

“THE FAITHLESS, MONEY-DRIVEN WORLD”: COMMUNICATION AND EXCHANGE IN THOMAS
PYNCHON’S *INHERENT VICE*

by

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ABSTRACT

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Set at the end of the 1960s in Southern California, Thomas Pynchon's novel *Inherent Vice* (2009) is a nostalgic and parodic take on the hard-boiled crime genre. With a nebulously defined search for an erstwhile lover and intimations of foul play from global corporations, its conventional plot construction has led most critics to view the frequency with which its private eye protagonist, Doc Sportello, consumes and distributes cannabis while detecting as a hyperbolic motif designed to accentuate the ostentation of the book's stylistic parody. This thesis argues that *Inherent Vice* uses cannabis as a symbolic embodiment of a way of thinking about exchange that effectively circumvents the problems Pynchon perceives to be posed by capitalism. *Inherent Vice* represents a stylistic departure for Pynchon in that, by advocating the repeated institution of small-scale economies of gift exchange, it offers a specific proscriptive ethical guideline for readers wishing to resist capitalism.

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Introduction: Cannabis and Capitalism

The main character of Thomas Pynchon's 2009 novel *Inherent Vice*, named Doc Sportello, is an idiosyncratic lead character because of the large amount of cannabis he smokes. *Inherent Vice*, a self-conscious parody of the hard-boiled crime novel, follows this stoner ex-hippie private detective, who is tracked down in the beginning of the book by his erstwhile beach bum girlfriend Shasta Fey Hepworth. She tells him that the guy she is shackled up with right now, Mickey Wolfmann, has suddenly gone missing, and that she senses—uh oh!—that Mickey's *wife* might be involved somehow! Doc plunges into a series of events that lead to the revelation of the influence that a mysterious organization, the Golden Fang, has on things around Southern California. Apparently this interest has its hand in real estate speculation, dentistry, illegal drug importation, and the rehabilitation of individuals afflicted by drug addiction.

What Pynchon intimates, in this book and in others of his, is that individual perception is limited enough that there might exist, just barely perceptibly, shadowy organizations with the ability to influence the material world in which we live. The world might, in fact, all be under the control of a few very powerful interests. Pynchon's books are often read as proposing the idea that, while the reality of cynical interests controlling our lives sometimes seems likely, our inability fully to countenance those institutions makes our potential ability to resist them fairly weak. Like other novels by Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* tries to make explicit the fact that, regardless of whether the kind of cartels described by *Inherent Vice* are out there in the real world, there are enough people internalizing a kind of capitalist-friendly ideology out there that a world in which such a cartel could thrive is not so infeasible. In the world Pynchon imagines, the ideology is subtle. It comes out in the way that characters interact. Pynchon sees capitalism as being analogous to selfishness, disingenuousness, the tendency to see material things in terms of their abstract value, and an attitude of exploitation.

Given the overall self-consciously parodic tone of the work, Doc's propensity to get high while detecting serves, on one level, simply to add incidental detail to a novel that is, like all of Pynchon's, grounded in a specific time and place. Cannabis is, of course, a purely recreational drug for many of the novel's characters. At the same time, it is clear that Doc, at least, is not unaware of the subtextual social rules governing proper use and distribution of the drug, which are not articulated in contractual terms. Doc knows, for example, that the best way to smooth over a tense social situation often requires just "going over to the file cabinet and retrieving his emergency stash" (*IV* 290). Cannabis usage demonstrates to others a

willingness to compromise and, more importantly, is understood by the other characters to indicate a conciliatory attitude, as “around the second or possibly third joint, everybody [begins] to relax” (*IV* 290). The awareness of social niceties within marginal communities—those economically or politically at odds with the government—helps Doc to sustain relationships that reward him with information incidental to his quest.

Not only is cannabis used to indicate social inclusivity in *Inherent Vice*, but its presence also appears to be conducive to significant developments in the metanarrative Doc perceives as underlying the international Golden Fang cartel and the United States government’s complicity in a plot to determine the course of history. Toward the beginning of the novel, Doc is sent after Coy Harlingen, erstwhile saxophonist for the surf band the Boards. His investigation stages itself as what appears at times to be aimless wandering, but his errant behavior is punctuated by moments of clarity after smoking. After a rehearsal by the band Beer, having “considerately brought along a shirtpocket full of prerolled Panamanian”, Doc learns from his cousin Scott Oof and Scott’s friend Lefty that Coy Harlingen, whom Doc has been hired to track down, ““allegedly OD’d”” but that, according to Scott, ““there’s also been a strange rumor going around, is that he really survived? [. . .] Everybody kept it quiet, some say they paid him to go on pretending he’s dead, and he’s out there someplace walkin among us in disguise”” (*IV* 44). Since Doc’s job is to locate Coy, his “considerate” idea to bring along and eventually distribute cannabis on a certain level nothing more than good detective work; he is aware enough to know that if he gets his acquaintances to smoke they will be more likely to convey spontaneous or unusual thoughts. In *Inherent Vice*, metanarratives are, unintentionally or not, hidden, and have to be construed by Doc and, in turn, the reader, as both engage in a process of constructing and editing a narrative explanation of events. This process of construction is involved with a process of selflessness and gift-giving behavior.

In *Inherent Vice*, cannabis is the object of a ritual where the fundamental dissimilarities between morally-based and value-based economies articulate themselves. The economies Doc institutes with his use and distribution of cannabis make no external reference to the monetary value of the substance, and are thereby placed in contrast with other value-driven enterprises (real estate development, cocaine distribution) that operate according to a logic where money is the bottom line. It would be impossible for Doc not to be aware, in the garage at Scott Oof’s house, that he is demonstrating a willingness literally to combust his property. The day before his talk with the band Beer, after all, Doc is driven up to the top of a

hill (“that [has] Shot While Trying to Escape written all over it” (*IV* 30)) by his police detective counterpart, Bigfoot Bjornsen. Here Doc is imaginatively shown, in a gesture reminiscent of the fourth chapter of *Matthew*, just how permeable the boundary between money and cannabis is. Doc has no way of knowing “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” (*IV* 33). With its emplacement in the center of a discourse around complicity with authority, this scene shows that cannabis bears significance not just as an incidental detail intended to give a sense of realism to a book about the end of the 1960s, nor does it simply function as a tool for detection. It is implicated in a struggle for Doc’s ability to enact a moral role in a society whose standards are disintegrating and being replaced by a strictly economic way of thinking; cannabis is tied up with money and materialism, and specifically with the economic structures typical of capitalist societies. ““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), Bigfoot offers. Much of the book’s underlying theme derives from its central character’s countenancing the permeability of the social sphere of interaction he and others had temporarily constructed for themselves via the use of cannabis.

The idea of the gift economy, stated formally by David Cheal in *The Gift Economy* (1988) and visited in terms of its implications for the process of artistic creation by Lewis Hyde in 1983’s *The Gift*, articulate models that explain for Doc’s behavior in terms of its difference from the logic of conventional capitalistic economies. According to Cheal, gift economies work without explicit reference to an external, quantifiable standard of value. Gifts of no apparent value may be exchanged with one another, but they stand for a reciprocally understood relationship of mutual obligation which precludes the necessity of a quantifiable (money-based) system of assigning value. Gift economies can operate based on an entirely distinct idea of value than money-based systems of exchange. This specific theoretic framework will work as a launching point for a discussion of the way that economic metaphors function broadly in Pynchon’s novel to integrate the ideas of exchange and communicability into the lexical fabric of characters’ interpersonal relationships.

Doc’s frequent consumption of cannabis figures as a motif that works to complicate characters’ conception of their own mutual hostility and exclusivity toward each other. By excepting the use of

cannabis from the system of monetary exchange, Doc institutes and participates in a gift economy, wherein value is unquantified and information, of varying levels of “relevance,” is incidentally exchanged as well. The tendency cannabis has to enhance conceptions of interconnectedness allows its use to act as a perceptual de-stabilizer. The consumption of cannabis is the place where socially transgressive destabilization takes place when it works as a medium for the institution of gift economies. These economies are special in that their unquantified system of value places cannabis outside of the realm of capitalistic methods of exchange), but also in their catalysis of internalized distinctions between “freak” and “straight” culture that Pynchon takes pains throughout the book to demonstrate are untenable and founded on incoherencies.

Cannabis’ recurrent appearances in *Inherent Vice* engender an atmosphere of levity that pervades the novel. This tongue-in-cheek parody of the hard-drinking private eye so typical of the detective fiction genre led contemporary reviewers to charge *Inherent Vice* with a lack of the seriousness of Pynchon’s weightier novels. Michiko Kakutani, in an advance review published in the *New York Times*, commented that, “Compared with ‘Gravity’s Rainbow’ or ‘V.’ or ‘Mason & Dixon,’ this novel is Pynchon Lite [sic]”. A review by Walter Kirn that appeared later in the *New York Times* praised the novel’s moralistic tone but nonetheless suggested that it ought to be approached with a degree of levity, since, on Kirn’s account, “the story takes on the shape of [Doc’s] derangement, squirting along from digression to digression and periodically pausing for dope-head gabfests of preposterous intensity” on ontological subjects. *Pace* the connotative singularity of his language, the idea that Kirn has of large chunks of dialogue having no meaning except insofar as they illustrate a kind of *zeitgeist* bespeaks a critical tendency not to evaluate late Pynchon novels with the same interrogative spirit with which readers are invited to approach a work like *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973). The tendency of contemporary reviewers dismissively to evaluate *Inherent Vice* based on its dissimilarity to Pynchon’s already established works presaged, if it did not indeed influence, later critical evaluations.

Subsequent scholarly writing has for the most part opted to situate *Inherent Vice* with the other two of Pynchon’s novels that take place in California, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Vineland* (1990). Such arguments for the novel as a reiterative, easily accessible self-parody that grounds the simplest of Pynchon’s themes in concrete character relationships are typified, for example, by Thomas Hill Schaub’s essay on “*The Crying of Lot 49* and other California novels”. Schaub deftly locates the presence in *Inherent*

Vice of particular, temporary alternatives to what retrospectively seems the inevitable encroachment of historical progress, noting that “the beach emerges . . . as the momentary alternative to the street and the hothouse, left, right and center”, and that recreation represents an escape from what will eventually be the wake-up call of society. His conclusion, exemplary of the majority of Pynchon critics’, is that *Inherent Vice* is *Vineland* redux, and that together they “are much less ambitious than in Pynchon’s first California novel [*The Crying of Lot 49*]” (Schaub 40-41). Critical evaluations of *Inherent Vice* accurately note its idiosyncratic homage to detective fiction, but stop short of analyzing its conceptual structure without implicitly assuming that it reiterates the same general themes as his earlier, presumably more accomplished, works. That is, most critics tend to assume that the novel levels accusations against the capitalistic interests that perpetuate war and economic disparity throughout the world while thematizing ontological instability as the root of a paralyzing inability to do anything about it. On my reading, though, *Inherent Vice* is different from anything else Pynchon has written in its advocacy of the repeated institution of a particular type of economic exchange as a viable method of political resistance.

The literary significance of *Inherent Vice* derives in part from its shared thematic concerns with other Pynchon novels. Specifically, *Inherent Vice* demonstrates an anxiety over capitalism evinced in the existence of both monopolies and cartels, which operate independently of the political sphere. It explores the way that historiographic interpretation shapes the actions of characters, like it does in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Against the Day*. *Inherent Vice* verbalizes an ambivalence about the feasibility of actual historical closure. It also shares with all of Pynchon’s other works a focus on the concept of a politically influential group of characters whose ability to wield power comes from its self-recognition as legitimate and as a result of its having the necessary force to enforce its policies. Linked with this is the novel’s realization of various communities of political resistance. Finally, particularly considering the dearth of critical work on the subject and its recurrence in every Pynchon novel, *Inherent Vice*’s thematization of and careful attention to drug use and culture can provide a retrospective framework with which to consider drug use in other of Pynchon’s novels.

