UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI UDINE
hic sunt futura

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TRIESTE

Corso di dottorato di ricerca in:

Studi Linguistici e letterari

Università degli Studi di Udine
in convenzione con l'Università degli Studi di Trieste

XXXVI ciclo

From Sunshine To Noir (?): The Revisitation of Sixties Los Angeles in 21st Century Crime Narratives

Dottorando

Antonio Di Vilio

Supervisore

Prof. Leonardo Buonomo

2024

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements..... iii

Sunshine and Noir: Premise.....p. 1

Chapter One. **The Revisitation of Sixties Los Angeles in 21st Century Crime Narratives: An Introduction**.....p. 5

1.1 Noir in context: from the New Deal to the Neoliberal Age.....p. 8
1.2 Hardboiled: a Los Angeles Story..... p. 11
1.3 Film noir and Los Angeles.....p. 13
1.4 L.A. Noir between postmodernism and the New Hollywood.....p. 16
1.5 The dilemma of incorporation: noir and neoliberalism.....p. 20
1.6 Reframing the Sixties into the Present: Contemporary Historical Crime Narratives.....p. 24

Part One. Reimagining the hard-boiled: an investigation of late Sixties Los Angeles.....p. 31

Chapter Two. **All power to (re-)imagination: Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice***.....p. 32

2.1 A little parenthesis of light": Pynchon and Marcuse, or coming to terms with the Sixties.....p. 35
2.2 Tearing a hole in the grey curtain: Pynchon between *One-Dimensional Society* and *Capitalist Realism*.....p. 44
2.3 "(What's so funny about) peace, love and understanding?" Political togetherness and post-postmodern possibilities.....p. 62
2.4 So why going genre? Pynchon's commentary on the aesthetics and politics of noir.....p. 76

Chapter Three. **"The sleeping giant of white guilt": BLM and the policing crisis in Walter Mosley's *Blood Grove***.....p. 87

3.1 Post-Watts Los Angeles and the crisis of policing .....p. 89
3.2 "Black Capitalism": Easy between the working class and the middle class.....p. 95
3.3 Mosley, Neoliberalism and Black Lives Matter.....p. 100

Chapter Four. **Searching for the ghost of Angeles Mesa: Disalienation and Unforgetting in Nina Revoyr's *Southland***.....p. 106

4.1 Angeles Mesa and the Erasure of Memory.....p. 109

4.2 Incorporation: a History of Violence……p. 113

Part Two. Unlikely Detectives, Unlikely (Re)Solutions……p. 119

Chapter Five. **Liberal memory and the violence of forgetfulness: Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*……p. 120**

5.1 Rewriting the End……p. 123
5.2 Cielo Drive, Hollywood, memory and nostalgia……p. 135
5.3 Historicizing through the medium: from the paperback noir to the exploitation movie……p. 140
5.4 "Want more Rick and Cliff?": extratextuality and other narrative possibilities……p. 142
5.5 A history made of genres: crime at the center……p. 150

Chapter Six. **The Cineautistic Detective: Post-cinematic Anxiety in Steve Erickson's *Zeroville*……p. 157**

6.1 Writing the Hollywood novel after the New Hollywood……p. 159
6.2 Marlowe goes to New York……p. 169
6.3 Between the real and *reel*: Cinema and Los Angeles……p. 175
6.4 Towards a Post-Cinematic Reality……p. 182

Chapter Seven. **Surveillance Capitalism and Captured Discontent in Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* ……p. 186**

7.1 Mors ontologica": Noir and the ontology of surveillance……p. 188
7.2 Unforgetting "the fallen": schizophrenia and antagonism……p. 197

Concluding remarks……p. 202

Appendix……p. 204

A Conversation with Steve Erickson……p. 205

Bibliography……p. 222

Summary……p. 242

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Leonardo Buonomo who helped me to turn my thoughts into an actual thesis. His professionalism, his incredible ability to listen, and his immense knowledge will continue to inspire me as a scholar. Our random film talking was actually the best help.

There is no way in which I can come to explain how much I owe to Professor Donatella Izzo who saw the birth of this project and who has always believed in me even when I did not. She is the reason why I do what I do.

My gratitude also goes to my first reader, Gabrielle Barfoot, who got the fundamental spirit of this thesis. Our conversations meant a lot to me.

This research would not have been possible without the support of Professor Shelleen Greene; her generosity and dedication are rare gifts. University of California, Los Angeles has been my home for a while, I thank Professor Mitchum Huehls, Professor Mark Shiel, Professor Kriss Ravetto and Professor Luisa Del Giudice. Thanks to Suryansu and Colin, the best smoking spot searchers. I am grateful to Amy, Lucia, Laura and the little Wrigley, greatest folk in Ocean Park.

Writing is a solitary affair but it gets less lonely when you have wonderful companionship. Thanks to my PhD colleagues, we made it somehow.

Thanks to my lifelong friends, Giggetto, Ciccio, Matteo, Paolo... I would not have been able to write this thesis without maintaining an appropriate distance from you all.

I thank Letizia, Danilo, Gianluca and Lizza, you never failed to show me your support. Yawn and Odette, I won't never forget.

Special thanks to my siblings Gerardo and Myriam, Alessandro and Veronica, you are the great beauty.

I can't help expressing my immense love and gratitude to my parents, Mariarosa and Lorenzo who never completely understood what the hell I was doing but they were always there to make sure I was happy. That's love at its finest.

Finally, thanks to Nicolò and Viola, incredible sources of inspiration.

This thesis is dedicated to the woman of my life, who was forced to watch the same movies countless times. She was there when this all began. Thank you for your unwavering love and faith. This is equally yours.

To my wife Diana

Almost cut my hair
It happened just the other day
It's gettin' kinda long
I coulda said it wasn't in my way
But I didn't and I wonder why
I feel like letting my freak flag fly
Yes, I feel like I owe it to someone

Must be because I had a flu for Christmas
And I'm not feeling up to par
It increases my paranoia
Like looking at my mirror and seeing a police car
But I'm not giving in an inch to fear
'Cause I promised myself this year
I feel like I owe it to someone

When I finally get myself together
I'm going to get down in that sunny southern weather
And I'll find a place inside to laugh
Separate the wheat from the chaff
I feel like I owe it to someone

Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young,
Almost Cut My Hair

Sunshine and noir: Premise

On January 18, 2023, the exact day I arrived in Los Angeles for my research period at UCLA, word of the death of David Crosby spread quickly in the city. At night, residents of Laurel Canyon in the Hollywood Hills were paying tribute to the Angeleno songwriter, co-founder of the Byrds and of the Crosby, Stills and Nash project, by playing his songs so loudly that anyone in the neighborhood could hear. At the Laurel Canyon Country Store, a legendary grocery store in which in the late Sixties and early Seventies one could easily find David Crosby, Neil Young, or Joni Mitchell buying fruits and vegetables, people were staging a candlelight vigil in the patio that is now decorated with colorful 1960s flower-power paintings and a flag that says "The United State of Laurel Canyon". While paying tribute to the dead artist, people seemed to be also involved in an act of remembering what had been the spirit of a bygone era. One of the protagonists of the Laurel Canyon music movement, in fact, Crosby was a figurehead of Sixties and Seventies Los Angeles hippiedom; his idealist persona brought together the aesthetic rebellion, psychedelic consciousness, the communitarian spirit and the political antagonism proper to the Californian counterculture of the time. On the other hand, as Rolling Stones journalist David Browne argues, "Crosby's downfall embodied the dark side of the indulgences of his generation" (Browne 2023). Struggling with drug addiction in the late 70s and 80s, Crosby's life came to resemble the self-destruction and uncontrolled hedonism which, in the post-Manson era, contributed to subdue the idealism that had characterized the dreams of the countercultural revolution.

That night at the Canyon, I could not help noticing a certain melancholy haunting the tribute: There is no narrative of the Sixties that does not mention the decade's failures and disillusion. The story of the unfulfilled promises and unrealized dreams of freedom, desegregation, communitarianism, peace and love is part and parcel of any account of the "long decade". The Los Angeles counterculture came to represent an anti-systemic myth, but like any other Californian myth, its destiny was to be debunked.

Los Angeles in the Sixties was the epicenter of change, in which the most violent aspects of American capitalist society were being challenged; the Watts Uprising, the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's liberation movement, the hippie counterculture, campus revolts, and the opposition to the Vietnam War were sites in which the

discontent towards government policies could be staged; the push for social change combined an aesthetic psychedelic consciousness and a political consciousness which Capital began to consider as a threat (Fisher 2020, 58). Also a *unified* group consciousness was slowly taking place, bringing together different aims; as Mike Davis suggests, "L.A.'s streets and campuses in the Sixties also provided stages for many other groups to assert demands for free speech, equality, peace and justice. Initially these protests tended to be one-issue campaigns, but the grinding forces of repression—above all the Vietnam draft and the LAPD—drew them together in formal and informal alliances" (Davis and Wiener 2021, 8). However, Los Angeles in the Sixties was fatally marked by some of those crucial events which writers and historians have considered as turning points for the end of the decade, especially at the level of collective consciousness and social imaginary, such as the killing of the Democrat Bob Kennedy at the Ambassador Hotel in 1968, the FBI and LAPD violent raid on the Black Panther headquarters in Los Angeles in 1969, and the Tate-La Bianca murders perpetrated by the pseudo-hippie cult known as the Manson Family.

Starting from the second half of the 70s, the representation of Sixties Los Angeles appears, *again* entrapped in what Davis – in his groundbreaking work *City of Quartz* (1990) – defined as the master dialectic of sunshine and *noir* that has always characterized what the history of culture produced *about* the city. Polarization of the debate is a cultural trait of the Sixties as well as of Los Angeles which sets itself "as the terrain and subject of fierce ideological struggle" (Davis 1992, 20). One could reasonably argue that there has never been a cultural expression equivalent to noir when it comes to the depiction of Los Angeles as the site in which polarization, ideological struggle, both mythologization and demythologization are reproduced. After all, noir has progressively become synonymous with Los Angeles in present time. Despite the many ways in which it has been glamourized, *nostalgicized*, and postmodernized, noir continues to project the same anxieties which defined the writings of the hardboiled narrators of the 30s and 40s and the rise of film noir, i.e., the relation between individual and space, the detection of social issues, the problem between democracy and capitalism. In the present time, noir has become a general term for film noir, hard-boiled fiction, mystery fiction, private eye novels, neo-noir, detective novels, crime narratives, but also for categories of feelings, sensations, atmospheres, moods; as Fredric Jameson has

argued, noir plays a central role in the vocabulary of ludic, commercialized postmodernism.

There is no consensus on what Noir originally was: An idea? A critical object? In the neoliberal context, it has also maintained a certain ideological ambiguity as regards its original project: not only is the genre a vehicle for a critique of the capitalist system, but it also reiterates some important logics of capitalism itself. This is also why, I will admit, noir has always been a source of fascination for me, not only as a scholar of American Studies with a Marxist background but also as a European citizen. I completely agree with Marc Vernet when he claims that film noir (a critical category invented by French criticism) allows one to love the United States while criticizing it, or more exactly to criticize it in order to be able to love it (Vernet 1993, 6). Sixties American counterculture and *noir* were the two apparently unrelated elements through which I made the decision to begin an academic career as an Americanist in 2017. During my studies, I gradually became aware of how, in the last two decades of literary and media narratives, Los Angeles was increasingly becoming the ideal common ground for the representation of the ideological struggle inherent to both noir and the Sixties. In fact, these two elements share a similar ambiguity which stands as the fundamental dialectic tension which characterized the writing of my thesis; on the one hand, I began to wonder whether noir, as a critical category, is able to present itself as a critique of capitalism without reaffirming the same logics of capitalist economics, the bourgeois attitude and its social structures (gender, race and class); on the other hand, I reflected on the ways in which, from the perspective of the 21st Century, we come to see the Sixties both as the moment in which, quoting Ellen Willis, we were "beginning to see the light" and the moment in which any possibility of change was radically incorporated in the neoliberalist agenda. In other words, is the 21st Century noir the genre through which we can come to understand that the culture produced in the Sixties was in fact being co-opted by the very structure it aimed to oppose? Or, is noir being used to recuperate the glimpses and the hopes of the Sixties as a way to project them in the present time? Can noir be the critical tool by which, quoting David Crosby, "to separate the wheat from the chaff"?; or, can popular narratives ever be "the master's tools" which can "dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1984)? An ambiguous genre for ambiguous times.

This work is a first, partial attempt to coming to terms with these questions concerning the revisitation of Sixties Los Angeles in contemporary crime narratives.

These narratives, regardless of their specificity, seem to share a similar project, that is a strategy of *unforgetting* with regards to events, people, and places of the past. To this aim, they will come to challenge or question one of the postmodern myths about Sixties Los Angeles: the cliché of a pre-shaped history in which the *Sunshine* has turned into an inevitable *noir*.

Chapter One

The Revisitation of Sixties Los Angeles in 21st Century Crime Narratives: An Introduction

Starting from the 21st Century, a series of novels and films, by using and renewing the distinctive traits of the noir genre, revisits the 1960s in Los Angeles, a crucial decade in American history from a political, social and aesthetic point of view. This thesis aims to investigate this major trend and to identify a new sub-genre in the vast and heterogeneous Los Angeles noir; the corpus of my analysis includes 5 novels and 3 films: Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (2009) and its filmic adaptation directed by Paul Thomas Anderson (2014), Walter Mosley's *Blood Grove* (2021), Nina Revoyr's *Southland* (2003), Steve Erickson's *Zeroville* (2007), Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) and *Once Upon a Time in… Hollywood* by Quentin Tarantino (2019) and his eponymous novelization of it published in 2021.

By focusing on the intermedial and intertextual nature of these works, constantly in dialogue with their respective literary and film adaptations, I try to demonstrate how such novels and films revisit not only the history of Los Angeles but also the filmic and literary imagination which, up to the 21st Century, characterized the representation of the city. On the backdrop, we can find the major historical events of Sixties and early Seventies Los Angeles which sets itself as a synecdoche for the entire nation; the 1965 racial uprising of Watts neighborhood, the Civil Rights movements, the Vietnam War, Charles Manson's Cielo Drive Murders, the Summer of Love and the War on Drugs inaugurated by Richard Nixon in 1971. These events help to shape the narrative of a new Los Angeles noir, which in the Sixties finds a way to revisit the contradictions of American history from the new perspective of the 21st Century.

On the other hand, the interest in the Sixties is also informed by what the decade represented in film – with the New Hollywood and the crisis of the majors – and in literature – as regards the deconstruction of postmodernist art. One of the challenges of these texts is to confront the possibility of a narration after the postmodern experience, and, more precisely, after what the theorists of postmodernism have called the crisis in historicity. In fact, as examples of post-2000 historical crime fiction, these narratives question the possibility of the genre as a way to reach the representation of the real. After the postmodern experience questioned "the possibility of knowing the truth", as

Mitchum Huehls claims in "Historical Fiction and the End of History" (2017), "a separate vein of post-2000 historical fiction devotes itself to demonstrating the real, and it sees the speculative possibilities of genre as one tool for building worlds that can capture that reality." (Huehls 2017, 145). In fact, the 21st Century Sixties Los Angeles crime narratives adopt a similar strategy to that of the historical crime novel, that is "an historical realism that foregrounds the narrative relationship at the heart of most crime fiction: the relationship between the past and the present." (Scaggs 2005, 19)

Moreover, Los Angeles has always been the capital of noir, both in the debunking of the Land of Sunshine myth and the idea of L.A. as a necessary evil; the way in which the city's image has been undermined by the weapon of what Kriss Ravetto calls the "cultural overdose of cliché" (Ravetto 1999), contributed reducing the cultural discourse to the binary logic of Sunshine and Noir, Black and White, Heaven or Hell, thus feeding what Norman M. Klein identified as Los Angeles "history of forgetting" (Klein 2008). In this respect, the return to the genre becomes particularly relevant; it seems to me that in these narratives, the detection has to do with the recognition and the rehabilitation of collective memory, what I define as a strategy of *unforgetting* in regards to both Los Angeles and the Sixties as an aesthetic reaction to the problem of the erasure of memory.

In particular, I will focus on the multiculturalism inherent to Los Angeles society which is mirrored in the heterogeneous corpus of the analysis; as we will see, such diversity plays an essential role not only in the historical shifts in the genre but also in highlighting crucial issues of contemporary neoliberal society. In fact, through revisitation of the Sixties – that is, the end of the countercultural utopia, the crisis of Vietnam, the militarization of the police and the enforcement of ghettos, the War on Drugs – the noir of the Twenty-first Century interrogates the contradictions of the neoliberal society, a society based on the surveillance, control and incorporation of diversity within the capitalist productive system. In this sense, if the hardboiled originates, as we shall see, from disillusionment with the idea of liberal democracy expressed by the New Deal Liberalism (McCann 2000), the noir of the 21st century, while coming to terms with the political and social climate of the late Sixties, continues to question the significance of democracy and justice in American society in the aftermath of 9/11, the War on Terror, the crisis of policing and the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement after George Floyd's assassination.

From the aesthetic point of view, never detached from the socio-political context, I show how the texts chosen for analysis reflect two major concerns; one is an anxiety about the fact that Los Angeles has gradually lost its hegemonic status as the capital of cinema, and, for some writers, it seems incapable of preserving its cinematic past; by revisiting the transformation of the cinematic experience in the Sixties and Seventies, from New Hollywood to the role of television and home-video, these narratives also express a preoccupation with the shifts in the medium and its transition to the digital and post-cinematic era.

Obviously, the attempt I propose is not to retrace similarities or differences between the Sixties and the first two decades of the 2000s but to identify, in the Sixties revival, a continuum in the noir discourse. Focusing on the interaction between the political and aesthetic aspects that regulate the historical dialectic in contemporary Los Angeles noir, it seems to me that using interdisciplinary methodologies – with regards to the analysis of the different aspects of the texts – is a necessary choice. Research work on the critical history of noir share common traits in the analysis of novels and films. Since the 1960s, we witness a tendency for film and literature scholars to borrow theories from various disciplines such as Urban Studies, Geography and Architecture to analyze the relationship between noir and the space of the metropolis (Maher 2021, Andersen 2003, Klein 2008). Many of the critical works on Los Angeles fiction build on the theories by Edward Soja, David Harvey, and other Neo-Marxist geographers which focus on Los Angeles as the quintessential example of the postmodern city. Nonetheless, Gender Studies and psychoanalysis have offered a significant contribution for the study of noir texts, in particular regarding the analysis of traditional tropes (the interactions between the private eye and society, between the detective and the femme fatale), through the lens of Freud and Lacan (Kaplan 1998, Copjec 1993, Krutnik 1991, Žižek 1992). As far as these theories continue to have great relevance in the noir discourse, and as far as my work partially intersects with such theories in the analysis of texts, the methodological approach of my thesis is more focused on the relationship between American Studies (history, society and culture) and Marxist critical theory. Particular attention will be paid to the critique of late capitalism, and the political aesthetic of neoliberalism, for their relevance in the dialogue between the Sixties and the 21st Century, especially as regards the absorption of racial difference in post-Civil Right society and the incorporation of the Sixties countercultural politics. Starting from the

tradition of Marxist critical theory, from Herbert Marcuse to Frederic Jameson, whose theories are reconsidered in the works of Mark Fisher, this interdisciplinary approach will provide me with the critical tools to analyze this trilateral relationship between the noir, the Sixties and the 21st Century American society.

However, we cannot take for granted the motivations which make noir one of the preferred genres for the revisitation of Sixties and early Seventies Los Angeles. On the contrary, what I want to demonstrate is that precisely through the dialogue with the style and politics of the genre and its later developments, that the Los Angeles noir of the 21st century finds a new way to investigate the crucial issues of the 1960s from the perspective of the new millennium. In this respect, I would claim that my analysis operates on at least three different historical levels: in fact, these narratives reflect the time in which they are written; as historical narratives they reflect the late 1960s setting, and at the same time they reflect on the anachronism of the genre. By highlighting the self-reflective and self-destructive nature of noir, I will consider the ideological and aesthetic interventions of the authors chosen for analysis.

In this introduction, I will thus retrace the birth of noir in order to understand the changes and the reiterations of the genre, questioning its ambiguous position in regards to the cultural logics of late capitalism. I will consider how Los Angeles, through noir, comes to an uneasy representation of itself; whether in the form of historical crime novels or period neo-noir, identifying the type of dialogue that the genre establishes with the Sixties Los Angeles will mean both retracing the historical and social events that serve as the background of these narratives and deciphering the literary and cinematographic models to which they refer. Finally, I will try to bring the discourse back to the 21st century to frame its relevance in the noir representation of the sixties, focusing, also in this case, both on social and political issues as well as on the aesthetic aspects of this dialogue.

1.1
Noir in context: from the New Deal to the Neoliberal Age

Going back to the history of hardboiled fiction and the rise of the Los Angeles-noir binomial, may help to answer two of the questions at the core of my research: why is noir still a sort of fast track to investigating Los Angeles contemporary social and

political issues by noir and non-noir writers? Why is noir reiterated as a form of cultural complaint and populist critique of liberal capitalism?

In the late 19th Century, during the age of classic detective fiction, Arthur Conan Doyle' crime stories – by perfecting the formal detective story created by Edgar Allan Poe – appeared as the literary and popular manifestation of the general faith by English society in the classical liberal theory; in the society of Doyle's novels, in fact, "murder does not truly question the liberal order, but only makes its virtues clear" (McCann 2000, 12). The classic detective like Sherlock Holmes was a bourgeoise man, highly committed to the rule of the law; his duty was to make sure that, despite the presence of isolated individuals who might have temporarily questioned the tenets of liberal society, order was always restored. The chaos and the anarchy of few individuals was vanquished.

By the turn of the Century, however, "the corporate concentration of economic power, the rapid growth of the state, and the prevalence of deep social ills and political conflicts all seemed to make the classical liberal theory at the core of Doyle's stories outmoded" (McCann 2000, 16). About the same time the detective story was becoming more and more popular both in England and in the United States, "the rise of organized capitalism and the evident failure of the unfettered market to deliver a just society" (McCann 2000, 6). challenged the assumptions at the base of the liberal theory. "The crisis of the Depression had finally made it clear, Roosevelt contended, that a complex, urban industrial society demanded a 'redefinition' of the nation's traditional liberal principles" (McCann 2000, 16). In this context, the American *hardboiled* novel proliferates; as Sean McCann suggests in his important work *Gumshoe America*, "a pop genre, a cultural complaint, and a political myth, hard-boiled crime fiction thus became a symbolic theater where the dilemmas of New Deal liberalism could be staged (McCann 2000, 5). This was the case of Dashiell Hammett's radical fiction which aimed to question the role of the law, authority, hierarchy and to unmask a corruption co-opted by the State. For the hard-boiled school of writers, born out of the pulp magazine *Black Mask*, crime was not seen as "the product of occasional and atypical tears in the otherwise secure moral fabric of genteel English society" (Pepper 2000, 10) but a problem inherent to the emerging American capitalist urban modernity. No wonder, then, that the protagonists, the characters and the plots of these stories reflected the social structure, the dynamics and the concerns of the modern society: in the 30s and

40s hardboiled one can usually find "the centrality of the character of the private eye, the existence of a client, along with the detective's evident distrust of the client, an urban setting, routine police corruption, the femme fatale, an apparently 'neutral' narrative method, and the extensive use of vernacular dialogue" (Scaggs 2005, 34).

Moreover, crime fiction problematized the relation between individuals and American society since it popularized violence, injustice and social issues as part of the American structures of power. Hardboiled fiction thus stood as a populist critique which could involve many different voices and issues.

In Raymond Chandler's novels, for example, the genre "echoes the broad political atmosphere of the New Deal era, which, as historians have noted, placed greater emphasis on matters of class standing and economic reform than on culture and ethnicity" (McCann 2000, 163), depicting a Los Angeles divided by class, by bigotry, by corruption against which the individual private eye's struggles to impose his morality. In the case of Chester Himes' crime fiction, for McCann, the genre's traditional preoccupation with the inadequacy of the law – its poor fit with the demands of society, on the one hand, and those of justice, on the other – became perfect means to dramatize the intimate relations between racism and American democracy (McCann 2000, 252).

On the other hand, since fragmentation, doubt, and liminality are at the core of the hard-boiled stories, such attributes contributed to making the genre fundamentally ambiguous in terms of politics and ideology. As Andrew Pepper notes,

> The cultural politics of the hard-boiled detective, for example, have always been deeply ambivalent. At once an alienated loner or maverick whose interventions are necessary because the law is shown to be corrupt or inadequate, he or she is outside of the dominant social order and yet is a crucial part of the machinery by which social control is maintained and existing hierarchies, policed. In much hard-boiled American crime fiction, then, we see a complex set of overlapping and yet conflicting forces at play, some conservative, others radical. (Pepper 2000, 14)

Hardboiled politics project on the detective some fundamental tensions; the private eye is constantly depicted in a limbo, between the idea of a democratic hero and the self-sufficient white male individualist; between a slightly racist, blatantly misogynist and sensitive man, a revolutionary and a bourgeois conformist.

Most of all, the detective becomes a stand in- for "some of the most pressing questions about the character of society […] as it is governed by the state and organized

under capitalism", such as "What can the individual do in the face of injustice and exploitation? […] Can crime ever be seen as a legitimate form of political protest? To what extent should we see the distinctive realms of crime, business, and politics as linked? "(Pepper 2016, 12-13) As we will see, such questions will also be at the core of the hardboiled cinematic version, the film noir, and will still dominate the re-appropriation of the genre in contemporary crime narratives.

1.2
Hardboiled: a Los Angeles Story

Among the writers who defined the politics of the hardboiled genre, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, Horace McCoy and other Los Angeles-based authors, found in the Californian metropolis the ideal setting for the representation of issues, questions and doubts which rose with the Depression and the New Deal project.

According to Mike Davis, the Depression in Los Angeles radicalized and affected the middle class precisely because of the very structure of the long Southern California boom "fueled by middle-class savings and channeled into real-estate and oil speculations". Not surprisingly, it is in the middle class that we find the original protagonists of "that great anti-myth usually known as *noir*" (Davis 1992, 37). Early 20th Century white-supremacist boosterism contributed in fact to reiterating the myth of Los Angeles as the land of sunshine, the place of opportunities, a Heaven on Earth. As David Fine suggests in the introduction to *Los Angeles in Fiction*, noir writers were concerned with debunking the idea of this dream:

> Writing against the myth of El Dorado, they transformed it into its antithesis: that of the dream running out along the California shore. Collectively, the thirties writers superimposed upon the original myth what has been called the Los Angeles Anti-Myth. The tension between myth and antimyth, between Southern California as the place of the fresh start and as the scene of the disastrous finish, recurs in almost all the fiction." (Fine 1996, 7)

Los Angeles came to be the allegory for what Chandler, in his introduction to the collection *Trouble Is My Business*, defined as a "world gone wrong," where "the law was something to be manipulated for profit and power" and "the streets were dark with something more than night" (Chandler 1950, 7). Of course, a focus on the city as the

place where to detect a system of social pressures as well as cultural and economic changes is not something that began with hardboiled writers. Edgar Allan Poe's first modern detective stories – such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) – suggested "that the perpetration, concealment, and detection of 'deep crime' are indissociable from the modern urban environment" (Nicol 2013, 83). Poe described the early nineteenth-century urban experience and "a new world marked not only by teeming crowds of people, but by unprecedented advances in technology such as the gas lamp and the birth of consumer culture and mass media" (Nicol 2013, 75); as Walter Benjamin put it, not only was Poe – along with Baudelaire and Dickens – one of the first prominent literary "students of the physiognomy of the big city" (Benjamin 1983, 36), but he was also one of the first literati to reflect on the relation between the intellectual and cultural production under capitalism (Whalen 1992).

Needless to say, Poe's urban spaces were radically different from early and mid-20th Century Los Angeles; the detective fiction of Chandler, Cain, McDonald, while describing a decaying nightmarish place, in which the only certainties left were the endemic violence and corruption of the city, they were also shaping the image of Los Angeles as a geographic place without a border and without a center, a city that – according to its boosters – dreamed of becoming infinite; its horizontal landscape was characterized by what the historian Carey McWilliams defined as "the breakdown between rural and urban distinctions" (McWilliams 1973, 193) in Southern California. In other words, it became a city in which the myth of the automobile could spread. Obviously the car became the means by which the private eye could navigate the otherwise uncrossable distances of Los Angeles and, at the same time, the specific place in which he could both profess his individualism and join the American consumer economy. Moreover, the exploitation of Southern California and its resources served as a background for the noir depiction of violence and greed associated with the (ab)use of land, oil, water; real estate speculation becomes a hysterical metaphor for the anxiety of securing a place in the sun, where both the insecurity of the middle class and the power of the elite converge, as exemplified in James McCain's *Mildred Pierce* (1941).

At the same time, Los Angeles also became synonymous with the culture industry, and Hollywood was soon considered *the* place in which the greed and the rapacity of the speculative Southern California economy could spread. In the context of the Great Depression, Hollywood played a valuable psychological and ideological role as

it tried to provide reassurance to a demoralized nation (Mintz 2016, 64). In this regard, noir fiction highlighted two main concerns. On one hand, Hollywood was perceived as a double for the disillusionment of the American dream, a way through which the process of boosting the American West as a place of opportunity and promise was being reiterated and, on the other hand, hard-boiled and noir-ish writers like Nathaniel West aimed to debunk the inconsistency of the myth of Hollywood and of its booster, "depicting hallucinatory landscape tottering on apocalypse" (Davis 1992, 38) and highlighting the alienation of people who "had come to California to die" (West 2018, 2). Nathaniel West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939) and Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935) and *I Should Have Stayed Home* (1938) therefore offered a first intimation of what would be considered the classic themes of the Hollywood novel and its enduring relation with the hardboiled. These authors tried to shed light on how the lives of aspiring stars and would-be celebrities are governed by capitalist logic and how their aspirations are first produced and then exploited by Hollywood tycoons for their own interests. Whether depicting a dance-macabre on the Santa Monica Pier or a fury-and-fire destruction of Los Angeles, these novels anticipated the postmodern imaginary of Los Angeles.

On the other hand, for noir writers, the Hollywood factory served as another example of what both Sean McCann and Mike Davis argued about the relation between aesthetics and the economics of the hard-boiled; these novelists, as McCann suggests, "called on the demands of the market to rebuke aesthetic pretense and on artistic value to denounce masscultural shoddiness" (McCann 2000, 22). They did not see themselves either as literary artists nor as commercial producers; the dilemma of reconciling their creative work with their commercial labors was projected, in the Hollywood context, in the struggle between the hardboiled writer and the industry producers. As John Scaggs points out,

> In 1943 Chandler went to Hollywood, and worked there for the movies off and on for the next five years. He worked on movies such as the adaptation of James M. Cain's Double Indemnity (1936), and wrote the screenplay for The Blue Dahlia (1946), but his distaste for Hollywood, and the five years he spent there, is clear to see in the vitriolic attack on the industry that is the foundation for *The Little Sister*. (Scaggs 2005, 41)

Chandler's Marlowe, in fact, came to symbolize "the small businessman locked in struggle with gangsters, corrupt police and the parasitic rich (who were usually his employers as well) – a romanticized simulacrum of the writer's relationship to studio hacks and moguls" (Davis 1992, 38). It is no wonder, then, that all these tropes and motifs of the Los Angeles novel of the 1930s and early 40s were transferred and redefined in the rise of the film noir in the 1940s which was inaugurated by some of the protagonists of the literary noir anti-myth of Los Angeles.

1.3
Film Noir and Los Angeles

> *While various, oft-cited film and literary movements, from German Expressionist cinema to home-grown detective fiction, may have helped shape the rough beast that is film noir, it slouched towards Los Angeles to be born.*
>
> Silver & Ursini, *L.A. Noir: The City as Character*

In the 1940s Hollywood attracted writers and artists not just from the United States, but from all over the world. A huge migration of anti-fascist intellectuals from Central and Eastern Europe, defined by Mike Davis as "the exiles", contributed to shaping the mythology of Los Angeles. This contribution was not only evident in the fiction, with the Marxist masters of the debunking, such as the Slovenian Louis Adamic and the Berliner playwright Bertolt Brecht, but also rose with a new group of thinkers who found in Hollywood the inspiration for their critiques of the culture industry, the consumer society and the seeds of postmodern culture. As Davis suggests,

> In Los Angeles where Adorno and Horkheimer accumulated their 'data', the exiles thought they were encountering America in its purest, most prefigurative moment. Largely ignorant of, or indifferent to, the peculiar historical dialectic that had shaped Southern California, they allowed their image of first sight to become its own myth: Los Angeles as the crystal ball of capitalism's future (Davis 1992, 48)

At the same time, among the exiles, a group of European cinema auteurs, such as Billy Wilder and Edward Dmytryk, collaborated with Hollywood writers to bring the hard-boiled genre to the screen. The sensibilities and the atmosphere shared by this films

were perceived as a new trend within Hollywood's wartime cinema which led the French film critic Nino Frank to coin the term "film noir". As Frank Krutnik argues,

> These films were *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Laura* (1944) and *The Woman in the Window* (1944). The term *'film noir'* served to establish an immediate link between these thrillers and the tradition of American 'hard-boiled' crime fiction, for French translations of such stories were published by Marcel Duhamel as the *série noir'*. The first three of these films were adaptations of 'hard-boiled' American crime novels – by, respectively, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain – and the other two were adaptations of novels which had 'hard-boiled characteristics (Krutnik 1991, 15)

One could argue that film noir helped to popularize the hard-boiled genre, its tropes and its aesthetics; after all, "the image of the hard-boiled detective in hat and overcoat with a gun in his hand", as Scaggs suggests, "is largely inherited from cinema and television" (Scaggs 2005, 2).Moreover, by bringing together German expressionist cinema and hard-boiled aesthetics, film noir served as the perfect means to project Los Angeles on the screen. In fact, film noir is often discussed in terms of the cinematic means though which Hollywood and Los Angeles eventually arrived at an uneasy reconciliation (Maher 2010, 49)

> By employing location photography film noir regularly utilized and depicted actual Los Angeles locales. For the first time it was not the city's studio backlots that were being featured on cinema screens but actual Los Angeles streets that were providing the mood and the physical texture to the new thriller narratives of film noir. From the Hollywood Bowl and Schwarz's Drugstore in *Double Indemnity* to the city's piers, boulevards and bungalows, Los Angeles locales could even headline a film noir title showcasing previously anonymous districts and buildings and repositioning them as recognizable urban topography and eventual iconography: *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *711 Ocean Drive* (1950), *Southside 1-1000* (1950), and *Union Station* (1950) (Maher 2010, 67)

Film noir then focused on the emergence of the metropolis itself and on Los Angeles as a particular case of the city which rejected modernity and its urban structures; as a city without boundaries, without a proper urban center and characterized by rapid development and ceaseless migration, Los Angeles represented for the exiles the negation of "every classical value of European urbanity" (Davis 1992, 21). This helps to

explain not only Weimer exiles' representation of the city – regardless of the influence of hard-boiled – as unremittingly pessimistic, but also the fact that, for the very structure of Los Angeles, film noir anticipated much of the postmodern concern with dispersion and displacement.

As Los Angeles came to "play the double role of utopia and dystopia for advanced capitalism" (Davis 1992, 18), it represented a fertile ground for the critique of capital and its urban manifestations, both for the intellectuals (such as Adorno, Horkheimer and other Frankfurters) and for *noirs*. As Dean MacCannell suggests, "there is a kind of innocent codependence of film noir sensibility and Marxist criticism, each providing the images and concepts that the other believes it needs" (MacCannell 1993, 282). In this regard, in film noir, a legitimate doubt comes to be a central concern of film noir critics who questioned the legitimacy for an industrial product, such as film, to stand as a means of effective critique towards the very system in which it proliferates. In other words,

> How can any capital-intensive work, such as film, produced for a mass audience be progressive, and what are the signs that it is? More crudely still, how far can a work go and still be produced and distributed within a system whose various structures are overdetermined by capitalism and patriarchy (not to mention racism and homophobia)? What is the most, and the best, we can demand or expect? (Pfeil 1993, 228)

These doubts occupy a central place in the noir debate in the postmodern context, further fueled by the rising incredulity toward the Grand Narratives (Lyotard 1979); in the post-Atomic world, the anti-detective novel and neo-noir began to revisit the hardboiled and film noir as a means to question both reality and History.

1.4
L.A. noir between postmodernism and the New Hollywood

What partly explains the reasons of a *noir turn* in contemporary revisitation of the Sixties is the analogous relationship that the literature and cinema of the Sixties and Seventies had already established with the 30s and 40s hardboiled and film noir. In the context of post-war and civil rights era the transformation of hardboiled fiction becomes a way to analyze the postmodern condition that "sees the world as contingent,

ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate." (Eagleton 1996, vii). Postmodern writers such as Jorge Louis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, Robert Coover and Thomas Pynchon radically changed the criteria and the leitmotifs of detection. For example, a stress on the solution was the automatized principle of the hard-boiled formula against which the anti-detective novel shaped itself. Considering the three major elements of a detective story (the detective, the investigation and the solution) we can affirm that the solution appears as the most important object of change in anti-detective fiction. As William Spanos suggests in his groundbreaking essay "The Detective and the Boundary", the anti-detective novel will question and challenge the positivistic readers' expectations, creating anxiety and terror through the alteration of the solution. Unlike the hardboiled hero whose investigation can be successful, even if he is profoundly changed by events which challenge his integrity and morality, in this context the detective becomes a *doomed detective* (Tani 1984).

In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale considers the detective story as "the epistemological genre par excellence" (McHale 1987, 9); presenting postmodernism as the crisis of reality as such, McHale argues that postmodernist fiction (science fiction in particular) is dominated by ontological questions; typical postmodernist questions concern both the ontology of the world and the ontology of the literary text through which the world is presented; for instance:

> What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on. (McHale 1987, 10)

In the postmodern context, also detective fiction seems to be marked by an ontological dominant, revealing a crisis of the epistemological as expressed by Oedipa Maas in Pynchon's Californian anti-detective novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), in which Oedipa's tragic situation is concerned with the inability to organize the abundance of information she has in a coherent way, or to formulate a reliable representation of the reality. "As in Chandler or Macdonald, nearly everyone Oedipa encounters proves to have been complicit in the original crime, the crime itself meanwhile changing its identity, becoming in the course of her investigations larger, more ramified, more

sinister—a conspiracy" (McHale 1987, 22). Oedipa's world is thus inhabited by a pervading paranoia where no final conclusion is possible. Pynchon's anti-detective novel, while expressing the postmodern crisis of linear narration, is deeply concerned with the new forms of control of capitalist economy which appears as a totalitarian, monolithic system. For Mike Davis, Pynchon's novel provided the ultimate freeway-map ontology of Southern California, mapping "a baroquely layered but ultimately one-dimensional reality (Marcuse ala Klein bottle?) in which the city is at once an endless text always promising meaning but ultimately only offering hints and signs of a possible and final reality ... like a 'printed circuit', - or a freeway" (Davis 1992, 67)

While the hard-boiled genre was being redefined in postmodern anti-detective fiction, a new cinematic genre revisits the film noir and its relation with Los Angeles; neo-noir or retro noir reflected "the historical shift from an industry dominated by black and white to an industry dominated by color; and second, the increasing role played by parody, pastiche, and fashion in the development of a self-consciously postmodern genre" (Naremore 2008, 8)[1]. Influenced by the New Hollywood of the 1970s, the role of television[2], the rise of academic film theory, and the increasing dissolution of boundaries between high, vernacular, and commercial art, neo-noir participates in the postmodern anxieties and dilemmas about the recuperation of the forms of the past as a way to engage critically with the present.

Always in the intersection between the real and its simulation, these films have been the object of debate for postmodern critics; Jameson questioned the possibility of neo-noir to establish a dialectical discourse with the present while relying on intertextuality, remake[3] and pastiche. Developing the famous concept of nostalgia film,

[1] Precisely as the term film noir, also neo-noir is to be considered as an academic term. Most of all, the demarcation of two specific eras, film noir as modernist and neo-noir as postmodernist, should not be considered as a rigid structure. As Sue Short argues, this demarcation "is especially frustrating because these discourses do not truly reveal the motivation or meaning behind given texts but have simply been employed to heighten their academic worth" (Short 2019, 20)

[2] In the 50s and 60s, the identity of noir genre is also shaped by the first TV police procedurals such as Jack Webb's *Dragnet* and *Adam 12* which were both set in Los Angeles and written with the collaboration of the Los Angeles Police Department. During the Cold War and countercultural era, these shows served as propaganda for the LAPD masked by a semi-documentary style.

[3] In *Postmodernism*, Jameson wrote that "the word remake is, however, anachronistic to the degree to which our aware- ness of the preexistence of other versions (previous films of the novel as well as the novel itself) is now a constitutive and essential part of the film's structure: we are now, in other words, in "intertextuality" as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect

Jameson lamented the waning of historicity in films such as Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) or Kasdan's *Body Heat* (1981) which approached the past "through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image, and '1930s-ness' or '1950s-ness' by the attributes of fashion" (Jameson 1991, 19). For Jameson, neo-noir, as an example of postmodern film, was "an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history" (Jameson 1991, 117). Again, the potentiality of noir of delivering a critique of the society is called into question.

In this phase, noir not only gets progressively involved in the general debate of postmodern art, but it represents also the challenge of representing the postmodern city. That is where Los Angeles comes into the picture. "A major revival of noir occurred in the 1960s and 1970s as a new generation of emigre writers and directors revitalized the anti-myth and elaborated it fictionally into a comprehensive counter-history" (Davis 1992, 44). Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) are the quintessential examples of this process. As Sean Maher argues,

> Interlacing fact and fiction, *Chinatown* sinuates a history of Los Angeles within a Hollywood imaginary – the Dark City as invented by film noir. *Blade Runner* subsequently collapses distinctions between real and reel cities by merging the spatio-temporal coordinates of a past and future Los Angeles on the physical sites of the Burbank backlot and locations steeped in film noir heritage. *Blade Runner* reified an imaginary Los Angeles under the logics of postmodernism that were enabled by a veritable pastiche of past, present, and cinematic cities (Maher 2021, 153)

Building on theories of scholars like Nezar AlSayyad and Mark Shiel, Sean Maher offers a critical perspective on the interaction between the city and its onscreen counterpart, between the real and the *reel* (AlSayyad 2006). While neo-noir continued "the embedding of Los Angeles locales within film titles" (Maher 2021, 94) – *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974), *Miracle Mile* (De Jarnatt, 1988), *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch, 2001) – a preoccupation becomes central in the noir debate: is the Los Angeles of noir a real Los Angeles or a mere Baudrillardan simulacra?

---

and as the operator of a new connotation of "pastness" and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history." (Jameson 1991, 20)

On the other hand, some other critics appear to be more in line with Linda Hutcheon's vision of postmodern art in which "the past as referent is not bracketed or effaced, as Jameson would like to believe: it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning." (Hutcheon 1988, 24).[4] For James Naremore, "ostensibly a nostalgia or retro film, Chinatown is actually a critique of the American past, inflected by Marxist and Freudian themes that were latent in some varieties of classic noir" (Naremore 2008, 206). Recuperating some tropes of Los Angeles noir – the real estate speculation, in this case, over the water supply – *Chinatown* brilliantly retraced the history of the *boosterist* abuse of the city, and represented the post-Sixties noirish pessimism.

In a later phase, deconstruction and parody of neo-noir come to be the means by which minorities represent themselves on the screen. An example of this process is Carl Franklin's 1995 adaptation of Walter Mosley's debut novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, which while revealing "the corruption beneath sleek, art-moderne Los Angeles in the same manner as any retro-styled film noir", is "designed to celebrate the resilience and tenacity of the postwar black community and to recover a lost or underrepresented culture" (Naremore 2008, 252).

In the post-noir and postmodern manifestation of the genre – the deconstructive practice on the one hand, and its exaggerations in revisiting the tropes of noir on the other – criticism heavily questions the potentiality of noir to represent the city while avoiding clichés and moralism; but most of all, it becomes evident that L.A. Noir now serves, in and out of academia, as a stand-in for the policing of critical discourse.

1.5
The dilemma of incorporation: noir and neoliberalism

By taking James Ellroy's fiction as an example, in *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis denounces one of the risks which the genre can encounter in its postmodern phase;

[4] James Naremore, for example, accuses Jameson of being "overly pessimistic". For the film scholar, in fact, "A good deal of postmodernist noir involves a conservative, ahistorical regression to the pop culture of the 1950s, or to a glamorous world before that, where people dressed well and smoked cigarettes. But this is by no means always the case" (Naremore 2008, 211)

> Ellroy risks extinguishing the genre's tensions, and, inevitably, its power. In his pitch blackness there is no light left to cast shadows and evil becomes a forensic banality. The result feels very much like the actual moral texture of the Reagan-Bush era: a supersaturation of corruption that fails any longer to outrage or even interest. Indeed the postmodern role of L.A. *noir* may be precisely to endorse the emergence of *homo reaganus*. (Davis 1992, 45)

We could say that, for Davis, noir becomes postmodernized, thus losing its ability to function as an effective critique towards the various ills and issues of capitalist society. In other words, noir critical potentiality becomes incorporated by the same system it aims to denounce, entering what we could define as its neoliberal phase. In *Undoing the Demos* (2015), Wendy Brown describes neoliberalism as the stage in which capitalism has succeeded in incorporating its own criticisms and is now able to co-opt such criticisms as part of its own identity, as a "further development of what Herbert Marcuse termed the 'closing of the political universe'—the erasure of intelligible, legitimate alternatives to economic rationality" (Brown 2015, 68)

In *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher makes a similar point; for the British theorist, the kind of machismo of demythologization of Ellroy's noir is the means by which "capitalist realism transforms itself into a kind of anti-mythical myth" (Fisher 2009, 10). For Fisher, this type of noir arises from the claim "to have stripped the world of sentimental illusions and seen it for 'what it really is': a Hobbesian war of all against all, a system of perpetual exploitation and generalized criminality." (Fisher 2009, 11)

It can be said that what Marcuse anticipated in his 1964 work *One-Dimensional Man*, that is capitalism's ability to convert its negation into affirmation, it has now reached its full accomplishment. In 1964, Marcuse wrote that

> The vamp, the national hero, the beatnik, the neurotic housewife, the gangster, the star, the charismatic tycoon perform a function very different from and even contrary to that of their cultural predecessors. They are no longer images of another way of life but rather freaks or types of the same life, serving as an affirmation rather than negation of the established order. (Marcuse 2007, 62)

For Fisher and Davis, noir becomes pantomimic, precisely because it seems incapable of escaping a mimetic representation of the ontological phase of late capitalism, that is the moment in which Capital "presents itself as ontologically, as well as geographically, ubiquitous" (Fisher 2009, 77).

On the other hand, scholars have also insisted on the persistence of the power of the genre; Kriss Ravetto, for example, considers noir's ability to visualize the cynicism of a world gone wrong despite the risk of political co-optation; reminding us that pulp's strategy of debunking, usually associated with the Left, was also used by right-wing crime writers such as Mickey Spillane or right-wing sympathizers like James Ellroy, and even by nihilist and apolitical personalities such as Raymond Chandler, Ravetto points to a quality of the genre which lies in the ability of "resisting facile political classification – boostering, debunking, slipping into the utopia of progressive politics or the dystopia of cultural nihilism – but exposing intellectual and academic modes that are deployed to police pulp culture" (Ravetto 1999, 208). In fact, Ravetto criticizes Mike Davis and "the lament" of the loss of Left politics which he projects on Los Angeles noir:

> Although Davis contradicts his own definition of noir — establishing it first as critical discourse of the Left, then accusing it of becoming a harpy of politically incorrect messages of the Right – such inconsistencies clarify the real stakes in the fight with/over LA noir: the policing of critical discourse. (Ravetto 1999, 221)

While I agree with Ravetto's argument about the risk that LA noir could become mere "in-fighting amongst the Left", and that reducing it to an innocuous endorsement of "corporate media's project of containment" would mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater, it is also true that one should not forget the different historical contexts and the modalities in which noir (as both hardboiled and film noir) proliferated (for example, the collapse of the divide between high/low literature, the different stages of American liberal capitalism, the rise of television, the shifts in the cultural market). Of course, as Ravetto claims, "what distinguishes noir from its retro-fashioning is not chronology, but the difference between pushing social issues to critical mass and copping an attitude" (Ravetto 1999, 210); but how do we define the difference between the two strategies? Which texts are able to push social issues to critical mass and which are not? Who decides? It is clear that we cannot put Chandler and Ellroy in the same literary box: it would mean de-historicizing what noir has produced and debasing the singular strategy of the texts. This does not mean that every post-noir or neo-noir work has betrayed and put aside the original project of the hard-boiled; deconstruction and parody in African American literature and Cinema, for example, have led to a revitalization of the genre

in the Post-War period (from Himes to Mosley, from Martin Van Peebles to Carl Franklin). Pulp is by definition a popular genre; as such, it could not resist its popularization in the commercialization and postmodernization of the late capitalist era. This means neither that we should consider and interpret noir as a dead genre which merely reiterates the logics of the consumer culture, nor that is an innocuous object which cannot formulate an effective and solid critique of the culture in which it is produced[5]. In the case of Los Angeles, this would mean chasing down all the shadows that we find between the Sunshine and the Noir. Of course, it is not an easy task. It means considering both going beyond what Ravetto calls "the Gramscian optimism and the Frankfurter pessimism" and resisting the temptation to abandon conventional modes of critique or to refuse to see the specters of Marx. It seems to me that the corpus of contemporary crime narratives that I analyze in this thesis, while taking account of the position of the genre after postmodernism, endeavors to unmask the dysfunctionality of neoliberalism without either submitting to its rapacity or arriving at facile, naïve solutions. By revisiting the Los Angeles Sixties cultural and political milieu and trying to re-establish an historical dialectic, they engage with a present and a future in which different and possible forms of aesthetic and political antagonism are re-projected. In the present time of ontology, dominated by what Mark Fisher calls Capitalist Realism, that is "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher 2009, 2), these narratives are, in fact, deeply concerned about this impossibility.

