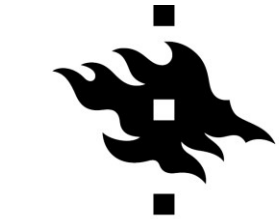

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Pot, Politics, and Postmodernism

The War on Drugs in Thomas Pynchon's California Trilogy

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Author:
Vili Äijö

Supervisor:
Jari Käkelä

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Abstract

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This thesis argues that Thomas Pynchon's California Trilogy conveys a political message in opposition to the forces that use the war on drugs for their own benefit. While taking a postmodern approach to its aesthetics, Pynchon's trilogy addresses these themes by highlighting the importance of counterculture communities that formed around marijuana in the 1960s. To access these questions, this thesis combines close reading, postmodern theories, and research by several Pynchon scholars such as McHale (1987; 2011), Cowart (2011) and Veggian (2014) to form the approach of the study on the postmodern and the politics in the California Trilogy.

As this thesis suggests, a certain "incredulity," as the main element of postmodernity, seems to be present in Pynchon's trilogy, especially in the counterculture enclaves of Vineland County in *Vineland* and Gordita Beach in *Inherent Vice*. Such incredulity can be seen in the ways that these communities abandon the traditional hegemony of mainstream power structures, instead opting to form their own. The main elements of postmodernism that this study recognizes in the trilogy are those of double-coding, irony, and pastiche. Hence, this thesis examines Pynchon's tendency to discuss even the political war on drugs with his trademark humor, drawing connections between literary realism and postmodernism. This thesis argues that with the postmodern California Trilogy, Pynchon can discuss the war on drugs with postmodern levity, instead of realistic gravity.

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1 Introduction

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon Jr. (born 1937) writes in his novels against many causes of inequality: against racism, against "ancient powers of greed and fear," which is how his protagonist in *Inherent Vice* views government outreach into counterculture communities (2009, 129), but also, in my reading, against the war on drugs, particularly the war on marijuana[1], and how those ancient powers might play into that war. Pynchon's rhetorical stance is realized in the novels as storylines, characters' actions, attitudes, and moods, and showcases through polarizations such as law enforcement versus hippies, generations versus other generations, and the government versus the individual citizens.

In this thesis, I study how the "ancient powers of greed and fear" mentioned above that enforce the drug prohibition in Pynchon's California Trilogy are portrayed as an antagonist of the counterculture hippie movement. I am approaching this by inspecting how the war on drugs is waged in the novels, using earlier categorization to categorize the sides, and studying the postmodern elements found in those representations. In this thesis I am studying the postmodern world portrayed by Pynchon's California Trilogy, where marijuana and its illegality plays a part in the construction of that world**.** Smith (2009) writes that

> Pynchon's texts reiterate, in different ways, how the terrifying state of the modern world, and the precarious position human beings inhabit in it, began at a point somewhere in the past. Thus Pynchon's "postmodern" techniques of narration and representation demystify the origins of modern technocracy, weapons of mass destruction, and authoritarianism to remind us that they are constructs that can be dismantled just as they were built. (18–19)

Pynchon's dismantling of the powers that be is an attempt to shed light to the terrific state of the modern world, yet as Smith states, with postmodern techniques the very acts of representation and narration can be used to dismantle the powers who unruly wage the war on drugs. Pynchon's focus on the sixties, with hippie characters in enclaves estranged from the public because of the war on drugs, is largely about the authoritarianism that has led the hippies

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[1] This thesis discusses how Thomas Pynchon's works employ themes related to the drug made from the plant *Cannabis Sativa*, commonly known as "marijuana". The term marijuana is not without problems, or without synonyms either, but it is used in this thesis based on the popularity of the term in colloquial use as well as in legal documents, such as the Controlled Substances Act. Synonyms for the drug mentioned in this thesis include *cannabis, weed,* and *pot,* as well as *joint* and *cannabis cigarette*, for the prepared, smokable form of the drug, as well as *roach*, the remains of a joint. People who smoke the drug are called *potheads*, and those associated with the culture (or other, often counterculture) are called *freaks*, and more commonly known as *hippies*.

to those enclaves as it is about the enclaves themselves, displaying the rather harmless nature of them. Cowart, in his book *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History* (2011) neatly emphasizes how the war on drugs affects these hippies: “The war on drugs tends to become a convenient excuse to harass the unassimilated, the different, the nonconforming, and the recusant. As such, it is the wrong war, the wrong cause” (99).

In short, I examine how the novels convey the politics of Pynchon when it comes to marijuana – namely, what kind of power it has over people; what forces it causes to move and in what emotional states people react to it with. Through this discussion, I aim to unravel the layers of political commentary embedded within Pynchon's portrayal of the opposing forces of the war on drugs, trying to shed light on the role it plays in shaping individual experiences and societal dynamics within Pynchon’s narratives. Pynchon’s California novels are a perfect example of a dialogist approach to discussing the war on drugs: they offer a humorous dig on both side of this dichotomy through their postmodern elements yet contain enough realism to be taken seriously as well. While this thesis does not go deep into humor analysis itself, I argue that Pynchon’s use of humor is both postmodern and political. This thesis then studies the different political actors and enclaves as well as their narratives in the California Trilogy.

1.1 Background information about Thomas Pynchon’s role in the postmodern literature field

As an author, Pynchon is known for his work in the field of postmodern literature (McHale 1987; 1992; Sim 2011; L. Barry 2011). Describing Pynchon’s work with some aspects of postmodernism, Joanna Freer writes in *Thomas Pynchon and the American Counterculture* (2014) that “Pynchon is an originator of the postmodern style in literature: […] his work exemplifies postmodernism in its irony and black humour, in recreating and adapting various generic modes, and in referencing high art and popular culture with equal enthusiasm” (2014, 1). Adams (2007) even makes the claim that with over thousand critical articles written about him, Pynchon may be the most cited author in the scholarship on postmodern literature and due to this his work has even come to define the study and teaching of postmodern fiction (252). McHale (2011) goes as far as to say that “so ubiquitous is Pynchon in the discourses about postmodernism that we might go so far as to say, not that postmodern theory depends on Pynchon's fiction for exemplification, but that, without Pynchon's fiction, there might never have been such a pressing need to develop a theory of literary postmodernism in the first place” (97).

Pynchon is most famously known for *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), a postmodern classic, which was awarded the National Book Award in 1974, and the novels looms largely over the Pynchon oeuvre. It has become *the* seminal postmodern work, one that still invites readers to pick up the book and not finish it. Later Pynchon followed the *Gravity's Rainbow* with *Mason & Dixon* (1997) and *Against the Day* (2006). Together with Pynchon's debut, *V.* (1963), they form the 'big four' of Pynchon's postmodern writing – works that seem to enjoy their place more on the bookshelf and in the academia than on the hands of an everyday reader. Speaking of this daunting aspect, the editors of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (2017) note that: "Pynchon's knowingness and fascination with popular culture are overwhelmingly evident in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as is his preoccupation with the lore of theoretical science, of obscure historical tales, and of contemporary comic books" (1519). The question reading Pynchon is not about the complexity of the encyclopedic knowledge displayed in the books, but rather about the reading process, which leave many stranded: as he employs shifting genres and interlaced plots, the dizzying experience is not inviting.

Yet this thesis is not about *Gravity's Rainbow*, but about the California Trilogy, which in turn has been thought of as an entryway to Pynchon, perhaps something whose novels will be more likely finished when started when compared to the 'big four'. These heavier books, both in metaphysical and physical sense, are balanced by the somewhat shorter *The Crying of Lot 49* ([1966] 2007) and *Vineland* ([1990] 1996), which bookend the monumental *Gravity's Rainbow,* as well as *Inherent Vice* (2009) and the *Bleeding Edge* (2013), the first of the two received the moniker 'Pynchon-lite' from literature critic Michiko Kakutani (2009), the term being happily then applied to the latter one as well. Whereas Pynchon's latest work, *Bleeding Edge*, is situated in New York, the rest of these 'lighter' works are all set in California, thus earning the moniker of "California Trilogy". Compared to the 'big four', Pynchon's California Trilogy (with the exception of *Lot 49*) has received less critical praise and fewer academic publications – some exceptions being the anthologies *Pynchon's California* (McClintock and Miller 2014) and *The New Pynchon Studies* (Freer 2019), and this thesis in part tries to bring more appreciation to the trilogy. Mainly, this thesis brings into the conversation what has so far has been left largely undiscussed by the academia: Pynchon's continued enamoration with marijuana, and how it can be interpreted from the trilogy.

1.2 Pynchon's relationship with marijuana and the 1960s

Pynchon is a known recluse, or as he puts the word, "person who does not want to talk to reporters" ("Pynchon Puts Pinch on CNN" 1997): his last official photo was taken during his time as a sailor in the U.S. Navy, in 1955, when he was only eighteen. He has continued this reclusion for over the six decades that he has been a published author. Thus, despite this renown in the field of postmodern literature, all the way from *V.* (1963) to *Bleeding Edge* (2013), Thomas Pynchon's public persona has remained an enigma. Or to put it in another way, he seems to have had controlled the public's perception of him throughout his literary career: he has never given a single interview and has written only a handful of articles and blurbs in addition to his literary work. He has commented concisely if not tersely on some of the theories about his persona and has even cut people off who have leaked information about his life. For what it is worth, we do know that he has a wife, Melanie Jackson, and a son, Jackson Pynchon; that he resides in New York on the Upper West side (Sales 1996), and, of course, that he has a profound love for marijuana.

On one of the few occasions that he has written publicly about his literature work, his life, or his relationship with the reporters after him, is in the introduction to the collection of his short stories, *The Slow Learner* (1984). When thinking back to his college days, the fidgeting days of trying to work out stories, he professes that: "I was hugely tickled by all forms of marijuana humor, though the talk back then was in inverse relation to the availability of that useful substance" (Pynchon 2000, 8). One of the few published accounts that includes both Pynchon and the writer of the article partaking in the consumption of marijuana comes from Gordon (1994), which exhibits a stoned Pynchon in an evening filled with literary references, firecrackers and late night burgers, all this happening one night in the 60s.

And the 1960s is what seems to be at heart of Pynchon's oeuvre. Although Pynchon writes about marijuana use in three stages of his literary career in the California Trilogy, he writes about the 1960s in all of them: *The Crying of Lot 49* is set in 1964, the key scenes of *Vineland* take place at the end of the decade, and *Inherent Vice* discusses the tail end of that decade, set somewhere in the early 1970s. The novels are also published in different times of marijuana legality and public acceptance, which affects how the drug is discussed in them.

For Cowart (2011), the "sunlike moral intensity" (85) of the decade turned out to be the most important time in history for Pynchon, the decade around whose "Pynchon's novels and other

short stories revolve in planetary orbits" (*ibid*). Pynchon, for him, is writing about the 60s as "an era of societal deconstruction" (92). This is recognized by Gordon as well, who writes that

> [j]udging from the evidence of *Vineland*, he has forgotten nothing of that intense, contradictory decade, neither the dewy-eyed revolutionary idealism nor the grim paranoia, neither the comic excesses nor the tragic waste. The era raised issues that are still unresolved in American society and culture. We keep going back to the 1960s, just as we keep going back to the Civil War of the 1860s: these are contested terrains. As in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the war goes on, although at levels more difficult to trace. (1994, 178)

Pynchon's return to 60s then can be read as a way of re-defining the metanarratives and historiographic metafiction, both elements of postmodernism. This thesis in part studies the ways in which Pynchon does it, building an approach based on postmodern theories and from Veggian's (2014) framework of three political generations in *Vineland*, which I further expand to cover all of the California Trilogy, focusing on the 'grim paranoia' and 'dewy-eyed revolutionary idealism' Gordon above suggests Pynchon to not have forgotten of the decade.