The novel’s idiosyncrasies are what make it most worthy of study though, if only because they represent significant thematic departures from a critically significant writer’s work. These special aspects may complicate future retrospective evaluations of the author’s oeuvre, especially those that try to impose a consistent thread of logic or tropological organization onto the whole body of work. Pynchon’s novels deal

with historically disparate periods of time, but *Inherent Vice* represents, in many respects, a return to 1990's *Vineland*. Uniquely among Pynchon's novels, *Inherent Vice* emphasizes the similarities among diverse social strata, and appears gently to chastise its characters for their mutual conviction of mutual alienation. Doc and Bigfoot have occupations that bear similarities toward one another; importantly, though, neither character has the mindset that would be necessary to allow a reconciliation between the novel's two main sociopolitical groups. Even though Doc bases his economies on morality and Bigfoot bases his on value, neither ontological assumption about exchange contains in it the ingredients that would allow for the apparent difference between the two characters to be dissolved.

The novel is also unusual amongst Pynchon's novels in the way in which it articulates sustainable loci of political resistance. *Inherent Vice*'s characters enact a politically subversive act whose occurrence is not (as in other Pynchon novels) transcendent of, but immanent in, the social fabric. That is, it does not take place in a realm that is somehow outside of society; it uses already extant aspects of society to engineer its resistance. The final and most obvious peculiarity of the book is its pervasive parodying of hard-boiled detective fiction. Quests of one sort or another are common fare in Pynchon novels, but *Inherent Vice*'s self-conscious homage to detective fiction makes it worthy of discussion especially with respect to its troubling summative commentaries on the body of Pynchon's work, which tend to focus on the fact that Pynchon's characters are unwittingly enlisted in detective quests, instead of already having those quests as part of their professional occupation.

Other treatments of *Inherent Vice*, while refraining from limiting their analysis to comparing and contrasting the book with other novels by Pynchon, have relied heavily on philosophical models to provide self-consistent explanations of the way things play out. Their shared reliance on theoretically structured argumentation sometimes strays from what is a decidedly errant narrative. Rob Wilson, in "On the Pacific Edge of Catastrophe, or Redemption: California Dreaming in Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*" (2010), detects a thread of transformation running through the book. Wilson claims that "Pynchon labors in the time-honored generic trenches of American 'hardboiled fiction' to elaborate the transformative energies of what California still stands for as worlding edge-space, as a temporal promise of social transformation and popular-cultural redemption not quite over" (Wilson 218). Similarly, in *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History* (2012), David Cowart defends the apparently unfocused narrative of this new book, writing, "As [Pynchon's] vision matures, he seems to feel that too much linearity may misrepresent or

betray or oversimplify what [Slovenian philosopher Slavoj] Žižek calls ‘the new world of dispersed multiple identities, or radical contingency, or an irreversibly ludic plurality of struggles.’” (Cowart 123). While my work follows Wilson in attempting to construe the types of transcendence articulated in the novel, its focus stems from a consideration of a single textual element and constructs the broader implications of the novel from there. Wilson’s argument is that transcendence, with its connotative dimensions placing it *outside* of something else being examined, takes precedence in Pynchon’s novels, while I maintain that the very idea of transcendence is at odds with what Pynchon intends to get across with *Inherent Vice*—that the book is instead trying to name a kind of immanent political resistance, that takes place within the confines of the legitimized social sphere.

Other works by Pynchon that have accrued criticism bear significance for the present evaluation of *Inherent Vice* because critical analysis of political resistance in the works, particularly those that foreground the family as a way to dissolve conceptions of otherness or alienation, points toward a poetics of morality and communication in the world inhabited by all Pynchon characters. N. Katherine Hayles, in her essay “‘Who Was Saved?’: Families, Snitches, and Recuperation in *Vineland*”, explores the interchangeability of roles of resistance and repression by examining the role of the snitch in *Vineland*, arguing that “the text explores the entanglements implicit in Frenesi’s transition from kin to snitch” (Hayles 20). Hayles perceives that Pynchon accedes to the idea of discourses representing themselves as having total control and knowledge. This thinking leads Hayles to the conclusion that *Vineland* points toward “insights”, “chief among [which] is the realization that apparently totalized structures have fissures that can be exploited for progressive purposes” (Hayles 28). Hayles’ identification suggests that Pynchon just as keenly notes the similarities amongst apparently exclusive social bodies as he does suggest the individual’s powerlessness when confronted with an apparently faceless and unitary structural opposition. The work that Hayles has already done permits for a new reading of *Inherent Vice* which takes into account the permeability of the types of structures that early Pynchon novels represent as impenetrable. *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* make meaningful action from within the system that would change the course of that system (whether it is political, social, economic, or symbolic) a seeming impossibility. Tyrone Slothrop and Oedipa Maas can identify traces of what appear to be global systems of control, but they can do nothing to resist those systems. *Vineland* is a radical departure in that it dissolves the boundaries between those who comprise the institutions and those who are acted on by those institutions. *Inherent Vice* continues in the

same vein as *Vineland* in articulating a way for the direction of the system to be changed from within, but takes *Vineland*'s goal a step further, as I argue below, by actually advocating for a specific type of political action.

Because the exchange of information figures prominently in *Inherent Vice*, the present project's discussion is not limited solely to acts of political resistance that take place in a strictly economic sphere. Rather, John O. Stark's conception, in *Pynchon's Fictions: Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information*, of Pynchon's fictions as embodying a poetics of information provides a valuable framework with which to consult verbal and material exchanges in *Inherent Vice*. By abstracting the general thematic concerns of Pynchon's fiction to the ideas of communication and informational exchange, Stark provides a far-reaching theoretical model for describing the various ways with which social difference is reiterated, eliminated, and ultimately inevitable for characters. Stark's assessment delineates a process of abstraction by which the analogous aspects of material and informational exchange appear to speak to the same principle of interpenetrability. That is, the fact that both material and conceptual circumstances can be altered by the actions of individuals or societies provides the justification for what Stark reads as Pynchon's politically radical idea of instituting social reorientation from within. The use of cannabis in *Inherent Vice*, when considered not simply as an incidental detail but as a small-scale model for the methods of exchange influencing the lives of different characters, provides a glimpse of the author's broader political message.

Investing intense significance in seemingly incidental details is not something *Inherent Vice* does without precedent. Samuel Thomas, in *Pynchon and the Political* (2007), has noted that "a fugitive politics making itself visible through what appears to be an incidental detail" effects itself in Pynchon's work considered as a whole. That line of analysis, though, has yet to be extended to *Inherent Vice*, and my claim is that cannabis functions in *Inherent Vice* as an image through which Pynchon demonstrates his own radical political ideology. Thomas' assertion that Pynchon's fiction "retains a legitimate impulse toward *immanent* transcendence" anticipates the localized, temporary spaces of political, social, and economic resistance embodied by characters smoking joints and taking part in the alternative economy of exchange in *Inherent Vice*. Whether Thomas' conflation of the two terms is intentional, *Inherent Vice* appears to posit immanence *contra* transcendence, where immanence works from within and transcendence effects itself from without, and seems to indicate attitudes of transcendence as contributing to the same social problems that capitalism does.

Inherent Vice is idiosyncratic, I argue, in that by localizing and concretizing the process of transcendence in the form of the cannabis cigarette, it interrogates the moral defensibility of a politically deviant act. Those who consume cannabis are able to participate in alternative social structures for limited periods of time, but those realms of exchange are not themselves exclusive or free from the influence of the authoritarian social structure. Readings of Pynchon's writing as advocating a certain sociopolitical stance are complicated by *Inherent Vice*'s decidedly ambiguous point of view respecting the extent to which a given person can be said to retain the ability to effect an exchange outside of the realm of conventional discourse. This thesis claims that *Inherent Vice* constitutes, with its doubtful attitude toward the sustainability of a transcendental political ideology, a partial return to the political pessimism of *Gravity's Rainbow*. If a system—economic, social, political, ideological, symbolic—represents itself as having privileged communication with whatever it is that arbitrates meaning in this world, it can represent itself as self-consistent, or totalized. These efforts at consistent self-representation, *Inherent Vice* suggests, are invariably bound to fail because reality is not structured in the same way that these systems are. Rather than reiterate any of Pynchon's previous themes on political resistance, I maintain that *Inherent Vice* articulates a skepticism about the very epistemological criteria that work to legitimate an activity as “deviant” in the first place.

Exploring the repercussions and textual significance of the use of cannabis in *Inherent Vice* provides a focal point for a discussion of political resistance and socio-cultural norms. This approach shows how a defiance of the conventions governing what Pynchon characterizes as the dominant, economistic discourse of the mainstream political sphere in early 1970s America propagates itself in the novel. Characters defy capitalism through the institution of an economy whose patterns of accumulation and distribution operate independently of language that assigns definite value to objects and information. Language is, after all, that which has the final say in conferring value on things. Money only has value insofar as it is the object of a verbalized agreement amongst parties respecting its value, and so the language of “economism” must necessarily borrow from ideas about value, use, and quantifiability. By grounding the act of political resistance in an economy of exchange whose epistemological and cultural foundations are distinct from those of the capitalist United States, Pynchon situates cannabis as a center of a circuitous, oblique discussion of the way that the language of economism insinuated itself into the culture of the 1960s. Approaching cannabis use in *Inherent Vice* from a critical perspective that borrows from gift

economics provides a refracting lens in which the intra-textual reverberations of the books' themes become readily apparent.

Part of the significance of this project derives from the critical tendency to characterize Thomas Pynchon's work as having two distinct periods, the later one inaugurated by the publication of *Vineland*. This conception generally tends to regard the earlier novels as more complex and accomplished, leading to characterizations of novels by Pynchon as "Pynchonesque," as though the writer lost his own identity after *Gravity's Rainbow*. The "late style," as addressed by Paul Mason in his advance review for the BBC of *Inherent Vice*, is seen as more direct, unambiguous, and earnest than the earlier style—abandoning complexity in favor of what Mason perceives to be "a move towards form, and closed form at that, towards genre, and towards communication". This gentler, simpler Pynchon (critics claim) chooses to limit the scope of his novels in favor of a new aesthetic of hybridization that preserves some of the formally and thematically radical aspects of his earlier fiction while tempering their tone with gestures toward what is conventionally recognized as realistic fiction. The idea of a "late Pynchon," though, is not new, and is obviously subject to reevaluation as new novels are published. David Cowart's 1994 essay on "Attenuated Postmodernism", discerns a thread of optimism running through *Vineland* that is not analogous to anything in the writer's earlier works; "Pynchon's setting is a representation of the American land; and he refuses to surrender the myth of American promise, which he seems to construe in terms of some continuing, provisional validity of a leftist political alternative to contemporaneous conservatism" (Cowart 9). N. Katherine Hayles, too, suggests that Pynchon's fiction radically altered its course after *Gravity's Rainbow*, as the permeability and mutual interchangeability of apparently exclusive social strata and spheres of interaction replaces individual helplessness in the face of globalized networks of control as a central thematic concern. *Inherent Vice*, with its superficial similarity to *Vineland*, suggests itself as a reinterpretation and revisitation of subject matter its author has already addressed. *Inherent Vice*'s self-conscious revisitation of the domain of *Vineland*, though, suggests a level of complexity that alone separates it from the rest of Pynchon's body of work. *Inherent Vice* is self-conscious of historical mediateness in two respects: it reads as a work in the stylistic vein of the time period which it represents, but it also positions itself as a revisitation of an existing Pynchon narrative, and so its mediacy is double. *Inherent Vice* suggests a particularly nuanced interpretation of historiography that deserves its own analysis.

