

An American Book of the Dead: Media and the Unconscious in *Vineland*

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Vineland is primarily concerned with how film, television and computer technologies shape not only contemporary experience but also the novel itself as a literary form that must inscribe and reflect upon the effects these media produce. *Vineland* offers a Janus-faced view of America in the 1980s: it looks back to a period when social revolution "went blending into commerce" and "the highest state of the analogue arts [was] soon to be eclipsed by digital technology" (VI 308); and it looks forward, on the technological horizon, to a media assemblage in which all information is digital and mediated through the computer interface. In the meantime, *Vineland's* present is defined by a contemporary media assemblage much like what Friedrich Kittler calls a "partially connected media system."

For Kittler, a flight on a jumbo jet concretely illustrates such a partially connected media system. More densely connected than in most places, media on an airliner remain separate according to their technological standard, frequency, user allocation, and interface. The crew, who will eventually be replaced by computers, are connected to radar screens, diode displays, radio beacons, and non-public channels, while the passengers, as Kittler puts it:

can benefit only from yesterday's technology and are entertained by a canned media mixture. With the exception of books, that ancient medium which needs so much light, all the entertainment techniques are represented. The passengers' ears are listlessly hooked up to one-way earphones, which are themselves hooked up to tape recorders and thereby to the record industry. Their eyes are glued to Hollywood movies, which in turn must be connected to the advertising budget of the airline industry. . . . Not to mention the technological medium of the food industry to which the mouths of the passengers are connected. A multi-media embryonic sack supplied through channels or navels that all serve the purpose of screening out the real background: noise, night, and the cold of an unlivable outside. Against that there is muzak, movies, and microwave cuisine. (102)

Kittler's example of the jet airliner cannot help but evoke the scene in *Vineland* of the California-Hawaii flight on which Zoyd Wheeler is employed as a musician playing a "baby-grand synthesizer" in a 747 "gutted and refitted as a huge Hawaiian restaurant and bar" (62). Pynchon's comic transformation of a familiar technology, however, is only one among many of the textual strategies he deploys to represent the oddly surreal banality of contemporary life among partially connected media systems. Yet *Vineland* is concerned not only with the information these media carry, but also with how they block access to other signs and signals no less a part of the landscape, which the text can record but the narrative cannot mobilize or integrate. At once part of and other than the media landscape, these signs and molecular perceptions delineate an unconscious realm that offers the only site of resistance to the mediatized (re)Oedipalization of America Pynchon suggests is the political legacy of the 1980s.

Set mostly in Northern California in 1984, *Vineland* focuses on the seemingly final demise of 1960s counterculture amidst the Reaganite repression masked by the "war on drugs" and television's omnipresent diffusions. With these historical events in back- and foreground, every exchange and allusion in the novel acquires a political resonance. Curiously, in this world teeming with mass-media images and unavenged acts of political repression, one is never really alive, and the dead are not completely dead. Specters walk the land, which either "linger[s] in a prefascist twilight" or has already succumbed to a darkness penetrated only by the light "from millions of Tubes all showing the same bright-colored shadows" (371).

How, then, are we to understand the novel's implicit contrast between the politically charged film images produced by Frenesi Gates and the 24fps film collective in the sixties, and the mind-numbing triviality of television in the Reagan era? One member of the younger generation, Isaiah Two Four, thinks television was what defeated the counterculture. As he explains to ex-hippie Zoyd:

"Whole problem 'th you folks's generation, . . . nothing personal, is you believed in your Revolution, put your lives right out there for it—but you sure didn't understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato, just like th' Indians, sold it all to your real enemies, and even in 1970 dollars—it was way too cheap." (373)

Television intrudes directly and unexpectedly into Zoyd's life in the novel's opening pages when he discovers that his annual act of maniacal transfenestration has become—without his prior knowledge or agreement—a prepared media event, with even the glass of the Cucumber Lounge's window through which he has jumped having been replaced with stunt glass made of clear sheet candy to insure his safety. Zoyd's yearly repetition of the act has been a signal to Federal authorities—in return for which he receives a monthly mental-disability check and parental custody of his daughter, Prairie—that he remains voluntarily in a state of cooptation, albeit refusing actual cooperation. But now, it seems, this fine but essential distinction is once again threatened, for one of the parties stage-managing the televised event is Zoyd's old enemy and longtime pursuer DEA field agent Hector Zuñiga. When Zoyd realizes that the integration of his own signature of cooptation into a well-planned media event is also a message from Hector, a message Zoyd "knew he didn't want to read anyway," he imagines it as coming to him on the television show *Wheel of Fortune*, but without the "genial vibes" (13) of host and hostess. Thus, within the act of simulation that initiates *Vineland*, an ominous but familiar (and familial) dynamic of complicities among an unwilling but compliant subject, the state apparatus, and television is revealed.