Since "capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history" (Fisher 2009, 4), it is fitting that a coherent revisitation of a historical period along with a Marcusean collective rehabilitation of memory become the first site of antagonism. Not surprisingly, the Sixties, as one of the most tumultuous decades of the American and Los Angeles past, provide the ideal site in which the protagonists of the contemporary multicultural Los Angeles noir can negotiate large parts of history. After all, just like noir, the Sixties have also become in the last twenty years the site of an ideological

[5] Andrew Pepper makes a similar point in regards to the way in which readers come to perceive popular texts. In *The Contemporary American Crime Novel*, he argues, "the solution is to tread some kind of uneasy middle way between both positions, between the cheerleaders and prophets of doom" (Pepper 2000, 16)

battleground between the left and the right, and within the left itself. Revisiting the decade becomes not only a way to coming to terms with its failures but also with its unrealized possibilities. Neither nostalgia nor resignation: these narratives show that, in order to see the decade for what it was, it is necessary to go beyond what seems to be another example of the Sunshine-to-Noir dialectic, that is the demythologization of a decade which seems to lie silent forever in the neoliberal unconscious.

1.6
Reframing the Sixties into the Present: Contemporary Historical Crime Narratives.

Over the past 50 years, the Sixties have continued to haunt our present in cultural, aesthetic and political terms, producing contradictory visions as well as simplifications and generalizations. For most of the so-called leftists, the decade assumed several connotations; the collapse of the Old Left, the combination of aesthetics and politics, the rise of new group-based consciousness, and the moment in which we began to see the light. There is no doubt that in the Sixties, across the country,

> "groups began to challenge basic assumptions and institutions, from segregation to campus restrictions to presumptions about personal development and national goals. Individuals drew inspiration from other events and actions—the tactics, vocabulary, and idealism from one situation feeding the next." (Bloom 2001, 4-5)

On the contrary, we are not sure about the "sixties" time boundaries; for some the 1963 assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Dallas marked the beginning of a new era while the 1973 Watergate Scandal signified its end. But it is clear that, on the level of perception, the Sixties produced a culture war that lasted many years and reflected the attempt within the heterogeneous forces of society to possess history.

For conservative politics, especially the so-called Republican Revolution of 1994, Sixties values came to signify the obvious antithesis of the neoliberal project. As Alexander Bloom argues in the introduction to *Long Time Gone: Sixties America and Now*,

> The 1960s remain alive for Americans thirty years after the decade ended. When the United States fought the Gulf War in 1991, the aim was not only to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait, but, as was explicitly stated by President George Bush, to finally expiate the "Vietnam syndrome" from our culture. When the reaction to the verdict in the Rodney King case sparked urban upheaval in Los Angeles in 1992, the Bush administration blamed the riots on the "failed politics of the '60s." (Bloom 2001, 3)[6]

As Lisa Duggan brilliantly explains in *The Twilight of Equality?*, neoliberalism represents in many ways the subduction of leftist social movements of the sixties and seventies (Duggan 2003). This is why, also for the leftists, the Sixties have come to represent a failure, that is the failure to produce radical change, the Left's incapacity to transform a generalized discontent into political effectiveness, and, no less importantly, the story of how the counterculture ended up in hedonism and self-destruction and how it was co-opted by the neoliberal Right. Again, "images of another way of life" into "freaks or types of the same life" (Marcuse 2007, 62). In the present time, the Sixties counterculture, as Mark Fisher writes, "might now have been reduced to a series of 'iconic' – overfamiliar, endlessly circulated, dehistoricized – aesthetic relics, stripped of political content" (Fisher 2013).

But the revival and interest in Herbert Marcuse, the father of the New Left and of the counterculture, in the works of Mark Fisher and in the enthusiasm of Frederic Jameson (who said that "This is certainly the time for a Marcuse revival!") suggest also the urge to reconsider, in the 21st Century, the legacy of the Sixties political sensibility. If neoliberalism triumphed by incorporating the desires of the counterculture and of the protagonists of the Sixties Great Refusal, it may be important – in the eyes of Fisher – to question the reasons behind its failures in order to project its energies in the present. The 21st Century historical crime narratives seem to share a similar project in their

[6] The Rodney King episode is also considered by Donald Pease as a gaping hole in the American state fantasy in the wake of the Gulf War: "When the film from the handheld video camera that documented the LAPD's beating of Rodney King was broadcast across television screens in 1991, this image could not be integrated within the state fantasy of the New World Order that the Gulf War was designed to in- augurate. Rather than settling into the image repertoire of the newly forged state fantasy, this documentary instead spontaneously recovered the memories—of slaves beaten by their masters, of migrant laborers forced into transfer centers, of Indians slaughtered by the thousands, of Vietnamese families dragged from their huts and shot and burned, of Iraqis forcibly separated from their homeland—that haunted the present with this record of injustice from the historical past at the very moment when the New World Order was systematically expunging that record from official historical narratives (Pease 2009, 39).

revisitation of Los Angeles in the Sixties as a moment in which alternatives models of life were rising up against a "one-dimensional society", a capitalist apparatus of control, surveillance, deregulation, segregation of minorities in the name of security, privatization and militarization. Also in this case, Los Angeles appears as a synecdoche of the United States. As Mike Davis suggests,

> "In the 1960s, in fact, in cities like Los Angeles, on the bad edge of postmodernity, one observes an unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus into a single, comprehensive security effort" (Davis 1992, 224)

A polarization of social forces took place in Sixties Los Angeles which was subjected to such a fanatic and all-encompassing campaign to police space and control the night. Along with minorities, many young whites were also routinely victimized, causing hatred of the LAPD to grow into a common culture of resistance." (Davis and Wiener 2021, 5). The counterculture and the political activism were obviously a target; "the combined efforts of the FBI's notorious COINTELPRO program and the LAPD's Public Disorder Intelligence Division were concentrated upon destroying Los Angeles's Black Power vanguards (Davis 1992, 298).

A renewed phase of boosterism characterized the 50s and 60s; developers – with the complicity of the government and the police, the face of the city of Los Angeles – aimed to privatize public space at the expense of the neighborhoods and their residents, from the "the removal of 12,000 low-income residents to pave the way for Bunker Hill redevelopment and Dodger Stadium in Chavez Ravine" (Davis 1992, 123) to the freeway construction which caused established Black and Chicano neighborhoods to lose several thousand units a year. "In the days when the young Daryl Gates was driver to the great Chief William Parker, the policing of the ghetto was becoming simultaneously less corrupt but more militarized and brutal" (Davis 1992, 294). That trend intensified post-1965, as Gates's LAPD repressed Watts through the paramilitarization of the police and the destruction of the community's radical fringe.

As an example of reaction to the (local) government policies, the Watts Uprising was not just the expression of resentment against institutional racism and the abuses of the LAPD – which attacked also a Nation of Islam Mosque three years earlier; "the 1965 explosion unified and energized a generation of young Black people, ended gang

conflict for a number of years, and catalyzed the extraordinary 'Watts Renaissance,' the city's most important arts and literary movement of the decade" (Davis and Wiener 2021, 4)

Uprooting neighborhoods and privatizing public spaces thus were both a consequence of the boosters' interests and a strategy of displacement adopted by the government to control the counterculture, the uprisings of colored minority, and the white working-class. In Los Angeles it became more and more evident that "the Oz-like archipelago of Westside pleasure domes – a continuum of tony malls, arts centers and gourmet strips – is reciprocally dependent upon the social imprisonment of the third-world service proletariat who live in increasingly repressive ghettoes and barrios" (Davis 1992, 227). Neighborhood erasure also began to feed the myth of the city which reinvents itself; its history, in the words of Norman Klein, becomes "the history of forgetting" (Klein 2008). The city is incapable of relating to its past, becoming the ideal setting for apocalyptic fiction and dystopian futures. As Mike Davis ironically suggests, "Los Angeles understands its past, instead, through a robust fiction called noir" (Davis 1992, 36).

Since the crime narratives that I investigate are all concerned with the recuperation of a specific time in the Los Angeles past, exploring the role of memory becomes crucial. In this respect, the persistence of Marcuse, "the last of the exile generation to arrive on the West Coast" (Davis 1992, 53) will be particularly relevant not only for its critique of capitalist totalitarianism but also for a more aesthetic-driven exploration of Sixties thinking. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse wrote that "unless the *recognition* of what is being done and what is being prevented subverts the consciousness and the behavior of man, not even a catastrophe will bring about the change" (Marcuse 2007, xlv, italics mine). Building on Marcuse's conception of memory as a disturbing and subversive element against the oblivion imposed by the established reality, I will show how these narratives – through the dialectical discourse or, in Marcuse's words, through the mediation between the past and the present – offer an invitation for a recognition and a collective recovery of memory as a way "to project the limits and the alternatives" (Marcuse 2007, 103). After all, noir has always been inherently linked to a notion of pastness; the narratives long for something that was never truly materialized: "Sometimes behind this notion one could find something similar to a void; Perhaps the best way to characterize noir sensibility is as 'false

nostalgia' or 'constructed nostalgia'. What is produced is a sense of loss of something that was never possessed, something that never was" (MacCannell 1993, 280). In this case, as we will see, this "constructed nostalgia" becomes not so much a nostalgia for the past, but what Mark Fisher calls a nostalgia for the future, or for a moment in which the future seemed possible.

The 21st Century Sixties Los Angeles noir brings together the epistemological nature of the crime novel with the epistemological understanding of history, but it is also aware of the ontological phase which characterizes postmodernism and present time; as an example of historical crime fiction, these narratives bring together "simultaneous awareness of past and present" which "seems to offer a means of gaining a new perspective on the present through the lens of the past" (Scaggs 2005, 80). By relying on the slipperiness and the different mutations of the genre, these historical crime narratives borrow distinctive features of contemporary historical crime fiction and the neo-noir (such as the detective as a hybrid between the amateur and the professional), of the postmodernist sci-fi noir, and of the traditional private eye story. The analysis of the corpus will thus be divided in two main parts. This division does not imply a theoretical, chronological or media-related criteria – but aims to emphasize the different stylistic approaches that these texts adopt in their use of the genre. More precisely, while in the first part we find works which strictly derives from the tradition of hardboiled crime novel or detective fiction (found for example in the presence of a private/amateur detective and a quest typical of the Los Angeles novel), in the second part we find novels and films that are not entirely ascribable to the genre of detective story in its purest form but which reflect noir in its multiple nuances and derivations, from pulp to the Hollywood novel, from dystopian fiction to the spy story.

After analyzing the various phases of noir in their respective historical and cultural contexts, I can proceed to frame the corpus of the thesis within the context of the 2000s. If it is true that the Los Angeles noir traces the crucial events of the late Sixties in order to reflect on American society after 9/11, it is therefore necessary to offer a general overview of the strategies of the individual texts taken into analysis, formulating some of the critical questions of the thesis: what events of the Sixties are taken up in these works? How are these events projected in the contemporary US context?

In chapter two "All power to (re-)imagination": Thomas Pynchon's Inherent Vice", I have tried to demonstrate how *Inherent Vice* operates a strategy of *unforgetting*, not only in relation to urban planning and neighborhood erasure (Klein 2008) but also in relation to the political and aesthetic legacy of the Sixties countercultural experience, as it becomes equally evident in the transmedial operation of Paul Thomas Anderson's 2014 film. Pynchon's noir seems to mirror the early aspirations, the contradictions and the fall of the New Left; written in 2009, in the post-Rodney King and post-9/11 America, it also aims to unmask the neoliberal dynamics of co-optation while examining the present political polarization, modern times restrictions of freedom, and considering the possible forms of political protest, from grassroots protest to accelerationism, and from psychedelic consciousness to communitarian spirit.

The post-Watts and post-Rodney King Los Angeles are also analyzed in chapter three "The sleeping giant of white guilt": BLM and the policing crisis in Walter Mosley's *Blood Grove*", in which Mosley's deconstruction of the genre for the representation of African American communities in Los Angeles becomes a means to question the 21st Century gentrification, displacement, and enforcement in Downtown districts such as Skid Row and the crisis of policing which led to George Floyd's assassination and the rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement. In this chapter I have considered the ambiguity of the relation between the African American hardboiled hero and economics as a direct consequence of neoliberalist project of incorporation of minority difference.

A similar focus on the neoliberalist politics in regards to minorities in Los Angeles characterizes chapter four "Searching for the ghost of Angeles Mesa: Disalienation and Unforgetting in Nina Revoyr's *Southland*". In the analysis of Revoyr's novel, I argue that the history of cross-racial integration in the Crenshaw district is significantly shaped by the government policies after the Watts Riots. This traumatic event highlighted the gradual acceptance of the Japanese Americans as a hard-working model minority on the one hand and the reiterated segregation of African Americans in South Central on the other. Nonetheless, *Southland*'s concern with the rehabilitation of memory coincides with the recuperation of social places which promote multiracial community life against the spatialization and alienation within late capitalist society.

A concern with the preservation of historical locations and the popular history of Los Angeles is also at the center of Tarantino's latest film and novelization. In chapter five "Liberal memory and the violence of forgetfulness: Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon*

a Time in Hollywood (2019-2021)", film becomes a utopic space of intervention in which history is rewritten and the sunshine-to-noir myth is temporarily challenged. By revisiting the Manson Murders, these works reflect on the rise of postmodern culture in the late 60s and the aesthetics modifications of the medium; I have highlighted, both in the analysis of the film and the novelization, Tarantino's effort to think dialectically with the present of Hollywood and the current state of the medium.

The aesthetical transitions of the medium become in Steve Erickson's *Zeroville* a way of coming to terms with the shifts in the cinematographic experience and to a time in which Los Angeles has lost the hegemonic status as the capital of cinema. In chapter six "The Cineautistic Detective: Post-cinematic Anxiety in Steve Erickson's *Zeroville*" I will thus analyze the collapse of the divide between the real and *reel* Los Angeles; a surrealistic noir becomes for the author a means by which to represent an aesthetic liberation and a historical continuity.

Finally, a focus on the aesthetics of antagonism has been at the core of my analysis of Richard Linklater 2006 adaptation of Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*. In fact, Linklater goes back to Dick's concern with surveillance and control society in the War on Drugs and post-Watergate context and updates it in the high-tech hypersurveilled Southern California present, where space has been progressively privatized in the wake of the War on Terror. In chapter seven "Surveillance Capitalism and Captured Discontents in Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* (2006)", I argue that Linklater's film, by representing how drug addiction and the consequent mental disease are converted in a form of profit for the neoliberal market, points to the "mental health plague in capitalist society" (Fisher 2009, 19) as an example of captured discontent and a possible site of struggle against the dysfunctional character of late capitalism.

Part One

Reimagining the hard-boiled: an investigation of late Sixties Los Angeles

Chapter Two

All power to (re-)imagination: Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*

Under the paving stones, the beach!
"Graffito, Paris, May 1968"

The epigraph of Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (2009), referring to the slogan used during France's 1968 student demonstrations "Sous les pavés, la plage", immediately conveys the idea of the retrospective and historical tone that pervades the novel by evoking an image – and a date – of the western countercultural experience in the late '60s. Nonetheless, the Situationist graffito contains two important material elements, the paving stones and the beach – the first artificial and the latter natural – which represent one of the allegorical polarizations of political, economic and cultural values at the basis of the novel. *Inherent Vice* is a *hardboiled* detective novel which tells the story of a hippie private detective Larry "Doc" Sportello, in 1970, who is embroiled in the Los Angeles criminal underworld while investigating three cases interrelated by the disappearance of his ex-girlfriend Shasta Fay Hepworth and her new wealthy boyfriend, Mickey Z. Wolfmann, a real-estate mogul who echoes Howard Hughes' models of capitalism and philanthropy and who contributed to changing the Los Angeles landscape and reflecting the evolution of Los Angeles as the postmodern town par excellence, as defined by Edward Soja (Soja 1989). Sportello is indeed associated with the "old-time hardboiled dick era" and with the finite economy (and ecology) of the beach in opposition to the "Glass house wave of the future" (Pynchon 2009, 33) — the LAPD headquarters "that sits incongruously amidst downtown architecture" (Pynchon 2009, 137). In Pynchon's 2009 novel, in fact, the private eye will have to cross swords with the LAPD detective Bigfoot Bjornsen – Doc's police detective nemesis – and what he calls "Reality", or the emerging paradigm of America as a neoliberal security state, with its "exploitative system of privatization, deregulation, militarization, and free-market fundamentalism" (Carswell 2017, 7) that Pynchon aims to examine.

In this chapter, I will try to demonstrate how *Inherent Vice* operates a strategy of *unforgetting*, not only in relation to urban planning and neighborhood erasure (Klein 1997) – one of the major concerns of the 21st Century Los Angeles noir, as we will see also in Nina Revoyr's *Southland* (2003) – but also in relation to the political and aesthetic legacy of the Sixties countercultural experience. The novel, in fact, seems to point to a critical recognition of the old "Long, sad history of L.A. land use, as Aunt Reet never tired of pointing out. Mexican families bounced out of Chavez Ravine to build Dodger Stadium, American Indians swept out of Bunker Hill for the Music Center" (Pynchon 2009, 30) as well as the fictional Tariq's African American neighborhood bulldozed to make way for Channel View Estates. Looking back at the post-1965 Watts Riots period, the events of which were described by Pynchon in his 1966 essay "A Journey Into The Mind Of Watts", the author denounces again the brutal dismantling of pre-existing and original communities, insisting on how segregation and erasure aimed to limit cultural diversity, and more specifically, how "racially exclusive suburbanization" as Mike Davis and Jon Wiener suggest in their socio-historical account of Sixties Los Angeles, "was creating a monochromatic society from which Blacks were excluded and in which Chicanos had only a marginal place" (Davis and Wiener 2021, 51).

By recalling the Watts Uprising, the novel also looks ahead to the Rodney King's murder in 1992[7], thus showing the direct consequence of what Gilles Deleuze claimed about the "society of control"; in the society described in the novel, that is regulated by capitalistic markets along with a de facto police regime, "control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explosions within shanty towns or ghettos" (Deleuze 1992, 3). In fact, the "law and order" policy dear to Richard Nixon resulted in a veritable state of surveillance in Los Angeles society in the Sixties, controlled by the logic of developers or, more generally, of late capitalism. But Pynchon suggests that surveillance is not only relegated to the past but that it is still part of the capitalist agenda. Not surprisingly, *Inherent Vice*'s characters also have to deal with the first networks used by the Department of Defense through systems such as ARPAnet to improve police surveillance and control over citizens, and through which Pynchon offers

[7] On April 29, 1992, a series of riots and demonstrations began in Los Angeles in response to the brutal murder of Rodney King, an African American motorist stopped and killed by the Los Angeles police.

a reflection on freedom in the Internet age from the point of view of his characters (something I will return to later in the chapter). Nonetheless the author's critique of Nixon and Reagan policies was already anticipated in *Vineland* (1990), in which the fascistic Nixonian repression is discussed particularly in relation to the War on Drugs and functions as the anthesis to the pastoral setting of Zoyd and Frenesi's peaceful place in Northern California. However, in *Inherent Vice*, such a critique is not limited to domestic issues; through the lens of a writer in the 21st century who lived the George W. Bush era of the War on Terror in its entirety, the figure of Nixon serves as an allegorical stand-in whereby to examine modern day restrictions on freedom, the history of US surveillance and the possible forms of resistance[8]. Indeed, the feeling of being deprived of one's liberty and of living in fear during a war popularly felt as pointless or at least avoidable – the Vietnam War in the novel and the Iraq war in the 2000s – are events that belong both to the fictional novel's world and to Pynchon's world at the time his novel was written.

Going back to the revisitation of the French slogan "Under the paving stones, the beach", in the epigraph of the novel, paying particular attention to the contrast between the two elements mentioned, allows me to argue that such a contrast triggers two possible interpretations of Pynchon's political account of the Sixties countercultural experience; the first places emphasis on the incorporation of the natural element into the artificial, or the incorporation of the countercultural glimpses of the Sixties in the neoliberal agenda; the second emphasizes the persistence and the resilience of the natural element (as the exclamation mark suggests) as opposed to the paving stones, that suggests a hopeful preservation of the countercultural impulse in the neoliberal age. In this respect, J.M. Tyree raises an important question in *The Counterforce*; "Does the novel represent what John Miller calls the 'freedom and faint hope' of Pynchon's California novels, or does it instead dwell, as Inher H. Dalsgaard, Luc Herman, and Brian McHale argue, 'less on utopian possibilities than on exposing the apparatus that maintains the status quo'?" (Tyree 2021, 16). In this chapter I will try to argue that the

[8] As Luc Herman and Steve Weisenburger suggests in their analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "A persistent topic of intellectual and political struggle during the 1966–71 years, this debate over forms of resistance reemerged during the second Iraq war, when thought again had to reckon with new/old political realities posed by the radically enhanced surveillance techniques and methods of control available to late capitalist sovereignties. (2013, 201)

novel is not only concerned with the coexistence of these two major strategies but that through the recognition of the countercultural failure of the Sixties – its modalities and its cultural legacy – it aims to preserve the 60s utopian aspirations and project them into the future. In this sense, the attention reserved to the past from the 21st Century perspective – or the interaction of the past with the present – turns out to be a way of commenting on the historical reasons for the failure, despite the fact that its ultimate aim then, lay in the desire for continuity. From this perspective, it will be necessary to take a step back to Herbert Marcuse, the father of the New Left, whose thought dominated Sixties radicalism and with whom Pynchon, in *Inherent Vice*, seems to share a similar political attitude; in fact, as I will discuss in this chapter, Pynchon's noir seems to mirror the early aspirations, the contradictions and the fall of the New Left as much as the countercultural Sixties in general. Since the novel proves to be concerned with the critique of late capitalism and neoliberal capitalism, starting from Marcuse's post-Marxist analysis of the affluent society, I will try to place the novel in a *chronological* dialogue with Fredric Jameson and Mark Fisher's theories in order to discuss the politics and aesthetics of Pynchon's later works. After outlining the position of the novel in terms of politics and ideology, it will be possible to understand its relation with the noir genre and the reason for his re-appropriating it.

2.1
"A little parenthesis of light": Pynchon and Marcuse, or coming to terms with the Sixties.

In the last 15 years, Pynchon critics have largely discussed the author's critical engagement with politics, often in relation to an implicit – in his novels' contents and forms – and explicit – particularly in his few essays such as "Journey Into the Mind of Watts" (1966) – sympathy with the Left and the Sixties counterculture[9]. While representing an obvious "political turn in Pynchon criticism" (Freer 2019, 178), such an

[9] Similarly to Joanna Freer's use of the term (Freer 2014, 12) in *Thomas Pynchon and The Counterculture*, I will use *counterculture* as a general word to identify the political opposition of the Sixties, represented by various movements and microcultures such as the hippies, the psychedelic movement, the New Left, the Civil Rights movements and also the Women's movement.

insistence on viewing Pynchon's body of work through the lens of politics and ideology also reveals the heterogeneous means by which his novels critically engage with politics.

Not surprisingly, political readings of Pynchon's novels have largely relied on (political) philosophy, whether on Foucault (McConnell 1993, Palmeri 2001), Deleuze and Guattari (Eve 2014, Mattessich 2015, Di Vilio 2021), or on the first generation of Frankfurt School thinkers, as is the case of Martin Paul Eve's *Pynchon and Philosophy: Wittgenstein, Foucault and Adorno* (2014). On the contrary, less attention has been paid to Marcuse's influence on Thomas Pynchon's latest works or, at least, to the resonance of Marcuse's theories in his oeuvre; the few interesting exceptions are basically related to the analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger's reading of Pynchon's novel and of his essay on sloth, "Nearer, My Couch, to Thee" (1993) is focused on the Marcusean concept of repressive tolerance[10]; Marcuse's thought, especially the pivotal works *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) and *Eros and Civilization* (1966), has been brilliantly discussed by Nadine Attwell (2004, 22-48) in relation to the postmodern nostalgia inherent to Pynchon's 1973 work[11]. Finally, in *Thomas Pynchon and the American Counterculture* (2014), Joanna Freer also mentions Herbert Marcuse as one of the influences on Pynchon's philosophical background; but her vision of Pynchon's politics – with which I am more in agreement – reads the writer's political philosophy as engaged with a social anarchism based on an "egalitarianism, community spirit, participation, and flexibility" (Freer 2014, 159). Of course, such attributes are equally present in Marcuse's conception of the New Left; the appreciation of Marcuse among contemporary anarchists, like Murray Bookchin for example, is a well-known fact, whether because the "kind of future imagined by Marcuse is more closely related

[10] "The concept that state powers will tolerate a certain degree of dissident, culturally resistant behavior in exchange for the sustained repression of people and populations, which repressed subjects impose on themselves" (Herman and Weisenburger 2013, 208)

[11] For a connection between Marcuse and *Gravity's Rainbow*, see Molly Hite, "Reading the Value System of *Gravity's Rainbow* with Marcuse, Freud, and the Yippies," in *Approaches to Teaching Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 and Other Works*, ed. Thomas H. Schaub (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008), 41, 43; Hite, "'Fun Actually Was Becoming Quite Subversive': Herbert Marcuse, the Yippies, and the Value System of *Gravity's Rainbow*," *Contemporary Literature* 51.4 (2010): 677–702. Precursor essays to Hite's work include Joseph Slade, "Religion, Psychology, Sex and Love in *Gravity's Rainbow*," in *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow*, ed. Charles Clerc (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 153–98; Toon Staes, "'When You Come to a Fork in the Road'—Marcuse, Intellectual Subversion and Negative Thought in Gravity's Rainbow and Against the Day," in *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, ed. Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 97–111.

to the traditions of anarchism and libertarian socialism" (Stevenson 2022, 88) or because of Marcuse's positivity towards the spontaneous character of any rebellion[12].

However, while it is certainly true that Marcusean theories informed much of the depiction of the one-dimensional society of Pynchon's early works – especially the Californian society of *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) –, I believe that the revisitation of the Sixties in Pynchon's 90s and 2000s works makes Marcuse even more relevant for several reasons. The first is that, in *Inherent Vice*'s mix of detective story and historiographic metafiction, *memory* itself – in the restorative and liberative sense intended by Marcuse (Marcuse 1966, 19) – becomes an ontological question driven by a political intent. The second is that the relevance of Marcuse today lies both in the postmodern aesthetic agenda (the recuperation of the past in all its forms, from nostalgia to parody) and in what seems to be an "apparent homology between Marcuse's analysis of industrial capitalism in the 1960s and theories of contemporary neoliberal capitalism". (Schutzbach 2022, 9)

In one of the most retrospective passages of *Inherent Vice*, the narrator provides us with a distinct yet nostalgic definition of the Sixties through the protagonist's problematic feelings about the future of the countercultural experience;

> and here was Doc, on the natch, caught in a low-level bummer he couldn't find a way out of, about how the Psychedelic Sixties, this little parenthesis of light, might close after all, and all be lost, taken back into darkness. (Pynchon 2009, 254)

By showing a preoccupation with an eventual loss of the Sixties heritage, the writer, from the perspective of the 21st Century, makes explicit the urgent need to keep the "parenthesis" open. The literary space – that of detective work – becomes, first of all, the space of recuperation of the past and is concerned with a resistance to what Tyree calls the problem of *timewashing*, "creation of fake pasts that purport to cleanse history of its deep stains and recurring nightmares with the scented spray of propaganda" (Tyree 2021, 9). By fighting this *war on truth*, Pynchon's fiction creates an alternative space for the imagination that is closely connected to the reiteration of utopia. That is

[12] In *Main Currents of Marxism*. Kołakowski accuses Marcuse of presenting a Marxism without a proletariat and without a notion of history, of distorting traditional Marxism and of presenting a "semi-romantic anarchism in its most irrational form" (Kołakowski 2008, 1119)

why memory becomes the first explosive counterforce in its becoming utopic phantasy and it is to be intended both as a personal memory – since Pynchon actually lived the counterculture in Manhattan Beach (Gordita Beach in the novel) and other Southern California locations in the late Sixties – and as an invitation for a collective recovery of memory. For Marcuse – as well as for Adorno – the tendence "to liquidate – as an 'irrational rest' – the disturbing elements of Time and Memory" (Marcuse 2006, 102-103) is a project inherent to the rationality of the advanced industrial society; in this context, relying on Time and Memory in relation to the present becomes somewhat disturbing. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse explores the power of the recognition and relation to the past as present as something that "counteracts the functionalization of thought by and in the established reality" (Marcuse 2006, 103) and that also helps to search for the truth and falsehood. In other words, for Marcuse,

> The mediation of the past with the present discovers the factors which made the facts, which determined the way of life, which established the masters and the servants; it projects the limits and the alternatives (Marcuse 2006, 103)

In *Inherent Vice*, the detective's quest thus becomes the search for such *factors* and Los Angeles is depicted as the space in which the actual contraposition between the *masters and the servants* can be staged. Of course, one can find such a dichotomy in most of Pynchon's novels in which the structure of the society is based on opposing figures, the elect and the nonelect or "preterite", an idea that can be traced back to the Calvinist revision of Lutheran theology. "From *V.* to *Vineland*, from *The Crying of Lot 49* to *Gravity's Rainbow*, and from *Mason & Dixon* to *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon insists on writing the history of the marginalized or, as he calls them, the preterite – those on whose backs an older idea of history unfolded" (Cowart 2011, 165); such a focus on the history of 60s Los Angeles – made up of a mix of fictional and true stories such as Watts, Chavez Ravine, Bunker Hill – stands for a broader examination of the history of power under capitalism. As David Cowart suggests, part of Pynchon's narrative project is the Debordian concept from *Society of the Spectacle* according to which "examining history amounts to examining the nature of power" (Debord 1983, 77). In *Inherent Vice*, as I mentioned, the Pynchonian dichotomy becomes the one between what the narrator calls "Flatland" people – real estate developers, policemen, politicians and all those in power – and the non-Flatland people associated with the

beach – dopers, surfers, minorities, hippies; in other words, the conflict within the novel involves the heterotopia of the beach and its finite ecologies on the one hand, and the infinite economies of the flatlands' on the other. (Berressem 2019, 434). By establishing in the novel the true nature of the historical agents, again, the masters and the servants – where the narrative point of view is basically in favor of the latter – and insisting on the restoration of memory by relying on historical events, Pynchon calls for a liberation of the past that reverberates in the present.

One of the most crucial examples of the *search for the truth* in the novel is provided by the dialogue between Doc Sportello and the African American character Tariq Khalil, a former member of the Black Guerrilla Family[13] gang, In particular, Tariq Khalil expresses the fear of his community of receiving the same treatment as that suffered by Japanese communities during and after WWII;

> "WW Two," said Tariq. "Before the war, a lot of South Central was still a Japanese neighborhood. Those people got sent to camps, we come on in to be the next Japs."
> "And now it's your turn to get moved along."
> "More white man's revenge. Freeway up by the airport wasn't enough.
> "Revenge for...?"
> "Watts."
> "The riots."
> "Some of us say 'insurrection.' The Man, he just waits for his moment." (Pynchon 2009, 17)

In this passage, Tariq Khalil sums up the modern history of the South Central neighborhood – the former Panthers' headquarters – and of its gradual dismantling; Pynchon insists on the status of the neighborhood described by Mike Davis as a "social wasteland created by the clearances for the Century Freeway – a traumatic removal of

[13] The Black Guerrilla Family is an African-American street gang founded in 1966 by George Jackson, also mentioned in the novel, "Big Jake" Lewis, and W. L. Nolen while they were incarcerated at San Quentin prison. It is one of the 60s and early '70s Los Angeles street gangs mentioned by Pynchon in the novel, a phenomenon closely linked to police brutality against the Black Panthers and other civil rights movements. In this regard, Mike Davis in *City of Quartz*, claimed that "As even the Times recognized, the decimation of the Panthers led directly to a recrudescence of gangs in the early 1970s. 'Crippin' the most extraordinary new gang phenomenon, was a bastard offspring of the Panthers' former charisma, filling the void left by the LAPD SWAT teams" (Davis 1990, 298). In *Inherent Vice*, therefore, there is an emphasis on the fact that gang revolts and guerrilla warfare resulted from territorial issues and the tensions related to land abuse and segregation practices used by the LAPD in their handling of racial matters.

housing and destruction of neighborhood ties that was the equivalent of a natural disaster" (Davis 1990, 298)

The choice of the term "insurrection" used by Tariq Khalil in contrast to the term "riots" leads to another problem of the interpretation of reality that has been disputed between the police, the government, the mass media and the establishment in general, and the groups of rebellion. The words used to identify these events – such as "riot", "revolt", "race riot" or "uprising" – assume shades of meaning behind which lie specific ideologies; here Pynchon's critique is concerned with what Marcuse in *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) calls the *political linguistics*, defined as "the armor of the Establishment", and that functions as "a priori linguistic defamation" (Marcuse 1969, 73). Marcuse takes as an example the U.S. government propaganda against the Vietcong in the late Sixties, but it discusses the problem in relation to illegitimate and legitimate violence used when it comes to forms of civil disobedience on the part radical opposition. In *Inherent Vice*, Doc calls the Watts events "riots", that is basically violent public disorder, disturbance of the public peace, opening to multiple meanings,[14] but that conjures up an image of mindless violence and destruction. Not surprisingly, it is also the word that was mainly used by the press and mass media at the time, especially by the Los Angeles Times, to identify and label the events. By contrast, the word "insurrection" preferred by Tariq suggests the existence of an uncomfortable status to overturn, or reverse and which, along with its synonyms "rebellion", "revolt" and "uprising" was the most used terms by civil rights activists during the Sixties in Los Angeles; these terms implied an act of morality, or ideology, at least, but, in any case, a willingness to improve a condition in opposition to the values of the established law and order. Of course, such debate on the value of these words and their ideological shades of meaning reverberates in the present especially in relation to the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in Los Angeles in early June 2020 – to which I will return later –, where "peaceful protests in the city turned violent", and where "the ghosts of Rodney King and Watts rise again" (Arango 2020). But most of all, one may think of *political linguistics* in relation to what happened following the defeat of President Trump in the 2020

[14] The federal Anti-Riot Act (1968) defines "riot" as "a public disturbance involving an act or acts of violence by one or more persons part of an assemblage of three or more persons, which act or acts shall constitute a clear and present danger of, or shall result in, damage or injury..." (18 USC, Ch. 102)

presidential election, namely the January 6 attack on Capitol Hill; "attack," "march," "insurrection," "storming," were the most used terms by the mass media and the political forces, shaping not only the history of the event itself and its perception, but also confirming the tendency to avoid the word "riot", most used for the anti-racist protests. News media were involved in a battle of words to describe the events, occasionally using euphemistic labels like "protests," "rallies" and "demonstrations" while describing what was happening.[15]

Nonetheless, as we come to know "the mob that attacked the United States Capitol appears to have obeyed the President's call to 'fight hard' and became a 'combat-ready' collective for civil purposes. When interviewed, many of the protesters claimed that they raided the Capitol because the President told them so" (Gounari 2022, 15). The Capitol Hill attack was also one of the symptoms of the authoritarianist Trumpism, largely made up of widespread populist and consent, a manifestation of the dominance of the new neoliberal ideology and late capitalism type of fascism in the context of democracy about which Marcuse warned us in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972). No wonder then that Marcuse – speaking about how the "the Nixon Administration has strengthened the counterrevolutionary organization of society in all directions" (Marcuse 1972, 24) – somehow predicted not only the return to a violent implementation of law and order, to the use of torture (think of Guantanamo), to the war on truth, to proto-fascism and white supremacism under Trump but also the massive obedience and consent that was already a distinctive trait of Nixon voters. Marcuse himself in the foreword to the second edition of Löwenthal and Guterman's *Prophets of Deceit*, claimed that Richard Nixon had *followers*, while the other two nominees, Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace, had voters. Since this neo-fascism, as Žižek claims, is "more and more 'postmodern', civilized, playful, involving ironic self-distance…yet no less Fascist for all that" (Žižek 2008, 81), one can imagine these *followers* as QAnon conspiracists with horned Viking caps or, as in *Inherent Vice*, as a sort of LAPD private militia, "some patriotic badasses known as Vigilant California" (Pynchon 2009, 226) who take part in a rally of GOP activists to whom Nixon addresses the following words;

[15] A recent study (Damon T. Di Cicco, 2010) examined coverage of protests in five major newspapers in the United States between 1967 and 2007, and found that during that time period, anti-racist protests were depicted as a nuisance more often than the conservative ones were.

> There are always the whiners and complainers who'll say, this is fascism. Well, fellow Americans, if it's Fascism for Freedom? /... can...dig it! (Pynchon 2009, 120)

If the statement made by William Shirer in the Los Angeles Times in 1970 – the year in which *Inherent Vice* is set – according to which "we may well be the first people to go Fascist by the democratic vote" (Marcuse 2015, 138) represents the anxiety of the leftists during and after the countercultural experience, Pynchon's revisitation of the *one-dimensional society* in *Inherent Vice* projects similar fears regarding the future of American democracy in 21st century American politics – from Bush's contested victory over Gore in 2000 to Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election, 11 years after its publication.

Nonetheless, the one-dimensional man in *Inherent Vice* appears to be an individual who is "manipulated and indoctrinated" (Marcuse 2006, 8) and who "does not know its true needs because its needs are not its own—they are administered, superimposed, and heteronomous" (Kellner 2006, xxviii); this man will have to face *heteronomous* counter-revolutionary forces that in the novel take the form of a chameleonic neoliberal enterprise called The Golden Fang, a dental clinic, a trafficking ship, a drug-related business and a Chandleresque mental hospital called *Chryskylodon* (that translates as Golden Fang). A clear example of this individual is given by Coy Harlingen, a former saxophone player in a surf band, "whose heroin OD provided a cover for his vanishing and recruitment by the authorities into life as an informant and paid thug" (Tyree 2021, 55). Turning into a government informant, much like Frenesi in *Vineland*, and forced to abandon his family (the ex-doper Hope and their daughter Amethyst), Harlingen in the novel is the quintessential representation of the incorporation of the subversive potentiality of established power. If the drug culture and the psychedelic experience could represent a temporary escape from the forms of everyday control – or "a metaphor serving the vision of a different social reality" (Cowart 2011, 98) – it has now become another form of social control, a way to marginalize the outsiders and, most of all, a government-related economic business, a process that will be made even more clear in Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly*. Doc's search for Coy – despite the positive result that I will discuss later – will shed light on the impossibility of escaping what Marcuse calls "the established reality" and on the forced renunciation of one's needs, or "the

utopian features of the alternatives" (Marcuse 2006, 258). Regarding this process, the narrator informs us

> This seemed to be happening more and more lately, out in Greater Los Angeles, among gatherings of carefree youth and happy dopers, where Doc had begun to notice older men, there and not there, rigid, unsmiling, that he knew he'd seen before, not the faces necessarily but a defiant posture, an unwillingness to blur out, like everybody else at the psychedelic events of those days, beyond official envelopes of skin. Like the operatives who'd dragged away Coy Harlingen the other night at that rally at the Century Plaza. Doc knew these people, he'd seen enough of them in the course of business. They went out to collect cash debts, they broke rib cages, they got people fired, they kept an unforgiving eye on anything that might become a threat. If everything in this dream of prerevolution was in fact doomed to end and the faithless money-driven world to reassert its control over all the lives it felt entitled to touch, fondle, and molest, it would be agents like these, dutiful and silent, out doing the shitwork, who'd make it happen. (Pynchon 2009, 129)

Was then the dream of prerevolution doomed to fail against "the ancient forces of greed and fear"? (Pynchon 2009, 130) In the analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Joseph Slade referred to Marcuse's warning "that established culture will probably co-opt rebellion, a notion that helps explain the failure of the Counterforce in *Gravity's Rainbow*" (Slade 1983, 184) There is no doubt that also in *Inherent Vice* such a notion is not just a possibility but, on the contrary, something that is happening, and which Pynchon re-examines from the 21st Century perspective. Such a re-examination, as I pointed out, can be considered, in Marcusean terms, a restoration of memory. But if, for Marcuse, "the restoration of memory is accompanied by the restoration of the cognitive content of phantasy" (Marcuse 1998, 19), this would mean that, for Pynchon, fiction is not a ground designed in order to win battles of the past, but rather a space in which one can "shatter the framework" (Marcuse 1998, 19) and project past utopian glimpses into the future. More precisely – in *Eros and Civilization* – Marcuse claims that

> Against the self-imposed restraint of the discoverer, the orientation on the past tends toward an orientation on the future. The recherche du temps perdu becomes the vehicle of future liberation" (Marcuse 1998, 19)

This brings me to James Berger's suggestion about the projected nostalgia that Pynchon develops in *Vineland*, that is a "nostalgia for the future, for possibilities of social

harmony glimpsed at crucial moments in the past but not yet realized" (Berger 1999, 171), an aspect that I will discuss in the next paragraph in relation to Mark Fisher and Jameson's conceptualization of nostalgia and utopia. While it's true that *Eros and Civilization* is one of Marcuse's most optimistic works and that such feeling is certainly part of Pynchon's later writings, I can reasonably assert that *Inherent Vice* shares the same ambiguous premises of Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, well summarized by the philosopher in the introduction to the first edition;

> *One-Dimensional Man* will vacillate throughout between two contradictory hypotheses: (1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2) that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society. I do not think that a clear answer can be given. Both tendencies are there, side by side— and even the one in the other. The first tendency is dominant, and whatever preconditions for a reversal may exist are being used to prevent it. Perhaps an accident may alter the situation, but unless the *recognition* of what is being done and what is being prevented subverts the consciousness and the behavior of man, not even a catastrophe will bring about the change. (Marcuse 2006, xlv, italics mine)

Similarly, in *Inherent Vice* there vacillates throughout a historical representation of the containment of the alternatives and the translation of the utopian phantasy – all power to (re-) imagination – into the future. It is clear that during the phase of translation, the *recognition* becomes a necessary and desired strategy in order to imagine the alternatives and Pynchon's *historical* detective fiction is a fertile ground for this aim.

2.2

Tearing a hole in the grey curtain. Pynchon between *One-Dimensional Society* and *Capitalist Realism*

> *So, in lots of ways, in that period from the late Sixties into the early Seventies, we were as close as we were going to be to postcapitalism, to a transition into postcapitalism. We weren't going to get as close again, possibly, until now...*

Although now doesn't look very promising, does it?

Mark Fisher, Post-Capitalist Desire

If it is reasonable to read the Los Angeles depicted in the novel as an example of the late capitalist society and of its models of exploitation, repression and corruption denounced by Marcuse, it is even more important to view Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* – and also all his late works – as reflective of its historical moment of production. Despite its 1960s setting, *Inherent Vice* is, most of all, a 21st-Century novel and for this reason it distances itself from the other two works of the "California Trilogy", in particular from *The Crying of Lot 49*, his anti-detective novel, that was set in a period contemporaneous with its production. Oddly enough, the novel's relation to history is more similar to *Gravity's Rainbow*'s retrospective project; while grappling with the Holocaust, the Cold War and the Atomic Age, Pynchon's most acclaimed novel is highly reflective of the late Sixties-early Seventies, the time in which it was written, in trying to come to terms with the Vietnam War, the New Left and the counterculture. There is no doubt that *Gravity's Rainbow* as well as *The Crying of Lot 49* (and later, *Vineland*), also informed *Inherent Vice*'s political radicalism and the complex ways in which it politically engages with history. After all, as Joanna Freer suggests, "Pynchon's work, from *V.* to *Inherent Vice*, embodies the essential originating spirit of the counterculture broadly considered." (Freer 2014, 158)

However, *Inherent Vice* – set in 1970, a post-Manson and pre-Watergate and pre-Reagan California – was published in 2009, 40 years after the fatal year 1969, or what the French would call an *année charnière*. The 21st Century thus becomes for Pynchon the ideal site to reflect on the changes that took place over these 40 years in terms of politics and aesthetics and the choice to set the novel in 1970 is in this sense allegorical; from a critical point of view, *Inherent Vice* seems to work on three different levels; it focuses on the historical reasons of the end of the utopia in the late Sixties and early Seventies, it reflects on how neoliberalism, from the 1970s to the present, incorporated much of the "Great Refusal", and it comments on the rise of postmodern culture without renouncing its forms and aesthetics. If *Vineland* described the first-wave of neoliberalism of the 80s Reaganomics – in which Ronald Reagan "is presented as

continuing the attack against the 1960s counterculture that Nixon began"[16] (Gourley 2019, 220) – *Inherent Vice* goes back to the seeds of the global neoliberal order, dramatizing, as Doug Haynes suggests, the shift occurring over those years, "as the nation, and the world, moves from Fordism to its neoliberal successor" (Haynes 2013, 4).

In fact, as Brian McHale suggests, "postmodern culture certainly overlaps with the Cold War era (1947–91), and is in some sense a phenomenon of the Cold War culture, it coincides more exactly with what Fredric Jameson famously called late capitalism, the era we are now more likely to identify with the rise of a neoliberal international economic order, beginning in the 1970s". (McHale 2019, 290) This periodization also helps to explain the presence and the relevance of Marcuse in the contemporary discourse on the capitalism, advanced capitalism, neoliberalism (in all its different connotations) and also postmodernism.[17] In *Undoing the Demos* (2015), Wendy Brown describes neoliberalism as the stage in which capitalism has succeeded in incorporating its own criticisms and is now able to co-opt such criticisms as part of its own identity, as a "further development of what Herbert Marcuse termed the 'closing of the political universe'—the erasure of intelligible, legitimate alternatives to economic rationality" (Brown 2015, 68) In Huehls and Smith's words, we reached the ontological phase of capitalism in which the three stages of neoliberalism – economic, political-ideological, sociological – are now fully realized (Huehls and Smith 2017, 3)

It seems to me that this incorporation – essentially a Marcusean intuition – is a concept that has been crucially translated in all the major theories of contemporary neoliberalism. Brown is not the only theorist to have noticed this connection; in the recent works of Jon Bailes (2020) and Lukas Schutzbach (2023), for example, it is evidenced that in Marcuse's concept of one-dimensionality, "his critique of the

[16] "Then again, it's the whole Reagan program, isn't it – dismantle the New Deal, reverse the effects of World War Two, restore fascism at home and around the world, flee into the past, can't you feel it, all the dangerous childish stupidity" (Pynchon 1990, 265).

[17] Marcuse is one of the most relevant examples when it comes to the relationship between critical theory and postmodern theory. It is evident that a certain Left postmodern theory relies on the Frankfurt formulations of the critique of domination more in general. As Ben Agger claimed, "in crucial ways Marcuse anticipates postmodern theory's concerns with the lifeworld, discourse, and the body. He did not theorize postmodernity explicitly. But his differences with Adorno help illuminate shortcomings in Adorno's negative dialectics, which remains a suggestive treatment of late capitalism but not a nuanced empirical reading of transformational opportunities". (Agger 1994, 27)

conditioning of consciousness in post-war consumer capitalism, and the possibilities for developing alternative thinking he considers, we witness the prelude to the neoliberal present" (Bailes 2020, 36).

