Pynchon’s Frictional Paradigm: The Force of Yoyodyne vs. the Counterforce of W.A.S.T.E.

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Édition électronique
URL : http://trans.revues.org/598
DOI : 10.4000/trans.598
ISSN : 1778-3887

Référence électronique

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 30 septembre 2016.

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Pynchon’s Frictional Paradigm: The Force of Yoyodyne vs. the Counterforce of W.A.S.T.E.

Sergej Macura

Taken at face value, one of the fundamental programmatic works in Western philosophy, Plato’s *The Republic*, reads as an epitome of the genre which earned its name on behalf of a book 2,000 years more recent – as the progenitor of utopias. The essential elements required for a utopia are all there: just and well-organized participation in the broader community has its favorable consequences for the inhabitants, “the state is the equivalent of an individual writ large, people group together and have benefits from their mutually dependent specializations, the state is headed by the decision-making Rulers, the Auxiliaries secure the state from outside threats, and finally, the Workers provide the necessities for all other citizens”¹. Plato goes on to lay down the strict rules applicable to the Guardians themselves (the Rulers and Auxiliaries form the two species of this social genus), regarding the abolition of the family and the introduction of state nurseries where all children are reared in perfect equality, without misleading loyalty to any one particular individual. However, the Greek philosopher’s conception of an ideal state comes into contrast with the widespread popular opinion that he offers the prospective subject a leisurely life free of constraints; in fact, his bans, impositions and regulations were so abundant in repressive traits that Karl Popper considered Plato the founder of “an influential political-philosophical tradition which gave the future political technologists of the 20th century the basis for an unprecedented political radicalism”², treated at length in *Open Society and Its Enemies*. Sweeping over the public opinion with the power of prophetic visions, the ideas that intend to make a collective happy find it justified to impose a scale of “higher values” on all humans indiscriminately. The content of the “highest good” may vary, so “to Plato it is a caste-ordered state, to Fichte and Hegel it is a corporately stratified nation-state, and to Marx it is a communist body envisioned as rational production and distribution of goods, but all of them rest on
coercion and indoctrination, where people are either identified as comrades or enemies, allies or opponents by blood, class or caste”.

Just as utopias share the common topos of a neatly functioning society resting firmly on the rule of law, conversely, quite a few legal proclamations, bills and acts indicate a tendency to build a collective where individuals adopt the sanctioned code of conduct, subjecting their own natural instincts to the framework of a greater good. While real-life laws serve the purpose of maintaining the existing order, and fictitious utopian laws do not refer to any tangible historical reality, their rhetorical structures are replete with legislative intent, judicial methods, final judgments, restricted covenants, and various other clauses, favorable or onerous in character, depending on whether the lawgivers had permission or prohibition in mind. The founding act of the US is a case in point: its very Declaration of Independence enshrines a puzzling phrase “pursuit of happiness”, which can be more fully understood only in the light of the Lockean tradition that gave it the impetus further augmented in the heyday of the American Revolution. Otherwise, it could be misinterpreted as naïve, superficial speech, even childish confabulation or just plain somnambulism of political struggle.

The aim of this paper is to briefly outline the utopian elements in the 1946 US Employment Act, since its basic provisions strike an overtly humane, perhaps excessively entrepreneurial chord of hope in rapid economic progress, and to more extensively discuss the relation of that act and its aftermath to the world modeled in Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), because its plot revolves around a tycoon’s will and never leaves the reach of a privileged defense corporation, an environment quite familiar to the author and his own period at Boeing in the early sixties. The main thesis will concern the drastic discrepancy between the propagated free enterprise and the actual self-organized segregation of a particular social group, which strives to offer some re-humanized resistance to the reifying machine of the industrial complex. However, much of the theoretical framework regarding the utopian ideas that fail in reality will be left behind in the second case study, as *Vineland* (1990) arguably presents a broader segment of the social panorama, in which flickerings of memories of the 1960s overlap with the life of several dysfunctional families in 1980s California; this text offers ample material for the analysis of utopia whose realization is attempted in more down-to-earth ways – formation of a martial arts sorority in the hills and rebellion on the part of certain civil rights movements, either on campus or in the setting of various labor strikes of the period. The utopia in this novel is brimming with vehement reactions to blatant state-run oppression, and its praxis involves much physical separation from the official system, a sort of escape into tangible enclaves on US territory.