Vineland as a whole, however, does not fully support Isaiah Two Four's negative view of television, and suggests that even tubal mindlessness can have its subversive appeal. In an essay on sloth for the *New York Times Book Review*, Pynchon asserts that the remote control and the VCR promote a "nonlinear awareness" perhaps incompatible with "the venerable sin of sloth," which seems to have moved on from the potato's couch to "more shadowy environments" like computer games, cult religions, and "obscure trading floors in faraway cities." With remote control and VCR, Pynchon explains, "Television time is no longer the linear and uniform commodity it once was. Not when you have instant channel selection, fast-forward, rewind and so forth. Video time can be reshaped at will" (NMC 57). All of which breeds the illusion, Pynchon adds, that we can control time, even escape it.

Vineland seeks to restore the pressure of real historical time to this video time. Hence its interest not only in generational differences but also in the family, where these differences are first produced and acknowledged (or denied). *Vineland* suggests that the period during which television increasingly saturated American consciousness (that is, from the 1970s through the Reagan-Bush era) saw significant changes in the mechanisms of social control put in place in the 1960s.

As Hector admits to Frenesi, there was no more need for the overt repression of young Americans:

"Yeah, PREP, the camp, everyth'n, they did a study, found out since about '81 kids were com'n in all on their own ask'n about careers, no need for no separate facility anymore, so Brock's budget lines all went to the big Intimus shredder in the sky, those ol' barracks are fill'n up now with Vietnamese, Salvadorans, all kinds of refugees, hard to say how they even found the place." (347)

Reagan's budget cuts, in fact, bring about several turns in *Vineland's* plot: notably, Frenesi and Flash Fletcher are dropped from the Federal snitch support system, and Brock Vond fails to capture Prairie at the novel's end when Reagan officially ends the political repression exercise known as "REX 84." More generally, *Vineland* implies that economic mechanisms and the distractions of television (as well as rock music) make blatantly repressive control by the state apparatus no longer necessary. Whether the state can actually wither away under these conditions, replaced by monolithic global corporations (as in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*), remains a peripheral question, yet not all that far away.

Hector shows up in Frenesi's life in *Vineland's* present because, now that she is off the government payroll and her own deal with the Federal authorities is in effect nullified, he thinks he can convince her to return to Vineland and direct an anti-drug film about the sixties. As Hector explains to Zoyd early in the novel, because Frenesi is "'a legendary observer-participant from those times,'" he wants to "'bring her up out of her mysterious years of underground existence, to make a Film about all those long-ago political wars, the drugs, the sex, the rock an' roll, which th' ultimate message will be that the real threat to America, then and now, is from th' illegal abuse of narcotics?'" (51).

The ironies here are multiple. Such a film could not possibly convey the truth of the sixties, but only pervert the kind of message Frenesi and 24fps had tried to communicate. For the collective, the camera was a weapon in the political struggle against abuses of American power; the images it recorded took the form of judgments all could read. Usually, the group simply went out looking for trouble:

[T]hey found it, they filmed it, and then quickly got the record of their witness someplace safe. They particularly believed in the ability of close-ups to reveal and devastate. When power corrupts, it keeps a log of its progress, written into that most sensitive memory device, the human face. Who could withstand the light? What viewer could believe in the [Vietnam]

war, the system, the countless lies about American freedom, looking into these mug shots of the bought and sold? (195)

The problem is that this objective is only as good as the people who pursue it, and Frenesi is seduced by the Federal prosecutor Vond, who gradually becomes the real director of the footage the collective shoots at College of the Surf, where an alternative to the state, the People's Republic of Rock and Roll, precipitously attempts to constitute itself. It is there that Weed Atman's framing (in both senses) and murder unequivocally undercut any argument about the efficacy and truth of the film collective's practice.

As a further irony, the corrupted circumstances of Hector's proposed film inevitably recall Frenesi's first political education:

Frenesi had absorbed politics all through her childhood, but later, seeing older movies on the Tube with her parents, making for the first time a connection between the far-off images and her real life, it seemed she had misunderstood everything, paying too much attention to the raw emotions, the easy conflicts, when something else, some finer drama the Movies had never considered worth ennobling, had been unfolding all the time. (81-82)

That something else, which Frenesi gleans from her parents' response to the credits, has to do with the political history of Hollywood, with scabwork, complicity and selling out, a history to which her father, Hub, did not remain completely immune.