In chapter one, “Anxiety about Capitalism in *Inherent Vice*,” I explore *Inherent Vice*’s most succinctly stated anxieties over enterprises characteristic of capitalistic economic structures. This chapter demonstrates that, though characters represent themselves as operating within the confines of a binary struggle that iterates itself at various levels of engagement (e.g., “hippies” vs. “straights,” “dopers” vs. “cops,”), the language of economism integrates itself so fully into each character’s social role so fully that all actions in the novel become illustrative of the actor’s economic ideology.

The second chapter, “Gift Economies and Immanent Resistance in *Inherent Vice*” considers alternative modes of exchange in *Inherent Vice*. By distributing and smoking cannabis, Doc institutes a localized and politically subversive gift economy of mutual obligation that, significantly, is differentiable from the capitalistic economic structure and rhetorical foundations, if not diametrically opposed to them. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how Doc’s altruistic gestures forge a space of political resistance wherein information is conveyed via conduits of mutual reassurance and trust.

This work concludes with a discussion of the repercussions *Inherent Vice* has for questions concerning what some have called a “late” period that began with the publication of *Vineland*. I claim that *Inherent Vice* represents a superficial “return” to *Vineland*, but that it also shares a concern that is shared by all of Pynchon’s works since 1990 with articulating specific methods of effective, temporary political resistance in the face of a discourse that represents itself as totalizing.

Chapter One: Anxiety about Capitalism in *Inherent Vice*

Inherent Vice follows Pynchon's other novels in articulating an anxiety about capitalistic culture, but the novel is unique among Pynchon's fiction in its nuanced portrait of the myriad facets of social existence touched by a single, unified logic of economic expansionism. Even though Doc is not among capitalism's most vocal critics, characters like Denis, Aunt Reet, and Sauncho, voice their anxieties about the totalizing influence that capitalistic thought has on individual identity and American culture. Even though the novel's diverse characters interpret the signs of capitalistic encroachment differently, the influence of capitalism as it is internalized by and imprinted onto the consciousnesses of individuals is foregrounded in *Inherent Vice* in three apparently separate spheres of interaction (land use, the idea of "turning" into an informant, and the existence of cabals), which each contribute to an overall anxiety that a serious threat exists to the present social order. Characters resist the capitalistic enterprise by enacting a method of resistance that involves a total ontological reorientation—an acknowledgement that not everything in life needs to be monetized or assigned a certain value.

It is often Doc's lawyer Sauncho who articulates a generalized anxiety about the state of American society, as in his "kind of courtroom summary" on the beach with Doc near the end of the novel, where he claims that "'there is no avoiding time, the sea of time, the sea of memory and forgetfulness, the years of promise, gone and unrecoverable, of the land almost allowed to claim its better destiny, only to have the claim jumped by evildoers known all too well'". Sauncho's statement, intriguingly linking fatalism ("better destiny") with economism ("claim jumped") bespeaks a concern that the apparent potential for change evident in the 1960s counterculture will eventually be overwhelmed by self-interested parties. Appended to his fatalistic proclamation is the hope that "'this blessed ship [American society] is bound for some better shore, some undrowned Lemuria, risen and redeemed'" (*IV* 341). Despite the fact that his statement echoes the work's general theme of belief in the reality of a mythologized past, Sauncho's generalized fears about his society mirror an anxiety about capitalism foregrounded in Doc's interactions with Bigfoot, in the trend of land privatization and development running through the novel, and in what Doc learns about the shadowy operations of the Golden Fang, whose influence he comes to realize resonates throughout the fabric of his social existence, bearing with it the potential fundamentally to alter the course of American history.

Pynchon articulates a complex understanding of resistance to capitalism by demonstrating that the rhetoric and underlying assumptions of capitalism tend to infiltrate even the most banal interpersonal situations. The individuals comprising American society, according to *Inherent Vice*, internalize the demands of brand-loyalty and consumerism. It is once again Sauncho, ironically enough “withdrawing his nose” from an advertisement-saturated television program, who notes of the StarKist® tuna that “‘Charlie really has this, like, *obsessive death wish*! Yes! he, he *wants* to be caught, processed, put in a can, not just any can, you dig, it has to be StarKist! suicidal brand loyalty, man”. Unlike Doc, who is inclined to retain a sense of optimism, Sauncho interprets the commercial trend as representing a “deep parable of consumer capitalism, they won’t be happy with anything less than drift-netting us all, chopping us up and stacking us on the shelves of Supermarket Amerika, and subconsciously the horrible thing is, is we *want* them to do it” (*IV* 119). Doc does not embody the sort of radical skepticism toward capitalistic ideology that Sauncho verbalizes; still, *Inherent Vice* takes care to identify the undercurrent of anxiety running throughout the counterculture respecting its eventual disintegration at the hands of interests that can turn individuals’ loyalty toward corporations instead of abstract ideals of community.

Inherent Vice hints at a social transformation whose effect is totally invisible to the observer, and the evidence it offers for this change is necessarily oblique. Part of *Inherent Vice* is engaged with the problem of whether an individual’s internalization of rhetoric commonly associated with capitalism represents a departure from what might be considered a “natural” mental state. Capitalism, *Inherent Vice* maintains, inscribes itself on the face of the landscape with real estate development, on the bodies of incarcerated and drug addicted individuals, and on the minds of those who, with their silence or their actions, are complicit in its project of destruction. The anxiety over a transformation in which appearances remain the same but internalized motives are altered is exemplified, as Rob Wilson identifies in “On the Pacific Edge of Catastrophe, or Redemption: California Dreaming in Thomas Pynchon’s *Inherent Vice*,” in the figure of “Coy Harlingen, who allegedly dies of a heroin overdose and comes back from the dead as an LAPD informant and faux-left demo-infiltrator”. Wilson claims that, “For Pynchon, being ‘born again’ transmutes into . . . ominous formations of goth zombies returning from the tomb, mutated citizens becoming the apolitical living dead” (Wilson 219). Coy Harlingen, on this reading, becomes apolitical because his actions are no longer the product of a struggle for one ideology’s dominance over another; the

change is total and has been effected in the entirety of Coy's identity, rendering him a functioning unit of the fascistic body, instead of a potential agent for political change.

Anxiety is not a topic with which Pynchon is unfamiliar. In fact, paranoia is one thematic element present in all of his works. Main characters, like Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* and Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow*, frequently feel an anxiety about the apparent order to the unfolding of events in their lives. In the typical Pynchon novel, as Samuel Thomas writes in *Pynchon and the Political*, "After the characters recognize a few coincidences, they begin to see a threatening order in them. Finally they change their minds and begin to doubt that they can understand events at all. At this point Pynchon suggests that the characters had merely imagined the order that they thought existed" (8). The "threatening order" that characters fear they detect in Pynchon's novels is itself the result of their ability to perceive the nearly invisible, though still discernible, effect of a capitalistic structure whose reach extends beyond the limits of an identifiable, individual corporation.

In the case of *Inherent Vice*, the shadowy cabal whose existence appears to govern so many of the events in Doc's life is the Golden Fang, which serves as an emblem not only of the totalizing economic power of capitalism, but also of the problematic effect that capitalistic ideology's tendency to exploit has on social existence. Where *Inherent Vice* departs from others of Pynchon's novels is with its deliberate foregrounding of the cabal influencing so much of the political and economic sphere of the 1960s. Instead of making the existence of cabals a convenient locus for foregrounding an investigation into ontology (as *Gravity's Rainbow*'s discussion of Dutch Shell invites the question of to whom to assign agency given a multiplicity of corporate interests), *Inherent Vice* envisions the cabal as a limited agent with definable goals. As the influence of the Golden Fang spreads malevolently from one real estate development to the next, not only do individual lots become cordoned off and transformed; time itself, too, is rendered a discrete commodity, one that can be bought and sold and transacted as easily as any material good.

Pynchon returns to the theme of boundaries frequently throughout his work, as in *Gravity's Rainbow*, where logical binarism provides a neat justification for ontological suppositions of dualism and the determinability of the natural world; *Inherent Vice* problematizes the process by which individuals internalize and enact those discourses of dualism which seem particularly wedded to capitalism as a whole. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, with his conviction about the alterability of animal behavior, the behaviorist Edward W.A. Pointsman demonstrates the kind of concern with control and delimitation characteristic of

capitalism. People that internalize the type of logic Pointsman does, Thomas writes, “choose between one and zero and ignore all the values in between, [creating a] new framework, a scientific context, in which to place old dualistic notions” (Thomas 61). Scientistic binarism, then, on Thomas’ reading of social progress in the novels of Thomas Pynchon, is merely a reiteration of the same conceptual foundations that underlay the dualistic Puritanism of some of America’s earliest European settlers. Both of these factors, in turn, contribute to an American identity wedded to capitalistic ideals of self-isolation and the exploitation of natural social and eco-systems for profit.

With *Inherent Vice*, the anxiety that Doc feels about the cabal’s plot to introduce false currency into the American market is not simply reducible to the immediate economic consequences of the transformation of his environment, but also is grounded in his intuitive understanding that the Golden Fang’s operation stands for the gradual and inexorable encroachment of an political framework whose totalizing influence will eventually transform everything Doc knows beyond recognition simply by virtue of its tendency to operate on the level of ideology, where motivations for actions are engendered. Pynchon adds complexity to the situation, though, by dwelling extensively on the subjective nature of Doc’s experience, and on his inability to extricate himself from the historical processes he is observing, in order to get an objective look at things.

Doc can never get the whole picture of what role the Golden Fang plays in structuring his local economy because in *Inherent Vice*, as in other of Pynchon’s novels, the author “dramatizes an interesting psychological phenomenon based on the relationship between knowledge and control” (Thomas 68). *Inherent Vice*, though, departs from earlier novels, I maintain, in its gesture toward the potential for sustainable resistance to totalizing capitalistic logic. *Inherent Vice*, as I argue in the following chapter, posits the potential viability of the economic system Doc institutes amongst his peers, as its operation is analogous to the way that Pynchon sees informational exchange happening in the natural physical world.

Doc’s interactions with Bigfoot make explicit the difference between the ethical systems that govern their behavior, and in this sense foreground an opposition (or, at least, a lack of cohesion) between Doc’s private eye work, for which he rarely receives remuneration, and Bigfoot’s occupation as a detective, which to Bigfoot’s thinking legitimizes extortion. Bigfoot is frequently the spokesperson for a vision of an American future in which social heterogeneity is eliminated and as such represents something like a self-elected spokesperson for capitalistic ideology. Part of *Inherent Vice*’s problematization of dualistic thinking,

though, comes from the situational irony that results from the reader encountering two characters with occupations, one of whom is completely unaware of his similarity to the other. Bigfoot expects the inhabitants of Wolfmann's new development to conform to a vision of submission to capitalistic doctrines of recreation and hygiene, informing Doc that "some wholesome family will quite soon be gathering night after night, to gaze tubeward, gobble their nutritious snacks, perhaps after the kids are in bed even attempt some procreational foreplay, little appreciating that once, on this very spot, an infamous perpetrator lay in a drugged stupor, babbling incoherently at the homicide detective, since risen to eminence, who apprehended him" (*IV* 23). Bigfoot's preoccupation with enforcing the opposition between himself and Doc, in spite of the similarity of their professions, is evident in his frequent attacks on Doc's character and appearance. However, the ease with which Doc is able to point out Bigfoot's logical inconsistencies tempers the novel's anxious mood by calling attention to the perverse logic governing capitalist ideas of otherness.