1.3 Theoretical background

The focus on this thesis is especially on the latter two books of the trilogy, *Vineland,* and *Inherent Vice*. Although the California Trilogy seems to share multiple themes worthy of inquiry, such as the rise of computers and the greed in land development, this thesis is focused on the war on drugs, present especially in *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*, felt by three differing generations: the new deal left, the flower power hippies, and the paranoid political right wing that oppose the two.

This categorization into three generations comes from Henry Veggian (2014) who discusses Pynchon's work as a piece of political writing, starting from the author Salman Rushdie's claim that *Vineland* is "a major political novel" (Veggian 2014, 135). Veggian notes that this claim has implications for postmodern literature as genre of political writing: while the genre of political novels has mostly been populated by realist writers, postmodern authors can "elaborate foundational elements of realism in a sustained or thoughtful manner" as well (136). This would be an issue if realism is seen as antithetical to postmodernism – as it often is seen – thus overshadowing its immediate political relevance and potential.

Reading Thomas Pynchon's California trilogy, I use the theories of postmodern literature. Most importantly the theories of McHale (1987; 1992; 2011) to analyze the postmodern elements of the trilogy. These postmodern elements can further be divided to two, postmodernity and

postmodernisms. Postmodernisms can be viewed to be seen as "the aesthetic forms and practices of the postmodern period" (McHale 2011, 97) and postmodernity as "the historical and cultural conditions that presumably gave rise to those forms and practices" (*ibid*).

The general mode that Pynchon has when discussing both marijuana and the stoners that use it is comedy, and Pynchon's humor is widely recognized (Kelly 2010; Heon 2003). His works are also notoriously filled with ill-named characters (such as Manny Di Presso), gags, one-liners, and allusions to comics, cartoons and other media. Also paranoia appears to be inherently tied to Pynchon's works (Bersani 1989), and Pynchon also seems to evoke a certain political stance in his writing (Cowart 2011, 84; Veggian 2014), even as Pynchon seems to convey both of these themes, too, while also wildly winking at the reader.

1.4 The California Trilogy[2]

1.4.1 *The Crying of Lot 49*

The Crying of Lot 49, published in 1966, gives a contemporary account of Southern California, but has little yet to do with cannabis, other than via The Paranoids, a band who enjoys the substance. *Lot 49* tells a story of Oedipa Maas, a housewife who is made an executrix of her late beau Pierce Inverarity's will. Oedipa stumbles upon "Trystero," which appears to be a secret postal system that dates to the 15th century, as a possible alternative to the common mailing system. While searching for more evidence and clues for the existence of Trystero, she becomes less sure of what, if anything, Trystero signifies and how it relates to Inverarity. In this search, Oedipa becomes increasingly suspicious and paranoid about the world around her: does Trystero exist or is it only an elaborate ruse set up by Inverarity to trick her even from beyond the grave? The novella ends with Oedipa heading towards the auctioning (or crying) of the lot 49, where a person that might represent Trystero is supposed to bid on a set of stamps referring to Trystero, owned previously by Inverarity.

As a pastiche of the detective novel, *Lot 49* is often used as a way to study the epistemological uncertainty in Pynchon's writing (McHale 1987, 22–24). It displays the confused state brought up by alternative possibilities for truth, highlighting the flawed nature of Truth itself, leading to a postmodern reading of the novella. Marijuana itself plays a smaller part in *Lot 49*, merely

[2] In this thesis, I abbreviate the title *The Crying of Lot 49* to *Lot 49,* and the title *Inherent Vice* to *IV*, especially when referencing the page numbers of the novels.

referenced one by The Paranoids, a rock group inspired by The Beatles, but they are the ones that do send Oedipa on the track of Trystero by connecting the dots between a Jacobean murder play called "The Courier's tragedy" and a bone charcoal business run by Inverarity. Because of this lesser focus on the drug, the novella receives the least attention of the three in this thesis.

1.4.2 Vineland

Standing in the middle of the California Trilogy, *Vineland* was received with mixed reviews and was seen as a let-down to the preceding *Gravity's Rainbow,* with Cowart famously stating: "the bad news: Pynchon has made no effort to surpass *Gravity's Rainbow*. The good news: he has not stood still as a maker of fiction" (1990, 67). The novel saw a change of style in Pynchon's writing, moving towards the "Pynchon Lite" some critics have dubbed his latter works – less emphasis on the narratological complexity, more so on references to pop culture. In *Vineland*, marijuana and those who enjoy the substance take a much more prominent role: a case in point, one of its central characters, Zoyd Wheeler. Zoyd smokes a joint within the first few pages and is continuously referenced as a product of the hippie, flower power generation, and lives in the fictional Vineland County, where pot growers and other ex-hippies live. In addition to this, the book has several central plot pieces surrounding marijuana: an arrangement based on planted – as in planted evidence – marijuana product in Zoyd's apartment is the reason Zoyd had to move to Vineland County in the first place. Marijuana also starts a revolution in an uptight university. Both work as an excuse for the law enforcement to showcase their power.

The story kicks off with Zoyd and his daughter Prairie fleeing a federal agent Brock Vond and drug enforcement agent Hector Zuñiga, both of whom are separately going after Prairie's mother, Zoyd's ex-wife, Frenesi Gates. Frenesi is an ex-lover of Vond and was a member of a film collective *24fps* that documented the rise and downfall of Weed Atman, a figurehead of a college in Trasero County. Hector wants to use Frenesi for an antidrug film production, while Vond wants to regain control over her through having the control of Prairie. *Vineland* ends with bathos: just as Vond is about to reach for Prairie from a DEA. helicopter, his funding is cut due to people staying 'straight' out of their own volition, the need for DEA. thus deleted. Vond dies and Prairie is left free to start a life without the shadows of the past haunting her.

I consider *Vineland* as Pynchon's first real effort of the dialogue surrounding the marijuana prohibition, and the book's key scenes are studied in depth in this thesis for their portrayal of the powers behind the war on drugs, who use the war as an excuse for their own personal gain.

In this I use Veggian's categorization of the three generations, as well as the theories of postmodernism.

1.4.3 *Inherent Vice*

In *Inherent Vice*, Larry "Doc" Sportello goes about not only in his day-to-day life, but also in his day job as a private investigator, under the influence of marijuana. The novel, perhaps even more than *Vineland* and *Lot 49* is peppered with puns, asinine (or depending on who you are asking, brilliant) one-liners, and the type of exuberant and sophomoric humor that Pynchon has been well known to exhibit. The book is set somewhere in the early 1970s, in the L.A. where the Charles Manson murders are about to go on trial and where Nixon is working to get rid of the leftist anti-war movement.

Early in the story, Doc Sportello is visited by an ex-girlfriend, Shasta, who warns him that her boyfriend, Mickey Wolfmann, is about to go missing. However, when Wolfmann disappears soon after, this is followed by Shasta's own sudden absence. As Doc is then found unconscious by his nemesis, Lt. detective Christian "Bigfoot" Bjornsen, at the place where Wolfmann was last seen, he becomes implicated in Wolfmann's sudden departure and has no other option but to look for him. While doing so, he encounters a mysterious heroin cartel called the Golden Fang, which is also a name of a boat, and an organization for dentists to dodge taxes. finds a supposed-to-be-dead saxophone player Coy Harlingen, whom he helps to reunite with his family. True to tropes of the private eye genre, the story closes with Doc driving into the fog, hoping that it would burn away, "and for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead" (Pynchon 2009, 369).

The dichotomy of opposing forces started in *Vineland* continues in *Inherent Vice*, which McHale (2011) sees as a companion novel to *Vineland*. Throughout the story, Bigfoot and Doc continue a similar cat and mouse relationship that Hector and Zoyd have in *Vineland*, but at the same time *Inherent Vice* explore humor surrounding pot more than any other Pynchon book. In this thesis, I study both the aforementioned relationship as well as the general message of marijuana representation of the novel through political and postmodern lenses.

2 Grim Paranoia: The Political actors of the War on Drugs in Pynchon's trilogy

> 'You one of these right-wing nut outfits?' inquired the diplomatic Metzger.
> Fallopian twinkled. 'They accuse *us* of being paranoids.'
> 'They?' inquired Metzger, twinkling also.
> "Us?" asked Oedipa.
> (*Lot 49*, 32)

Paranoia is almost synonymous with the works of Thomas Pynchon. The term itself is quite troublesome, as evidenced by Leo Bersani (1989) who notes that both he and Pynchon have used the term as "unfounded suspicions about a hostile environment," while the term also has an "extraordinarily complex medical, psychiatric, and psychoanalytic history" (99). In my discussion, I use the term *paranoia* to refer to both "unfounded suspicions about a hostile environment" and to a more clinical concept of "unreasonable false beliefs" ("Paranoia" 2024). Together they form a term to describe both the *belief* and the *suspicion*, especially of hostility.

In this chapter, I discuss paranoia in relation to the forces that in Pynchon's works use the war on drugs as an excuse to pursue their own agenda. I will do this through building a framework based on Veggian's (2014) division of three separate generations of political actors: the New Deal leftists; the Flower Power hippies; and to oppose both, the paranoid right wing.

The character of Mike Fallopian in the example above only acts as a progenitor paranoid right in this thesis, as Veggian only applies his categorization to *Vineland*. I, however, argue that the argument of the different generations and their political antitheses can be applied to all California Trilogy novels. Cowart (2011) notes this as well, writing about Fallopian and the connection between *Lot 49* and the rest of the trilogy:

> One sees a progression among the sixties novels in the passion their author brings to depicting the forces of reaction. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon represents as relatively harmless the posturing of the meta-Bircher Peter Pinguid Society [Fallopian above], but in *Vineland* he expresses an abhorrence verging on the Swiftian for the right's perennial flirtation with fascism […] A similar strain of outrage permeates Inherent Vice, in which Pynchon imagines a "private army of vigilantes" (*[IV*,] 207) tolerated, even assisted, by the Los Angeles police and less visible "agencies of command and control" ([*IV,*] 265, 268).. (128)

Before studying these 'forces of reaction,' this chapter begins with a brief look at the relationship between paranoia and marijuana from the law enforcement's perspective in *The*

Crying of Lot 49. I will then move on to applying the framework provided by Veggian's article to the secession of "The People's Republic of Rock and Roll" in *Vineland*. I build from the argument of *Vineland* being a major political novel to discuss the California novels as a whole a major political work. I will end the chapter by discussing the law enforcement agents who are paired with the pothead protagonists of the California Trilogy.

2.1 An introduction to marijuana in the California Trilogy: The Paranoids

I begin this chapter with a glance at the *The Crying of Lot 49*. At the beginning of the novella, Oedipa Maas is unexpectedly made the executrix of the will of her deceased ex-boyfriend, Pierce Inverarity, who had amassed a large fortune, consisting of the complete city of San Narciso. Somewhere between a quarter and a third in in the *Lot 49*, in the midst of their excursion to one of Inverarity's real estate projects, the Fangoso Lagoons, the executrix Oedipa Maas, her new fling, the once child actor now turned lawyer Metzger, as well as the local band mimicking British Invasion, the Paranoids, encounter Manny Di Presso. They find him on a stolen boat in the middle of an artificial lake, where Di Presso is hiding under a tarp, paranoid as they come. Manny Di Presso (as in "manic depression" – as bipolar disorder was once called) is one of those Pynchonistically christened characters, that invite us to do an ironic reading of the scene, as argued by McHale (2011, 102).