Finally, and more humorously, there is obvious irony in the fact that Hector's movie-for-TV project is hopelessly entangled in his own fantasy of a career move from drug enforcement to a television series, thus parodically enacting a reconfiguration of power *Vineland* as a whole understands more seriously. As his associate Sid Lutoff observes, "'The fucker . . . wants to be the Popeye Doyle of the eighties. Not just the movie, but *Hector II*, then the network series'" (338). A recent escapee from a Tubal detox center whose sanity several other characters question, Hector is "'the real thing, all right,'" Frenesi's son, Justin, proclaims: "'[you c]an tell by the way he watches television'" (355).

Far from decrying or undercutting "Tubal nuances" (355), awareness of which establishes Hector's authenticity within American hyperreality, Pynchon seems to revel in it, as an observer-participant working in both fictional and real registers. Imaginary movies for TV like *Young Kissinger*, with Woody Allen, and *The G. Gordon Liddy Story*, with Sean Connery, evoke subliminal perceptions that cut

ironically in several directions, while perverse appropriations like the towtruckers Vato and Blood's rearrangements of the *Chip 'n' Dale* theme song ring out with gruff but tonic anarchy:

After listening to the chipmunk duo's Theme a couple of times, getting the lyric and tune down, Blood, turning to Vato during a commercial for re-enlistment, sang, "I'm Blood," and Vato immediately piped up, "I'm Vato!" Together, "We just some couple of mu-thuh-fuckers / Out—" whereupon a disagreement arose, Vato going on with the straight Disney lyric, "Out to have some fun," while Blood, continuing to depart from it, preferred "Out to kick some ass," turning immediately to Vato. "What's 'is 'have some fun' shit?" (181)

As a medium of popular culture, television can also incite us, as it does Pynchon here, to abrasive but serious play. What counts is not what television *is*, but what we do with it. Not incidentally, Vond achieves a new stage of control-freak mastery when he learns to repress a laughing fit set off by something on the Tube.

This is not to deny that television, having swallowed up the world of Hollywood movies, now constitutes a labyrinth of images within which the real becomes shadowy and difficult to identify. One character, Takeshi Fumimota, thinks that television even weakens the border between life and death (218), a perception confirmed in the novel by the uncertain existence of the Thanatoids. Nevertheless, it is within this labyrinth of images that a serious and systematic search for the real is enacted in Prairie's attempt to find out the truth about her mother, Frenesi, and what she did in the politically turbulent 1960s.

Much of *Vineland's* narrative is structured by Prairie's quest, which is initiated by a scene of reading in which Prairie pulls up texts and images on a computer monitor, and later watches film footage her mother shot for 24fps. Although Prairie will finally meet her mother face to face at the Traverse-Becker family reunion at novel's end, her access to her mother's experience through these technological mediations proves sufficient for a narrative resolution of sorts, while at the same time raising questions about how that narrative is constituted and what it must necessarily leave out.

The dramatic question for Prairie comes to center on Frenesi's part in the murder of her lover Weed Atman, a mathematician and leader of the student revolt at the College of the Surf. Weed's murder is the vectored event towards which Prairie's search through the past must inevitably move and in which it must culminate, since it represents not only her mother's betrayal but the effective end of sixties counterculture. For this reason it is also the event from which the

events in *Vineland*'s present can be said to date or flow. Given the novel's temporal organization around this critical moment, it is all the more striking that the moment itself is not represented: the narrative moves up to and away from it, with the event's ellipsis occurring in the attempt of 24fps to film and record it. Thus, although the physical event is inaugurated in a complex rearrangement of camera, light, sound, and gun in relation to the members of the film collective who handle these devices, the actual event emerges only in its after-effects, registered first on the filmed faces of the participants and now (in the novel's present) by Prairie as she watches the footage some fifteen years later.

The narrative renders the event only through a complex overlay of doublings and exchanges, conveyed by puns and double-entendres ("That's when Frenesi killed the light, that's how the shot ended" [247]), in a textual collapse of two opposed worlds previously set apart in Vond's tempting of Frenesi to choose between the "make-believe" and the "real." Frenesi speaks first:

"I can't bring a gun in the house."