As the most horrible conflict in human history was drawing to a close, the Senate of the United States introduced a bill in January 1945 which became one of the most influential acts in US economic history, regulating and determining the labor structure of the newly emerged superpower for decades. Section 2 of the Act delineates the projected economic framework in the most benevolent vocabulary, falling back on the huge state enterprises of common good, a sort of *déjà vu* in American politics ever since its formative revolution. The Congress solemnly declared that “it is the policy of the United States to foster free competitive enterprise and the investment of private capital in trade and commerce” and “to assure the existence at all times of sufficient employment opportunities” for all Americans with necessary educational requirements. It was of utmost importance to maintain full employment in the US so that it could “promote the general welfare of the nation”, “foster and protect the American home and the American family as the
foundation of the American way of life”, “raise the standard of living of the American people”, “preserve and strengthen competitive private enterprise, particularly small business enterprise” and “strengthen the national defense and security”. Laying down the foundations for a new, happy age could hardly have been more verbally concise and hopeful, with no social layer left behind in this series of resolute promises, including the returning war veterans as well. The economy of post-World War II California recorded a sharp increase in the production of electronic equipment, sophisticated weaponry (usually labeled “defense missiles” or “reconnaissance aircraft”) and an additional boom in the media and entertainment sector. In the early 1960s, the US had the highest mass standard of living in human history; contrary to the “all-pervasive poverty” of previous historical periods, affluence was considered as a matter of course, and consumerism could be happily pursued by millions of citizens desirous to get a new car, buy a larger TV set or subscribe to a glamorous lifestyle magazine. Nevertheless, the two novels by Pynchon which form the subject-matter of our discussion furnish the readers with images of 1960s California that greatly deviate from the spiking fivefold growth in gross national product between 1940 and 1960 – they feature hippies, squatters, drifters, civil rights protesters, pot-smokers, FBI agents and informers, irregularly employed stuntmen and waitresses, lawyers involved in shady activities, one-night stands, bizarre machines which defy any sensible logic or physics, and many others. According to Michael Harrington, there existed another America beneath the polished surface of planned prosperity, and in 1962 its population totaled between 40,000,000 and 50,000,000 largely invisible inhabitants, unskilled workers, the migrant farm workers, minorities, people for whom work was sporadic, demeaning, and demoralizing:

To be sure, the other America is not impoverished in the same sense as those poor nations where millions cling to hunger as a defense against starvation. This country has escaped such extremes. That does not change the fact that tens of millions of Americans are, at this very moment, maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency. If these people are not starving, they are hungry, and sometimes fat with hunger, for that is what cheap foods do. They are without adequate housing and education and medical care... But even more basic, this poverty twists and deforms the spirit. The American poor are pessimistic and defeated, and they are victimized by mental suffering to a degree unknown in Suburbia. In the following pages, we will aim to present and analyze the key instances of societal friction in The Crying of Lot 49 and Vineland, focusing on California as the geographic, and on the 1960s and partly the 1970s as the temporal sample of our research; we will shed some light on the social groups that did not want to become part of the all-encompassing, unboundedly advertised progress and in return established some utopian collectives of their own, outside the singularity of the System.

The Crying of Lot 49 – A Silent Channel of Alternative Communication

The novel’s main character, 28-year-old Oedipa Maas, lives an uneventful life in southern California, with her husband, radio disc jockey Mucho, when she is informed of the fact that her former boyfriend, the deceased mogul Pierce Inverarity, had named her executrix of his will. She leaves for Pierce’s domicile in San Narciso, from where he had started out in the real estate business – the main narrative line presents Oedipa unraveling a pseudo conspiracy of the mysterious symbol of a muted trumpet and secret
postal systems in medieval Europe and 19th-century US, with rather circumstantial than admissible evidence of its existence. It leaves her quite confused at the end as to whether the conspiracy ever existed or it was staged for her to believe that the conspiracy was the fruit of her paranoid delusions. The long hand of corporate business never leaves the stage as long as the events are taking place in or near Inverarity’s industrial property, i.e. the San Narciso aerospace giant of a cartoonlike name Yoyodyne. Virtually all paths around this humorous maze lead through some segment of the company, from Oedipa’s meeting with his lawyer Metzger via the encounters with electronics assembly people (employees current and former) in an appropriately arranged bar The Scope (with the sign shaped like an oscilloscope), to the futile quest for the meaning of the intriguing symbol around the San Francisco Bay Area.