At the same time, the relevance of Marcuse in contemporary theories is also a symptom of a broader presence of the Sixties in the contemporary discourse, whether in the commodification of its political and aesthetic meanings or in the reiteration of positive and liberative desires; the British theorist Mark Fisher has largely discussed this process, especially in his final lectures included in *Postcapitalist Desire* (2020);

> Why do we still care about the 1960s? Why are we required to care about the 1960s? Why does it haunt us at the level of iconography and why do its cultural forms persist? I'd say it has something to do with the unrealised desires that were inherent in those forms and to which those forms still speak...? I don't like this phrase "speak to"... That they're still relevant to. (Fisher 2020, 101)

As I will try to illustrate in this paragraph, Mark Fisher's understanding of the Sixties is relevant not only for the attention paid to the "unrealised desires" of the counterculture – and the way in which they are still relevant in the 21st Century – but also for the *nostalgia for the future* and the anxieties related to what he calls the "slow cancellation of the future" (Fisher 2014, 4). I would suggest that such interpretations are also at the core of *Inherent Vice*'s political attitude toward the future of the political legacy of the Sixties in the present and that Fisher's critical reading of Marcuse – especially in his later works – helps to shed light on the alternatives and the models drawn by Pynchon. Interestingly enough, Fisher's most famous work, *Capitalist Realism* (2009), came out the same year in which *Inherent Vice* was published. In this work, Mark Fisher discusses what Marcuse called "the closing of political universe" in terms that seem strictly related to Jameson's view of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism; but Fisher's concept of capitalist realism eventually helps to analyze more concretely the dispersion inherent in the term *neoliberalism*. Fisher describes capitalist realism as a state in which "capitalism is believed to be the only viable system of economic and social organization, since by today, any imaginable political alternative seems to have lost all currency" (Schutzbach 2023, 3). However, Fisher's claim is even darker and more pessimistic as regards the subversive potentiality under capitalism;

> What we are dealing with now is not the incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their *precorporation*: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture (Fisher 2009, 9)

As previously discussed, *Inherent Vice* partially resumes the problem of *incorporation* as the detective Doc Sportello is aware of being "doomed" (Pynchon 2009, 97) and warns us that the "dream of prerevolution was in fact doomed to end" (Pynchon 2009, 129); this process is problematized more clearly towards the end of the novel, in the confrontation between Doc and the Golden Fang lawyer Crocker Fenway, a scene masterfully rendered in Paul Thomas Anderson's film adaptation;

> "It's about being in place. We—" gesturing around the Visitors' Bar and it's withdrawal into seemingly unbounded shadow, "we're in place. We've been in place forever. Look around. Real estate, water rights, oil, cheap labor—all of that's ours, it's always been ours. And you, at the end of the day what are you? one more unit in this swarm of transients who come and go without pause here in the sunny Southland,"
>
> "And you don't ever worry," Doc grinned back cordially, "that someday they'll all turn into a savage mob screamin' around outside the gates of PV, maybe even looking to get in?"
>
> Shrug. "Then we do what has to be done to keep them out. We've been laid siege to by far worse, and we're still here. Aren't we." (Pynchon 2009, 347)

Doc's condition of "transient" is opposed to Fenway's "being in place" – as an example of Los Angeles developers, capitalist and institutional power; the villainous Fenway warns him that any future disruptive event – "a savage mob screamin'" – can only be neutralized, suggesting how capitalism – represented in this case by real estate – is prepared to contain it. But Crocker Fenway acts somehow as the agent of capitalist realism to the extent that he makes clear how their modes of production and power have always been lain in their ubiquity – "we've been in place forever" – reminding us of the abused phrase attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. But most of all, and here I am referring more specifically to *precorporation*, Fenway represents a capitalist mega-network known as the Golden Fang; this organization not only serves as a metaphor for the neoliberal globalization for its transnational operations and

capitalist ubiquity, but also represents what Fisher calls "the pre-emptive, formatting and shaping of desires" (Fisher 2009, 9). Its business is in fact based on first creating and then exploiting needs by selling drugs, to recovering dopers to get false teeth because heroin "sucks the calcium out of your system like a vampire" (Pynchon 2009, 60), with the help of Vigilant California, or inventing fake protesters (like the aforementioned Coy Harlingen) in order to give "revolutionary youth a bad name" (Pynchon 2009, 122).

What seems even more interesting to me about the relevance of Fisher's theories in *Inherent Vice*, is not so much the presence of a capitalist realist society, but a strategy aimed at recovering a *postcapitalist desire*, a concept that "develops from capitalism and moves beyond capitalism" (Fisher 2020, 56), starting from an analysis of the Sixties and that is discussed in more depth in Fisher's later works. However, in such works, it becomes clear that Fisher's revaluation of the utopian impulses of the Sixties is partially inherited from Fredric Jameson, whose theories, in this sense, constitute – both in chronological terms and on the level of interpretation – a link between Marcuse and Fisher.

In his well-known essay, "Periodizing the 60s", Jameson argued that the failures of the counterculture and what he calls "missed opportunities" are to be found in the historical situation itself; for example, the emergence of new collective identities, or the new "subjects of history" in relation to the crisis of the classical conception of social class in the institutional sense and, from an aesthetic point of view, the "new conflation of the forms of high and mass culture, that characterizes postmodernism itself" (Jameson ideologies 501). Of course, Jameson criticizes the aesthetics of postmodernism to the extent that while high modernism – whatever its overt political content – was oppositional and marginal, the former is no longer at all oppositional since "it constitutes the very dominant or hegemonic aesthetic of consumer society itself and significantly serves the latter's commodity production as a virtual laboratory of new forms and fashions" (Jameson 2013, 501), here raising again the forementioned problem of incorporation.

However, while postmodernism is thought of as the period which marks the end of "ideology", where ideology "in this sense meant Marxism, and its 'end' went hand in hand with the end of Utopia", it is also true that Jameson himself problematizes the search for the "Utopian impulses [..] in various forms of postmodern today" (Jameson

1991, 159). By recognizing the fact that "'Utopia' in that period was also a code word that simply meant 'socialism' or any revolutionary attempt to create a radically different society" (Jameson 1991, 159), Jameson reflects on the importance of Marcuse concerning the projection of a utopian vision in the present;

> One wants to insist very strongly on the necessity of the reinvention of the Utopian vision in any contemporary politics: this lesson, which Marcuse first taught us, is part of the legacy of the Sixties which must never be abandoned in any reevaluation of that period and of our relationship to it.
> […]
> If one inserts the sixties into this historical narrative, everything changes; "Marcuse" virtually becomes the name for a whole explosive renewal of Utopian thinking and imagination, and for a rebirth of the older narrative form (Jameson 1991, 159-160)

But when Jameson refers to the utopian impulses of the Sixties, he is also aware of the fact that what they produced was not a unified and totalizing model of antagonism (as class was for the Marxist tradition); on the contrary, they produced "a vital range of micropolitical movements (neighborhood, race, ethnic, gender, and ecological) whose common denominator is the resurgent problematic of Nature in a variety of (often anticapitalist) forms" (Jameson 1991, 160), a process symptomatic of a repudiation of the grand politics (the traditional left parties). Of course, the importance that Pynchon gives to the variety of new forms of political movements related to neighborhood, race, and also anti-capitalist forces in *Inherent Vice* should be interpreted not only as an expression of his enthusiasm for the New Left but also as something that can be fostered in the present; Pynchon does not suggest that the type of antagonism represented by the counterculture led to the failure of the left (what Fisher calls "the subduing of the counterculture"); on the contrary, his position seems more aligned with Mark Fisher's claim according to which "the failure of the left after the Sixties had much to do with its repudiation of, or refusal to engage with, the dreamings that the counterculture unleashed." (Fisher 2018, 780). In other words, Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* amplifies the urgency of the questions that Fisher raises in *Acid Communism*;

> What if the counterculture was only a stumbling beginning, rather than the best that could be hoped for? What if the success of neoliberalism was not an

> indication of the inevitability of capitalism, but a testament to the scale of the threat posed by the spectre of a society which could be free? (Fisher 2018, 780)

Of course, I am not suggesting a naïve vision on the part of Pynchon of the counterculture; as much as Marcuse, he is aware of its failure and incorporation. In fact, as Freer suggests, "Doc Sportello is a dope-smoking hippie private detective who, in 1970, is already nostalgic for the moment when the counterculture was at its height, before it was compromised by government infiltration or had sold out to consumer capitalism. (Freer 2019, 177). Pynchon in fact describes the characters who belong to the hippie community of Gordita Beach as not immune to the fetishism of commodities, especially when it comes to food consumption, sexuality, drugs. However, I want to insist on the fact that Pynchon's revisitation of the Sixties as a "little parenthesis of light" has to do precisely with the "specter of a world which could be free" (Marcuse 1998, 127); rather than expressing a sterile nostalgia for the specificity of the countercultural experience of the Sixties, he is engaging with recovering a continuity of the desire for liberation. After all, this is what Fisher, in his later works, is mostly concerned with; his idea of continuity seems to posit itself between the two unavoidable errors that Jameson sees as "nostalgic commemoration of the glories of the 60s" and its opposite, that is an "abject public confession of the decade's many failures and missed opportunities" (Jameson 2008, 483). In fact, one of the possible yet simplistic temptations to fit *Inherent Vice* into the postmodern nostalgia mode. But if *Inherent Vice* does project a type of nostalgia, this should not be interpreted as a nostalgia for the past as conceived by Jameson, but rather what Fisher calls the nostalgia of the future[18]. As Schutzbach makes clear in his reading of Fisher, "Thus, even our visions of the future seem confined to the present; turning into a perverted nostalgia for the future, they devolve into a longing for a vision of the past in which a future, no matter how bleak, still seemed possible (Schutzbach 2023, 2).

Nonetheless, in *Acid Communism* and *Postcapitalist Desire*, Fisher discusses the possibility of a vision of the future in relation to the present, focusing on the importance of analyzing the conditions that led to the struggles in the late Sixties and early

[18] Fisher often uses the term haunt, to describe the kind of presence of the Sixties in the contemporary imagination, I will occasionally borrow the term "Hauntology" – a term coined by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* – in Fisher's meaning, in relation to the return or the persistence the Sixties as in the manner of a ghost.

Seventies and trying to liberate them from their *specificity* in time and place, or, in other words, thinking about them as something "we could imagine occurring again, and better"; in this sense, one of the most crucial question to be faced is the ambivalent problem of scarcity. In the introduction to *Acid Communism*, he insists, again, on how Marcuse's critique of artificial scarcity – the essential project of capitalism – allows us to shed light on the legacy of the Sixties;

> In any case, Marcuse allows us to see why the Sixties continue to nag at the current moment. In recent years, the Sixties have come to seem at once like a deep past so exotic and distant that we cannot imagine living in it, and a moment more vivid than now — a time when people really lived, when things really happened. Yet the decade haunts not because of some unrecoverable and unrepeatable confluence of factors, but because the potentials it materialised and began to democratise — the prospect of a life freed from drudgery — has to be continually suppressed. To explain why we have not moved to a world beyond work we have to look at a vast social, political and cultural project whose aim has been the production of scarcity. Capitalism: a system that generates artificial scarcity in order to produce real scarcity; a system that produces real scarcity in order to generate artificial scarcity. Actual scarcity — scarcity of natural resources — now haunts capital, as the Real that its fantasy of infinite expansion must work overtime to repress. The artificial scarcity — which is fundamentally a scarcity of time — is necessary, as Marcuse says, in order to distract us from the immanent possibility of freedom (Fisher 2018, 779)

By insisting on Marcuse, Fisher not only claims that the production of artificial scarcity – a scarcity of time in the case of the Marcusean analysis – is the means by which capitalism has always suppressed individuals' freedom and the possibility of their autonomy, but also that the maintaining of scarcity is the real problem that capitalism has to face. Is not, also in the eyes of Pynchon, the question of scarcity which haunts the present time, both in its natural and artificial production? And, in particular, is not 21st Century Los Angeles the ideal site in which one can find its present manifestations and outcomes, e.g. housing and homeless crises, the natural disasters in Southern California, and the California water crisis?

Inherent Vice projects each of these fears in several passages and through different characters and plots. Take for example the role of Mickey Wolfmann, the real-estate magnate; Wolfmann's Channel View Estates, described as an "environmental abuse", "assault on the environment" and a "chipboard horror", stand not only as an

example of the brutal dismantling of African American communities in South Central but also the necessity of the creation of artificial scarcity, echoing 21st Century South L.A. gentrification and the inability of the current residents to live in new luxury housing units. Not surprisingly, real estate – in the tradition of L.A. Noir, from *Mildred Pierce* to *Chinatown* – is at the center of the investigation in the novel and the film, and in the society representing it, it provides both the means by which capitalism asserts its power and the way in which its fragilities can be unmasked. In fact, *Inherent Vice* opens with Doc Sportello's girlfriend, Shasta Fay Hepworth, who asks him to investigate the plot against her new boyfriend, the real estate tycoon Mickey Wolfmann. It soon becomes clear that Wolfmann's disappearance is linked to his latest real estate development called "Arrepentimiento" – a Spanish word that means "sorry about that" – in the desert near Las Vegas where "anybody could go live there for free, didn't matter who you were" (Pynchon 2009, 248). For this reason, his wife, the Department of Justice with the help of the LAPD and Vigilant California, kidnap Mickey in order to stop his philanthropic and anti-capitalist idealism and he is sent to the mental institute Chryskylodon to undergo rehab treatment. Doc realizes that Mickey also invested FBI money – "What 's with this FBI interest in Mickey Wolfmann? Somebody's been playing Monopoly with federal housing money?" (Pynchon 2009, 75) – and that, of course, his disappearance is also connected to the Golden Fang. Mickey's utopic project – a "penance for having once charged money for human shelter" (Pynchon 2009, 249) – represents a break from the capitalist production of scarcity and so is something that must be avoided in order to guarantee the artificial scarcity. In the film adaptation, when Doc visits a sedated Wolfmann at the Chryskylodon, the real-estate tycoon tells the hippie, "I dreamed I gave away all my money...I spent my whole life making people pay for shelter...when all along I didn't realize it should've been for free..." (Anderson 2014). In other words, Mickey's idealist project turned into a mere anti-capitalist nightmare, must be read as a temporary possibility of freedom and for this reason must be suppressed.

Besides artificial scarcity and its consequent mechanism of over-production, *Inherent Vice* also shows the emergence of natural scarcity which, as Fisher says, "haunts capital" (Fisher 2018, 779). Of course, Pynchon's ecological consciousness is present in all of his works, from to *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, and from *The Crying of Lot 49* (where real estate development is central to the ecological discourse) to

Vineland.[19] The scarcity of natural resources, often allegorically presented in the possibility of an imminent apocalypse, is in fact at the center of Californian narratives of the 21st Century – as will become clearer in the analysis of Steve Erickson's fiction – that project fears of a natural catastrophe. In *Inherent Vice*, the myth of the lost continent of Lemuria, submerged beneath the Pacific Ocean as a punishment for its inhabitants' corruption and greed[20], serves both as the utopic site of imagination and the projection of apocalyptic fears, as many scholars have observed (Liner 2016, Cichosz 2017)

As Samuel Thomas suggests, in Pynchon "categories such as metaphysics, magic, dream and myth (which are crucial to any reading of Pynchon) can all be incorporated into an oblique but rigorous mode of political analysis" (Thomas 2007, 9). Here I would insist on the political meaning of Lemuria and the way in which the characters related to the counterculture engage with the myth. In fact, if it is true that the characters, from the perspective of 1970, begin to reflect on the Sixties (on the decade's opportunities and failures), the sunken continent becomes a site in which both the possibilities and the loss of utopian dreams of the counterculture can be transferred. While I agree with Chicosz's Foucauldian reading of Lemuria as a Los Angeles's heterotopia (as both an heterotopia of compensation and subversion) it seems to me that, for Pynchon, at a more practical level, the faith in what is natural (Earth) must necessarily be connected to an anti-capitalist or post-capitalist agenda. It is enough to think of to Doc's friend, Sortilège, and her hopeful outlook;

> "They're destroying the planet," she agreed. "The good news is that like any living creature, Earth has an immune system too, and sooner or later she's going to start rejecting agents of disease like the oil industry. And hopefully before we end up like Atlantis and Lemuria." (Pynchon 2009, 105)

Pynchon connects the countercultural desire of a revolution with an inevitable revolutionary impulse on the part of the ecosystem against its exploitative forces. In other words, from the 21st Century perspective, he is aware of the fact that the issue of

[19] On this subject, see Coffman, Christopher K., "Ecology and Environment", in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 187-194.

[20] In the novel, Vehi – Sortilège's psychic and spiritual teacher – believes that Lemuria and Atlantis "had sunk into the sea because Earth couldn't accept the levels of toxicity they'd reached" (Pynchon 2009, 23)

the ecological crisis (and the current scarcity of natural resources) has never been so urgent and that it should be central to any kind of radical and leftist political agenda. Lemuria, in this perspective, represents not so much the nostalgia for a mythical dream place that existed before California's capitalistic and environmental exploitation, but rather a place that must be remembered in order to keep the utopia safe. However, its return (and the utopia connected with it) would be related more to a postcapitalist desire than to a longing for pre-capitalist conditions. That is why, the Lemuria of *Inherent Vice* can also be read as an allegory of the Sixties countercultural relation to utopia itself; the characters' main concern may or may not be recovering some kind of primordial status, but Pynchon is more preoccupied with remembering the past and recognizing it. For example, in one of the most melancholic passage of the novel, the narrator expresses Doc's feeling about Lemuria;

> He thought about Sortilège's sunken continent, returning, surfacing this way in the heart of L.A., and wondered who'd notice it if it did. People in this town saw only what they'd all agreed to see, they believed what was on the tube or in the morning papers half of them read while they were driving to work on the freeway, and it was all their dream about being wised up, about the truth setting them free. What good would Lemuria do them? Especially when it turned out to be a place they'd been exiled from too long to remember. (Pynchon 2009, 315)

Pynchon is aware of the fact that we cannot retreat into what Nick Land calls a nonexistent pre-capitalist imaginary[21] and that, as Matt Colquhoun writes, "We have as much chance of escaping capitalism as we do of crawling back inside our mothers" (Fisher 2020, 19). For the writer, this exile from Lemuria coincides with the exile from the desire for utopia in a broader sense; the writer is preoccupied with people stuck in the capitalist realism and that "saw only what they'd all agreed to see"; elsewhere in the novel, Doc expresses a similar fear by wondering "how many would have recognized revolution if it had come up and said howdy" (Pynchon 2009, 586).

Moreover, what makes the allegorical use of the myth of Lemuria in the novel even more interesting is the way the characters can have access to it. In fact, Lemuria is available to Doc, Sortilège and Shasta (as we will see in the next paragraph) only

[21] See Nick Land, "Machinic Desire" in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic; Sequences Press, 2011, p. 339.

through a type of psychedelic consciousness which takes the form of dreams, astrology, LSD trips and other kinds of altered consciousness. It is certainly true that, as Cichosz suggests, "Lemuria corresponds to psychological rather than to historical time (Cichosz 2017, 13)"; as Sortilège points out, the possibility of its return is due to a precise condition; "Neptune moving at last out of the Scorpio death-trip, a water sign by the way, and rising into the Sagittarian light of the higher mind" (Pynchon 2009, 102). It is no coincidence that Sortilège is the character to which the ecological discourse is linked; in fact, she stands for another pivotal example of the antagonism inherent to the counterculture that Fisher revisits in the concept of psychedelic consciousness. In this case too, Fisher goes back to Marcuse who, in *Essay on Liberation* (1969), claims that

> The revolution must be at the same time a revolution in perception which will accompany the material and intellectual reconstruction of society, creating the new aesthetic environment. Awareness of the need for such a revolution in perception, for a new sensorium, is perhaps the kernel of truth in the psychedelic search. (Marcuse 1969, 37)

From this passage, it becomes clear that the relevance of Marcuse in *Inherent Vice* has to do with the importance that Pynchon gives to the aesthetic dimension and to popular culture; according to Fisher, "The exorcising of the 'spectre of a world which could be free' was a cultural as well as a narrowly political question. for this spectre, and the possibility of a world beyond toil, was raised most potently in culture — even, or perhaps especially, in culture which didn't necessarily think of itself as politically-orientated" (Fisher 2018, 777); in this sense, one of the most important manifestation of the aesthetic in *Inherent Vice* is represented by the psychedelic experience, one that is not necessarily connected to drugs, but that is concerned with the expansion of consciousness more broadly, as in the case of dreams. As Sortilège tells the hippie detective, "I dream about it, Doc. I wake up so sure sometimes. Spike feels that way, too. Maybe it's all this rain, but we're starting to have the same dreams. We can't find a way to return to Lemuria, so it's returning to us. Rising up out of the ocean" (Pynchon 2009, 270). From this perspective, Paul Thomas Anderson's narrative intuition to choose the astrologist Sortilège as the voiceover narrator in the film adaptation, shifting from the novel's omniscient narrator, is particularly evocative of the necessity to connect the aesthetic and the political in order to re-create the Sixties sensibility.

Moreover, if it is true that "whatever promise Lemuria holds, it is not a promise accessible to sober consciousness or quotidian life" (Cichosz 2017, 13), one must necessarily consider the paradoxical role that drugs play in the countercultural experience and in the novel in particular. In other words, in the eyes of Pynchon, were the psychedelic drugs a vehicle of liberation through consciousness expansion and a temporary withdrawal from the repressive society? Or, on the contrary, were they another means through which neoliberalist policies (for example, the War on Drugs) could incorporate the countercultural impulses? Joanna Freer raises a similar question in relation to the use of psychedelics in *The Crying of Lot 49*, suggesting that Pynchon "probably considered psychedelics potentially helpful in achieving the countercultural aims of internal freedom and, in turn, social change, but saw drawbacks in the unguided use of the drug and in the incommunicability of the experience it offers" (Freer 2014, 77) and, we might add also, the problem of the violence and suicides connected to it. Similarly, in *Inherent Vice*, psychedelics are not only used by Doc in order to access altered consciousness but they are also used *against* him, as in the case of the violent Puck Beaverton, member of the neo-Nazi Aryan Brotherhood, who "had deliberately put him on a bad trip, giving somebody a pretext to sedate him and bring him here." (Pynchon 2009, 523). Moreover, as an example of the way in which neoliberalism incorporated and subdued the liberative potentiality of drugs experimented by the counterculture, one may think of the allegorical and schizophrenic scene in Paul Thomas Anderson's film adaptation, in which the LAPD detective Bigfoot, Doc's nemesis, eats all of Doc's weed after smashing down his beach house front-door.

However, regardless of the neutralization of drugs as a liberatory experience in the following decades and their failures to provide real social changes, the psychedelic experience must be remembered – and I think this is crucial in Pynchon's revisitation of the counterculture – as a moment in which, among youth, an anti-work ethic was taking hold. Fisher reasonably pointed out that what capital feared in the late Sixties and early Seventies was the conjunction of psychedelic consciousness plus class consciousness[22]. "Because, surely", Fisher claims, "key to the counterculture, for all its failings – and it had many – was an anti-work ethic, mainstreaming an anti-work ethic"

[22] As a mainstream example of this conjunction, Fisher often mentions in his works a line taken from the song "I'm Only Sleeping" by The Beatles, in which Lennon sings "Stay in bed…Float upstream…" (Fisher 2020, 58 and Fisher 2018, 784)

(Fisher 2020, 58); in other words, one should not separate the psychedelic (and psychic) consciousness and type of experimentalism from the countercultural consciousness as a whole. By insisting on various forms of consciousness expansion in the novel, Pynchon reminds us that the transformation imagined by the counterculture would have required, as Ellen Willis claimed "a social and *psychic* revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude" (Willis 1992, 158, emphasis mine). But most of all, part of the attention reserved to the psychedelic consciousness in *Inherent Vice* should be read as a renewed valorization of an aesthetic sensibility in the present; from this perspective, one could think of the provocative concept, *acid communism*, developed by Mark Fisher, a concept that "points to something that, at one point, seemed inevitable, but which now appears impossible: the convergence of class consciousness, socialist-feminist consciousness-raising and psychedelic consciousness, the fusion of new social movements with a communist project, an unprecedented aestheticisation of everyday life." (Fisher 2018, 782). Of course, I am far from attributing a kind of communist sympathy to Pynchon and I agree with Joanna Freer's point according to which "he would not sympathize with communism's faith in centralized organization and bureaucracy" (Freer 2014, 189) as well as with the violence with which part of the New Left was associated in the late Sixties[23]; however, it would be hard to deny that a convergence of the different types of antagonism and consciousness that Fisher suggests, is still central to Pynchon's political view.

Moreover, the writer's attention to the creation alternative spaces of resistance such as acid becomes even more clear when, in the novel, characters begin to discuss ARPANET, a first example of internet, and the way in which computers were entering everyday use. Not surprisingly, Doc uses a drug-related similitude while expressing his fear that one day "they gonna make it illegal" by telling Fritz, "Remember how they outlawed acid soon as they found out it was a channel to somethin they didn't want us to see? Why should information be any different?" (Pynchon 2009, 606)

[23] The use of violence, for Pynchon, may be intended as a kind of last resort, an extrema ratio in the fight against oppression (Freer 2014, 59). Also from this perspective, Pynchon's conception of violence, as in the case of the Tariq Khalil episode in the novel and the actual Watts Uprising, can be associated to Marcuse's concept of the violence of resistance, that is basically a violence for the defense of life radically opposed to the institutionalized violence of the established system. See Marcuse 2015, 62)

Pynchon reflects on technological progress as a possibility of entering what Fritz calls "the wave of the future", or a moment in which another future could be projected. Of course, I am not claiming that Pynchon praises technological progress per se, but that the relationship of the characters with technology in his writings can open up space to accelerationist interpretations, as was the case with Benjamin Noys and the CCRU (Cybernetic Culture Research Unit) and their analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Moreover, Fisher, who was a member of the CCRU, reasonably reads a kind of proto-accelerationism as a Marcusean intuition, particularly in relation to Marcuse's view of technology as something that "operates against the repressive utilization of energy in so far as it minimizes the time necessary for the production of the necessities of life" (Marcuse 1998, 93). [24]In *Inherent Vice*, the internet and computerization are not seen as absolute progress; in fact, from the perspective of the 21st century, Pynchon is aware that technological progress has been used by neoliberalism as an additional means of surveillance and repression to be exercised on the population, and ARPANET – used by the U.S. Department of Defense – was a clear example of this process. At the same time, however, Pynchon revisits the moment in which internet and the computerization of everyday life, or the moment when these technologies became mainstream "providing" as Benjamin Noys suggests "one of the last utopian remnants worthy of any commodity fetishism" (Noys 2014, 38). Interestingly enough, Pynchon imagines such a commodity as another possible space of antagonism, insisting on "the occasions for subversion it allowed" (Chamerois 2019, 230); in other words, the internet and computerization become not only a way to improve work – as in the case of Doc's search for information – but, most of all, a site from which to "set up a temporary commune to help each other home through the fog." (Pynchon 2009, 606).

So far I have discussed how *Inherent Vice* is preoccupied with both showing the modalities and the mechanisms of a neoliberal repressive society and the constant research for alternative and possible moments of resistance. Of course, one of these alternatives is provided in many ways by what Joanna Freer – revisiting Victor Turner's

[24] Similarly, Fisher notes this type of accelerationism also in Deleuze and Guattari. In their work – especially the *Anti-Oedipus* – they emphasize the need for alternative spaces of resistance but "they [don't] talk about withdrawing from the world market and instead they talk about accelerating the process" (Fisher 2020, 178) I partially discussed this aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's thought in relation to *Inherent Vice* in another essay. See Di Vilio, Antonio. "Security and Surveillance: Los Angeles Police and Land Abuses in Thomas Pynchon's Inherent Vice", *JamIt!*, 5, 2021, pp. 13-36.

theories – termed "communitas", insisting on Pynchon's anarchist attitude toward egalitarianism and comradeship, a social anarchism which combines "a necessary degree of structure with as much anti- structure, or communitas, as possible, the aim being to organise society in such a way as to prevent the accumulation of power in any one individual or group (Freer 2014, 159). In fact, Pynchon's depiction of counterculture in *Inherent Vice* and the way in which different anti-structure sensibilities are combined – psychedelic consciousness with ecological and a broader political one – is symptomatic of an urge to externalize frustrations, an urge that we have seen materialize in many movements and types of activism in the 21st Century. It is true that, as Michael O'Bryan suggests, "Pynchon's early-career enthusiasm for the New Left stemmed from its tendency toward horizontally networked grassroots movements around varied causes (prominently: campus free speech, antiwar protests, and black liberation) over the top-down organizational hierarchies inherent to Old Left institutions oriented toward state Marxism" (O'Bryan 142). For this reason, while O'Bryan links Pynchon's anarchist sympathy to Jacques Ranciére and David Graeber, I would insist again that Pynchon's enthusiasm for new and various forms of political organization mirrors Marcuse's idea of the New Left; "for Marcuse", as Douglas Kellner claims, "the New Left at its best united spontaneity with organization, combining strong anti-authoritarian and liberatory tendencies with the development of new forms of political struggle and organization." (Kellner 2015, 2)

Moreover, Pynchon's vision of a better future and his discontent with the neoliberalist mirror, as Sean Carswell has noted in his interesting book *Occupy Pynchon,* many aspects of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, often considered by Mark Fisher as a positive example of this externalization and collectivization of the discontent. In fact, *Inherent Vice* came out in the same year in which the students of the University of California occupied campus buildings while protesting against the budget cuts, tuition hikes, and staff cutbacks that had resulted from the Great Recession of 2008; such protests set the ground for the actions and the contents of the Occupy Movement; during Occupy Los Angeles – which took place in 2011, starting from Pershing Square on September 23 and around the City Hall on October 1 – almost 300 protesters were arrested and it became clear that such a model of political

disobedience[25] was a threat because it exposed alternatives and questioned the idea of American democracy, focusing on fundamental democratic concepts such as freedom of assembly and the importance of public spaces.

However, the OWS protest made large use of slogans and it organized mainly through websites, influencing also the movements born 10 years later. As I have said, *Inherent Vice*, in its operation of unforgetting, expresses the constant alert for the legal recognition of Blacks. In this sense, it echoes the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement in terms of what Mark Fisher calls "a corrective". At the same time, as Cedric Johnson claims, "Like the Occupy Wall Street protests before, however, Black Lives Matter is more of a sentiment than a fully formed political force" (Johnson 2022, 13); while the problem of the creation of a political force that Johnson denounces will be discussed in relation to Walter Mosley's *Blood Grove*, I would insist, for now, on the importance of not subduing such a "sentiment" as long as we conceive it as a feeling akin to Marcuse's The Great Refusal, — "the protest against that which is" and "the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom" – something that must be accessible through the instinctual and the emotional. In other words, this sentiment should be intended as an emotional reaction. Of course, as Lauren Langman claims in relation to Marcuse's Great Refusal and the contemporary social movements, "emotional reactions do not lead to social movements per se", but "demands for justice and emotional reactions, often in the form of moral shocks, are responses to crises; anger, anxiety, and indignation become the triggers that impel and propel social movements" (Langman 2017, 374). If I insist on the importance of the emotional and the sentimental as regards the legacy of the Sixties in the contemporary forms of antagonism, it is because precisely this attitude, that we can also read in Mark Fisher's focus on the importance of emotions such as the collective joy of counterculture, that can help us to humanize again what capitalism has dehumanized; it is no coincidence that Marcuse saw "himself as simply an absolute and sentimental romanticist" (Marcuse 2005, 154) and that Pynchon's late novels, as many critics have observed, become more and more sentimental. In *Economy and Society*, Max Weber claimed that

[25] I am referring, more precisely, to the term coined by the political theorist Bernard E. Harcourt, with which he identified the new form of dissent represented by the Occupy Movement which questioned and rejected the legitimacy of the existent political structure and political institutions, in opposition to the civil disobedience that accepts such legitimacy but "resists the moral authority of the resulting laws" (Harcourt 2012, 33)

> Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is "dehumanized," the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation. This is appraised as its special virtue by capitalism (Weber 1968, 973).

From this perspective, the personal and the emotional in *Inherent Vice* become a pivotal and inevitable site of anti-structure from which one can rethink models of political resistance and regain a sense of optimism; in the next paragraph I will delve deeper into these topics, particularly in relation to the idea of love and the sense of togetherness that pervade Pynchon's novel and the way in which the focus on human bonds both mirrors and rejects the tradition of the *hardboiled* genre.

2.3
"(What's so funny about) peace, love and understanding?" Political togetherness and post-postmodern possibilities

> "Una sofferenza d'amore può essere in qualche modo collegata alla lotta di classe? [...] Io cerco di dare a una mia questione personale un ambito più allargato, marxista, per non sentimme solo.
> Ettore Scola, *Dramma della Gelosia*, 1970[26]

The question which Oreste Nardi asks his comrade Bertocchi during a PCI (Italian Communist Party) rally in Ettore Scola's *Dramma della Gelosia* (1970) – as well as evoking the international dimension of the Sixties protests, known as Global '68 – allows me to introduce another connection that is at the core of the countercultural experience, the one between the personal and the political. In the introduction to *Long Time Gone: Sixties America then and Now* (2001), the editor Alexander Bloom writes

[26] "Could the pains of love be, in some way, could it be related to the class struggle? I'm trying to attribute to a personal matter of mine a broader, Marxist, meaning so as not to feel alone." Ettore Scola, *The Pizza Triangle*, 1970.

> Lost in the modern imagery of "sixties" life is the interconnection of the political, the cultural, and the social. Individuals' lives, ideas, and actions wound together—the personal became political, and the cultural and political seemed to be two parts of a whole (Bloom 2001, 8)

In this paragraph, I will focus on how such a connection is well represented through Doc Sportello's relationship with Shasta Fay Hepworth and through the depictions of his *communitas* ties in the city of Los Angeles; if it is true that a sense of togetherness pervades the novel through different communal forms – such as the family – it would be interesting to explore the nature of such an idea of solidarity, a political strategy in which *Inherent Vice* distances itself from the purest forms of *hardboiled* fiction, reflecting both the values and the contradictions of the countercultural experience.

Although Pynchon critics did not pay particular attention to this aspect of the novel, it can be reasonably asserted that *Inherent Vice*, in its genre blending formula, is a love story[27]. Oddly enough, it is Paul Thomas Anderson who best read Pynchon's novel as an investigation of romance and human bonds; in fact, in his 2014 film adaptation, the melancholic tone of the novel is reinforced and much more space is given to Doc Sportello's personal struggle with loss, exemplified not only in the ending scene in which, unlike the novel, Doc and Shasta are driving together down Santa Monica, but also in the daydreaming sequences in which Doc's personal memories of Shasta – such as the Ouija board episode – are evoked to the strains of Neil Young's "Journey Through The Past". In the novel, in fact, the search for a lost love and Doc's attempt to mend his relationship with Shasta, become not only a metaphor for the inevitable collapse of the counterculture – its inherent vice – but also the writer's *hauntological* attempt to recapture a past in which the future still seemed possible despite the realization that it might "fall into the dark and be lost forever" (Pynchon 2009, 514). The narrator shows us this process through the powerful time-related image of the footprints;

> Shasta wandered slowly down to the beach and through the wet sand, her nape in a curve she had learned, from times when back-turning came into it, the charm of. Doc followed the prints of her bare feet already collapsing into rain

[27] Of course, this is not something new for hardboiled fiction. Leonard Cassuto, in his book *Hard-boiled Sentimentality*, argues that "hard-boiled crime fiction and sentimental literature share deep concern with the kinds of community that can be formed in a society shaped by individualism and capitalist modernization" (Cassuto 2009, 3)

> and shadow, as if in a fool's attempt to find his way back into a past that despite them both had gone on into the future it did. (Pynchon 2009, 514)

Not surprisingly, Pynchon uses an expression typical of detective fiction – "followed the prints" – in relation to Shasta in order to connect Doc's detection (his work sphere) to his sentimental sphere. In fact, the centrality of Shasta in Doc's imagination is such that her figure not only brings his investigation on to a more personal level (precisely in Shasta's connection with Mickey Wolfmann) but dominates also his psychedelic consciousness. Previously, I discussed how Lemuria represents the mythical dream place standing for a pure untarnished past radically opposed to California's capitalistic and environmental exploitation. Both in the novel and the film, Lemuria, the sunken continent in the Pacific, also becomes an allegory for Doc and Shasta's past;

> Doc turned over Shasta's postcard now and stared at the picture on the front. It was a photo taken *underwater* of the ruins of some ancient city—broken columns and arches and collapsed retaining walls. The water was supernaturally clear and seemed to emit a vivid blue-green light. Fish, what Doc guessed you'd call tropical, were swimming back and forth. It all seemed familiar. He looked for a photo credit, a copyright date, a place of origin. Blank. He rolled a joint and lit up and considered. This had to be a message from someplace besides a Pacific island whose name he couldn't pronounce. He decided to go back and visit the Ouija-board address, which, being the site of a classic dope misadventure, had remained permanently entered in his memory. (Pynchon 2009, 270, italics mine).

The ancient city in the picture, other than recalling Lemuria, stands for a metaphysical place, a space of the unconscious which "seemed familiar" precisely because it is reachable through a psychedelic consciousness that Doc and Shasta shared. The image of this place drives him to visit a real address discovered after they talk to the Ouija-board with the help of Sortilège; after Doc and Shasta had located "the mystically revealed dope dealers address, which turned out to be an empty lot", they found themselves under a big and unprecedented storm and Doc imagines "all this karmic waterscape connecting together, as the rain went on falling and the land vanished, into a sizable inland sea that would presently become an extension of the Pacific.". In the final scene of the film, Anderson makes an allusive reference to the *underwater*, connecting the allegory of Lemuria to the Shasta's feelings about her relationship with Doc.

SHASTA
Remember that day, the Ouija board
set us off into that big storm?
DOC
One of a couple things I never
forgot -- don't know why.
SHASTA
This feels the same way, tonight.
Just us. Together. Almost like
being *underwater*. The world,
everything gone someplace else. (Anderson 2013, 126)

Despite the fact that the ending of both the novel and the film does not imply Doc's definitive reconnection to Shasta, it is clear that his primary investigation has to do with recovering an idea of togetherness that is, most of all, a way to resist and to confront the "reality", namely the flatland capitalist society represented by developer Mickey Wolfmann. Shasta's affair with the wealthy developer synthesizes Doc's fear with regard to the collapse of the Sixties counterculture. When, at the beginning of the novel, Shasta visits Doc in his Gordita Beach apartment to ask him to investigate the disappearance of Wolfmann, she appears "all in flatland gear, hair a lot shorter than he remembered", in opposition to when "it was always sandals, bottom half of a flower-print bikini, faded Country Joe & the Fish T-shirt". (Pynchon 2009, 1) Immediately after her visit, the narrator informs us of Doc's fear of losing Shasta as he begins to question the nature of her feelings for Mickey. Again, the narrator focuses on Shasta's aesthetic appearance – which clearly becomes an allegorical reference to her position in regards vis-a-vis Doc and the counterculture – when revealing Doc's thoughts; "He ran through things he hadn't asked, like how much she'd come to depend on Wolfmann's guaranteed level of ease and power, and how ready was she to go back to *the bikini and T-shirt lifestyle*, and how free of regrets?". But, most of all, here Doc questions the truthfulness of Shasta's feeling about Mickey, through which Pynchon ironically discusses the concept of "love" during the countercultural era;

> And least askable of all, how passionately did she really feel about old Mickey? Doc knew the likely reply—"I love him," what else? With the unspoken footnote that the word these days was being way too overused. Anybody with any claim to hipness "loved" everybody, not to mention other useful applications, like

> hustling people into sex activities they might not, given the choice, much care to engage in. (Pynchon 2009, 5)

In this connection, In *Thomas Pynchon and the American Counterculture*, Joanna Freer discusses the complexity of the concept of "love" in Pynchon's fiction, insisting on how love is for the author a political ideal, "as idea and practice", a motivating principle and a constant presence, especially in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Freer also focuses on the exploitation of this idea once at the core of the early counterculture and then manipulated under the guise of "free love". In *Inherent Vice*, in fact, Pynchon seems to be skeptical regarding the sexual revolution and its early aesthetical expression – namely the redemptive and subversive power of pornography[28]; the sphere of sexuality has not much to do with pleasure, rather it becomes more narrow, disturbing and weighed down by the political and social situation. While I agree with Richard Moss who claims that "Shasta becomes the vehicle for Wolfmann's own sexual power fantasy, a fantasy that Doc then assumes" (Moss 2018, 115), I would insist on the fact that Doc's attitude has less to do with getting into Shasta's sexual fantasy and more with keeping her from entering Mickey Wolfmann's. The sexuality of both Doc and Shasta coincides with the anxiety proper to the situation of the counterculture in late Sixties and early Seventies; Doc's concern is, once again, about the incorporation of the sexual revolution of the Sixties in the neoliberal sphere of control, whereof Wolfmann represents the projection, especially from Doc's perspective. This can help us to explain the ambiguity and the tension of the violent sex scene in the novel (which also appears more violently in the film) that follows Shasta's return to Doc, now in "in some kind of Mexican shirt, pale purple with some orange embroidery on it, and had her hair wrapped in a towel". In the scene, Shasta tries to taunt Doc by describing her sexual relations with Mickey Wolfmann, telling Doc how "he was just so powerful. Sometimes he could almost make you feel invisible. Fast, brutal, not what you'd call a considerate lover, an animal, actually,". As Moss states, "Shasta knows that Doc finds this erotic, and by extension

[28] I agree with the general critical analysis of this aspect of Pynchon's work, according to which, for Pynchon, both sex and porn have been co-opted by the very powers that Pynchon hoped it would act against; Moss writes, "In the wake of the hippy era and the sexual revolution, a time that informs much of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon appears to have become jaded and to have lost hope in the idea of sex as redemptive" (Moss 2019, 113).

Pynchon writes this scene using pornographic language" (Moss 2018, 114) but it is clear that for Doc it is not an erotic phantasy but an erotic nightmare. His angst derives – and the ensuing fast and violent sex scene between Doc and Shasta makes this point clearer – from the fact that Doc tries to superimpose his figure on Mickey's; although he rejects him and everything he represents, he also experiences a deep sense of powerlessness and loss which he tries to compensate for by performing the sex act in which he can be the protagonist. The key sentence in this passage is pronounced by Shasta; "If my girlfriend had run away to be the bought-and-sold whore of some scumbag developer? I'd just be so angry I don't know what I'd do" (Pynchon 2009, 306. Here, Shasta forces Doc to confront not only what Jennifer Backman calls "Doc's repressed desire to wield the power of the elect" (Backman 2018, 24) but also his weakness and his anxieties as both a hippie and a detective.

This brings me to another reflection about the much debated modifications to the *hardboiled* genre tropes that Pynchon operates in the novel, especially in terms of the representation of the detective masculinity and the femme fatale agency. While it is certainly true that, by the end of the novel, Shasta becomes a *liberated* femme fatale in terms of narrative agency and (ceasing to be a mere symptom of Doc's character as a psychoanalytic analysis of the traditional femme fatale would suggest), I would insist on the fact that Pynchon reiterates some of the tropes "of the standard (blatantly misogynistic) hard-boiled detective/femme fatale relationship to produce a cultural critique that is itself an extension of the kind frequently seen in traditional noir" (Backman 2018, 21); more precisely, Shasta is "the gendered figure through which the hard-boiled male narrates a larger sense of cultural loss and betrayal" (Breu 2005, 71). In fact, as Jennifer Backman suggests in her analysis of *Inherent Vice*, Doc not only shares "the ambivalence evident in the hard-boiled male's contradictory desires simultaneously to possess and repudiate the femme fatale" but he also turns Shasta "into a repository for the anger, sadness, and worry he feels about the demise of the counterculture" (Backman 2018, 22). However, it seems to me that Shasta distances herself from the regular femme fatale not merely because she forces "Doc to confront his subconscious" (Backman 2018, 25), not because Doc respects her agency and free will, but rather because she is fully aware of being a femme fatale ("If my girlfriend had run away to be the bought-and-sold whore of some scumbag developer"); by depicting her as an ironic and self-aware character, the narrator excludes any misogynistic view of

Shasta. Moreover, in her critical attitude towards the question of love and sex in the countercultural era, Shasta deconstructs even more the figure of the femme fatale; in the aforementioned sex scene, while taunting Doc, Shasta makes a crucial reference to another Doc nemesis, Charles Manson;

> "Word's around that you have this thing about Manson chicks?"
>
> "Y—well, 'thing,' guess it depends what you— Are you sure you want to be doing that?"
>
> She had unbuttoned her shirt and now, looking him in the eye, began unhurriedly to stroke her nipples. Mildred glanced up in momentary interest, then, shaking her head slowly side to side, got off the couch and left the room. "Submissive, brainwashed, horny little teeners," Shasta continued, "who do exactly what you want before you even know what that is. You don't even have to say a word out loud, they get it all by ESP. Your kind of chick, Doc, that's the lowdown on you."
>
> "Hey. You the one's been stealin my magazines?" (Pynchon 2009, 276)

Shasta's reference to the Manson chicks problematizes the exploitation of free sex in the late Sixties Los Angeles and how the liberation of sexuality turned into another example of domination and submission as exemplified by the Manson Family practices; nonetheless, the Mansonoid idea of sexuality is itself pornified, as proved by Doc's reference to his magazines and Shasta's ironic comment on the "Manson chicks" recalls a paradigm which Joseph Slade noted in his analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow,* "the more a culture promotes sexual release, through pornography and commercialization or exploitation of sensuality, the more sexuality loses its erotic power to subvert control" (Slade 1983, 190). Similarly to what happens with the figure of Mickey, Shasta forces Doc to superimpose his own figure on that of Charles Manson, the moment she asks Doc "what would Charlie do?". As in the case of Mickey Wolfmann, Doc is again being asked to confront both his own moral values and the breakdown of the values of the hippie movement of which Manson has become a cult leader.

In fact, other than the question of sexuality, in the 1970 Los Angeles society presented in the novel, the paranoid manifestations of the post-Manson events raise real fears about another fundamental concern of the counterculture, namely the very nature of communal living. In the film, for example, a policeman warns Doc that "every gathering of three or more civilians is now defined as a potential cult" (Anderson 2014);

in Pynchon's novel, characters denounce the loss of innocence and how people in Los Angeles felt more vulnerable after the Cielo Drive murders. For example, Hope Harlingen claims,

> "[…] Cruising straightworld neighborhoods picking out strange houses at random, asking to use the bathroom, going in and shooting up.
> Course, now that's impossible to do, Charlie Manson and the gang have fucked that up for everybody. End of a certain kind of innocence, that thing about straightworld people that kept you from hating them totally, that real desire sometimes to help. No more of that, I guess" (Pynchon 2009, 256)

It becomes even more clear that the Manson Family, despite the alternative organization of living in the old Spahn Ranch, undermined the countercultural myth of communal living. The Manson followers, who called themselves a family, show how vulnerable and exploitable was the idea of autonomy imagined by the counterculture in terms of alternative living styles to those of established society. This brings me back again to Marcuse, was also concerned about this aspect; if it is true that the counterculture, in its desire for liberation, aimed to undermine the nuclear family and the patriarchal family, then the Manson Family provided an example of what Marcuse defined as "the Desire as ultimate reality". Marcuse in the *Letters to Chicago Surrealists*, warns against the reappropriation of desire for autonomy by reactionary and right-wing politics, and he takes the Manson Family as an example.

