history been the exclusive privilege of an aristocratic elite: everyone else was a mere tenant, paying rent to their landlord (2008, 235). While drawing the line, the land-surveyors act according to this privilege, but they cannot help noticing the political and moral consequences of their work. The making of the line is in itself an appropriation of the land, in which the land-surveyors participate through their outwardly disinterested scientific work. It also paves way to colonialization, for in the wilderness outside the colonies the act of surveying land eventually means that land can be bought cheaply or simply taken from the Native Americans, and

added to the realm of European landlords.[10] The novel underlines that during the long process of making the Mason–Dixon line, the ownership over a vast amount of American soil is determined by symbolic pacts between people who were never even there in the first place. Or as the novel's narrator, Reverend Cherrycoke explains:

> [T]here exists no "Maryland" beyond an Abstraction, a Frame of right lines drawn to enclose and square off the great Bay in its unimagin'd Fecundity, its shoreline tending to Infinite Length, ultimately unmappable, – no more, to be fair, than there exists any "Pennsylvania" but a chronicle of Frauds committed serially against the Indians dwelling there [. . .]." (M&D, 354)

The land-surveying project also affects the settlers, for the line may cross their land, and they are forced to be citizens of one or the other state, or if they have settled outside the colonial regions they are forced to leave or move further to the frontier. And of course real estate business starts to flourish once the borderlines have been mapped and legalized:

> Three agents for Philadelphia land-speculating Interests are said to be out here this summer, scouting real estate [. . .]. The Metropolitan cabal back there 'tis said, goes upon the hope of the next Purchase of the Indians, of as much trans-Alleghenian land as possible. The settlers having been serv'd Eviction Notices last year by Capt. Mackay and the Highland Forty-second [. . .]. (M&D, 658)

Throughout the novel, Pynchon uses the making of geographical lines as a metaphor for power. Most openly this is commented on during a dialogue with Mason, Dixon and Feng Shui master

[10] The novel also contains references to Indian massacres in the eighteenth-century British colonies, like the one in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1776 (M&D, 341–348).

Zhang, who criticizes the entire project of line-drawing as a mode of ruling:

> To rule forever [. . .] it is necessary only to create, among the people one would rule, what we call...Bad History. Nothing will produce bad history more directly nor brutally, than drawing a Line, in particular a Right line, the very Shape of Contempt, through the midst of a People – to create thus a Distinction betwixt' em, –'tis the first stroke. (M&D, 615)

One can see in Zhang's statement a reference – an anticipation – of the best known historical epithet for the Mason–Dixon line: that a century later it became the borderline between slavery and abolitionism, and as a consequence the borderline of the Civil War that cost more than three hundred thousand lives (Clerc 2000, 43; Cowart 2008, 348). What was at the beginning a mere property line became a cultural and national scar whose impact is felt even today. But there is also something else in Zhang's opinion, for in *Mason & Dixon* the Line (often written with capital letter) is also a metaphor for those metaphysical boundaries that constitute Enlightenment thinking: human vs. animal, living vs. dead, representation vs. reality, familiar vs. *unheimlich*, scientific rationalism vs. the irrational, and so on (Käkelä-Puumala 2007, 56–61, 147–154). The end of the Line is also the end of reason, beyond which these metaphysical divisions and subdivisions can no longer be made: "Beyond lies Wilderness, where quite another Presence reigns, undifferentiate" (M&D, 491).

In his fiction, Pynchon always makes us aware that the boundaries of real estate are created with violence. But instead of employing the romantic trope of an unspoiled nature threatened by human greed, Pynchon's way of writing on environmental themes can be considered post-humanist in the sense that it does not rely on nature as some lost condition outside culturalized individuals.

Rather, with Pynchon nature becomes something wild, mechanistic and uneasy within us.[11] The violence is first and foremost social, for any privatization of land entails breaking down of the land as common, that is, as free and collectively shared resource of soil, water, flora and fauna. Furthermore, this also means breaking down of those cultural, locally varying significances that are connected with the land – a theme that Pynchon often describes through the usurpation of the land of the North American indigenous peoples. In *Mason & Dixon*, the recurrent juxtaposition between land-owners and Native Americans reveals not only two different cultures, but two different ways of understanding the relationship between humans and nature. This becomes very clear at the western point of the Line somewhere in what would later be West Virginia, where the Native American tribes do not allow the land-surveying to continue, or the Line to cross a sacred Indian warrior path. Mason starts to feel anxious, not only about their commission, but about the otherness of the natives: "[. . .] these Visitors how Strange, who belong so *without separation*, to this Country cryptick and perilous" (M&D, 648).