The importance of the company was such that, as Oedipa remembered Pierce’s words, he felt like a “founding father”. The immediate vicinity of Yoyodyne consists of an interminable row of factories, auto lots, drive-ins and small office buildings whose address numbers reach as high as 70,000 or 80,000 – they seemed unnatural even to a Los Angeles woman. Be it as it may, this factory was San Narciso’s main source of income, as was the case with a number of smaller settlements in the then US. The economic foundations of this imaginary community are very far from being mere figments of the author’s often unreliable imagination – in fact, the Los Angeles area turned into one of the biggest aircraft industry winners during World War II and in its aftermath, as federal funding concentrated heavily on the factories immediately available for the instant mass production of the arsenal. An exhaustive study of postwar economic growth informs us about the successful model which was followed in this zone for decades to come: “The pattern of World War II industrial investments gave those regions in which defense plants were concentrated a decided advantage in securing postwar defense contracts and ultimately contributed to a long-term shift in the spatial distribution of U.S. manufacturing activities”

In addition, the highest per capita income of the mid-1950s, with rare exceptions, was disposable in the states of the manufacturing belt and the Far West, all of which contributed to the building of an unquestionably prosperous, well-to-do consumer community, on a good way to attain the life laid out in the resolutions of the 1946 Employment Act. Basically, Oedipa arrives in a one-factory town whose very structure rests on the fact that the plant encompasses the entire settlement, not the opposite; that situation prompts the reader to ponder the reasonableness of having such a hypertrophied corporation that overwhelms other aspects of living in San Narciso – the excess of private control of capital, coupled with governmental weapons contracts, drastically undercuts the utopian idea of free enterprise, solid family and small businesses in particular. The humorous place name is also indicative of the tendency of industrial magnates to produce suburban stage sets or (seen from a common employee’s perspective) kitschy, pretentious mausoleums, since the largest stockholder is dead even when the story opens.

Living in a relatively affluent region of the US, the Yoyodyne plant workers do not seem to have a problem with low wages or a shortage of money, but, as the plot will show, with the meaning of life and labor in the conglomerate they serve. The federal government gave the private sector considerable freedom to set the terms of wage bargains, and the 1962 Annual Report of the Council of Economic Advisers (approximately the time when the action is taking place) explicitly stated: “Individual wage and price decisions assume national importance when they involve large numbers of workers and large amounts of output directly or when they are regarded by large requests of the economy as setting a
pattern. Because such decisions affect the progress of the whole economy, there is legitimate reason for public interest in their content and consequences.” Curiously enough, this relevant document does not mention the happiness of the employees at the enterprise, but it stresses the importance of productivity per se: “There are important segments of the economy where firms are large or employees well organized, or both.”

The following paragraphs will try to delineate the activities some workers undertake, but with a view of poking organized fun at the industrial system, not of advancing it further. The Scope has a reputation of being a haunt of factory employees, who form a relatively coherent, autonomous group. All of them wear glasses as if echoing the bar's name in a strange follow-up ritual, and stare at the newcomers in silence. The early evening crowd enjoys listening to electronic music by Stockhausen, and the bar maintains a strictly electronic music policy, supplemented even by taped jam sessions on Saturdays. Not only do the workers dispense with assembly-line precision and rigidity, but they also introduce Oedipa to a secret alternative channel of communication, which under the acronym W.A.S.T.E. serves the postal needs of a number of workers in the Yoyodyne corporation, thus circumventing the government monopoly on mail delivery. If the hypothesis that the workers subversively organized this postal service within a weapons titan is true, and the opposite hypothesis that the system stems from Inverarity's wish to stage a simulacrum for Oedipa is false, then we can catch a glimpse of a utopian community in nuce functioning and well nested in the core of the US military-industrial complex. In turn, each member of this two-directional communications group has the obligation to send a letter a week in the Yoyodyne branch of the "system", so as to make the overall effort worthwhile – this fact might also indirectly highlight the pointlessness of labor in the official weapons plant, where ballistic and antiballistic missiles are endlessly produced in a circle ("yo-yo"), and "energy is expended in a cycle of activity which is essentially meaningless mechanical repetition." 