In this scene is the introduction to marijuana in the studied California Trilogy. The Paranoids and their girlfriends overhear Oedipa, Manny and Metzger discussing the details of a litigation about U.S. troops' bones used for tobacco charcoal, and recount how the whole thing sounds just like a play they saw called "The Courier's Tragedy". Di Presso becomes horrified and grows even more paranoid: "'They've been listening,' screamed Di Presso, 'those kids. All the time, somebody listens in, snoops; they bug your apartment, they tap your phone——'" (Pynchon 2007, 42). This is the way that the Pynchon's paranoids usually act: voice their concerns out loud, for the world and the reader to hear. Perhaps to soothe Di Presso, another girl swears to privacy and explains how the cigarette bone charcoal is not of their interest anyway:

> "But we don't repeat what we hear," said another girl. "None of us smoke Beaconsfields anyway. We're all on pot." Laughter. But no joke: for Leonard the drummer now reached into the pocket of his beach robe and produced a fistful of marijuana cigarettes and distributed them among his chums. Metzger closed his eyes, turned his head, muttering, "Possession." (*ibid*)

Although the Paranoids together with Di Presso largely fade from the narrative after this encounter, they serve the purpose of introducing Oedipa and Metzger to the play "The Courier's Tragedy," which then occupies a significant portion of the relatively short novella and causes Oedipa to become increasingly suspicious of what is real and what is delusional; one could even say, paranoid – even as Oedipa herself does remain more or less sober throughout the story in *Lot 49*.

First, the language used provides some insight: the narrator refers to the substance as "marijuana cigarettes". As the counterculture or "stoner" culture had yet not fully breached into the zeitgeist with all its etymology at the time of the book's release in 1966, introducing the drug to the general audience through an almost legislative language seems like a way of treading a fine line, where no real side is taken – linguistic or otherwise. Such tactic is not needed 24 years later in *Vineland*, when Zoyd Wheeler drives around a parking lot "smoking up half a joint he'd found in his pocket" (4).

Although Pynchon balances on the linguistic tightrope of the drug in the above excerpt, it was not at all the debut of the plant in the country's literary field. Veggian (2014) postulates that the appearance of marijuana in American literary scene coincides with the point when modernist literary tensions were giving way to postmodernist ones (147). Perhaps unintentionally, Veggian thus ties the drug together with the postmodernist literary genre and period. Between *Lot 49* and *Vineland*, a lot had happened both to the author and the counterculture movement as well: both had broken into the mainstream and then drawn back, into their own (though perhaps cross-pollinating) sects, allowing slang and terminology to develop further. This tactic seems almost archaic when compared to *Inherent Vice*, in which the main character Larry 'Doc' Sportello is introduced as a knowledgeable member of the marijuana enthusiast community within the first pages.

Secondly, and more importantly to the theme of this thesis – how marijuana plays into Pynchon's California novel's – is Metzger the lawyer's disappointment. This disappointment can be explained due the fact that a simple possession of marijuana cigarette in the early 60s counted as a felony: by closing his eyes and turning away he is literally willing to turn a blind eye and to look the other way. This is underlined by the narrator's dry "Laughter. But no joke", almost implying a judgement towards the merry Paranoids. This is perhaps the first and last appearance of the narrator seen as judgmental about the substance use, thus giving way to the reading of a more sympathetic view of the users and the drug.

Compared to the rest of the California novels, this encounter between some faction of law enforcement (here, the lawyer-turned-actor Metzger) and the potheads is mild, bordering on the verge of not being an interaction at all (Metzger and the Paranoids do not converse directly in the scene). As the war on drugs started by the Nixon administration in the early 1970s ramps up the harassment of hippies, Pynchon's fangs begin to show as he takes the political actors and the law enforcement as his targets. Although the paranoia exhibited in this excerpt by Manny Di Presso was not so much directed at the Paranoids, and therefore to pot smokers in general, it illustrates how the two – pot smokers and those paranoid – are not only present starting from the very first book of the California Trilogy, but also are tied to how Pynchon writes about the drug – with humor. The excerpt also provides some context surrounding the legal status of the drug, as well as giving an example of the cultural life of the pot smokers. It even drives the plot forward, by introducing "The Courier's Tragedy".

To move on then from the *Lot 49*'s lesser emphasis of the drug requires further postulation about how the war on drugs play in the California Trilogy. One such is provided by Veggian (2014), which will be used to discuss *Vineland* in depth and extended to *Inherent Vice* as well. Despite this being the extent of marijuana representation in *Lot 49*, the book's possibility of a whole different world via the secret postal system Trystero acts as a prelude to the possible worlds afforded by the drugs in the later novels. Or, as Cowart (2011) puts it in reverse: "drugs are to *Vineland* what the Trystero is to *Lot 49*—a metaphor serving the vision of a different social reality" (98). Again, although Pynchon critics apply their postulations on set novels, I expand them to cover all of the California Trilogy.

2.2 *Vineland* as a political novel, the California Trilogy as a political trilogy

This section discusses the argument that Pynchon's *Vineland* is a political novel, especially in its way of discussing marijuana. In his 2014 article Veggian argues that *Vineland* moves from the territory of literary postmodern to that of literary realism when discussing the war on drugs. He claims that the novel "enters the familiar domain of the political novel" due to the economic, institutional, and political actors that are in conflict within it (138). As a summary of these actors, he writes that in *Vineland*, "a group of right-wing zealots coordinates its war on drugs in concert with industries and institutions of scale so as to eliminate the local, economic grounds of radical political organization." (139). Veggian's argument of *Vineland* as a political novel builds from the claim put forth by author Salman Rushdie (1990) in the New York Times review of the novel, in which he writes:

> What is interesting is the willingness with which [Pynchon] addresses, directly, the political development of the United States, and the slow (but not total) steamrollering of a radical tradition many generations and decades older than flower power. […] [A] major political novel about what America has been doing to itself, to its children, all these many years. (1990)

This section of this chapter then recognizes the political actors and argue through Veggian that the war on drugs in *Vineland* is waged by what he calls "the paranoid right" in the novel and that Pynchon can be seen using the tradition of realist novel to discuss this. These categorizations are recognized and discussed, especially in relation to marijuana, in the following section and in the remainder of this thesis.

2.2.1 The three generations

A political novel by Pynchon might be a tough argument to swallow for the fact that Pynchon is a postmodern author, and postmodern literature is "widely regarded" (Veggian 2014, 136) incompatible with realism. If *Vineland* is political novel, then it cannot be said that postmodern is without any relation to the real. For Veggian, to suggest that *Vineland* is a political novel

> would seem to require suspending the dogmatic belief that the traditions of literary realism and postmodernism constitute mutually exclusive movements that embody opposed stages of historical development, the prior one of objects, individuals, and classes vacated by the digital phantoms of one more recent. (*ibid*)

Vineland, then, would seem to occupy postmodernisms in some aspects of the novel and the 'traditions of the literary realism' in others. This suspension of 'the dogmatic belief' that the two constitute two 'mutually exclusive movements' allows for the interpretation of *Vineland*, and expanding from that, of the whole California Trilogy, as works that both play around with representation ('the digital phantoms') and the reality that we try to represent ('objects, individuals, and classes').

This section of the chapter then discusses the ways in which *Vineland* can be read as a political novel, especially in the way that marijuana plays a part in it: the novel begins as the paranoid right wing launch the war on drugs on the illegal pot farms of Vineland County, and the tension between these two opposing 'economic, institutional, and political actors' is felt throughout the book.

To begin with, to discuss the "slow steamrolling of the radical tradition" further, Veggian recognizes three distinct generations within *Vineland*: the older generation of post-depression

New Deal politics as the first generation; the 'flower power' or hippie politics of the 60s as the second; and

> a third and rival group, aligned against the prior two, comprises a paranoid lot of post-McCarthy cultural conservatives. In this group, remnants of the old landed aristocracy, religious fundamentalists, and paranoid Cold War reactionaries have joined forces to form a bureaucratic alliance with control over federal and state institutions of governance. (137)

Veggian builds this analysis around the character Frenesi Gates. Frenesi is a counterculture-activist-documentarist in the late 60s, who betrays both her documentary collective, the hippie movement, as well as one of her lovers, all under the influence another lover, federal prosecutor Brock Vond. This betrayal causes Frenesi to escape from Vond and to marry Zoyd Wheeler, eventually giving birth to their daughter, Prairie. Frenesi returns to Vond once more, before escaping and living under witness protection program. Her disappearance from the witness protection program in 1984 causes Vond to wreak havoc in Vineland County under the guise of war on drugs, as he is certain that Frenesi has returned to Zoyd and Prairie.

The first generation is represented by Frenesi's mother Shasha and her family, the Becker-Traverses, whose political affiliation Pynchon further expands in *Against the Day* (2006). The second generation is represented by their progeny, namely Shasha's daughter Frenesi and her ex-husband Zoyd. Brock Vond is the main antagonist of the book and the representative of the third group. In the main timeline of 1984, this third group uses the war on drugs as a cover to go after "the remnants of the younger radical generation who have retreated to the margins of American society" where they are "demonized and hunted down" (Veggian 2014, 137)

I argue that this divide of political categorization can be expanded further from the *Vineland* to apply to the whole of the California Trilogy. For example, in *Inherent Vice*, this 'paranoid right' can be seen in Crocker Fenway, an L.A. real estate mogul and a 'fixer' around the town, capable also to act as a middleman between powers that have mutual interests but cannot locate one another. As the protagonist Doc and the underground heroin cartel Golden Fang need to arrange a meeting, for the release of ex-heroin addict Coy Harlingen in exchange of the twenty kilos of heroin stolen from the Golden Fang, planted in Doc's trunk by Lt. Detective Bigfoot, Doc's nemesis, Crocker comes to help. And as Doc confronts Crocker – and mentions that the greed of the paranoid right has kept the real estate mogul Mickey Wolfmann from finishing his low-income housing project Channel View Estates – Croker retorts back with

> "It's about being in place. We—" gesturing around the Visitors' Bar and its withdrawal into seemingly unbounded shadow, "we're in place. We've been in place forever. Look around. Real estate, water rights, oil, cheap labor—all of that's ours, it's always been ours. And you, at the end of the day what are you? one more unit in this swarm of transients who come and go without pause here in the sunny Southland, eager to be bought off with a car of a certain make, model, and year, a blonde in a bikini, thirty seconds on some excuse for a wave—a chili dog, for Christ's sake." He shrugged. "We will never run out of you people. The supply is inexhaustible." (347)

Based on the way in which both Vond and Crocker are presented in the novels, with Croker calling those below him a 'swarm of transients,' it is not too far-off to say that it is a question of economic organizations that oppose one another, as Veggian postulates (138). Here is then the realism that is seeping through the cracks of Pynchon's postmodernity: as Croker lectures Doc about 'being in place,' the mogul asserts of the controlling economic organizations as 'being in place forever'. Thus the 'cultural conservatists' – those preserving the status quo where they have the upper hand with any means necessary – of the third generation as described by Veggian (137) are acting paranoid in the face of something that might thwart them, even seemingly.