"But you can bring a camera. Can't you see, the two separate worlds—one always includes a camera somewhere, and the other always includes a gun, one is make-believe, one is real? What if this is some branch point in your life, where you'll have to choose between worlds?" (241)

What grounds the substitution of gun for camera in *Vineland*, however, is not this (or any other metaphorical) exchange, but a specific understanding of filming: not as a simple doubling or reproduction of the real, but as a penetration or cutting into it, which thereby opens a space prerequisite for the emergence of a new form of photographic or cinematic subjectivity. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon explores such openings primarily through the device of the interface, but in *Vineland* his interest in the materiality of film and other media leads to a complication of this textual strategy. The shooting/filming of Atman explicitly constitutes an interface, but it also defines a bifurcation point ("some branch-point in your life") rendered in turn as a reading effect: on one side of the film, "shapes [that] may have moved somewhere in the frame, black on black, like ghosts trying to return to earthly form" (246); on the other side, the faces captured by the light, above all the close-up of the murderer Rex's gleaming eyeball and "Frenesi herself, dark on dark, face in wide-angle distortion, with an expression that might, Prairie admitted, prove unbearable" (247). The gunshot, in contrast to these filmic effects, is resolutely part of the real, a re-closing or suturing of the space momentarily opened by the sequence

of filmshots, physically continuous with while also signalling the collapse of Weed Atman into lifeless materiality. The separation of media here (the series of simultaneous instantiations by which Howie "missed the actual moment" with the camera but "Krishna got all the audio" [246] while Frenesi searches for the floodlight cables) establishes in advance the fragmentary conditions in which the narrative must attempt to bridge the distance from a wholly disparate real to a socially credible version of reality.¹

Within the force field delineated by these intersecting but separate technological media, the status of consciousness becomes uncertain, implicitly equivalent to reading effects, which, as Prairie discovers, may prove unbearable. (It is worth noting that Prairie, although a viewer of the filmed scene, is not the one from whose point of view it unfolds. Her reading, like the insinuations of Frenesi's rememberings or retrospective reflections into the narrative, constitutes a re-doubling of a scene that is fissured from the outset.) Often drawing explicitly on Freud's notion of the psychic apparatus (or, as Jacques Lacan puts it, "the brain as dream machine"), contemporary theory assumes consciousness can appear only as a secondary effect, the result of machinic interplay among a perceptual apparatus, a recording device and a symbolic system. In Lacan's account, consciousness is (at best) a partial reflection or anamorphosis, with the unconscious insistently emerging in the ruptures of representation, erupting in those "parts of the real image which can never be seen . . . where the apparatus seizes up, where it blocks up" (158). The multiple breaks and discontinuities and the temporal doublings that characterize Pynchon's rendering of Weed Atman's murder suggest something like this unconscious, but as multiple foldings over an unrepresentable moment between perception and consciousness.² At the same time, the narrative, as a sense-making device, must leave out, repress or in some way glaze over (in a thin, transparent film, as it were) these breaks to constitute a continuity over time. Thus, whereas Pynchon's text provides a legible (albeit often implicit) record of these breaks and doublings, what matters for Prairie is less her trajectory through or across them than the meaning she gleans from a reading of a filmic image of Frenesi's face.

In contrast to film's fracturing of the real, computer technology in *Vineland* is identified with a realm of factual omniscience. Let us briefly consider Prairie's first scene of reading, earlier in the novel. Seated before the computer monitor, Prairie becomes "a girl in a haunted mansion, led room to room, sheet to sheet, by the peripheral whiteness, the earnest whisper, of her mother's ghost." Knowing "how literal computers could be—even spaces between characters

mattered," she wonders if ghosts are literal in the same way, that is, only responsive to the needs of the living. Prairie soon discovers that she can "summon to the screen" ghostly images of Frenesi (114), images she gradually learns to read and interpret. However, at the end of this first evening of her quest, after she has logged off and gone to bed, the narrative itself continues: "Back down in the computer library, in storage, quiescent ones and zeros scattered among millions of others, the two women [Frenesi and DL], yet in some definable space, continued on their way across the low-lit campus, persisting, recoverable, friends by the time of this photo for nearly a year" (115). And so the narrative continues, recounting further details of their friendship, only returning to Prairie at the computer again some thirteen pages later, at the chapter's end.