Engineer Mike Fallopian explains to Oedipa why his colleagues from the secret group stay in touch with someone human: "In school they got brainwashed, like all of us, into believing the Myth of the American Inventor – Morse and his telegraph, Bell and his telephone […] Only one man per invention. Then when they grew up they found they had to sign all their rights to a monster like Yoyodyne". Such employees simply had to follow the routines already written for them and soon they started being ground into anonymity. The messages sent through the secret postal system are almost void of content, especially of content openly detrimental to the company's functioning, and one of them innocently reads: "Dear Mike, how are you? Just thought I’d drop you a note. How’s your book coming? Guess that’s all for now. See you at The Scope." As far as the novelty of the message is concerned, it exemplifies the phatic rather than the communicative function of language, since the same phrases may have been used in any informal bar-room conversation between the sender and the recipient, and they bring nothing new to either person's mental spaces. But Pynchon stresses the precedence of a new act of communication over the very content of the process, a new paradigm of self-expression which does not conform to the sway that federal monopoly holds over any individual's letter in the rest of America. Thus a fraction of the factory's labor force surreptitiously uses the inherent slowness of its vast system and causes the first fissures in the monolithic structure; the irony becomes even more poignant when we learn that the secret post functions without the need to spend any official means of payment, as letter stamps have already been cancelled and portray non-existent motifs, like, for example, an airmail stamp showing a tiny black figure with its arms outstretched on top of the Capitol dome. The entire novel can indeed be viewed
as a multilevel essay on the possible construction of a perpetuum mobile system, and it shows this idea in several isomorphic variants: the machine called Maxwell’s Demon, which can allegedly sort out the faster molecules from the slower ones in a two-chamber combustion engine; the innumerable proliferating textual variants of a Jacobean tragedy presenting the earliest reference to the Tristero organization (sworn avengers who act against the Thurn and Taxis monopolist delivery service, among other things); and finally, the no-cost underground organization that gives rise to a new, independent miniature postal universe.

The entire humorously subversive system of puny individuals taking advantage of the industry’s slow reactions is presented to the reader through a necessarily unreliable reflector, since Oedipa cannot boast of any mastery of thermodynamic or information technology concepts; instead of clarification, we can only become aware of further obfuscation of meanings and entanglement into the mystery. For example, this is her mind’s grasp of the concept of entropy, while listening to engineer John Nefastis’s explanation: “He began then, bewilderingly, to talk about something called entropy. The word bothered him as much as ‘Trystero’ bothered Oedipa. But it was too technical for her. She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication”.

It is fairly evident that the passage provides an insight into her mind, which can only lower the veracity of Nefastis’s technical explanation in the process of transmission. The whole series of bizarre adventures in the text, in fact, is refracted through her mind only, and Oedipa constantly resists giving in to the plausible structure of the underground communicative utopia, so that she moves through the events somewhat tangentially, not allowing either negation or affirmation to take her over. This may be happening by way of self-defense, because regardless of the seeming philanthropic or liberating character which utopias propagate before their establishment in reality subjects them to a test, utopian-sounding ideas may swerve away into tragedy all too easily. Perhaps the crucial example of this perversion comes from Oedipa’s own psychiatrist, Dr Hilarius, who breaks down in an attack of paranoia, thinking Israeli agents are pursuing him; when the police begin hammering on the door he confides in Oedipa that he conducted experiments on the Jews in Buchenwald, inducing catatonic insanity through torture, drugs and surgery. Then he starts exculpating himself by stating which utopian model he embraced in the war:

If I’d been a real Nazi, I’d have chosen Jung, nicht wahr? But I chose Freud instead, the Jew. Freud’s vision of the world had no Buchenwalds in it. Buchenwald, according to Freud, once the light was let in, would become a soccer field, fat children would learn flower-arranging and solfeggio in the strangling rooms. At Auschwitz the ovens would be converted over to petit fours and wedding cakes, and the V-2 missiles to public housing for the elves. I tried to believe it all.