California as a location to discuss political movement is of course not inherently Pynchonian. Another California novel, "The Grapes of Wrath", (1939) by John Steinbeck, could also be read as the paranoid right of making sure that the radical left is 'kept in place'. Written very much in realist tradition, the book follows the Joad family, who escape the Dust Bowls from Oklahoma to California, searching for work and scarcely finding any. The novel culminates in the main protagonist Tom Joad's vow to work for the oppressed. Veggian recognizes the similarities of the two and discussing whether the generations of the New Deal and 'Flower Power' get together: "we might think of *Vineland* as responding to the question of whether pot smokers get along with the Joads and survive the concerted onslaught of a reactionary opponent," (138) thus arguing that as much as *Vineland* is about the relationship between the second and the third generation, it is as much about the first and second generation as well.

This plays through the relationship between the parents belonging in the "first generation" and the children in the "second generation", such as between Zoyd and his mother-in-law, Shasha Gates: Shasha is doubtful of Zoyd's ability to raise Prairie, which is not helped when a monolithic slab of pressed marijuana is planted in Zoyd's apartment by orders of Vond, and

Shasha is called in ("'Zoyd what have you got yourself into now — oh, my,' as she registered the looming block of cannabis, 'God? with the little baby in the house, are you sick?'" (*Vineland*, 296). In *Inherent Vice*, even the older generation acts more loosely around the drug, in accordance with the general attitude of the book: Doc's parents Leo and Elmina, after an enjoyable marijuana experience by Elmina, want to experiment with the drug. Doc cautions them: "'Not when you're baby-sitting, okay?' ''Course not,' growled Leo. 'Ain't like that we're dope fiends'" (*IV,* 353). No more yells of "Stupid pothead" or "Meddling bitch," as heard in the *Vineland* scene (*Vineland*, 296), the first and second generation seem to be getting better along as the author ages.

All in all, to argue, as Veggian has, that *Vineland* is a major political novel, as claimed by Rushdie, it would require to either suspension of the dogmatic beliefs about the antithetically thought literary realism and postmodernism that Veggian argues for, or further poeticization of the latter to allow further affordances of the former. Then again Pynchon's refusal to address his relationship with postmodernism leaves the poeticization to be done solely by literary critics, and Pynchon can therefore be as removed from postmodern theorization as he can claim to be in its *avant garde.*

In the next section, I will take Veggian's postulations and study them in the section of *Vineland* discussing the People's republic of Rock and Roll. The focus of the section is in discussing a seceded campus in *Vineland*. The section will then study the perhaps unintentional irony of having a revolution started by marijuana being ended by a Judas-like betrayal that leads to an assassination of character named Weed. Along Veggian's categorization, postmodern aspects of the narrative are recognized as well.

2.3 Studying the political actors in the People's Republic of Rock and Roll

In a fictional Trasero County, next to a military reservation, there is the campus of the College of the Surf. Through a revolution started by marijuana, the campus secedes and declares itself as "The People's Republic of Rock and Roll" – or PR^3 in short. Although *Vineland* is set in 1984, much of the story is told in analepsis, and this scene of the novel takes place around the heyday of the hippies, sometime in the late 60s. PR^3 becomes a place of interest for its abandonment of strictly conservative values in favor of those exhibited by the hippie flower power movement. The campus is soon filmed by a counterculture documentary film group as well as taken an interest by a federal prosecutor, Brock Vond. Vond maneuvers an assassination

of the unwilling 'junta' of the campus, a math teacher aptly (and very typically for Pynchon) named as Weed Atman.

In the secession of PR[3], Pynchon seems to imply that marijuana has the power of revolution: "in the midst of a noontide scene tranquil enough to have charmed a statue, there arose, suddenly, the odor of marijuana smoke. […] Like loaves and fishes, the hand-rolled cigarettes soon began to multiply, curls of smoke to become visible" (205). As later evidenced in this thesis as well, biblical allusion is strong when describing marijuana in Pynchon's California novels: here, the marijuana cigarettes themselves defy reality; they multiply as in the alluded luncheon at the Sermon on the Mount. The drug is said to be "extremely potent" (*ibid*), perhaps originating from somebody's brother enlisted in the service. The confusion it causes leads people disarray, with one young woman falling to her knees and "began screaming at Jesus to deliver them all from the satanic substance" (*ibid*). As the revolution at the campus had begun with "no prelude […] the same dread disease infecting campuses across the land" (*Vineland*, 204), Pynchon might also be alluding to a sort of recounting of how the late sixties saw a revolution of student protests starting across the nation, with the PR[3] standing for a representation of the college uprise and upheaval at large.

The police are called in, and soon start acting violent against the people at the campus. And in that same biblical vein, a savior of sorts rises up from the masses: Weed Atman[3]. The students at the university campus at first choose to follow Weed solely for his 6'3.5 feet height (roughly 195 cm), which provides him with a vantage point to observe police brutality happening around the campus, as "the true nature of police was being revealed to him. 'They're breaking people's heads?'" (*Vineland*, 207). Weed leads the people following him to safety, with some escaping the campus and others remaining, leading Weed to the apartment of a Southeast Asia studies graduate student Rex Snuvvle. Through Snuvvle's Marxist ambitions, Weed becomes "what looked like an emerging junta" (208).

The campus also becomes a place of interest rather quickly: as the students begin a vague 24 hours a day "research — somebody's, into something —," they discover that the university was an "elaborate land developers deal from the beginning, only disguised as a gift to the people,"

[3] Weed's forename is perhaps the most common nickname for marijuana, while his surname Atman is Sanskrit for "breath" and "self" and is "one of the most basic concepts of Hinduism, the universal self, identical with the eternal core of the personality that after death either transmigrates to a new life or attains release (moksha) from the bonds of existence" ("Atman" 2024). In the novel, Weed becomes a "thanatoid" – a ghost.

(209). As a counteraction they decide to secede from the US and "become a nation of their own" which they decided to name "after the one constant they knew they could count on never to die, The People's Republic of Rock and Roll" (ibid) – later shortened to just PR^3. The campus is described in this "deprived" state as

> a lively beachhead of drugs, sex, and rock and roll, the strains of subversive music day and night, accompanied by tambourines and harmonicas, reaching like fog through the fence, up the dry gulches and past the sentinel antennas, the white dishes and masts, the steel equipment sheds, finding the ears of sentries attenuated but ominous, like hostile-native sounds in a movie about white men fighting savage tribes. (204)

The reason for this transformation is a "mystery to all levels of command" (*ibid*), especially since the college is located between two "ultraconservative" counties of Orange and San Diego, housing the "wealthy, […] most of them solid Southern California money, oil, construction, pictures" (*ibid).* The college was to be a 'private polytechnic' where students could be trained to be future employees of the aforementioned powerful, well-off people. The students admitted are likely to be docile, with the college enforcing "a haircut and dress code that Nixon himself confessed to finding a little stodgy" (204-205). Here, Pynchon more and more ramps up on the differences, the polarization of the counterculture and the conservative powers that be, namely the second and third generation as recognized by Veggian. Thus, the campus is "the last place anybody expected to see any dissent from official reality," (*ibid*) where the narrator draws a line between the 'official reality' enjoyed by 'the straights,' and the counterculture reality of the potheads, here implied as being two separate things.

Marijuana's role in this part of the novel seem to mirror the postmodernism of irony and pastiche as recognized by McHale (2011). Whatever may be the reasons behind making the drug illegal, here Pynchon writes how a single marijuana cigarette, soon multiplying like the biblical loaves and fishes, acts as a gateway not to other drugs, but to abandonment of the hegemony erected by the power structures, causing the college to form its own sect of people, which McHale calls as the postmodernity of "incredulity" (98). Together this pastiche and incredulity form a continued narrative of a possible "alternative reality", where marijuana acts as a catalyst for political movement. Possible realities and worlds, their relation to ours and questions of ontology in general, as argued by McHale (1987), are one of the dominant questions asked in postmodern literature, and PR^3 thus becomes an example of both of these postmodern theories postulated by McHale.

This unofficial reality is soon being filmed by a counterculture/feminist film group 24fps. Their camerawoman, Frenesi Gates, is the central character of *Vineland*, one who not only Zoyd and his daughter Prairie are separately trying to find in 1984, but whom DEA agent Hector Zuñiga and Brock Vond are also after, the appearance of the latter putting the wheels of the main story of the novel into motion. Around the setting of PR^3's revolution, in the late 60s, Frenesi Gates has recently begun a relationship with Vond, a federal prosecutor. Vond is intent on bringing down the PR3, as an exercise in a coup:

> "It's a laboratory setup," Brock argued, "a Marxist mini-state, product of mass uprising, we don't want it there and we also don't want to invade — how then to proceed?" His idea was to make enough money available to set them all fighting over who'd get it. It would also, as Brock pitched it, have value as a scale model, to find out how much bringing down a whole country might cost. (212)

'They,' being the Department of Justice. Frenesi is troubled because she has also started a relationship with Weed. Brock plans Weed's assassination, in which Frenesi helps with by acting as a middlewoman by providing Weed's assassinator with the gun. Although the reader is well aware of Vond's powers as a prosecutor capable of raiding the Vineland County in search of Frenesi in the 1984 timeline, the analepsis provides more background to Vond's character, revealing that Vond, more than anything, "operates arbitrarily under the aegis of the war on drugs to pursue personal agendas and to stifle dissent", as Burket (1999, 729) notes.

In addition to the postmodernities and postmodernisms found in PR^3, Veggian's postulation of the second and third generation can be then read from this excerpt as well. Brock Vond thus enters Vineland (both the novel and the fictional county within it) as an embodiment of what Veggian calls "the unethical, paranoid illegality of the American right wing" (151).

How does PR^3, along with Brock Vond and the paranoid right tie into this? In the way that the right uses the war on drugs as an excuse to thwart political movement associated with hippies. After Weed's assassination, groups of students rebelling at the PR^3 go missing. "They've gone underground," Vond declares, with some finality (*Vineland*, 248). The truth of the matter is, though, that Brock Vond has a personal project called the 'Political Re-education Program,' or PREP. In PREP, civil detainees are

> examined for snitch potential. Those found suitable might then be offered a choice between federal prosecution and federal employment, as independent contractors working undercover for, but not out of, the DOJ's Political Intelligence Office. After undergoing a full training curriculum that included the use of various weapons, they could be transferred

> — the contracts essentially sold — to the FBI and under that control be infiltrated, often again and again, into college campuses, radical organizations, and other foci of domestic unrest. (*Vineland*, 268)

With Pynchon most likely aware of the actual COINTELPRO program of cold war FBI using similar tactics of disrupting potential risk factors, he associates Vond with the same forces that he more deeply studies in his 'big four', here plainly categorized as the third generation. Vond's use of Frenesi in assassinating Weed is an example of the influence the paranoid right paranoid has on the flower-power hippies.

Pynchon also addresses this tension slightly in *Inherent Vice* in relation to the late 60s–early 70s TV show *Mod Squad*, where a group of teenagers of the flower power generation act as undercover agents in a contract like Vond's PREP. Doc and his lawyer Fritz are eating at Zucky's, a legendary restaurant whose sign can be seen briefly blinking during the opening credits of another TV series of the period, *Marcus Welby M.D.*, causing the place to be filled with customers to the annoyance of Magda the waitress. Doc tries to find a positive side:

> "At least it ain't Mod Squad-ers," Doc grumbled.
> "What," Fritz innocently. "My favorite show."
> "Pro-cop fuckin mind control's more like it. Inform on your friends, kids, get a lollipop from the Captain."
> "Listen, I came up in Temecula, which is Krazy Kat Kountry, where you always root for Ignatz and not Offisa Pupp." (*IV*, 97)

Here, Fritz alludes to the George Herriman comic *Krazy Kat*'s titular character, and its characters Ignatz and Offisa Pup. In the comic, Krazy Kat is in love with Ignatz the Mouse, who keeps throwing bricks at Krazy, who in turn sees it as an act of love. Offisa Pup is also in love with Krazy, and when Krazy is not involved, Pup and Ignatz try to best each other, trying to make the other look foolish. Ignaz and Offisa Pup can then be, albeit perhaps crudely, seen as standing for the hippies and the paranoid right, seeing as Offisa Pup is always trying to lay on the law on Ignaz.

