

Author(s): Sean M. Carswell  
Affiliation(s): California State University Channel Islands  
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### Abstract:

This essay argues that a shift occurs in Thomas Pynchon's oeuvre with the novel *Vineland*, specifically with respect to power systems and resistance. Previous novels by Pynchon represented power structures as abstract, nearly supernatural systems that the characters could hardly conceive of, much less oppose. *Vineland*, on the other hand, brings power structures down to earth, representing them as a network of national governments, multinational corporations, and supragovernmental agencies. This is very much in line with what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri define as Empire. In response to these power structures, Pynchon constructs a resistance movement that arises spontaneously, much in the same fashion as what Karl Polanyi describes in *The Great Transformation* as a double movement or countermovement. Tracing both the power structure as it is presented in the novel and the movement of resistance to it elucidates a political philosophy that Pynchon continues through his four most recent novels. This outline appears in *Vineland* first by presenting Empire as engaged in a series of civil wars as a means of restricting civil rights, second by examining the multitude's complicity in perpetuating Empire, third by analyzing the failure of violent revolution, and finally, by providing a positive site for resistance.

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# The *Vineland* Guide to Contemporary Rebellion

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Sean M. Carswell

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The final pages of *Vineland* mark a shift in Thomas Pynchon's oeuvre. Relative to his first three novels, *Vineland* ends on a more hopeful note. Protagonist Prairie Wheeler has successfully completed her search for her mother, despite the interference of the diabolical federal agent, Brock Vond. In a playful allusion to Star Wars, the Darth Vader-like Brock descends from the sky and tells Prairie, "I'm your father". Prairie quips back, "But you can't be my father... my blood type is A. Yours is preparation H" (376). This exchange immediately precedes the end of Brock Vond's power and the beginning of Prairie's liberation. Brock dies shortly thereafter and is escorted to an underworld by a pair of shady tow-truck drivers. Peace reigns among the Wobblies, communists, activists, snitches, mad men, punk rockers, and drug dealers who, along with Prairie, populate the Becker-Traverse family reunion. Even the dog comes home with a face full of feathers from the blue jays that attacked in the novel's opening paragraph. This ending gives hope, specifically, for a resistance to the power structure represented by Brock Vond. The irony of Pynchon lighting his spark of hope for resistance in 1984 is salient. Beyond the irony, though, and beyond the mixed and often negative reception that *Vineland* received upon its publication, the novel provides an entry into ideas that Pynchon went on to explore and expand upon in his next three novels. *Vineland* catalyzes Pynchon's articulation of power and resistance in a globalized society. Though the novel precedes Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's critical trilogy *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*, it is helpful to explore Hardt and Negri's concepts of Empire and the multitude in conjunction with this shift in Pynchon's oeuvre. Reading Pynchon through the lens of Hardt and Negri clarifies Pynchon's conceptions of power and resistance. It also helps to alleviate David Harvey's justified criticism that Hardt and Negri offer no concrete model for resistance through the multitude. The power structure in Pynchon's novels is very much in line with Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire and Pynchon constructs a multitude in *Vineland* that can serve as a model of resistance to Empire.

Compared to *Vineland*, Pynchon's earlier novels had bleak endings. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, protagonist Oedipa Maas watches her life unravel as she gets wrapped up in the mystery of the possibly fictitious Trystero system. Like the rocket bomb that he is indelibly tied to, *Gravity's Rainbow's* protagonist Tyrone Slothrop ends the novel fragmented and dispersed. Likewise, Sidney Stencil is swallowed in a freak waterspout

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on the final page of *V*. In all three cases, an overarching, sometimes seemingly supernatural or legendary, power-structure guides and manipulates the characters. Power is abstract and haunting. It has mysterious names: *V*. or the Trystero. In the case of *Gravity's Rainbow*, it is only ominously referred to as They. These power structures are far less abstract or supernatural in *Vineland*, which makes them seem far more surmountable. As N. Katherine Hayles observes, "[T]here are also chances for recovery in *Vineland*. Precisely because it operates on a diminished scale, the problems seem more solvable, more as if they had a human face in contrast to the inhuman, looming presences that haunt *Gravity's Rainbow*".<sup>1</sup> As the supernatural They or the legendary Trystero, systems of power become a force greater than Tyrone Slothrop or Oedipa Maas can comprehend, much less oppose. Prairie Wheeler, on the other hand, can look her oppressor in the eye and make a joke about hemorrhoid cream. The human face of the oppressor makes possibilities for resistance palpable.

Of course, it is ironic that Pynchon situates his hope for resistance in the year 1984. It is the year in which George Orwell set his fascist dystopia, after all.<sup>2</sup> Several critics have commented on Pynchon's irony. For example, Molly Hite describes the eighties as "a time when the phrase 'American Left' sounds dangerously like an oxymoron".<sup>3</sup> Though Hite does not expand upon this notion, her point can be articulated fairly easily. 1984 is the year of Ronald Reagan's reelection. It signifies the heart of the neoliberal takeover. The eighties were a time when multinational corporations, governments, and supranational agencies conglomerated into the power system that Hardt and Negri refer to as Empire. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey specifically traces this eighties takeover as it occurred through the policies of former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, President Reagan, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and Communist Party of China leader Deng Xiaoping. Harvey focuses on Reagan's policies in the early 1980s, which attacked organized labor. According to Harvey, "It took less than six months in 1983 to reverse nearly 40 per cent of the decisions made during the 1970s that had been, in the view of business, too favourable to labour".<sup>4</sup> Reagan attacked labor unions through specific federal policies. He pushed to move industrialization from its union-controlled centers in the American Northeast and northern Midwest to so-called "right-to-work" states in the South and to foreign lands with lax labor oversights. Harvey further observes that, under Reagan, "public assets were freely passed over into private domain".<sup>5</sup> This private appropriation of public goods can be viewed as one of capitalism's final daggers into the pre-industrial tradition of Marxist commons.

While Reagan attacked unions ideologically for their role in regulating markets that, according to Reagan's neoliberal ideology, should remain unregulated, his Secretary of the Treasury, James Baker, "breathed new life" into the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Brady "used the IMF to impose structural adjustment on Mexico and protect New York bankers from default".<sup>6</sup> These policies, which regulate markets in

favor of banks and multinational corporations while preaching in favor of unregulated markets, were mirrored globally by the neoliberal moves of Thatcher, Volcker, and Deng. This becomes the first historiographical context in which Pynchon situates *Vineland*: an America where labor unions are under attack, public wealth is being pirated by private enterprise, and supranational organizations are superseding the authority of representative democracies.

Additionally, 1984 represents a time of both increased law enforcement funding and the acceleration of paramilitary forces fighting in the so-called War on Drugs. In "The Fourth Amendment and Other Inconveniences," David Thoreen elucidates the exponential growth of law enforcement and liberal forfeiture laws that characterized Reagan's domestic policy. The 1980s saw a dismantling of the Fourth Amendment and law enforcement agencies granted increased powers for surveillance and the seizure of property. Thoreen explores the role of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Justice in expanding these surveillance and forfeiture practices. He even posits Louis Giuffrida, former head of FEMA under Reagan, as the real-life model for Pynchon's Brock Vond. Giuffrida, like Vond, propagated a sort of rehashed Cold War against certain groups of Americans, a war which greatly infringed upon constitutionally protected civil rights, and a war against an abstract: the Drug War. Combining Harvey and Thoreen's characterizations of 1984, *Vineland* is set against a backdrop of neoliberal takeover and authoritarian practices used to quell any resistance to this takeover. It becomes the perfect setting for the assembly of Wobblies, communists, sixties revolutionaries, and punk rockers who gather at the end of the novel.