The novel, whose main character, sagging under the inability to solve the multiplying mysteries, brings herself to invent the credo “Shall I project a world?” indeed takes both Oedipa and the reader to numerous passages, into dubious mental territories, whose ethical or psychological impact could also bring disaster in its wake. At the end of this text, facing the multiplication of unfamiliar though alluring utopias, we are left with an announced premonition from Pynchon’s debut novel V.: “Truth or falsity don’t apply”.

TRANS-, 14 | 2012
Vineland – A Locality of Loud Rebellion

About a quarter of a century passed before Pynchon returned to approximately the same place and time, in the novel three times as long; essentially, Vineland has a frame narrative set in 1984 from where the revolution of the sixties is seen and refracted, forming the embedded narrative in its own right, and the third section of the text brings us back to 1984, to a time without the plausible transcendence of the remembered decade. The teenager Prairie searches for her absent mother, named Frenesi Gates, whose subversive activities of the past may have made her disappear from the common world, only to be reached by authorized agents of federal secret services; she now lives a new life with another husband and their son. Prairie’s father, Zoyd Wheeler, performs his silly stunt (transfenestration, as it is called in the novel) once a year “in order to collect his mental-disability check from the US government”19. A host of other bizarre events take place, generated by a large array of would-be rock musicians, FBI snitches, American kunoichi, and the like, but the framework of family reunion, the desire to reestablish the nuclear commonwealth, is never compromised.

In brief, the utopian communities of the novel include the following:
1) the Kunoichi Attentives, a martial arts sisterhood
2) the 24fps film collective, in which Frenesi fiercely participates
3) the PR3 project at the College of the Surf

We could also make a passing mention of the location itself. It is an imaginary county in northern California, whose name has a Viking etymology alluding to a land of plenty. In reality, it may well be located in Humboldt Bay, as descriptions and geographic details indicate. The imaginary topos as a whole stands in noticeable opposition to Western utopian ideology, which is fundamentally “a masculine project, born out of an empiricist attempt to control the natural, the material, the body. Consequently, they have to be presided over by the reasonable, the spiritual and the masculine; nature, women and the body are constructed as indefinites, empty and chaotic elements onto which Man must impose ‘Form’”20. In the world of this novel, “art, love and the labor movement contend for the central roles in the new ideological constellation”21, as colonialism and Christianity had lost much of their influence in the contemporary USA.

The two main female characters in the novel, Darryl Louise Chastain (known as DL) and Frenesi Gates, operate in mostly parallel plotlines, which on the other hand also diverge beyond the sphere of any common denomination. Not being able to withstand the aggressive behavior of her officer father any longer, DL eagerly learns the secrets of martial arts from experienced Inoshiro Sensei and a few years later she shows interest in joining the Sisterhood. While recounting the tale to Prairie, she wistfully adds a note on enthusiasm of many movements in their initial phase: “Back then they let anybody who showed up crash here for free. Early days, more idealistic, not so much into money”22. The sorority functions as a well-trained group, and it possesses a solid feminine hierarchy, led by the Head Ninjette. They live in the hills, showing contempt for the amenities of civilization, and embracing the more natural rhythm of energy flow, reduced costs and lower frequency of trespassers on their communal life. The frenzy for Far Eastern armed and unarmed combat had been sweeping the industrialized countries ever since the war ended, and hand in hand with it went the interest in Zen Buddhism and numerous other
forms of religious experience, out of the sphere of official Eurocentric faith. The thought-provoking consequence of this parallel structure is that a society without male-dominated, government-oppressed members was quite possible – the ominous corollary of this short-lived system that embraced both the body and the mind, the feminine and the masculine, is that the sixties were unfortunately flanked by the repressive thirties and fifties on the one hand, and the hopeless seventies and eighties on the other. That decade was perhaps the best age for the redemption of the unrealized American dream on the universal scale, and for the re-establishment of the miniature haven, the family – this dream will persist with Zoyd until the close of the narrative. The cenobite life of the Kunoichi Attentives does not rest on an invention of their own, because the sisterhood found its place in a former unrecognized Catholic mission for nuns, and isomorphically, a women’s organization, spurned by the official discursive formation, nests in the sanctuary of another women’s organization spurned by an analogous discursive formation in its own age. The civil rights struggle of the sixties must have had a lengthy prehistory, and the dispossessed finally voiced their concern with more strength in this extremely turbulent decade, the tipping point of the critical mass of liberation. Unlike Pynchon’s previously analyzed novel, *Vineland* gives us much more of the taste of explosive social antagonism, and idealists in this text are rather forced to fight for their rights (even physically) than to invent harmless secret codes of communication. Instead of cybernetic freedom, they demand it to be palpable, breathable and collective; instead of symbolic communion of a secret group of people from a corporate payroll, the oppressed in this novel are left to their own devices in the struggle to escape the overwhelming system altogether.