From this vantage point it is perhaps not surprising that Pynchon constantly returns to the Earth in his fiction – be it the globe, or the soil, or the geological strata, a lost continent or the fantastic underworld. Besides being a central metaphor for Pynchon's ecocriticism in many of his novels, one of the attributes of the Earth is that it exists independently of property relations marked on its surface: his characters have a yearning for "Down Below, where no property lines existed (M&D, 233) – an indeterminate ground to dwell on.

***Bleeding Edge*: new economy, new spaces**

[11] On post-humanism as a concept, see Clark 2011, 63–71.

Against this background it is interesting how Pynchon returns to the theme of estate again in his latest novel. *Bleeding Edge* is set in New York, and the materiality of the city itself – buildings, neighbourhoods, coastal line, infrastructure like bridges, airports, streets, alleys and highways – plays a prominent role. References to real estate business and property values occur frequently, often reflecting the protagonist Maxine Tarnow's journeys in the city. For example, when Maxine goes to meet her friend, blogger activist March Kelleher, her address is described in terms of future gentrification:

> This old *boricua* neighborhood survives, scraped and soiled, driven indoors, done with, its original texts being relentlessly overwritten – the gangs of the fifties, the drug dealing twenty years ago, all publicly fading into yup indifference, as high-rise construction, free of all self-doubt, continues its march northward. Someday very soon this will all be midtown [. . .]. (BE, 266–267)

Similarly, another meeting in Hell's Kitchen is described with reference to property values: "Wised-up real-estate mavens of Maxine's acquaintance assure her that this is the next hot neighbourhood. Redevelopment is in the air"(BE, 257). And of course, Maxine ends up in a sexual liaison with one Nicholas Windust, a ruthless federal agent and a possible murderer. When it is also divulged that Windust is a neoliberal IMF consultant who partakes in the global privatization of natural and human resources in the Third World, his rap sheet starts to sound very familiar: "he tortures people with electric cattle prods, he pumps aquifers dry and forces farmers off their land, he destroys entire governments in the name of a fucked-up economic theory he may not even believe in [. . .]." (BE, 245–246)

What gives the theme of real estate in *Bleeding Edge* a new dimension, however, is the way the physical spaces are intertwined with the immaterial spaces of the internet. The novel is centred

around IT business and culture – computer-security firms, online gaming, the deep web, virtual reality, blogging, hacking, and coding – and the ways virtual space constantly affects and modifies the non-virtual consultant "meatspace" (BE, 168), or what used to be known as the real life of flesh and blood. The archetypal villain in *Bleeding Edge* is computer-security CEO Gabriel Ice, a former nerd who has made big money during the dotcom bubble before the millennium, and who has close ties to mobsters and terrorists, as well as the National Security Agency. While Pynchon's former real estate developers had been driven by the "need to possess, to alter the land" (L49, 123), Ice represents this same drive within the immaterial spaces of the internet. Hence, one can detect three economic registers in the novel. Firstly, there is the traditional real economy represented via property values. Secondly, there is monetary-financial economy, represented most clearly by Maxine's "semi-ex-husband" Horst Loeffler, an investor who "to this day has enjoyed a nearly error-free history of knowing how certain commodities around the world will behave" (BE, 21). Thirdly, there is the new economy, or cognitive capitalism represented by Gabriel Ice. The attributes of the new economy are strikingly different to those of the two other registers because it is based on digital technologies: high-technology industry, business and financial services, the media, digital culture, and so on (Todd 2014, 144). The new economy relies heavily on intellectual, cognitive labour, for example linguistic and other interpersonal skills and therefore it uses resources that are intangible and difficult to quantify (ibid.).

In terms of Hardt&Negri, the artificial common – the common wealth that resides in languages, images, knowledges, affects, codes, habits, practices, and forms of life – runs throughout metropolitan territory and constitutes the metropolis (2009, 250). While the common resides in immaterial production, it also affects the real economy of the metropolis. As an example of this Hardt&Negri mention the real estate market where the central creator of value is *location*, which is nothing else than access to common wealth: "not only with respect to the park but also the quality of neighborhood relations, the pathways of communication, the intellectual and cultural dynamics,

and so forth" (115). What happens in the real estate market is that the wealth produced in the common is constantly abstracted, captured and privatized, and made into a source of profit (ibid.).