> To celebrate the Desire as ultimate reality (as a pseudo-radical psychology does) is mystification, bad metaphysics, naturalistic, not dialectical materialism. Desire is always only the desire of particular individuals under the particular conditions of their existence and shaped by these conditions. It follows that even the most elemental desire may well be regressive, enslaving, and may thus have to be repressed in the struggle for autonomy. Similarly: madness, spontaneity. (The madness of the "Manson family" is throughout characterized by the destructive features of American society—not by protest against it.) The cult of spontaneity has a long historical record of service to reactionary politics. (Marcuse 2007, 185)

While the issue that Marcuse exposes is also present– as I will discuss later – in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* as a way to dramatize both the social and the aesthetic reality of the late Sixties Los Angeles, in *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon is more interested in the legacy of the ambiguous idea of communal living at the basis

of the counterculture politics; in particular, the countercultural characters in the novel demonstrate that, however far from the traditional *father-mother-child* nuclear family which the Sixties counterculture denounced, the Manson Family revealed far more destructive, enslaving, patriarchal and male-chauvinist features, in Marcusean terms, than the traditional nuclear family. The post-Manson atmosphere which brought to a close of the individual sphere as opposed to the openness to which the counterculture aimed, clashes dramatically with Pynchon's idea of the communal, exemplified by Doc's concern about ties and relationships. From this perspective, it seems to me both coherent and surprising that in *Inherent Vice* Pynchon reveals a sympathy towards the concept of the family. Joanna Freer has suggested that "from *Vineland* onwards, the basic tenor of the writing is sentimental. This change is especially marked in Pynchon's treatment of familial relationships, and as the years pass, it seems that Pynchon comes to view the family as a social ideal and even as a last bastion of *communitas* in self-interested times, as a blighted but resilient unit of resistance" (Freer 2014, 144-145)

Freer's claim is interesting in that, at first glance, it would be difficult to link Pynchon's positive treatment of the family in his late works with the anarchist, socialist anarchist, Marxist or Socialist views usually associated with the author's political sensibility. In fact, while in the Marxist tradition family is seen as an institution based on oppression, authority and conventional morality, and which performs ideological functions for Capitalism, in different eras of leftist politics we have seen shifts in the Left's debate on the family. One may think, for example, of the fathers of anarchism; Pierre-Joseph Proudhon saw the family as the first unit of society, a site for the construction of morality, Errico Malatesta considered the family as the essential element for the progress of humanity[29], and Michael Bakunin fostered the idea of a natural family and the abolition of the legal family. Whereas the New Left was generally opposed to the patriarchal family in which reactionary attitudes, conservatism and sexual repression could prevail, actually the position of the post-Marcusean Left was characterized not only by an opposition to the traditional family but also by an

[29] For example, Malatesta, in "Il Problema dell'amore", published in the american periodical *La Questione Sociale*, wrote "Ma è possibile abolir la famiglia? È desiderabile? Prima di tutto notiamo che, malgrado il regime di oppressione e di menzogna che ha prevalso sempre, e tuttora prevale, nella famiglia, questa è stata, e resta ancora, il più gran fattore di sviluppo umano, poiché essa è il solo luogo dove l'uomo normalmente si sacrifica per l'uomo e fa il bene per il bene, senza desiderare altro compenso che l'amore del coniuge e dei figli." (Malatesta 2012, 122)

Aristotelian return to the concept of family as the first communitarian structure of the individual (oddly enough, Marcuse married three times and had one son). One can reasonably claim that the presence of family as community in Pynchon reflects an unresolved question and the different views in the radical criticism of capitalism about the nuclear family. But it seems to me that Pynchon's positive treatment of the family especially in the later phase of his career – particularly in *Inherent Vice* – reflects another crucial contradiction that has to do with the evolution of capitalism itself. It is Mark Fisher who in *Capitalist Realism,* claims that

> The situation of the family in post-Fordist capitalism is contradictory, in precisely the way that traditional Marxism expected: capitalism requires the family (as an essential means of reproducing and caring for labor power; as a salve for the psychic wounds inflicted by anarchic social-economic conditions), even as it undermines it (denying parents time with children, putting intolerable stress on couples as they become the exclusive source of affective consolation for each other). (Fisher 2009, 33)

From this perspective, at a time in which both the nuclear family and its rejection have been incorporated into the neoliberal modes of production and in which "the family has been drastically altered by modern developments from industrialism to women's participation in the labor force to the hedonism implicit in mass culture" (Willis 1992, 152)[30], it is possible that Pynchon comes to see the family as a site of resistance against "the capitalist vision of "individual self- aggrandizement" (Lasch 1979, xvi) that sees a subversive potential not in the dissolution of the family, but in its reconstruction. After all, is not Doc Sportello's ultimate desire to reconstruct the Harlingen family at the end

[30] In this regard, one of the crucial points about the leftist debate on the family is represented by the feminist movement. Ellen Willis, in *Beginning to See The Light*, quotes Lasch's The Culture of Narcissism as "the latest polemic to suggest that radicals who criticize the family are beating a dead (and presumably mourned) horse". However, Willis insists on the fact that "the family is still the main source of women's oppression and the main focus of feminist politics, which is probably why male leftists are so inclined to premature announcements of its demise." Of course, Ellen Willis was not the only one to criticize Christopher Lasch, especially for his work *Haven in a heartless world: The family besieged* (1977), for which Lasch was no longer considered a radical leftist, but a reactionary conservative. Lasch criticized the feminist movement, especially the second wave, which blamed the family as the origin of women's oppression; in the preface to the book Lasch claimed, "the most important indictment of the present organization of work is that it forces women to choose between their desire for economic self-sufficiency and the needs of her children. Instead of blaming the family for this state of affairs, we should blame the relentless demands of the job market" (Lasch 1979, xvii).

of *Inherent Vice*, as a compensation for his investigation, a way to oppose the capitalist threat to a form of organization? After Coy, ex surf rock saxophone player and heroin addict, agrees to work as a snitch for the government in exchange for undergoing a drug rehabilitation program, Doc sets him free from his double life and he finally manages to bring him back to his family. Most importantly, Coy ceases to be a tool for the flatland powers and can – at least temporarily – escape from a life under surveillance. In the film adaptation, Doc's concern for Amethyst is particularly well expressed[31]; when Sortilège asks Doc "What will nag you in the middle of the night?", Doc answers "little kid blues…saxophone players, whatever he meant to do, Coy, mistakes aside, Nobody deserves to go through life without seeing their daughter" (Anderson 2014). However, Pynchon insists also on the redemptive values inherent in Coy Harlingen's choice to get back to his family and to correct his mistakes, such as "the karmic error of faking his own death", and of course, heroin, which from an attempt to get "the freedom from that endless middle-class cycle of choices that are no choices at all", as Hope Harlingen points out, became a nightmare. In fact, Amethyst breastfeeding – the heroin traveling through Hope's breast milk – becomes another metaphor for the exploitation of the innocence associated with the countercultural Sixties and, likewise, Amethyst's "little kid blues" (Anderson 2014) another expression of the melancholic feeling inherent in the loss of the counterculture. Coy's return, therefore, could be read as an example of the phenomenon described by Christopher Lasch – who in the 1960s was a Marxist influenced by the Frankfurt School which also, according to Lasch, often took contradictory views of the contemporary family – in his debated and often misinterpreted work *Haven in a Heartless World* (1977). In fact, in the introduction, Lasch writes that

> Many radicals in the seventies have rediscovered the importance of family ties, often without even reading *Haven in a Heartless World*. Some of them have come to this position out of a need to put their personal lives in order, to reject drugs and sexual promiscuity, and to establish stability and permanence. Others have discovered the value of the family in the course of their experience as community organizers. Those who embraced this kind of practical activity,

[31] It is evident that the emphasis Paul Thomas Anderson puts on Coy's plot in the film adaptation should be read as an interest in line with the focus on family and family issues present in most of Anderson's filmography. IN this regard, Eric Sandberg suggests that in its adaptation, *Inherent Vice* decisively shifts the "nostalgic register from the social and political towards the personal" (Sandberg 2020, 11)

> after the collapse of the visionary politics of the new left, although at first they continued to condemn the family as a bourgeois institution and a bastion of male chauvinsim, soon found that the working-class family constitutes an important cultural resource in the working-class struggle to survive. (Lasch 1979, XV)

Whether we see Pynchon's treatment of the family as a unit in which a transition from individualism to community can take place, or, as a spontaneous anarchist form or organization in which "both men and women should be prepared to make sacrifices that benefit the well-being of the entire group" (Freer 2014, 146), it is clear that his treatment of personal relationships represents one of the very profound modifications that the writer operates with regards to the hardboiled genre.

In fact, Pynchon's awareness of the codes of the genre and more precisely the atemporal reconfiguration of a genre born out of the Depression context in the cultural and political setting of the late Sixties Los Angeles, is mimetically translated into the anxiety which Doc experiences in the novel in relation to the other characters. When at the beginning of the novel, in the most traditional noir incipit, Shasta enters Doc's apartment in Gordita Beach – and not his office, thus setting the tone on a more personal level – presenting herself as the *femme fatale* and asking Doc to investigate the disappearance of Wolfmann, Doc struggles to pass himself off as a *professional* detective (Me? Trying to be professional here, is all"), and telling Shasta, "You know I have an office now? just like a day job and everything?" (Pynchon 2009, 3). Sportello not only tries to provide himself with a professional credibility in his confrontation with the Los Angeles flatland world – an aspect that I will analyze in the next paragraph in relation to Doc's LAPD nemesis, Bigfoot Bjornsen – but he also struggles not to get involved on the emotional level. Also from this perspective, Doc already knows he is "doomed" (Pynchon 2009, 97); in *Gumshoe America*, Sean McCann describes the heroes of the hard-boiled as "notoriously far from communally minded" (McCann 2000, 45), in opposition to the ideal of community and he focuses on – taking Dashiell Hammett's detective Sam Spade as an example – an attitude aimed at maintaining "the chaste professional autonomy" (McCann 2000, 117) . The hardboiled detective is – in this sense – a Private "I", precisely because, in his being self-sufficient, he refuses a participation in the public and communal sphere, navigating the urban context and, at the same time, refusing to be absorbed by it; in other words, he is an "alienated individual who exists

outside or beyond the socio-economic order of family, friends, work, and home" (Scaggs 2005, 59). It seems to me that, in the case of Doc Sportello, the detective's alienation – even if it never disappears entirely – becomes a communal alienation, as Doc reveals how, in the late Sixties Los Angeles context, the different minoritarian communities with which he interacts struggle to affirm their identities with respect to the flatland society, namely institutionalized power and bureaucratic government. Doc's "I" thus reflects an ontological shift from the private to the communal (and not to the public, which would suggest a unified and less porous interaction with the social).

This does not mean that Pynchon, in his recuperation of the genre, rejects its main strategy; in *Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality*, Jameson wrote that "the form of Chandler's books reflects an initial American separation of people from each other, their need to be linked by some external force (in this case the detective) if they are ever to be fitted together as parts of the same picture puzzle" (Jameson 2016, 11). *Inherent Vice* expresses the same "need", and Doc Sportello is also capable of uncovering the infinite interconnections but the nature of his force is not entirely "external"; in fact, he also struggles to create communal sites of solidarity, albeit opposed to the forces of power and control. The detective figure serves as a link to connect the flatland Elect and the non-flatland Preterite, but his true aim is to foster his own *communitas*. Although the result is a polarized society – reflecting again the polarization of the political sphere in the contemporary U.S. – Pynchon's use of what Eric Sandberg calls the "anti-authoritarian radicalism" (Sandberg 2020, 143) of the hardboiled, is the means by which the creation of communal sites of resistance (or the hope of them) challenges the alienation typical of the Chandlerian hero who, on the contrary, is left with "no one to feel communal with" (McCann 2000, 197). If Chandler's aesthetic theories, as McCann claims, "evoked a nostalgic image of a fraternally unified culture, and they depicted that brotherhood as falling victim to a society robbed of its cultural integrity and falsely joined by the market, mass media, and bureaucratic government" (McCann 2000, 193), Pynchon, from the 21st Century perspective, aims to re-create a vision of social responsibility and solidarity among those who are victims – in both class and racial terms – of the neoliberal power of post-Sixties society. According to this perspective, the detective has to deal with knowledge – for example, Aunt Reet's recognition of the history of land abuse against Los Angeles minorities, his informative dialogue with Tariq Khalil about Watts residents – in order to create a sense of unity. Unlike

Chandler's characters, who never recognize the Black residents of Watts in autonomous terms, as people struggling with their own problems – an attitude exemplified by Marlowe and Malloy's white brotherhood in Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*[32] – Sportello continually negotiates not only space, trying to connect the various microcosms of Los Angeles, but most of all, history itself.

When in one of the most surrealist passages of the novel, Doc consults Thomas Jefferson at the Plastic Nickel on Sepulveda who "spoke to selected dopers, usually quoting from the Declaration of Independence or the Bill of Rights" (Pynchon 2009, 204).

> "So! the Golden Fang not only traffick in Enslavement, they peddle the implements of Liberation as well" (Pynchon 2009, 294).
>
> "Hey... but as a founding father, don't you get freaked out a little with this black apocalypse talk?"
>
> "The tree of Liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants," replied Jefferson. "It is natural Manure."
>
> "Yeah, and what about when the patriots and tyrants turn out to be the same people?" said Doc, "like, we've got this president now ..." (Pynchon 2009, 204)

By referring to the Golden Fang neoliberal dynamics of co-optation, Jefferson, who was once a slave owner, also "invokes one of the founding contradictions of the U.S.—its commitment to solely white liberty and the acceptance of slavery" (Haynes 2013, 13). But is ironic that Pynchon uses Jefferson's sympathy for revolution and translates it in the context of the late Sixties, of the "black apocalypse talk", with which Doc clearly refers to Charles Manson's vision of black power. In fact, the founding father responds with the famous and misinterpreted words written in the letter to William Stephens Smith, on 13th November 1787, while he was in Paris, in which he praised – referring to the armed insurrection known as Shays' Rebellion that had been suppressed in Massachusetts in 1787– the spirit of resistance and rebellion as a means to preserve liberty. In Pynchon's parallelism, Doc not only with his reply "contracts", as Doug

[32] Sean McCann notes that "Marlowe bonds with his white brother Malloy against this alien presence and that his feeling for the ex-con becomes deeper after Malloy kills the bar's black owner" and that "it is only because of their common membership in the white race, and because of their essential foreignness to the "dinge joint" around them, that Marlowe and Malloy can recognize their mutual interests" (McCann 2000, 160)

Haynes suggests "a huge slice of American history", but he also demonstrates a dialectical attention to the process of *historicizing*.

Finally, by recognizing and respecting the different nature of the narratives associated with the multiculturalism of Los Angeles, the detective – and Pynchon – also acknowledges and values the importance of narrative itself. The infinite interconnections which the narrator draws on, do not leave the detective isolated or suspended – as it was the case of Oedipa's feeling of disillusion in the postmodernist *The Crying of Lot 49*; with regard to Pynchon's 1966 anti-detective novel, Stefano Tani claimed that "normally the detective finds out the truth through communication, by talking with suspects and witnesses, but here communication is the center of mystification (Tani 1984, 94). On the contrary, while in *Inherent Vice* the narrative turns out be more and more complicated, at least Doc Sportello tries to re-establish a control over communication, and he remains hopeful with regards to the possibility of connections. This shift in attitude can be reasonably read as a shift from postmodernism to post-postmodernism (Frangipane 2016, Di Vilio 2020), where the paradigm of the anti-detective fiction – as I will discuss in the next paragraph – is again dissembled. However, as Paolo Simonetti suggests, *Inherent Vice*'s has to do less with the search for the truth than with "something that has more to do with moral commitment and social responsibility" (Simonetti 2012, 296). While the strategy of *Inherent Vice* – in its mixture of detective fiction and historical fiction – is still fundamentally epistemological, at the end of the novel we are left with a feeling of uncertainty, symbolically represented by the fog that persists throughout the narrative; but it's because of Pynchon's insistence on the interconnection and the togetherness evidenced in this paragraph – the belief in a "temporary commune to help each other home through the fog" – that Doc's attitude towards the unknown remains hopeful.

2.4
So why going genre? Pynchon's commentary on the aesthetics and politics of noir

In his chapter "The Contemporary Sixties Novel: Post-postmodernism and Historiographic Metafiction" (2020), Mark West argues that in the 1960s novel, U.S. post-postmodern writers show a dual attempt to describe the Sixties without indulging

irony and emotional distance, and to confront the past by recurring to their personal memory and experience. Their fiction thus highlights the contrast between the past and history, where, according to Savvas, "the past is what happened and as such is (largely) irretrievable; history, however, is how we understand that past, and how we constitute it in the present. The past is ontological, where history is epistemological". (Savvas 2011, 2). Since, as I mentioned in the introduction, most of the 21st Century Sixties Los Angeles noir brings together the epistemological nature of the crime novel with the epistemological understanding of history, *Inherent Vice* presents itself as a detective novel that can capture not only history but also *reality*. In fact, the anxiety showed by the post-2000 historical fiction has to do with the revisitation of the genre itself as a way to reach the representation of the real. After the postmodern experience questioned "the possibility of knowing the truth", as Mitchum Huehls claims in "Historical Fiction and the End of History" (2017), "a separate vein of post-2000 historical fiction devotes itself to demonstrating the real, and it sees the speculative possibilities of genre as one tool for building worlds that can capture that reality." (Huehls 2017, 145). When it comes to noir, despite the fact that the historical crime novel eventually liberated the genre from the search for realism – exemplified by the exaggerations of the police procedural – still, as John Scaggs claims, "the historical crime novel is as much characterised by its search for realism as the police procedural, albeit an historical realism that foregrounds the narrative relationship at the heart of most crime fiction: the relationship between the past and the present." (Scaggs 2005, 19). *Inherent Vice*, as I have discussed, maintains a complicated relationship with the representation of history; on the one hand, it aims to revisit the Sixties to uncover the reality and to negotiate an idea of the past (from the political and the cultural perspectives) operating what Linda Hutcheon, quoting Tafuri, identified as an historical assessment of the present contradictions (Hutcheon 1988, 18). On the other hand, while Pynchon still embraces an idea of postmodernist parody as a "value- problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations", Pynchon also shares the same anxieties of the post-boomer writers of the Sixties novel that is reckoning with "the problematizing of history by postmodernism" but with an additional level of self-awareness, as he was a protagonist of both the countercultural and the postmodernist experience.

This helps to explain one of the main strategies in the return to the hardboiled genre; as I discussed in the introduction, noir – in both its history and in the history of its critical and popular reception – participates, especially from its late capitalist phase, in the dynamics of reproduction, endorsing "corporate media's project of containment" (Ravetto 1999, 210) and vindicating the same forms of cultural containment which the genre menaced. Similarly, Los Angeles mimetic association with noir – both the debunking of the myth and the idea of L.A. as a necessary evil – the way in which the city has been attacked by the weapon of what Kriss Ravetto calls the "cultural overdose of cliché", contributed to bringing the cultural discourse to bear on the binary logic of Sunshine and Noir, Black and White, Heaven or Hell, thus feeding what Norman M. Klein identified as Los Angeles "history of forgetting" (Klein 1997). In *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon shows to be aware of this process; of course, this does not mean that Pynchon posits himself outside of the capitalist logic of the cultural industry but that he refuses to consider noir and the critical discourse around it as *doomed to fail*; at the same time, by delving deep into the popular culture of the late Sixties and early Seventies Los Angeles, he also rejects the finitude and the simplification around the critical and artistic representations of the city.

In fact, Pynchon's return to the *hardboiled* genre as a tool to critique the mechanisms of power and oppression and to question the moral values of American democracy, while not rejecting the populist strategy of Chandler or Hammett, demonstrates his belief in the permanent potentiality of the genre. As I discussed, his vision of Los Angeles – in both its past and future – may be personal , but the world he describes still deals with complexity, in terms of urban structures and relationships, where both heroes and anti-heroes play controversial roles. Also from an aesthetic perspective, the insistence on the popular culture – and on hardboiled as a form of popular culture – is itself a strategy; the merging of high and low art, Los Angeles as the city in which to trace back the rise of pop culture and postmodern culture, represents the point of departure for Pynchon's critique from the *inside* of the genre. In other words, Pynchon uses the postmodern not to merely question the postmodern culture and its relationship with the counterculture, but to find in postmodern(ism) a way to move beyond it. By writing a novel on popular culture he uses the potentiality of the genre's popular appeal in order to share his critique. After all, was not, in the eyes of Raymond Chandler, the collapse of the distinction between high culture and popular

entertainment, or the "literature of expression" and the "literature of escape", at the core of the project of the hardboiled literature? In the famous essay *The Simple Art of Murder* as well as in his letters, Chandler claimed that "there is no such thing as serious literature" (Chandler 1981, 159), suggesting that the achievement of the hard-boiled crime story "proved that 'important writing' could be done in popular genres" (McCann 2000, 152). Of course, *Inherent Vice* complicates this issue, since it incorporates the popular dimension of the hardboiled with parody and combines it with a renewed form of metahistorical fiction. But it is clear, also in the various novel extensions in other media – to which I will shortly return – as well as in the linguistic form that it pursues, that *Inherent Vice*'s aesthetic sensibility is grounded in the Sixties pop culture. For this reason, the novel has also been criticized for its popular appeal, and both Pynchon's later detective novels *Bleeding Edge* and *Inherent Vice* have also been labelled as "Pynchon Lite" (Jones 2009, 9), as if, as Sandberg puts it, "Pynchon's novels about popular culture are condemned as popular culture" (Sandberg 2019, 142)

I would suggest that *Inherent Vice* shows an Avant-pop sensibility – in a similar way as that employed by Steve Erickson's *Zeroville* – to the extent that he combines "Pop Art's focus on consumer goods and mass media with the avant-garde's spirit of subversion and emphasis on radical formal innovation." (McCaffery 1995, xvi–xvii). The abundance of pop-cultural products in *Inherent Vice* plays a dual role; on one hand, Pynchon employs these products to describe the Sixties Los Angeles society in a realistic way (again, from the *inside*) as the life and the language of the characters are fully depicted by their relation with consumerism – for example, Froot Loops cereals, cartoons, Television, car culture; on the other hand, he denounces the ubiquity of pop culture consumerism as something that neutralizes and degrades the subversive potentiality of the artistic and cultural product. I'll try to provide a couple of examples; when in the novel the passengers and the guests of the Department of Justice vessel are singing Thunderclap Newman's "Something in the Air", a famous revolutionary anthem of the counterculture, and they are doing it "with every appearance of sincerity", the narrator tells us that "Doc wondered how many would have recognized revolution if it had come up and said howdy" (Pynchon 2009, 356), thus denouncing the transformation of a subversive cultural product into consumerism and conformity. From this perspective, one should also read the ironic presence of Herbert Marcuse among the infinite mentions of pop stars, politicians, musicians and celebrities in *Inherent Vice*. In

fact, Marcuse is mentioned in the novel in relation to Coy Harlingen's preparations to become a snitch for the police department; these preparations "sometimes included reading Herbert Marcuse and Chairman Mao and the comprehension issues that came along with that" (Pynchon 2009, 266). Funnily enough, it is obvious why the police use the reading of Marcuse and Mao in their training of a snitch as an undercover agent.

However, popular culture and its products are also in turn used by the characters as an aesthetic response to society, and, more often than not, to question the relation between the product and its use in terms of ideology. This is the case of the hardboiled genre, whose history is revisited in order to dramatize different moments of 20th Century American society. In his genealogy of noir, the intertextual references inform the detective's own anxiety in confronting his own figure – his condition as a detective in the postmodern era with the detectives who contributed to the rise of the genre. Also in this case, the confrontation becomes a critical tool; Doc in fact shows himself to be nostalgic for the "old-time hard-boiled dick era", as he recognizes a distance, especially in terms of morality, from "all these great old PIs—Phillip Marlowe, Sam Spade, the shamus of shamuses Johnny Staccato, always smarter and more professional than the cops, always end up solvin the crime while the cops are folio win wrong leads and gettin in the way." (Pynchon 2009, 97). On the contrary, the hippie detective Doc Sportello is now fully aware of his postmodern condition, of his being a doomed detective ("Cause PIs are doomed"). This condition is reflected in the rise of a new detective genre, the television cop show series, with its mainly conservative and institutional ethics and which from the late 50s up to the 70s saturated the TV palimpsest. This realistic pop-representation of late 60s media history highlights the constant police presence not only in public life – on the streets – but above all in the private sphere of the citizens. As Doc says, "nowadays all you see anymore is cops, the tube is saturated with fuckin cop shows" (Pynchon 2009, 97). Bigfoot, Doc's LAPD nemesis and "named after his entry method of choice" is a crucial example in this regard. In fact, Bigfoot Bjornsen, who knocks down Doc's door or metaphorically reigns in his house through the TV, "like many L. A. cops" (reminiscent of Vineland's Hector Zuñiga, who becomes a movie producer) "harbored show-business yearnings" (Pynchon 2009, 9) and, (reminding us of Chief Parker or Jack Vincennes in L.A. Confidential), he stars in a television series like *Adam-12* (a spinoff of Jack Webb's *Dragnet*) and also makes his appearance in the advertisement campaign for real estate site Channel View Estates. Bjornsen – whose

Swedish surname has been associated by the critics to the rise of Scandinavian noir in the 21st Century – is a stand-in for the ordinary values of police machoism established with the rise of Chief Parker who was chief of LAPD and contributed to changing its aesthetics up to his death in 1966. But Bigfoot is also a parody of the police self-sufficient masculinity, of the conformity of the Cold War era, and the law and order rhetoric, often employed in order to conceal his latent homosexuality typical of the noir and hardboiled genre (exemplified, for example, by the abundance of scenes in which Bjornsen eats frozen bananas). The mixture of power and corruption that Bjornsen embodies, is also an expression of the shift of the criminal element in detective fiction which now recognizes how crime does not operate outside society or at a local level (like in Chandler, for example), but is now at the core of the institutional and governmental structures; Doc recognizes that crime now functions at a more ontological level, but it is Shasta who reveals to Doc one of his most crucial fears. In a conversation with Doc and Coy, she says

> "Both of you, cops who never wanted to be cops. Rather be surfing or smoking or fucking or anything, "but what you're doing. You guys must've thought you'd be chasing criminals, and instead here you're both working for them." (Pynchon 2009, 313)

That is also why Pynchon's return to the hardboiled – and Doc's nostalgia for the old Private Investigators – is thus aligned with a critique of the protect-and-serve procedural shows, which deprive the noir of its critical and anti-authoritarian element. Eric Sandberg claimed that both *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge* "refer to the hardboiled tradition as a throwback to a more innocent or at least less compromised age" (Sandberg 2020, 142). Although, as James Ellroy and noir know that "America was never innocent" (Ellroy 1995, 3), I agree with the fact that Pynchon's revisitation of hardboiled has to do with recognizing a shift in the way in which the Private Detective can accomplish his epistemological quest; Pynchon is acknowledging the condition of his detective through his opposition to the democratic hero of the hardboiled when, for example, he exposes Doc's discomfort as he tries to access parts of society to which he does not belong (he is always hassled by the police or by some other institutional or flatland power); while the noir hero "demands a paradoxical combination of rights: to be completely detached from society and at the same time to be allowed total access to

every part of it", Doc cannot take this combination for granted. He cannot, like Marlowe, walk "freely through the mean streets of the city's underside in one scene and, in the next, strides with the Same nonchalance across the oriental carpets of the hot-house billionaire General Sternwood" (McCannell, 287); as a more political persona, the hippie detective has to deal with the fact that outside of Gordita Beach all he can find is what Bigfoot calls "a world of inconvenience" (Pynchon 2009, 34). In other words, Pynchon is using hardboiled as a way to investigate the shift from the Democratic hardboiled hero of the New Deal Liberalism and Fordist Capitalism to the postmodern detective who has to face the new forms of ubiquitous and fluid accumulation of power of late capitalism.

From this perspective, also Pynchon's awareness of the reappropriation of the genre in relation to *The Crying of Lot 49* anti-detection is also made clear in the novel; while Pynchon's 1966 novel contributed to changing the hard-boiled tradition by creating a narrative in which the doomed female detective, Oedipa, falls into the labyrinth of non-solution, *Inherent Vice* returns to a more traditional form of *hardboiled* by embracing its epistemological strategy in order to come to terms with the same dilemma which generated Oedipa's struggle and alienation. In fact, what has changed between Oedipa and Doc is the degree of understanding and awareness of their postmodern condition; while Oedipa Maas, a housewife turned detective, is necessarily less conscious and aware, "imprisoned in suburbia and as innocent of the world as she is ignorant" (Coale 2019, 212), Doc is already embroiled in the criminal world he investigates; he knows himself to be a *doomed detective* much as other characters try to figure out what their position in society is. How else could we explain Jade (the Chick Planet Massage Asian employee) description of herself as "a small-diameter pearl of the Orient rolling around on the floor of *late capitalism*"? (Pynchon 2009, emphasis mine) Accordingly, paranoia, one of the postmodernist narrative tools most used by Pynchon in his career, in this context is not something imposed *vertically* by the author, but something that is inherent to the society in which the detective operates (as we will see also in Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly*).

Moreover, the intertextual relation with the history of the genre in *Inherent Vice* serves also as an aesthetic means to produce new meanings (again, in the form of a postmodern parody) in relation to the representation of Los Angeles, both in the novel and the film. *Inherent Vice* echoes the typical hardboiled exploration of Californian

urban capitalism and its agents; one can think of the insurance-plot which reminds us of *Double Indemnity*, or capitalist moguls like Noah Cross in *Chinatown* or urban development in Robert Zemeckis' *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) and most of all, the real estate business dealings in James M. Cain's *Mildred Pierce* (1941) and its film noir adaptation (1945) by Michael Curtiz (also mentioned several times in the novel). Scott McClintock makes the point that Doc Sportello character in Pynchon's novel reverses the gender role reversal enacted by the eponymous Mildred Pierce in Cain's novel, "embodying in his own embrace of a sentimental expression of feeling a certain "feminization" of the hard-boiled detective figure, which may not be unrelated to the feminization of American culture attempted by the hippie counterculture" (McClintock 2014, 101) Also in Paul Thomas Anderson's adaptation, the use of a female voice-over narrator (Sortilège) echoes *Mildred Pierce*'s female narrator, suggesting a similar intention to reverse the hard-boiled style typically associated with the male narrator in film noir.

The attention paid to the use of cars both in the novel and the film, not only refers to the spread of car culture as another form of consumerism in late Sixties and early Seventies Los Angeles, but it points to another important feature of noir. In fact, in hardboiled and film noir, the car usually represents another extension of the detective's urban isolation and alienation ("In certain days, driving into Santa Monica was like having hallucinations") and in *Inherent Vice*, while the automobile dramatizes Los Angeles's complex urban structure, it also allows the characters to move from one place to another in Southern California. However, Doc Sportello proves to be completely caught up in the car culture; in the novel the car becomes personified ("Nobody calls my car a murderer, man") and, much like in *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*, it also allows characters to enjoy and consume pop music. Also in the act of driving and in the description of the locations, the novel and the film both construct a series of intertextual relations with the film history of Los Angeles. Doc's investigation into the Chryskylodon mental institute echoes the unregulated private rehabilitation and detox clinic for wealthy addicts owned by the moneygrubber Dr. Verringer in Raymond Chandler and Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*.

Similarly, in Paul Thomas Anderson's film adaptation, the sequence in which Doc drives into the bulldozed neighborhood of Watts and which shows African American

children running alongside the car clearly recalls the L.A. Rebellion[33] masterpiece *Killer of Sheep* (1978), directed by Charles Burnett. This is interesting not only for the narrative strategy, but also for the sensibility which Anderson shows with regard to the medium. Paul Thomas Anderson's homage to Los Angeles cinematic history – which is coherent with the attention paid to California history in his filmography, like in *There Will Be Blood*, *Magnolia*, *Boogie Nights* and the latest *Licorice Pizza* – is closely related to the preservation and, again, the *unforgetting* of the filmic legacy. Not surprisingly, *Inherent Vice*, like *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*, was shot on Kodak 35mm film, which as well as being a stylistic choice, also mirrors the anxiety felt about the death of cinema in the digital age, an anxiety which Anderson shares with Quentin Tarantino and Steve Erickson and which is at the core of Los Angeles's contemporary representation of the past. In other words, if, as evidenced in this chapter, *Inherent Vice*'s detection has to do with the disappearance and the recovering of memory with regard to Los Angeles and the Sixties, from an aesthetic point of view Anderson shows that detection work is also related to the preservation of Los Angeles film history and to the problem of "the erasure of memory".

After all, in *Inherent Vice*, the relation between film (and also the film industry) and reality is dramatized in the novel itself. In fact, it also deals with the tropes of the Hollywood novel; Doc admits that the reason why he chose to become a private detective *is* a fictional film noir; "That picture made me who I am today. That PI that Burke Stodger played, man, I always wanted to be him." Moreover, the fictional actor, Burke Stodger, mentioned in the novel, is based on the real-life actor John Garfield, whose life was destroyed by being put on the Hollywood Blacklist because of his communist sympathies. In the most traditional trope of the genre, Shasta is an aspiring actress, who "fantasized like everybody else about getting into movies" (Pynchon 2009, 11) and her relation with Hollywood society is also problematized. In particular, the narrator stresses the impact of the Cielo Drive murders on Shasta and other actresses; "You could be the sweetest girl in the business, smart with your money, careful about dope, aware of how far to trust people in this town, which was not at all, you could be nice to

[33] The group of Black filmmakers that have come to be known as the L.A. Rebellion were in film school at the University of California, Los Angeles, between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s. These filmmakers "created a watershed body of work that strives to perform the revolutionary act of humanizing Black people on screen." (Field 2015, 1)

everybody—focus pullers, grips, even writers, people you didn't even have to say hello to—and still be horribly murdered for your trouble" (Pynchon 2009, 308).

Much like in Steve Erickson's *Zeroville*, the role of television in the popularization of film is particularly stressed in the novel, as the characters discuss movies screened on "off-network channels dedicated to long-ago TV movies and unsold pilots". As well as Wiltern and Hermos, two historical Los Angeles theaters, being mentioned in the novel, Pynchon's cinephile sensibility is also displayed in relation to the experience of seeing movies in theatres and Doc is described as a movie-goer. Los Angeles history is thus defined also in this dialectical relation with the history of the film industry; in the novel Pynchon twice mentions the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer downsizing under the ownership of James Aubrey in 1969-1970, by referring to the "MGM studio's historic sell-off" in Culver City. During this period, in fact, a lot of MGM furnishings and memorabilia were sold along with acres of their property for real-estate development[34]. The narrator informs us that Doc found the suit that John Garfield had worn in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) "at the big MGM sell-off not long ago" and that "it turned out to fit Doc perfectly". In this transition from the *reel* to the real, Pynchon addresses the enduring relation between film history, the film industry and the city of Los Angeles.

In this chapter, I have tried to analyze some of the multiple ways in which *Inherent Vice* revisits the historical, political and aesthetic context of the late Sixties from the perspective of the 21st Century. Pynchon's return to the hardboiled genre proves to be a way of coming to terms with the Sixties, the pop culture, the postmodern era and the history of Los Angeles and it reflects a deep engagement with a (personal) re-evaluation of the political legacy of the time. Behind an apparent politics of nostalgia, I explored the author's concern with the possibility and urgency of the narrative after the postmodern experience. Via Marcuse, Jameson and Fisher, I discussed how memory and history play an essential role for Pynchon in the re-evaluation of the Sixties as a "little parenthesis of light" but also as the moment in which capitalism reasserts its power in new ways, incorporating many of the glimpses of the countercultural experience. In the coexistence of these two strategies, it seems to me that *Inherent Vice*

[34] After the financial crisis, studios were reorganized especially in terms of space and "MGM was perhaps the most extreme case. A year after posting losses of $35 million in 1969, Kirk Kerkorian sold the entirety of MGM's sound stages in Culver City to real estate developers for 7.3 million" (Webb 2014, 34)

not only tries to establish a dialectical relation with the present but it also tries to preserve the 60s values of antagonism, utopia and optimism, and project them into the future. In *One-Dimensional Man,* Marcuse wrote about the subversive value of memory in post-War society;

> Remembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory. Remembrance is a mode of dissociation from the given facts, a mode of "mediation" which breaks, for short moments, the omnipresent power of given facts. Memory recalls the terror and the hope that passed. Both come to life again, but whereas in reality, the former recurs in ever new forms, the latter remains hope. " (Marcuse 2006, 101)

The recovering of memory also remains one of the main strategies of Pynchon's novel; by revisiting the social and political milieu of the Sixties, he acknowledges the new ways in which inequality, artificial scarcity, racism and violence can spread under the new phase of capitalism; but he also calls for the persistence of hope "for whatever would happen", whether for "a temporary commune "to help each other home through the fog" or "For the CHP to come by and choose not to hassle him" (Pynchon 2009, 369). In the pervading fog of late capitalism, Pynchon shows us that "even glimmers of alternative political and economic possibilities can have a disproportionately great effect" (Fisher 2009, 81). This is the point that Fisher makes at the end of *Capitalist Realism*, when he writes "the tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again" (Fisher 2009, 81). This is why Pynchon leaves us with Doc driving in the fog and waiting "For the fog to burn away, and for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead." (Pynchon 2009, 369); the detective's chance to see more clearly will depend on the level of his success in chasing down the alternatives.

Chapter Three

"The sleeping giant of white guilt": BLM and the policing crisis in Walter Mosley's *Blood Grove* (2021)

> For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness.
>
> James Baldwin, *Sonny's Blues*

From the publication of his first novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990), the African American writer Walter Mosley significantly contributed to the tradition of the black detective story, influenced by the authors of the hardboiled school, such as Raymond Chandler, Charles Willeford and, most of all, by Chester Himes and his Harlem detective series. Mosley and his beloved character, the WWII veteran private-eye Easy Rawlins, have not only stretched the possibilities in terms of the tropes and forms of the noir genre, but they have offered an important historical representation of black communities and neighborhoods, as is the case with Los Angeles South Central and Watts in the post-WWII period – from the late 40s to the late 60s – in which Easy Rawlins navigates. The author's reappropriation of the noir genre had always put at the center his preoccupation with and understanding of race and racial identity; not only is the writer aware of the importance of the different historical contexts in which the genre proliferated, but he consciously takes advantage of the *backwardness* of noir in order to both continue and shape the critical project of the hardboiled, where racial issues and the black subject matter in the urban context are at the core of the investigation.

It is no wonder, then, that the Easy Rawlins series covers 20 years of American history and 20 years of Mosley's career. In 2021, five years after the publication of *Charchoal Joe* (2016), Mosley published his last Easy Rawlins novel, continuing the

investigation of a crucial decade for American and African American politics. *Blood Grove* revisits the cultural tensions and the contradictions of late 1960s Los Angeles; set in 1969, the novel sees Mosley's private detective as he grapples with the sense of isolation, the ghettoization, the racially exclusive suburbanization which defined Los Angeles in those years (Davis and Wiener 2020) and which forced him to be a more sympathetic, albeit reluctant detective. Easy Rawlins is a different kind of hero from the Chandleresque one; he is no longer the lone wolf whose personal life remains outside and distant from the criminal world he investigates. The mean streets he travels are his own (Fine 1996, 147) and Mosley's particular construction of hard-boiled narrative provides a site from which the hard-boiled hero can build and sustain an idea of African American community and solidarity[35]. As John Scaggs suggests, "Walter Mosley's appropriation of hard-boiled fiction is one based on racial and historical issues, in which Marlowe's xenophobia is inverted and deconstructed to reconstruct the history of black migrant experience in Los Angeles that Chandler's fiction marginalises or omits." (Scaggs, 79)

As I mentioned in the introduction, it is worth considering how, in the nature of Mosley's detective story and more generally in the context of a detective long-series, multiple temporalities are taken into account. Mosley's hard-boiled novels operate as historical fiction on at least two levels. As Daylanne English suggests, "not only are the novels' settings prior to their publication dates, but the hard-boiled detective novel itself constitutes a kind of literary anachronism, a postmodern return to a form born in and of modern disillusionment regarding the liberal democratic state" (English 2009, 362). In other words, we can claim that although Mosley's Easy Rawlins' novels are set in the pre- and post- civil rights era, from the late 40s to late 60s, they are written from the perspective of the 1990s and 21st century and they reflect the anachronism of the genre, of a form born out of Depression, as a cultural complaint "about the poverty of liberal theory" (McCann 2000, 16). In this chapter I will try to argue that while the author's first Los Angeles hardboiled novels reflected Los Angeles society post 1992 Riots[36],

[35] It is precisely Mosley who claimed that "The difference between Easy and other old-time detectives is that he is part of the world. He has a house, a family" (Glaseby 1995, 20)

[36] For example, in *Black Betty* which takes place in 1961 but which was published in 1994, Easy travels from Watts to a Beverly Hills gated community and back, encountering and uncovering police brutality and a great deal of white-on black violence along the way. As English suggests, "Clearly, the novel is commenting simultaneously on the Los Angeles-and the US-both of its setting and its publication date. Mosley's early 1960s Los Angeles, that will soon erupt in the

Walter Mosley's later hardboiled novels reflect much of the post-postmodern neoliberalist society in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and the assassination of George Floyd. As happened with Chester Himes' noir novels, the "traditional preoccupation" of the hard-boiled genre with legal failures and injustices offers Walter Mosley "a perfect means to dramatize the intimate relations between racism and American democracy" (McCann 2000). However, in the case of *Blood Grove*, I try to argue that Mosley's and Easy's ideological and moral positions, by navigating the contradictions of 1969 Los Angeles, both mirror and dramatize the populist sentiment, the rhetoric and the limits of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, especially in relation to the question of policing, racism and class politics.

3.1
Post-Watts Los Angeles and the crisis of policing

In the last Easy Rawlins mystery, *Blood Grove*, Craig Kilian, a veteran traumatized by combat experiences in Vietnam, arrives unannounced one day in 1969 at the L.A. detective agency that employs Easy. The veteran tells Easy that he was involved in a fight with a Black man who was about to attack a white woman in an orange grove. After fatally stabbing the Black man, Craig was hit in the head and lost consciousness and when he woke up, both the man and the woman were gone. Because of his veteran solidarity, and also taking into account eventual post-traumatic stress disorder, Easy decides to help Craig and he agrees to help find out what happened at the campsite. The private eye will soon regret this decision; he gets involved in the criminal underworld of Los Angeles, from murderers to thieves, from offices to sex clubs, only to discover that the Sixties had not brought about the changes he had been expecting.

In fact, in *Blood Grove*, the I-narrator delivers some clear, hardboiled styled statements about 1969 Los Angeles, its socio-political context and Easy's own feelings about the historical moment.

1965 Watts uprising, offers a clear parallel to the Los Angeles of thirty years later, which will erupt in 1992, again as a result of economic and judicial injustice" (English 2006, 777)

> There was what they were calling a cultural revolution going on among the youth of America. They wanted to drop out and end the war, make love for its own sake, and forget the prejudices of the past. These long-haired, dope-smoking, often unemployed wanderers gave me insight into what my country, my country might be (Mosley 2021, 37)

At the beginning of the novel, Easy's tone reveals to be at least hopeful and sympathetic toward the project of the counterculture; the private eye considers the revolution as something that could bring an improvement from many perspectives, i.e. anti-war program, black political consciousness, and free love. But by the end of the novel his tone suggests a shift in terms of his confidence and expectations. Easy argues,

> Nineteen sixty-nine was an interesting year. There was strong anti-war action from the colleges and universities and all kinds of black political insurgence. The sleeping giant of white guilt was awakening and there seemed to be some kind of hope for the future. If you were innocent enough, or ignorant enough, you might have believed that things were improving in such a way that all Americans could expect a fair shake. (2021, 275)

At the very end, the *might* has inevitably become a *might have*; Easy's proud revolutionary impulses, have resulted in disillusionment. His voice seems to be haunted not only by the past but by the loss of a possible future (Fisher 2014, 55). What happened in the interim? After being involved in five deaths and in innumerable examples of racial abuse, Easy comes to understand that the fragmented nature of racial Los Angeles is never fully healed. Despite the fact that 1969 proves to be a temporary site in which the Los Angeles multicultural urban paradigm can emerge – as proved by Easy's significant interracial collaborations reminiscent of the Civil Rights era, such as the one with "Vu Von Lihn, a thirty-seven-year-old refugee from Vietnam" (Mosley 2021, 22) – Mosley's detective always returns to a solitude that is not just symptomatic of the classic hardboiled hero persona – "I had a yen for isolation" (Mosley 2021, 10) – but it becomes a metaphor for the impossibility to finally connect with the ethnic archipelago (McWilliams 1973, ix) and for a reflection on the importance of his Black manhood and his strong ties with his own community. An example of this is provided by the conversation between Easy and Milo Garnett, the hippie uncle of Easy's adoptive daughter, Feather.

> "You think we're the same, you and me?
> "Yeah," he asserted. "Marx and Lenin, Jesus too. They all—"
> "It's my turn, Milo. Let me talk a minute, okay?"
> "Yeah," he said, "sure."
> I got the feeling that people didn't usually get to speak once he started on a tear.
> "I hear what you're sayin', but I see it a little different," I said.
> "You mean you believe in this capitalist bullshit?" There was actual disdain in his words."
> I hear what you're sayin', but I see it a little different", I said
> "The way I see it is that you'n me were both in a shipwreck and we got washed up on opposite shores. [..] We're both stranded but there's one big difference"
> "What's that" Milo Garnett asked.
> "I'm on a desert island, and even though it looks like you are too, really where you washed up is a peninsula…If I set out on my way looking for food and water, company, or just a different view, all I'll do is walk in a circle and end up back where I started – looking at you. But you take the same walk on your side, you will end up back in the bosom of America; hot dog stands, beautiful women, and enough drugs that you'll forget that shipwreck and the time it seemed like we were in the same jam" (Mosley 2021, 53)

Through the figure of Milo, Easy recognizes that the hippie revolution and quest for equity is just a temporary state. The private eye does not feel part of a collectivization of the battles of the counterculture; rather he recognizes his status, his belonging to nothing but his community. But most of all, Easy recognizes a distance between his way of living and the hippies' way. Mosley's ambiguous depiction of hippies is summarized in their hedonism, "free love and getting high, world peace and sharing what you have with those who don't" (Mosley 2021, 102), which challenges the detective's moral and ideological position, especially in regards to Feather's safety.

Also from a professional perspective, the 1969 context offers Easy the possibility of connecting his experience as a WWII veteran to that of someone with a similar experience. The fact that he accepts to help Craig Killian, regardless of the accusation against him of killing a black man, shows Easy's need to feel a sense of community with the other. "Because of that bloody history", Easy admits, "Craig Kilian was as much my brother in blood as any black man in the U.S. I had to help him because I could see his pain in my mirror." (Mosley 2021, 4). Reconstructing Craig's unreliable narration becomes not only the detective's job, but also an allegory for Mosley's effort to describe the intricate relations between different identities in Los Angeles society at the end of the *long decade*. In other words, the Vietnam War context and the 1969 socio-political

atmosphere gives Easy the occasion to coming to terms with different kinds of memory which he tries to bring together in a unified narrative. The late Sixties civil rights and the antiwar atmosphere temporally connect Easy's veteran experience with Craig's one. While Easy was an African American soldier in WWII, Craig is a white man currently serving his country and "who had lost his sanity in the jungles of Vietnam" (Mosley 2021, 14). However, if at the beginning of the novel Easy's sympathy for the shell-shocked vet Craig provides a temporary site for the idea of a unified nation and the elimination of generational barriers, the injustice, the violence and the racism of the world Easy has to face in order to solve the mystery represent an anti-utopian moment in which the African American detective realizes that nothing has really changed.

In fact, Mosley shows how, four years after the Watts riots, South Central is an abandoned neighborhood with a devastated economy;

> The LA riots were almost four years gone but the devastation was still apparent. Burned-out businesses and more pedestrians than populated the streets of the rest of the city. Men and women who were the heirs of slavery trod down the avenue looking as if they were still bearing up under the heavy loads of another man's wealth. (Mosley 2021, 118)

Easy's depiction of African American issues insists on the historical continuance of a position of subordination, a critique which has always involved the fundamental binomial of economy and race. As Keith Hughes suggests, "Mosley places African American experiences at the center of the experience of capitalism felt by all the exploited of the world. Like Du Bois, Mosley sees African Americans as holding a unique vantage point from which to critique the world, a vantage point gained through suffering" (Hughes 2008, 33). As Easy claims at the beginning of the novel, "One thing I never forgot was that I was a black man in America, a country that had built greatness on the bulwarks of slavery and genocide" (Mosley 2021, 11)

No wonder, then, that Easy's Black Los Angeles remains the sum of the black migration experience from east Texas and southwest Louisiana; he admits, "I'm a black man closer to Mississippi midnight than its yellow moon. Also I'm a westerner, a Californian formerly from the South—Louisiana and Texas to be exact" (Mosley 2021, 20). In Mosley's fiction – and *Blood Grove* is no exception – one can always detect the author's attempt to build a genealogy of Black suffering; Mosley's I-narrative can still

be traced back to the blues[37] which "as a form of expression, reminds the reader of the suffering and hardship borne by African-Americans throughout the history of the United States" (Pepper 2000, 125). Crime fiction is, in this sense, employed by Mosley as a way to bring together the different temporalities of such suffering but also to demonstrate the exceptionalism of his hardboiled hero. Being "a black private eye" (Mosley 2021, 23) in Los Angeles, as the femme fatale Montana reminds Easy, is part of the exceptionalism. Mosley offers through the crime narrative a collective trauma, a kind of communal memory that is the experience of the African Americans, by remembering that, as Claudia Rankine writes, "there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black" (Rankine 2015, 146)[38]. Easy knows this all too well; as he claims in *Blood Grove*, "I was already guilty because of the color of my skin. It was even worse because my brethren had committed the crime. My head would be considered for the chopping block no matter how guilty the liberals on the Westside or in Washington felt." (Mosley 2021, 157). Even if the Sixties prove to be a time in which a consciousness of the racial issues expands beyond the African American community ("the sleeping giant of white guilt was awakening" (Mosley 2021, 275), Easy recognizes and highlights the persistence of the difference in regards to his condition. Despite the fervor of the civil rights campaign and the social climate of 1969 Los Angeles, the detective remains quite distant from these events and Mosley's tone is far from being nostalgic. Mosley knows that "The Sixties failed to produce the sort of class-based politics and political organization capable of bringing serious social change. Nostalgia for that era cannot be a guide to the tasks of the present and future." (Johnson 2022, 77)

This difference is dramatized through a critique of the police violence and police abuse which affected the African American residents of Los Angeles and that still affects Easy 20 years after his first case as a detective. By revisiting the post 1965 social and

[37] On this subject, see also Soitos, Stephen. *The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

[38] Critics have associated Mosley's racial discourse with other African American writers, from Ralph Ellison to Toni Morrison. David Witzling suggests that Mosley's narratives, like Morrison, assert "the presentness of an oppressive past in the Black imaginary in order to challenge dominant narratives of US history" and, as in the case of Morrison's *Beloved*, "they represent the African American past and reiterate the trauma of the economics of slavery to direct attention much more thoroughly to the emergence of a post–Civil Rights era subjectivity that echoes and comments on the conservative movement's discourse of colorblind economic opportunity" (Witzling 2014, 96)

political atmosphere, *Blood Grove*, from the perspective of the 21st Century, mirrors the crisis of policing that affected Los Angeles especially from 2005[39] and that led to the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. Mosley's depiction of South Central as a segregated and hyper-surveilled neighborhood, as LAPD's capitalization intensified in the wake of the 1965 Watts Uprising[40], also points to the contemporary reality of Los Angeles, particularly in neighborhoods such as Skid Row, in the Downtown district, where the government policies have been heavily focused on surveillance, apparently in the name of security and social improvement. As George Lipsitz writes in his brilliant essay "Policing Place And Taxing Time On Skid Row",

> Local, state, and federal authorities spend six million dollars every year to pay for the deployment on Skid Row of a special force of fifty police officers and an additional twenty-five narcotics control agents. These expenditures leave less revenue available for safe and affordable lodging, accessible trash cans and restrooms with working sinks and toilets, medical care, and drug treatment and rehabilitation. Moreover, the stop-and-frisk policies and the arrests that accompany them on Skid Row actually promote disrespect for the law: they rely on racial profiling, provoke frequent, random, and indiscriminate confrontations with citizens who have engaged in no criminal activities, and make residents feel like interlopers in their own neighborhoods. Police stops, questionings, and arrests interfere with people's daily routines, while constant disruption and dispersion fragment social ties. (Lipsitz 2016, 81)

An important example of the process described by Lipsitz is provided in the first pages of *Blood Grove*, in which Easy is owed $80,000 by a client, but the money is tied up in court, so the client gives Easy a Rolls-Royce as collateral. As soon as he crosses the boundaries of South Central and he enters the white world of Los Angeles, Easy gets harassed by the LAPD.