Yet here the notion of computer memory as a ghostly realm accessed through a kind of magic is less important than the way the computer itself provides the transition from third person to omniscient narration, a transition relying on an assumption made explicit at the beginning of the next chapter when Ralph Wayvone tells DL, "'We know your history, it's all on the computer'" (131). Throughout *Vineland*, in fact, characters acknowledge the computer as a site (even agency) of omniscience, as when Frenesi refers to God as a hacker. The narrative, however, provides the means by which the difference between stored data and human memory is registered and made significant, most obviously through Prairie's quest. First, Prairie's scene of reading integrates information from various media into the narrative by implicitly overriding or bridging the separation of media at precisely the point where this separation figures a gap or fissure in the real itself. Second, this narrative may be construed as driven by an Oedipal desire (a point to which we will return). In this sense, Prairie's quest reaches a culmination when she sees the footage of Atman's murder:

Her mom, in front of [Prairie's] own eyes, had stood with a 1,000-watt Mickey-Mole spot on the dead body of a man who had loved her, and the man who had just killed him, and the gun she'd brought him to do it with. Stood there like the Statue of Liberty, bringer of light, as if it were part of some contract to illuminate, instead of conceal, the deed. With all the footage of Frenesi she'd seen, all the other shots that had come by way of her eye and body, this hard frightening light, this white outpouring, had shown the girl most accurately, least mercifully, her mother's real face. (261-62)

In the televisual world of *Vineland*, however, Oedipal identifications are never more than partial. Whereas Frenesi's identity has been split

into a real and a cinematic self, with no possibility of the one being definitively separated from the other, Prairie's identity is fractalized, constructed through a series of partial identifications with television characters: Bionic Woman, Police Woman, Wonder Woman, even Brent Musberger, not to mention

these junior-high gymnasts in leotards, teenagers in sitcoms, girls in commercials learning from their moms about how to cook and dress and deal with their dads, all these remote and well-off little cookies going "Mm! this rilly *is* good!" or the ever-reliable "Thanks, Mom," Prairie feeling each time this mixture of annoyance and familiarity, knowing like exiled royalty that that's who she was supposed to be, could even turn herself into through some piece of negligible magic she must've known once but in the difficult years marooned down on this out-of-the-way planet had come to have trouble remembering anymore. (327)

Although more needs to be said about the construction of the subject within these two technological regimes—the cinematic and the televisual—in *Vineland* it is clear that they provide contrasting means by which these two characters view themselves and attempt to negotiate the social.

Like all images, the image of Frenesi's face is not only a lure and a continually deferred object of Oedipal identification but also a realm where other, less narratable forces are at work. Frenesi recalls her life with Vond as a Time outside time, a realm of silver and light from which she is brought "like silver recalled grain by grain from the Invisible to form images of what then went on to grow old . . . get broken or contaminated" (287). When she thinks about her present life with her current husband, Flash, like her a paid Federal snitch, she takes comfort in the fact that, as long as their files are on the government's computer system, they are guaranteed a spectral sort of life. Conversely, when they discover that their computer files have been erased, they are suddenly condemned to paranoia and the terror of the unknown. In both instances, image and computer file, the narrative brushes up against a limit, an invisible, non-narrativizable realm to which access is gained through technological media, and the border between life and death becomes shadowy.

It does so because both cinematic images and computer files—as technological media—operate as flight apparatuses to other worlds. Kittler points out that the realm of the dead has the same dimensions as the storage and emission capacities of its culture: "If grave stones stood as symbols at the beginning of culture, our media technology can bring back all the gods. . . . In the media landscape immortals have

come to exist again" (112). In *Vineland* this is particularly true of television and film images, but it is also true of the computer. What emerges from the computer's contradictory associations with life and death, presence and absence, is a representation of the computer not simply as a technological means of surveillance through the storage, retrieval and transmission of data throughout a network, but also as a means of access to something like the realm of the dead.

In light of this relation between a culture's media storage capacity and its realm of the dead, much of what might appear peripheral to *Vineland's* narrative acquires a different kind of significance: the ghost imagery throughout; the explicit reference to the *Bardo Thödol*, or *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (218); Yurok stories recounted or alluded to, particularly those of the *woge*, little autochthones who withdrew from the Northwestern landscape when humans appeared; the voices "not chanting together but remembering, speculating, arguing, telling tales, uttering curses, singing songs" (379) that Vond hears near Shade Creek, itself near Tsorrek, the world of the dead (186); the "unrelenting forces" or "faceless predators" pursuing Takeshi and DL "into Time's wind" (383); even the *Wineland* evoked by the Norse epic of betrayal the novel obliquely echoes; and finally, the Thanatoids, characters who are neither alive nor dead, and who, near the novel's end, curiously come alive as never before, perhaps, the narrator speculates, as an effect of television (363). Weed Atman returns as a Thanatoid; but while the Thanatoids are officially alive, Atman is officially dead.