Beyond the accumulation of neoliberal power, the eighties represent a cultural void for some critics. In *Pynchon and History*, Shawn Smith addresses this cultural void. He states, "Rather than the real values that make for a just society, such as charity, compassion, and responsibility to one's self and others, *Vineland* shows an America largely blinded by the illusory and empty values of the culture industry and the consumerist ethos of the mid-eighties".<sup>7</sup> These illusory and empty values are particularly salient with regards to television. Several critics have addressed the motif of television — or the Tube, as Pynchon refers to it — in *Vineland*. Perhaps the most in-depth analysis of the Tube in *Vineland* comes in Brian McHale's *Constructing Postmodernism*. McHale describes "an ontology of television"<sup>8</sup>, in which "TV worlds insinuate themselves into the real world to pluralize the latter".<sup>9</sup> As McHale argues, the Tube shifts the ways in which the characters develop their conception of reality. This is demonstrated several times throughout the novel. For example, Prairie's boyfriend, Isaiah Two Four, cheers up Prairie in a particularly stressful moment by assuring her that the worst is nearly over. He tells her, "Only a couple more commercials, just hold on, Prair" (105). DEA agent Hector Zuñiga is not only addicted to the Tube, he finds validation for his life in

cop shows. The motif persists throughout the book. It works both to comment on and analyze the impact of the Tube on contemporary American culture and to establish a backdrop of a cultural void left by the monologue created from television's blue light.

This adds to the world and the context where Pynchon establishes a site of resistance against Empire: a society so hypnotized by television that they barely notice the neoliberal revolution taking place around them. As David Thoreen explains, "Like Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle, who slept through the political transition from monarch to democracy, Zoyd Wheeler and the contemporary American voter have slept through a change in governments, this time from democracy to fascism".<sup>10</sup> This shift from a social safety net to a neoliberal state, from democracy to a new sovereignty, from the engaged citizenry of the sixties to the thanatoids bathed in the blue light of the eighties, creates more than an ironic situation for a nascent multitude. It creates, as Molly Hite observed, a situation in which any sense of the American Left seems like an oxymoron. However, no matter how dominant a power structure is, its power can never be complete. Empires inspire resistance movements. Exploitation breeds revolution. Economic historian Karl Polanyi explores this trend in *The Great Transformation*. He discusses double movements or countermovements that arise spontaneously to unregulated marketplaces. These countermovements typically lack a strong ideological or theoretical backing. Instead, they simply recognize the inevitable annihilation of land and labor inherent in a liberal economy and rise to protect both humans and the environment.

Hints of budding countermovements lacking a strong ideological or theoretical backing can be read in glancing passages throughout the novel. One example occurs when Prairie and Ché reminisce about the Great South Coast Plaza Eyeshadow Raid (327). On the surface, this may be a simple romp, kids having fun. However, the narrator describes security guards being overwhelmed by the sheer number of roller-skating adolescent shoplifters. The numbers are too great to contend with. This resistance through sheer numbers is reminiscent of Wobbly protesters who would flood a protest in a mass so great that local jails could not contain them all. Police had no recourse for the Wobblies, who outnumbered the space in the local jails, other than to allow them to protest.<sup>11</sup> This somewhat symbolically links Prairie to her Wobbly great-grandparents. Of course, Ché, Prairie, and their compatriots were not outwardly staging a protest; they were shoplifting. Nonetheless, the girls' raid demonstrates the machinations of a countermovement. They rise spontaneously, without great theoretical or ideological grounding, to attack a system that exploits both land and labor.

Of course, this attack only provides an example of a countermovement. It is not a Pynchon guide for rebellion. The most notable distinction being that the girls are simultaneously participating in and rising up against global commodity culture. This is an example of what Pynchon refers to in his foreword to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

as cognitive dissonance: "to be able to believe two contradictory truths at the same time".<sup>12</sup> Pynchon goes on to acknowledge, "We all do it". Pynchon also explores this very human tendency throughout his subsequent work. His three most recent novels are populated by characters simultaneously resisting and complying with consumer corporate culture. The eponymous characters of *Mason & Dixon* frequently criticize burgeoning globalization built on the backs of slaves and exploited workers while sitting in coffee houses, eating and drinking the very commodities produced by this unjust system. *Inherent Vice's* Doc Sportello actively rejects the materialism of 1970 Los Angeles while driving the freeways in a Dodge Dart he loves as if it were sentient. This complexity is perhaps most directly confronted in *Against the Day*, when Reef Traverse and Flaco meet in a café in Nice. Flaco notes that the café is a perfect target for anarchist bombers hoping to attack the bourgeoisie. Reef disagrees, stating, "I've got to where I like these cafés, all this to-and-fro of the city life — rather be out here enjoying it than worried all the time about some bomb going off" (850). When the bomb does go off, Pynchon describes the attack as horrific and largely senseless. The graphic language he uses to describe the carnage suggests Pynchon's own horror at this form of resistance. The entire scene also seems to advocate only a partial withdrawal from consumables or a marketplace. Indeed, even anarchist bombers Reef and Flaco have come to enjoy some of the trappings. Pynchon seems to be arguing, instead, for an economy that prioritizes social relations over the marketplace — an ideology that stands in direct opposition to neoliberalism, which subverts all aspects of life to the marketplace. As this example demonstrates, Pynchon does not seem to wish to blow up the metaphoric café — in fact, he wants to get his coffee there. He simply rejects an ideology that privileges the café over humans. Examining the Great Eyeshadow Raid relative to Pynchon's subsequent works, the flashback can be read as a problematic rejection of (though not advancement against) neoliberalism. Pynchon's more articulated forms of resistance — which adhere more closely to Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude — are demonstrated in the examples of the Becker-Traverse reunion and the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives, which I discuss below. The Great Eyeshadow Raid further highlights the notion that, though it is ironic and sometimes seemingly oxymoronic to situate hope for a resistance to Empire in 1984, the height of the neoliberal takeover is the place where the countermovement begins to coalesce.

Pynchon's examinations of both this neoliberal takeover and this nascent multitude marks the beginning of the stylistic and thematic shift that occurs in *Vineland*. Pynchon begins to drift away from a sixties radicalism concerned with authoritarian governments and characterized by paranoia. He drifts toward a more articulated concept of power that has much in common with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of Empire. Hardt and Negri contend "that sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire".<sup>13</sup> According to Hardt and

Negri, Empire is a global network consisting of government agencies, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions that work like governments but beyond the jurisdiction of national rule. This is not an empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth century model, which is characterized by governments and their militaries colonizing a foreign region to exploit it for its natural resources. Instead, it is Empire without a single sovereign. Hardt and Negri reject from the outset "the idea that order is dictated by a single power and a single center of rationality *transcendent* to global forces, guiding the various phases of historical development according to its conscious and all-seeing plan, something like a conspiracy theory of globalization".<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Empire is neither an individual authoritarian ruling with an iron fist nor a conspiracy of the excessively wealthy. It is instead better understood as a horizontal network. Individual power among the humans composing the network shifts, with some humans rising relative to others, some profiting immensely and some falling out of power, yet the structure — the single logic of rule — remains intact. This new paradigm of sovereignty, for Hardt and Negri, should not be defined "in purely negative terms". Specifically, one should avoid defining Empire "by the definitive decline of the sovereign nation-states, by the deregulation of international markets, by the end of antagonistic conflict among state subjects, and so forth".<sup>15</sup> These negative terms are too limiting. While Empire is characterized by the decline of sovereign nation-states, the leaders of those nation-states retain a certain amount of power in negotiating global trade during events like the G-20 summits. While an ideology of deregulation does characterize the neoliberal underpinnings of Empire, international markets are regulated by treaties such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and by organizations like the WTO. Antagonistic conflict continues among state subjects. As I will demonstrate below, these antagonisms create a permanent state of exception that lends authority to Empire. So while factors such as the declining power of nation-states, the notion of deregulation, and violent conflict add to the composition of Empire, the concept is far more complicated.

Hardt and Negri maintain that "The new paradigm is both system and hierarchy, centralized construction of norms and far-reaching production of legitimacy, spread out over world space".<sup>16</sup> The structural logic of Empire can be viewed as "governance without government," an ideological consensus of rule.<sup>17</sup> Empire works as a network with various negotiations of power occurring between a limited number of players who contend for a greater share of it while ensuring that power does not expand beyond this network. Since the 1944 Bretton Woods agreements, "post-Fordist" neoliberal capitalism has been driven by this global network. It has been characterized by organizations like the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund; by multinational corporations whose members are instrumental in drafting not only state and federal laws, but also trade and tariff treaties that allow for the exploitation of labor while facilitating profits of these corporations; and various "First World" governments that work largely in concert with big business. This capitalism is a far cry

from Adam Smith's *laissez faire* conception largely because capital and governments are so frequently inseparable. In fact, as scholars like Wendy Brown and David Harvey demonstrate, the purpose of contemporary national governments seems to be largely economic. Under neoliberalism, every aspect of society becomes saturated by the logic of the marketplace.