As Fritz sees himself rooting for Ignaz, he is vowing his loyalty to Doc as opposed to the law enforcement – or he is aligning himself more with the second generation (the hippies) rather than the third generation (the paranoid right). The question of betrayal as a way of disrupting the counterculture groups seems to be something that Pynchon takes offence in, and this thesis will further scrutinize in the following chapter: As Vond is building an army of possible

snitches, the second generation, with its sects of subculture, here joined together by marijuana, is thwarted by an enemy that seems to be alike religious persecution.

This allusion to religion was evidenced in this section by the ways that marijuana played a role in PR[3]'s secession, and in the next section it will come even clearer in the ways that the detectives representing the third generation interact with the potheads of the second generation. In the following section, Pynchon posits two pairs of "Ignaz's" and "Office Puppa's" in 'Doc' Sportello and 'Bigfoot' Bjornsen in *Inherent Vice*, set somewhere in the early 1970s, and Zoyd Wheeler and Hector Zuñiga in *Vineland*, their relationship dating from the late 60s to the 1984 main setting of the book. In the next section, then, I will finish the chapter with discussing the relationship between the hippie protagonists and the detectives they deal with.

2.4 Tempting the hippies: introducing the detectives of the California Trilogy

In this section, I continue to discuss the two generations – the hippies and the paranoid right – postulated by Veggian (2014) through the pairs of Bigfoot and Doc in *Inherent Vice* and Zoyd and Hector in *Vineland.* I argue that Doc and Zoyd represent the flower power second generation, Bigfoot and Hector stand as the front of the third generation, and the passages that Pynchon write dealing with these detectives offer a chance for the hippie protagonists to hold steadfast in their stance against the 'ancient powers of greed and fear'. As these detectives hold certain power over the hippies, notions of power related to the law enforcement, enforcing the felony of marijuana possession, use and distribution, are recognized as a way for the third generation to antagonize the second generation.

Pynchon's potheads in this trilogy are foregrounded by a rival – a detective. Both sides take part in illocutionary swashbuckling and betwixt such, there is actual dialogue happening that discusses the politics of pot even further. In this section I display through excerpts the ways in which detectives try to lure these hip hippies to become informants: further plunging into interactions between law enforcement and the lawbreakers, the *Vineland,* and *Inherent Vice* both show law enforcement testing the loyalty of our heroic hippies through offering money for information to turn their compatriots in cannabis in. These offers to work as snitches are never reciprocated by the protagonists, who see the work highly immoral.

As marijuana's role in the narrative grows, so does the role of the law enforcement. The law enforcement agents in Pynchon's California Trilogy, including the detectives studied in this chapter, are represented as deceitful, manipulative, and condescending, yet somehow

humanlike: varying from almost a camaraderie that is shared between the rivals in both *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice* to the pure evil that is *Vineland*'s Brock Vond. Emotions run high and in high numbers, ranging from empathy to sympathy, from pure hate to pure disgust and pity. By *Vineland*'s release in 1990, the 1960s counterculture had all but come and gone, leaving behind them a society of hippie-turned-yuppies or hippies living on the stoner enclaves such as the fictional Vineland County. In *Vineland*, Pynchon would paint his first picture of a head-on confrontation between the powers and be and his hippie protagonists in a novel where the law is abused for one D.E.A. agent's personal gain. First, I will start with the relationship between Hector Zuñiga and Zoyd Wheeler.

Their relationship is described as "a romance over the years at least as persistent as Sylvester and Tweety's" (*Vineland*, 22), having started "shortly after Reagan was elected governor of California" (*ibid*). This would then date it to the year 1967, the year sometimes referred to as 'the summer of love' due to its surgency of psychedelia – namely pot and LSD. Hector enters the narrative in 1984, right after Zoyd performs his yearly stunt of jumping through a window, a necessity for Zoyd to collect his mental-disability check. This is part of a plan to keep Vond, working for the government, aware of Zoyd's location. That is, away from Zoyd's ex-wife, Frenesi Gates.

Hector is in Vineland to inform Zoyd that Frenesi has disappeared, the disappearance soon prompting Brock Vond to launch an all-out attack to the Vineland County under the guise of war on drugs. But back in 1967, as a way of introducing himself, Hector states that he is visiting the band's apartment on "the matter of drugs" (23). "'Thank God!' screamed [Zoyd's bandmate] Van Meter, 'it's been weeks, we thought we'd never score again! oh yes, it's a miracle—' Zoyd kicking him frantically," (*ibid*) the scene continues. Hector is there to bargain a deal:

> "[…] snapping, like a magician, a crisp five-dollar bill, half a lid of Mexican commercial in those days, from behind Van Meter's ear. Zoyd rolled his eyes as the bass player grabbed at the money. "And there's always plenty more in our imprest fund for good-quality product [of information]. For make-believe bullshit, of course, we pay nothing, and in time we grow annoyed." (24)

This "Purchase-Of-Information" deal causes Zoyd to reflect on his own standing in the hippie community, even more so than the "rolling of eyes" judgement that he gives to Van Meter. Although tempted by being fooled on several dope purchases, he never turns a dealer in, partly because of sympathy, partly for his own protection (24). Hector, however, grows highly irritated

because of the repeating, identical geographical topography of the fictional Gordita Beach, resulting in false arrests and failures to apprehend fugitives (24-25). Yet Hector's reasons for finding Frenesi in 1984 are not so pure either: He is looking for her to direct and write a movie about her time 'underground' and in PR^3, called "Drugs — Sacrament of the Sixties, Evil of the Eighties" (342).

This transaction of information in 1967 is almost identical to that of Larry 'Doc' Sportello's and Lt. Christian F. "Bigfoot" Bjornsen of the Los Angeles Police Department in *Inherent Vice.* Here is how "Bigfoot" makes an entrance into the narrative of *Inherent Vice*:

> "CONGRATULATIONS, HIPPIE SCUM," Bigfoot greeted Doc in his all-too familiar 30-weight voice, "and welcome to a world of inconvenience. Yes, this time it appears you have finally managed to stumble into something too real and deep to hallucinate your worthless hippie ass out of." He was holding, and now and then taking bites from, his trademark chocolate covered frozen banana. (*IV*, 22)

This world of inconvenience, of course being all the legal hassle that Bigfoot is not only capable of, but also legally mandated to put Doc under: Doc has just been found on a crime scene next to a dead body, with a billionaire land developer gone missing. Bigfoot's demeanor is softened by a trademark frozen banana ("It's an addiction, I used to deny that, but my therapist says I've made amazing progress," Bigfoot confesses later in the novel – parallelling addictions of the potheads to those of the law enforcement (*IV*, 139)).

After recovering Doc from the scene, Bigfoot takes him for a ride and offers a similar deal as Hector did with Zoyd, yet perhaps with a currency more alluring to Doc: payment in marijuana. As Bigfoot takes Doc to a secluded spot that "had Shot While Trying to Escape written all over it" (32), he discloses to Doc that the Nixon administration is throwing "fistfuls of greenbacks [dollars] at anything that even looks like local law enforcement" (*ibid)*. Doc is wary ("rat on everybody I ever met, how far back do we go and you still don't know me any better'n 'at?" (*ibid)*), yet Bigfoot assures him that previous 'hippie freaks' have taken up on that deal ("Toward the end of the month in particular.") (*ibid*). As this exchange progresses, Doc and Bigfoot's dynamic is likened to a question of faith, with Doc questioning the morality of Bigfoot's actions:

> Well, Doc didn't have the beard, but he was wearing some tire-tread huaraches from south of the border that could pass for biblical, and he began to wonder now how many other innocent brothers and sisters the satanic Detective Bjornsen might've led to this high place, his own scenic overlook here, and swept his arm out across the light-stunned city, and offered them everything in it that money

> could buy. “Don’t tell me you can’t use it. I am aware of the Freak Brothers’ dictum that dope will get you through times of no money better than vice versa, and we could certainly offer compensation in a more, how to put it, inhalable form.” (33)

As Doc (and Zoyd earlier) are being tempted by the ‘satanic’ detectives, it is no wonder that their standing in the stoner enclave becomes a question of faith being tempted, drawing allusions to Bible. And here, biblical allusions again abode: Doc critiques Bigfoot’s actions as akin to those of the devil; this detective is attempting to lead ‘innocent brothers and sisters’ and offering them ‘everything the money could buy,’ yet even more seductively, Bigfoot moves to a territory of hassle-free way of obtaining marijuana (“Acapulco Gold! Panama Red! Michoacán Icepack! numberless kilos of righteous weed, name your figure, just for trivial information we already have anyway. And what you don’t smoke— improbable as that seems— you could always sell.” (33)).

Holding steadfast in their conviction of the second generation, Pynchon’s potheads showcase moral backbone: as the detectives offer the potheads their heaven on earth – money or marijuana – they try to abuse the powerlessness of the hippies in the California Trilogy. As the legal status of the marijuana drug has gone through drastic changes in between the publications of Pynchon’s three California novels, when it comes to the law enforcement’s relationship with marijuana users, they each offer a contemporary view that ranges from cautious (as evidenced by the character Metzger in the *Lot 49*) to catastrophic (as evidenced by Brock Vond in *Vineland)* to ultimately very casual (as evidenced by Bigfoot in *IV*) – albeit still abusive.

In the following chapter, I will scrutinize these issues further analyzing the California Trilogy using the categorization by Veggian and further adding poetics of postmodern literature to deepen the understanding afforded by the trilogy to cover facets of postmodern humor in addition to the political seriousness. The main focus of the next chapter will be on what to think of these hippies then – what are the things that they are so vehemently defending against the detectives? How do they deal with the day to day, especially since their ontological certainty of the world is sometimes doubted, sometimes in fact warped? And why is the California Trilogy so funny if it is about major political issues? More importantly, what seems to be the major message that Pynchon wants to discuss with his representation of these pothead hippies? And what are the devices that he employs when discussing this message?

3 The Dewy-eyed Revolutionary Idealism: The Postmodern Hippie Potheads

In this chapter, I will first pay attention to how the pot-smoking protagonists are presented in the novels. I will also discuss how Pynchon builds his trademark humor from these potheads' antics, while also discussing the political powers at play. I will finish this chapter by looking at the postmodern techniques at work in presenting these war on drugs in the California Trilogy. I further demonstrate the postmodernity of "incredulity" in Pynchon's tendency to write historiographic metafiction that focuses on those subculture enclaves such as the freak community of the Gordita Beach and the marijuana growers of Vineland County, as well as discussing the postmodern pastiche and irony in the California Trilogy.