What Bigfoot offers Doc is, significantly, not money, but cannabis -- his goal is to encourage Doc to acknowledge a value-equivalence, quantitatively speaking, of a certain amount of cannabis and a certain amount of money. *He appeals to Doc to allow the quantitative, value-oriented logic of capitalism to inform his decision*: "Try to drag your consciousness out of that old-time hard-boiled dick era, this is the Glass House wave of the future we're in now". He describes "numberless kilos of righteous weed, name your figure, just for trivial information we already have anyway" (*IV* 33). Bigfoot's statement about already having the information significantly leaves ambiguous whether he is only saying so duplicitously to assume an air of indifference toward Doc's cooperation, or whether the police force really does not need any help from the hippies and is instead only interested in enlisting them in the enterprise of self-interest. Bigfoot positions himself here as a voice in opposition to the economic model Doc implements.

Assuming that he has successfully turned Doc, Bigfoot reinforces his conception of cannabis as an object of monetary exchange by saying, "And what you don't smoke -- improbably as that seems -- you could always sell" (*IV* 33). Bigfoot is so exemplary of an individual fully conforming to the demands of capitalistic logic that he attributes his own predatory instincts to Doc. Ultimately, though, his own exploitative thinking leads him to assume that Doc is ignorant of the broader implications that his deployment of drugs as payment has.

In *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History*, David Cowart identifies as a central theme in *Inherent Vice* "the clash of reactionary and redemptive energies in shaping an American future" (Cowart

93). Like Bigfoot, he contends that Doc learns, as a result of the events of *Inherent Vice*, that lasting transcendence from capitalism cannot be effected, but rather that “though painful, such recognitions are part of growing up as a nation” (Coward 91). The counterculture’s inability not to be incorporated into the rhetorical structure of capitalism makes the distinctions between capitalism and its presumable other unnecessary, as Bigfoot is simultaneously trying to turn and take advantage of Doc.

A major theme of *Inherent Vice* is that of “going over” or being “turned.” As enthusiastically as Bigfoot enforces the distinction and opposition between the “straights” and the “hippies”, he makes tentative efforts to enlist Doc’s help as an informer, thereby reducing the boundaries separating the two. In a scene that recalls the fourth chapter of the book of Matthew, Bigfoot drives Doc into the hills above the city, sweeps his arm “out across the light-stunned city”, and offers Doc monetary compensation for his help in the drug war. ““Nobody can predict a year or two hence, but right now Nixon has the combination to the safe and he’s throwing fistfuls of greenbacks at anything that even looks like local law enforcement.”” Significantly making use of an image of physical violence to suggest the abundance of available financial resources, even Bigfoot’s most sincere efforts at establishing cooperation are marred by an internal resentment for Doc’s lifestyle; as he is quick to add, ““federal funding beyond the highest number you can think of, which for most hippies is not much further than the number of ounces in a kilo”” (*IV* 32). This interaction foregrounds Pynchon’s anxiety about capitalism in its insinuation that capitalistic apparatuses incorporate elements of resistance in order to eliminate resistance. That is, this passage demonstrates the instability of the premises informing the foundation of capitalistic rhetoric by showing that the capitalist need to reiterate difference belies a tendency to incorporate difference into its own smooth functioning. While the capitalist state depends on alienating the majority of its constituents from a group it broadly defines as “hippies,” it also depends on the lifestyle choices of that same group necessitating their interaction with and subsequent cooperation with the capitalistic state. If the hippies use cannabis, they have to take part in a larger economic exchange into which the capitalistic state can insinuate itself.

Pynchon makes it clear in *Inherent Vice*, though, that Bigfoot’s and Doc’s respective ways of living are informed by different principles of ethicality from one another as is evident from the fact that Bigfoot comes about his beloved bananas in a morally questionable fashion. He gets them by “driving around once a week to Kozmik Banana, a frozen-banana shop near the Gordita Beach pier, creeping in by way of the alley in back” and shaking down its owner. A crucial element of Bigfoot’s extortion is that it

works on another person committing extortion, since the owner of Kozmik Banana is using the old peels to rip off desperate drug users. From Pynchon we learn, “It [is] a classic shakedown. . . . Bigfoot [sees] no reason why law enforcement shouldn’t be cut in for a share of the proceeds” (*IV* 140). His conscience is clean, but his reasoning is that ““if it’s legal, then so is taking my cut. Especially, see, if it’s in the form of frozen bananas instead of money”” (*IV* 140). What Bigfoot’s rationalization demonstrates is a tendency that the novel attempts to identify as occurring at various levels of social organization, wherein the presumption of another’s self-interestedness is used as justification for selfish actions. Bigfoot is able to excuse himself from guilt for committing an apparently morally wrong act by appealing to the idea of another’s guilt.

Doc’s behavior is marked by a series of adaptive performances in which he temporarily assumes, but is not taken over by, an identity in conformance with the “straight world”. One source of opposition or disharmony between Doc and Bigfoot is Bigfoot’s presumption of naïveté on the part of Doc, who is more cunning at adapting to the main stream of society than his detective counterpart supposes, indicating a fundamental flaw in the detective’s logic of social divisiveness. Cowart concludes that “Bigfoot may accuse him and his fellows of infantile behavior, but Doc legitimately refuses to abandon or outgrow his hippie identity” (*IV* 126). Doc is only a hippie, though, insofar as Bigfoot categorizes him in that way. His own behavior indicates as many departures from the stereotypically hippie-like as it does from the “conventional” way of things. In spite of his attempts to “keep the world at bay”, though, Doc cannot avoid becoming the capitalistic system’s antagonist as long as the private eye’s way of detection remains different from that practiced by the representatives of the capitalistic state. The only way Doc can resist capitalism is by refusing to corroborate the legitimacy of equating money with information. He actualizes this in the real world by instituting gift economies.

Pynchon foregrounds the totalizing and concrete reality of capitalism and links its spread to economic disparity by dedicating some of *Inherent Vice* to a simplified recounting of the increase in suburban development that took place in California in the late 1960s. After learning about the disappearance of Tariq’s neighborhood (“not tripping”, he magnanimously types), his awareness newly attuned to the presence of Wolfmann’s empire, “Doc spot[s] black pedestrians, bewildered as Tariq must have been, maybe also looking for the old neighborhood, for rooms lived in day after day, solid as the axes of space, now taken away into commotion and ruin” (*IV* 19). Even established structures, those that appear

permanent and that have taken on familiar aspects, can be transformed or outright demolished by the influence of the real estate developers.

The influence that suburban sprawl and development has on the lives of members of marginalized communities (like Tariq's) acts as a metonymic representation of the totalizing and transformative influence capitalism has on the groups that comprise a society. In *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*, Stephen Mattessich argues of the California novels that "a revisionist urge" that "proves especially irresistible given that the period in question so resolutely presents itself in a traumatic mode" results in a fixation upon the detrimental ramifications of land speculation on social conditions, during "a kind of anti-period defined as a structure of differences and founded on a temporal discontinuity". The self-consciously idealized model of 1960s California, foregrounded by the painting that appears early on in the novel, might parody what is, on Mattessich's reading, "a perception that its postwar 'period' is ending or has ended, and that as a result it can be comprehended from a vantage point outside the period itself" (Mattessich 211). Pynchon's novels about California in the 1960s invite varying levels of interpretation. *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland* offer a simplified allegorical structure that invites an interpretation the "real" 1960s which emerges through the reader interacting with the period's own representational modes. *Inherent Vice* presents to the reader a stylized version of the California of the late 1960s that references and parodies the period's tendency toward idealization while indicating its own mode of self-representation as a viable method for initiating meaningful social change.

In Gordita Beach, the spaces once inhabited by marginalized communities become areas where privileged young people can enact a performance resembling rebellion, but which is actually a hollow and meaningless repetition of behaviors already neutralized by the totalizing capitalistic system. The lot remains empty until, eventually, it is restored to "a park, where the youth of Gordita Beach, by the laws of karmic adjustment, were soon gathering at night to drink, dope, and fuck, depressing their parents, though not property values particularly" (IV 14). Significantly, the injurious influence that violating the normative codes of behavior normally governing their lives would ostensibly have is not sufficient to undo the totalizing conditioning the teens have been subject to their whole lives.

Furthermore, the adaptive nature of capitalistic influence is emphasized by Doc's meditation on an "old Gordita reflex dating back to shortly after the Second World War, when a black family had actually

tried to move into town and the citizens, with helpful advice from the Ku Klux Klan, had burned the place to the ground” (IV 14). Despite the fact that the citizens retain the assistance of a white supremacist organization, their motives eventually appear to be founded on maintaining the class divisions that allow the capitalistic economic system to perpetuate itself. What this passage shows is that in Pynchon’s vision of 1960s America the social divisions inherent in capitalism reveal an economic disparity of which racial intolerance is only symptomatic. *Inherent Vice* places, it is clear, a particular and pronounced emphasis on the way that capitalistic logic, with its reliance on binaries and divisions amongst things, presents a particular ontology which must be circumvented in order for socioeconomic revolution to take place.

The concern Pynchon voices in *Inherent Vice* about the role that the capitalistic expropriation and privatization of land plays on the social sphere manifests itself in fleeting images throughout the novel, as in the eerie separation Doc notices taking place amongst music-listeners when Japonica drives past Wallach’s Music City. Doc can recall a time when free music was the norm thanks to the availability of public spaces, but here, “in every window, one by one . . . appear[s] a hippie freak or small party of hippie freaks, each listening on headphones to a different rock’n’roll album and moving around at a different rhythm”. The change in the listeners comes as a shock to Doc and Denis, who conceive of music as being a conduit to communality instead of a commodity. The difference, from Doc’s point of view, is that “here, each person [is] in solitude, confinement and mutual silence, and some of them later at the register [will] actually be spending money to hear rock’n’roll” (IV 176). The music which represents itself in terms of its rebelliousness toward authority is being turned into a commodity for sale to teenagers, and *Inherent Vice* suggests that the physical layout of a city can determine the extent to which interpersonally intimate connections can be established.

Finally, the anxiety about capitalism is perhaps most explicitly articulated by Pynchon through the novel’s focus on the Golden Fang, the shadowy organization whose influence on narrative events in the novel is so conspicuous as to suggest it as a representation of the agent of causation in the capitalistic world. Because the Golden Fang has diverse interests and operations (e.g., in selling drugs to people and subsequently “rehabilitating” them) The Golden Fang (whose name conjures an image with an uncanny resemblance, incidentally, to Bigfoot’s trademark frozen banana) represents the capitalistic corporation *par excellence*, privileging profit over all else and assuming an infinite supply of potential resources to fuel its unending accumulation of profit.

The Golden Fang is emblematic of an epistemological and ontological framework, too—one that regards history as determinable and susceptible to efforts to control its course. Not only does the novel suggest that the Golden Fang maximizes its profits by engaging in illegal international trade, but the cartel also apparently attempts to establish a new *currency* in the United States that appeals to the a single personality instead of the authority of the federal government. After the Justice Department brings to the surface containers the *Golden Fang* deposited in the ocean, the “shrink-wrapped bundles of U.S. currency” they discover, surprisingly, that, “instead of the usual dignitaries [. . .] all of these bills, no matter which denomination, [seem] to have *Nixon’s* face on them” (*IV* 117). The Golden Fang’s significance lies in its status as a locus of intersection where the various ideological precepts of Pynchon’s conception of capitalistic logic articulate themselves and attempt to impose themselves on the world. The Golden Fang functions symbolically as an emblem of an economic ideology and as a historico-political agent of ideological imposition. Significantly, too, the Golden Fang’s dedication to insidiousness does make it entirely invisible, even by a misdirected private eye; after learning of the existence of the Chryskylodon institute for addiction recovery, Doc reasons that “if the Golden Fang could get its customers strung out, why not turn around and also sell them a program to help them kick? Get them coming and going, twice as much revenue and no worries about new customers—as long as American life was something to be escaped from, the cartel could always be sure of a bottomless pool of new customers” (*IV* 192). This passage foregrounds the book’s critical attitude toward capitalism by suggesting that the life conditions produced by a capitalist society are emotionally intolerable, but also articulates the work’s overarching hope that change will take place from within the existing social system that will make American life recognizable, yet not escape-worthy.