---

[39] From 2005, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa with the help of the Los Angeles Police Department launched SCI, the Safer City Initiative, in order to reduce criminality in the Skid Row neighborhood. But, as Lipsitz suggests, "SCI, in reality, has served as a tool favored by elites to enable gentrification, displacement, and the stripping of assets from the poor and communities of color in Skid Row, Los Angeles, the area with the highest rates of homelessness and poverty in the country" (Camp and Heatherton 2016, 13)

[40] In the aftermath of Watts, in fact, "the LAPD started the country's first special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team, which in its first deployment stormed the LA headquarters of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense at 41st and Central in December 1969. The department also purchased more helicopters and other weaponry, cars, and vans, and acquired state-of-the-art upgrades in communications hardware and intelligence-gathering infrastructure" (Gilmore and Gilmore 2016, 118)

> I passed Pico and Olympic, finally crossing Wilshire into Beverly Hills. I had even made it a block or two past that when the flashing red lights appeared in the extra-wide rearview mirror. It was one of thos wake-up calls that happen in the lives of black men and women in America when they mistakenly believe they have crossed over freedom…
> The equation was a matter of simple addition: Rolls-Royce + black man without driver's cap + any day of the century = stop and frisk, question and dominate – and, like the solution of pi, that process had the potential of going on forever. (Mosley 2021, 34)

The car – traditionally the L.A. private eye's natural habitat and the only possible means of transportation in Mosley's Los Angeles's infinite and fragmented urbanism – becomes not just a metaphor of the private eye's loneliness – but also a vehicle for Easy's interaction with the white world's hostility and power. Despite his efforts, he has to return again to his community in order to not feel "anomaly". As Easy claims, "They didn't arrest me so I drove far enough east that only the car was anomaly, not the driver" (Mosley 2021, 74). Nonetheless, the possession of the Rolls Royce reflects the uneasy relationship that Easy has with ownership or what he calls "temporary ownership" (Mosley 2021, 174) and his dedication to following the American dream. It could be affirmed, in fact, that in Mosley's novels the most controversial aspect of his representation of African Americans is the coexistence of two hypotheses regarding their positioning in terms of class in Los Angeles society: in the first we have a hardboiled hero who is, by definition, a member of the working class; in the second, on the contrary, what leaps to the eye is a serious detective who aspires to becoming a member of the American Middle Class. In my opinion, however, it is precisely the coexistence of these hypotheses that allows us to define Mosley's literary project more precisely.

3.2
"Black Capitalism": Easy between the working class and the middle class

In *What Next: A Memoir Toward World Peace* (2003), Mosley places the history of African American discrimination in a class-related dimension, when he refers to African Americans "the first pure slaves of mass production, and therefore we are the first bona fide members of the modern proletariat" (Mosley 2003, 29). Such a view is

certainly apparent in Easy Rawlins' hardboiled persona; while the hero is aware of such status, the reader cannot help noticing how he moves up and down the economic ladder and how such movement is important in the construction of his agency. In fact, critics have long discussed Mosley's position regarding class; Jerrilyn McGregory claims that "quite a few of Mosley's literary critics situate him outside of the American working class, aspiring chiefly to achieve the middle class American dream, which is a gross error". According to McGregory, it is the working class that "holds the most credence for Mosley's historical crime fiction, not the middle class he's being affiliated with" (McGregory 2008, 96) What for McGregory may seem a gross error, is, in my opinion, an inevitable result which opens for an interesting area of discussion with regard to Easy's ideological values. One cannot ignore the fact that Mosley's African American characters, and in particular a character like Easy Rawlins, show a willingness to go beyond the working-class condition and to embrace an idea of social mobility, that is, more often than not, capitalist entrepreneurship and middle class professionalism. But the fact that Easy's position – also in the course of a single novel – continually moves between anti-capitalist and capitalist views, from the insecurity of his investigating work to the security he seeks for his family, from moving out of ghettos to middle-upper class neighborhoods and back, is precisely a symptom, if not a product, of neoliberal rhetoric. As David Wiztling suggests,

> Membership in the professional-managerial class—which is made literal in Easy's receipt of the first private investigator's license issued to a Negro in Los Angeles—has substituted for an actual opportunity to attain the economic security Easy had sought for himself and his community early in the series. As the owner of an official license to do knowledge-based labor who also remains poor, Easy comes to represent both sides of the class divide between the emergent Black bourgeoisie and impoverished urban Black communities. (Witzling 2014, 98)

In *Blood Grove*, one can perceive Easy's insecurity regarding his class status when, in a conversation with his adoptive daughter Feather, he warns her "You know I'm a little nervous you hangin' out with all these wealthy kids from that fancy school'a yours. I mean, I don't want you thinkin' that we're rich just 'cause'a this house." (Mosley 2021, 29). Despite the fact that Easy has gained professional status and property ownership, he is also aware that he can be considered *poor*. But Easy is smart enough to know how

to benefit from this in-between condition; "One of the great things about being a black PI in the late sixties and before", Easy says, "was that most people saw you as being poor. That way they could offer you what sounded like a great deal of money, confident that you'd sell your soul for it" (Mosley 2021, 130).

It is certainly true that Mosley treats racial matters as a result of global capitalism's excesses and that "Easy constitutes an unheralded freedom fighter, without being part of a social movement, who actively deconstructs the capitalist power system" (McGregory 2008, 94); but on the other hand, in *Blood Grove*, and in the latest Easy novels, the reader can perceive the different ways in which the protagonist continually flirts with capitalist model of powers[41] and commodity fetishism. Not only, does he admit, that "Capitalism is a feral beast but I love her when she works for me." (2021, but he also believes in the idea of the American dream;

> But even while I was well aware of the United States' crimes and criminals, still I had to admit that our nation offered bright futures for any woman or man with brains, elbow grease, and more than a little luck . . ." (Mosley 2021, 14)

Rawlins has now come far from his little Watts apartment and he has managed to escape the binomial ghetto/poverty[42]; now he owns a big house in the hills, in the fictional Brighthope Canyon compound owned by his wealthy friend, "Living on the mountaintop, protected by five Sicilian bodyguards,", in a house that is "three tall stories high and cylindrical, painted mission white, and sporadically draped with ivy and passion fruit vines" (Mosley 2021, 27), with a garden of rosebushes on its roof. In

[41] Lee Horsley, in *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction* (2005), considers Easy's homeownership as "draw[ing] him ever more inexorably into the whole white-dominated system of capitalist exchange" (Horsley 2005, 220).

[42] It is precisely Walter Mosley who, in his essay "The Black Dick", claimed, "if you want a good job you have to wear a different shirt, a shirt without its collar frayed, and good shoes, so that your potential employer won't see the desperation in you. You have to use an uncle's address so you won't be identified by neighborhood. And if you bathe and dress right and speak without an accent (without the truth coming out of your mouth)-then maybe you'll get a toehold in another world. ... Hiding poverty and working hard is how most Americans have migrated from the ghetto to suburb" (Mosley 1991, 131). In relation to Mosley's essay, in which "Mosley explicitly connects Rawlins's ambivalent relationship with the white community and his own efforts to get published", the critic James Berger interestingly suggests that Easy Rawlins's ambivalent sense of his attempt to enter the middle class offers an allegory for Mosley's own divided struggle to gain literary recognition (Berger 1997, 291).

Devil in a Blue Dress, Easy admits he wants "own enough land that" he "would pay for itself out of the rent it generated" (Mosley 1990, 52) while in *The White Butterfly* he dreams "about being one of the few black millionaires in America" (Mosley 1992, 162). Neither is his family any alien to the capitalist way of life; his Aunt Jewell Blue is a real estate mogul, his daughter attends a private school. Real estate properties, usually one of the tropes for part of the corruption in the world of the enemy that the Los Angeles private eye faces, represent here not so much Easy's desire to enter the white-American middle class, but rather one of the ways in which neoliberalism professes its color-blindness, promising security and equality regardless of race and class. But what Mosley demonstrates through Easy Rawlins is that the pursuit of ownership, or joining the middle-class as black professionals or owners does not equate with economic security nor a priori respectability for African American individuals. In this case too, revisiting the Sixties entails retracing the origins of this process. In *The Reorder of Things*, Roderick Ferguson traces the strategy of incorporating black minority difference in the neoliberal project back to Richard Nixon's 1968 campaign. Ferguson writes,

> As Nixon's interest in quelling the appeal of communism suggests, his articulation of black capitalism was filled with Cold War imperatives. Indeed, placating black radicals by "offering blacks a substantial 'piece' of the proverbial American 'pie' through government and private-sector programs" (57) was indelibly tied to Cold War strategies. […] Through Nixon, "black capitalism" became a management strategy for affirming minority self-determination and preventing insurgency. Hence, in the presidential campaign of 1968 Nixon would promote strategies that "combined repression with reform." (Ferguson 2012, 56)

Mosley's representation of 'black capitalism' in the Easy Rawlins series complicates the relation between the private eye and class status; in other words, for Mosley, Easy's racial identity does not necessary imply a binary assumption of economics. He is, despite everything, a bourgeois hardboiled hero and Mosley's hardboiled novels are far from being a simple debunking of the myth of the economic dream which Los Angeles incarnates, as it was more generally the case of Los Angeles noir writers from the 30s and 40s. Mosley's depiction of Easy's status also – consciously or unconsciously – dramatizes the fact that while liberalism may have needed racism – and 30s and 40s hardboiled may have mirrored such a need – "neoliberalism doesn't, it needs anti-

racism" (Benn Michaels 2006, 297). That is why, as Ford suggests, "rather than proposing to replace a myth with the truth, Mosley uses Easy's narrative to explore the ways that survival on the street depends on the dialectical coexistence of the two." (Ford 2005, 1077)

In Mosley's ongoing series, Easy Rawlins has learned how to confront the white world, proving to be a link between the surveilled and ghettoized black world and the Whites' privileged spaces; but to this end, Easy always relies on his community and connections, (his mechanic Primo, Mouse, Christmas, Fearless Jones and his witch friend Mama Jo). In *Blood Grove*, in particular, Easy develops a strict sense of belonging to his family. As in the case of Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* and Nina Revoyr's *Southland*, family proves to be the basis for an idea of community, a place from which it is possible to imagine a stability that is opposed to the chaos of the criminal world. As he conducts his various investigative duties in the perilous streets of Los Angeles, he is always-already aware of the fact that he needs to return home safely to care for his children.

His ambivalent and contradictory status as an hero with one foot in the rising black middle class and a stable family home and the other in the dangerous outlaw, racist street life necessary reflect the difficult arduous of reappropriation of the hardboiled genre in the construction of the identity of an African American private eye. The minefields that Easy seems to be constantly negotiating are the ones imposed by the neoliberalist reiteration of "false promises of equal economic opportunity and the transcendence of race" (Witzling 2014, 90). On the one hand, he is still the African American working class hero, fighting against the daily injustice to which his people are subjected and imagining a liberation which starts from economic considerations; on the other, in Mosley's detective series, as I have said, Easy increasingly shows a desire to join the middle class. Such a desire is present in "his attempts, in all the novels, to gain a formal education" (Berger 1997), as emphasized in the book by Easy's attention to his daughter's education but also by his passion as "a reader", of American literature classics ("the thoughts of Euclid and Shakespeare from classes at school and W. E. B. Du Bois and Sojourner Truth from my library and that of Jackson and Jewelle Blue"), from Melville's *Billy Budd* (Mosley 2021, 17) to Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mosley 2021, 113).

At the same time, considering the enduring relation between the segregation and the discrimination in housing[43], it is not surprising that home ownership happens to be one of Easy's major concerns; his desire to own a property where Feather "could feel like she was living a normal life" is symptomatic not of a simple desire for social mobility but of making an avoidable choice in order to feel secure; on the other hand, as Witzling suggests, in Mosley's fiction, "Black characters achieve personal security as well as community preservation only by compromising with the capitalist ideology that has historically subordinated them" (Witzling 2014, 91).

In light of this compromise, the characters' ideology can also seem confusing; not only does it reflect the condition of African Americans and other minorities under neoliberalism, but it also risk to sharing that neoliberalist ideology itself. From this perspective, Mosley's fiction shares similar contradictions with the Black Lives Matter movement, especially with regard to the limits of identity politics, black exceptionalism and the erasure of class diversity.

3.3
Mosley, Neoliberalism and Black Lives Matter

In his analysis of Mosley's Socrates Fortlow collection of stories, *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned*, the crime fiction scholar Andrew Pepper claims that in Mosley's fiction, "individualizing imperatives of neoliberalism are countered by initiatives within black communities emphasising grassroots activism, education, engagement with public institutions". For Pepper, in this sense, Mosley's collection comes closest to articulating – and perhaps therefore foreshadowing – the larger concerns of the Black Lives Matter movement. This is true also for what concerns the Easy Rawlins series; Easy's investigations mirror the kind of "politics without ends" which Pepper associates with the Black Lives Matter movement, "i.e. where politics is characterised as a series of ongoing struggles against state violence and oppression and where there is no obvious end-point and where the struggle constitutes the politics" (Pepper 2019, 17) While I agree with Pepper's general argument, it is also true that, for

[43] It is worth remembering, for example, the California Proposition 14 of 1964 which nullified the Rumford Fair Housing Act, passed in 1963 by the California Legislature in order to end racial discrimination by all the owners who refused to sell or rent their properties to African American and Mexican people.

the same reasons, Mosley's hardboiled often remains confined within the space of the cultural complaint. In this space, Mosley's narrative comes to be a parallel to the fundamental idea of the Black Lives Matter movement which is, in the words of Cedric Johnson, "the latest permutation of racial liberalism" (Johnson 2023, 386) and liberal anti-racism. This is particularly true for two reasons which concern the lack of a real class-based discourse in Mosley's fiction. The first is that Mosley's narrator links the policing issue almost exclusively to the question of racial politics; in a similar way, as his confrontation with Milo demonstrates, Easy traces the question of economics back to the question of race, by putting emphasis on the difference between his status (the desert island) and the hippie's one (the peninsula).

In other words, there is no doubt that Mosley's fiction involves a critique of the state of power (especially in terms of race and class relations), but it is also something that risks working within the logic of the capitalist/neoliberalist state. In this connection, some critics have noted, for example, Bill Clinton's enthusiasm for Mosley's fiction[44], or they have questioned the substance of Mosley's racial politics[45]. But such arguments only confirm that crime fiction, as I've argued in the introduction, is never fully consistent with particular ideology or fixed political position; as Pepper suggests,

> Himes and Mosley, like Ellroy, Sallis, Carter and all the 'best' crime writers, cannot be neatly situated somewhere on the political spectrum. Their writing and characters are manifestations of an at times bewildering mixture of attitudes, ideologies, politics and ambitions; moving between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic positions, their detectives consciously subvert the values of an established or dominant culture while simultaneously policing its not so fluid boundaries (Pepper, 2000, 136)

In the case of *Blood Grove*, while Mosley unmasks the imperatives of neoliberalist policies, his characters consciously or unconsciously operate within this logic. From this perspective, Mosley's fiction also both mirrors and question Black Lives Matter's inherent contradictions. For example, in its provocative book, *The Panthers Can't Save Us Now*, Cedric Johnson denounces the gestural anti-racism performed by corporate

[44] It is worth remembering Clinton's crusade against Black Lives Matter demonstrators during Hillary Clinton's campaign. See Glen Ford, "Bill Clinton Insults Blacks in order to Build Hillary's 'Big Tent' Party", *Black Agenda Report*, April 13, 2016.
[45] Lee Horsley, for example, poses the question: "Is it perhaps a more 'comfortable' read for white readers than it ought to be?" (Horsley 2005, 221)

giants like Walmart and Amazon which widely condemned the killing of George Floyd and other policing excesses and he discusses some of the problems associated with the Black Lives Matter movement in regards to neoliberal politics; Johnson writes

> Black Lives Matter sentiment is essentially a militant expression of racial liberalism. Such expressions are not a threat but rather a bulwark to the neoliberal project that has obliterated the social wage, gutted public sector employment and worker pensions, undermined collective bargaining and union power, and rolled out an expansive carceral apparatus—all developments that have adversely affected black workers and communities. Sure, some activists are calling for defunding police departments and decarceration, but as a popular slogan, "Black Lives Matter" is a cry for full recognition within the established terms of liberal democratic capitalism. And the ruling class agrees (Johnson 2022, 8).

Mosley's fiction not only echoes, as Pepper suggests, the Black Lives Matter project of grassroots activism, and fight for justice and equality from a communitarian perspective; but it also emphasizes the Black individualism that is inseparable from a certain kind of neoliberal politics. Critics have often claimed that Mosley's fiction often moves from an anti-capitalist tradition of African American literature; but this is only partially true. Mosley's hard-boiled novels also reiterate the populist project of the detective within the modern state; even if the detective understands that racism is a also a matter of class[46], and Easy recognizes that capitalism is what contributes to the disparity and the alienation of poor Black Americans, Easy's dream, his idea of the future, his idea of stability are still inextricably linked to the neoliberalist project[47] and to the idea of black middle class, exemplified by Easy's faith in "bright futures for any woman or man with brains, elbow grease, and more than a little luck" (Mosley 2021, 14). Easy's rhetoric of the hardworking black man and his concern with homeownership is what defines his position in-between what was considered the "underclass" and the

[46]For example, Easy claims that "In America everything is about either race or money or some combination of the two […], the famous and powerful believe they have a race and the poor know for a fact that they do" (Mosley 2021, 20).

[47] After all, this contradiction is also present in Mosley's non-fiction work, *Folding the Red into the Black*, where the author offers a personal political theory that unites socialism and capitalism, in which the former works for the latter and viceversa, resulting in a confused, old-fashioned, New Deal-like idea of State capitalism.

"middle class"[48]. Of course, Mosley's African American characters are far from being exclusively working-class; the author shows how complex is the African Americans' participation in the national economy of the Post-War era and, while reiterating an idea of black exceptionalism, he also considers class as a determinant factor. In this regard, in his latest book, *After Black Lives Matter: Policing and Anti-Capitalist Struggle*, Cedric Johnson critiques the disappearance of the class politics discourse in the Black Lives Matter movement;

> The existence of an internal class politics among blacks still remains invisible to those who view the color line as the fundamental problem of the twentieth century – a formative political statement by W.E.B. Du Bois that achieved liberal orthodoxy during the Cold War. Rather than viewing the black condition as exceptional and race as the singular determinant of black life, a closer examination of black experiences of the postwar urban transformation throws into relief different and at times conflicting interests. We see blacks leaving hazardous slum tenements for newly constructed public housing. Well-established black neighborhoods and commercial corridors are bulldozed to clear the ground for highway construction and urban renewal. Blue-collar black couples are met by angry crowds as they attempt to purchase homes in white neighborhoods. Black professionals and artists live in proximity and relative harmony with whites in the more urbane reaches of society. We see black landlords who behave like white landlords, and black developers posing for photos with gilded shovels in hand as they break ground on exclusive subdivisions for black middle-class residents. (Johnson 2023, 124)

By approaching the postwar years through a critical Marxist analysis of race and capitalism, Johnson emphasizes the importance of class, insisting on how black subjects experienced "those social restrictions in classed ways". But at the same time, and Easy Rawlins is a good example of this, Johnson denounces the integration of the working-class – without limiting the discourse to race or particular ethnicity – in a new affluent, consumer, relative middle-class. Not surprisingly, Johnson goes back to Herbert Marcuse's landmark book, *One-Dimensional Man*, to stress the integration of notions of individual desire, freedom and satisfaction with those of capital:

[48] Cedric Johnson defines the "underclass" to the "middle class" of the Post-War Period. According to the Cold War ontology of class, Johnson argues, the "middle class came to be understood as white, suburban, law-abiding, virtuous, affluent, property owning, hardworking, autonomous and Republican" while the "underclass was black and brown, urban, poor, criminal, dysfunctional, dispossessed, lazy, dependent (Johnson 2023, 108).

> As Marcuse argued, the integration of significant portions of the working class into a new nominal property-owning class had the effect of integrating political horizons as well, making the notions of freedom and happiness – momentarily contested by popular, Depression-era left movements – now indistinguishable from those of the ruling class. (Johnson 2023, 119)

In *Blood Grove*, the contradictory position of Easy Rawlins in regard to the relation between class and race becomes more and more evident. Like Black Lives Matter, Walter Mosley's fiction amplifies "this experience of alienation and its many facets – the regular contact with and harassment by police; supervision by courts, welfare bureaucrats, probation officers and predatory enterprises" (Johnson 2023, 209); but at the same time, as Easy gets more and more involved in the capitalist, middle class, bourgeoise way of life, we see how, following Johnson's critique of BLM, "this problem of alienation" in Mosley's fiction, "is too often seen as a racially exclusive experience, a position that too easily disconnects from the broader experience of estrangement under capitalism, albeit in many manifestations" (Johnson 2023, 210). In this sense, from the 21st Century perspective, the revisitation of the Sixties in the Easy Rawlins' detective series reminds us of a fundamental and enduring question, that relates to the lack of a class-based politics in the countercultural era, a lack which continue to haunt our present.

But regardless of the ways in which Mosley's fiction comes to mirror or to unveil the limits of the Black Lives Matter movement and, at the same time, re-projecting its popular sentiment, his historical crime fiction dramatizes the peculiarity and the singularity of the African American experience in the urban context in relation to history, politics and economics. By revealing a continuity of the African American history of subordination and racialization, as well as the history of black resilience from the Sixties Civil Rights Movements to BLM, the *hard-boiled* becomes for Mosley a hauntological way to build such a continuity, precisely because he does not reject a historicization of the past in order to engage critically with the present. Mosley reminds us that his Veteran black private eye is not the only one who is traumatized, but that it is our present that is haunted by the trauma of the past. However populist it may be, Mosley's project remains necessary in the panorama of contemporary American crime fiction; even when his narrative may be perceived as working within established terms

of liberal democratic capitalism, it raises fundamental questions about the contemporary relation between race and power structures.

Chapter Four

Searching for the ghost of Angeles Mesa: Disalienation and Unforgetting in Nina Revoyr's *Southland*

> Those of us who are still here—a million, half a million, a hundred thousand, no one really knows anymore—are already driving around with dead streets and dead alleys inside us, dead buildings and dead windows and dead gutters, dead intersections and dead shops, not the urban corpse of the present but the dead city of the future. We've already seen the end of Los Angeles the way the people of Pompeii watched their end rise in the smoke of Mount Vesuvius years before it actually blew. And walking around with a dead city in you either makes you just as dead or it thrills you, it makes you the most alive you've ever been, surrounded as you are by a landscape that's just choking for the breath of someone or something alive.
>
> Steve Erickson, *Amnesiascope*

Walking in the Crenshaw District, one can find some of the typical landscapes of contemporary Los Angeles in which the post-War futurism meets the newest real estate development: modernist Googie architecture, enormous parking lots, shopping centers and fast food restaurant chains. At 3730 Crenshaw Boulevard, near the intersection with Coliseum St., now people can have coffee at Starbucks and buy pills at the Walgreen, exactly where once was a famous bowling alley, surrounded by coffee shops, known as the Holiday Bowl. Before it was abruptly shut down on May 7, 2000, the Holiday Bowl was a rare, quintessential example of a social space which played a fundamental role in South Los Angeles' history of integration, bringing together Angelenos of all races, classes and ages. Built in 1958 in the black neighborhood of Crenshaw, Bowl's "recruitment of all races" came to symbolize the desegregation of African Americans, while "for Japanese Americans interned by the government during the war, the Bowl's very construction symbolized the rebuilding of shattered lives" (Kurashige 2001). The Bowl was in fact a project of five Japanese American investors and it was enthusiastically promoted by the entire community; during the 1960s and 1970s, "Holiday Bowl was arguably the most recognized hang-out for the Sansei

generation" (Kurashige 2001). But the Holiday Bowl was not only a place of integration and desegregation; in recent Los Angeles history, the Bowl also stood as a site of resistance against historical traumatic events that occurred in the district and, more recently, against its demolition to make way for the economic development of the area. Even during the burning of Los Angeles in the 1992 riot, "numerous patrons, including Rodney G. King, sat outside the alley protecting it from looters telling anyone who approached 'the bowl was our place'" (Reft 2013). When the site was closed during the recession in 2000, the creation of the Coalition to Save Holiday Bowl and grassroots efforts managed to save the building from the demolition promoted by a real estate developer[49]. Responding to a community campaign for preservation and revitalization, the City of L.A. Cultural Heritage Commission "voted to designate Holiday Bowl an historic-cultural monument and to preserve only the building's façade, leaving the bowling alley available for redevelopment." (Kurashige 2001).

The Holiday Bowl, with its history of desegregation, cross-racial integration, and resistance against Los Angeles's history of erasure and forgetting, is one of the psycho-geographic places around which the narrative of Nina Revoyr's 2003 novel, *Southland*, is constructed. The Bowl's cross-racial model of community resonates in the nostalgic and complicated account of Revoyr's revisitation of Los Angeles history: the pre-war and post-war periods, the Watts Uprising and the 1992 L.A. riots serve as the metronome of a narrative which covers 60 years of American history and, most of all, retraces the history of family ties and community relationships which defined the life in the streets of Crenshaw, one of the first racially mixed areas in Los Angeles. In fact, *Southland*, published by the Japanese American writer Nina Revoyr in 2003 – 3 years after the Bowl was closed – tells the story of a young Japanese American woman, Jackie Ishida, who is a Law student at UCLA; after the unexpected death of her grandfather Frank Sakai, who was sent with his family to the internment camp of Manzanar when he was 16, aunt Lois finds a will written by Frank, her father, in 1964, a year before the rebellion exploded in Watts. In the will, it is spelled out that Frank's little corner store, located in Crenshaw district, was supposed to go to a man known as Curtis Martindale. *Southland* exploits some tropes of detective fiction in order to explore the complicated

[49] As Scott Kurashige meticulously reports, "developer Abe Shofet of Axiom Real Estate applied for a demolition permit to make way for a strip-mall. Council member Nate Holden rushed to support demolition, advancing the misguided notion that community residents must choose between preservation and economic development" (Kurashige 2001)

and evolving race relations in the history of Crenshaw, a multiracial Los Angeles neighborhood. The will, hardly a new trope in crime fiction, has always been a fertile ground for the investigation of mystery in the past, from Agatha Christie's *Motive v. Opportunity* (1928) in which a will has been written in invisible ink, to Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) where Oedipa Maas becomes executor of the will of the real estate mogul Pierce Inverarity. However, while in Pynchon's postmodern novel, Oedipa undergoes a profound alienation from her family and friends, Jackie's investigation becomes an opportunity for reconciliation and understanding of her racial identity.

Like Oedipa at the beginning of the novel, Jackie is invested with a role that does not belong to her. She becomes an unwilling, amateur detective as she drives through the streets of Southern and Northern California in order to solve a family mystery. The crime narrative begins when Jackie is asked by her aunt to find out who Curtis Martindale is. In fact, Jackie will find out that four black teenagers were killed in Frank's store in 1965, during the Watts Riots and that their murders were never discovered. Jackie's detection, as will be made clear later, also becomes a way to mend her relationship with her dead grandfather and, more precisely, to discover the history of her family and of the forgotten neighborhood of Angeles Mesa, now part of the Crenshaw district.

In this chapter, I will focus on Nina Revoyr's *Southland* as an example of the Los Angeles detective novel in which the detection has to do with the rehabilitation of the memory of a forgotten past; I will show how *Southland*, by dealing with Japanese American history and the evolution of the Crenshaw district from a racially mixed area to an almost entirely Black neighborhood, engages with the problem of Los Angeles's erasure of memory (Klein 1999); moreover, in contrast to the idea of a communitarian spirit that the novel tries to restore to the reader, I will try to argue that a fantasy of kinship in interracial relations is complicated by the economic and cultural projects of late capitalism through the incorporation of new forms of minority difference and new frames of racial discrimination.

4.1
Angeles Mesa and the erasure of memory

In the prologue to the novel, the reader can immediately perceive the fundamental concern of *Southland*, which takes the form of a complaint and a regret for something that is irreversibly lost. The novel opens with the description of the old neighborhood of Angeles Mesa, a genuine, idyllic, rural place; "It was always country-in-the-city", the narrator says "but with a central place to gather. And since the Mesa had everything – food, bowling, church, and friends; not to mention trees, game, and a backdrop of hills – there was never any reason to leave" (Revoyr 2003, 10). To the nostalgic account of the neighborhood in the past, when it didn't matter if "neighbors spoke a different language, wore a different color skin" (Revoyr 2003, 11), we find superimposed on it a tragic, dark, and haunted *now* in which the neighborhood has become a place "the rest of the city dismisses as ghetto" and from which almost all the former residents have moved out.

In *The History of Forgetting*, Norman Klein, by associating Los Angeles's history of urban erasure and the erasure of memory, deplores the fact that neighborhoods have also become robbed of their history and how Los Angeles's culture is getting progressively flattened by a collective amnesia. Revoyr's *Southland* seems to share a similar anxiety, thus insisting on the inability of the city to save its memories from inevitable oblivion.

> Now, if that lost driver went through certain parts of the neighborhood, he would still see a few of the elderly residents – Japanese and Black – in a place the rest of the city dismisses as ghetto. But their children and grandchildren, and their friends' children, too, have moved elsewhere to build their own lives. *In the city where history is useless and the future reinvented every day*, no one has any need for game you hunted and cooked yourself: for berries stolen off the vine; for neighbors in pairs and threesomes sitting on stoops with cups of coffee, faces lifted to accept the morning sun. No one thinks about the neighborhood, its little corner market. No one, including the children of the people who lived there. (Revoyr 2003, 12, italics mine)

No wonder then, that *Southland* appears as a recollection of specific places, like a cartography of the city's past, as if the narrator meticulously tries to remap its places, and in doing so, comes to terms with the city's urban development.

As in many of the narratives set in Los Angeles, the earthquake becomes a metaphor for the city's self-destruction but also as a possibility for constructing new narratives. In fact, *Southland* takes place a few weeks after two disruptive events; the Northridge earthquake that had destroyed thousands of buildings and killed fifty seven people and two shootings and numerous hold-ups within the Estates. Even though Frank "had been oddly unperturbed by the quake" (Revoyr 2003, 13), it will be the earthquake that metaphorically sets itself as the beginning of the narration after his heart attack[50]. Like the function it serves in Erickson's *Amnesiascope* (1996), the earthquake functions as yet another metaphor of urban erasure, from which the necessity and the possibility of *unforgetting* history is revealed to those who have survived.

At the beginning of the novel, Jackie visits her aunt and uncle who lived in the Tara Estates, that "some clever developer", the narrator says, "had named the complex after Scarlett O'Hara's plantation which had been built right there in Culver City, on the old RKO Studios lot just a mile away" (Revoyr 2003, 9). Here Jackie is told by her aunt about Frank's will and about the "thirty-eight grand in cash" found in his closet; at her aunt's place, Jackie begins to delve more deeply into both her grandfather and Angeles Mesa's past; she will go through the streets of Los Angeles, driving down memory lane, in the company of the African American James Lanier, a director at Crenshaw's Marcus Garvey Community Center, who is the cousin of one of the four victims. The reader will soon discover that Curtis Martindale – to whom the ownership of the store was supposed to pass – was not only Frank's employee at the Mesa corner store, but that he was one of the boys that were killed (frozen) in the store as they tried to protect it during the Watts Riots. We will also learn that Curtis was the son of Frank and the African American Alma Martindale; theirs was an illegal affair kept secret by Frank, since it was against the legal veto on interracial marriage in California that was in force until 1948[51].

Interracial relations are at the core of *Southland*'s narrative texture which, by delving deep into Mesa's rich history of successful integration, aims to recover the spirit

[50] Jackie in fact, wondered "if the heart attack hadn't been some delayed reaction to the trauma of the quake" (Revoyr 2003, 19)

[51] With the case known as Perez v. Sharp, the Supreme Court of California voted against the state's ban on interracial marriage which, for the Court, violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

of community and an idea of cross-racial solidarity that seems to belong to a forgotten past in which Frank was the proud owner of a little corner market store which, in a reduced but similar way to the Holiday Bowl, represented an occasion for interracial harmony and integration.

In fact, Jackie's role as amateur detective not only concerns finding out who killed the four black boys in the little corner store; most of all, the act of piecing the clues together is more like an attempt at filling in the gaps of a narrative that has been removed from her family history, and from the city's history in general. As Revoyr's narrator explains about Jackie's feelings,

> She didn't have the energy to explain about how her family didn't talk. None of them, including her grandfather. No words laced together into a chain of intertwined stories that connected her to anyone's past. More than gaps in the narrative; there was no narrative. Whole years, like the years of World War II, dropped cleanly from their collective history (Revoyr 2003, 64-65)

Not surprisingly, WWII stands as the first turning point in Revoyr's recollection of Japanese American history through the Sakai family; Japanese American internment, as Monica Chiu argues, "interrupted the slow acclimation of white Americans to their Issei acquaintances (first-generation Japanese who emigrated from Japan) and Nisei neighbors (the American-born second generation) by igniting a vicious racism against them" (53). In *Southland*, not only is internment an example of a complication in the Japanese American history of integration, but also a moment in which the Japanese American community was forced to erase its past.

> During the last week of April, 1942, the Japanese of Los Angeles awoke to find that evacuation orders had sprouted, overnight, from trees and poles all over the city. They had a week, the orders said, to prepare for their departure; they were being moved inland, away from the coast. All over L.A. – all over the coast – Issei and Nissei rushed frantically around their homes and neighborhoods. They didn't know if they were coming back, so they had to ger rid of everything. Houses and farms were sold to white men wearing soft felt hats and hard smirks. Furniture, and boxes of books, dishes, plants, clothing were dragged out to front lawns for emergency sales. Some neighborhoods were so choked with beds and tables and clothes that it looked like Japanese America was simply moving outside. Old photographs and letters from Japan, paintings, records, *kimonos* – anything with a whiff of Japanese about it – were burned

> or buried, so no arrogant young soldier who'd just started to shave could come and claim they were in league with the enemy (Revoyr 2003, 107)

As Revoyr says, "it's very common in Japanese American families, for example, for folks not to talk about the internment, there was shame around it, there was silence around it" (Revoyr 2021). From this perspective, Revoyr's noir narrative is to be intended as a utopic space in which silence is eventually broken. This brings me to Marcuse's reflection on the responsibility of art after, "in spite of and against Auschwitz":

> Art is inexorably infested with this guilt. Yet this does not release art from the necessity of recalling again and again that which can survive even Auschwitz and perhaps one day make it impossible. If even this memory were to be silenced, then the "end of art" would indeed have come. Authentic art preserves this memory in · spite of and against Auschwitz; this memory is the ground in which art has always originated this memory and the need to create images of the possible "other." Deception and illusion have been qualities of established reality throughout recorded history. And mystification is a feature not only of *capitalist* society. The work of art on the other hand does not conceal that which is – it reveals. (Marcuse 1978, 56)

Revoyr's fiction is, in this sense, a way to "explode the normal universe of communication and behavior" (Marcuse 1978, 20) where memory can perform a disruptive act against the established reality. In contrast to the tragedy of the evacuation, the narrator also insists on what I previously identified as a cross-racial solidarity that is present in the novel; in fact, in the days before the evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans, the residents of Angeles Mesa proved to be supportive of their neighbors. African American Old Man Larabie, who employs Frank at the corner market, brings "canned fruits and the wool socks his wife had knitted"; Andy Riley a white man from Boston "brought three pairs of long underwear" (Revoyr 2003, 109), while other people also brought coats and cakes.

However, Revoyr's insistence on interracial relations is not only a way to represent Mesa's history of communal solidarity between different racial identities but also a way to explore the shifts in the representation of race as a response to late capitalist policies. In this respect, the revisitation of the Sixties in Los Angeles, and more precisely, of the Watts Uprising, becomes a fertile ground for the historicization of racial difference.

4.2

Incorporation: a history of violence

In a passage of Steve Erickson's 1996 novel, *Amnesiascope*, the I-narrator claims:

> I'm not entirely sure at what point he had been here long enough to finally understand that if there was ever a city where history counts for nothing it's Los Angeles, that in Los Angeles history is one of those things that will obscure your vision more than illuminate it. (Erickson 2013, 23)

This passage would not look out of place in *Southland* when it comes to Jackie's disorientation as she tries to relate to both Los Angeles's present and its history; as she goes on with her investigation, and regardless of the fact that the pieces are coming together, there are several questions that Jackie would not expect to ask herself, and a lot of ways in which she is forced to look inside the complicated history of race. In order to start her investigation, Jackie has to get away from her comfortable middle-class life between Torrance and the UCLA School of Law, a life where she had almost forgotten racial prejudice and even her own heritage, to the point that, as Monica Chiu notes, Jackie's friend Rebecca from the Law School "insinuates that Jackie is no longer Japanese by cataloguing her numerous relationships with white women and accusing her of practicing "reverse missionary" (Chiu 2014, 63). As she navigates Little Tokyo, Jackie realizes that "there was not a white face here, nor a black or a brown, and somehow Jackie felt more conspicuous on this street, as if everyone could sense how out of place she felt" (Revoyr 2003, 133). It is both ironic and illuminating that Jackie's ethnicity becomes more visible to her when she is surrounded by Japanese Americans; by insisting on her separation from her Japanese family both in terms of race and class, Revoyr's narrator raises important questions about the nature of the Asian American space in the American racial landscape.

In *Southland*, in fact, Jackie's position in terms of race and class reflect the contemporary situation of Asian Americans, what Palumbo-Liu defines as an in-between position, part of both minority and majority identity, a condition that, for the critic, is strictly linked to the project of late capitalism (Palumbo-Liu 1999)[52]. As Monica

[52] In *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, Palumbo-Liu argues that "the nature of Asian American social subjectivity now vacillates between whiteness and color. Its visibility is of a particular texture and density; its function is always to trace a racial minority's possibilities for assimilation. The occasional absence of "Asian American" from racial categories in America reflects the

Chiu suggests, "In Revoyr's novel Japanese Americans are proclaimed enemy aliens during World War II but are incrementally accepted afterwards as hard-working minorities on the path toward social acceptance and subsequent (economic and physical) mobility" (Chiu 2014, 50). In a passage of the novel, aunt Lois remembers her grandparents' stories about their lives in Japan and how they became citizens "transformed into Americans at the mass naturalization ceremony at the Hollywood Bowl in '54." (Revoyr 2003, 36). This naturalization was, in fact, part of a larger process in the recruitment of both labor and capital from Asia; especially with the Immigration Act of 1965, as Roderick Ferguson suggests, "material changes in Asian American communities would produce the conditions by which powerful institutions would strategize over the incorporation of Asian and Asian American subjects" (Ferguson 2012, 162).

In *Southland*, the way in which Jackie has renounced or ignored aspects of her Japanese identity in order to feel integrated in the American middle class appears almost natural and predetermined; as she comes more and more in touch with her Japanese roots, she also becomes more aware of her racial hybridity. It is significant that this awareness is directly linked to the crossing of urban borders and neighborhoods; Torrance, the district where Jackie was born, is described as a quiet place with tree-lined streets; Torrance has in fact the second largest concentration of ethnic Japanese people in the U.S. (after Honolulu) and it is highly significant that Japanese integration in the Post-War period and beyond, was strictly related to the rise of multinational capitalism, represented by the presence of headquarters of Japanese automakers (Honda, Toyota), the Mitsuwa supermarkets, computer outlets and other Japanese companies. By contrast with Torrance, the narrator describes Jackie's uncomfortable feelings in regards to Crenshaw's "haphazard, clump of dingy, tan, threatening, buildings" (Revoyr 2003, 15). This conflict of feelings and Jackie's identification with the Torrance model of economics reflect Palumbo-Liu's argument about the impact of economic development on racial identity;

> The transitions in various analytic terms, from monopoly capitalism to late capitalism, from "dual personalities" to "hybrid" subjects, and so on, has merely

undecidability of the term. Asia/America resides in transit, as a point of reference on the horizon that is part of both a "minority" identity and a "majority" identity. This constant transitivity evinces precisely the malleability and resistance of "America" with regard to racial reformation (Palumbo-Liu 1999, 10)

> complicated our notions of Asian/American, rather than resolved them. Yet there is reason to believe that, perhaps more now than ever, the Asian/American predication may be completed, somewhere on the horizon (Palumbo-Liu 1999, 13).

Jackie's racial hybridity is even more highlighted by the encounter with African American history in the Crenshaw district. Frank Sakai's little corner store is the perfect example of this process; as Chiu suggests, the grocery store as "the novel's focal point elevates the importance of economics: the Japanese American ability to relocate away from Crenshaw is a financial impossibility for most African Americans at the time" (Chiu 2014, 23). The store not only stands for a past in which interracial relations were possible, but it is also the site in which – in in the wake of tremendous events – disparity in terms of race become more evident. Frank sells the grocery store in 1965 after the death of his biological son and he relocates with his family to the Gardena neighborhood. His case was not isolated; as Scott Kurashige argues, after the Watts Rebellion, Crenshaw lost half of its Japanese American population, who "followed the trail of jobs and housing leading to many of the suburbs where whites had already fled"; moreover, "a rise in violent crime during the 1970s especially propelled Japanese American out-migration from Crenshaw" (Kurashige 2008, 281).

In this regard, *Southland*'s revisitation of the Watts Rebellion performs at least two functions. On the one hand, the uprising can be regarded as the moment that highlighted, also on the level of perception, the fact that in some areas of Los Angeles African Americans were being ghettoized and segregated even before the Sixties. In fact, "for African Americans from the Jim Crow South", as Kurashige suggests, "moving west was a common strategy of survival and advancement, especially when job opportunities opened up during World War II. What they encountered in Los Angeles, however, were new ideas and technologies to propagate segregation and inequality in their new surroundings" (Kurashige 2008, 8-9). This condition is particularly well expressed by Bruce Martindale, Curtis' father, who complains about the racism experienced in Crenshaw especially in relation to economics;

> "Curtis, every day I got to answer to this skinny young white boy who never once in his life has got his hands dirty. He couldn't run a machine if he had to, yet he pays me less than the white men who got easier jobs. A foreman's no different than a master, far as I'm concerned. Ain't no mistake people call this place Southland." (Revoyr 2003, 232)

Drawing on the master/slave relation and on the very name Southland– with which the Greater Los Angeles Area is usually identified – Bruce associates the racism experienced in Southern California with the memory of the Jim Crow South.

On the other hand, the novel pictures the Watts Uprisings also as the moment in which borders between races become more evident, emphasizing how the perception of African Americans and of their restricted urban and class mobility was radically different from that of the Japanese Americans. In other words, the novel shows how the privilege of urban and class mobility was not guaranteed to the criminalized Black population in South Los Angeles. As Kurashige argues,

> But as Black segregation, poverty, and militancy intensified during the postwar era, Japanese Americans were invoked as a "model minority" whose achievement surpassed even that of whites. Tacit acceptance of Japanese Americans allowed whites to act in a manner consistent with modernist narratives of integration, to see themselves as tolerant people with rational rather than prejudiced reasons for opposing Black political demands. If Japanese Americans could attain middle-class status after being interned - so went the "model minority" argument - then Blacks had only themselves to blame if they did not follow suit. (Kurashige 2008, 11)

The gradual acceptance of Japanese Americans as a hard-working minority together with the cliché of good, productive citizen is opposed to the precarious condition of the poor and criminalized African Americans[53]. From this perspective, the choice to bring the time of the narration from 1965 to 1992, the year of the L.A. riots that occurred as a response to Rodney King's death, is particularly relevant. The Mesa grocery store is in fact sold by Frank after his son was killed in the 1965 events; the store was then owned by a Korean couple, but the building caught fire during the 1992 riots. As Nina Revoyr suggests, "the uprisings fit into the history of Los Angeles by reminding us — dramatically, and at great cost — that the hopefulness and opportunity for which L.A. is rightly known are not necessarily available to everyone" (Cha 2021, 197). The little corner store market becomes also a spatial metaphor for the lack of progression in terms

[53] Monica Chiu also notes that this difference is presented by the narrator in the comparison of Frank Sakai with Bruce Martindale as "an instance of prevailing attitudes about race"; "Bruce is described as a 'big, hulking man' who is 'loud and tornado-like' when angry, which seems fairly often (126). By contrast, when seventeen-year-old Alma first meets Frank, she admires how he walks with 'confidence and quickness'" (Chiu 2014, 59).

of economic opportunities in the Black neighborhood of Crenshaw; from an example of Post-War interracial community life, the Mesa store becomes a stand-in for the racialization and degeneration of urban spaces under late capitalism. As in present time Crenshaw has become in the general perception synonymous with a Black neighborhood, its history also reflects one of the neoliberal tendencies to shift the racial discourse to the "urban problem", a "colorblind alternative referring to what in the early 1960s was called the Negro problem". As Daniel Robert McClure argues,

> Rather than explicit language, such as the "Negro problem," the path was cleared for new language, such as the "urban problem." The ability of language to disavow the knowledge of the crimes and injustices of the past helped make the American dream of the post–World War II era appear in line with the historical projection of American exceptionalism (McClure 2021, 47).

Southland describes the difficult relation between space and race and the history of suffering that characterizes the lives of both the minorities in Los Angeles. At the same time, while not romanticizing the past, it also evidences nostalgic moments in which a communal and interracial way of life was not only possible but desirable in the streets of South Los Angeles. As a reaction to a loss, Revoyr's noir shows an attempt to *unforget* the past; in her novel, the restauration of memory in present time appears as a way to challenge the ways in which late capitalist policies have configured the relation between individuals and space, or, in other words, how neoliberalism has projected into the urban space new forms of racial domination. In fact, the process of reinvigoration of memory can also be read as a process of what Fredric Jameson calls "disalienation":

> Disalienation in the traditional city, then, involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories. (Jameson 1991, 51)

Alienation and helplessness are what Jackie experiences when she sees the store for the first time in 1994. The place is empty and abandoned, haunted by the ghosts of the people who tried to save it from its dark destiny. We understand that Jackie's detection also serves as a means to revive places like this; Frank's Mesa Corner Market, the Marcus Garvey Community Center, The Holiday Bowl, Leimert Park, the barbecue

church, are, in the novel, all examples of an enduring history of community life that *Southland* seems to promote against the spatialization, the dispersion and the consequent alienation of late capitalist society.