The dialectic of Empire can be further understood in relation to its antithesis, the multitude. The multitude stands in opposition to Empire and is composed of, in a sense, the workers of the world. The contemporary workers of the world who construct the multitude differ from the early-twentieth-century concept of the Industrial Workers of the World and Big Bill Haywood's notion of One Big Union. Instead, Hardt and Negri characterize twenty-first-century labor as "biopolitical production". Hardt and Negri use the term "'biopolitical production' to highlight that it not only involves the production of material goods in a strictly economic sense but also touches on and produces all facets of social life, economic, cultural, and political".<sup>18</sup> For Hardt and Negri, the industrial concept of eight hours for labor, eight hours for leisure, and eight hours for sleep have been replaced by the immaterial and affective labor of the twenty-first century. Immaterial labor is characterized by "immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response".<sup>19</sup> The relationships and emotional responses of immaterial labor, in particular, compose "affective labor," that is, "labor that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion".<sup>20</sup> Thus, the global, twenty-first-century workers who produce commodities, combined with those who produce knowledge, information, delivery systems, communication, and affects, who are all exploited in common by Empire's push for accumulation and the neoliberal ideology for which the logic of the marketplace saturates every aspect of life — social, cultural, economic, and political — compose the multitude.

While the multitude is bound by Empire's common exploitation of them, Hardt and Negri are careful to distinguish between a falsely unifying concept of "the people" and a multitude that allows its members to retain their singularities. For Hardt and Negri, the concept of "the people" robs humans of their individual concerns by imposing a homogeneity of concerns upon them. The multitude rejects this homogeneity. According to Hardt and Negri:

The multitude, in contrast, is many. The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity—different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences.<sup>21</sup>

By maintaining internal differences, the multitude need not choose between singularity and plurality. The multitude instead maintains its singularities, but work in concert against the common exploitation of Empire. The most salient example of



the multitude that Hardt and Negri present are the protesters who shut down the WTO conference in Seattle in 1999. The protesters maintained their singularities. Environmentalists protested the destruction of the environment resulting from WTO policies; labor unions protested the erosion of workers rights under WTO regulations; various other groups protested the damage WTO ideology inflicted with respect to gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity. Each group of protesters upheld their singular purpose while simultaneously working with other groups to protest a common exploitation.

These concepts articulated by Hardt and Negri provide both a vocabulary and a theoretical framework for understanding the shift that occurs in Pynchon's oeuvre beginning with *Vineland*. While Pynchon has wrestled with a new paradigm of global sovereignty at least since the time of his initial publication of "Under the Rose" in 1961, *Vineland* marks the more complex and fully-theorized concept of a horizontal network of global sovereignty similar to that which Hardt and Negri define as Empire. While Pynchon has constructed a force of resistance to Empire from the Whole Sick Crew in *V.* to the Counterforce in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the motley cast of characters surrounding Prairie Wheeler in *Vineland* represent a more fully-realized network of biopolitical laborers who work in concert against Empire while maintaining their singularities. Viewing labor as immaterial and affective further helps to situate the sites for resistance Pynchon creates throughout *Vineland*.

This definition of global sovereignty was first articulated by Hardt and Negri in their 1999 text *Empire*. Of course, *Vineland* precedes this definition by nearly a decade. Nonetheless, as Pynchon brings the systems of power he criticizes down to earth in *Vineland*, his description of these systems of power match Hardt and Negri's description of Empire. A convenient example of Pynchon's Empire lies at the point where Pynchon moves the narrative of *Vineland* to Japan, places it in the perspective of Takeshi Fumimoto, and weaves Cold War-era monster movie tropes into his pastiche.

Takeshi, at this point, is called to investigate the destruction of a Chipco research laboratory. Little information is given about what type of corporation Chipco is, exactly, but the size of their laboratory, their fleet of passenger helicopters, their private railway station, and other signifiers of opulence suggest that they are a wealthy and powerful corporation. Takeshi is called in because, apparently, a Godzilla-type sea monster stepped out of the ocean and stomped on the research lab. Like so many Pynchon characters, Takeshi regards the official story with skepticism. He does not know how much Professor Wawazume — who recently wrote the floater for Chipco's insurance coverage — knows. Takeshi encounters Minoru in the monster's footprint. Minoru shows Takeshi the shrapnel from an Eastern bloc explosive with modifications made in South Africa. The device reminds both Takeshi and Minoru of time they spent together in the Himalayas dealing with a nuclear incident.

This particular moment elucidates Pynchon's construction of the system of power in the novel. First, Chipco has clearly hired an outside explosives expert to blow up their research laboratory and make the explosion look like a monster's footprint. Wawazume's insurance company was somehow complicit in Chipco's actions. This investigation brings together a seemingly freelance insurance investigator and a government bomb-squad expert. Takeshi acknowledges that his independence as an investigator is nominal. Despite his lack of a company pin, he is indelibly tied to the multinational corporate system. Minoru presents an interesting case as a government bomb-squad expert in a nation that not only has not been at war for over thirty years, but that ostensibly has no standing army (though, of course, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces call that assertion into question). Minoru's work investigating explosions and defusing bombs keeps him so busy that his only moments of peace occur when he is in transit, typically by airplane. The mere fact that Minoru and Takeshi know each other so well suggests that corporate and national interests are often inseparable. The investigators' knowledge of Czech and South African explosives and bomb scares on the Indian/Tibetan border demonstrates the international scope of their interests. They are clearly tied to something much larger than a single insurance claim. They are operating as appendages of a system of power that exists as a network of corporate, national, and global interests. This network is extremely wealthy, powerful, and corrupt. The narrator observes, "Far above them some planetwide struggle has been going on for years, power accumulating, lives worth less, personnel changing, still governed by the rules of gang war and blood feud, though it had far outgrown them in scale" (146). Professor Wawazume's complicity with this system of power keeps him wealthy and powerful enough to have paparazzi following him. Minoru, who refuses to believe that a monster made the footprint, unaccountably disappears, much like Joseph Heller's Dunbar, who is disappeared in *Catch-22*.<sup>22</sup> Takeshi falls somewhere between Wawazume and Minoru. He neither profits off the Empire nor challenges it. He is simply swept along by it.

Takeshi's passivity in this scene could be familiar territory. Like Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* and Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Takeshi is paranoid and subject to the whims of gigantic power systems. However, Takeshi's paranoia is validated more by his affinity for amphetamines and its common side effects than as the result of a nefarious and incomprehensible They. The gigantic power systems, again, are brought down to earth. They are a network represented by a multinational technology corporation and the militaries of a few different nations. Pynchon further explores this network by following Takeshi and Minoru from the footprint of Empire to the most clear-cut representative of the machinations of the Empire in the novel, Brock Vond.

Takeshi and Minoru, seeking clarification on the explosives debris they found under the footprint, go to a conference of federal prosecutors in search of an explosives expert. Takeshi encounters Brock Vond at this conference. The nature of the conference is not

explored, but it is nonetheless curious. As a federal prosecutor for the Department of Justice, Brock's job would be more concerned with domestic laws and domestic affairs, not international laws and international affairs. Thus, his presence at an international conference would raise questions regarding what type of information the prosecutors would be sharing. Clearly, since Minoru knows he can find an expert at the conference who can identify on sight eastern European and South African explosives by the debris they leave behind, the prosecutors' scope of competence expands beyond basic legal issues. The presence of explosives experts and prosecutors like Brock who specialize in quelling domestic resistance suggests that this conference is about sharing information regarding the maintenance of multinational corporate, national, and supranational interests. In other words, Brock Vond is at a conference designed to perpetuate the power of Empire. The fact that the conference is in Japan may suggest that Pynchon is parodying the paranoid eighties notion that Japanese economic prowess would take over the United States. Perhaps, if Brock had survived, his 2011 conference would have been in Beijing. The humor behind the parody, of course, lies in Pynchon's demonstration of power stretching far beyond the notion of individual nation-states and expanding into a global network. Further, Brock's presence in Tokyo could seem out of character. Throughout the rest of the novel, he is concerned solely with domestic issues — quelling sixties rebellion and waging a drug war. At the conference, he is part of a global force as well as a national one, again reifying Pynchon's exploration of a power that is no longer characterized by simple authoritarianism.