In *Inherent Vice*, the Golden Fang works to reaffirm the totalizing effect that capitalistic logic can have on the structure of a society by insinuating itself into the fabric constituting the recurrent cycle of addiction and recovery the economically privileged of Southern California are slipping into by the end of the 1960s. What is finally most troubling about the Golden Fang is its potential to have been the agent behind potentially any significant events in American history. Part of what it “is” in the book is the object of characters’ speculation, which means that part of it has to be defined in terms of its potentiality. The reader and the characters are ignorant of the extent to which the Golden Fang exerts its influence, and since

it could conceivably be everywhere at all times, it fosters a sense of mystique and (in the more anxious characters) paranoia.

Pynchon is at pains in *Inherent Vice*, though, to articulate an anxiety directed not only toward the narrowing economic influence of cabals, but also toward the epistemological framework that privileges the capitalistic economic premises of accumulation and commodification. The government and corporations are often implicated as the agents of social and economic change, but the references to occluded actors points to a nuanced understanding of capitalistic logic that envisions it as being centered within individuals and evident in their actions in the world. That is, a person's association with the capitalistic state is determined by whether their internal attitudes reflect the logic of the state's interests. While one of the primary questions faced by Slothrop and the reader in *Gravity's Rainbow* is whether or not a multinational arms cartel exists, in *Inherent Vice* the truth of the Golden Fang's existence is rarely questioned. With *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon creates character portraits of individuals internalizing the logic of the system they serve. Importantly, that logic seems to be predicated on a money-based conception of reality, one of whose repercussions is the tendency to assign value to things like information.

The thematization of this kind of logic is not without precedence in other Pynchon novels. Tiina Kakela-Puumala, in her essay on money in *Against the Day*, claims that, in that work, "Pynchon thematizes and elaborates [an economic] change throughout the novel by using economic rhetoric in situations where it seems at first out of place—interpersonal relations and subjectivity—and shows how with money, larger political issues become intertwined with private life" (Kakela-Puumala 148). In *Against the Day*, social friction results from the clash of systems of value based on material specie and systems of value based on speculation and the abstraction of value from matter. One of the effects of the replacement of the gold- and silver-based systems of value in *Against the Day* is the transferability of economic rhetoric into various spheres of social life. Kakela-Puumala's remarks were written before *Inherent Vice*'s publication, but I argue that Pynchon makes what amounts, essentially, to the same move in *Inherent Vice*, and that he foregrounds this concern with the dialogues between Doc and Bigfoot.

The overt concern with money and exchange that dominates so many of Doc's discussions with Bigfoot foregrounds the incompatibility of their models of economic exchange. I claim that, in Pynchon's writing and in *Inherent Vice* especially, larger political issues become inextricably tied to private life not simply as a result of money, but as the result of the language of economism integrating itself into the

lexicon of the 1960s and inscribing itself physically upon the landscape and bodies of individuals, and imaginarily on people's mental processes. Doc's interactions with Bigfoot, the encroaching real estate developments, and anxiety over the Golden Fang appear, finally, to be manifestations of the same ethos in the universe of *Inherent Vice*, one whose tenets of accumulation, exchange, and mutual mistrust, as they become internalized by the constituent members of society, alter the course of that society's development.

The capitalistic ethos of which Pynchon is so wary apparently attempts to preserve its integrity by rejecting things -- rhetorical frameworks, actions, people -- which it cannot assimilate into its own framework. After Fritz, the skip tracer who initiated Doc into the trade, shows Doc ARPAnet, a precursor to the internet that featured a digitally communicative interface, Doc's immediate reaction is first to note its radical potential and then to predict its impending enfeeblement. He asks, "'So when they gonna make it illegal, Fritz?' 'What. Why would they do that?' 'Remember how they outlawed acid soon as they found out it was a channel to somethin they didn't want us to see? Why should information be any different?'" (IV 195). Here, Pynchon's language is careful to obscure the precise place, person, or institution that holds power, instead opting for the vague "they"; "information", in this case coded digitally, constitutes a threat to a social order whose continued functioning requires a sort of delirium or selective refusal to acknowledge information. Pynchon's intentionally vague use of the word "they" to indicate the agents governing social organization, following a practice established in *Gravity's Rainbow*, decentralizes the locus of power and establishes the discourse of contemporary capitalistic American society as the primary site of totalization. Pynchon intimates that Doc's characterization of the capitalistic discourse's reaction to information as one of outright rejection is not quite correct, though, given the police interest in information.

Doc's skepticism about ARPAnet appears to be a reiteration of an anxiety over technological progress detected by Georgios Maragos in "A Medium No Longer: How Communication and Information Become Objectives in Thomas Pynchon's Works". Maragos maintains that information technology's malleability renders it an ideal medium for disseminating messages directed at controlling people's behavior, as "our information technologies . . . do not only allow or facilitate such a situation, but practically impose it, because they are manufactured in a way that allows it" (Maragos 173). ARPAnet is, for *Inherent Vice*, like the 1960s counterculture: it holds the potential to be the forum for radical

sociopolitical reorientation, but its openness also makes it vulnerable to interests that might want to exert control over it or exploit it for their own gain.

The social order that Doc perceives as beginning to totalize the relations surrounding him makes its presence felt by organizing information into packets whose context renders them socially acceptable -- namely, through the influence of the television. On the way back from Las Vegas with Tito the limousine service owner, Doc stops at a motel occupying a liminal space, as “time-zone issues too complicated for either of them to understand had leveraged the amount of programming available here, network and independent, to some staggering scale” (*IV* 253). Here, Doc gets a glimpse at the ideological inculcation undergone by every member of his generation. The television offers an escape, a fantasy with “Toobfreex at play in the video universe, the tropic isle, the Long Branch Saloon, the Starship *Enterprise*, Hawaiian crime fantasies, cute kids in make-believe living rooms with invisible audiences to laugh at everything they did, baseball highlights, Vietnam footage [. . .]”, etc. The fantasy world proffered by the television provides a delusional alternative to the real world but at the same time cordons off and delimits the permitted extent of fantasy; in this way the television, becomes the agent both of distraction and of inculcation. The anxiety over capitalism is felt in *Inherent Vice* as a sort of closing down of potentiality—an imposition of fixed meaning onto theretofore open possibilities.

Inherent Vice’s pessimism and anxiety about capitalism is perhaps best articulated toward the end of the novel, when Doc visits Crocker Fenway for the final time, attempting to extricate himself from any future association with the Golden Fang. Fenway’s gregariousness is obviously due at least in part to his sensing an opportunity to hang onto his money: “‘That’s all you wanted? No money, now, you’re sure?’” Doc’s response, “‘How much money would I have to take from you so I don’t lose your respect?’” provokes a curious response. “Crocker Fenway chuckled without mirth. ‘A bit late for that, Mr. Sportello. People like you lose all claim to respect the first time they pay anybody rent.’” (*IV* 346). Here the novel grounds its problematization of the capitalist system in a critique of the viability of methods of resistance to it. Even if Doc refuses to accept monetary compensation and enlistment in the capitalist project in that sense, his inevitable engagement with the United States’ monetary system, Fenway believes, places him in a position of inconsistency undeserving of recognition. Doc’s retort that people lose respect for people like Fenway due to their unabashed predacity demonstrates, finally, the utter incompatibility of the two value systems guiding Doc’s actions and the actions of agents of the Golden Fang.

The mutuality that Doc embodies through his distribution of cannabis is Pynchon's way of articulating, under the guise of allegorical excess, a viable alternative to the discourse and rhetoric of capitalistic economism. I maintain that Doc is afflicted, but *Inherent Vice* appears to offer an unusual model of resistance to the capitalistic, money-driven ethos in the form of Doc, whose role, never really unwitting, in the course of events shaped by the shadowy cabal is not that of the conduit. As chapter two explores, Doc institutes with his actions different small-scale gift economies whose value systems derive from considerations that do not quite match those that ground the capitalistic project. Doc's agency repeatedly establishes him as an actor whose ethical motivations derive from a foundation foreign to economism. In my next chapter, I argue that Doc embodies the sort of anarchistic transcendence/resistance articulated and defended in *Against the Day* -- albeit with idiosyncrasies of his own. *Inherent Vice* attempts to show that the contracts may implicitly be established without contractually stated reference to value.

Chapter Two: Gift Economies in *Inherent Vice*

Cannabis plays a complex and unusual role in *Inherent Vice* in that it is both a recreationally used mind-altering drug and the medium through which gestures of community and commonality are expressed. Its dual status allows it to catalyze certain of Doc's insights into the nature of the case he is investigating, to complicate readers' interpretation of the tenability and consistency of Doc's claims, and to act as a symbolic locus of a moral economy. basic principles of this economy are in turn misinterpreted and intentionally perverted by representatives of the capitalistic economy Pynchon establishes as exerting a powerful influence on popular American political ideology. Characters like Bigfoot and Crocker Fenway, who rely on the idea of competition to provide moral justifications for their actions, indicate with their words the unspoken recognition that their cynicism bespeaks an economic worldview that is, in the long-term, untenable. *Inherent Vice* offers what proves to be a complicated perspective on gift economies and their interaction with capitalistic economies by suggesting that though gift economies are a way to resist capitalism, they also have indelible limitations that stem from the fact that nearly every action is coercible into accordance with the dominant ideology.

Doc's periodic reinstitution and renewal of a gift economy constitutes itself as an invisibly subversive political tactic in part because of its ostensible inconsequentiality. The conventional economist's stance on gifts is that their exchange represents so small an exclusion from the capitalist economy that they do not make much of a difference. As David Cheal notes in *The Gift Economy*, his generalized study of the economic model of gift exchange, "Gifts are economically trivial, it is thought, because the capitalist mode of production has replaced gift transactions with market transactions (the thesis of capitalist transformation)" (Cheal 32). To the capitalists, gift exchanges appear to pose an insignificant threat because they exclude themselves from the market, which is where real power is transacted. Doc's (and other characters') use and distribution of cannabis takes place outside the sphere of capitalistic influence by virtue of its illegality. Its exemption from the economic structure is also due to its irruption into a broad plane of social interaction that negates the gift's status (in capitalist societies) as inherent to intra-familial relations. Cheal writes, "The remnants of gift morality are . . . assumed to be confined to privatized family ties (the thesis of emotional sequestration), and it is suspected that beneath their sentimentality all gift exchanges are really conducted for personal gain (the thesis of economic rationalization)" (Cheal 9). Not only does cannabis work in *Inherent Vice* to add momentum to the plot, but it also destabilizes notions

about the pervasive logic of capitalistic culture. its use illustrates a kind of political resistance whose principles resist incorporation into an economic logic. In *Inherent Vice* the “straight” community, by grounding its self-definition in terms of what it is *not* (viz. the “freak” community), precludes the possibility of meaningful exchange between members of the respective groups, but also presents the repressed groups with a ritual for affirming mutual resistance. All members of the freak community have to do to resist the logic of the capitalists is perform activities that dissolve difference (specifically, economic difference), and they do this by literally combusting symbolic representations of value in a shared entry into a state of altered perception.