3.1 Analyzing Pynchon's humor in regard to postmodernism

At the beginning of *Inherent Vice*, some ten pages in, Denis relates to the protagonist Doc about his recent trip to the world of semantics:

> "So Doc, I'm up on Dunecrest, you know the drugstore there, and like I noticed their sign, 'Drug'? 'Store'? Okay? Walked it a thousand times, never really saw it—Drug, Store! man, far out, so I went in and Smilin Steve was at the counter and I said, like, 'Yes, hi, I'd like some drugs, please?'—oh, here, finish this up if you want."
>
> "Thanks, all's 'at'll do 's just burn my lip." (*IV*,10)

The excerpt starts with a low-hanging drug joke, and it ends with the appearance of a joint (referred to as "this" and "'at"), first of dozens, if not hundreds to come in *Inherent Vice*. The causal connection between the drugstore trip and the handed joint is not made clear, but does it matter? There are jokes galore to come, and do any of such one-liners as "drug store" and puns such as the name Denis need to do other than pop up and make us laugh before disappearing? Could there be a reason for these jokes?

Not all see it that way. The same joke drew criticisms by Barnes & Noble Reads reviewer James Parker of being "haute-Pynchonoid" (Parker 2009) – too stupid even for Pynchon – although, Parker does conclude that despite what he views as bad puns, the book does contain great humor. Similar criticism was given to *Vineland* by the author David Foster Wallace, who in a private letter to Jonathan Franzen admitted his disappointment to the follow-up to *Gravity's Rainbow* and wrote "I get the strong sense he's spent 20 years smoking pot and watching TV" (Max 2012, 152). Even *The Crying of Lot 49* was at first received with mixed reviews, before

earning its place both in the canon and on the *Time* magazine's unranked "List of the 100 Best Novels" that starts from the magazine's first publication in 1923 (Kelly 2010). One of the first raving reviews for *Lot 49* came from The New York Times, where the double edginess of Pynchon's comedic writing was noted by Richard Poirier when discussing the Trystero's W.A.S.T.E mailing system:

> the exuberance of such comedy softens the portents of national calamity, but at the same time it makes it nearly impossible for Pynchon to persuade the reader, as he anxiously wants to do, that the whole System and the whole book have more meaning than a practical joke. (Poirier 1966)

Poirier points out that Pynchon is "anxiously" trying to "persuade" the reader to believe that the book and the W.A.S.T.E mailing system have more meaning than 'a practical joke'. Poirier continues that "the same difficulty was apparent in "V.", where the author's style at points of sincerity about love and youth was, by contrast to the vitality of his comic writing, platitudinously limp and sloganeering" (*ibid*). For Poirier, in *V.*, despite Pynchon's attempts at writing about love and youth, his comedic talent overshadows his more sincere urges.

Thus, the excerpt from *Inherent Vice* above is exactly the sort of gag that has come to define Pynchon as a humorist. As Haynes (2019) puts it:

> [Pynchon] encompasses, even invents, a huge range of comic, witty, and humorous techniques, effects, and affects, seemingly for the purposes of just goofing around, but also for deflating or mocking conventions of realist seriousness and sentiment. This is especially true in the sense that such disciplinarian modes and moods prescribe what novels are allowed to do and be. (130)

So while Pynchon's jokes may at times seem rather juvenile, the way his works dissolve the barrier between serious and laughable is also a key mode of postmodernism, as recognized in this thesis as well: while Pynchon discusses the different generations (as postulated by Veggian (2014) and their role in the war on drugs, he employs an arsenal of techniques that keep the tension light, and focus on the enclaves that the war is acted upon. Speaking of *Vineland*, Veggian writes: "Pynchon's novel elaborates a synthesis of styles and moods that achieves the realist's ambition of portraying the individual, social, and historical gravity of a "world" with sustained postmodern levity" (2014, 136). He further says that *Vineland* is a novel "where postmodern puns and cannabis-inspired humor share a narrative space with serious depictions of a form of economic warfare" (139). Veggian even suggests that Pynchon had this juxtaposition of the two literary traditions of realism and postmodernism as "a comparable rift" (*ibid*) in mind when writing about the generational relations of the left: In Veggian's reading,

Vineland is as much depicting the generational differences of the earlier realism and latter postmodernism as it is describing those of the New Deal leftists and the "flower power" hippies (*ibid*).

Yet Pynchon's detachment from addressing these issues on one hand denies us of having some finality in regards of his own opinions and on the other hand allows us to form our own interpretations of the work, free of the weight of the Author. Pynchon's relationship with postmodernism has been stated in this thesis, yet Copestake (2003) raises another point about the reclusiveness of the author in relation to his position on the field:

> The relationship between Pynchon's fiction and the array of styles, strategies and questions which postmodernism embodies is one that he has had no responsibility for directly determining other than to have produced a body of work which for a generation of critics has resounded with significance with postmodernism's perceived characteristics. (9-10)

Copestake sees the benefits that detachment from pronounced authorship and being a public figure as making Pynchon's work "free from any obligations laid down by such definitions" of "critical assertions of literary postmodernism" (9). In Copestake's view Pynchon can then freely either claim to be as far removed from the postmodern literature as well as to be one of its "foremost practitioners," also allowing the works to be studied without the authors discourse about the works getting in the way. To view Pynchon's work as postmodern literature requires considering how postmodernism and postmodernity can be defined.

In such engagement with postmodern techniques, flaunting the "disciplinarian modes and moods" is central to Pynchon's work, even as the actual *reason* for using such humor, that is, any final message that such humor could be seen to build towards, remains ambiguous. It seems that these jokes are passed to the reader like Denis hands the joint to Doc, so also our answer may be the same – "all's 'at do 's just burn my lip" – or we may try to reason the reason for the laughter, as I do in this thesis through the postmodern lens that I approach the trilogy.

3.2 Discussing the postmodernism in the California Trilogy

As argued before in this thesis, the battle between the paranoid right wing and the two generations of leftist radicals, especially focusing on the 'flower power', can be expanded to the whole of the California novels. I expand this argument to argue further that this battle is portrayed through postmodern techniques juxtaposes the 'message' of the enclaves in the war on drugs to become more readily available.

One way of defining postmodernity is that it is about the impossibility of laying hard truths and making statements about what is real (Cowart 2011, 83–84) – in short, postmodernity is said to be left with relativism: everything is only true in relation to something, such as culture or religion, never objectively (Gellner 1992, 22–23). The postmodern literature then is self-reflexive, evoking the ideas of relativism in almost all its aspects. But if we cannot make statements about what postmodernity is, lay hard truths about it, then what can we say?

Indeed, as Hutcheon (1989) states: "any attempt to define the word will necessarily and simultaneously have both positive and negative dimensions. It will aim to say what postmodernism is but at the same time it will have to say what it is not […] [i]n general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, selfcontradictory, self-undermining statement" (1). This seems to make defining postmodernism itself a sort of a fool's quest. Literary critics Bennett and Royle (2016) offer 'postmodern vocabulary' in their attempt to define the term, for it cannot be explained through a "set of coherent explanatory theories," noting the "mobile, fragmented and paradoxical nature" of the term (325).

In turn, Veggian (2014) compares postmodernism with literary realism: "Critics have by and large regarded the two traditions as antithetical insofar as postmodernism is understood to disturb and reject the epistemological claims of realism" (136). He continues to note through the way of Frederick Jameson that realism's place in postmodernity is only to act as a "concept of realism" (*ibid*) – as in, that postmodern literature is both self-conscious and self-contradictory, perhaps only capable of discussing itself as a postmodern work, as Hutcheon noted above.

Taken together, the idea of postmodern texts representing differing worlds as well as begging the question whether such worlds can even be represented, the California novels' treatment of the war on drugs can be studied with postmodern lens: with the renowned Pynchon humor treatment, both the 'grim paranoia' and 'dewy-eyed revolutionary idealism' of the opposing forces of the 'war' are exaggerated, hyphenated and interwoven, offering a multifaceted critique of societal norms and power structures. Linda Hutcheon does state that "postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life," (1989, 2) which this thesis also takes under scrutiny: hegemony is flaunted in Pynchon's California novel by the pothead characters, mirroring the real-life hippie movement in the real world.

Yet the sort of political reading done by Veggian and in this thesis is criticized by some Pynchon critics: "attempts to 'explain' Pynchon's writing by relating it to the world outside the text fall

into the same trap Pynchon constructs for his characters, who also search for a stable center of meaning where none exist," writes Smith (2009, 15), by the way of McHoul and Wills (1990). Yet though we might fall in a trap when trying to 'explain' Pynchon's writing, I do it by sticking close to the poetics of postmodern literature as well as close-reading how marijuana deals in the novels.

3.3 Studying the potheads and the postmodern ontology of marijuana

The pothead characters of *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice* – Zoyd Wheeler and Larry 'Doc' Sportello, respectively – offer a chance to study how marijuana plays a part in the characters day-to-day life. Marijuana is not a simple thing in Pynchon's world(s). Smoking it may cause characters to overthink themselves into "brain-freeze" (*IV,* 96) or become assured they are hunted about by zombies (132). Being labelled a stoner or a hippie causes other people to mistrust you: in *IV,* Doc's attempts to talk about the Golden Fang, a possible drug cartel, and gets stonewalled by his nemesis detective: "Oh. And this wouldn't […] just be some more of your paranoid hippie bullshit, would it, because frankly neither the Department nor, more importantly, I, have the time to waste on these pothead fantasy leads" (214).

Users of the drug are thus being seen as believing fantasy as opposed to the real by the more 'straight world' characters. Meaning those not smoking pot: when Zoyd Wheeler tries to warn his teenaged daughter of a possible, seemingly looming and increasingly impending danger, the first response he gets is: "Sure this ain't pothead paranoia?" (*Vineland,* 46). This idea of "pothead paranoia" continues when Zoyd is about to go cash a check in a bank but sees the personage acting weirdly inviting: "No, it wasn't pothead paranoia — but neither was Zoyd about to step inside this bank" (*ibid*). These potheads seem to recognize when they are in these fits of 'pothead paranoia,' yet the world outside of them seems to first have cause to doubt whether everything that these potheads experience is a product of false beliefs. Yet Pynchon does note the rather quaint notion of the world's ontology being shifted to 'pothead paranoia,' as evidenced in this chapter.

3.3.1 Marijuana's role in the potheads' life

The 'political' act of the "second generation" hippies of Veggian's categorization seem to then revolve around pot. Especially in *Inherent Vice*, the freak community of Gordita Beach seems ultimately very harmless. As Cowart (2011) postulates: "The war on drugs tends to become a convenient excuse to harass the unassimilated, the different, the nonconforming, and the

recusant. As such, it is the wrong war, the wrong cause" (99). The potheads, in short, are mainly interested in pot, and it may as well be that the message that Pynchon is driving for with the California Novels is to merely be allowed to be interested in pot without any additional hassle.

Pynchon's potheads are then particular – they mainly indulge in marijuana. "Potheads, you're so exclusive. Would you say you took offense at Glen's preference for barbiturates and amphetamines?" barks Bigfoot when Doc denies his acquaintance with the motorcycle gang Aryan Brotherhood (*IV,* 26). When Doc thinks back to what her ex-girlfriend Shasta had seen in him notes that "Doc, aside from being just about the only doper she knew who didn't use heroin, which freed up a lot of time for both of them, had never figured out what else she might've seen in him." (11) Whereas the drug profiles of biker gang members and heroin users are frowned upon, Marijuana is singled out from other drugs in positive light and its quotidian nature is recognized.