Throughout the novel, Brock is constructed as a face of Empire. He is tied to international business concerns, domestic disputes, upper echelons of governmental powers, and to wars fought by Americans against Americans. These wars are particularly relevant to Hardt and Negri's conception of Empire. Hardt and Negri argue that "war has become a general condition: there may be a cessation of hostilities at times and in certain places, but lethal violence is present as a constant potentiality, ready always and everywhere to erupt".<sup>23</sup> In other words, Empire maintains its power through a politics of perpetual warfare. Hardt and Negri explain that periods of war suspend democracy, subverting human rights by claiming that winning the war supersedes the rights of individuals, and, if war can be perpetual, the suspension of human rights can be perpetual as well. *Vineland's* Sasha Gates echoes this sentiment when she recalls that, prior to World War II, her life had been about fighting exploitative corporate powers by working with unions, participating in general strikes, advocating for the release of wrongfully imprisoned union leaders, and campaigning for the labor-friendly gubernatorial candidate Culbert Olson. However, Sasha says, "The war changed everything. The deal was, no strikes for the duration. Lot of us thought it was some last desperate capitalist maneuver, a way to get the Nation mobilized under a Leader, no different than Hitler or Stalin" (77). Sasha, like Hardt and Negri, observes that the resistance to Empire often takes a back seat to the ostensibly more important issue of

winning a war. Thus, Empire makes war "the primary organizing principle of society".<sup>24</sup> Brock Vond becomes a figurative general of this perpetual warfare.

He fights first a war against sixties student activism and second, the so-called War on Drugs. Of course, neither of these are wars according to the traditional usage of the term. As David Thoreen observes, "The War on Drugs is the fourth non-war war of the century, after the 'war' on the economic problems of the Great Depression, the Cold War, and President Johnson's War on Poverty".<sup>25</sup> Thoreen further argues that the War on Drugs is fought more like a traditional war than the previous "non-war wars". Brock demonstrates this. He organizes forces against first the student activists of the PR<sup>3</sup> and second the residents of *Vineland*, who either passively condone marijuana cultivation and sales in their town or actively grow and sell marijuana. In the War on Drugs, in particular, the narrative voice of *Vineland* takes on a martial tone. The narrator explains that

most of Brock's troops had departed after terrorizing the neighborhood for weeks, running up and down the dirt lanes in formation chanting 'War-on-drugs! War-on-drugs!' strip-searching folks in public, killing dogs, rabbits, cats, and chickens, pouring herbicide down wells that couldn't remotely be used to irrigate dope crops, and acting, indeed, as several neighbors observed, as if they had invaded some helpless land far away, instead of a short plane ride from San Francisco. (357)

Hardt and Negri claim, "High intensity police action, of course, is often indistinguishable from low-intensity warfare".<sup>26</sup> The narrative description of Brock's war on *Vineland* supports this conflation. The police forces are described as "troops," they run in formation like soldiers, they engage in chemical warfare, and, as the neighbors observe, they act as if they are invading some land far away. Brock's version of the War on Drugs is described as an invasion of American soil by the troops of Empire. The language is similar when Brock organizes local police forces to invade the College of the Surf and dismantle the PR<sup>3</sup>. After the invasion, Brock even brings several of the students to a facility that closely resembles a prisoner-of-war camp. The camp, which is named the Political Re-Education Program, or PREP, turns the prisoners of Brock's war on sixties activism into double agents for the Department of Justice. The ironic name, PREP, adds to the dark humor. Brock turns sixties hippies into eighties preppies. Most importantly, however, through his invasions and prison camps, Brock demonstrates that his work goes beyond the Department of Justice and engages in Empire's politics of perpetual war, specifically the permanent state of exception this perpetual war imposes upon civil rights.

Beyond his role in these domestic wars — which could perhaps be described as civil wars — Brock holds onto his role as an agent of Empire by a tenuous thread. Granted, Brock is incredibly powerful, particularly with regards to characters like Frenesi, Flash, and Zoyd. Even his partner Roscoe seems to be under Brock's sovereignty. Roscoe handles Brock the way an amateur snake handler deals with the cobra in his hand:

keeping it an arm's length away, perpetually aware that it could strike at any second. Brock works throughout the novel to perpetuate the power of Empire. He seeks to be part of the upper echelons of power. Nonetheless, he himself is not a metonym for Empire. He is simply a part of the network.

As I mention above, Pynchon brings the power systems down to earth in *Vineland*. He mentions them by name, identifying Them as

Hitler, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Nixon, Hoover, Mafia, CIA, Reagan, Kissinger, that collection of names and their tragic interweaving that stood not constellated above in any nightwide remoteness of light, but below, diminished to the last unfaceable American secret. (372)

Thus, for Pynchon, the once supernatural They becomes the earthly leaders who consolidated neoliberal power: the fascist Adolf Hitler; the anti-labor, corporate-friendly presidents Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon; criminal organizations like the Mafia and federal organizations like the CIA that both strive to maintain a multinational, consumer-driven corporate culture; leaders of anti-democratic military coups like Henry Kissinger; and perpetrators of a politics of perpetual warfare like Franklin (or even Theodore) Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.

The systems of power, as they are named here, represent the more powerful members of Empire. Hardt and Negri invite readers to view Empire "as a tree structure that subordinates all of the branches to a central root".<sup>27</sup> Hitler, Roosevelt, and that "connection of names" are perhaps higher branches. Utilizing other metaphors, Hardt and Negri refer to Empire as both a horizontal network and a hierarchy. Empire's power is spread out among various competing interests who hold various amounts of power, yet power is not expanded beyond this network. Thus, to return to the metaphor of the tree, Brock aspires to climb to a higher branch. After all, "He'd caught a fatal glimpse of that level where everybody knew everybody else, where however political fortunes below might bloom and die, the same people, the Real Ones, remained year in and year out, keeping what was desirable flowing their way" (276). Brock feels limited in his ability to rise within the hierarchy of Empire. He believes that the more powerful individuals would forever view him as little more than a hired thug whose services benefited them, and, further, who became expendable once his services were no longer needed. Like the Darth Vader Brock alludes to in his final scene with Prairie Wheeler, Brock has only limited power. He is manipulated by the Real Ones who hold a greater amount power within Empire.

This represents a divide in the way in which Pynchon deals with power. Unlike the more supernatural power structure of *Gravity's Rainbow*, where They held dominion over a preterite population that would ostensibly represent Us, *Vineland* brings power relations into a discursive area where They, to some extent, become Us. Or, at least, We are indelibly, perhaps even inevitably, complicit in perpetuating Them. While Brock Vond is complicit in perpetuating the power of Empire, he is also excluded from it at its

highest levels. His attempts to rise in the hierarchy of Empire are viewed as threatening to those who hold more power than him. After Brock has invaded Vineland, secured the area, confiscated land, and directed operations, his power is stripped away when, "Suddenly, some white male far away must have wakened from a dream, and just like that, the clambake was over" (376). Brock's funding is pulled away from him. He is forced to retaliate on the verge of his greatest authoritarian victory. This pulling of Brock's funding and his power illustrates that power is constantly being negotiated within Empire. Some individuals fall from the tree.