Most critics have ignored or not known how to read this burgeoning multiplicity of subliminal events on the margins of *Vineland's* narrative, events which bring about or register a number of uncertainties and confusions about the real (and the Lacanian symbolic and imaginary as well). Like the pervasive television and movie images and references, these events constitute a heterogeneous and non-narrativizable realm reflecting the sudden and immense expansion of late-twentieth-century America's media storage capacities, and consequently the expansion of its realm of the dead. In other words, *Vineland*, in its obvious concern with new information technologies, must contend with the fact that, if the dead remain in the memory of the living, it is no longer simply because of writing and oral narrative. Kittler suggests that nineteenth-century photo albums establish an infinitely more precise realm of the dead than Balzac's *Comédie humaine*. His observations recall those of Paul Virilio, who refers to the cinema as a ghost industry "seeking out new vectors of the Beyond" (29). These and other media, including the computer and its communications networks, not only provide a suddenly and greatly

expanded realm of the dead, but also bring about more varied possibilities for flight into other worlds.

These other worlds—whether accessed through television, movies, newspaper reportage, Indian myth, tales of reincarnation, or Norse epic—are all immanent to Pynchon's narrative while not fully integrated within it. Each of these narrative sources implies a different information technology and a different mode of address. As a sense-making device, *Vineland's* narrative must somehow integrate these other worlds, each with its distinctive threshold for flight, while also acknowledging that these effects are not inherently connected and thus enjoy a quasi-independence. In this double obligation the narrative registers the fact that we still live among partially connected media systems with incompatible data channels and differently formatted data. In *Vineland* the differences between and among media still count, producing not only different kinds of subjectivity and the possibility of different reading effects, but also a complex temporality in which a mythic past, two distinguishable historical moments (the 1960s and the 1980s), and a different technological future are all simultaneously present. For in *Prairie's* technologically mediated quest, *Vineland* also augurs a new kind of communications network in which the heterogeneity of information in a partially connected media system will disappear: with the complete digitalization of all analogue media, media as such will become merely different interface possibilities accessed through a computer terminal on an optical fiber network.

In the meantime, for the more or less contemporary technological present, *Vineland* assumes an assemblage of partially connected media. These different media operate according to what Deleuze and Guattari—who make a guest appearance in the novel as the authors of the *Italian Wedding Fake Book* (97)—call different semiotic regimes, or mixtures of different semiotic regimes. Together these regimes comprise a “collective assemblage of enunciation,” but one which differs from anything Deleuze and Guattari describe, since for them the collective assemblage of enunciation is made up solely of verbal utterances, like a delimited mass of “indirect discourse” always prior to direct discourse:

Direct discourse is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage; but the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice. I always depend on a molecular assemblage of enunciation that is not given in my conscious mind, any more than it depends solely on my apparent social determinations, which combine many heterogeneous

regimes of signs. Speaking in tongues. To write is perhaps to bring this assemblage of the unconscious to the light of day, to select the whispering voices, to gather the tribes and secret idioms from which I extract something I call my Self (*Moī*). (TP 84)

Vineland is enveloped by just such a collective assemblage of enunciation—call it the Vineland molecular unconscious—in which a whole gamut of whispering voices is explicitly registered as such, not only the voices of the media and those from the realm of the dead, but also voices that directly haunt the characters, as when Frenesi hears Vond's night voice, as if from one of the "sleek raptors" of "fascist architecture," whispering, "'This is just how they want you, an animal, a bitch with swollen udders lying in the dirt, blank-faced, surrendered, reduced to this meat, these smells'" (287). What Pynchon brings to light through this polyphony of voices and proliferating frames of reference, as well as through the characters' dreams and the temporally layered scenes, is the collective assemblage of enunciation that gives *Vineland* its distinctive shape and texture. But while Deleuze and Guattari conceive of the assemblage of enunciation exclusively in terms of words, voices, and murmurings, Pynchon's assemblage includes stories, images, texts, computer files—the whole range of contents contemporary media make available.

Pynchon builds the characters in all his novels, not out of closed-off personal traits, but out of individualized perceptions of and adaptations to the social structure. In contemporary America the social structure is represented most insistently by the media, particularly television. In *Vineland*, the allusions to cop shows (enactments of law and order), family shows (reinforcements of the Oedipal triangle) and game shows (thinly disguised celebrations of commodity fetishism) assume their obvious social ordering function and simultaneously provide opportunities for the characters to divert or subvert this function. Zoyd, mourning his loss of Frenesi, refuses to commit suicide in Hawaii because he doesn't want to hear Steve McGarrett (from *Hawaii Five-O*) say "'Book him, Danno.'" Frenesi masturbates to images of motorcycle cops on TV, and Justin's friend, when he needs some distance from the domestic scene, thinks of his parents as a television program (351). As we saw above, Prairie reacts to television through a shifting slide of partial identifications which always allow her a space of critical differentiation. As these and other Pynchon characters constantly demonstrate, media effects can always be decoded and recoded differently. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the media operate as a powerful apparatus of social control precisely because they harbor a potential for radical, schizophrenic deterritorialization. The structures

of meaning (redundancy) necessary for recoding and overcoding are never sufficient or complete. Decoded flows (not just of capital, but of sounds, images and texts) ceaselessly engender new flows that inevitably escape.