The action of the novel oscillates between the system of kinship relations and the system of snitch relations, as many persons in the text gradually yield before the soft or hard governmental power. An embodiment of that power can be best seen in the character of FBI agent Brock Vond, who wishes to coerce dissidents into becoming informers, with the aid of their ‘re-education’ in specially designed camps. Whereas her revolutionary parents see nothing problematic about Frenesi’s radical activity, they cannot endure the thought that their daughter cooperates with the official system. That is the very thing she does, when she falls for Brock’s seduction, only to leave him for Zoyd considerably later. The FBI agent abhors the idea of kinship, and tries to suit familial ties to the structure of the state apparatus, to the extent that he terms the dissidents “children […] safe inside some extended national Family. […] They’d only been listening to the wrong music, breathing the wrong smoke, admiring the wrong personalities. They needed some reconditioning”.

Frenesi’s participation in the 24fps (frames per second) ensemble may be construed as an attempt to counter the crude power of gun-wielders with something symbolically adequate, like the camera and its lens, with the difference lying in the fact that ideals and symbolic values mean nothing to types like Brock. However, the members of the Death to the Pig Film Collective are even bolder, as they claim openly: “A camera is a gun. An image taken is a death performed. Images put together are the substructure of an afterlife and a Judgment”.

The crew cruised around the country and took shots of the injustices and raids happening without official TV coverage, they exposed the evil on tape and considered their duty efficient in the long run, even though it was potentially dangerous in the short run, due to the police night patrols. To the brute force of the establishment they replied with symbolic subversion, which fell into oblivion as soon as the seventies were over and hardly any leftist energy was still perceptible in the time when Prairie was
viewing the archive tapes with DL, who also formed part of the guerilla movie outfit. Here are some of the recorded 1960s scenes: "Strikers battled strikebreakers and police by a fence at the edge of a pure green feathery field of artichokes while storm clouds moved in and out of the frame. Troopers evicted the members of a commune in Texas, beating the boys with slapjacks, [...] slapping little kids around, and killing the stock..."25.

Rebelliously inspired, the PR project breaks out at the moment in which students at the College of the Surf campus find out that their institution is only a land developers’ deal from the outset, in the guise of a gift to the people. So the young decide to secede from the state of California, knowing well that the bureaucracy would never relinquish its hold of the plan to countenance the construction of luxury vacation units, and they proclaim The People’s Republic of Rock and Roll. The students immediately carve themselves an idol of a mathematics professor Weed Atman, who has a name ringing with substance abuse and pseudo-Oriental meditation. By this time, we find out that the protesters intend to bring down the Nixon administration and that Frenesi is actually working for the government, as he liberally takes and develops copies of the films she shoots. In order to destabilize the movement, Brock uses Frenesi as an undercover agent, and her affair with Atman can serve as real-time logistical support for the governmental intrusion. The collapse occurs due to two causes: “the hippies’ project and systems of resistance fail because they are framed in the same dualist structure as the systems they react against; the dualist ideologies in Pynchon’s fiction falter when they collide with the material, the natural, the feminine”26. Weed gets assassinated and utter chaos breaks loose on campus – random shooting, tear gas from the air, assault of camouflaged troops, to be followed by scores of injuries, hundreds of arrests and several persons unaccounted for.