Brock's expulsion from Empire casts him into a space inhabited by characters who are neither wholly of Empire nor of the multitude. This space is occupied by characters like Frenesi and Flash, who start the novel as federal snitches, but after becoming victims of budget cuts that end their federal career, must find a new way to survive. It is also occupied by Ralph Wayvone. Though he is a Mafioso figure and the Mafia are among the names Pynchon's narrator lists as the Real Ones — the ones with the real power within Empire — Ralph recognizes that, regardless of his underworld power, he will remain a "wholly-owned subsidiary" (93). Ralph is a subsidiary of a multinational corporation while Frenesi and Flash are subsidiaries of the American government. They are all complicit in perpetuating the power of Empire while, at the same time, being exploited by it. This blurred space between Empire and the multitude invites the reader to go beyond concepts of two sides competing for global sovereignty and to view sovereignty in a more complex fashion.

In general, most of the characters in the novel are simultaneously complicit in perpetuating the power of Empire and exploited by it. What seems to matter, however, are the details of the complicity and exploitation, specifically, how complicit one is and in what ways one is exploited. As Molly Hite observes, "In *Vineland*, complicity is a fact of life, but it ... is not by definition total and does not by definition rule out resistance".<sup>28</sup> Instead, characters must ask themselves in what ways they are complicit in perpetuating systems of power, and they must examine the sites for resistance. These issues of complicity, which lie at the heart of *Vineland*, echo one of the arguments Linda Hutcheon makes in *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Hutcheon asserts, "[T]he postmodern we know has to acknowledge its own complicity with the very values upon which it seeks to comment".<sup>29</sup> In other words, resistance can only begin once the characters (and by extension, the readers) recognize the ways in which they perpetuate the system they criticize. The character of Zoyd Wheeler provides a convenient illustration of this concept.

Throughout the novel, Zoyd and his nemesis Hector make much of Zoyd's "virginity" with regards to his non-informant status. When seemingly everyone in the novel is selling, trading, or bargaining for information to take down sixties rebellion, Zoyd refuses to become an informant. His virgin status in this regard validates, for him at

least, his identity as a countercultural figure. His resistance takes a negative status — that he was never an informant — rather than a positive status as one who has advanced any sort of cause. He is presented as someone who operates outside the boundaries of consumerist culture and government oppression, yet his very livelihood is underwritten by the federal government in the form of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) provided for his annual acts of public insanity. Should he fail to perform one of these acts annually, he stands to lose not only his income, but custody of his daughter Prairie. In this way Zoyd — like Frenesi, Flash, and Brock — is in the employ of the federal government. Further, because the SSI checks are not enough to fully support Zoyd, he works a variety of odd jobs in and around Vineland. Most of these jobs are piecemeal. None of them are union. His willingness to take this work undermines the power of the unions that once organized in Vineland, the very unions for which Prairie's grandmother Sasha worked, the unions Prairie's great-grandfather Jess Traverse fought for and, during the fight, lost the ability to walk. Zoyd's scab status in a sense validates Reagan's anti-labor, neoliberal policies. Zoyd has sidestepped the long fought gains of nineteenth- and twentieth-century labor battles; the unions they created; the social safety net of health insurance, eight-hour days, and retirement plans they advocated for; and the basic human dignity associated with being a professional laborer. He has accepted the neoliberal notion that his labor is a commodity (though, as Polanyi observes, commodities are products created for resale and human labor, by definition, is not a commodity) and therefore subject to the laws of supply and demand. This uncritical acceptance ignores the long history of destruction of civil rights and social relations caused by viewing labor or land as a commodity.<sup>30</sup> Zoyd gets little in return for his dismissal of labor rights other than the vulnerability of a paycheck-to-paycheck existence. Thus, Zoyd's self-identification as a countercultural figure is complicated by his complicity. The first thing he must do to engage in viable resistance is recognize this complicity. He is dependent upon the federal government for his livelihood. His scab status helps to perpetuate the ever-widening divide between the those who control the wealth and those who create it. His complicity undermines his resistance. Nonetheless, as I argue below, his complicity does not completely eliminate his power to resist.

In order to discover the site where Zoyd and, by extension, Pynchon's audience can resist Empire despite our complicity in perpetuating it, I turn to the opposing sites of resistance created by Pynchon in *Vineland*: the failed student movement of the sixties<sup>31</sup> and the emerging multitude of the eighties. Like Pynchon, I will begin with an analysis of the failed rebellion and end with an exploration into new possibilities. Because *Vineland* views sixties rebellion through the retrospective eyes of Prairie Wheeler, I will do the same.

At its core, *Vineland* is a novel about Prairie Wheeler searching for her deadbeat mother. Entwined in Prairie's search for her mother is a search for ways in which to

create an identity. This identity is reliant upon a family and cultural history to which Prairie has limited access. In this regard, Prairie's search for her mother is also a search for herself, her future, and her role in an America that Pynchon presents as at war with itself. Prairie's search is most poignant when she investigates her mother's role in 24 fps. Prairie experiences the sixties through files stored on the Kunoichi archive computers and the film archives kept by Ditzah in her house in the San Fernando Valley. The counternarrative to sixties rebellion told through these archives serves as a synecdoche of student rebellion. Pynchon's historiography matches that of his former Cornell classmate and collaborator<sup>32</sup> Kirkpatrick Sale's description of real-life activists Students for Democratic Society in his book *SDS*. According to Sale, the story of the SDS is

a story which above all tries to explain how in ten years an organization could transform itself from an insignificant band of alienated intellectuals into a major national force; what that force meant to the universities, the society, and the individuals it touched; what happened to undo it just as it appeared to reach the height of its power; and what legacy it left behind.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, Prairie watches 24 fps from its inception as an insignificant band of alienated activists to its confrontation with the Justice Department at the College of the Surf, where student activism has gained in power, arrogance, and naivety enough to commandeer private property and secede from the United States. Prairie traces this evolution down to its failure, just as Sale does with the SDS.

In both cases, the failure is coupled with a turn toward violent resistance. Sale begins his historiography of the SDS with the explosive end of the group. The explosion was both literal — several members of the SDS were killed when the bombs they were making exploded — and figurative — the explosion effectively ended the SDS; nothing was left of the movement but metaphoric fragments. The stylistic decision of Sale's to begin his story of the SDS with its violent ending reminds his readers that, regardless of what happens throughout the rest of his history, it will end in failure. This structure serves to use the history of the SDS as a warning against the futility of violent resistance. In *There's Something Happening Here*, David Cunningham's history of COINTELPRO, Cunningham seconds Sale's interpretation, stating, "The emergence of the Weather Underground signaled the end of SDS as a viable mass movement".<sup>34</sup> In other words, when the members of the SDS transformed into the Weather Underground and employed violence as its primary tool of resistance, the entire movement crumbled.

Likewise, Pynchon uses the violence at the College of the Surf to explode 24 fps. Prior to their engagement in the College of the Surf, 24 fps is a not exactly pacifistic. DL has a violent role in the organization. She serves as "security," which means violent engagement to her. What is significant about her role, however, is its scale and its scope of practice. She uses violence only as a resistance, never as an advancement. She defends. She does not attack. In almost every case, when, as a member of 24 fps, she engages



violently with her opposition, the engagement is tailored to transport herself and other members of 24 fps away from danger and to a safe place. Once 24 fps enters the College of the Surf, however, the actions of their rebellion mirror those of civil war. The members of PR<sup>3</sup> secede from the United States. The members of PR<sup>3</sup> must know that the act of commandeering American soil for foreign purposes will be seen as an act of aggression or invasion by the United States. Thus, this secession is a direct confrontation. The members had to know that it would — as it did — provoke a hostile response from the federal government. Further, the PR<sup>3</sup> ultimately fails as soon as a gun is introduced into the equation. Brock gives the gun to Frenesi, who passes it on to Rex Snuvvle, who uses it to kill Weed Atman. Following the shooting, federal forces invade the PR<sup>3</sup> and violently take it back. The members of 24 fps disperse, never to reassemble as an activist group. The student resistance is quelled.

Prairie witnesses these events in the novel's 1984, in the context of Brock's pursuit of her and her mother. She contemplates the methods of ridding herself of Brock. DL tells her, "[U]nless you can call on troops in regimental strength, and the hardware that goes with 'em, best not even think about messing with Brock" (266). For DL, who has already tried to kill Brock once and who has witnessed Brock's ability to wage war against the American people in both the sixties at the College of the Surf and in the eighties in *Vineland*, violent resistance to Brock is futile. Implicit in her comment, though, is the notion that, unless a resistance group can assemble the military might of Empire, violent resistance is futile. The College of the Surf incident demonstrates exactly how undermanned the PR<sup>3</sup> is to deal with the forces assembled by the Justice Department. After all, Brock's troops decimate the entire movement in a matter of hours. Likewise, the SDS demonstrated the futility of bomb-making against the world's largest military power.