Part Two

Shades of Noir: Unlikely detectives, Unlikely (re)solutions

Chapter Five

Liberal memory and the violence of forgetfulness: Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019-2021)

In 2019, when Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* was released, it was 50 years since the fatal night of August when members of the Manson Family drove to 10050 Cielo Drive in the Benedict Canyon and slaughtered a pregnant Sharon Tate, her companions Jay Sebring, Abigail Folger, and Wojciech Frykowski, along with the young Steven Parent. A myth, a controversial murder and a trigger-point for conspiracy narratives, such crucial events of the political and social atmosphere of late Sixties Los Angeles became the basis for Tarantino's return to Los Angeles noir. In Tarantino's film, followed by a novelization published in 2021 and written by the director himself, Los Angeles becomes again a space between memory and imagination in which an anxiety about the preservation of both its cinematic and real life history is staged by means of different narrative strategies. In this chapter I will try to explore the multiple sets of relationship between the author, the history of Los Angeles and the history of the medium and I will focus on how, for Tarantino, cinema becomes again a utopian space in which history and representation can be continually renegotiated – for example, with the alternate ending of the film and the novelization itself. At the same time, *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* deals with the director's fantasy which embraces the well-established neon-flashing and sunshine/noir of Sixties Los Angeles "by acknowledging its commodification of everyday life" (Shiel 2012, 282); but starting from a reflection on the late Sixties as the rise of postmodern culture, the director/writer also shows a willingness to deal dialectically with Los Angeles as it was in the Twenties of this century. From this perspective, the Cielo Drive events and their representations can serve as a good starting point.

Before Tarantino, many writers, directors and journalists revisited these events from various angles; whether it be as *true crime* books, documentaries or feature films, the Manson murders were and continue to be a subject for narration. Starting from the years that followed the trial (which began on July 24, 1970), when Vincent Bugliosi,

who had served as the prosecutor for the Manson trial, published his famous *Helter Skelter: The True Story of The Manson Murders* (1974), Ed Sanders wrote *The Family: The Story of Charles Manon's Dune Buggy Attack Battalion* and Joan Didion worked on her autobiographical essay *The White Album*, subsequently published in 1979.

In fact, a revisitation of the story of Charles Manson and his cult have basically dominated the representation of Sixties Los Angeles over the last 20 years; just consider movies and tv series such as *The Manson Family* (2004), *Helter Skelter* (2004), based on the Bugliosi-Gentry book, *Manson, My Name is Evil* (2010), *House of Manson* (2014), *Manson Family Vacation* (2015), the two seasons of *Aquarius* (2015-2016), *Manson's Lost Girls* (2016), *Wolves at the Door* (2017), *The Haunting of Sharon Tate* (2019) and *Charlie Says* (2019); or documentaries, like *The Six Degrees of Helter Skelter* (2009), the animated short film *Old Man* (2012), or *Life After Manson* (2014); not to mention the plethora of non-fiction books about the Manson murders and novels which feature the Manson Family or Family-like cults, such as John Kaye's *The Dead Circus* (2002) and Emma Cline's *The Girls* (2016). Not surprisingly, Quentin Tarantino's own research on the Manson Family and the terrible events of Cielo Drive – that helped to shape his 2019 film script and 2021 novelization – is based not so much on Vincent Bugliosi's 1974 cult book but rather on the journalistic work published by Tom O' Neill in the same year that *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* was released. O'Neill's *Charles Manson, the CIA, and the Secret History of the Sixties* was the result of the work carried out by the journalist over 30 years and Tarantino was allowed to read the draft while working on his last movie (Rogan, 2021). It was on O'Neill's book *Chaos*, a highly documented work which pointed out discrepancies in Bugliosi's book[54], that Tarantino built the background for his own version of the *facts* and allowed him a breathing space between his film and his novel. But where does such a narrative interest come from? How can the persistence of this attention towards the Manson Family and the Manson murders be explained?

One could reasonably assert that the interest in this particular subject is part of a larger trend in crime narratives in general, especially when it comes to *true crime*, a sub-genre that in any case – as we have seen with Pynchon and his account in *Inherent*

[54] For O'Neill, Vincent Bugliosi's *Helter Skelter* was not a precise account of the events; in *Chaos*, he writes that "There are big holes in *Helter Skelter*: contradictions, omissions, discrepancies with police reports." (O'Neill 2021, 10). O'Neill debunks Bugliosi's theory according to which Manson meant to start a race war.

Vice of Sixties television – is deeply rooted in the media history of American noir. It is also Tarantino who stresses the impact of television on the young generation of the Sixties, which he sums up in the words spoken by one of the hippie girls of the Family, while sitting in the back of the car before the Cielo Drive murders;

> 'We grew up watching TV. Every show on TV that wasn't I Love Lucy was about murder,' she says, 'My idea is, we kill the people who taught us to kill. This is Hollywood. They live in pig-shit fucking luxury. I say fuck 'em.' (Tarantino 2019)

This cynical, but somehow naïve, affirmation not only shows Tarantino's willingness to meditate on the aesthetics of his art and the models who helped to form it – an aspect to which I will return later in the chapter – but also the abundance of murder-related television products which defined the Baby boomers' culture and that continue to persist in 21st century television. In particular, serial killer profiles and true crime shows have proliferated in the American media, from the first cable-tv police procedural to 2000s pay-per-view platforms, and while this is part of a general media interest in violence (including cinema and TV series), it is also a source of fascination for audiences from a psychoanalytic point of view[55]; it is enough to think of *Zodiac*, *Ted Bundy*, *Mindhunter* (one of the episodes of which is, again, about Charles Manson), *The Jeffrey Dahmer Tapes* and other true crime shows that can easily be found on Netflix or other streaming platforms.

However, media depictions of psychopaths are comparatively few in number compared to all the media coverage relating to the figure of Charles Manson and his cult. What's so special about Manson then? Why is Tarantino still interested in such an overrepresented figure? Answering these questions is the first step to analyzing the strategies behind Tarantino's 2019 film *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*[56] and his

[55] In this regard, it is worth mentioning Philip Jenkins' analysis of psycho killers and what he calls "predators" in relation to the new policies of United States after the end of the Sixties; "obvious parallels exist between the new constructions of America's foreign and domestic problems in the late 1970s, between predatory states overseas and predatory individuals at home […] At home and abroad also, the rhetoric of evil condemned the naïveté and weakness of existing institutions and ideologies, especially of those liberal views stemming from the moral relativism of the 1960s." (2006, 151)

[56] I will refer to the film as "*Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*" and to the novelization as "*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*"; the book title, in fact, omits the ellipsis.

2021 novelization of it and to investigating his ideological and aesthetic position in relation to the end of the Sixties.

5.1
Rewriting the End

As Tom O' Neill also suggests in *Chaos* (2021, 30), it is almost impossible to talk about Manson and the Cielo Drive murders of August 1969 without quoting Joan Didion's famous remark from *The White Album*:

> Many people I know in Los Angeles believe that the Sixties ended abruptly on August 9, 1969, ended at the exact moment when word of the murders on Cielo Drive traveled like bushfire through the community, and in a sense this is true. The tension broke that day. The paranoia was fulfilled. (Didion 2019, 776)

Although, from my point of view, the ethos of the Sixties and everything that the decade symbolically represented for liberal America didn't end quite so abruptly as Didion suggests[57], there is no doubt that the Sixties reached an emotional peak at 10050 Cielo Drive. Not surprisingly, the climax is almost mimetically translated in the narrative structure of the film *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* of which the night of August 8-9 happens to be the epilogue, albeit through the device of the alternate history. *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* tells the story of an old-fashioned Hollywood actor, Rick Dalton, depicted as the star of the fictional TV Western show *Bounty Law*, who struggles with his fading popularity during the rise of the New Hollywood, a transformation symbolized by Roman Polanski and Sharon Tate who have moved next door to Dalton right in the Benedict Canyon and with whom the older actor tries to connect in order to save his career. At the end of the film, in the rewritten history presented by the director, Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth prevent the murder of a pregnant Sharon Tate and her companions by killing the members of the Family as they irrupted into the wrong house on Cielo Drive. As many scholars have suggested, Tarantino's writing has always entertained, with his heterogeneous methods and strategies, a close

[57] In this connection, I agree with the point that James Riley makes in his solid book *The Bad Trip: Dark Omens, New Worlds and the End of The Sixties* (2019), suggesting that the anxieties and tensions – generally associated with the end of the decade – permeated the Sixties as a whole.

relationship with history, especially American and Wild West history. Often, this relationship translates into a rewriting and reconfiguration of crucial events: in *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), for example, it is the end of the Second World War that is rewritten; in *Django Unchained* (2012), Tarantino revisits the condition of slavery before the Civil War; in *The Hateful Eight*, the social and political ambiguity of the Reconstruction reverberates (Botta 2021, 235). Although historical film is not a label commonly attributed to Tarantino's movies, undoubtedly the role that history plays in these narratives is such as to modify their constructions and strategies. As Federico Pagello suggests, from *Inglourious Basterds* on, "all of his films would be set in precise historical contexts, explicitly engaging with crucial sociopolitical issues or tragic, historical events" (Pagello 2020, 184).

When it comes to *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*, I do not refer so much to the great historical events but rather to the history and American popular culture of the late Sixties – which of course includes Manson, New Hollywood and television. In other words, the importance that Tarantino gives to the figure of Charles Manson and his cult has to do with recognizing in this figure a *small part* to narrate the whole; Manson is actually part of the much larger narrative that is (the end of) the Sixties[58]. As lawyers, writers and journalists, from Bugliosi to O'Neill, have convincingly demonstrated, Manson was directly or indirectly connected to the cultural cornerstones and major events of the decade; the hippie culture, the counterculture, the music industry (through Terry Melcher, Dennis Wilson and the Beach Boys), the film industry, the CIA, the LSD mind-control experiments, conspiracy theories, and race theories were somehow synthesized in one figure. I am not interested here in delving deeper into these issue which can, however, partially explain the centrality of Manson in Tarantino's period movie. In my analysis of *Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood,* what seems to be relevant in the recognition of Manson's story is precisely his connection to the 1969 Los Angeles society in terms of ideological values; I refer to the representation of counterculture and the polarized yet ambiguous values inherent in Tarantino's reappraisal of the New Hollywood. Although the writer/director's approach to history is here still essentially

[58] It is also true that Manson became a cult figure when it comes to noir narratives. As Sue Short suggests in her insightful work on neo-noir, "directors seem largely drawn to noir because it is provocative, with Tarantino appearing intent on courting notoriety in choosing the Manson killings for his return to noir" (Sue 2012, 147)

postmodern and "metahistorical" (Hutcheon 1989) –in deploying elements of metafiction, in the reappropriation of the aesthetics and codes of the past– history becomes a space for a re-imagination that necessarily implies ethic and political strategies. And since the Sixties are the decade of the imagination par excellence, a revisitation means also starting from a personal imagination. No wonder then that adopting rewriting practices in *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* entails, first of all, engaging with utopia. What Tarantino is actually claiming through the alternate history and the counter-killings of the Manson Family, is that cinema and writing, in general, are utopian spaces in which one can rethink history and deliver it in a new form. That is also why Tarantino's engagement with the history of the Sixties in his last movie is postmodern in the way in which Linda Hutcheon interpreted it; "the past as referent is not bracketed or effaced, as Jameson would like to believe: it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning" (Hutcheon 1988, 24). To this end, Tarantino again adopts meta-narrative practices; the cinema world – represented not only by stars like Rick Dalton but also by marginal characters such as a stuntman – becomes the starting point for a choral representation of the Sixties and for the exploration of the cultural changes of the era. Nevertheless, I was surprised to read, following the release of the film, that *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* would somehow eschew the responsibility of commenting on the cultural and socio-political values of the Sixties, that "in fact, it's an extremely apolitical film", that "does not get into any of that late-1960s history" (Chaney 2019) and when it does it is "against the idea of a counterculture"[59] (Scott 2019). It seems to me that mainstream critical responses to the movie fail to consider the political engagement of Tarantino's cinema for two main reasons; the first is that Tarantino's presumed anti-triumphalism of the Sixties counterculture and rejection of the *disruptors* of 1969, if true, would represent not so much an apolitical attitude but rather a position that is not satisfied, or at least aligned, with the general 21st Century liberal attitude towards the *mythology* of the Sixties. Secondly, the cinema of Quentin Tarantino, from a narrative and aesthetic point of view, has never placed ideology before art, authorship and fictionality; yet this prioritization

[59] A.O. Scott in a review of the film on the New York Times writes: "Tarantino's anti-ironic celebration of the mainstream popular culture of the time amounts to a sustained argument against the idea of a counterculture. Those who would disrupt, challenge or destroy the last stable society on earth are in the grip of an ideological, aesthetic and moral error. Hippies aren't cool. Old-time he-men like Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth are cool." (2019)

does not imply an apolitical strategy. As is widely recognized by Tarantino's scholars, Tarantino's cinema has always been deeply engaged with aesthetics and it seems to me that is the aesthetic dimension the site in which we may find the potentiality to transform and subvert societal structures (inherent political potential); from this perspective, we should "avoid the temptation of offering readings of his cinema as an apolitical, and yet, 'ethical' reminder of the always-impending, and always already-happened, (post)modern catastrophes that brush away all utopias of political emancipation" (Pagello 2020, 42). Indeed, the cinema of Quentin Tarantino has always suggested that art provides a space for dissensus, in which additional forces can be brought to the fore and that such forces should be disturbing and uncomfortable and capable of challenging established cultural and aesthetic hierarchies.

To this end, I will try to analyze how in Tarantino's revisitation of the late Sixties Los Angeles, a reflection on both ideology and politics is to be found in the aesthetical configuration of the relationship between archetypical figures and characters of the time; this configuration is always filtered metafictionally and allegorically through the cinematic values that the characters bring to the screen. In other words, I will consider how through the depiction of a relation between the cinema of the Sixties and the broader cultural history of the decade, the author offers a complex political and personal account of the end of the Sixties.

Starting from this perspective, the choice of the protagonists in *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* seems to be quite relevant and consciously ironic; Tarantino eschews a naïve, simplistic and comfortable take on the Sixties political, social and artistic atmosphere by opting two white old-fashioned male actors as the protagonists of his noirish nostalgic fairy-tale. In this respect, Richard Brody writes in *The New Yorker*: "Tarantino's love letter to a lost cinematic age is one that, seemingly without awareness, celebrates white-male stardom (and behind-the-scenes command) at the expense of everyone else". (Brody 2019) However, I would suggest that it is precisely Tarantino's characterization of the two fictional white male protagonists, Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth (Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt), that argue against such a simplistic view. As I mentioned, *Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood* is above all the story of an old Hollywood actor, symbol of white masculinity and a patriarchal society, who is facing his decline; as the fictional producer Marvin Schwarz (Al Pacino) claims, Rick is "an Eisenhower actor in a Dennis Hopper Hollywood," (Tarantino 2021, 170) suggesting a

collision of two distinct eras. Moreover, Rick is clearly struggling with his sense of self in that he represents a television culture also in decline. We see him crying several times in the movie – when questioned by the child method actress Trudi, when he has a mental breakdown in his trailer – showing not the typical white male strength, but a man undergoing an identity crisis.

The rise of the New Hollywood in the late Sixties – which Tarantino has always considered as an "absolute positive response to the homogenized 50s" (Maher, 2021) – marks the impact of a new society represented in the movie by Sharon Tate, Roman Polanski, Bruce Lee, the hippies and the counter-culture which challenges the established social and political structures in and out of the cinematographic context. Trying to find a role that can save his career, Rick is no longer the self-sufficient white male, since he has to adapt to the new environment. Tarantino's fairy tale stresses the coexistence of two different cultures. No wonder then that the emphasis on Rick's hatred of hippies and the hippie culture more in general, should not be read as Tarantino's personal position or evocative of the general ideology of the movie, but rather as Rick's embodiment of a Fifties conservative, right-wing mindset. Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth's conservative cowboy heroism – which is translated into the killing of the cultists – appear to be symptomatic of late Sixties and Seventies right wing attitudes towards the search for a common enemy and the rhetoric of revenge. As Philip Jenkins notes, especially in the early Seventies, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, with the upsurge of feminist movements and gay movements, the critique of white male masculinity was translated into a critique of the institutions in their entirety;

> At a time when society was under comprehensive attack from ruthless enemies at home and abroad, America had lost its ability to defend or assert itself, and right-wing critiques drew on a powerful rhetoric of impotence and castration, captivity and restraint. Repeatedly, social dangers were symbolized by the idea of Americans unjustly held captive by evildoers, whether as prisoners of war, hostages to terrorists, or brainwashed inmates held in cult compounds. (Jenkins 2006, 20)

There can be no doubt that Rick Dalton embodies the essence of the late Fifties and early Sixties cowboy star – as the final clash with the hippies suggests – and it is not for nothing that he is eventually boosted and reconfigured as a Reagan-like cowboy

figure standing for the final collapse of the countercultural dreams, the triumph of the security state[60] and what Donald Pease calls a collaboration between Hollywood and Washington "in the production, distribution, and naturalization of state fantasies" (Pease 2009, 130)

Moreover, since in the movie much of the depiction of the Sixties era is filtered through Rick's point of view and through the figure of Cliff Booth – "good friend, a good stuntman, and a war hero, […] a real killer" (Tarantino 2021, 52) as described in the novelization – the audience is offered only a partial, imprecise and ideologized account of the hippies. In this regard, Tarantino's take on the 1969 Los Angeles appears to be substantially distant from the city depicted in Pynchon and Anderson's *Inherent Vice.* The absence of hippie groups other than the Manson one is pretty faithful to the generally conservative mindset of the late Sixties in the wake of Manson murders, but it also reveals Tarantino's insistence on the disillusionment with the counterculture. In the public opinion, Cielo Drive was in fact the crucial event that helped to boost the increasingly widespread idea that cults like the Manson Family were part of the Hippie culture. But as Tom 'O Neill has pointed out,

> Manson and his ragged following were not hippies. To be sure, they fit the popular stereotype: The men grew their hair long and didn't shave; the women wore flowing peasant dresses and flowers in their hair; and drugs such as LSD, hash and marijuana were part of their daily lives. Manson borrowed some hippie lines about free love. But as he saw it, hippies were weak and ineffectual, and where they aimed to expand their consciousness, he wanted his followers "dead in the head." ('O Neill 2019)

Just as the characterization of Rick and Cliff is used as an antithetical mirror through which the conservative ethos of the Fifties can emerge, *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*'s representation of the countercultural and hippie values functions in a similar way; the positive glimpse of the counterculture lies – though not for the protagonists – at the core of the New Hollywood's rebellious spirit. I am referring to the allegorical representation of Sharon Tate (Margot Robbie) in the movie, a rising actress

[60] As Pease claims in his pioneering work *The New American Exceptionalism*, "throughout the cold war, the security state also invoked the cowboy western to displace actually existing social and political contradictions onto a strictly imaginary site where they underwent symbolic resolution" (2009, 165)

in the Sixties, whose figure is today mainly reduced to the story of the murders of Cielo Drive. Tate appears as an example of one of Hollywood's tragic and innocent victims (along with Natalie Wood, Judy Garland and others) a central theme in Steve Erickson's *Zeroville* through Vikar's concern with the father-Hollywood figure that sacrifices its children. If in the archetypical fairy-tale structure suggested by the narrative, Rick Dalton is "a folkloric hero of Nixon's 'silent majority'" and the Manson Family an expression of a dangerous skewed and ultimately fatal exploitation of hippie values, Sharon Tate embodies the hopeful, possibly naïve, pure dreams of the youth culture and the dynamic underground reforms of the New Hollywood and, especially from an allegorical perspective, she appears as the central figure that affects the characters' agency.[61] Most importantly, her agency is reinforced in the scene in which we see Tate in the Bruin Theatre in Westwood while watching herself in *The Wrecking Crew*, the 1968 film starring Dean Martin;. the actress appears smiling, proud and, most importantly, barefoot; here a trademark of Tarantino's aesthetic visualism – just remember the *Death Proof* or *Pulp Fiction* foot fetish scenes – takes on another meaning, suggesting the radiant Tate's link to the life-affirming countercultural values as opposed to Rick's gloomy and conflicted character[62]. Sharon Tate is connected to the New Hollywood also through the figure of Roman Polanski; although he is a marginal character in the movie, it is Rick Dalton who mentions him as the director of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and as "the hottest director in town and probably the world" (Tarantino 2019), and he is shown as a "symbol of the new, androgynous type that will dominate popular culture in the Seventies" (Pagello 2020, 192). Tarantino's tribute to Bruce Lee, who taught Sharon Tate Kung Fu for a period during the making of *The Wrecking Crew*, is another expression of the revolution that the New Hollywood and counterculture brought to the fore in terms of representation of the minorities on the screen as much as on the streets.

It is clear that an analysis of the alternative interpretation of historical facts deployed at the end of Tarantino's movie cannot ignore what each of his characters

[61] Actually the debate around *Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood* also included a famous question to the director – then often discussed by Tarantino in other interviews – by a journalist during a press conference of the movie in Cannes; the journalist asked why Margot Robbie had so few lines in the film and Tarantino answered "I reject your hypothesis".
[62] The only other characters in the movie represented barefoot are in fact a group of hippies on the streets singing one of Charles Manson's songs.

represents in the context of New Hollywood and in the light of the socio-political context of the late Sixties; and of course his intervention on history cannot be separated from actual events but the fact remains that his reinterpretation, far from demeaning, actually reinvigorates what his characters stand for. In other words, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, combining historical facts with their re-elaboration necessarily "reveals both the limits and powers of historical knowledge. To challenge history or its writing is not to deny either." (Hutcheon 1988, 223). By removing Sharon Tate's murder and by reversing the course of historical facts, in the fictional world of *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* the innocence and the hopes of the Sixties idea of utopia are, in fact, preserved. In the utopic and fairy-tale reversal of the 1969 events, crime is employed as a redemptive device and the killing of the degenerate hippies becomes an aesthetic means – a point I will discuss later – whereby the positive aspects of the counterculture can be saved.

Indeed, it is precisely the fact that the movie ends up like a fairy-tale that we are reminded of what happened in reality; Tarantino's revisitation of a crossroads of Hollywood and American history does not imply a naïve representation of counterculture; on the contrary it highlights both its potential for active emancipation but also its potential for descending into nihilism and cultism. Not surprisingly, the movie takes on its darkest and most pessimist tone during the scenes at the George Spahn Ranch where the figure of Charles Manson though physically absent looms large over the whole narration; Cliff stops for the hippie girl Pussycat on the sidewalk as she is attempting to hitch a ride to the George Spahn Movie Ranch where she lives with the Manson Family. Cliff is intrigued since he used to work at the ranch as a stuntman during the 50s and early 60s; the Spahn Movie Ranch was in fact owned by George Spahn, a rancher who occasionally rented out the space for Western productions and who had actually known Cliff. During their drive to the ranch, Pussycat offers to perform a sexual act on Cliff, who declines since he does not "want to go to jail". The scene is evocative of how Charles Manson took advantage of the Sixties sexual freedom by exerting his power over his followers by coercing them into sex; Tarantino's critical depiction of the sexual practices of the Family is, in fact, presented through Pussycat, whose description as one of the "Manson chicks" can be traced back to Shasta's ironic description of them in *Inherent Vice* as those "submissive, brainwashed, horny little teeners who do exactly what you want before you even know what that is." (Pynchon 2009, 497). This theme is reinforced in the scenes set at the ranch; Cliff finds out that

the blind old George Spahn is actually a hostage of the Manson Family ("George, I just want to make sure you're okay and that all these hippies weren't taking advantage of you"). As is widely known, Manson manipulated Spahn into allowing his cult to live at the ranch, where the hippie girls had sex with George on Charles Manson's orders. From this perspective, we can consider Tarantino's take on Charles Manson and his relationship with the counterculture similar to Pynchon and Anderson's retrospective depiction of Manson as a figure who incarnates spontaneous yet regressive desires, in Marcusean terms, the one "characterized by the destructive features of American society—not by protest against it." (Marcuse 2007, 185)

While celebrating an important era for its artistic and positive values – especially the reaction to the predominant sexist and racist culture of the 50s – *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* does not participate in the apocalyptic vision that the Sixties values really finished with the end of the Sixties (as suggested by his aesthetic reappropriation of Seventies artistic codes) but at the same time it does not accept a univocal vision of that time nor a nebulous idealization of it. As Federico Pagello claims, "Tarantino shows the end of that crucial decade as the moment in which two temporalities collided, leading to the rise of a new phase, in which women and minorities can find more opportunities to be represented (first of all, in cinema), but where ruthless competition and widespread violence did not cease to reproduce new hierarchical structures based on class, gender and race divisions" (2020, 192). I would reiterate the fact that the contradictory representation of these two temporalities lies at the core of what come across as Tarantino's commentary on the rise of postmodernism and more specifically, on the reciprocal, yet controversial elements of the counterculture and the postmodern culture. As David R. Shumway suggests,

> The counterculture contributed significantly to the tendency of dispensing with traditional cultural hierarchies. According to a common narrative, modernism was defined by its resistance to popular culture and consumer society, but in postmodernism high art embraces both of these. (Shumway 2016, 119)

Despite the fact that counterculture "assumed that it could penetrate beneath the surface of the consumer society" (Shumway, 124), *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*

shows how in many ways counterculture was doomed to become a consumer culture[63]. While showing hippies' rejection of power, as evidenced by Pussycat's disdain for the police, for rich people and for television actors[64], Tarantino also depicts them while watching TV, as seeking material success and alternately criticizing or defending different types of authority.

Moreover, Tarantino's meta-critique of 1969 Hollywood is in fact also a means to discuss hierarchies, power and the impact of ideology on the industry and how the latest trends can affect art (in this case filmmaking and the public and critical reception of movies). In this regard, it is worth noticing the dual significance that a particular character introduced by Tarantino can take on; I am referring to the tribute to the director Sam Wanamaker who appears on the set of a fictionalized version of *Lancer*, the television show starring Rick Dalton as Caleb. Wanamaker – a communist who also served in the American army during WWII – was in fact blacklisted in Hollywood during McCarthyism; in the late 1968 after working at the Shakespeare's Globe in London as an actor and a director he directed and starred in many movies for the cinema and the television (such as *Christ in Concrete* from 1949, a film adaptation of Pietro Di Donato's novel). In *Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood*, Wanamaker (Nicholas Hammond) is the director of the pilot episode of the western show *Lancer* and he tells Rick Dalton that he wants a new look for the character of Caleb, deriding the western costume typical of shows such as *Bonanza* and *The Big Valley*. Sam wants to give Caleb "a mustache, big droopy Zapata-like mustache" and a hippie jacket and a hippie-ish hairstyle; "I want a zeitgeist flare to the costumes. I mean nothing anachronistic but where 1869 and 1969 meet especially when it comes to you". Through the figure of Wanamaker and his suggestion that films set in the past can also be evocative of the present as well, Tarantino, like Wanamaker, comments on limitations and trends that not only belong to 1969 but also to 2019 Hollywood. *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*'s rehabilitation of b-movies, and television and pop culture of the Sixties suggests a particular agenda: in his fairy-tale there is certainly a triumph of Sixties Hollywood entertainment

[63] In this connection, see the provocative yet interesting *Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture*, by Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, New York: Harper Business, 2005.

[64] As Pussycat tells Cliff, "Actors are phoney. They just say lines that other people write and pretend to murder people on stupid TV shows. Meanwhile, real people are murdered every day in Vietnam." (Tarantino 2019)

regardless of its political and ideological implications. This triumph, however, is far from being apolitical; in the first place, it should be read as a wider recognition of the Sixties as not simply the decade of the counterculture, as exemplified by Rick Dalton's status as the hero of the Nixonian silent majority or Cliff Booth's conservative veteran heroism[65]; moreover, it should be interpreted as a commentary on 2019 Hollywood in relation to the spread of cancel culture and woke-culture in the wake of Harvey Weinstein and #MeToo movement. From this perspective, although mainstream critical response does not fully recognize the complexity – on the level of form and content – of *Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood*'s take on the political Sixties, it is very aware of the film's position in relation to 21st Century trends and socio-political attitudes concerning art. Not surprisingly, following critical reception of the movie and the novelization, Tarantino criticized Hollywood's political correctness and censorship by saying that "this is the 80s part two, what we're living through right now"; the movie implicitly reflects on the impact of producing a movie in which irony and ambiguity are part of an aesthetic agenda. Therefore, by choosing the fairy tale structure Tarantino relies on the cinematic utopian potentiality to debunk the cultural myth of the Sixties as the passage from sunshine to noir, by demonstrating that the end of the Sixties, for all the dark and disturbing events experienced, did not end in a catastrophe nor with the triumph of utopianism. In other words, the film suggests that "despite the apocalyptic rhetoric that often accompanies it, the postmodern marks neither a radical Utopian change nor a lamentable decline into hyperreal simulacra" (Hutcheon 1988, xiii), where, in the terms discussed by Hutcheon, Utopian refers to its Marxist connotation[66] and lamentable decline to any of the apocalyptic and nihilist neo-Nietzschean orientations regarding the future. Not surprisingly, other critics such as Catherine Constable and David Roche (2018, 5), have insisted on Hutcheon's position on "the political and critical potential of the postmodern aesthetics of recycling" (Constable 2015, 81), suggesting an idea of "affirmative postmodernism" (2015, 75).

[65] As Philip Jenkins suggests in his *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*, "Reaganism did not represent a sudden invasion by a mysterious alien force. Conservatism certainly commanded popular support in the 1960s, considerably more than many historians and media outlets might lead us to believe".

[66] Or what Jameson identifies as a positive utopian notion of History in which one can access the real referent of the historical discourse.

Moreover, as Tarantino's cinema is always metafictional, it constantly requires an active audience perspective; his movies ask the spectator not only to distinguish between what is real and what is fictional but also to view everything from an ideological and political perspective. By asking the viewer cast his mind back to his own liberal memory of the heritage of the Sixties cultural values, *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* also implicitly raises questions about what it means to be liberal in 21st Century America.[67] After all, there has always been a debate around the role of film noir, pulp, hardboiled and American detective fiction in general. Tarantino is not the first or only author using pulp fiction to have been accused of being right-wing, misogynist, or racist. We could reasonably include Tarantino in the group of pulp writers like James Ellroy or Raymond Chandler who demonstrated one of the truths of pulp fiction, i.e. that it is a genre which "often avoids easy moralisms of both the Right and the Left, thereby not only resisting facile political classifications – boostering, debunking, slipping into the utopia of progressive politics or the dystopia of cultural nihilism – but exposing intellectual and academic modes that are deployed to police pulp culture." (Ravetto 1999, 208)

Finally, while it's true that Tarantino's movie asks the audience to play an active role in a collective re-evocation of the Sixties, it also highlights the director/writer's personal re-imagination of the decade that still revisits postmodern culture in a mimetic way, and that relies heavily upon memory and nostalgia. Such devices are in fact the pivotal elements around which Tarantino's discourse in relation to the Sixties is constructed.

[67] More specifically, Tarantino also seems to be aligned with Bret Easton Ellis' view about the current debate on identity politics. In *White* (2019) the American writer argues "The idea that if you can't identify with someone or something then it's not worth watching or reading or listening to is now commonplace in our society—and sometimes used as a weapon to attack somebody else: for not being more "woke" by failing to make something relatable" (139). For an analysis of woke-ism trends in Hollywood, particularly for what concerns the incorporation of hashtag protests in the neoliberalist agenda, see Gennero, Valeria. *Politici e corretti. La contestazione studentesca, l'attivismo digitale e il culto della purezza* in Ácoma, 17, 2019.

5.2
Cielo Drive, Hollywood, memory and nostalgia

In 2019, during a roundtable discussion for *Entertainment Weekly* following the release of his film, Quentin Tarantino declared that in 1969 he "was between six and seven years old, so the film became a big memory piece." Indeed, there can be no doubt that *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*'s revisitation of the Sixties involves not only a process of re-imagination but that its inherent narrative depends heavily on the author's memory. But how can memory be separated in some way from the narrative nature of a text? In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon – picking up on one of the central arguments of Paul Veyne's *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, (1971, 309) – has argued that "even the event closest to us personally can be known to us afterwards only by its remains: memory can create only texts. There is no such thing as the *reproduction* of events by memory" (154). Similarly, as Hayden White suggests, "As a symbolic structure, the historical narrative does not reproduce the event it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events" (1978, 52). In this respect, *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* adopts a narrative strategy that while it is presented as personal and partial, is also precise about what the author wants to deliver to the audience. That helps to explain why Tarantino's childhood-driven look back on the Sixties draws attention, for the most part, to the pop culture (music, films, bars and billboards, cars) and little to the political events that characterized the late Sixties Los Angeles. The Vietnam war is mentioned only briefly, no references are made to the Californian campus revolts or to racial and civil rights movements. The depiction of countercultural impulses and the Sixties in general is mainly concerned with aesthetics, in relation to music and the movie industry and in terms of cultural trends. Tarantino acknowledges that at the core of the counterculture – regardless of its incorporation into consumer culture – there was what Mark Fisher, in line with Marcuse, defined as the connection between the aesthetic challenge and the political challenge (Fisher 2020, 167).

The movie's exploration of Los Angeles is partially informed by the memories of a 6 years old Tarantino, insisting on neon lights, endless car rides, KHG radio (almost always shot from the perspective of the passenger side), and industrial products. The geographical re-imagination of Hollywood is heavily influenced by nostalgia; a nostalgic fantasy – though not entirely devoid of a postmodern and often negative meaning of

nostalgia – is the device through which *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* exposes a set of relations with the Sixties but also a means to engage historically and geographically with the city of Los Angeles.

In the first place, it is worth considering that nostalgia has always been part of Tarantino's cinematic aesthetics but it is no less relevant that his *retro-maniac* activity as a promoter of movies, especially as the artistic manager of the Los Angeles's theater The New Beverly, is symptomatic of his nostalgic and cinephile sensibility. Oddly enough, I was not surprised to see a reproduction of the Cielo Drive road sign hanging on the wall in the hall of The New Beverly theater. The sign, while encapsulating a collective recognition of the city's past and the reference to the film, also reveals *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* as a site whereby to experience again the *pastness of the past*, which is precisely the aim of nostalgia. As Hutcheon claims,

> This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an "historical inversion" (1981, 147) The aesthetics of nostalgia might, therefore, be less a matter of simple memory than of complex projection; the invocation of a partial, idealized history merges with a dissatisfaction with the present. (Hutcheon 2012, 20)

The strategy at the core of the movie is, in fact, to bring the past close, exiling us from the present, as shown by the retro tagline on the front cover of the novelization: "Hollywood 1969…you shoulda been there!" (Tarantino 2021). The soundtrack, the accuracy in the reconstruction of the places, costumes, and the atmosphere of the city of that time suggest that the movie wants to create the illusion of being there, whether cruising on the Sunset Strip, the Hollywood Boulevard or going to movies in Westwood. Yet, behind this projection, there is a clear dissatisfaction (nostalgia) with the present that, in the case of Tarantino, is specifically translated into cinematic terms. In this regard, there is clearly no need to mention the number of times Tarantino has declared his contempt for contemporary cinema – by claiming that, after the 80s, "we're living through another repressive time" – to understand how Tarantino's aesthetic lexicon has always looked to the past.

However, in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* the author's nostalgia becomes a means by which to evoke an idealized but also haunting idea of history. It shows both

the will to recreate the experience of the Sixties and, above all, the anxieties connected to the disappearance of it. Cielo Drive is the most explicative example of this process, being the place where the cathartic moment of the Sixties in Los Angeles assumed in the collective imagination, a meaning akin to "the end of the Sixties". Cielo Drive continues to reappear as a ghostly presence in 'hauntological' terms in many Los Angeles narratives. Here, I am referring to the term, *hauntology* – a concept derived from Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994)[68] – starting from a question raised by Mark Fisher: "is hauntology, as many of its critics have maintained, simply a name for nostalgia?" (2014, 20). If, as Simon Reynolds puts it in *Retromania* (2012), hauntology is all about memory's power (to linger, pop up unbidden, prey on your mind) and memory's fragility (destined to become distorted, to fade, then finally disappear) (335), in Tarantino's Hollywood, not only is the memory of the city projected in all his particular places, forms and temporalities, but the representation of them also suggests their transience; but unlike in the haunted world presented through Vikar's vision in Erickson's *Zeroville* – in which different versions of Los Angeles and cinematic times and spaces are constantly going or melting one into another – in *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* we are always aware that the disappearance of a specific temporality – in this case the end of the Sixties – is what our present is haunted by. That is why Tarantino's attitude, whether it be in his iconography, style or politics, is always concerned with a nostalgia for the present – as Fredric Jameson conceived it (Jameson 1991, 279-287).

However, while a postmodern type of nostalgia tangibly belongs to both Tarantino's filmic and novelized versions of the text, there are two other elements that somehow offset the nostalgia; the first is a deliberate use of irony, not only in the dialogue of the characters but even more specifically in the denouement. The final scene in which history is subverted is still ironically apocalyptic and the ways in which the hippies are killed by Rick and Cliff are no less absurd (just think of the flamethrower or Cliff's hallucination). While still relying upon nostalgia, the movie's attitude here would

[68] "A pun on 'ontology' (in French 'hantologie' and 'ontology' sound almost the same because the 'h' isn't pronounced), the concept allowed Derrida to use the philosophically problematic figure of the ghost – neither being nor non-being, both presence and absence simultaneously – to discuss the uncanny persistence of Marx's ideas after the death of communism and 'the end of history' (the supposed triumph of liberal capitalism announced by Francis Fukuyama)" (Reynolds 2011, 328)

he better described in Hutcheon's terms; it does indeed recall the past "but always with the kind of ironic double vision that acknowledges the final impossibility of indulging in nostalgia, even as it consciously evokes nostalgia's affective power" (2012, 23). In its denouement, *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* while showing the impossibility of an alternative history unless by the *utopian* means of parody and pastiche (the ironizing of nostalgia), it also shows "a sometimes shameless invoking of the visceral power that attends the fulfilment of that urge" (Hutcheon 2012, 23). In this sense, Tarantino acknowledges and uses the affective power of nostalgia, only to engage in active remembrance.

The other element that questions the nature of postmodern nostalgia in the movie is its quest for authenticity in the representation. While embracing Baudrillard's vision of the postmodern city – which is also Vikar's textual mapping of Los Angeles in Erickson's *Zeroville* – according to which "to grasp its secret, you should not, then, begin with the city and move inwards to the screen; you should begin with the screen and move outwards to the city" (Baudrillard 1988, 56), Tarantino's depiction of the city – relying on memory and fantasy – is *consciously* postmodern and it is in this consciousness that he tries to go beyond postmodernism. Despite the fact that in the representation of the city the movie revisits some of the geographical landmarks of the modern Los Angeles (it is enough to think of Musso & Frank, the Bruin Theatre, the Sunset Strip, the Benedict Canyon), the places we see are both reel and real[69]. The real Los Angeles is indeed present in its Sixties neon signs and bright colors, seen from a car driving through an imagined topography in the style of hard-boiled fiction and passing by certain famous Hollywood locations, with their history and their ghost-like presences.[70] With regard to what he calls geographic license, Thom Andersen ironically claims in the video essay *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), that "after all, in a fiction film a real space becomes fictional; why shouldn't a car chase jump from the Venice canals

[69] I am referring to the important urbanist study by Nezar Al Sayyad, *Cinematic Urbanism, a history from the modern from reel to real* (2006). The author's analysis – starting from Jameson and Baudrillard's notions of simulacra – "does not accept the division of space into real and reel but instead proceeds with the notion that reel space ceases to be primarily representational and in fact turns generative in its potential" (Nezar 2006, xii).

[70] Tarantino's conscious use of pop-cultural references are in fact accurate in regard to the history of places: for example, the scene in which Sharon Tate is listening to a song from Paul Revere and The Raiders' at her 10050 Cielo Drive house, is both ironic and respectful towards the history of the house itself, since the front man of the band Mark Lindsay lived in it with Terry Melcher and Candice Bergen, before Roman Polanski and Sharon Tate moved there.

to the Los Angeles harbor thirty miles away […]" (Anderson 2003). Also in Tarantino's Los Angeles there is no continuity in terms of geography, one can see how the Torrance Pussycat Theater suddenly emerges in Hollywood or how the film delivers a glamourized version of Musso & Frank grill during the late Sixties; but it's precisely because Tarantino's knowledge of history coincides with the knowledge of pop culture and postmodern culture that his cinema deploys a Los Angeles that is both fictionally and non-fictionally real, and yet calls for authenticity. After all, as Mark Shiel asks at the beginning of his *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, "Where is the line between reality and representation to be drawn?". (2021, 7) The reason why I believe that Tarantino tries to go beyond the problem of postmodern representation is to be found in the dialectical tension that *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* establishes with the Los Angeles of the present. What would seem a merely nostalgic project and a reiteration of postmodernism's rejection of dialectical thinking as conceived by Baudrillard – according to whom, in postmodernism, "the dialectic stage, the critical stage is empty" (Baudrillard 1994, 161) – is, in reality, a problematization of the history of Los Angeles as the capital of popular culture and the capital of film making. In other words, how can we reconcile the idea of an anti-dialectic nostalgic work with Tarantino's anxiety about *external* issues, such as the present decline of Los Angeles as the epicenter of the film culture, the problem of the preservation of history (cinematic and real), and, finally, toward the haunting idea of the death of cinema? For example, when interviewed, Barbara Ling, a Los Angeles native[71] and the production designer for *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*, argues that one of the major difficulties for the shooting was the re-creation/renovation of original historical locations. In fact, Ling says, *Once Upon a Time* often "raced against developers who were actively tearing down buildings the production hoped to shoot" and, she added, Los Angeles is "a town that just never really preserved its history" (Coates 2020).

Still, Tarantino's version of Los Angeles is part of a larger narrative strategy in which fictional and real artifacts are indistinguishable. In this regard, I agree with Pagello's claim that "Tarantino's cinema repeats the fundamental move of all modern art that consists of eliminating any simplistic opposition between art and life". (2020,

[71] Barbara Ling contributed enormously to the reconstruction of the Sixties Los Angeles. It is reasonable to deduce that *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*'s depiction of the city was the result of both Tarantino's childhood memory/imagination and Ling's memory of it as a teenager.

41) In other words, if Tarantino's movie still maintains a relationship with the postmodern culture it is in its less negative and more creative values. However, since the movie relies upon an inextricable relation between the real and the fictional representation and it becomes, as I described, an attempt to come to terms with the problem of erasure of memory, it would be reasonable to think of *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* as a work that critically incorporates the problem of the postmodern representation (the hyperreality), and an attempt to go beyond it.

It is for this reason that, in the following paragraph, I will try to assess how the juxtaposition of fictional and real fosters a *historization* of the Sixties through the history of the medium, as shown not only in the movie but also in the novelization and other extra-textual narratives connected to *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood.*

5.3
Historicizing through the medium: from the paperback noir to the exploitation

While I was writing the introduction to this chapter, on May 19th 2023, Tarantino twitted via *The Video Archives Podcast* – hosted by Tarantino and Roger Avery – announcing the death of the fictional actor Rick Dalton;

> We are saddened by the news of the passing of actor Rick Dalton, best known for his roles in the hit TV series 'Bounty Law' and 'The Fireman trilogy'.
> Rick passed away peacefully in his home in Hawaii and is survived by his wife Francesca.
> RIP Rick Dalton 1933-2023. (Avery 2023)

On the following days, on Beverly Blvd in Los Angeles, the New Beverly theater neon sign also read "In Loving Memory. Rick Dalton 1933-2023. 'A Wonderful Actor'". The sign, as in the case of the Cielo Drive sign previously mentioned, while making a reference to the film, also demonstrates that *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*'s narrative elements of the historical metafictional account of the Sixties go beyond the fixed boundary of the text. This narrative project had already revealed itself during the early promotional period of the film through a considerable number of artifacts; the director asked different artists (such as Steven Chorney and Renato Casaro) to create

movie props connected to the movie's storyworld. In 2019, while walking on the streets of Los Angeles – for example, on the back wall of the Aquarius Theater in Hollywood – one could find faux posters of movies starring Rick Dalton, such as *Tanner*, *Nebraska Jim* a fictional film by Sergio Corbucci, *Operazione Dyn-o-mite!* and *Uccidimi subito, Ringo, disse il Gringo* (again, a reference to Corbucci's *Ringo and His Golden Pistol* from 1966). Similarly, the fictional advertising brochure[72] of *Once Upon a Time in... Hollywood* – printed in the form of an issue of a fictional film magazine, whose editor is Quentin Tarantino – guides the reader and the viewer through the world created by the director. In the opening pages there is a letter addressed to the readers:

> These pages step back into 1969, the year *Easy Rider* and *The Wild Bunch* were released, the year of Woodstock and the moon landing, a year of peace, love, tragedy, and war. Before you experience Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood, take the time to immerse yourself in Rick Dalton's world. Enjoy. (Tarantino - Columbia Marketing Group, 2019)

Through a journalistic take, this magazine aims to inform the reader about the world portrayed in *Once Upon a Time in... Hollywood* and presents the characters, the films they starred in and other artifacts setting them in the historical frame of 1969. In this process, such artifacts become part of the imagination of the Sixties as they are historically and culturally positioned together with the actual products of the decade. I use the word "products" precisely because what seems to be relevant in the expansion of fictional artifacts relating to the movie is the idea of an abundance of such artifacts – an obvious Godard's lesson – that is proper to the pop culture and consumer culture in which Tarantino is interested. As the elements of the fictional world expand beyond the screenplay and the film, *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* proves to be a moment in the author's career in which the typical Tarantino intertextuality – made up of heavy use of citations, stylistic references, signifiers and ever-looming presence of film history – becomes schizophrenic to the point of heading towards autotextuality[73] and self-reflexivity. In this regard, the novelization *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2021), is a crucial example not only of the ways in which Tarantino historizes the past by using

[72] This number of a fictional film magazine, "Rise of a Leading Man", with Rick Dalton on the front cover, was released in the limited edition of the Blu Ray.
[73] For autotextuality, I refer to the dialogue between works by the same author, and the symbolic or hermeneutic relationship between his texts. For a detailed account of this notion, see Kolarov, Radosvet. *Repetition and Creation. Poetics of Autotextuality*. London: Routledge, 2020.

different medium and genres, but also of how he shows a greater awareness of his own oeuvre and of its position in the history of cinema; in this sense, he not only plays with genres, styles and artistic products from the past but his films start to play with themselves. This playfulness is made clear not so much in the narrative elements of the novelization, but rather in the layout and in the packaging of the novel itself. Indeed, despite the fact that it presents itself as an independent product, it is, in many respects, related to the film in a kind of symbiosis that is expressed both in the film, the novel and Tarantino's own media and commercial interventions.

5.4
"Want more Rick and Cliff?": extratextuality and other narrative possibilities

In the first place, in its transmedia adaptation, Tarantino's novel maintains a narrative relationship that presents itself not so much as an adaptation, but rather as an expansion. Jan Baetens speaks of novelization in terms of "anti-adaptation," suggesting that "novelization does not so much aspire to become the movie's other as it wants to be its double". In other words, "the imaginary regime novelization fosters for itself is that of a copy (calque), that is, an immediate transfer" (Baetens 2005, 50). In the case of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, the narrative imagery is not simply transferred but undergoes a further process. According to Kate Newell, the position of the novelization with respect to the film can be analyzed in respect of the simultaneity of the Derrida's terms "in place of" and "in addition to" (2017, 32). While, in the case of Tarantino, the novelization certainly fosters the addition, the substitutive aspect is not fully integrated; this can be explained, again, in historical and aesthetics terms. Of course, what we mean today by novelization is different from the original strategy of a genre that saw its golden age between the 60s and the 80s; before the technological revolution brought about by VCR, the Blockbuster and the home video more broadly, the reading experience of a novelization coincided with the need to experience something as close as possible to the viewing of a movie. Therefore, in this phase, the main – though not the only – strategy of the novelization was to be faithful to the filmic experience.

Contemporary novelization, on the contrary, influenced by the technological and digital impact – the possibility of accessing the medium in different ways (currently dvds and streaming platforms) – is indeed more interested in setting itself up as an alternative to or an expansion of the film. This does not mean that this aspect was not already part of the strategies of novelization in its golden age: in *Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon takes as an example the novelization of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Arthur Clarke to explain how the novelization often provides a further exploration of some aspects related to the psychology of characters or how it exploits the dynamics of expansion to add scenes previously cut from the movie (Hutcheon 2006, 119); thus, in a similar way, in the novelization, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, the reader can expand his knowledge about the ethics and the actions of a character like Cliff Booth by learning that he was a World War II veteran who actually killed his wife and committed several murders (a fact just casually mentioned in the film); or, for example, the narrator informs us of Cliff's favorite Kurosawa films, and of how he started a career as a stuntman.