The events which took place on this campus bear so much resemblance to the actual events from the Berkeley campus in October 1964, that they can hardly pass unnoticed; 23-year-old student Jack Weinberg was arrested by the police for distributing antiracist leaflets, and as he was placed in the car, several hundred students surrounded the vehicle, sat around it and blocked the transport for thirty hours. This sit-in kicked off a series of strikes on the same campus, which even had to shut down due to such a massive turnout. The Free Speech Movement was only one in a line of radical protests, from the 1950s civil rights protests to the 1970s women’s movement, and all of them shared certain “New Left” ideas and practices. All the freedom-generating activities in the novel also have this liberally minded substratum as a common ideological core, and their practitioners abide by very egalitarian principles, shunning every possible elitism. The four-month Berkeley campaign involved a full spectrum of the student body, regardless of class, race or creed; graduates and undergraduates, students from conservative and liberal families alike, and it drew support from the Young Democrats and the Young Republicans27. Protester Mario Savio articulated the youth anger by summing up the issues with a vibrantly utopian note of human needs which the governmental machine suppressed as a prerequisite for unquestioning service:

We don’t mean to be made into any product, be that it government, industry, or organized labor...There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part; you can’t even possibly take part, and you’ve got to put your bodies on the gears, upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you’ve got to make it stop, and you got to indicate to the people who run it or who own it – that unless you’re free, the machine will be prevented from working at all28.

The insistence of the novel’s movement on only one leader made the entire subversive ideology much more vulnerable to the smoothly running corruptive mechanisms of the
people in power; once bereft of the central figure, the commune collapsed in a raid not unlike one of wolves on their long-studied prey. Ironically, Weed returns as a Thanatoid, a chimeric breed who spend their time watching the omnipresent Tube for hours a day, and can be compared to living shadows. Such is the power of Brock Vond that “he even stages Weed’s death as a media event, in line with his possession of Frenesi”\textsuperscript{29}, in the literal and metaphorical senses of the word. The Thanatoids are a grimly humorous version of hippies who turned into stultified yuppies over only one decade, and experience life mostly as alienated from life as possible, suffused by the debilitating signals that come from the screen permanently; not even the home-loving inhabitants of the county can escape this stupefaction.

In addition, we may mention two other theories of reality which marginally occur in the novel, and are propounded by second-line characters. Although without a major role in the narrative as a whole, they do contain certain background overtones – less prominent voices in what Bakhtin would term \textit{polyphony} – of a possible better world, and enrich the benevolent, preservational relation to the surrounding world, a unity of humans and nature, often so grossly overlooked and painfully disrupted. The first is Sister Rochelle’s sermon when Frenesi, Zoyd and Prairie finally reunite at her parents’ house, with a very unorthodox view of heaven and hell:

When the Earth was still a paradise, long long ago, two great empires, Hell and Heaven, battled for its possession. Hell won, and Heaven withdrew to an appropriate distance. Soon citizens of the Lower Realm were flocking up to visit Occupied Earth on group excursion fares, swarming in their asbestos touring cars and RV’s all over the landscape […] till the novelty wore off, and the visitors began to realise that Earth was just like home […] And then all the gateways to Hell were finally lost to sight, surviving only in local tales handed down the generations […] So, over time, Hell became a storied place of sin and penitence, and we forgot that its original promise was never punishment but reunion, with the true, long-forgotten metropolis of Earth Unredeemed\textsuperscript{30}.

Another order of things, a passage to the realms absent from the expunged versions of colonizers’ stories, on account of their Native heathen origin, can direct the more sensitive readers (or characters) to the primeval land without paranoid divisions between mind and matter, the living or the dead. Worlds of matter and of spirit meet without causing fantasy or nightmare; acorn grounds, rocks in the river, boulders on the banks, groves and single trees had their own names, with their own spirits: “Many of these were what the Yurok people called \textit{woge}, creatures like humans but smaller, who had been living here when the first humans came. Before the influx, the \textit{woge} withdrew. […] For the Yuroks, who had always held this river exceptional, to follow it up from the ocean was also to journey through the realm behind the immediate”\textsuperscript{31}.