Part of the impetus behind violent resistance in *Vineland* is presented as naivety. While discussing the PR<sup>3</sup>'s secession, the narrator comments, "In those days it was still unthinkable that any North American agency would kill its own civilians and then lie about it" (248). From Prairie's 1984 perspective and the reader's nineties perspective, this disbelief in the U.S. government's willingness to wage war against its citizens is naïve. Prairie is witnessing Brock's martial activities under the banner of the War on Drugs. For Prairie and for readers who remember the War on Drugs' no-knock warrants; the violent battles waged largely in poor rural or inner-city areas; the massive stockpile of weapons obtained by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other anti-drug units; and the forfeiture laws that allowed anti-drug wings of police departments to enrich their coffers through the cars, boats, houses, and various other properties confiscated and subsequently auctioned for the profit of these departments, the notion of any North American agency killing its own civilians is easy to believe. After all, the War on Drugs was the most militaristic of America's twentieth-century non-war wars.

Even from Sasha Gates' perspective as the daughter and granddaughter of labor activists familiar with the wrongful convictions and executions of the Haymarket martyrs in Chicago in 1887; the wrongful conviction and execution of Joe Hill; the battle between striking steel workers and Andrew Carnegie's mercenaries (who were backed by the state militia) in Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1892; the massacre of striking miners and their families by the National Guard in Ludlow, Colorado in 1914<sup>35</sup>; and various other incidents in this vein, an American war on American people is far from unthinkable. By showing this violent strain of sixties rebellion both through the perspective of Prairie and following explorations into Sasha's activism in the thirties, forties, and fifties, *Vineland* presents violent resistance to Empire as futile and lacking in both historical knowledge and critical thought.<sup>36</sup>

Thus far in the novel, Pynchon — like Hardt and Negri — defines Empire not as a faceless or supernatural enemy but as a horizontal network of humans and a single logic of rule dedicated to neoliberal ideology; he presents Empire as engaged in a series of civil wars as a means of restricting civil rights; he considers the role of complicity with Empire among those who resist it; and he analyzes the failure of violent revolution. His final step, then, is to provide a positive site for resistance. He does this most saliently in two places: first, with regards to the family at the Becker-Traverse family reunion, and second in the social and economic alternatives suggested by the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives.

*Vineland* ends with most of the major characters gathered at the Becker-Traverse family reunion. The narrator introduces the reunion in idyllic tones, describing dawn gracefully emerging in the great north woods of California. The Beckers, Traverses, and other guests arise to this almost mythical morning. Even woodland creatures arise among them. This is followed by a bustle of pleasant activity that denotes families enjoying quality time with one another. The land upon which they gather is also intriguing. The reunion is held, apparently, not in a state or national park nor on a campground or any other type of private property. No one has paid a fee to camp there. The land lies off the beaten path, away from county or state roads, in a place that, strictly speaking, may not exist in Northern California. It is clear that no one in the Becker-Traverse clan owns the land. No one profits from the land. It seems to be an old growth forest that the Beckers, Traverses, and whomever else attends the reunion use gently, then leave for the next creatures who should pass by. Because the land is not turned into a commodity (a campground, timberland for a logging company) or a public property (a park, a preserve), because it lies off the network of public and private roads and is instead accessible through paths worn by vehicles accessing the land, because it is not policed by federal, state, or county employees or by private security, the land is relatively autonomous from capital and Empire. It therefore exemplifies the Marxist notion of the commons. This is where Pynchon begins to develop his site for resistance to Empire.

The notion of family at the family reunion is greatly expanded in the narrative. Significantly, very few of the characters assembled at the Becker-Traverse family reunion are named Becker or Traverse. Several, strictly speaking, cannot be considered related to the Beckers or the Traverses. This is particularly true once characters like DL, Takeshi, and a handful of Thanatoids join characters like Zoyd at the reunion. While all taken to be family, none are related. Instead, those who gather at the reunion constitute a familial community that has been drawn together by their resistance to (and, to some extent, complicity in) Empire. The metaphor of family is important because the characters seem to be together less by choice and more as a circumstance of their births, their socioeconomic status, and their place in a system of power. This is a far cry — perhaps even a polemical one — from the "family values" that George H. W. Bush campaigned to reinstate in the late eighties (which, in all likelihood, was happening at the exact time Pynchon was finishing his composition of *Vineland*). For Bush's campaign, family values signified a nostalgic return to the fifties notion of "family" as a controlling patriarch and his submissive wife and children. Ostensibly, this family would also be white (or perhaps black like the family in *The Cosby Show*). There is nothing nuclear, nothing genuinely patriarchal about the Becker-Traverse clan gathered at the end of the novel. Hardt and Negri, like Pynchon, warn against a "nostalgia for past social formations".<sup>37</sup> For Hardt and Negri, nostalgic cries for family values are dangerous. They argue that "the ultimate object is the reconstruction of the unified social body and thus the recreation of the people".<sup>38</sup> In other words, the danger lies in using family to create homogenous concerns — and typically the concerns of the patriarch — instead of honoring the singularities of individual family members. Pynchon seems to share this concern.

Like most families outside the novel and outside of the nostalgic view for "family values," the guests at the Becker-Traverse reunion are not a unified group. Pynchon has constructed them, instead, as a motley assemblage. They cannot be lumped together into a false concept like "the people". Instead, they mirror Hardt and Negri's definition of the multitude, which is, in short, "an irreducible multiplicity; ... singularities that act in common".<sup>39</sup> In accordance with this definition, those who gather at the reunion come from various walks of life. They are Wobblies, pot growers, victims of the fifties red scare, socialists, labor activists, veterans of the sixties student movement, and others living on what is often conveniently and erroneously referred to as the fringes of society.

Several critics have interpreted this assembly at the Becker-Traverse family reunion as a site of resistance. Among them, Shawn Smith notes, "Families, surrogate families, and communal social structures oppose the text's fascist collective".<sup>40</sup> Smith's simple passage highlights the importance of a sense of non-patriarchal family and community as the specific resistance to fascism. His statement echoes N. Katherine Hayles's argument in "'Who Was Saved?'," where she convincingly argues that Pynchon develops

a dichotomy in *Vineland*, positing the anti-family agents of suppression such as Brock against the more family-oriented activists such as Sasha and Zoyd. Pynchon further articulates the nature of the resistance when he has Jess Traverse read a passage from Ralph Waldo Emerson, which Jess first encountered in William James's *The Variety of Religious Experience*:

Jess reminded them, "Secret retributions are always restoring the level, when disturbed, of the divine justice. It is impossible to tilt the beam. All the tyrants and proprietors and monopolists of the world in vain set their shoulders to heave the bar. Settles forever more the ponderous equator to its line, and man and mote, and star and sun, must range to its line, or be pulverized by the recoil." (369)

This is a complex citation. The fact that it comes from the Jess Traverse, who is less a patriarch in the family — after all, he has hardly appeared in the pages of the novel until this moment, and he is presented as someone who neither seeks nor wants control of the lives of his family members — and more simply the family elder suggests that Pynchon is connecting the wisdom of this citation not with patriarchy but with a wisdom drawn from shared history. That shared history is passed on not only from family elders, but from intellectuals who have come to represent a certain freedom of thought and questioning of authority. Because Jess originally read the passage in a "jailhouse copy" (369) of James's book, the wisdom also comes from some anonymous, community-oriented individual who saw fit to donate this book — through one means or another — to a jail library. Finally, this citation comes to the reader from Thomas Pynchon as a way of highlighting the importance of creating a counternarrative to Empire's narrative of resistance. Thus, while Pynchon does investigate the failure of turning to violence in sixties rebellion, he also argues, through this passage, that sixties rebellion, like the rebellion of communists and labor activists that preceded it, like the punk rockers of Prairie's generation that follow it, all aid in "restoring the level... of the divine justice". This counternarrative echoes Polanyi's notion of a countermovement. By situating this movement on the Marxist commons of the Becker-Traverse reunion (the very type of commons attacked by Reagan's neoliberal appropriations), with its polemical family values, the countermovement becomes one that actually does contain both theory and ideology.