Despite the complexity with which cannabis is approached in *Inherent Vice*, it is, for Doc, very obviously a recreational drug whose use does not necessarily entail detective work. The day after Bigfoot’s informant overture, Doc “roll[s] a number” of “some Hawaiian product [he has] been saving” while he is in his office killing time (*IV* 35). There is no apparent reason for his doing so, and it is mentioned as casually by the narrator as that of another novel might mention a character having a cup of coffee. The textual significance of this instance derives from its casual insinuation into the fabric of the narrative, because the mention of cannabis happens so quickly and is sandwiched between two exchanges of information—with Bigfoot and Tariq—that contribute to the narrative’s momentum.

Doc’s recreational use is linked to spontaneous realizations of significant interconnections amongst the disparate elements of the case. While reading Fritz’s file on the Golden Fang, “Doc [lights] a joint” and, in the course of his rumination, realizes that there are a multiplicity of meta-narratives that could unite what are a disparate series of circumstances and coincidences. Cannabis’ role in precipitating the convolution of Doc’s speculation is later underlined: “‘Good shit, ain’t it,’ Fritz handing back a smoldering roach in a roach clip, all that was left of what they’d been smoking” (*IV* 95-6). Doc’s use of the drug, while clearly grounded in its recreational potential, by no means influences only the most inconsequential of his thoughts; rather, its effects are the conduit by which ontological instability is introduced and meta-narrative consistency is questioned. The viewpoint from which he confronts the world is complicated by his drug use; the view from which the reader consequentially must approach the novel must also reflect that instability, since the novel does not set consistent representation of reality as one of its priorities.

For Doc, recreational use of cannabis is not accompanied by ingenuousness about its potential to introduce (potentially advantageous) tangentiality into conversation. Since cannabis use can cause people to

become distracted, he recognizes its useful properties. He uses preparations of the drug in concentrated efforts to glean information about the Golden Fang on several occasions. Significantly, though, his distribution of cannabis is never accompanied by any kind of verbalized recognition of the exchange that is taking place; other characters do not situate themselves in positions of subservience to him for his beneficence.

Cannabis is understood by characters in *Inherent Vice* to be a medium of gift exchange, which, in a different context, Cheal defines as something which “contain[s] evidence about the nature of the relationship between donor and recipient”. According to Cheal, “An exchange of gifts usually confirms that a relationship is anchored in a framework of mutual recognition of the participants’ social and personal identities” (Cheal 22). By offering people joints Doc establishes people as socially and economically equivalent actors, whose conversation is not dominated by overt metaphors of exchangeability and value. *Inherent Vice* suggests that the language of capitalism lends itself to the preservation of a kind of social hierarchicalization that preexists the contemporaneous state of things.

Given *Inherent Vice*’s eventual preoccupation with Coy’s status as representing both political subversion and repression, Doc’s institution of a gift economy appears to precipitate a significant textual development. Outside the Club Asiatique in San Pedro, Coy and Doc share a joint of “Asian indica, heavily aromatic” that leads Doc to the conclusion, in the middle of the conversation, that “regardless of who in this might help whom, Coy [is] going to require a light touch” (*IV* 86). The complicity in using an illegal drug despite the potential for dire consequences integrates the two into a web of mutual reliance and trust that establishes them, in each other’s eyes, as actors whose use of the drug necessitates and speaks to a systematic alienation from the money-driven, ideologically capitalistic “straight” society.

None of this is to say that Doc uses cannabis entirely ingenuously. He certainly establishes himself as both aware of its usefulness in extracting information from potentially useful sources and fine with using it on his own time. More significant, though, is that the fact that he is aware that the utility of sharing joints does not preclude him from acting ethically in his pursuit of information, as offering cannabis does not place a contractual obligation on the other person to reveal information. The novel suggests that there is something about the language of capitalism, with its stated reference to quantified value, that establishes a relationship of dominance and subservience amongst parties. By instituting gift economies, Doc can be a purpose-driven actor in the social world while maintaining his moral imperative of social egalitarianism.

Although his motives for use remain diverse, Doc's very clear awareness of the usefulness of cannabis in his efforts to obtain information is evinced in his first encounter with Clancy Charlock, who notices a joint in Doc's ashtray, "clank[s] open a Zippo and fire[s] it up, and by the time Doc [gets] it back [is] less than half its original length" (*IV* 147). Despite Doc's sexual interest in Clancy, he reminds himself to "be professional, now" and steers the conversation to Clancy's brother, Glen, whose whereabouts have remained unknown to Doc. In this instance, instituting a small-scale gift economy dissolves social boundaries, relaxes the interlocutors, and provides an impetus for uncensored, direct communication. Similarly, when Doc, in lieu of continuing to smoke Jason Velveeta's "withered joint" made out of "inexpensive Mexican product" from which "somebody [has] forgotten to remove the seeds and stems" lights and "hand[s] over a joint of Columbian commercial proven effective at stimulating conversation", his actions bespeak his awareness of cannabis' utility in potentially communicatively rich interpersonal situations (*IV* 158). Finally, Doc's awareness of the economic and social repercussions and reverberations attendant to sharing cannabis is demonstrated in his diffusion of the tension in the room during a confrontation between Tariq and Clancy. By "retrieving his emergency stash" and instigating an iteration of a gift economy wherein explicitly stated reciprocal obligations are conspicuously absent, he assuages the tempers of his clients.

There is, undeniably, in all the instances of cannabis smoking discussed above a mutual unspoken recognition amongst the characters of a symbolic expression of placation in the interest of increased communicative flow. That is, if Doc produces a joint, it is immediately understood by other characters to be metonymically representative of the relaxation, euphoria, and openness brought on by the drug, and it is in this way that its effects become abstracted from its use and embodied in its exchange. The actors in these small economies embody a system steeped in moralism, contrary to the monetarily-based one of the United States. In *Inherent Vice*, the joint represents a ceremonial object, not coincidentally because of its tendency to produce meditative states, at least in Doc, and presumably in other characters as well. By participating in the consumption of cannabis, characters immediately establish their identities as being located outside the centralized governmental discourse on drug use that is thematized throughout the novel. Establishing commonalities in terms of a shared identity of marginality provides a means by which characters facilitate meaningful dialogue. The gifts of *Inherent Vice* speak to what Cheal calls "instrumental and expressive interests," in a moral economy that can take on multiple levels of meaning. A value-based economy only

takes into account instrumental interests—those which increase the quantitative well-being of the individual, while a gift economy transacts in both the instrumental (the informational) and the expressive (the affirmation of community embodied in the joint). For Doc, using cannabis to grease the wheels of potential sources does not contradict the gesture of complicity and friendliness he displays in offering them the drug, because the dual coding of the act of offering permits another character to accept it as an expressive gesture and not as an instrumental gesture without establishing an explicitly stated inegalitarian point of view.

Doc's use of cannabis also works as a reaffirmation of feelings of community amongst his friends and close acquaintances. After Denis accidentally sets fire to his bed, Doc finds "a White Owl cigar most of whose contents he had tweezed out and replaced with Humboldt sinsemilla" and offers it to Scott Oof and Denis (*IV* 296). Doc is here reciprocating Denis' earlier gesture, while he is relating to Doc his experience of going to ask for drugs at a drug store, of a joint so small that Doc says, "'Thanks, all's 'at'll do 's just burn my lip'" (*IV* 10). Members of the marginalized "freak" community maintain close social ties in part by sharing the recreational drug, because "gifts are . . . the products of autochthonous emotions, that is the spontaneous acts of people who have genuine feelings for each other" (Cheal 85-86). Part of maintaining the identity of a community involves mutual recognition of vulnerability. Members of the freak community make a gesture toward their own total inebriation by partaking in the drug, and thereby reaffirm their confidence in the communality of their surroundings.

Pynchon highlights the material value of cannabis and thereby grounds the object of ritual in the substantial with Sortilège's acceptance of "weed or acid in lieu of cash" in return for her diagnosis and solution of "all manner of problems, emotional and physical" (*IV* 11). All characters in the marginal community symbolically destroy their ties to capitalistic economic systems, even though they are always in reality in dialogue with that system. By removing material goods from the system of individual proprietorship and consumption they exempt themselves from a political discourse that delegitimizes recreational drug use and they physically destroy a substance for which they exchanged money, obliterating their own capital. Indeed, all of Doc's gestures can be read to signify a sort of instigation and sustenance of an altruistic relationship, because they make no reference to value. Cheal's statement provides a particularly useful general framework with which to approach the way that Pynchon uses Doc's institution of gift economies to make sense of and comment on mainstream American society because their separation

of economies based on considerations of value and those based on moral concerns offers a sorting apparatus for distinguishing between the different kinds of economies in *Inherent Vice*.

In *Inherent Vice*, there are many interchanges that are analogous to cannabis-based gift economies but whose distinction lies in their legitimacy (that is, their permissibility under the law). Though gift economies iterate themselves at various levels throughout the book, those that provide Doc with meaningful social interaction and communication are those that establish actors as being mutually involved in an illegitimate enterprise. The contrast that permits this conclusion to be drawn is drawn between inhabitants of the “straight” and “freak” segments of society. Sometimes Doc’s job puts him in contact with people who are not drug users, and though some of the same rules of comportment apply in this kind of society, capitalism’s trace is always subtly written into the scenes where he engages in other kinds of gift economies. When he finally decides to visit Mickey Wolfmann’s wife in gathering information on his disappearance Doc’s nervousness at being offered a drink by Sloane Wolfmann is evident in his hasty announcement that “tequila’s just fine -- and what a welcome relief not to be offered any ‘pot!’” (IV 59). Here Doc, pretending to be the representative of one of Mickey Wolfmann’s debtors, foregrounds the artificial mediacy of the exchange by implicitly contrasting it with a genuinely communitarian gesture. What makes the gesture mediate is the fact that the drinks are not directly offered to him, but rather come to him by way of Luz, who is employed by Mrs. Wolfmann. Here, Mrs. Wolfmann’s ambivalence about her husband’s disappearance, which establishes her as alien to most of the idealistic members of the marginalized community, is embodied in this interaction; interested primarily in material wealth and satisfaction, her gestures toward altruism are mediated through a capitalistic discursive framework.

Still, drinks appear to retain the ability to work in a manner parallel to cannabis, at least insofar as they represent gestures of an affirmation of commonalities and a maintenance of community. On the night that he first meets Coy, Doc’s stewardess friend Motella tells him, “Now Doc my man, . . . remember me and Lourdes ’s springin for this, so tonight it’s well drinks only, none of that li’l umbrella shit” (IV 81). Motella’s overt mention of the monetary value of alcoholic beverages subjects her act capitalistic influences. Not coincidentally, no one mentions the value of the cannabis they share except for the pimp Jason Velveeta, who makes the overenthusiastic claim that his weed’s high quality justifies its high price. The extent to which analogs of the cannabis-based gift economy can really exist in the straight world is questionable, as is evident from Motella’s emplacement of a limiting (and strictly) monetary factor on her

demonstration of communality. Not coincidentally, conversation stalls amongst the members of the party and shortly thereafter Doc follows Jade out into the parking lot, where he has his first rendezvous with Coy.