\section*{Conclusion}

The two case studies of Pynchon’s forays into the relationship between contemporary political visions of a humane society and the crushing dehumanizing state in the field, present two thoughtful, committed texts with a set of common core ideas: the fast-growing economic sector need not automatically signal the apex of joy for its employees, and the control exercised by the state and wielded by governmental agents out of control may do more harm than good and cause adverse reactions, thus setting a possibly flammable friction into motion. The oppressed (or the Preterite, as they are sometimes called in Pynchon) choose to establish a utopian order of their own, and function in codes
not sanctioned officially – in The Crying of Lot 49 the community starts up a miniature postal system so that they may bypass the monopolist surveillance of their harmless private jokes, and in Vineland the revolt becomes noticeably more manifest, diffuse, public and gets into the media spotlight as an undisputed fact. The earlier novel may be read at a more theoretical level as a humorous indirect comment on the titanic proportions of state-supported private arms corporations whose labyrinthine bureaucracy makes employees' intellectual life almost void of sense, although in the context of postwar development such enterprises worked in fine unison with the utopian plan of making all of America happy by leaving no one without an employment opportunity. The top-down approach had to meet some opposition at the base of the labor pyramid, as it cared more about profit-yielding management than about the workers who left one-third of their mature years in such giant clockwork. The reaction in the depicted Vineland county also owes much to real-life events in the civil rights movement, especially to the long strike on the Berkeley campus in the mid-1960s, some of whose proponents unequivocally demanded that a humane society should function according to the bottom-up model. The utopian groups in this novel part in different ways in their desire not to be treated like merchandise or puppets, but they ironically sometimes appear in precisely such roles (sold into white slavery, turned into FBI informers or presented in humiliating situations on television). The plot of Vineland is more of an illustration of how groups behave when they deliberately distance themselves from enterprise payrolls and try to reform the state by swinging fists and cameras at police truncheons, although their isolated subversive communities enter a losing battle against a well-funded disciplinary machine. The former novel devises a subtle rebellion against a huge representative of the so-called soft power, whereas the latter constructs relatively disjointed visions of how the grassroots people react to open repression at the hands of big capital; it is an object lesson on the practice of private corporate business in alliance with the protective governmental machine rather than a caricature of inventive, two-track-minded engineers who do live off the company which they ridicule.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE


NOTES

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18. Thomas Pynchon, *V.,* London, Vintage, 2000, p. 120.
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**RÉSUMÉS**

Cet article trouve son point de départ dans les clauses fondamentales de la Loi du travail des États-Unis de 1946, qui sous-tendent le discours utopique selon lequel tous les membres d’une société doivent pouvoir subvenir à leurs besoins. Alors que l’économie de la Californie a sans aucun doute prospéré durant les décennies de l’après Seconde Guerre mondiale, et ce en partie grâce aux investissements fédéraux dans les industries d’armement, l’influence abrutissante que les grandes entreprises avaient sur les vies de leurs employés de bas niveau provoque, dans le roman de Pynchon *Vente à la criée du lot 49*, une réaction subversive d’un groupe du personnel technique dans la grande entreprise de Yoyodyne. La forme d’utopie que ce groupe développe ne
se hasarde pas au-delà de la composition de lettres acheminées par un service postal secret à l'intérieur de la compagnie, cette résistance inoffensive leur permettant une forme de réhumanisation. Le roman Vineland présente une révolte beaucoup plus fondamentale contre la répression d'État sous la forme de mouvements divers à plus grande échelle, dans un département imaginaire – une équipe de cinéma enregistrant des documentaires en direct sur la violence gouvernementale ; une communauté féminine d'arts martiaux résidant dans les collines ; un groupe d'étudiants proclamant sa propre république de courte durée. Ce second roman ne crée pas de polémique avec le texte de la Loi bien qu'il dépeigne les implications pratiques du monopole des entreprises ou de l'État et les réactions à ses excès.

The starting point of this paper can be found in the basic provisions of the 1946 US Employment Act, which are redolent of the utopian discourse stating that all the members of a particular society should be provided for. While the economy of California undoubtedly prospered in the decades after World War II and owed some of the success to federal investments in the weapons industry, the stupefying impact that large corporations had on the lives of their lower-level employees caused a subversive reaction in a group of technical staff at the giant Yoyodyne plant in The Crying of Lot 49. Their form of utopia did not venture beyond writing letters via a secret postal service within the company, and this harmless resistance served as a manner of re-humanization. Vineland presents a much more fundamental rebellion against state repression in the form of various movements on a larger scale, in an imaginary county – a film collective that shoots live documentaries on governmental repression, a martial arts sisterhood which lives in the hills, and a fierce body of students who even proclaim their own short-lived republic. The latter novel does not raise a polemic against the text of the Act so much as it portrays the practical implications of the corporate or state monopoly and the reactions to its excesses.

INDEX

Mots-clés : Pynchon, utopie, W.A.S.T.E., Yoyodyne
Palabras claves : distopía
Thèmes : littérature
Keywords : utopia

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