Jess's validation of resistance movements at the end of Pynchon's novel which, to some extent, explores the failures of those movements, demonstrates what Stefan Mattessich refers to as Pynchon's "refus[al] to surrender the myth of the American promise".<sup>41</sup> The American Left, with its desire for a more democratic society, with its embrace of the commons, with its focus on reconstructed families and communities, is not an oxymoron and it has not been destroyed by the Reagan years. It is, in fact, gathered to resist the corporate takeover of the American promise. As Molly Hite observes, "This return is not a restoration; it does not bring back the sixties — or the thirties, or the teens. But it does reconstitute a community of resistance in a

widened historical context".<sup>42</sup> The Becker-Traverse reunion groups together resistance movements that have previously been historicized as separate: the Wobblies, fifties communists, sixties student activists, and eighties punk rockers. In his history of the SDS, David Cunningham notes, "The SDSers ... clearly separated themselves from many Old Leftists by asserting that such reforms did not require the working class as the driving agent of change".<sup>43</sup> In *Vineland*, Pynchon heals this separation. He does not present the Old Leftists and the New Left as a unified whole. They are instead part of the multitude: "groups we had previously assumed to have different and even contradictory interests manag[ing] to act in common".<sup>44</sup> Zoyd, despite his scab activities, aligns himself with a family of labor activists. Frenesi, the federal snitch, jitterbugs with her mother Sasha, whose career in Hollywood was destroyed by federal snitches through the House Un-American Activities Committee. The multitude at the reunion resist the Empire that exploits them by gathering on land in the public commons and turning to non-patriarchal, non-unified families and communities for support. As Eric Solomon argues, "[A]ll the characters and themes of the novel will coalesce at the end as surreal forces will combine to sustain family and defeat the government".<sup>45</sup> The text supports Solomon's argument. Brock, the agent of the Empire, the Darth Vader, is destroyed. Prairie, the hope for a new generation, stands up to him. The reunion demonstrates Hardt and Negri's notion, "Dominance, no matter how multidimensional, can never be complete and is always contradicted by resistance".<sup>46</sup> The Becker-Traverse family reunion is the site of resistance against Empire's dominance.

The reunion as Pynchon's site of resistance, however, is incomplete. The multitude assembles at the reunion. The assembly serves to demonstrate the power of the commons and community. Prairie's arrival at the reunion is preceded by her flashback to the Great Eyeshadow Raid, which allows the reunion to also be cast as a rejection of consumerism. Pynchon's construction of the reunion further serves as a counternarrative to the typical historiography of sixties rebellion. This idyllic moment in mythical *Vineland* even has a moral like any other fable. N. Katherine Hayles summarizes the moral: "If salvation comes, it will arrive by cherishing the small everyday acts of kindness that flourish in networks of kinship and friendship".<sup>47</sup> However, the multitude, the commons, the reconstructed family and community, the rejection of consumerism, and the counternarrative are not enough to defeat Brock. He instead suffers his real defeat when his funding is pulled by a nameless white man who has climbed higher on the tree of Empire than Brock. Further, his defeat may symbolize a temporary respite for the multitude from the tyranny of Empire, but Empire has not suffered any real defeat. They have simply moved their perpetual war to another front.

The reunion alone as the site of resistance is problematic. The first problem lies in its lack of efficacy. Again, the reunion does not defeat Brock. The second problem lies in the reunion's lack of acknowledgement of its own complicity. On this public

commons, among this reconstructed community, the Beckers, Traverses, and guests watch televisions, they camp in recreational vehicles that are notorious gas guzzlers, they cook breakfast in RV microwaves or on propane stoves, they drink coffee, and they generally consume their consumables. Appearances to the contrary, they have not completely escaped Empire. Their gasoline and propane purchases support multinational oil corporations. Their recreational vehicles support the automobile industry. The coffee they drink is emblematic of globalized trade and Americans' addiction to it (a point Pynchon extensively articulates in *Mason & Dixon*). Perhaps most importantly, television, as Isaiah Two Four points out, at least partially led to the failure of sixties rebellion. All of this money spent on the reunion helps to perpetuate Empire. If Pynchon's hope for resistance is to expand beyond what Hayles refers to as "a few moments of grace"<sup>48</sup>, the reader must look elsewhere in the text.

This expansion of Pynchon's site of resistance lies in the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives.<sup>49</sup> Unlike the Becker-Traverse family reunion, which is an annual respite from the power of Empire, the Sisterhood serves as a perpetual safe harbor for the multitude. When DL becomes too entwined in the interests of Empire, she flees to the Sisterhood, knowing it is the only safe place for her to untangle herself. Likewise, when Brock begins sniffing around Vineland and posing a threat to Prairie, DL brings her to the Sisterhood's mountainside retreat, where Prairie is able to hide out long enough to make sense of her dilemma. Even Takeshi seeks his resurrection through the Sisterhood. Because it exists in the novel as a safe harbor, a hideout, and a place of rebirth, the mountainside retreat of the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives deserves further examination as a site of resistance.

In all likelihood, the mountainside retreat strays from the vision of Hardt and Negri with respect to the multitude. While Hardt and Negri come from a Marxist tradition and demonstrate an inherent mistrust of private property, the mountainside retreat of the Sisterhood exists within the logic of late capitalism. The retreat is on private property. They protect this property with a gate. Thus, it is even a gated community. Further, they are funded through the lucrative "self-improvement business" (107). They advertise in mass market magazines. They market themselves to children. They rely on a mixture of nostalgia and orientalism to sell their self-improvement platform. Through all of these elements, they demonstrate their complicity within Empire.

Recognizing this complicity is the first step in the Sisterhood's resistance. They understand the logic of the market and work within it. Despite their somewhat deceptive marketing attempts, however, their program of spiritual rebirth is not presented as a façade. All of the characters in the novel who turn to the Sisterhood in a time of need find what they need at the retreat. DL is untangled from Empire there. Prairie does begin to find her mother and, through that act, begins to find herself and her role in society while she is at the retreat. Takeshi is reborn there (annually, in fact). Even the Sisterhood's

advertising campaign's soft promises of "some chorus line of Asian dewdrops" (107) are destroyed when visitors arrive to find the Sisterhood a multi-ethnic group. Further, though they exist on private property, that property is open to members of the multitude who can, as Prairie explains it, "earn what you eat, secure what you shit" (109). Even the gates function in the book to prevent Empire's invasion rather than to prevent the arrival of the multitude. Through these methods, the Sisterhood's complicity becomes conscious. This consciousness allows them to manipulate it in their favor.

Further, the Sisterhood does overlap with Hardt and Negri in several ways. First, the Sisterhood's work is essentially biopolitical. They create immaterial products: the information Prairie needs to find her mother; the pseudo-spiritual martial arts knowledge that DL pursues; and the feelings of ease, of well-being, of safety, of personal growth that characterize affective labor. Hardt and Negri further maintain, "[B]iopolitical production shifts the economic center of gravity from the production of material commodities to that of social relations".<sup>50</sup> The biopolitical production inherent in the Sisterhood's business model does drift away from the strictly material, strictly industrial production that a Marxist bourgeoisie inextricably entangles itself in. The knowledge, communication, and feelings of ease and safety produced by the Sisterhood are more difficult to commodify. Hardt and Negri contend, "Biopolitical products... tend to *exceed* all quantitative measurement and take *common* forms, which are easily shared and difficult to corral as private property".<sup>51</sup> In other words, because the biopolitical production of the Sisterhood is so difficult to measure quantitatively, because it is so difficult to translate into a simple commodity, it becomes a power with more autonomy than industrial production. Capital can hover over it parasitically, but the biopolitical production ruptures traditional relationships between capital and industry.