This quotidian nature comes up frequently in *Inherent Vice.* When two separate customers happen to meet in Doc's office, he goes "over to the file cabinet and retrieving his emergency stash. Like, if this wasn't an emergency . . ." (*IV,* 290) It is around "the second or possibly third joint," when "everybody began to relax" (*ibid*). And in this quotidian use, the potheads know the values and qualities of pot: as a pimp named Jason Velveeta tries to sell his services to Doc, he takes a "withered joint from his pocket and lit up. Doc recognized the smell of inexpensive Mexican produce, and that somebody had forgotten to remove the seeds and stems" (158) – this act of removal not done, the joint not only decreases in the amount of the available tedrahydrocannabinoil-9 (THC), or the psychoactive substance, that produces the high marijuana is associated with, but also causes other undesired side-effects. Doc recognizes that Velveeta's pot is both inexpensive and low quality, making it a less desirable item in the community. This daily use though might still cause trouble to the pothead. When Doc's current fling Penny suggests that Doc has murdered a member of the bike gang and simply forgotten it, Doc retorts:

> "Well, but . . . How would I forget something like that?"
> "Grass and who knows what else, Doc."
> "Hey, come on, I'm only a light smoker."
> "Oh? How many joints a day, on average?"
> "Um . . . have to look in the log. . . ." (70)

The implication of a log, that is never mentioned in the text, is of course a defense mechanism from Doc, perhaps to save time – yet the negative side effect of short-term memory loss caused

by marijuana is discussed in the text. Doc calls his memory a "city dump" (163*)*, though notes that "a site of [a] classic dope misadventure […] had remained permanently entered in his memory" (167), implying a connection between a 'classic' experience gained from smoking pot and its remembrance.

The stories told of Pynchon's potheads are of this quality – 'classic dope misadventures,' which enter our memory through their fantastical, funny, and barely fathomable quality. Yet the "cloudless sky, in the sort of perfect daylight you always saw on TV cop shows" (*IV*, 164) of these potheads often turns murk, and the connection to cop shows seems ample. "Something about the light had begun to go weird. The sun vanished behind clouds which grew thicker by the minute," (165) Pynchon writes about Doc's trip to score marijuana gone bad, as if all the elements around the world surround the experiences of obtaining, valuing and smoking marijuana.

Through marijuana then, the potheads and stoners that make the cast of the California Trilogy define themselves or are defined as something separate from the ordinary, everyday. Mainly, the main problem that the potheads have is, is with dealing with the law enforcement, or other actants of the straight world, where they have to not only denounce their affiliation with the second generation of Veggian's postulation, but also have to act to fit in. When Doc goes undercover, dressed as a "straight," he announces loudly to his host: "Thank you, Mrs. Wolfmann, tequila's just fine—and what a welcome relief not to be offered any 'pot'! I'll never understand what these hippies see in the stuff! Do you mind if I smoke a normal cigarette, by the way?" (59). Here this is done to a highly humorous degree of course, but Pynchon's potheads usually recognize when they must go "on the natch [natural, abstaining from drugs]" (166) – or to forgo pot. Here, Doc is lying sober and surrounded by motel rooms where TV screens are blaring different TV shows, and thinks back on all the higher powers that have defeated any attempts of resistance, brought up by watching a John Garfield movie:

> Doc, on the natch, caught in a low-level bummer he couldn't find a way out of, about how the Psychedelic Sixties, this little parenthesis of light, might close after all, and all be lost, taken back into darkness . . . how a certain hand might reach terribly out of darkness and reclaim the time, easy as taking a joint from a doper and stubbing it out for good. (*IV*, 255**)**

Marijuana figures as a figure of speech as well but pinpoints the connection between marijuana and the "Psychedelic Sixties," that Pynchon writes about in his works, as recognized by Gordon and Cowart earlier in this thesis. The 'certain hand' seems to be implying to the forces of the

paranoid right postulated by Veggian, and these pothead hippies of the second generation might be headed for that 'low-level bummer' that seems to come true when the hippies need to migrate to Vineland County in *Vineland.*

3.3.2 Postmodern ontology in marijuana

It seems no wonder then, that the reality of the worlds these characters live is doubted by those living in the 'straight world'. As McHale argued, "not that postmodern theory depends on Pynchon's fiction for exemplification, but that, without Pynchon's fiction, there might never have been such a pressing need to develop a theory of literary postmodernism in the first place" (2011, 97). As the pot-smokers' reality is doubted by people around them, it again invites the reader to do a postmodern reading of the novels, where the questions of how these alternative worlds are constituted.

In his poetics of postmodernism, McHale (1987) argues that postmodernity takes modernity's questions about knowledge[4] and adds to them questions about being (9–11). He states that the main difference between modernist and postmodernist text is the thing that most guides the reader: in modernism this is the *epistemological* (McHale 1987). In postmodernist literature the dominant is *ontological*, which for McHale is centered on questions such as "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (10). Postmodernist text might question the ontology of the text itself or the world it projects:

> What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on. (10)

To discuss how these questions of ontology are presented in the text, some further poeticization is needed. It is again provided by McHale (2011), who makes a difference between Pynchon's postmodernities and postmodernisms.

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[4] McHale's postulates that the questions modernist works want to answer relate to that of epistemology, to questions of "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?", as well as "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; how is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable? And so on." (1987, 9). These questions can continue in postmodernism as well, as it is only a question of the dominance of the postmodernist questions that make a divide for McHale.

3.4 Postmodernities and postmodernisms

McHale makes a difference between *postmodernities* as being the "historical and cultural conditions that presumably gave rise to [the] forms and practices [of postmodernism]," and *postmodernisms*, which are the "aesthetic forms and practices of the postmodern period" – e.g., the 'styles' that come up in postmodern literature (97). In the following, I discuss one postmodernity and two postmodernisms of Pynchon's, as defined by McHale.

3.4.1 Postmodernity through incredulity

Of the postmodernities, McHale first recognizes incredulity, and this is the one aspect of *postmodernity* that I will focus on in this thesis. This is a skepticism towards the grand narratives that had so far 'underwritten and sustained' modern western culture and society (98). Grand authorities such as God, Marx, or the President no longer hold judgement, but rather the power is in 'little narratives' of "subcultural enclaves," as McHale calls them. Postmodern literature's tendency to write *histographic metafiction*, the genre of "sceptical, self-reflective historical fiction that [Linda Hutcheson] associates with literary postmodernism," (97) fits the bill according to McHale, and is evident in Pynchon's writing as well: the 'freaks' (the members of an 'underground' counter-culture, often hippie, movement) of Gordita Beach in *Inherent Vice* as well as the marijuana growers in *Vineland* place their fate in the 'little narrative' of marijuana as a common denominator, even when the world around them opposes to it. When Denis's food is stolen by a surfadelic (a portmanteau of surf and psychedelic) rock band The Boards, he is aghast of why the band didn't leave him any. As Doc questions why should they have, Denis can't give a straight answer right away. Soon he answers back:

> "Because," Denis answered Doc's question a bit later, "they are supposed to be freaks, a freak surfadelic band, that's their public image, and freaks don't rip off other freaks, and most of all if they take your food, freaks share it. Didn't you see that movie? There's this actual 'Code of the Freaks'—"
> "I think," Doc said, "that was like 1932, some traveling circus story, different kind of freaks. . . ." (*IV,* 196)

These small counterculture enclaves form their own 'code,' as Denis has recognized to be a real thing, confusing with the movie 'Code of the Freaks,' yet maintaining the key difference of being part of the enclave: shared goods, high moral values ('freaks don't rip off other freaks') and high aversion towards betrayal ('they're supposed to be freaks'). In these enclaves, this

aversion towards betrayal serves as a cornerstone of commitment to alternative values and rejection of traditional roles. Emphasizing trust and loyalty, Pynchon criticizes the established power structures and underscores the quest for autonomy in fragmented and marginalized social groups.

Cowart (2011) avers that the reason marijuana is discussed so much in the California Trilogy is not because of the drugs *per se*, but in how the drugs act as "a touchstone or gauge of governmental repression" (99). Pynchon's style to address this is through biblical allusion, how in this enclaves the members are alike brothers and sisters, being lured by satanic detectives and their offers of earthly goods such as money and marijuana. As has been shown in this thesis, this is evident again and again in how the detectives try to lure the hippie protagonists to betray these communities, and how the hippies in part have stayed strong.

Why the detectives use such tactics is simply because that's the way for the 'freaks' to enjoy the privileges of the 'straights'. In the California Trilogy, "a drug culture is the natural corollary to the political and economic exclusion of any social element. Drugs, at once destructive and subversive, correlate to powerlessness," Cowart continues (*ibid*). When standing strong in their incredulity towards the powers that be, the hippie protagonists thus maintain their power, even if the drugs correlate to their powerlessness, a fact which the detectives try to abuse.

Next, I will analyze the works through the "postmodernisms" that McHale categorizes.

3.4.2 Postmodernism through double-coding

As first of the two postmodernisms, McHale recognizes double-coding, which he also states to be the best known and the most influential *postmodernism* of the postmodern era (101). High culture and mass media get mixed together, which to McHale also explains the paradox of Pynchon being both an object of academic study as well as having a cult following. He recognizes that reading Pynchon requires "more or less esoteric knowledge," and that his fiction displays "avant-garde difficulty" and "high-culture allusiveness" that are counterbalanced by "low-cultural entertainment value" (*ibid*). This ties to this thesis as well, as Pynchon's mode of humor is visible in nearly every part of the California novels, ranging from silly names and puns to dance and musical numbers and slapstick comedy, while at the same time discussing the war on drugs and the conditions of that it forces those subcultural enclaves, mentioned above, as real dangers that thwart the livelihoods of those enclaves, caused by menaces such as the "ancient powers of greed and fear" (*IV*, 129). There are, for example, ways of exaggeration

being used in Pynchon's serious attempt to discuss the war on drugs – caricatures, over the top characters, events that shouldn't take place yet do. In *Vineland*, there is a former Nazi *Luftwaffe* officer that leads the Reagan CAMP helicopter surveillance over Vineland County. Later in the novel, Brock Vond's attempt to kidnap Prairie comes to a literal screeching halt when President Reagan interrupts "REX 84," the readiness exercise under whose guise Vond had started his operation in Vineland, and Vond's omnipotence withers in a blink of an eye.

This is very much the 'levity' that balances the 'gravity' of the realism, as postulated by Veggian (2014, 136). Near the end of *Vineland*, a band is playing a three-note blues song called "I'm a Cop", featuring lines such as "Fuck your brother / Fuck your mother / fuck your pop– / Hey! I'm a cop!" (*V* 356-357). The crowd reacts to this "as if it were gospel," crying out "'How True!'" and "'I can relate to that!'" (*ibid*). Even as Pynchon is writing a novel where three generations have to position themselves in relation to the war on drugs, he is still peppering the book with songs that, just as the puns mentioned earlier, might just seem asinine.

More than anything, McHale recognizes characteristic for Pynchon the "unstable, disorienting interaction of his complex style with models derived from popular genre fiction, movies and television" (101) – *Inherent Vice* and *Lot 49* that are very much detective novels, the cartoonish characterizations of Bigfoot and Hector, and the overall employment of both film techniques as well as name dropping of films and tv shows as seen above in the way that Doc and Denis discuss the *Code of the Freaks* (1932).

3.4.3 Postmodernism through irony and pastiche

Secondly, McHale recognizes postmodern irony. Drawing a line between the modernists and postmodernists, he states that while irony was a characteristic of the modern period style, in postmodernism the irony takes a different stance. Modernism's irony was "disjunctive; striving to recover an ideal integration and coherence it acknowledged the disconnectedness of things and sought to at least control disconnection if not ultimately resolve it" (102). This recovery of integration is not necessary in the postmodern style: it is suspended; postmodern irony simply accepts that the world is in disorder. There is no need to 'resolve' the world, if one can accept that everything is true in relation to some other context, leaving the world a disordered place.