These effects, however, do not entirely account for *Vineland's* assemblage of enunciation, above all for the importance of drugs, which sensitize and defamiliarize the body as a medium of perception, making of its sensations a flight to other worlds. In *Gravity's Rainbow* drugs and the cinema are connected through "[t]he property of time-modulation" (GR 389); but in *Vineland* drugs assume a wider importance, because, like alcohol during Prohibition, they are essential to the current economy and structure of power. In general, Pynchon makes unavoidable the usually repressed fact that American writing in the twentieth century is intimately linked to the use of drugs and alcohol, obviously in writers like Hemingway, Faulkner and Burroughs, but also in a writer like John Updike, Pynchon's antithesis, whose sophisticated *New Yorker* gin-and-tonic style refamiliarizes and normalizes precisely the defamiliarizing effects of ingesting foreign substances. *Vineland*, however, suggests political *and* literary reasons drugs are a necessary ingredient of Pynchon's writing.

Deleuze hints at the logic of this necessary linkage when he draws our attention to an implicit connection between "drugs as the American community" (emphasis added) and a molecular and machinic form of perception he calls "gaseous" (85). Gaseous perception, according to Deleuze, is a genetic and differential state of perception beyond both solid and liquid perception, either of which can be subjective or objective, formal or material. Gaseous perception, in contrast, assumes a state of universal variation and interaction of images, images no longer subject to the human eye or human vision. It corresponds to a Cézannian vision of a world before humankind, a pure perception of images in themselves. Gaseous perception is, therefore, "not subject to time," but "has 'conquered' time," or "reaches the negative of time" (81). In this context Deleuze cites Carlos Castaneda's program for "stopping the world" through drugs to experience a form of molecular perception, wherein one sees "the molecular intervals, the holes in sounds, in forms" (85). Deleuze finds gaseous perception embodied specifically in works of American experimental cinema by Brakhage, Snow, Nelson, Jacobs, and Landow.

While *Gravity's Rainbow* is pervaded by gaseous forms of perception and the representation of stoned states and drugged consciousness, *Vineland* is haunted by their absence or marginality. Mucho Maas is a key character in this regard. In *The Crying of Lot 49* Mucho's advocacy of LSD is accompanied by his own account of

perceptions—like the spectrum analysis of music he does in his head—which directly illustrates Deleuze’s description of molecular perception. Reappearing in *Vineland*, Mucho observes that the primary effect of drugs taken in the sixties was that they made one feel immortal, and therefore they posed a direct threat to state control through the power of life and death the state holds over its citizens. At the same time, Mucho’s personal history since the sixties points to the necessary entwinement of illegal drugs with the growth of the music industry (just as Hector’s personal history indicates the necessary complicity between the illegal drug trade and US law-enforcement). After experiencing a serious cocaine addiction, Mucho is now on the Natch, and has become an advocate of abstention as the only way to beat a system based on control: “‘Cause soon they’re gonna be coming after everything, not just drugs, but beer, cigarettes, sugar, salt, fat, you name it, anything that could remotely please any of your senses, because they need to control all that’” (313). In the meantime, “‘They just let us forget. Give us too much to process, fill up every minute, keep us distracted, it’s what the Tube is for’” (314).

For Pynchon’s characters, then, the media assemblage in *Vineland* is both a substitute for and a blockage of the possibility of gaseous perceptions, which, unlike the media, elicit not a totalizing view but a schizophrenic multiplicity of views implicitly suggestive of the limits of the human, and necessarily of the limits of human control. Thus, as a novelistic embodiment of a collective assemblage of enunciation, *Vineland* functions not to deny the media but to counteract their totalizing effects by molecularizing or particle-izing specific Tubal references—or nuances. Liberated from molar narratives and politically oppressive schemes of redundancy and control, such nuances enter the novel’s associative stream in the same way peripheral signs and messages from other worlds enter it, that is, as implicitly gaseous or fractal perceptions that remain peripheral or only immanent to the narrative. (The word “fractal” appears twice in relation to perception: “fractals of smell” [323], and the “fractal halo” [381] of DL’s sunlit hair.) These gaseous perceptions, which remain almost imperceptible or illegible, are like the signs and messages haunting the consciousness of all the major characters. The pattern is established early in the novel when Zoyd recounts to Prairie his attempts to “visit Frenesi out in the night”:

“Where’s it you go, then? Where is she?”