Legitimate gift economies, lacking the reaffirmation of commonality inherent in cannabis use, rarely lead to complications or enhancements of Doc's internal meta-narrative about the Golden Fang. At "the Boards' rented mansion", where a party is being held, "a couple of house groupies named Bodhi and Zinnia [come] forward with leis, or actually love beads, and put them around Doc's and Denis's necks" (*IV* 125). This gesture, benign though it may be, belies the hostility demonstrated toward Doc and Denis by the party's attendants. When Doc is probing Arthur Tweedle, a member of the Vigilant California militia, for information, Art offers Doc beer. Pynchon here draws attention to the potential of ritualized exchanges to act as conduits for meaningful interpersonal exchanges. Even though rituals like drinking beer appear mindless, "It is in fact the repetitive, habitual nature of the 'traditional' occasions that makes it possible to think thoughts that have little place in the everyday life world of work and recuperation" (Cheal 94). Though consuming alcohol does not provide the same conversational error and tangentiality that cannabis does, its infrequent juxtaposition in the text with the decidedly more overt instances of cannabis use leading to insight strengthens a claim for Pynchon's reading of American society at the close of the 1960s as an acclamation of delegitimized or alternative ontologies or meta-narratives. That is, *Inherent Vice* destabilizes the straight world's claim of distinction from the hippies. The analogies between the gift economies initiated in the form of drinks and in the form of cannabis are clear and demonstrate that, as Doc believes, the similarities between the social groups suggest that any deeply-set notions about difference must be wrong.

Inherent Vice's thematization of a parallel moral (as distinct from value) economy bespeaks a specific, politically motivated communicative attempt between Pynchon and the reader. Cheal grounds this idea in the history of economic theory with his statement that "social reproduction . . . necessarily includes altruistic behavior within moral economies, which is why no society has ever existed on the basis of a purely political economy" (Cheal 87). With *Inherent Vice* Pynchon appears to construe social systems as being comprised of dissoluble boundaries between individual actors and the larger groups they inhabit. That is, individuals can act to influence social systems as readily as those larger, faceless systems act on them. By representing various variations on and misinterpretations of the ideal gift economy, *Inherent Vice* encourages the reader to consider the permeability of the boundaries defining the separation between the

“straight” and “freak” worlds (or any social structure that represents itself in terms of its absolute difference from another).

Doc’s eventual interrogation of his own ethos is precipitated by a series of experiences that introduce him to parodic, perverse, and deliberately malevolent gift economies initiated by his contemporaries. At the party at the Boards’ house that Doc and Denis attend masquerading as a reporter and a photographer, Doc notices “a member of the company . . . going around jovially handing out joints”. Rather than simply reaffirming the sort of gift exchanges initiated by Doc, the distributor says, “Hey! Guess what’s in this grass?” ‘No idea.’ ‘Come on, guess!’ ‘LSD?’ ‘No! it’s just grass!’ . . . Almost before Doc [knows] it, he[s] gotten so stoned on the mystery weed that he flashe[s] how . . . *every single one* of these Boards [is] a *zombie*, undead and unclean” (*IV* 132). What is weird about this situation, and what makes it particularly distressing for Doc, is that the distributor introduces an element of uncertainty and potential threat into a situation of heightened psychological reactivity. The seeming violation of altruistic behavioral norms leads to a near-immediate onset of paranoia, simply because the unnamed man draws attention to the vulnerability of the recipient in a gift situation.

In *Inherent Vice*, any character who initiates a conspicuous gift-giving occasion is immediately subject to popular suspicion, and there certainly exists considerable intra-social group pressure to conform to certain norms respecting gift-giving behavior. Just as the young man at the Boards’ house is violating an unspoken norm of non-duplicity in gift-giving situations, Mickey Wolfmann’s participation in real estate endeavors that neglect to envision profit as the primary motivating factor precede his apparent abduction and forcible reeducation. Before his abduction he is involved, for example, “zomes,” which are architectural structures purported to be larger on the inside than on the outside. Such structures would constitute a violation of the laws of thermodynamics, which would be unacceptable to an economic system that has a vested interest in the replenishment of demand. As Aunt Reet tells Doc, ““The book on Mickey is, is he’s unpredictable. More and more lately. Some would say eccentric. I would say stoned out of his fuckin mind, nothing personal”” (*IV* 8). Mickey’s change in behavior is so conspicuous because, after aligning himself usually with the legally sanctioned capitalistic endeavors of the United States, his purportedly drug-induced altruism is a violation of numerous political and corporate interests’ normative endeavors. Whether Aunt Reet really believes Mickey is intoxicated or if she is simply referring to the extreme nature of his

actions, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Mickey's involvement with the Golden Fang may have made him particularly susceptible to drug use.

Typically Mickey, as a real estate mogul, conforms to a mode of behavior most consistently exemplified throughout the novel by Bigfoot Bjornsen, Doc's police detective pseudo-foil. On their first meeting in the book, Doc knowingly parodies the initiation of a gift exchange because he is already aware that Bigfoot will react unfavorably to the suggestion: "'Howdy Bigfoot. Can I have a bite?' 'Sure can, but you'll have to wait, we left the rottweiler [sic] back at the station'" (*IV* 22). Bigfoot embodies a value-based economic standpoint in his resistance to communicative or material exchanges that do not result in a measurable profit. His style of behaving, characteristically duplicitous and avaricious, is suggested via image as well by the beverage Agents Flatweed and Borderline provide Doc during their first "impromptu" interrogation. "The coffee, in sumptuous black cups with gold FBI insignia, didn't taste like it accounted for too much of their entertainment budget" (*IV* 72). Similarly, Bigfoot's concern with appearance evinces itself in his aspirations to become a film star and his compulsive tendency to rhetorically justify his political stance as though declaiming for an audience—a trait Doc does not share. However, Bigfoot's underlying substance is corrupt and bereft of palatability.

The theme of hidden or secret progressive corruption reiterates itself in Doc's meditation on the police's intradepartmental altruism, itself apparently unchangeable and analogous to the community-affirming gestures Doc makes by distributing cannabis. One of the greatest sources of consternation for Doc throughout the book is the question of whether Bigfoot's actions are sincerely motivated, and one reason he finds to suspect that the same kind of community-affirmative attitude he recognizes in his freak friends is that the police department's partnerships have their own kind of unwritten rules: Doc believes that, "for all the department's long sorrowful history of corruption and abuse of power, here [is] at least something they [have] not sold but kept for themselves, forget in the dangerous life-and-death uncertainties of one working day after another". Doc's ambivalence as to whether the police represent a consistent embodiment of the capitalistic value-based logic becomes clear in his conclusion that police altruism, too, must entail "no faking it, no question of buying it with favors, money, promotions -- the entire range of capitalist inducement couldn't get you five seconds of attention to your back when it really counted" (*IV* 66). Though Doc is capable of recognizing the police's insular altruism, he is unable to initiate meaningful exchange across the social barrier by making an analogous gesture. When he visits the police station to

report Bigfoot for his apparent breach of department policy, he gives Bigfoot's superior, Pat Dubonnet, a hot dog. "'Here you go Pat, expressly for you.' Before he [can] blink, the detective [has] grabbed, unwrapped, and somehow ingested at least half of the lengthy wiener and bun within, which had also come with Everything On It" (IV 47). Still, his inquiries into Bigfoot's record with the police department are met with suspicion, demonstrating the presumption of duplicity shared by both the "freak" and the "straight" communities.

Even though gift economies exist within various self-defining communities, when those represent themselves as exclusive of one another it appears that informational exchange is stultified. That is, people may offer each other drinks or drugs depending on the social situation, and those similarities are indelible; what makes the social groups differ from one another is one's conviction that is somehow different from the other. Part of this communicative stagnation results from a tendency, in the process of defining the limits of the social group, to objectify extraneous actors and neglect to take into account their personal autonomy. When Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd, a dentist with an office in the Golden Fang's canine building, tries to divert Doc with "a quantity of white cocaine crystals", he is following the advice of the *Golden Fang Procedures Handbook*, which states that "'dealing with the Hippie is generally straightforward. His childlike nature will usually respond positively to drugs, sex, and/or rock and roll, although in which order these are to be deployed must depend on conditions specific to the moment'" (IV 170). Dr. Blatnoyd supposes that one drug is as good as any, and the manual's recommendation to "deploy" certain tactics indiscriminately speaks to a logic of capitalistic abstention from altruism and a mischaracterization of Doc, who repeatedly distances himself, both internally and in his speech directed toward other characters, from the hippie community.

Inherent Vice insinuates that the self-totalizing logic of the capitalistic system and its associated social apparatuses contributes to collective and individual loss of control when it foregrounds Bigfoot's addiction to bananas. When at one point Bigfoot proposes a stop at a freezer in the police station, "Doc, expecting to see homicide-related body parts [is] surprised instead to find several hundred frozen chocolate-covered bananas inside. . . . 'It's an addiction, I used to deny that but my therapist says I've made amazing progress. Please, dig in, feel free. I'm told I have to share'" (IV 139). The accusation that Bigfoot's wife Chastity makes, that Doc is responsible for Bigfoot's therapist bills, takes on an added significance in light of the fact that one of the problems for which Bigfoot is seeking psychotherapy is his inability to stop

himself from consuming bananas that he obtains through extortion. Uncannily, Doc's attempts to initiate ameliorative dialogue between the two result in an amplification of the avaricious and accumulative tendencies of his counterpart. Doc's gesture toward conciliation with Bigfoot, typified by his gift of Wyatt Earp's mustache cup, is incorporated into Bigfoot's ontological framework as another opportunity to draw attention to the disparities between the value systems to which the two detectives purport to ascribe. "Chastity and I had an appraiser over last weekend to look at some pieces. And that Wyatt Earp mustache cup? Turns out it's real. Yeah. You could've kept that 'sucker and turned it for *big bucks*" (IV 335). Bigfoot's assumption that the monetary value of the artifact is the sole indicator of its total value indicates a fundamental dissimilarity in his and Doc's ontologies; whereas Doc's conception of the worth of objects consciously takes into account unquantifiable variables, Bigfoot's idea of value is more strictly tied to its quantification in terms of money.

The enumeration of the various factors motivating gift exchanges in *Inherent Vice* troubles any simple characterization of Doc as embodying a naively untenable socioeconomic stance, as the multiple examples of duplicitousness he encounters throughout the novel compel him to countenance the limited effect of his unselfish distribution of cannabis as gifts. Doc's dogged conviction of the efficacy of gift economies as a means by which to structure a community and facilitate meaningful communicative exchanges seems to have been precipitated by his indentured servitude to his first employer after college. The narrator explains that "Doc, known back then as Larry, Sportello had found himself falling behind in his car payments. The agency that came after him, Gotcha! Searches and Settlements, decided to hire him on as a skip-tracer trainee and let him work the debt off that way" (IV 51). Significantly, it is during his tenure with Gotcha! that Doc earns his new name, and thereby assumes a new identity. But Doc's liminal status in between the money-driven capitalistic system and the altruistic "freak" community becomes particularly obvious with his acceptance of the prospect of servitude in lieu of engagement with a quantifiable monetary debt. The extent to which he can be said consistently to embody a social and ontological standpoint distanced from the typical capitalistic one is troubled by his accrual of debt in the first place.

Any claim about the ingenuousness of Doc's motives in initiating gift economies is further upset by the possibility that Doc's cannabis use represents, rather than recreational relaxation and mind-expansion or affirmative community-reinforcement, the satiation of an addictive impulse. His cannabis use

is obvious and pervasive enough that it is deployed against him as evidence of unreliability. To Penny's claim that his cannabis use is excessive Doc protests, "'Hey, come on, I'm only a light smoker.' 'Oh? How many joints a day, on average?' 'Um . . . have to look in the log'" (IV 70). Numerous motives may influence Doc's consumption and distribution of cannabis, but his daily, repetitive use of cannabis may speak to an addiction analogous to Bigfoot's, a delirious response to the internal crises engendered by apparent insurmountable barriers to communication both characters perceive to exist between them.