A great example of postmodern irony in the California novels would be an episode of members of a band turning into Zombies in *Inherent Vice*. In chapter nine of the novel, Doc is searching for Coy Harlingen, an ex-"junkie" (heroin addict), who is believed to be deceased, at a house

rented by the band "the Boards," whom Doc soon believes to be zombies. The mood at the house is building more and more tense around Doc, until someone downstairs is walking around handing out joints. After the recipients had lit up and inhale, the member who handed out the joints would say: "Hey! Guess what's in this grass?" (*IV,* 132). As people wonder, ("No idea.", "LSD?", "I don't know, uh… mescaline!", "Shredded psilocybe mushrooms? Angel dust? Speed?") he retorts, cackling, "No! it's just grass! Hahahaha!" (*ibid)*. Perhaps this uncertainty about the marijuana in the joints causes Doc some anxiety:

> Almost before Doc knew it, he'd gotten so stoned on the mystery weed that he flashed how it wasn't just Coy whose vital signs were debatable—somebody had definitely been out harrowing the next world for Boards personnel, because Doc knew now, beyond all doubt, that *every single one* of these Boards was a *zombie,* undead and unclean. "Dead and clean is okay?" Denis, who had materialized from someplace, wondered.
>
> […]
>
> "Aaahhh!" Denis running off in panic, "I'm outta here, man!"
>
> Denis having failed to provide him much of an anchor in reality, Doc now proceeded to freak even further out. That dope with its extra ingredient which might not really have been there could also have had something to do with it—howsoever, Doc suddenly found himself fleeing through the corridors of the creepy old mansion with uncertain numbers of screaming flesh-eating creatures behind him. . . . (132–33)

Through excerpts such as these, marijuana then offers possibilities to study the possibilities of how differing worlds (ontological questions being the dominant query of postmodern literature, as postulated by McHale (1987)), such as those vacated by zombies, is possible. Even if Doc is under the influence of the 'mystery weed,' and 'flashes' how he 'knew' that everybody in the Boards personnel is a zombie, in the storyworld this disruption of our ordinary world is handled nonchalantly. Thus, the zombie joke is further built-up on with Denis having the same paranoid freak-out episode as Doc, and pushed even further when it is nonchalantly agreed by everyone in the Boards vicinity that the band members have become zombies, so much so that later in the novel Coy explains how the groupies surrounding the band

> all got together and kicked in and hired an exorcist. Some Buddhist priest from the Temple downtown. He came up one day and did his thing, and now the Boards and the house are all officially dezombified. They gave him a maintenance contract to run regular psychic perimeter checks (299).

And so, Doc and Denis accept the band being zombies and so does everyone around them, so much so, that an exorcist is hired to de-zombify the house. Did the Boards actually become zombies? Was it all the 'mystery weed'? If so, are everyone, including Coy and the groupies

under the influence of the same weed? Or is this just a gag? Echoing McHale, we might note that "Pynchon appears to be half kidding here, but about what?" (2011, 104). Yet there is no question for Doc that zombies are real and that the Boards are zombies.

The postmodern world of Thomas Pynchon is one where things are inherently in disarray, or to put it another way, perhaps the whole world has an "inherent vice" – some aspect of the world that keeps it from being an integrate whole, and is instead the ironic parts seep through, even if we don't know what they are making fun about. And in his assignment to find the deceased Coy Harlingen, Doc, albeit with panic, accepts that he is ought to run into the living dead as he tries to find the dead living.

This McHale ties together with the idea of pastiche – "neutral mimicry, lacking parody's ulterior motives" (102). Things such as Pynchon's silly namings (Denis's name, "whose name everybody pronounced to rhyme with penis" (*IV,* 10) for one example, Manny Di Presso in *Lot 49*¸ and Weed Atman in *Vineland* as another) are recognized as 'cues' for ironic reading, but McHale notes how we are often left wondering what "exactly the point of Pynchon's irony might be" (*ibid*). Sometimes they are only gags, yet sometimes there seems to be a deeper thing to uncover. So, the serious and the laughable go hand in hand in Pynchon's writing (which was recognized as a property of *double coding* as well): the real and the unreal are within the same plane, as the living and the dead roam the same earth.

3.5 Messages portrayed by postmodernism

While McHale provides ample resources to studying the 'style' of postmodern literature and offers a view into the poetics of postmodern literature, this view is also challenged by different scholars. Cowart (2011) writes:

> however accomplished [postmodern authors] might be as practitioners of the emergent aesthetic, they remain curiously moral—even moralistic—in their outlook.[…] Nowhere is this paradoxical subversion of the postmodern gospel more evident than in the work of Thomas Pynchon, an author who leaves his readers in no doubt regarding his attitude towards racism, oppressive economic practices, genocidal violence, skullduggery in high places, and police-state repression. (84)

As this thesis is concerned with reading the California novels as political novels, one of those "attitudes" that Cowart mentions could be that Pynchon is trying to show a possible reality of cannabis use – one which has been actively acted out by smaller communities for at least sixty

years and counting in the real world – instead of the federal driven message of the government, which in turn has affected rest of the world as well.

An example of this would be in how Doc wonders about the future of the hippie flower power movement, as when 'on the natch' and thinking how how a certain hand "might reach terribly out of darkness and reclaim the time, easy as taking a joint from a doper and stubbing it out for good" (255), as postulated earlier in this thesis. The fear for the hope of the hippies is also evident when Doc has an epiphany about the dangers near the counterculture movement. Within the Boards' house, Doc starts to pick up on some 'vibrations'. The ability to pick up on these vibrations is attributed to LSD, as Doc recounts how taking that drug forces the P.I. to pick "some kind of extrasensory chops," which enable him to sense, as he calls it, 'an atmosphere' of people who displayed "a high level of discomfort, even fear, about anybody who couldn't be dropped in a bag right away and labeled" (*IV,* 129-130).

Doc's sense of the second generation being somehow in a state of fear or discomfort is attributed to something that is perhaps the key to the novel, with its depictions of the agents that perhaps should not be present. Doc reflects how all around the Greater Los Angels "among gatherings of carefree youth and happy dopers" he had begun to notice older men, "there and not there, rigid, unsmiling," people with "a defiant posture, an unwillingness to blur out […] beyond official envelopes of skin" – signaling very much to the activities of the paranoid right (130).

> Doc knew these people, he'd seen enough of them in the course of business. They went out to collect cash debts, they broke rib cages, they got people fired, they kept an unforgiving eye on anything that might become a threat. If everything in this dream of prerevolution was in fact doomed to end and the faithless money-driven world to reassert its control over all the lives it felt entitled to touch, fondle, and molest, it would be agents like these, dutiful and silent, out doing the shitwork, who'd make it happen.
>
> Was it possible, that at every gathering—concert, peace rally, love-in, be-in, and freak-in, here, up north, back East, wherever—those dark crews had been busy all along, reclaiming the music, the resistance to power, the sexual desire from epic to everyday, all they could sweep up, for the ancient forces of greed and fear? (*ibid*)

In this excerpt the 'happy dopers,' people of the second generation under the influence of marijuana, are *de facto* (instead of being a delusion) also surrounded by some forces of evil. Albeit at the periphery, possible maybe to be only picked out with 'extrasensory chops,' these forces would throw the 'dream of prerevolution' to the 'faithless money-driven world'. Doc is wondering whether this is happening at every public gathering of psychedelic drug use ('concert, peace rally, love-in, be-in, and freak-in') on the largest population centers ('here [in L.A.], up north, back East'), "reclaiming" the goods that the counterculture movement had won

– the freedom from the traditional modern world – all for the 'ancient forces of greed and fear'. For Doc, and perhaps then by extension, for Pynchon, the pre-revolution dream ('the resistance to power, the sexual desire from epic to everyday') is in danger by these forces: the third generation is a real threat to the second one. The people 'doing the shitwork' would be these people, these defiant older men who keep an 'unforgiving eye'. And as *Vineland* goes to show, that very much happens: the hippies venture out to Northern California, into the Vineland County, as the "pre-revolution" fades and the second generation is either forced to adapt or to become recluse.

With marijuana use then, and the postmodernities and postmodernisms afforded by its representation, Pynchon offers a view to the freak enclave who build the world through and surrounding marijuana use: on the very first pages of *Inherent Vice*, Doc is first introduced to the narrative as possibly hallucinating (*IV*, 1), soon said to not have been smoking much that day (5) – yet still perhaps under the influence of the drug. When studying a painting on his apartment wall, Doc thinks of the painting as

> a window to look out of when he couldn't deal with looking out of the traditional glass-type one in the other room. Sometimes in the shadows the view would light up, usually when he was smoking weed, as if the contrast knob of Creation had been messed with just enough to give everything an underglow, a luminous edge, and promise that the night was about to turn epic somehow. (6)

Thinking of the California Trilogy in the same vein, it might as well prove to be to the possible audience of real-life marijuana enclaves as 'a window to look out of' when the ability to deal with the traditional glass-type one is out of the question. And as such, in the novel the 'contrast knob of Creation' is also messed up 'just enough' to give these stories the same underglow and luminous edge that make the California novels epic.

The "dewy-eyed revolutionary idealism" is then nothing more and nothing less than hope for a future where 'that useful substance,' as the author calls it, is part of the world, without its users being under control of forces that cause 'grim paranoia' and use the war on drugs for their own benefit. And in doing so, perhaps the dews in the eyes are formed from laughter, not from tears.

4 Conclusion

In this master's thesis I have discussed how Thomas Pynchon's California Trilogy straddles the line of being both a trilogy of political novels as well as clear examples of postmodern literature – the two often thought to be mutually exclusive. Pynchon flaunts the very postmodern poetics that have come to describe him in portraying the war on drugs in modes more common in literary realism, but also employs stylistics and ideologies of postmodernism in a way that moves the questions of marijuana to the spotlight, increasingly so as the trilogy moves forward to *Vineland* and even further in *Inherent Vice*.

Pynchon's California Trilogy deals heavily with the theme of war on marijuana, with three political generations recognized in *Vineland* by Veggian (2014), used in this thesis to cover all of the California Trilogy. These generations consist of a 'first generation,' New Deal Leftists, 'second generation,' Flower Power Hippies, and 'third generation,' the Paranoid Right Wing. Mostly, the politics of the novels surround the tension felt between the hippies and the paranoid right wing, as war on drugs is waged on the hippies by the paranoid right. This tension is present both in Brock Vond's attack on Vineland County and to the PR^3 in *Vineland* and can be further read in the dialogue between the law enforcement and the hippies. *Vineland* and *Inhrent Vice* take almost biblical quality in their narratives when Zoyd and Doc are asked to be informants for the law enforcement. In writing about these enclaves, Pynchon uses varieties of postmodernisms to shed light to the power that marijuana has in these communities: namely double-coding, irony, and pastiche.Postmodern books, then, can become political, even if the 'levity' of postmodernism counters the 'gravity' of literary realism.

This thesis has studied the marijuana in Pynchon's California Trilogy. Even though the California Trilogy has been thought of as a lighter counterpart to the heftier, more canonized big four postmodern works of Pynchon's oeuvre – *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon*, and *Against the Day* – California Trilogy is also bountiful in its expressions of postmodernisms and provides a place to study a very real life phenomenon of war on drugs through hippie characters who ultimately want to be left alone and enjoy the 'useful substance,' as the author calls it.

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