“Keep tryin’ to find out. Try to read signs, locate landmarks, anything that’ll give a clue, but—well the signs are there on street corners and store windows—but I can’t read them.”

"It's some other language?"

"Nope, it's in English, but there's something between it and my brain that won't let it through." (40)

While Pynchon's writing frequently appeals to orders other than or outside the visible, in *Vineland* such non-narratable signs and gaseous perceptions delineate the shifting, evanescent contours of a molecular unconscious (again, "Vineland" as Pynchon's construction of a collective assemblage of enunciation). According to Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization, this molecular unconscious is given only in "microperceptions," and thus it stands in opposition to both the perception-consciousness system *and* the projections or translations of the unconscious into molar constructions like the Oedipal structure. Microperceptions are like "holes in the world allowing the world lines themselves to run off" (285); thus they are also escape routes, lines of flight toward an uncoded outside. In *Vineland* these microperceptions are crucial, for the threat of (re)Oedipalization is omnipresent. Indeed, only the possibility of microperceptions—of cracks and holes in the social structure, of moments of pure perception beyond any socially imposed meaning—allows the characters any opportunities for instantaneous flight and hence a critical resistance to the re-Oedipalized enclosure that *Vineland* suggests *is* contemporary America.

In these terms drugs (or rather their repression) acquire their special importance, as Pynchon makes explicit in the numerous references to and imagined depictions of the single most important repressed historical narrative immanent to *Vineland*, namely the large-scale Federal military invasions of the rich marijuana-growing areas of the Northwest coast ordered by Reagan in the early 1980s. For Vineland County (where Holytail is) the consequences are obvious:

Sooner or later Holytail was due for the full treatment, from which it would emerge, like most of the old Emerald Triangle, pacified territory—reclaimed by the enemy for a timeless, defectively imagined future of zero-tolerance drug-free Americans all pulling their weight and all locked in to the official economy, inoffensive music, endless family specials on the Tube, church all week long, and, on special days, for extra-good behavior, maybe a cookie. (221–22)

In relation to *this* narrative, and all that it implies about the viability and power of the Oedipal structure in Reagan-era America, Prairie's quest no longer appears necessarily or exclusively Oedipal, but driven by a desire for access to the sixties as a moment of historical otherness,

when “sex, drugs, and rock an’ roll” made a genuinely significant political difference.

While the narrative in *Gravity’s Rainbow* sketches a network of indeterminate relations (a multiplicity) and then fragments wildly in fierce defiance of the “terrible” “Oedipal situation in the Zone” (GR 747) at the novel’s end, the narrative in *Vineland* stages a convergence of a reconstituted non-nuclear family in which an assortment of mother- and father-figures—both symbolic and real—clusters around Prairie, who understandably takes off for the woods, “Feeling totally familied out” (374). But Prairie’s resistance to further enactments of the family romance is what makes her available to Vond, who is also the other side of the sixties countercultural experience. Thus, in multiple senses, Prairie’s direct confrontation with her mother’s seducer in the novel’s closing scene in which Vond attempts to abduct/ seduce her is structurally predetermined. And Prairie’s reaction is double: first, she rejects Vond with a teenage insult, but later, speaking to a now empty sky from which he has permanently departed, she expresses a wistful desire that he return and “Take me anyplace you want” (384). Fittingly, then, as Prairie falls asleep on the novel’s last page, she is pulled between “Brock fantasies” and molecular perceptions, “the silent darkened silver images all around her” (384–85). On the one hand, a pull towards the dark seducer (“every woman loves a fascist”) or the Oedipal father (it hardly matters which, since both are molar configurations of desire). On the other hand, a flight toward the silver realm of molecular perception. This realm, this time outside time, is the *Vineland* molecular unconsciousness; as such, it offers the only site of resistance to the omnipresent effort to re-Oedipalize and recode the deterritorialized flows unleashed by Reaganomic capitalism. But like *Vineland*’s implicit inventory of what is in our government files as well as our realm of the dead, perceptions of this realm offer a resistance to precisely the narratives by which this recoding of control is both established and authorized.

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Notes

¹Cf. Kittler 114–15. For Kittler, “methodological distinctions of modern psychoanalysis and technological distinctions of the modern media landscape coalesce very clearly.” Thus Kittler equates the Lacanian symbolic, imaginary and real, respectively, with writing, film and sound recording.

²See Hanjo Berressem 219–29 for a Lacanian reading of this scene.

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