I gave the example of Arthur Clarke, author not only of the novelization but also of the original script for *2001: A Space Odyssey*, precisely because – besides the fact that this film strongly shaped the imagination of the Sixties, as will emerge also from the analysis of Erickson's novel – in terms of authorship it is closer to Tarantino's transmedia operation. In fact, one of the most singular aspects of the novelization of *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* and that is particularly relevant to the metafictional strategies discussed in this chapter, is the coincidence of the screenwriter and adapter (or the novelizer). This coincidence implies the absence of some assumptions underlying the theory of novelization: in fact, we know that

> Novelizations are a subcategory of licensed fiction, meaning that the characters and storylines that serve as their basis belong to copyright holders distinct from the writer, and that the writer's end product must conform to the *limitations* of pre- existing characters and fictional worlds (Newell 2017, 34, italics mine)

In the case of Tarantino's novelization, we cannot consider the copyright holder as a figure distinct from that of the writer in that there is no appropriation of movie characters or of stories that belong to a different author. In the panorama of contemporary novelization, the major trend is to employ writers who accept this literary

challenge because they themselves are fans of a film, a saga or a TV series and their purpose is to explore a fictional world to which they feel somehow connected. On the other hand, this type of operation is perceived "as limiting writers' creativity, as novelizers are expected to work within a series of constraints, including length and deadline requirements, setting and story continuity, fidelity, and market expectations."[74] (Newell 2017, 35). On the contrary, we could say that, although *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* is a literary product equally subordinate to commercial and marketing dynamics, at the same time it is free from any limitations, parameters and restrictions in terms of artistic creativity. There is no doubt that, the starting point for the novel is, again, the film (and the screenplay) of 2019; however, it remains to be seen how limiting for the author, in creative terms, this can be given the fact that the characters, the storylines and the storyworld were produced by the author himself. In this regard, I propose to analyze some of the strategies that seem to me predominant in the process of adaptation of Tarantino the director carried out by Tarantino the writer.

In the first place, it seems to me that the novel is not intended as a device to alter the narrated facts of the movie but rather to alter the fact of narrating, i.e. the mechanism and structures of the narration itself. A clear example, from this point of view, is given by the ending. The novelization, in fact, ends with a phone call between Rick Dalton and the young actress Trudi Fraser (Julia Butters): the scene, contained in the original film script, was also shot for the film but was then cut during editing. It is clear that the climax reached in the film's finale cannot be the same as that of the novel in terms of narrative construction. The choice is to be attributed to the different nature of the two mediums but also to the creative use of the novelization as an intermediary integration that is both cumulative and alternative. On the other hand, one could think of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* as a hybrid form between novelization and recounted movie, in which it is the film that becomes an instrument of the novel, a way to advance events and introduce narrative elements that contribute to the narrative development of the story (Maggitti 2007, 109). In this connection, the starting point for the adaptation is not the film or the film discourse as a whole: as Mahlknecht states in his crucial work

[74] As David Sweeney interestingly notes, novelizers are perceived as writers who privilege the economics of the creative process over *artistry*: they refer, ironically but also defensively as if preempting criticism, to themselves as "hacks" and "whores", thus reflecting on their authorial status (Sweeney 2015).

on Hollywood novelization, "although novelization is certainly a verbal representation, what it represents is not technically a visual representation, but, rather, another verbal representation – the screenplay – which, in turn, is represented by the visual" (Mahlknecht 2012, 141). This means that in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* the narrativization of the screenplay remains tangible: the use of short sentences, the descriptive elements, the transitions of characters in the scenes and the nature of the dialogues evoke the film shots through their verbal representation in the screenplay and then in their visual the form in the novel.

However, if Tarantino's novel were conceived as a narrativization of the script or a merely transmedia verbalization, it would make for uninteresting reading matter and would also be artistically sterile. On the other hand, as Newell again suggests, "novelizations tread a line between boring the audience with what it already knows and angering the audience with what it doesn't" (Newell 2017, 37). With regard to the audience, in fact, there are several innovative, exploratory and expansive elements that make Tarantino's novelization a literary work in its own right. If the ending is an example of how the three narrative acts of the film are replaced by a different narrative structure in the novelization – which, in turn, privileges flashbacks and flash-forwards – it also introduces another element to the novel, that is the psychological exploration of characters and situations that are less developed in the film. I am referring in particular to the story of Charles Manson and the development of his agency, which differs from that of the film, also from the quantitative point of view. The narrative economy of the novel therefore gives the writer a larger space to explore – as I discussed at the beginning of the chapter – one of the most problematic and fetishized dynamics in the revisitation of the Sixties, namely the figure of Charles Manson. Among the most intense narrative passages of the novel, we find in fact a sort initiation rite that further explains Tarantino's concern with the psychological indoctrination of the Manson-style hippies. The teenager Debra Jo "Pussycat" Hillhouse – a character probably inspired by Leslie Van Houten, the member of the Family convicted of the La Bianca murders – finds herself with Charlie and the Manson family in Greenbriar Lane, Pasadena (a symbol of the American white middle class) where she is about to break into a house for her first "kreepy krawl" (Tarantino 2021, 77).[75]

[75] The Manson Family's practice of secretly entering someone's home and, without harming anyone, leaving only a trace of evidence that they had been there.

> "And I love you, Debra Jo," Charlie tells her, "and it's that love that ever so slightly nudges you toward greatness. I'm in your heart, 'Pussycat,' I'm in your paws, I'm in your tail, I'm in your nose, and I'm in your pussycat skull." Charlie's fingers come off her shoulders, and he wraps his arms around the young girl, embracing her from behind. She leans her weight back against him. And they both slowly sway from side to side, shifting their weight from their left foot to their right foot, rocking her like a baby in his arms.
> "Allow me the privilege of guiding you through this. And the girl who emerges from that house will be gargantuanly more powerful than the girl who enters it." (Tarantino 2021, 79)

The writer therefore focuses not only on the ways in which Manson enters the psyche of his family members but also on the characterization of Charles Manson himself, once again entering the narrative limbo between fiction and true crime, exploiting his character to provide what is almost a parody of the typical Manson Family hippie.

Once Upon a Time in Hollywood also shows how the novelization makes it possible to experiment with alternative narrative structures and temporalities; in particular, with regard to the real history (chronological events), the fictional narrative arc of the novelization is shifted in time. Whereas in the movie the night between 8 and 9 August 1969 is the denouement of the narrative, the events described in the novelization take place later in time. The scene that is the epilogue in the film is recontextualized to the past and then brought forward to the beginning of the novel;

> And in a scene straight out of Wendkos's picture *The Fourteen Fists of McCluskey*, Rick set the assailant on fire with the practice flamethrower left over from McCluskey, which he had in his toolshed. ("I burnt that goddamn hippie to a crisp," he later told his neighbor). (Tarantino 2021, 103)

This scene also helps to explain another pivotal element in the construction of the narrative; in fact, in the interaction with objects, artifacts and elements of fiction that belong to the storyworld of both the film and the novel, it is evident how the director/writer plays with the different meta-cinematic levels; here an element such as the flamethrower, which originally serves as a prop in a fictional film called *The Fourteen Fists of McCluskey* in which Rick Dalton sets a group of Nazis on fire (a clear autotextual reference to *Inglourious Basterds*), is reused, semantically. against the hippie girl who attacked Cliff. This not only results in the indistinguishability of the different narrative plans, but also testifies to the desire on the part of the writer/director

to mix the different levels of fiction, thereby suggesting the interchangeability of the cinematic images and the real ones.

The space of the novelization is therefore used by Tarantino as a space for narrative experimentation that goes beyond the canonical limitations of the genre and focuses on the concepts of authorship and creative freedom. Even from an aesthetic point of view, novelization reflects on its own status, presenting itself as an anachronistic operation in which nostalgia again plays an important role. In fact, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* aims to appear not as a contemporary novelization but as a commercial product that belongs (and refers) to a specific period of the past. In other words, the novelization is one of the genres through which Tarantino is historizing the past. Along with the verbal and narrative changes that occur in the novel, it is worth dwelling on how the aesthetic and commercial aspect is not at all secondary or external to the writing process, but is relevant to context of writing itself.

From the cover and the format of the book, Tarantino's novel shows an awareness of the history of novelization that influences in a decisive way the aesthetic configuration of the novel and contributes to the relationship that Tarantino establishes with the history of the medium. In this context, the American edition published by Harper Perennial Paperback on June 29, 2021 presents two particularly significant elements; both on the cover and on the back there are pictures of the film's characters, from Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt) to Charles Manson (Damon Herriman); the edition was directly released as a "mass market paperback" (there was no first hardcover version), presenting itself as a cheap pocket book. There is no doubt that this operation is a reference to the great revolution that the paperback represented from the 50s to the 70s when paperbacks accounted for about a third of all books sold in the United States (Eike 1986, 25). In particular, the paperback noir had been an important transformation of the genre, in both economic and cultural terms, starting from the novels of Jim Thompson and Charles Willeford in the post-World War II literary and commercial landscape[76]. Especially with regard to genre fiction, it was especially customary in the 1970s and 1980s for an author's debut work to be published directly in paperback format. In addition, after the first edition of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* we find several advertisements for books that were very popular in the seventies: *Oliver's Story*

[76] See Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2000.

by Erich Segal (published in 1977), *The Switch* by Elmore Leonard (1978) and *Serpico* by Peter Maas (1973). The advertising of the latter portrays Al Pacino, the protagonist of the film adaptation directed by Sidney Lumet in the same year; this aesthetic awareness of the medium is also manifested in the decision to show in the paperback version several references to the promotional tie-ins between book and film. Moreover, as Kevin Mims notes, usually these advertising spaces were meant for "books of the same vintage and in the same genre. Which makes the back-page material in Tarantino's novel seem inauthentic" (2021, 1). Despite the aesthetic inauthenticity – which is also expressed in the choice of advertising books belonging to different years in the same decade – it is clear that it was Tarantino's intention to present the book as an artifact belonging to the 1970s, without denying the fictional nature of the product. In other words, as is the case with his film, Tarantino consciously mixes artifacts of his invention with actual cultural products of the time; for example, in the advertisements, one can find a fake western novel titled *Ride a Wild Bronc* by an actual novelist from the 70s, Marvin H. Albert, writer of crime novels and westerns.

This discourse is made further explicit in the fictional advertisements that Tarantino inserts in the extra scenes of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, concerning products that exist only in the fictional universe created by the director. Chattanooga beer, for example, is used by Cliff Booth, in a typical imitation of the moment when, in a western film, the cowboy puts his gun back in its leather holster. It comes as no surprise that that beer does not exist in reality nor did it exist in America in the late Sixties: it is in effect an artifact created by Tarantino himself and one that can also be found in the fictional magazine previously mentioned. The advertising suggests that in the so-called Tarantinoverse[77] such beer exists regardless of its use and that it is the characters themselves who decide what that use will be (a similar function is attributed to Duff beer in the sitcom *The Simpsons* by James L. Brooks)[78]. Another example – which calls attention to the masculinity of the character of Cliff Booth – is the Red Apple

[77] A fictional universe governed and inhabited by the director's creations that, in various ways, maintain narrative and symbolic relationships. Tarantino himself confirmed its existence in an interview with Waleed Aly in 2017 on the television program The Project, in which the director claimed the existence of two different levels of reality within this universe.

[78] A similar space is the one covered by *Bounty Law*, the TV series in which Rick Dalton – now an icon of the Western television sixties – is Jake Cahill. In addition to having its own narrative parenthesis in the extra contents of the film and in the novelization, it is in all respects a spin-off the director of which will be Tarantino.

cigarette brand that had already appeared in several previous films, such as *Pulp Fiction*, *Kill Bill* (as a large advertising poster) and also *The Hateful Eight*, suggesting that the brand dates back to the 1860s.

This type of schizophrenic intertextuality and autotextuality is not meant to be limited by any textual or temporal boundary; on the contrary, from 2019 on, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* has always expanded its fictional world; as the fictional death of Rick Dalton has proved, Tarantino's text (in all its forms) is still producing meaning and re-shaping its own discourse; not surprisingly, the final page of the novel contains another advertisement – "Want More Rick and Cliff?" – which announces the Deluxe Hardcover edition with new additions. On November 9, 2021, in fact, a new hardcover edition – containing photos from the set of the movie, images of posters and memorabilia regarding Rick Dalton, a parody of Mad Magazine, a Bounty Law script written by Tarantino – was published by the same publisher.

Tarantino's novelization received a critical attention similar to the one paid to the film as regards ideology; misogyny and racism were not only attributed to characteristics inherent to the genre – the pulp-tough guy style portrayed by a version of Mickey Spillane – but also to the authorial voice as "startlingly coarse, sadistic even, when dealing with the female protagonists" (Elwes 2021). Nevertheless, the novelization was acclaimed for its pulpy-page turner qualities (Garner 2021) and especially for Tarantino's ability to steer in fresh directions some conventions of the two genres, the movie novelization and the Hollywood novel (Bordwell 2021).

In fact, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* does take a different path from the configuration of a Hollywood novel, not because, as I have discussed, it is derivative or paratextual, but because of the quality of the narrative itself. The Hollywood novel traditionally deals with a "debunking" strategy, where desire (or the lack thereof) and the aspirations of wanna-be actors are at the very center of the narration, and where characters usually end up experiencing the dissolution of the dream (Rhodes 2010); whereas *Once upon…a Time in Hollywood* is, in part, about the rise and the fall of a leading actor, Rick Dalton, and the aspiration of a psycho-musician, the novel is more about a fantasy aimed at keeping the dream and the illusion alive. Regardless of the ideological and cultural background of the characters, the narrative points to an idea of "community", the Hollywood one, where relationships can be built on the movie set, at a pool party or in the neighborhood. Not surprisingly, it will be the child-actor Trudi, at

the end of the novel, who will make Rick realize "how fortunate he is and was" to be an actor in Hollywood.

But most of all, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* turns the eponymous film's intertextual features and references into something more *explicit*, almost in the form of a critical essay or an insider's history of Hollywood. In this connection, the novel stands between his later non-fiction book *Cinema Speculation* (2022) and a pulp Hollywood story in the style of James Ellroy. By mixing true and fictional personalities, Tarantino's Hollywood novel aims to be fictional in documenting a pop cultural piece of history, and it aims to be critical in the writing of a story about pop culture.

5.5
A history made of genres: crime at the center

I discussed how novelization proves to be one of the codes through which Tarantino engages with culture from a historical point of view. *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*'s revisitation of history is, most of all, enacted through a dialogue between art and its historical moment of production. This is precisely why genres – in terms of pastiche and mixture – take on two different functions. One is characterization, insofar as genres also affect the agency of the characters and help to clarify how a character is informed by a specific temporality; the other is a metacritique, or the way in which Tarantino comments on history through cinematic intertextuality, adopting, yet again, a dialectical perspective with regard to the history of the genres and their respective historical contexts. As I will try to analyze in this final paragraph, crime – mediated in its symbolic and discursive values through different genres and genre-blending practices – plays a fundamental role in the construction of meanings.

There is no doubt that the relationship between Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth lies at the very center of the narration; both the protagonists, as I have mentioned, are obviously linked to the 50s popular culture, deeply invested in television and rooted in the broadly conservative, white-male oriented cultural setting of the decade. No wonder then, that their models of inspiration can be traced back to the 50s pulp-fiction models; in the novel, Cliff Booth is described as a big admirer of the fictional secret spy Matt Helm, the quintessential Cold War pulp hero – blatantly racist and misogynistic –, protagonist of the pulp books written by Donald Hamilton from 1960 to 1993. The association between Booth and Helm (much like the one between Cliff and Mannix), is

an example of a broader strategy through which Tarantino constructs his characters; while showing the power of the medium to shape the desire and the personality – like John Garfield, Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe's influence on Doc Sportello in *Inherent Vice* – Tarantino shows how his character are not simply defined but constructed through the history of the medium. If Doc Sportello is a blend of Marlowe and Lebowski, Cliff Booth is both Helm and Mannix.

Booth and Dalton's racism and anti-countercultural feelings are meant to be a caricature of the right-wing cowboy hero, a figure that echoes the television western and military-style figures of 50s and early 60s productions. Rick Dalton's character is evocative of actors such as Ed Burns, George Maharis, Ty Hardin (who played a role in *Bronco*) and, most of all, Steve McQueen who starred in the famous TV series *Wanted: Dead or Alive* (1958-1961) as the bounty hunter Josh Randall. Since the cultural background of the Sixties clearly challenges Rick's ideological and professional status, the actor is offered the chance to go to Italy in order to star in some spaghetti western movies. The Italian Spaghetti western – often made in collaboration with other European countries such as Spain – represented in fact a type of European cinema that influenced the New Hollywood, and that was mainly concerned with a revisionism of certain genres like the Western. Besides Sergio Corbucci, mentioned several times in both the film and the novel, an obvious example is Sergio Leone, whose *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) and, most of all, *Once Upon a Time in the West*[79] (1968) hugely influenced much of the American western, both during and after the New Hollywood wave, as well as Tarantino's own aesthetics. At the same time, Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth's friendship seems to reference the classic trope of the buddy film that influenced the spaghetti western of the Sixties – it is enough to think of *The Big Gundown (*1967) and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). Of course, as one of the first examples of the buddy film was the buddy cop show, this trope is also a link to the TV police procedural series, one of the genres that is most represented in *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* when we see the characters watching television. No wonder then that Rick

[79] As Peter Avellino notes, "that haunting final shot has Margot Robbie as this version of Sharon Tate emerging from her home just as her *Don't Make Waves* co-star Claudia Cardinale does at the end of Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*, each sent to offer a form of cinematic benediction, each in their own way a symbol of all that is good in the world, one the promise of the coming civilization and growing west, one the totally pure love of the movies and all their possibilities coming out to greet her neighbor Rick at last." (Avellino 2019)

Dalton is also shown as starring in *The F.B.I* (1965-1974) television series, establishing himself as the hero of Nixon's silent majority just as Jack Webb did in the years of *Dragnet*. Just as the buddy cop film endures in the panorama of contemporary noir, Rick and Cliff's friendship and pulp attitudes also recall Shane Black's works, such as *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996), *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005) and, most of all, *The Nice Guys* (2016), set in 70s Los Angeles, with which Tarantino's last movie shares a pulp-comedy sensibility.

This also leads to a reflection on Tarantino's enduring yet ambiguous relation with the neo-noir genre. As Sue Short has noted, "his denial of any association at the time, stating in interview 'I don't do neo-noir', is curious, given the fact that he patently does, or did, yet he was apparently keen to distance himself from the genre that made his name" (Short 2019, 23). Indeed, it seems clear that *Pulp Fiction* and *Jackie Brown* especially revealed in many way a neo-noir sensibility, not only because of Tarantino's obvious fascination with Elmore Leonard's crime narratives but also because of these movies' critical engagement with the Los Angeles urban space that is inherent to the noir genre. Both the films were, in fact, examples of the "neo-noir at the new millennium" in which "the tarnished dream of the suburbs is all that remains" (Silver and Ursini 2005, 154). While it is certainly true that Tarantino's movies became more and more heterogeneous and complex in terms of the recycling of genres and genre blending, I would still consider noir as the primary frame of reference when it comes to the late Tarantino, for two reasons; the first is that a return to a western aesthetics (*Django Unchained* and *The Hateful Eight*) is mainly concerned with a western that – after the experience of the New Hollywood – became revisionist and anti-. But as Sue Short notes, "what is often termed as the 'revision-ist' western is clearly inflected by *noirish* cynicism" and the "American Dream is both supported and subverted in combining noir and western tropes, confirming a land of opportunity for those willing to bend the rules, yet not without cost" (Short 2012, 154, italics mine). The second is that an apparent distancing of himself from the classic premise of the noir in the late Tarantino should not be read as a distancing of himself from this genre, as we know that evolution and hybridization have always been part of noir;

> neo-noir's potential is not proven through repetition but a capacity for revision. It can go much further than the classic era in terms of asserted levels of corruption yet, more importantly, it can also combat such tendencies. The

> fatalism aligned with noir, the sense of insurmountable doom faced by protagonists, is refuted in certain contemporary examples that allow seemingly powerless figures to triumph against the odds (Short 2012, 154)

Regardless of its ideological and strategical implications, the premise of *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* is concerned precisely with a similar sense of revenge, in which two "has been" figures like Rick and Cliff can indeed triumph in the end.

Moreover, if the emergence of the New Hollywood in the late Sixties can be identified as the seedbed of neo-noir, the relationship with the genre in Tarantino's revisitation takes on different forms and shows itself to be a retrospective of many of the changes relating the genre. For this reason, we can say that the relationship with noir becomes even more articulate, yet even more dispersive, precisely because a revisitation of the genre is present in its different manifestations – hardboiled, thriller, noir, neo-noir, erotic thriller, horror or true crime – whether through an endless citation of the history of noir or a reappropriation of tropes and figures. It is enough to consider the character of Cliff Booth; if it is true that with this movie Tarantino implements the intertextuality and the reflection on the artificial nature of the representation, the choice to introduce a stuntman, a body double, is strictly functional for this purpose. Cliff is, in fact – a throwback to a pivotal figure of the cinema of Brian De Palma, and particularly his neo-noir/erotic thriller *Body Double* (1984) – a double body because his function is not only expressed in his characterization as a stuntman on the takes with Rick Dalton but throughout the whole narrative discourse. Cliff is probably more of a Western hero in reality than Rick Dalton is in fiction, as shown by the scene in which Cliff goes to the Spahn Movie Ranch owned by the hippies, moving as a cowboy in a city of outlaws. His mission as a stuntman is not only about "carry[ing] the load" (Tarantino 2019) but extends to a friendship with Rick: not surprisingly it will be Cliff who is the real antagonist in the final clash with the Manson Family. His function is mimetic in regard to the mechanisms of the film itself: he "carries the load" of the narration – which can then progress – since the stuntman carries the weight of the actor[80]. In any case, the metacinematic trope of the body double allows Tarantino to investigate not only the *artificiality* of fiction (as well as his obsessive cinephilia) but also to experiment with

[80] An interesting interpretation of Rick and Cliff friendship in terms of dependence, is given by Federico Pagello who writes about a "master–slave dialectic" (Pagello 2020, 195), deriving from Žižek's psychoanalytic theories.

structures that privilege, both in the novel and in the film, the narratives of both figures.[81]

On the other hand, the Los Angeles noir is only present through superficial citation, like Cliff Booth's relation with his dog which recalls Marlowe (Elliot Gould) and his cat in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, and Sharon Tate's visiting the bookshop in Westwood that eventually recalls John Huston's *The Big Sleep*. On the contrary, since the visual reconstruction of Los Angeles of the period is largely dedicated to Sharon Tate's figure, the inspiration for the movie's atmosphere can be traced back to romantic dramas of the late 60s and 70s, such as the endless car-cruising of Jacques Demy's *The Model Shop* (1969), Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* (1967), Hal Ashby's *Shampoo* (1975) and Phil Karlson's *The Wrecking Crew* (1968). In this respect, it is interesting to note how James Naremore's statement about Tarantino's inspiration for *Pulp Fiction* still intersects with *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*'s references;

> Instead of simply harking back to the 1940s and 1950s, Tarantino takes most of his inspiration from the period when both auteurism and the idea of noir gained a strong foothold in America and when a fairly sophisticated film culture coexisted with "bubblegum" music and color TV. He uses old-fashioned materials in much the same way as the *Cahiers* group in the early 1960s, but his nostalgia extends forward to movies like *Mean Streets* and *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), and his cinephilia is combined with a "screen memory" of TV kitsch. (Naremore 2008, 216)

In his last movie, Tarantino continues to cultivate the *vintage* sensibility described by Naremore, but since the inspirations he describes derive from the same context on which *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* insists, his references seem to be moving towards more specific meanings and strategies. As another example of this process, it is worth noting that, in Tarantino's film, neo-noir overlaps with horror and exploitation cinema, both rooted in the experience of 1970s; the aesthetics of these genres significantly shapes not only the climax of the scenes at the Spahn Movie Ranch – which can be

[81] An homage to *Body Double* is also paid by Tarantino in the scene in which we see Cliff and Rick sitting in the car just after a cinematographic panel that depicts a fictional landscape is moved by the theater. In *Body Double*, in fact, during the opening credits, we see a natural landscape with the sun and palm trees; after a few seconds, we realize that this background is nothing more than a panel placed on the back of a production theater and then taken away by operators. The great metaphor on which the film is built – and which obviously influenced Tarantino's aesthetics – is precisely that of fiction: the viewer is constantly reminded that what he is about to see is fake.

associated, as many have noted, to the New Horror Cinema through a film like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* – but also the epilogue of the movie. Here Cliff's brutality towards the hippies' bodies further challenges audience enjoyment and the nature of the enjoyment itself, again raising questions about the representation of violence[82]; "the level of gore is clearly aimed to provoke this reaction in the viewer, activating the kind of shock and excitement with which exploitation cinema aimed to provide its audience" (Pagello 2020, 197)

Finally, the genre to which *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* naturally relates and that helps to historicize more directly the Hollywood context, is a genre that, though less clearly defined, has a long tradition and relationship with noir. I am referring to the "movies about Hollywood" [83], clearly influenced by the modernist writers of the Hollywood novel, and that, starting from the 50s, proliferated on the Hollywood scene. Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), Mankiewicz's *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954), the film version of *The Big Knife* (1955) are among the primary examples of this genre that evolved together with the noir genre itself, to find its postmodern cinematic manifestation in the Coen Brothers' *Barton Fink* (1991) and David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*. No wonder, then that *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* ends where *Sunset Boulevard*'s narrative began, at an open air backyard swimming pool, a place that here becomes a symbol of Hollywood at the crossroads where modern and postmodern meet.

Both *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* and its novelization – as an example of the (New) Hollywood novel – show that a recognition of late 60s Los Angeles cannot be separated from a personal, childhood-driven fantasy which relies as much on the power of imagination as on unreliable memory. This is why at this stage the cinematic noir – as will be evident also in the analysis of Erickson's novel – becomes invested with a

[82] In this chapter I did not focus much on the question of violence in the cinema of Tarantino which is one of the bones of contention for which he has been criticized throughout his career. However it seems clear that the representation of violence in Tarantino's cinema should be understood in its deliberate artificiality; its cinematic representation – being part of Tarantino's postmodern aesthetics – should be accepted for what it is; mere representation. The viewer is conscious of the fact that what he is seeing is not real; however, as Pagello suggests, "the fact that cinematic violence cannot literally hurt the viewer does not mean that cinema cannot hit her on a different level—sensual, emotional or intellectual: films are fictional and, yet, their 'effects' on the spectators might be 'real,' if—and only if —those spectators approach them in the right way" (Pagello 2020, 199)

[83] Naremore defines them as "part of the cycle of quasi-noirish movies about Hollywood" (2008, 328)

precise role, coming to terms with the question of erasure and the violence of forgetfulness. With these questions in my pocket, I will head to the city of *Zeroville*.

Chapter Six

The Cineautistic Detective: Post-cinematic Anxiety in Steve Erickson's *Zeroville*

"That Secret Movie? The one that's hidden
frame by frame in all the other movies?"
"Yes."
"Maybe we're not dreaming it. Maybe it's
dreaming us"

Steve Erickson, *Zeroville*

When *Zeroville* came out in 2007, the native Los Angeles writer Steve Erickson had already published his most acclaimed and famous novels, such as *Days Between Stations* (1985), *Tours of the Black Clock* (1989), *Arc d'X* (1993) and *Amnesiascope* (1993). From the beginning of his career, critics in and out of academia struggled to define and categorize Erickson's work; his art has always been neither in tune with contemporary literary trends nor fully described by the critical categories usually associated with the writer's oeuvre, i.e. postmodernist fiction, pulp, dystopic fiction and surrealism. In fact, in the last 40 years, Erickson's literary figure has remained subterranean, long considered a *writer's writer*; acclaimed and appreciated by the giants of postmodernist and post-postmodernist fiction such as Thomas Pynchon[84], Jonathan Lethem, David Foster Wallace and Paul Auster, and at the same time largely ignored by academic scholars. However, one could assert that the difficulty in deciphering the chaos inherent in Erickson's literary works is determined by the fact that his writing has always been concerned with indecipherability itself. Not only because, as Matthew Luter and Mike Miley suggest, "Erickson's work does not offer art as an easy solution to all that ails a soul or a nation" (Luter and Miley 2021, ix), but also because it often privileges a heterogeneous and often anarchic approach to art. Art becomes not simply a means through which to express an idea of the reality which surrounds us, but more often than not it takes over reality itself; in other words, his fiction points to the conclusion that one cannot live without being profoundly and *metaphysically* shaped by

[84] Thomas Pynchon provided blurbs for Steve Erickson's early books (such as Arc d'X) and both writers are represented by the literary agent Melanie Jackson, who married Pynchon in 1990.

art. More precisely, Erickson's interest in popular culture, 20th Century modernism and postmodernism, the erosion of the high/low cultural hierarchy, and, most of all, the erosion between art and life, contribute to making his fiction *chaotic*. This is why I prefer to consider his work, despite the different strategies of each novel, as inextricably linked to an Avant-pop sensibility. The literary critic Larry McCaffery – who included an excerpt of Steve Erickson's *Arc d'X* in his famous Avant-Pop anthology *After Yersterday's Crash* (1995) – defined Avant-Pop as an art concerned with consumer goods, mass media and materials of popular culture, combining these features with an avant-garde spirit of subversion (McCaffery 1995, xvi–xvii); if the Avant-pop's canon seems to work against the logic of a literary canon, in its being extremely eclectic and in its aim of bringing together unclassifiable works, then Erickson's fiction shares with Avant-Pop a similarly contradictory literary project. The coexistence of pop culture, literature, film, music, history, politics with an avant-garde, almost punk imagination is a pivotal feature of Erickson's literature; to read his fiction is to accept that one cannot separate reality from aesthetics and that the writer's imagination can become interchangeable with the medium's imagination. As Erickson told McCaffery and Tatsumi in an interview, "distinctions between the artifice of the media and the artifice of the mind become more difficult to make". If we come to accept this definition, Erickson's fiction no longer appears chaotic or dystopic, but it becomes extremely real, though in hysterical, dreamlike, metaphysical and surrealist terms.

Analogously, one cannot fully understand the bond between Steve Erickson and Los Angeles if not in this interchangeability; Los Angeles is present in almost all of his novels, even when they are not actually set in the Californian metropolis; whether as an apocalyptic setting, the site of geological events, or as a cinematic medium, the Los Angeles imagination informs the characters, and viceversa. Erickson acknowledges that however realistic the representation of the city aims to be, the *reel*, the fictional and the dreamy have now become an inextricable part of its imagination, but that for this reason it is not less *real*. For the author, Los Angeles is the site of the uncertainty and mutability, the epicenter of the transformation; it is a place capable of transforming people as much as it is capable of transforming itself. In Erickson's Los Angeles, chaos, again, is what eventually allows the characters to start a new life, like in the typical situation of the Hollywood novel; it becomes a blank slate, where not only are characters allowed to reset their life but Los Angeles continually resets itself. As indecipherability

is at the core of Erickson's narrative, the city can serve as an obvious metaphor for that; if it is true that Los Angeles noir always dramatized the individual attempt to understand how to relate to the fragmented and mutable space which surrounds it, this genre – in its enduring relation with Los Angeles – is present in Erickson's fiction not as a conscious stylistic revisitation but as an inherent, ontological condition. None of his works are technically detective novels as such; still, Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles is echoed in his fiction at a more fundamental, systemic level. This is the case of *Rubicon beach, Arc D'X, Amnesiascope*, *The Sea Came at Midnight*; but when it comes to *Zeroville* , the idea that noir, and, more generally, cinema, music and art can affect reality and the way in which we perceive it, is carried to extremes. In *Zeroville*, as I will try to demonstrate in this chapter, reality exists along with the cinematic experience, but art is the true site of transformation. In this regard, the revisitation of the Sixties in Erickson's *Zeroville* are not only an interesting setting but an obvious one. Here, the detection which takes place in the cinematic reality, will allow the detective to come to terms with the historical transformations of the medium during the New Hollywood, the rise of television and other cultural and aesthetic transitions which affected Hollywood at the end of the decade. However, as in the case of Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*, Erickson's anxieties in regard to such transitions turn out to be part of a larger, dialectical perspective which finds in the Los Angeles of the Sixties a way to reflect on the current state of the medium, that is the transition to a post-cinematic age (Shaviro 2010), and to a time in which Los Angeles has lost its hegemonic status as the capital of cinema.

6.1
Writing the Hollywood novel after the New Hollywood

> This is the summer of 1969, two days after Vikar's twenty-fourth birthday...He's been in Los Angeles an hour. He's just gotten off a six-day bus trip from Philadelphia, riding day and night.
> (Erickson 2013, 1)

Right from the first page of Steve Erickson's *Zeroville*, the reader can recognize some of the tropes and narrative situations which best defined the classic Hollywood

Novel. The protagonist, Vikar, born Ike Jerome in Pennsylvania where he has received a seminar Puritan education, which is very reminiscent of the one New Hollywood filmmaker Paul Schrader received from his conservative Calvinist parents; Ike is abused by his father and their complicated relationship not only underpins the religious symbolism within the text, such as Abrahamic sacrifice, but it recalls how Hollywood handed its sons and daughters over to death; this is the case of Jayne Mansfield and James Dean, quoted several times in the text, but most importantly of Soledad, with whom Vikar establishes a noir-like relationship which I will discuss later. Vikar moves to Los Angeles from the East Coast in order to become a film director and to work for the film industry, a narrative cliché which recalls 1930s novels such as Nathaniel West's *The Day of The Locust* (1939), Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They* (1935) or *I Should Have Stayed Home* (1938), Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* (1941) or Bruce Wagner's Hollywood works. These novels engaged with a representation of the Hollywood society, the movie-making process and the dramatization of desire[85]; more often than not, they aimed to debunk the inconsistency of the Hollywood dream or to satirize the industry by emphasizing the tragic destiny of characters that "had come to California to die" (West 2018, 2) and investigating the condition of marginality of Hollywood's 'outsiders' (extras, would-be actors) along with the dissolution (and disillusionment) of their dream. Whereas the industry's dehumanizing capabilities and depravities[86] have been largely investigated by these writers, such themes are not at the core of Erickson's narration; in *Zeroville*, the protagonist does not experience rejection by the industry nor the tragic destiny of McCoy's characters. On the contrary, while he also manages to be a successful film editor and director, his major concern has more to do with the destiny of the movies and less with the possibility of making them. Vikar in fact is obsessed with movies and he is defined "cineautistic" by one of the characters in the novel; his disillusion lies in the fact that in Hollywood nobody seems to care anymore about film culture and history and that his "cineautism" leads him

[85] On the question of desire in the Hollywood novel, see Rhodes, Chip. *Politics, Desire, and the Hollywood Novel*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008.

[86]As Steve Erickson notes in his review of David Cronenberg's *Maps to the Stars* (2014) – showing once again an awareness of the Hollywood narrative tradition – "Bruce Wagner is also a novelist, whose fiction—like that of Fitzgerald, West, and Tolkin, with whom I imagine he won't object to being compared—is preoccupied with Hollywood's depravities" (Erickson 2014, 2).

to an initial condition of displacement and anachronism, with which Vikar will grapple for the entire narration.

> Is it possible he's traveled three thousand miles to the Movie Capital of the World only to find people who don't know the difference between Montgomery Clift and James Dean, who don't know the difference between Elizabeth Taylor and Natalie Wood? (Erickson 2013, 29)

The psycho-narration[87], which is largely privileged in the novel, illuminates a particular cine-trauma which triggers the plot; when Vikar understands that the image he had of Los Angeles and Hollywood is not what he encounters in reality, his attitude begins to absorb and project the melancholy of the loss of an age. Vikar arrives in Los Angeles as a religious messianic figure (as the name suggests) with the myth of the Classic Hollywood literally on his head. On his skull, in fact, the protagonist has a tattoo with images of Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift in a scene from *A Place in the Sun* (1951), a film which is not only an example of what Erickson calls Cinema of Hysteria[88], but which best represents the moment – the end of the 40s and early 50s – when the Hollywood studio era (or the Golden Age of Hollywood) was about to end. From the very beginning of the narrative, it becomes clear that what separates Erickson from the classic Hollywood novelists is precisely his interest in the cinema as a medium rather than as a business. This interest, I would argue, is concentrated in the character of Vikar, who himself becomes a medium through which the history of cinema and an aesthetic attitude can be constructed. In this sense, like Los Angeles, Vikar is for Erickson a "blank slate" on which the medium and its transitions can be inscribed. Indeed, Vikar is entrusted with the task of investigating a mystery which takes place on the cinematic level and that looms large in the narration; much of the protagonist's plotline deals with detecting a "secret movie that's been hidden, one frame at a time, in all the movies ever made" (Erickson 2013, 299). While *Zeroville*'s concern is in line with the post-postmodern writing preoccupation about the Sixties, that is "how to link

[87] For psycho-narration I refer to a narrative technique aimed to represent consciousness in a text; it is a precise type of indirect discourse in which the narrator reveals the mental processes of the character, potentially including its unconscious aspects (Herman and Vervaeck 2019, Cohn 1978)

[88] For Steve Erickson, Cinema of Hysteria "is a clandestine cinema that's been forming throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, movies that make no "sense" but that we instinctively understand anyway" (Luter and Miley 2021, 169)

together a series of events into a comprehensible and explanatory narrative" (West 2020, 213), Vikar proves that – regardless of the cultural and socio-political changes – cinema, and art, are the only place in which we can find not only a real idea of continuity but also in which the imagination can escape the limitations of reality, as Marcuse claimed, "in its refusal to accept as final the limitations imposed upon freedom and happiness by the reality principle" (Marcuse 1998, 148). It goes without saying that, for Erickson, the aesthetic recuperation of the Sixties has to do with art in Marcusean *liberative* terms, that is the rehabilitation of the imagination, the expansion of the consciousness, and more precisely, phantasy. In *Zeroville*, Vikar – and later other characters close to him in the novel – comes to absorb everything he sees on the big screen; watching movies, for him, is a dreamlike experience to the extent that his dreams contain the cinematic experience and "his dreams have contaminated the movies themselves" (Shaviro 2007). Just as Vikar's oneiric dimension is connected to the cinematic dimension, phantasy functions for him as something that "links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art), the dream with the reality" (Marcuse 1998, 87).

Erickson's novel starts in Los Angeles, in the summer of 1969, precisely on the day of the Manson murders. If in *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*, the Cielo Drive events coincide with the end of the narrative, in *Zeroville* they serve as a metaphor for the beginning of Vikar's investigation. Also in this case, the choice is obvious. The end of the Sixties is hardly a new trope in Erickson's fiction; the three narrative sections of *Rubicon Beach* converge in 1968, when Bob Kennedy was assassinated, in *The Sea Came at Midnight*, the Paris Protests of 1968 becomes a metaphor for a crossroads in an apocalyptic calendar. The sign of the apocalypse is present also in *Zeroville* in various forms; undoubtedly, the Manson Murders in their connection with the end of the countercultural and utopian experience of the Sixties, but, most of all, film industry structural and artistic changes, with the collapse of the studio system and the rise of authorship during what is known as the New Hollywood[89]. In the case of *Zeroville*, the Manson Family murders do not merely represent the collapse of the countercultural utopia, as is eventually the case in Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (2009). They contribute, rather, to providing a link between the death of classic Hollywood and the

[89] On the subject see King, Geoff. *The New Hollywood: An Introduction.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

emergence of an interest in new media along with the rise of the New Hollywood.[90] If it is true that the Manson murders "turned everything wonderful or explosive or radical or new or amazing into death, paranoia and murder" (Melnick 2018, 681), the atmosphere of paranoia and the specter of death haunt Vikar's narration right from his arrival in the city. In fact, when Vikar arrives in Los Angeles, with his physical aesthetics in contrast with hippie culture, his *A Place in The Sun* intertextual tattoo represents a romanticism that "stands juxtaposed against the moment we first see Vikar, who arrives in LA in the summer of 1969 on the day of the Manson murders" (Miller 2021, 154). He discovers that both the police and the civilians are terrified of Manson's lookalikes and that everyone mistakes him for a member of the Manson's family.

> "This one about the pigs. Written on the door of the house in the blood of," waving one photo, "the mother of," waving the other, "this one. Am I supposed to take it personally, Ike? Was this for me, this about the pigs?" but Vikar sobs, wishing he never had seen it […].
> "I'd stay out of those canyons if I were you," one of the cops tells him. 'There's something going on up there." (Erickson 2013, 66-70)

While Vikar is totally unaware of Manson and the cult paranoia sweeping through the city, his only concern relates, once again, to his 'cine-phantasmatic' idea of the city. When he visits the Laurel Canyon Boulevard, he talks about the house where "Harry Houdini lived while trying to become a movie star in the twenties" (2013, 45), which now is just a secret passage leading to all parts of the canyon and which is "occupied by an extended family of hippies led by a musician with a Groucho Marx mustache" (2013, 50). In this symbolic handover—a symbolism not by chance built on a mysterious and spiritual figure like Houdini—Vikar detects the first signs of a socio-cultural change. People both from the canyons and the beach are suspicious of his presence and it becomes difficult for him to establish relationships due to this pervading paranoia.

[90] Some prosecutors, in the wake of the Manson Murders, said that the murders were a sort of revenge on Charles's part; he wanted to become a rockstar and the house where the deaths occurred used to belong to Terry Melcher—a music producer who had refused to collaborate with Manson. This hypothesis would be another symptom—employed by the author—of the representative change in the interest towards the Sound within the society depicted in the novel.

> "For God's sake, Sol," Margie says, "he's not one of the Manson Family. He's harmless. I promise you," she says knowingly.
> "He is not harmless," Vikar hears Soledad answer. "He may not be one of the Manson Family," she concedes, "but he's not harmless." (Erickson 2013, 170)

The invasion of the canyons by the hippies, the looming sense of death and the perception of impending doom were socio-cultural symptoms that peaked with the Manson family murders. The scenario of the novel is organized around this apocalyptic vision of the end of times, hardly a new trope in Los Angeles art and literature. As Mike Davis has explained in his book *Ecology of Fear* (1998), "the destruction of Los Angeles has been a central theme or image in at least 138 novels or films since 1909" (1998, 276), not to mention songs.[91] From Tod's painting called "The Burning of Los Angeles" in *The Day of The Locust* (West 1939) to the raining down of frogs in San Fernando Valley in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1998), images of destruction still inhabit Los Angeles narration.

Cataclysms and apocalyptic settings, albeit more evident in other works of Erickson's fiction such as *Days Between the Stations* (1985) and *Amnesiascope* (1996), in this case allude to the cultural importance of a particular time period. In fact, although in *Zeroville* Los Angeles experiences "the biggest fucking earthquake in forty years" (2013, 136), the real apocalyptic setting is realized in a more symbolic way so that, in the economy of the narration, August 1969 represents the disruptive force that strengthens Vikar's agency; the post-apocalyptic area, in which the protagonist operates, represents the construction of a new world, new values and meanings that Vikar conveys through his relationship with his pupil Zazi, through his trip to Europe and finally through the detection of the "Secret Movie" (Erickson 2013, 758). In this sense, the author tries to offer the possibility of a narration after the disruptive events, a possibility that lies in the cinematic storyworld of the novel rather than in the external reality. On the contrary, Vikar's interactions with the world outside the cinema—and in particular with Zazi—often translate into a cine-religious education, as a way of confronting his past and present.

It would be both natural and easy to read Vikar merely as a messianic figure who points out the path to a new reality or, in cinematic terms, to a new Hollywood, in which

[91] For instance, two famous songs by Neil Young, "After the Gold Rush" (1970) and "L.A." (1973), describe the author's fantasy visions of the destruction of Los Angeles.

an idea of creativity and freedom is fostered and romanticized by the author. In part this is true; Vikar – the punk angel bearing the sign of the apocalypse on his skull – embodies what Erickson calls the "anarchy set in" of the new era of Hollywood and its promise of freedom; freedom is what drives Vikar's work as film editor, and he is also awarded a prize in Cannes "for an original and provocative contribution to the art of montage and the creation of a revelatory new cinematic rhetoric" (Erickson 2013, 44). Vikar's motto is "fuck continuity"; but such rhetoric does not mean that his punk attitude leads him to reject an idea of continuity but that, on the contrary, for the "cineautistic" detective, there should be no such thing as continuity in film editing because everything is already connected, "all scenes anticipate and reflect each other", "Scenes reflect what has not yet happened, scenes anticipate what has already happened" (Erickson 2013, 55). Vikar takes advantage of the apocalyptic setting of the late Sixties to demonstrate that, for all the prevailing chaos, the possibility of continuity in the cinema is not only possible but inevitable. The apocalyptic setting of the late Sixties reveals to be not a time in which one perceive the end of the medium, but a moment in which, for all the chaos, the possibility of continuity is to be revealed.

Not surprisingly, the protagonist's anxiety about the question of continuity is also translated in relation to the history of Los Angeles;

> Los Angeles is the City of the Real, whose stories are as old as time, where people go to hide from God, unlike the more hopeful, childlike people of New York. "Scenes that have not yet happened," he explains to those around the table, "have." New York makes sense to Vikar now—as he leaves the room, everyone staring after him—in a way it never did when he was there.[92] (Erickson 2013, 211)

For Erickson, Los Angeles is not the City of the *reel* but is still the city of the real, precisely because cinema is as old as Los Angeles itself. In *Zeroville*, the problem of the erasure of memory usually associated with Los Angeles is here presented in the cinematic form; while cinema affirms its pastness in the transitions to other technologies or other mediums, Hollywood forgets its past and sacrifices its children, becoming a place where everything has been reset to zero (Erickson 2013, 161). Not

[92] Just like Vikar – who for many reasons is of the most autobiographical characters invented by Erickson, the latter too admitted the importance of traveling abroad for his later understanding of the nature of Los Angeles. See Appendix, p. 217.

surprisingly, the title of the novel recalls a line from Gordard's *Alphaville*, a futuristic mix of film noir and science fiction – an obvious inspiration for Erickson – where the private eye Lemmy Caution has to destroy the city of Alphaville and its dictatorial computer, Alpha 60, which has abolished freedom and emotions in the city. In one of the dialogues between Lemmy and Natacha, a citizen of Alphaville, the question of the erasure of time and memory is explicated;

> "No one has ever lived in the past; no one will ever live in the future. The present is the form of all life."
> "We are unique. Wretchedly unique."
> "You shouldn't call this dump Alphaville; it's Zeroville."
> "The present is terrifying because it is irreversible." (Gordard 1965)

In *Zeroville*, Vikar raises the fact that, in both reality and cinematic reality, present is the only possible time and his technique of film editing is precisely the act of accepting the obliteration of the line between past and future. Similarly, Vikar embraces the obliteration of the line between "reality" and "non-reality", between dreaming and watching a movie, and this is for him the quintessential form of freedom, or in Marcusean terms, "the opposition of phantasy to the reality principle". [1] In *Eros and Civilization,* Marcuse claims that "the opposition of phantasy to the reality principle is more at home in such sub-real and surreal processes as dreaming, daydreaming, play, the "stream of consciousness."; these are, for Marcuse, sites in which one can escape restrictions and repressions of the reality. In this sense, art is the place where the Great Refusal (that is the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom) can be formulated without punishment. Vikar embraces such a struggle through cinema, not only to free himself from his oppressive past, but also to prove that cinema, regardless of his pastness, can survive only if it frees itself from restrictions.

From this perspective, it should not be surprising that Erickson's fiction here becomes, in a sense, "surrealistic"; it is Marcuse – echoing Adorno and the other Frankfurters – who argued that "Art survives only where it cancels itself, where it saves its substance by denying its traditional form and thereby denying reconciliation: where it becomes surrealistic and atonal" (Marcuse 1998, 145). If surrealist art sought to register the hidden currents of the unconscious (Bordwell 2001, 452), then *Zeroville*'s

art proves to be conscious in depicting Vikar's cineautism, where causality is as evasive as in a dream. This helps to explain the centrality of Luis Buñuel, one of the founders of the surrealist movement, in Erickson's novel. Not by chance, many of Ike's cinematic dreams relate to Soledad – a mysterious character who I will discuss later – in which visions of her intersect with frames of Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan Of Arc* (1928), create a symbolic overlap. In fact, Soledad is mentioned in the novel as Bunuel's illegitimate daughter; "she was in a nuthouse for a while in Oslo, and story has it she was cast as the woman who vanishes on the island in *L'Avventura* and then was dropped at the last minute, for mysterious reasons no one ever has understood or explained" (Erickson 2013, 159). The fact that Vikar will finally reach Oslo at the end of the narration, searching for the original film print of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* testifies to the confluence of different kinds of realities (also in terms of time and space) in the same narration, that is proper to Bunuel's art as well as to Zeroville's narration. Luis Buñuel also appears in the dreams of Cooper Léon, the Spanish revolutionary Vikar encounters in Spain. Léon asks Vikar to film the fake death of the "fascist assassin the Generalissimo", Francisco Franco, who "ran Buñuel out of Spain in the late forties" (Erickson 2013, 63). In fact, the surrealist death of Franco in Vikar's film – starring Cooper Léon's papa – will set Spain free from dictatorship; as Cooper tells Vikar, "The assassin the Generalissimo died, and now many good films are allowed in my country. Thanks to you." (Erickson 2013, 171). Cinema – as in the case of Tarantino's metafictional narrative – creates a utopian space of intervention where art becomes a metaphor for liberation.