Additionally, when Hardt and Negri discuss the specifics of resistance from the multitude, they observe, "The most important organizational characteristic of these various movements is their insistence on autonomy and their refusal of any centralized hierarchy, leaders, or spokespeople".<sup>52</sup> Resistance movements are organized more like a network that do have leaders and spokespeople, just not centralized ones. For example, Subcommandante Marcos can exist as a voice for the resistance movement in Chiapas, but he cannot exist as the voice for the resistance movement. He is free to speak provided he clarifies that he speaks for himself. Likewise, the Sisterhood does have leaders, just not centralized leaders. For example, Prairie, in her effort to earn her place at the retreat, becomes the head of the kitchen. She takes charge over the menu and the use of resources. She manages the others in the kitchen. She is not, however, part of a hierarchal chain of command. She simply fills a need. Sister Rochelle, who is described as "Senior Attentive, or mother superior of the place" (108), does fill a leadership role. She outlines conditions for DL, Prairie, and Takeshi's stay at the Kunoichi, but her role rejects the logic of late capitalism in two significant ways. First, as I mention above,

all of these characters find what they need at the retreat. Sister Rochelle facilitates this process. Her role is one of nurturing and assistance. She does not seek to profit off DL, Prairie, or Takeshi. She does not exploit their labor. She instead ensures that their time at the retreat is communally profitable. Second, Sister Rochelle rejects standard notions of competition associated with capitalism. Though the Sisterhood is in the business of spiritual readjustment, Sister Rochelle tacitly supports DL and Takeshi's enterprise into what they refer to as karmic readjustment. DL and Takeshi labor in biopolitical production similar to the Sisterhood's. The Sisterhood rejects the capitalist impulse to profit parasitically off DL and Takeshi's karmic readjustment business. Instead, the two groups work in concert for their mutual benefit rather than attempting to destroy each other through profit-driven competition.

Ultimately, the Sisterhood stands in opposition to Empire. Pynchon makes this clear from the very introduction of the mountainside retreat. The narrator introduces the retreat through the eyes of Prairie:

As they got closer, Prairie saw archways, a bell tower, an interpenetration with the tall lime surfaces of cypresses, pepper trees, a fruit orchard ... nothing looked especially creepy to her. She was a California kid, and she trusted in vegetation. What was creepy, the heart of creep-out, lay back down the road behind her, in, but not limited to, the person, hard and nearly invisible, like quartz, of her pursuer, Brock Vond. (108)

This description first envisions the retreat through an ecological perspective. The lushness of the vegetation is welcoming, a sense of home from Prairie (as, perhaps, her name itself would suggest). It secondly presents a dichotomy: Prairie's very identity is reinforced by the retreat while the Empire — and I say Empire because the heart of creep-out for Prairie includes but is not limited to Brock — that lies behind her threatens to destroy her. In this way, Pynchon signals to his reader his site of resistance to Empire. It resides in a social business engaging in biopolitical production: one that is complicit to corporate society but recognizes that complicity and moves beyond it; one that rejects consumerism by refusing to sell consumables and by rejecting the notion of spirituality as a commodity; one that accepts payments beyond the typical system of cash currency; one that exists for mutual profit instead of exploitative profit; one that reconstructs notions of family and community to provide a safe harbor; and one that rejects competition in favor of cooperation. This social business alone is not enough to take down the Empire in the novel. It exists only as a respite from the novel. But the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives' mountainside retreat coupled with the Becker-Traverse family reunion serve to introduce Pynchon's conceptions of a world that can exist in opposition to Empire.

These two examples serve only as the beginning of Pynchon's investigation into new sites of resistance. His three subsequent novels expand and articulate these notions. *Mason & Dixon* travels back to the revolutionary atmosphere that preceded the new republic of the United States to construct a coherent vision of the multitude as the true



founders of the American promise. *Against the Day* both further explores the futility of violence in resistance to Empire and expands the counternarrative of resistance movements, specifically the anarchist and socialist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. *Inherent Vice* further develops the socially conscious alternative economic structure hinted at by the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives. All three of these novels enlarge the notion of a multitude and its revolutionary potential.

While these novels more clearly articulate Pynchon's sites for resistance, they all rely on the framework established in *Vineland*. After all, *Vineland* serves to bring systems of power down to earth, to give these powers human faces, and present them as surmountable. *Vineland* introduces and explores the destructive elements of Empire's perpetual civil war and highlights the importance of recognizing how these non-war wars are really attacks on both the American people and the American promise. *Vineland* explores complicity as a gray area wherein people can recognize the ways in which they perpetuate the systems they oppose yet use this recognition as a starting point for a new path of resistance. *Vineland* demonstrates the futility of violent resistance to Empire while simultaneously proposing new methods of peaceful attack. For all of these reasons, *Vineland* serves as the thematic foundation for *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*, and *Inherent Vice*. Pynchon's new approach to the American promise begins here.

## End notes

1. Hayles, p. 25.
2. Pynchon is obviously conscious of this irony. For a more complicated view of this, see Pynchon's introduction to the 50th anniversary edition of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.
3. Hite, p. 140.
4. Harvey (2005), p. 52.
5. Harvey (2005), p. 52..
6. Harvey (2005), p. 73.
7. Smith, p. 106.
8. McHale, p. 126.
9. McHale, p. 129.
10. Thoreen, 217.
11. See Zinn, pp. 324-325 for a description of several of these free speech protests that occurred from 1909-1912 in cities like Spokane, Fresno, Aberdeen, and San Diego.
12. Pynchon (2003), p. xi.
13. Hardt and Negri (2001), p. xii.
14. Hardt and Negri (2001), p. 3.
15. Hardt and Negri (2001), p. 13.
16. Hardt and Negri (2001), p. 13.
17. Hardt and Negri (2001), p. 14.
18. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. xvi.

19. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 108.
20. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 108.
21. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. xiv.
22. Captain John Yossarian, the protagonist in *Catch-22*, is haunted by the awkward diction the military uses with regards to his friend Dunbar. Dunbar did not disappear. He was disappeared, suggesting that some outside force led to Dunbar's disappearance. Likewise, Minoru seems to have been disappeared, i.e., some force of Empire seems to have taken Minoru out of the equation.
23. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 4.
24. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 12.
25. Thoreen, pp. 224-225.
26. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 39.
27. Hardt and Negri (2001), p. 300.
28. Hite, p. 147.
29. Hutcheon, p. 10.
30. Karl Polanyi demonstrates the destructive results of viewing land and labor as commodities in *The Great Transformation*. See, in particular, Polanyi's chapter "Popular Government and Market Economy".
31. It is important to qualify this notion of a "failed" movement. I do not wish to imply that all sixties student activism failed. I disagree with that notion. As exemplified below with the quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson, sixties student activism performed important work in balancing injustices in our society. I use the term "failed" simply to denote the failure of the violent wing of the student movement.
32. While students at Cornell University, Thomas Pynchon and Kirkpatrick Sale collaborated on a musical titled *Minstral Island*. The manuscript for the musical is housed in the archives at the University of Texas.
33. Sale, p. 6.
34. Cunningham, p. 65.
35. In *Against the Day*, a young Jess Traverse takes up arms against the Colorado National Guard at Ludlow.
36. A further problem of violent resistance to Empire that *Vineland* does not explore, though it is important to acknowledge, is the impossibility of separating violent means from violent ends. Pynchon saves this exploration for *Against the Day*. Reading the two novels as a conversation with each other regarding methods of resistance allows for a more complete view of Pynchon's arguments. However, for the purpose of this essay, that exploration is premature.
37. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 190.
38. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 191.
39. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 105.
40. Smith, p. 129.
41. Mattessich, p. 9.
42. Hite, p. 148.
43. Cunningham, p. 44.
44. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 163.
45. Soloman, p. 163.
46. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 54.

47. Hayles, p. 28.

48. Hayles, p. 28.

49. The gender implications of Pynchon situating his site of resistance with a sisterhood should not be ignored. However, a deeper analysis of this would only serve to mirror the main arguments presented by Molly Hite in "Feminist Theory and the Politics of *Vineland*".

50. Hardt and Negri (2009), p. 135.

51. Hardt and Negri (2009), p. 136.

52. Hardt and Negri (2004), p. 86.

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