Doc finally appears to situate himself in a transitional state between a money-driven value system and a morally-based value system. Aware of the interchangeability of money and differently valuable, Doc betrays his own jaded methods of detection with his response to Coy Harlingen's remark, in the parking lot of the Club Asiatique, that "'I can't pay you right now', saying, 'When you can. Whenever. Unless maybe you're one of these folks who believe information is money . . . in which case, could I just ask --'" (IV 87). Here Doc's multiple motivations become clear as his words bespeak an unintentional acknowledgement of the cynical element to his investigative work at the same time as a marked indifference to money.

Ultimately, *Inherent Vice* adopts a complex and destabilized stance toward gift economies. Though their institution and sustenance appears to be intrinsic to the stabilized functioning of social collectivities that define themselves in terms of a shared interest or occupation, their ability to cross social boundaries remains limited, in part because the gift represents a dissolution of the boundaries, a leveling of the distinction, between the social groups that define themselves in terms of their opposition to other social groups. Doc's attempt to enlist Bigfoot in his own economy of altruistic gift-giving falls flat because Bigfoot lacks the conceptual language that would be necessary for him to be able to conceive of Doc as his social equal.

Doc's repetitive attempts to achieve social harmony and cooperation by resorting to the distribution and consumption of cannabis represent, broadly, an economic model based on gift-giving whose value system derives from moral, rather than quantitative, considerations. By establishing himself and all other characters involved in the exchange as, first, alienated from the normalizing capitalistic discourse of monetary exchange as defining interpersonal interactions, and second, socially equivalent interlocutors whose unspoken recognition of their obligation to reciprocate the magnanimous gesture realizes itself in their facilitation of meaningful communicative exchange, Doc resists what he perceives to be the logic governing the actions of capitalists. The extent to which Doc's embodiment of a morally-based

economic model places him in direct opposition to the monetary model guiding actions of those characters associated with the Golden Fang is limited by his explicit recognition of the final interchangeability of money and information, and by his recognition of intra-departmental solidarity amongst members of the police force. *Inherent Vice* not only posits the question of whether gift economies are practicable in contemporary American society, but also destabilizes representations of capitalistic discourse as being self-consistent and totalizing, since even in the very structures representative of mainstream American societies exist gift economies, their analogues, and their dark perversions.

Conclusion: Capitalism, Gifts, History, and Being a Decent Person

The previous two sections have made claims about the way *Inherent Vice* evinces an anxiety over capitalism and the novel's thematization of gift economies as potential alternatives to capitalistic economies. The antagonism *Inherent Vice* seems to articulate about capitalistic, money-driven systems of economic exchange expresses itself on numerous interpretive levels, perhaps most obviously in terms of real estate development and the degradation of the natural and social world. By steeping Doc's investigation into the disappearance of Mickey Wolfmann in the lore (supplied by Aunt Reet) surrounding property development in Southern California, and by placing Tariq Shalil in the place of the victim of expansionism, the novel verbalizes a concern about the capitalistic tendency to exploit land. Capitalism is also envisioned as the economic structure that fosters the growth of institutions whose maximization of profit derives from exploitation and social control. The Golden Fang is not metonymically representative of capitalism, but the structure and rhetoric of the state does permit its continued existence. The Golden Fang is an enterprise whose goal is to determine human behavior by subjecting people to an endless (and, for the organization, profitable) cycle of addiction and rehabilitation. Capitalism's accommodation of corporate structures like this is another source of anxiety in the novel, which is closely related to the threat of economic totalization that looms over society, and in particular over the counterculture, throughout the book.

One threat that capitalistic logic poses to a sustainable human society, *Inherent Vice* intimates, is its tendency to privilege the idea that all sites of exchange are reducible in essence to their roles as objects of value-oriented exchange. The constrictive effect economism has on individuals' ability to think openly becomes a source of major consternation for Bigfoot as he tries clumsily to create his own gift economy. Capitalism also represents the agent of disintegration for the countercultural community. Its language of economism robs characters of their ability to view themselves as members of a community and compels them to consider their allegiance to an interpersonal network to be exchangeable for a high enough amount of currency. The danger capitalism poses to the counterculture is not due to its highly empowered repressive forces but to its rhetoric's insinuation into the lexical base of contemporaneous American society. Finally, capitalism is the source of apprehension in *Inherent Vice* because, if capitalistic premises achieve their totalizing control of the human mind, jobs like Doc's becomes obsolete, dependent as they are upon what may, for lack of a better word, be termed "altruistic" behavior from others. Doc's recognition of

the artificiality of history, and its documents' numerous lacunae, spurs him to institute small-scale gift economies that, in their exemption from monetary exchange and limited exchange amongst communities, are antithetical to the economic structure alluded to by representatives of the capitalist state. In a world wherein social structures that are not governed by the language of economism are unimaginable, where do the freaks go?

Inherent Vice insinuates that gift economies present an alternative solution to the problem posed by the progressive encroachment of the language of capitalistic economism on everyday life. Particularly, the gift economies instituted by Doc insist on the use of language grounded in the morally-based economic mindset. Doc as a private eye is very clearly situated opposite a police detective. The police officer can use coercion and money to gain information, while the private investigator has to rely on goodwill and ingenuity. The fact that Doc uses cannabis recreationally makes him exemplary of the participant in a gift economy, wherein a substance is exchanged whose value is effaced and whose significance comes out of its being the object of a shared experience. Even though gift economies are suggested as ways out of the problem of capitalism, the straight world provides numerous perversions and parodies of gift exchange, as is the case with Bigfoot's problem sharing his food and Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd's nervous offer of cocaine. The fact that the capitalists can mimic members of the counterculture shows that the book does not view capitalistic economies and gift economies to be fundamentally mutually exclusive. The interpenetrability of the two modes of economic exchange is represented in the reverberation of gift-economic gestures throughout the book, like with ARPAnet's role in opening a new route for interpersonal communication.

Historiography provides the key for deciphering *Inherent Vice's* stance on the validity and sustainability of economies of gift exchange, especially in the face of an apparently very powerful capitalist state that has at its disposal a language of value-oriented economism. The novel provides, via the two paintings (one in Doc's house and the other in Crocker Fenway's), various models of historiographic interpretation that position representatives of the straight world and the counterculture at epistemological odds. With its attention to the way that the paintings represent reality and especially the past, the novel suggests that one method of historical interpretation, engendered by and symptomatic of Doc's repeated contemplation of his idealized portrait of 1960s California, is a viable method of sustainable political resistance. This resistance takes place, importantly, in the realm of material exchange as well as that of communicational exchange, because a method of resistance to capitalistic discourse that will be able to

perpetuate itself has to deflect on various levels. With its thematization of the permeability of history the novel also suggests that artistic contemplation is key to sustainably resisting capitalism. By self-consciously mimicking the tone characteristic of hard-boiled detective fiction and of the 1960s' own self-idealization, *Inherent Vice* positions itself as an artistic representation of an idealized California that can occupy a similar role in the reader's life to the one the painting plays in Doc's life; that is, it can catalyze attempts to institute specifically situated pockets of rhetorical resistance and thereby to alter the course of history.

With his yearning for the end of the world, Bigfoot evinces a deterministic view of history -- one that can alternately be read as a salvation narrative or (given the instability of Bigfoot's convictions about social divisibility) a narrative of self-destruction. The instinct toward annihilation, I argue, comes from Bigfoot's inherently paradoxical assumptions about history. After being transferred to Gordita Beach, Bigfoot is purported to have articulated an anxiety about the place being haunted, going around telling people of a group of previous inhabitants of the land who "'had a drug cult, . . . deluded themselves they were visiting other realities -- why, come to think of it, not unlike the hippie freaks of our present day. Their graveyards were sacred portals of access to the spirit world, not to be misused. And Gordita Beach is built right on top of one'" (*IV* 355). Here Bigfoot's paradoxical assumptions are laid bare. He believes in an identity shared between hippies and shamanistic indigenous cultures, but verbalizes an anxiety about the natives' influence beyond their extinction while articulating arrogant certainty of the destruction and total effacement of the history of the hippie culture.

The book's thematization of historiography draws the attention of the reader to the fact that individual convictions about historical progression, founded on ontological and epistemological assumptions, can in their turn shape and influence the present. *Inherent Vice* poses the question of whether individuals can effectively and meaningfully resist the logic of a capitalistic economic and social structure, and whether that resistance can ever bring about any real change in social consciousness. Bigfoot's attitude toward historiography, itself the product of his internalization of capitalistic ideology, is that the past tends not to repeat itself, but that its repercussive effects can show up in unexpected places, like with the tribe of Native Americans supposedly haunting an L.A. real estate development, which Bigfoot first encounters on his transfer into Gordita Beach and which apparently has a near-traumatic effect on him.

It is worth thinking about *Inherent Vice* and its thematization of gift economies and historiography because the work shares so many characteristics with other of Pynchon's novels, especially those in his "late" catalogue. Since it is similar in so many superficial respects, perhaps the preceding analysis of what appears to be an idiosyncratic motif will open up alternative methods of inquiry into the work of Thomas Pynchon. Like all of Pynchon's novels, *Inherent Vice* verbalizes an intense interest in the way that conflicting ontologies and epistemologies hold potential to alter, determine, or influence the course of history -- either by changing representations of the past or by controlling the people who will soon be inhabiting the future. The book shares, with *Mason & Dixon* (1996) and *Vineland*, a concern with the family and its viability as a unit in the face of the divisive, conflictual language characteristic of capitalistic enterprise. Like *Vineland*, *Inherent Vice* demonstrates Pynchon's awareness of capitalism and families' non-mutual exclusivity. Like all of Pynchon's late novels—*Vineland*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*, and *Bleeding Edge*—*Inherent Vice* attempts to articulate modes of resistance to what its author perceives to be the invariably deleterious influence global capitalism has on the individual and society. It departs from all these representations, though, in proposing a tentatively tenable method of describing and enacting historical variability. That is, the book suggests that by viewing the past as an elusive entity whose representation determines, to an extent, the progression into futurity, individuals can embody localized points of change from the capitalistic mindset to one more oriented toward community and the reconciliation of difference. Unlike, e.g., the hollow earth intimated in both *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day*, though, the alternate realities in *Inherent Vice* do not represent departures into the fantastic but are instead the identifiable products and extensions of a certain process of exchange and perceptual alteration.

This thesis indicates several directions for future research. Now that a framework has been established for understanding the way that gift economies in *Inherent Vice* address and counteract the numerous reverberations of capitalistic economism, those same gift economies' repeated appearances throughout other novels in Pynchon's body of work might be construed in terms of their significance as acts of ideological resistance, and not simply as convenient acts of altruism. Given the prominent status of drugs in *Inherent Vice* as the source of, variously, enlightenment, recreation, and the establishment of communality, a renewed discussion of drugs' appearances throughout all the author's novels might provide new insight into their occupation of numerous social and economic roles, and their function as symbols or emblems of whole conceptual structures. Future research might also consider sacraments and religiosity in

Inherent Vice. The fact that cannabis is combusted in joint form, that a novel concerned so closely with reiterating a phallic motif (Bigfoot's bananas, the Golden Fang building) marks characters' departure out of the sphere of economism with the literal destruction of a phallic symbol, suggests that psychosexual or religious frameworks might also yield insight into the perplexingly complex and frequent way in which cannabis gets used.

Inherent Vice is singular in Pynchon's body of work and in the corpus of American literature in its detailed exploration of the way that the economic ideologies, rhetoric, and lexicons all create each other. By representing a character existing at the fringes of society who is able to evade corruption, the novel suggests that resistance to the strictly value-based economic thinking of capitalism must take a distinctly non-purpose-oriented form—that the internalization of a truly non-capitalistic economic lexicon inscribes itself everywhere Doc acts.

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