In *Bleeding Edge*, Pynchon makes a transition from natural common to artificial common, or, from material to immaterial production by integrating the theme of property and real estate into the IT-world. Beneath its public business proceedings, Ice's company has a hidden agenda of privatizing digital infrastructures: Ice is "a bandwidth hog" (BE, 156), who "is just buyin fiber's all it is [. . .] payin top dollar, tryin to nail down as many miles of cable as he can get" (465). He is controlling the access to web sites, facilities and resources, and creating surplus value by using the free work of hackers and coders for his own purposes. This is what happens in the novel with DeepArcher, a virtual reality designed by two coders, Justin McElmo and his partner Lucas, and further developed by open source code enthusiasts. Initially, DeepArcher was designed to be a "refuge" (BE, 373): not a virtual playground but more like a free world for everyone interested, with lifelike settings such as city scenes, malls and shops, landscapes, interiors, traveling vehicles, and avatars that resemble real people to a varying degree. DeepArcher relies on the common: it provides an open platform for commonly shared knowledge and communication, innovation and creativity that stands against private control and market forces. As such DeepArcher embodies the form of immaterial production described by Hardt&Negri; for them the open internet infrastructure of knowledge and culture is the place where the biopolitical economy nowadays produces value (2009, 282).

Of course, this wealth is under constant threat of exploitation and legal control. After visiting DeepArcher, Maxine understands its significance when looking at the Isle of Meadows, a nature preserve for migratory birds on the western side of Staten Island next to the great toxic Fresh Kills landfill:

> DeepArcher also has developers after it. Whatever migratory visitors are still down there trusting in its inviolability will some morning all too soon be rudely surprised by

> the whispering descent of corporate Web crawlers itching to index and corrupt another patch of sanctuary for their own far-from-selfless ends. (BE, 167)

Indeed, DeepArcher is attacked from the start by all kinds of parties with various interests – "the feds, game companies, fucking Microsoft" (BE, 36) – who try to hack the source code and sometimes succeed. As a result, the virtual reality starts to change in ways that are parallel to the workings of real estate capitalism: bit by bit, the free space or resource is turned into a capital asset, and the coders' work is commercialised. Maxine notices this on her second visit to DeepArcher after the 9/11 terrorist attacks:

> She can't help noticing this time how different the place is [. . .]. Yuppified duty-free shops, some for offshore brands she doesn't recognize even the font they're written in. Advertising everywhere. On walls, on the clothing and skins of crowd extras, as pop-ups out of the Invisible and into your face. (BE, 354)

Gabriel Ice tries to buy the source code, in order to gain total control over DeepArcher, but the designers Justin and Lucas thwart Ice's efforts with a true anti-capitalist move as they decide to open its source code for free. When the source code is in the open, anyone can partake in the city design – even Maxine's two sons Ziggy and Otis in their "Zigotisopolis" (BE, 428–429), which is a version of New York from earlier decades. Towards the end of the novel, Maxine notices that the virtual spaces of DeepArcher increasingly start to resemble her real neighbourhoods, and the difference between the two becomes vague. The virtual world of DeepArcher cannot be taken over: it stays what is was from the beginning – a Foucauldian *heterotopia*, a cultural counter-site that is both real and illusory (Foucault 1984, 3).[12] One of the characteristics of heterotopia is that it

[12] Foucault mentions several examples of heterotopias that serve either as a deviation or a refuge for times of crisis: mirrors, boarding schools, cemeteries, brothels, psychiatric hospitals, theatres, ships, archives and museums.

contains all the other real sites that can be found within a culture: they are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (ibid.).

> This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned [. . .]. Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. (1984, 8)

DeepArcher seems to belong to the second kind, since it provides both replicas of known sites of the world (such as certain New York locations), and the possibility to create new ones. But more importantly, it is a free and shared space for human interactions – in Foucauldian terms "an effectively enacted utopia" that does exist in reality (1984, 3). "[S]ee, it's only, like, code?" mutters Maxine after she has wandered around in the virtual world several times (BE, 373). "No, Maxine, no!", contest the Russian mobsters Misha and Grisha: "it's real place!"

> "It is asylum, no matter, you can be poorest, no home, lowest of jailbirds, *obizhenka*, condemned to die – "[13]
>
> "Dead –"
>
> "DeepArcher will always take you in, keep you safe" (ibid.).

The question of land and land-ownership in Pynchon can be traced back to his early fiction, and it has formed a constant thematic ever since. Sometimes it is more prominent, sometimes it is more in the background, but it is always there. The political battles described in Pynchon's fiction are surprisingly often also battles about the right to the land: to land as property, or a place to dwell, or

[13] *Obizhenka*, Russian prison slang, a prisoner who is low man on the totem pole. *Pynchon Wiki:Bleeding Edge*. (IRL: https://bleedingedge.pynchonwiki.com/wiki/index.php?title=Chapter_34)

both. And as we have seen from the examples above, this right is symbolic by nature and also alterable via symbols. It doesn't necessarily need any tangible external reference in order to work. Pynchon's sympathies are no doubt on the side of those without landed property, which can be seen in the recurring geographically, socially and even ontologically indeterminate places in his fiction – places where the Pynchonian multitude finds its home.

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