Moreover, Erickson's revisitation of the countercultural values of the Sixties extends beyond cinema; the protagonist's relationship with a growing interest in "Music" (capitalized throughout the novel with reference to punk music) embodies the birth of a heterogenous cultural scene during the 70s. If at the beginning of the narration Vikar shows his disregard for Music in what he calls the "Heretic City," by the end "for a while he realizes he's come to care more about the Sound than the Movie" (2013, 350). In fact, Vikar starts going to clubs he first had avoided, seeking the Sound, which the characters identify with the emergence of punk[93] as a

[93] Intertextual references to music are no less important than cinematographic ones in Erickson's construction of the storyworld in his novels. Another reference to punk and new wave

countercultural force in the 1970s, one in which Vikar – during his period in New York – seems to find his spiritual dimension. It is not a coincidence that the only made-up film in the novel, for which Vikar is nominated for an Oscar, is called *Your Pale Blue Eyes*, clearly recalling the 1969 song by The Velvet Underground, who were, at the time, among the forerunners of punk and avant-guard music in the United States. It's clear that Zeroville's author seems to put at the core of the narration a multiple range of disruptive cultural impulses, and much of the narrative tension lies in the relationship between Vikar and the different media, and their impact on society. If it is true, as Erickson argues, that "Vikar is a punk angel bearing the sign of the apocalypse" (Luter and Miley 2021, 156), the protagonist's punk attitude can be traced back to Surrealism as "one of countercultural psychedelia's clearest antecedents" (Colquhoun 2020, 16); it is Mark Fisher who wrote on his blog *k-punk*, that "Like punk, Surrealism is dead as soon as it is reduced to an aesthetic style. It comes unlive again when it is instantiated as a delirial program (just as punk comes unlive when it is effectuated as an anti-authoritarian, acephalic contagion-network)" (Fisher 2018, 109). Punk in Erickson's fiction has not much to do with the apocalypse in destructive terms, but with the possibility of liberating the imagination; but instead of translating this liberation merely in the style of a delirial writing, punk performs a regenerative role, in the sense that art can reinvent itself only by fostering a continuity in his liberating potentiality.

As we will see in the next paragraph, the transitions that Vikar confronts starting from his arrival in Los Angeles on 9 August 1969 not only have to do with art and the medium in general; changes affect also Los Angeles and its most iconic genre, noir, which becomes transmedial, transregional and hauntological. From this perspective, the title of Vikar's film *Your Pale Blue Eyes* is not just a reference which evokes the influence of music on film as a medium; if the Velvet Underground were an example of American protopunk, their frontman, Lou Reed, represents for Erickson[94] an example of how a certain Los Angeles noir quality was incorporated in music (especially in punk music) in the Seventies, going beyond the city and its literature. The author is now aware of how noir has become an ethereal, undefinable and ever-expanding category.

---

can be found in his novel *These Dreams of You* (2012) in which subplots involve figures such as Iggy Pop and David Bowie.

[94] See Appendix, p. 204.

6.2
Marlowe goes to New York

Just as for Erickson the idea of noir coincides with indecipherability, the cinema of hysteria and noir become interchangeable; *Zeroville* interrogates noir as a critical category but it is far more interested in its unconscious and dark side than in the Hollywood fascination with glamour. If, as Naremore argued, many film noir of the post-War era "used tough, Hemingwayesque dialogue and American production values to bestow a kind of glamour upon the dark emotional moods" (Naremore, 27), *Zeroville* rejects any glamourized version of the genre, and it focuses on noir's ability to deal with the subconscious[95]. Nonetheless, Erickson's interest in the multiple changes of the genre is also a way through which he comes to understand the changes that affect his beloved Los Angeles and, of course, Hollywood's conscience in depicting the city and the United States in general.

Although Vikar will travel to New York and Europe in order to solve the cinematic mystery, Los Angeles is the primary setting of the novel; not surprisingly, most of the allusions to L.A. literature and film imagery concern the mystery genre or the private-eye genre[96]. Erickson's reappropriation of noir tropes is not restricted to *Zeroville*, since also *Rubicon Beach* (1986) as well as *Days between the Stations* (1995) are filled with Chandler and noir influences, particularly in the construction of the characters.[97] In *Zeroville*, for example, references to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) occur several times and perform two narrative functions: the first is the construction of a noir imagery to which Vikar's story is associated, setting the tone for his investigation, while the second, less explicitly, concerns Vikar's relationship with Los Angeles and the other characters along with his agency. In particular, Vikar's relationship with Soledad Paladin is symptomatic not only of his centrality as a male

[95] In an interview with Larry McCaffery, Erickson claimed that "What Hollywood loves about noir is the style and glamour of it, not the desperation it expressed" (Luter and Miley, 2021 61).
[96] I explored these features also in an academic essay (See, Di Vilio, A. "The Cineautistic Detective: Steve Erickson's "Zeroville" and the New Hollywood Novel", *Iperstoria*, 18, 2021).
[97]A deep awareness of Chandler's literature and influence on the contemporary novelists and writers is also visible in Erickson's activity as film critic, as his reviews on Paul Thomas Anderson's *Inherent Vice* (2015), on Amazon's *Bosch* Tv Series (2016), and on Nicholas Winding Refn's *Drive* (2011) show.

subject in the narration, typical of noir narratives, but also of the existence of a link between his oneiric world and the real experience, an ability that belongs to the film medium and by extension to Vikar.

Soledad Paladin – loosely based on a real European actress named Soledad Miranda, who was a star of soft-core vampire movies – is the tragic actress Vikar falls in love with, playing a fundamental symbolic role in the novel's storyworld. Dying in a car crash, just like her real-life counterpart, she represents Vikar's concern with the father-Hollywood that sacrifices its children; in fact, she can be, much like Shasta in Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*, considered as "the gendered figure through which the hard-boiled male narrates a larger sense of cultural loss and betrayal" (Breu 2005, 71). Above all, Soledad's function in the novel is extremely critical with regard to Vikar's complex sexuality. This brings us to another reflection: Vikar in his dreams experiences an erotic desire for Soledad "as Siamese twins," (2013, 161) expressing both a feeling of desire and of guilt in that she represents the screen siren of the time, as Erickson himself states, complicating Vikar's sexual conscience. While initially Elisabeth Taylor had been Vikar's ultimate erotic model, he begins to feel guilty when seeing Kim Novak in *Vertigo* (1958) on the screen and "feels like he's cheating on not only Taylor but Soledad as well" (Erickson 2013, 514).

This essentially shows us not only that the dream dimension is present in Vikar as a continuum of cinematic vision but also that his dreams represent his repressed sexuality, in a classical Freudian interpretation. Similarly, in Vikar "scopopholic viewings act as the catalyst for these internalized projections" (Randles 2019, 135) and his centrality as a character is typical of noir narratives in which the female form is conveyed to the viewer through the lens of male heterosexuality. In some respects, Soledad is evocative of the femme fatale and her agency is divided on two levels, one cinematic and one real. As Vikar yells at her: "'This is the profile of the one who wants you,' and turns his head back, 'this is the profile of the one who would kill you, for sacrificing your nine-year-old child'" (2013, 389). If on the one hand Soledad distracts Vikar from protecting her and Zazi, on the other hand she enacts Vikar's awareness about the rise of a new type of screen siren. Soledad's life, despite her charm and the power to seduce Vikar, is doomed to be destroyed. She plays a part in "*Lesbian*

Vampires"[98] (2013, 173), a porn film in which she is a seductive vampire and which who gives rise to the Vamp, the dark lady in European cinema (modeled in the US on Theda Bara). This was the first representation of the woman commercially offered in movies as an object of sexual fantasy and the last gasp of the cult of the *femme fatale* (Kaplan 1998, 180). Not by chance, Soledad will play a minor role in Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973), an iconic noir movie that introduces the New Hollywood transition operating a free transposition of Chandler's novel. Her agency as a *femme fatale* is of course limited, and she cannot even find a role in a movie because of her extreme beauty (both Antonioni and Altman refuse to give her a lead).

Moreover, as Liam Randles claims, "a lustful fascination with Soledad develops from a processing of her screen persona" (2019, 133) and Erickson's recurring presentation of the evocative qualities of movies—the medium acting as a tissue between dream and memory—naturally fits into such a portrayal. In the cinema environment, the character's repressed sexuality can manifest itself involuntarily and appears to be on the screen as well as in his dreams. Of course, repressed sexuality has always played a significant role in the classic private eye characterization, and in Vikar this dimension is constantly driven by his memory and dreams. The resurrection of the past is central to Vikar's investigation and regulates his relationship with Soledad and Zazi, Soledad's daughter; in fact, the idea of a surreal connection between Vikar and Soledad's past is perpetuated throughout the novel and is eventually projected into the future. On the one hand, Vikar's model of the cinema-church he built as an architecture student reminds Soledad of the mental institute in Oslo where she spent her childhood; on the other hand, Vikar's dreams of Soledad projects her into celluloid and frames in films he will eventually discover. In this regard, references to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)—defined by Erickson as an example of cinema of hysteria— reveal the nature of this relationship:

> In another movie, a private eye fell in love with the blonde he was hired to follow. The blonde was haunted by past lives and the memory of once having committed suicide by flinging herself from an Old California mission steeple; when she described the steeple, the private eye recognized it, and told her she

[98] The title of this film can be automatically associated with the real film *Vampyros Lesbos* (Franco 1971) in which Soledad Miranda is Countess Nadine Carody.

> had seen it not in any past life but this one. But it was the private eye who didn't know the truth, a truth he could never suspect. (Erickson 2013, 109)

The visions of the mission steeple bring to Vikar's mind his model of the small church and the "vision of this church was so perfectly realized in his mind that he worried it was something he had seen and forgotten, as though in a past life" (Erickson 2013, 110). Vikar's paranoia increases as he discovers that the model he designs is identical to Soledad's mental hospital in Oslo, where he will discover the original film print of *The Passion of Joan* Arc (Dreyer 1928). Therefore, *Vertigo* (Hitchcock 1958) has the hysteric power of connecting Vikar's past to his future investigation and movies, much as his dreams serve as premonitory clues in his detection.

A similar connection between the past and the future is conveyed through the allusion to another classic noir movie, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). In the text, this reference is connected to Vikar's viewing of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer 1928) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick 1986) as similar past and future representations. These movies, as Erickson claims, "share a kind of anarchic spiritualism, even as they tell their stories from opposite ends of both modern history and modern imagination" (Miller 2021, 155). In fact, *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982) – one of the most discussed L.A. noir films – reflects in a futuristic setting Vikar's personal history and his journey to Los Angeles, in a moment in which the city represented the future (and its end) both in a cinematographic and metaphorical way. If *Blade Runner* is considered the film which best tells the story of the postmodern Los Angeles "where utopian aspirations have turned into a dystopic hell" (AlSayyad 2006, 10) and which "helps us remember – and forget – high urban decay at the moment before downtown L.A. sank like a stone, an urban-planned island trapped by its own policies" (Klein 2008, 83), for the narrator of *Zeroville*, in the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner*, everything is reset to zero.

> An L.A. private eye of the future executes robots who believe they're human because they remember. The movie takes place in a Los Angeles where everything is reset at zero. The future is reset at zero. Memory is reset at zero, prophecies are reset at zero. All latitudes and longitudes are reset at zero; everything that one believes about oneself is reset at zero. There's no sunlight in this Los Angeles; every day is reset at zero. There's no starchild in this movie because childhood has been reset at

> zero. In this Los Angeles, there is no Hollywood; in this movie, the Movies have been reset at zero. (Erickson 2013, 738)

By moving to Los Angeles Vikar resets his life to zero, leaving his childhood and his father behind, exposing his orphanhood; "he's an orphan the way the Starchild in *2001* is the ultimate orphan, the way Joan of Arc became an orphan" (Miller 2021, 155). In Hollywood, Vikar can start his detection, absorbing the cultural fervor of the time; he is the chosen one to the point of being made responsible also for the 1981 discovery of the lost Oslo print of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer 1928). Besides, as Žižek claims apropos of *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982), "the hero, the hard-boiled investigator, is sent on a quest […] whose final outcome is that he himself was from the very beginning implicated in the object of his quest" (1993, 200) and Vikar's dreams and memory suggest that he is implicated from the beginning of the narration.

If one of detective fiction's conventions is the revelation of hidden truths, it is clear that the discovery of a clandestine film consisting of hidden stills concealed within every movie ever made shall take place through Vikar's interaction with both the real and the cinematic world. In this regard, the protagonist's acceptance of being, like Jeffrey in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, "in the middle of a mystery" (Lynch 1986), going so far as to travel to Europe, is symptomatic of his agency of editor/detective in search of his own quest.

Not surprisingly, by juxtaposing Vikar and the private eye figure, the narrator eventually links Vikar's experience to Robert Altman's adaptation of Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1973), where "the most famous and romantic of L.A. private eyes finds himself at the beach, amid the lazy decadence of the seventies" and in which Vikar can almost "recognize the beach house where he was seduced by Margie Ruth" (2013, 115). In the same house Vikar encounters a young Robert De Niro[99], another important figure from the New Hollywood, who in *Taxi Driver* (1976) will significantly transform the detective's image. As *Zeroville*'s narrator claims, "Three years later Marlowe will move to New York, change his name to Bickle and drive cabs for a living" (2013, 256).

[99] The presence of De Niro also points to his leading role in the famous adaptation of Fitzgerald's unfinished Hollywood novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1976).

Vikar will also go to New York, where he will again find himself protecting Zazi from Soledad's conduct, remedying the "tradition" of parents who sacrifice their children, and saving a William Friedkin picture. Here Ike will also experience the emergence of punk music that can be summarized in his listening of Joy Division's *Shadowplay*, a song that "evokes a displacement that's as liberating as it is terrifying, and images of a secret city, with wandering streets that spiral down to some forbidden center" (Miller 2021, 164). As Erickson's narrator links the punk and the noir feelings of displacement together, Vikar experiences this displacement, the *vertigo*, and it could not be otherwise since everything in *Zeroville* happens to be circular[100], every frame tends to come together in the same frame, "each scene is in all times . . . and all times are in each scene" (2013, 200).

Finally, Vikar's meeting with the ghost of Montgomery Clift later in the novel is indicative not only of *Zeroville*'s endless circularity but also of the nature of the quest. "Like a private eye eluding pursuit in the ongoing movie of Los Angeles, Vikar gets off at the seventh floor and takes the stairs the rest of the way to the ninth" (2013, 744) and establishes a surreal dialogue with Clift who suggests to Vikar:

> "That Secret Movie? The one that's hidden frame by frame in all the other movies?"
> "Yes."
> "Maybe we're not dreaming it. Maybe it's dreaming us." (2013, 758)

Just as his dreams have become part of the movies themselves, Vikar, much like his skull, becomes "almost literally a blank slate, or a medium (in the spiritualistic sense) for the cinematic medium (in the McLuhan sense)" (Shaviro 2007). Mirroring Perceval's quest for the Holy Grail, the secret Vikar seeks is not fully revealed at the end of the novel. Anyway, if Beekman argues that Marlowe represents the archetype of a "sober knight on a never finished quest" (1973, 166), Vikar, with his cinematic-heroic values, brings to cinema a transcendental dimension, with no definite solutions for its ontology, but rather providing interpretations—if not understanding—for the transition from the Golden Age to the New Hollywood and beyond.

[100] In this trope, *Zeroville* also evokes another great Hollywood-noir novel, Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935)

6.3
Between the real and reel: cinema and Los Angeles

As in the case of Chandler's novels, to read *Zeroville* also means to explore the City of Angels and its environs. But while Marlowe's journey – often made by car – is the one across darkened bungalows, decaying office buildings and sinister nightspots (Ward and Silver 1987), for Vikar the perception and knowledge of Los Angeles physical sites is subordinated to the cinematic one; for him, Hollywood Boulevard's landmark bar, Musso and Frank, is the place where Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder "were writing *Double Indemnity*, both drinking heavily because they couldn't stand each other"; the building which now hosts the department of African American Studies at the UCLA campus is a monolith he's already seen in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odissey*, and the Roosevelt Hotel is the place haunted by the ghost of Montgomery Clift. Also his perception of people is cinematically-driven; for Vikar, Ronald Reagan is not the president of the United States, but a character of Don Siegel's *The Killers*, and Vikar "is startled to see the same actor who had slapped around Angie Dickinson in that movie appearing in another one on TV" (Shaviro 2007). This brings me to a reflection about the protagonist's perception and Erickson's representation of a *reality* in which, as I've argued, one cannot distinguish the real from the imaginary but where such tension does not necessarily become artificial, or, from a postmodernist perspective, hyper-real. I think it is time to clarify what the relation between *Zeroville*'s reality and a kind of postmodern hyperreality might be.

In the hyperreal imagery of postmodern culture, according to Baudrillard's formulation of the concept, reality has reached a complete mediatization, and there is no longer space for the historical and the dialectical. In the hyperreality, the real has simply disappeared; the image and what the image represents become hidden in the process. Following Baudrillard's concept of the simulacra, the architectural scholar Nezar Alsayyad, argues that in the tension between the real and the reel, in certain postmodern representations, "the reel emerges as the main frame of reference, where the copy replaces the original – and even negates its relevance. Here the reel becomes the only reality that is left" (AlSayyad, 2006, 238). Although we could argue that the mediatization (or cinematization?) of reality is for Vikar a quasi-ontological condition, and for Ike (and Erickson as well) "movies are an integral constituent of the urban

environment" (AlSayyad 2006, 1), Vikar and the other characters of the novel never lose a *sense* of history. In other words, in Erickson's novel, the cinematic reality is for Vikar the guiding reality, but its narrator is fully aware of the tension between the cinematic (reel) and the real. In this tension, history does not disappear. Erickson suggests that for all the chaos, the surrealist blending of oneiric, cinematic and real, a connection with history is still possible and *searchable*. As in the case of Tarantino's Sixties movie, *Zeroville* also tries to go beyond the question of hyper-reality, precisely because neither the image nor its object do disappear in the tension between them. Reality is still visible, and, arguably influential. One of the most crucial examples of this process is represented by the characters' discussions about movies in the novel. In fact, *Zeroville* –again like the novelization of *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood* – often takes the form of a film essay, contextualizing and historicizing the film and the medium and the way in which we get access to them in different eras. Vikar's conversations with other characters (the black burglar and, later in the novel, with Zazi) are particularly evocative of Erickson's attention to producing meaning through the cinematic experience and not hiding it behind a hyperreal confusion. For example, in a dialogue between Vikar and the African American cinephile robber who stepped into Ike's apartment to steal his television, *Zeroville* also anticipates the ongoing debate around cinema and cancel culture, as the black burglar says, "*The Searchers* is one wicked bad-ass movie whenever my man the Duke is on screen, evil white racist honky pigfucker though he may be"[101]. Starting from this debate about John Wayne, Vikar and the burglar continue to discuss the Western genre in what seems to be a process of historicization.

> "My Darling Clementine, it's got the inherent mythic resonance of the Western form but in terms post-War white folks understood, figuring they were all worldlier and more sophisticated than before the War. Ford's creation of the archetypal West, laying out codes of conduct that folks either honored or betrayed—and I'm just trying to give the motherfucker due credit, not even holding against him, not too much anyway, the fact that he played a Klansman in that jive Birth of a Nation bullshit—anyway Ford's view of the West was so complete by this point that Hawks, Budd Boetticher, Anthony Mann, they could only add to it, you hear what I'm saying? But of course the Western changed along with America's view of itself, from some sort of heroic country, where everybody's free, to the spiritually fucked-up defiled place it really is,

[101] Vikar will later use the burglar's line in an interview during the Cannes festival.

> and now you got jive Italians, if you can feature that, making the only Westerns worth seeing anymore because white America's just too fucking confused, can't figure out whether to embrace the myth or the anti-myth, so in a country where folks always figured you can escape your past, now the word is out[…]" (Erickson 2013, 42)

The burglar's monologue summarizes one of *Zeroville*'s main concerns, that is both the backwardness inherent to cinema – the relation of movies with their time of production – and the inevitable changes that occur to genres and film through time. It is important to understand, again, the double tension that exists in Erickson's novel. On one hand, the form of the novel is essentially cinematic, in the sense that Erickson employs the cinematic mode (occasionally through intermedial references, imitating, for example, the montage editing[102]) as an additional tool in order to convey the idea that reality has become cinematic; on the other hand, we cannot consider the narrator as entirely cinematic – maybe it would have been cinematic if the story was told by Vikar as a first-person narrator – , but instead it creates spaces for other forms of writing (the commentary, the critique) and for extra-cinematic realities (dreams, subconscious), as if safeguarding the inherent quality of the prose. In other words, if in its approach to the question of mediatization, the narrative does not become absorbed but still maintains a dialectical relation with history and space, similarly in *Zeroville*, the literary form does not become incorporated in the cinematic, but still performs the quality of a literary text. Erickson's novel certainly has what, by using the author's own words, we could call a "visual" quality, one that "is not necessarily cinematic" (Luter and Miley 2021, 13), and I believe the distinction that Erickson makes between the two terms can help to explain the role of cinema (structure, theme, technique) in the novel. First of all, the cinematic mode employed by Erickson is consciously parodic; *Zeroville*'s narrative results in very brief chapters, on average one page – occasionally one-line long. The chapters are actually like brief takes which help the narration offer an ideology of discontinuity along with the displacement of Vikar. The novel's structure is made up of short numbered passages ascending to number 227, before counting down to zero, and is described by Erickson as "a kind of Godardian conceit" (Stubbs 2021, 139). In addition to the reference in the title, Godardian jump cuts are adapted into

[102] Rajewsky defines intermedial references as "for example references in a literary text to a film through, for instance, the evocation or imitation of certain filmic techniques such as zoom shots, fades, dissolves, and montage editing" (Rajewsky 2005, 52).

prose enlightening the protagonist's anxiety and disorientation, metafictionally questioning the idea of continuity. As Geoff King suggests, "continuity editing creates a coherent impression of space and time, and the connections between one and the other. Jump cuts and breaches of the 180 degree convention upset these coherencies" (2002, 39).

> 63.
> [...]
> he's too embarrassed to rise from his seat, so he goes on riding …
> 64.
> "… into the night—
> —west on Hollywood Boulevard and then cutting down La Brea to Sunset, turning right." (Erickson 2013, 131)

Similarly, the short chapters enable the narrator to change the focus – just like a camera – and to represent flashbacks, perspectives, and also focalization through close-ups and cuts. In the following passage, for example, the cut is employed to make the transition from the external (ch. 6) to the internal setting of the scene (ch. 7).

> 6.
> "You can let me off here," he says, and she drops him where Sunset and Hollywood Boulevards fork, at a small theater—
> 7.
> —where he goes to the movies.
> A silent European film from the late twenties, it's the worst print Vikar has seen… (2013, 31)

This technique is also used by Erickson to shift constantly from Vikar's oneiric dimension to the filmic one, presenting an internal focalization thanks to which the reader can understand that the numerous intermedial references (Rajewsky 2005, 52) to other movies are presented through Vikar's consciousness. His mental subjectivity, for example, is fostered by the cutaway (Bordwell 1985, 330) that produces a disorienting effect through an addition of elements – such as the intertextual reference to a movie scene – which are not supposed to belong to the depicted situation. However, movies present an inherent pre-determined visual interpretation, all the intermedial references of the novel do not threaten the reader's imagination. That is why I am not fully convinced by the general consideration of Erickson's novel (or novels) as cinematic.

The narrative of *Zeroville* still relies on the reader's imagination, and not on the camera (or the imitation of a camera). The intertextuality – for example, the relation between Vikar's story and stories from other movies – does not close down the reader's imagination, but opens it to for multiple possible interpretations[103]. While it is clear that the structure engages cinema at the level of the narrative technique, trying to approximate the rush of a movie, the cinematic qualities of *Zeroville* are not for the sake of parody or pure intermediality but are there in order to convey a larger sense of the role of cinema in reality (social, historical, geographical). I will provide another example: The structure of the novel is not only fast and linear because it tends to replicate the formal structure of a film, but also because it points to both to the spatial disorientation of the industry during and after the New Hollywood and a certain spatial quality of Los Angeles itself. That is why Vikar's endless journey in *Zeroville* can be interpreted as his endless pursuit of an idea of Hollywood. At a point in the novel, the Viking man, a director loosely based on the figure of John Milius[104], tells Vikar what for the protagonist is a harsh truth;

> "I want to stay in Hollywood."
> "God love you, vicar, but you're being a pussy. Don't you understand? This is Hollywood."
> "What do you mean?"
> "This godforsaken stretch of Gibraltar. The cutting room in Madrid. Paris, Bombay, Tokyo, fucking Norway, wherever—it's all Hollywood, everywhere is Hollywood, the only place on the planet that's not Hollywood anymore is Hollywood. […] (Erickson 2013, 103)

Just as Hollywood loses its spatial coordinates as the capital of film, the novel needs to widen the spatial and geographical horizon of the storyworld. Especially in the second section of the novel, most of Vikar's cinematic adventures will take place outside Los

[103] I tried to consider the nature of this intertextuality in terms of optional or obligatory and, however helpful it may be, I do not think the narrative requires a pre-understanding of intertexts or some kind of cinephile knowledge.
[104] The reference to producer, director and screenwriter John Milius is obvious in Erickson's attempt to capture the spirit of the New Hollywood and the socio-political climate of the late Sixties; most famous for having written the script for *Apocalypse Now*, the great Vietnam movie, and, also, "as being lampooned by John Goodman for his character in the Coen Brothers' *Big Lebowski*" (Cohen 2021, 173), it was Milius who said, at the beginning of the New Hollywood experience, "Now, power lies with the filmmakers" (Pye and Miles 1979, 10)

Angeles. But also when the novel lingers on a Chandlerian exploration of Los Angeles, such representation appears to be fast and horizontal. In fact, *Zeroville* seems to mirror the project of certain New Hollywood and independent un-Hollywood filmic representations of the city, often made by a director figure identified by Quentin Tarantino as "the Post-Sixties Anti-Establishment Auteur" (Tarantino 2023, 89); these films, such as Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973), Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* (1975), John Cassavetes's *Faces* (1968), and Hal Ashby's *Shampoo* (1975), pointed to a cinéma vérité-style and aimed to delve deeper into the true character of Los Angeles, In *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, Mark Shiel argues that some of these films "generally insisted on filming the real city on location, rendering Los Angeles as a patchwork of horizontal, high-speed and depthless landscapes with hand-held and vehicle-mounted cameras, and rapid zooming and panning, to a degree unprecedented in American narrative film" (Shiel 2012, 277). This seems to be the rhythm that also characterizes Vikar's cinematic journey; Erickson links the horizontal experience of the city offered by film noir with a phantasmatic and hauntological revisitation of a bygone Hollywood. But despite the fact that Vikar is driven by the Hollywood myth, Erickson's portrayal of the city aims to be as accurate as possible; while in Chandler's mapping of the city and in atomic noir such as *Kiss Me Deadly*, Los Angeles "is a city without pedestrians" (Christopher 2006, 21) where everything becomes *private*, with the prevalence of elements such as cars, apartments, and private offices, in Erickson's Los Angeles there is still an effort to maintain a public dimension between characters. I am not only referring to the more obvious public experience of seeing a movie in a crowdy theatre; part of the authenticity of Erickson's "Cineautistic" detective are – at least at the beginning of his stay in Los Angeles – Vikar's endless bus rides. His way of exploring the city is totally opposed to the cliché of the car as the only means by which it is possible to know the city. Erickson's choice is a curious one; in Thom Andersen's video-essay *Los Angeles Plays Itself* – defined by Mike Davis "a detoxification program for those of us who carry around too much Hollywood in our heads" (Andersen 2003) – the voice-over narrator asserts

> Who knows the city? Only those who walk, only those who ride the bus. Forget the mystical blatherings of Joan Didion and company about the automobile and the freeways. They say, nobody walks; they mean no rich white people like us walk. (Andersen 2003)

Not surprisingly, it is by riding the bus that Vikar gets to know the spatiality of the city and its inherent multiculturality. Of course this is not a new trope in Los Angeles literature but a rare one; one can think of Hisaye Yamamoto's short story *Wilshire Bus* (1988) or of Marisela Norte, a performance artist who wrote most of her poetry on the No. 18 bus from East Los Angeles into downtown Los Angeles. Despite the different strategies, also for Vikar the bus represents both a place of solitude and sociality. But, most of all, it is what temporarily distances him from the cinematic reality.

> 63.
> On the bus, the erection doesn't go away. A pretty girl gets on a few stops after Vikar, and then at the next stop a Latino mother with a small child, and when the bus reaches Vikar's stop and he still has the erection, he's too embarrassed to rise from his seat, so he goes on riding …
> 64.
> —west on Hollywood Boulevard and then cutting down La Brea to Sunset, turning right. The mother and child get off and then the pretty girl, but Vikar continues on until he's the only one on the bus and he can see the driver watching him in the rear-view mirror. By the time the bus reaches the Strip, Vikar's erection is finally gone. The driver still stares at him in the rear-view mirror. (Erickson 2013, 52).

In this case riding the bus enables the protagonist to get rid of a cinematic erection he had watching a "black-and-white Japanese gangster movie" at La Vista Theatre between Los Feliz and East Hollywood. However rare the element of the bus for a Los Angeles noir like *Zeroville* may be, it still emphasizes "a sense of geographic dispersal generated by a diversity of settings and the business of getting around the city, on foot or in a car" (Shiel 2012, 219), or, in the case of Vikar, riding a bus.

But regardless of the accuracy in the description of Los Angeles urbanism, in *Zeroville*, the city is, first of all, defined by its being Pop. Every corner, every building, every bar has its own pop story and it is defined by it. Vikar's imagination is, as Shiel writes, quoting Plagens, "pre-emptively Pop". (Shiel 2012, 278) After all, we could say the same of Erickson's; Ike searches for the ghost of Montgomery Clift, staying at the Roosevelt Hotel where Clift lived in between filming *A Place in the Sun* and where Steve Erickson "knocked out the first fifty pages" (Miller 2021, 166) of *Zeroville*. While in *The Sea Came in at Midnight* (1999)— Erickson's sixth novel —movies are projected on the city walls, in *Zeroville*'s world those projections are already present in the

characters' minds, from Vikar to Zazi, who by the end of the novel dreams about Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) despite not having seen the film.

6.4
Towards a Post-cinematic reality

As I've discussed so far, the attention to the forms and history of other media in Erickson's literature becomes in *Zeroville* also a way to analyze how aesthetic transitions are and must always be historically framed. Such transitions are also the means by which Erickson engages critically with the present and with the current state of the seventh art, its context and its reception. In the previously mentioned discussion between Vikar and the African American burglar in which the film-essay aspect of the novel erupts, the arguments shift from actors' qualities to American politics, providing not only some critical discussion about American society—for example the Western myth ideologies from a racial standpoint—but also the representation of television with its inherent form of viewing. The conversation between Ike and the burglar also presents itself as a reflection on watching television as a type of experience essentially different from watching a movie at a theater, "something that might be scientifically inferred by technical differences in their respective modes of encoding visual information" (Jameson 1997, 205). What is suggested here is "television's inherent capacity to reduce the filmic medium to its own form" (Randles 2019, 131), where old elements and what Jameson, in *Postmodernism*, calls "new cultural signs or logos" (Jameson 1997, 86) are brought together with and taken away from their specific contexts (the cinema theatre in this case). If television allows a repeated and 'private' viewing of a movie – an event that can take place even after many years from the movie's release – it also gives space to a change of perceptions and interpretations of meaning and ideologies according to time and place. When Zazi sees *A Place in the Sun* (Stevens 1951) on television after having seen it in a theater with an audience that laughed at it, she tries to explain to Vikar "how seeing the movie by herself was very different from being part of a collective response" (Miller 2021, 170). What Erickson is suggesting – along with the fact that in modern times movie watching become a more solitary experience – is a consequential deconstruction of movies and, of course, of their internal meanings brought into a wider context. In *Zeroville* the perpetual

references to movies, almost never explicitly named, represent the popularization and decontextualization proper to pop-culture.

From the 21st century perspective, Vikar's motto "fuck continuity" (2013, 405) should not only be read as a transition to New Hollywood but also as a religious/cinematic prophecy about what Steven Shaviro calls the "post-cinematic age," where "Film itself has not disappeared, of course; but filmmaking has been transformed, over the past two decades, from an analog process to a heavily digitized one". In this context, Vikar's "filmmaking abandons the ontology of time and space" (Shaviro 2010, 388) by creating his own kind of post-continuity editing, fueled by his punk attitude.

In *Post-Cinematic Affect*, Shaviro argues that "The New Hollywood of the 1970s may just have 'intensified' the conventions of continuity editing; but the Hollywood of today has exploded them" (Shaviro 2010, 84) and reached the point he calls "a stylistics of post-continuity." Also for Vikar the conventions of continuity editing no longer represent a way of expressing his art, but of doing so in a different way. As Erickson claims, "to Vikar's way of seeing things, a car may disappear into a tunnel and come out someone's garage, in another city or another year, and there's a logic to that all its own." (Luter and Miley 2021, 148). In Shaviro's conceptualization of post-continuity/post-cinematic, "Digital technologies, together with neoliberal economic relations, have given birth to radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience"; not surprisingly Shaviro refers to Mark Fisher when he claims that under this logic of consumption, that of what Fisher calls capitalist realism, "duration implodes; it shrinks down to a dimensionless, infinitesimal point. Time is emptied out, or whittled away" (Shaviro 2010, 62). In *Zeroville*, Vikar is fully aware of this process, but his reaction to the question of continuity editing, his formulation of a surrealistic, delirial editing is an act of liberation from a situation in which there may be, in Shaviro and Fisher's terms, "no 'shocks of the new' to come" (Shaviro 2010, 62)

Shaviro discusses the dispersion, the reiteration and repermutation in the post-cinematic age in historical terms;

> Just as the old Hollywood continuity editing system was an integral part of the Fordist mode of production, so the editing methods and formal devices of digital video and film belong directly to the computing-and-information-technology infrastructure of contemporary neoliberal finance. (Shaviro 2010, 3)

While post-continuity editing for Shaviro seems to be part of a preoccupation with moment-to-moment excitement, and with delivering continual shocks to the audience, Vikar's unconscious form of editing tries to go against the logics inherent to the infrastructure described by Shaviro, precisely because for Ike cinema already exists and "Each scene is in all times and all times are in each scene." (Erickson 2013, 79) The Cineautistic detective acknowledges and accepts that cinema, muck like Time, is both past and eternal and that "Today, cinema is undoubtedly a residual cultural form – which doesn't mean that it is going to disappear any time soon" (Shaviro 2010, 177)

In Shaviro's words, "the task for a critical art today is not to mourn this loss, but to discover what possibilities the new situation offers."[105] For Vikar, such possibilities begin with delivering a sense of history, that is both the history of the media forms and the history of a truly liberative imagination. Despite his initial naivety, Vikar will become aware of his role of cineautistic detective, floating in the post-noir Los Angeles atmosphere, and finally embracing the post-postmodern and post-cinematic discontinuity by questioning the essence of the medium. This is why, although his cultural sensibility is undoubtedly shaped by the 20th Century's dominant media – film and television – I would argue that by the end of the novel Vikar will be not just a "homo cinematicus" as defined by Anthony Miller (Miller 2021, 155), rather it will reflect all the changes and the anxieties that would make him a *homo post-cinematicus*.

After all, if it true that Los Angeles noir has always registered the tone and the conscience of a particular era – from the hardboiled to the postmodernism, from long goodbyes to blade runners – it seems to me that *Zeroville* is no exception. In *More than Night: Film Noir in its Context*, James Naremore argues that

> The film version of *The Big Knife, Sunset Boulevard, The Bad and the Beautiful, A Star is Born, The Barefoot Contessa,* belongs to a cycle of quasi-noirish movies about Hollywood that were released in the early 1950s. (Notice also that the Hollywood novel had long been a favored genre of the American modernists and the literary left.) The cycle was initiated by *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), and it included such films as *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), *A Star Is Born* (1954), and *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954). These pictures coincide not only with the blacklist, but also with the loss of studio-owned theater chains

[105] And this seems to be also Erickson's point in my interview with him when he claims "We can lament that, but what's the point? I mean that is the way it's gonna be. Movies is not going to become a different kind of medium because people are going to stay at home and watch them alone. I would be like the person that laments the Gutenberg printing press because he will no longer be able to listen to the storyteller stand on a rock and tell the story." (See Appendix)

> and the rise of television. They seem to reflect Hollywood's guilty conscience and its sense that an era was ending. (Naremore 2008, 238)

Steve Erickson's *Zeroville*, in his Hollywood novel-noir combination of genres, reflects the post-cinematic conscience of Hollywood, without indulging in the catastrophic outcomes of the transformation but rather insisting on the possibilities of new narratives. We all know that according to critics, Cinema is dead and reborn several times, just like, to noir writers, Los Angeles was "supposed to die by fire, earthquake, suffocation, amnesia, in the dark, in a movie theater" (Klein 2008, 73). But even in *Zeroville*, where everything is reset to zero, and where the Sixties are reset to zero, Cinema can still be part of our imagination and Los Angeles, for better or for worse, is still the city we want to re-imagine.

Chapter Seven
Surveillance Capitalism and Captured Discontent in Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly*

Death to the New Path
k-punk

In Erickson's *Zeroville*, the reference to *Blade Runner* points to the imaginary of a postmodern Los Angeles where utopian dreams are converted into dystopian nightmares and where everything has been reset to zero. Ridley Scott's film, adapted from Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), informs Erickson re-appropriation of Los Angeles noir as the quintessential example of postmodern cinematic pastiche as well as genre-defining sci-fi neo-noir. If Philip K. Dick's influence on Steve Erickson is evident in the dystopic, surrealistic, and apocalyptic features of his writing, Dick's legacy is equally pervasive in contemporary Los Angeles and Californian literary and cinematic representations, not only for a certain noir quality that has always pervaded his novels, but, most of all, because of his concern with the political and social atmosphere of 1970s Southern California. A case in point is Richard Linklater's 2006 filmic adaptation of Dick's novel *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) which represents a unique attempt to reinvigorate the political and critical potential inherent to Dick's writing and to project it into the 21st Century context. It is no wonder that this adaptation was the product of a reluctant, "left-wing, anti-authoritarian, independent persona" (Stone 2014, 5). While Paul Thomas Anderson's adaptation of Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* was a coherent choice in the director's exploration of Californian history of greed and abuse, *A Scanner Darkly* appears in tune with Linklater's lifelong interest in sub-cultures and with his representation of a kind of *aproductivity* as an alternative and counteracting model to postmodern capitalist society. What I define here as *aproductivity* is not to be intended as a nihilistic refusal of production or as a clueless pursuit of leisure; on the contrary, Linklater characters reflect an attitude – reminiscent of the Dude's attitude in Coen's *The Big Lebowski* and also of the stoned Doc Sportello in *Inherent Vice* – that deals with "imagination,

reflection and collaboration as a rebuttal to convention, consumerism and competition" (Stone 2013, 75) and that can be traced back to the Sixties counter-cultural aesthetic sensibility.

What Stone identifies as a rebuttal to convention can also be related to Linklater's attitude as a filmmaker. Despite the relation with the majors as regards the distribution of his movies, Linklater has always been associated with an independent auteurism and a kind of regionalism and localism when it comes to the film-making process. A self-taught, low-budget filmmaker, Linklater made the emblematic *Slacker* for just $23,000, "with which he conjured a richly atmospheric espousal of slacking not as laziness but as a refusal to engage with the fast-track consumerism and aggressive foreign policy of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush Senior" (Stone 2013, 1). The search for a realist representation of groups that are marginalized and minoritarian is, in fact, a way to represent – often in limited time and space – both the victims of capitalist policies (consumerism, hedonism) and an alternative way of life opposed to the conformism of the established society. This is also the case of *A Scanner Darkly*, where a social realism is juxtaposed with an aesthetic surrealism that manifests itself not only in the rotoscoping animation technique but, most of all, in the pervading paranoia that haunts the narrative.

In fact, in Linklater's 2006 film adaptation of *A Scanner Darkly*, Bob Arctor (Keanu Reeves) is a narcotics undercover detective who lives a double-life as a junkie and as a police agent named Fred. The setting is not the city of Los Angeles but the Greater Los Angeles area, more precisely the suburbs of Anaheim, Orange County, where a group of white paranoid drug addicts live together in a family-house. In the dystopic near future presented in the film, Substance D, a powerful drug that causes hallucinations and psychosis, has spread throughout the county and almost 20% of the population has become addicted to it. In order to deal with the epidemic, the government, with the help of the New Path – a tentacular rehabilitation clinic – has developed a high-tech surveillance system and a specific costume, the scramble suit, which endlessly adapts the identity of the informants who become a sort of everyman, a mosaic of millions of people.

Extremely faithful to Dick's novel, *A Scanner Darkly*, despite its near-future setting, also remains close to Dick's project to portray an alternative late 60s and early 70s Southern California, in which suburbanized zones becomes the ideal site for what

Mike Davis defines the privatization of public space in Los Angeles County and Orange County with the increase in electronic centralized surveillance (Davis 1990, 1998)[106].

Of course, Dick's emphasis on drug culture[107] and control society was an attempt to come to terms with the 70s American War on Drugs and with the rise of a totalitarian surveillance state in the wake of the Watergate scandal[108]. Linklater's main concern – as I will try to demonstrate in this chapter – is to deal dialectically with Dick's work and its relation to a precise historical period while engaging with the present ontological state of surveillance capitalism in the context of post-9/11 and the War on Terror. In his "ultimate postmodern detective noir" (Bradshaw 2006, 42), ample space is given to the rendition of a postmodern society of control and addiction where the line between the detective and the detected is irreversibly blurred and the question does not concern knowing *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* – (who watches the watchmen?) – but rather what kind of world(s) the characters inhabit. But the film's greatest merit is to reiterate and update Dick's strategy of unforgetting as regards the discontent of a specific moment of the Seventies SoCal and of a specific group of people who suffered and underwent "a punishment" that, as Dick claims at the end of the novel's footnotes, was "was far too great" (Dick 1991, 212). Building on Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, I will show that Linklater's noir points to such discontent as something that must be captured and politicized precisely because it appears a symptom of a bigger "enemy" (Dick 1991, 212) and it gradually reveals the dysfunctional character of late capitalism.

7.1
"Mors ontologica": Noir and the ontology of surveillance

[106] Speaking of Los Angeles police's long history of enforcement, in *City Of Quartz* (1990), Mike Davis recalls an almost Dickensian sci-fi paranoid-world when he ironically claims that "having brought policing up to the levels of the Vietnam War and early NASA, it is almost inevitable that the LAPD, and other advanced police forces, will try to acquire the technology of the Electronic Battlefield and even Star Wars" (Davis 1990, 253)

[107] Dick's novel is often considered his anti-drug novel par excellence precisely because it is rooted in Dick and his friends' real experience; the author claimed that "drug use is not a disease, it is a decision, like the decision to step out in front of a moving car' (Dick 1991, 218)

[108] Johnson interestingly argues that Michael Foucault would also have been composing his 1975 *Discipline and Punish*, where he discusses his concept of panopticism, at roughly the same time that Dick was imagining the hypersurveillance of *Scanner*. (Johnson 2012, 97)

One of the reasons why, in Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly*, sci-fi noir appears again as a vehicle of credible criticism of the current state of capitalism is a certain respect not only for Philip K. Dick's novel but, most of all, for Dick's persona. There is no doubt that *A Scanner Darkly* presents itself as the most autobiographical novel the Californian writer has ever written. In fact, the novel includes personal anecdotes and real experiences from the late Sixties and early Seventies, when Dick lived in a San Rafael suburban home experimenting with drugs with other fellow dopers before moving to Orange County in 1972[109]. As David Johnson suggests, in so many ways "*Scanner* may be the closest that cinema has come to a biopic on the writer albeit filtered through a science-fiction dystopia, and it simultaneously reflects some of Dick's most central obsessions at the time, including the rise of totalitarian state surveillance" (Johnson 2012, 97); no wonder then that Dick's novels anticipated central concerns of postmodernist thinking (Baudrillard and Jameson often cite Dick in their works), while, at the same time, as Mark Fisher notes, "it is both ironic and fitting that Dick's own fictions should have been so central to postmodern culture" (Fisher 2006). Of course, Fisher is alluding to the use (in the eyes of Fisher, it would be more correct to say *ab-use*) of Dick's noirish fictional worlds in action-thriller film adaptations such as Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002), Woo's *Paycheck* (2003), and, most of all, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. For Mark Fisher, in fact, it is with *Blade Runner* that noir becomes postmodernized and a vehicle for the appropriation (*postmodernization*) of pulp and the avant gard. The negative influence of Ridley Scott's film is, for the British theorist, the result of Scott's hyper-aestheticized rendition of Dick, which, as Fisher claims,

> excises all the trash which isn't picturesque, eliminates the low-rent kookiness and transforms Dick's balding, paunchy losers into classically anti-heroic Noir 'tecs. *Blade Runner*'s impact quickly went beyond influence, and it became metonymically implicated in late capitalism. Scott's Noir near-future quickly collapsed into capital's postmodern present; at a certain point in the eighties, it seemed that every advert was filmed inside the Tyrell corporation. Hollywood, evidently, was hypnotized by Blade Runner; and after *The Matrix*,

[109] As David Johnson claims, "Several events in both novel and film come from this period, including a friend's hallucination of insects in his hair, another friend's trying to make cocaine from sunblock, an unexpected car malfunction, a suspicious break-in that seemed both to confirm Dick's theories and to cast doubt on his sanity, and a woman whom Dick was in love with and whom he once accused of being an undercover agent" (Johnson 2012, 97)

> SF remains trapped in the sleek, chic noir-lite black leather prison that *Blade Runner* designed. (Fisher 2006)

In the world of *A Scanner Darkly*, there is no space for the picturesque nor for the baroque futurism of Scott's *Blade Runner*. There are neither heroes nor anti-heroes in Dick and Linklater's story[110]. Still, the problem of knowledge in regards to reality, undoubtedly a postmodern concern, is equally present in *A Scanner Darkly*, but with an important distinction. While Scott's focus on androids was a way to question the possibility of representing the real faithfully, the pivotal question in Linklater's adaptation is about the possibility of knowing reality at all[111]. In the film – similarly to what happens in Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* – the epistemological nature of the detective story (What is there to be known?; Who knows it? Whodunit?) in its blending with Dick's science fiction[112] enters the sphere of the ontological (What is a world?; What kinds of world are there?)[113].

This condition is dramatized by Bob/Fred's inability to carry on his investigation precisely because he is no longer able to identify people and to distinguish the world he inhabits. Both Substance D and the scramble suit become a metaphor for the loss of identity – "Mors ontologica, "Death of the spirit. The identity. The essential nature." (Dick 1991, 195); paranoia is an immediate symptom of this process, as exemplified by the Freck's visions of ineradicable bugs in the opening scenes of the film. To distinguish between the persistent state of paranoia and the real becomes impossible not so much because of the consequences of drug abuse – as the hippie Ernie ironically tells Bob Arctor, "Don't blame the drugs" (Linklater 2006) – but precisely because it is reality

---

[110] Linklater also stressed this point; in an interview he says "because [Philip Dick's] stories and novels often involve futuristic elements, they are a popular source for movies. People have taken core ideas from his stories, and have turned them into big action- thrillers. A *Scanner Darkly* is a different kind of story though. It's not plot-driven in that way. It's really about these guys and what they're all doing in their alternate world and what's going through their minds is really what keeps the story moving" (Linklater 2006)

[111] Mark Fisher interestingly makes this distinction against the backdrop of Baudrillard's three order simulacra; "The question around which *Blade Runner* is organized – is this an android or is it a human? – effectively keeps it locked at the level of Baudrillard's *second* order of simulacra, but the prescience of Dick's fiction was to have broached the *third* order of simulacra, where the status of reality as such is in question" (Fisher 2006)

[112] For Brian McHale, "science fiction is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism: it is the ontological genre par excellence (as the detective story is the epistemological genre par excellence" (McHale 1987, 16)

[113] On the question of the shift in postmodernism from the epistemological to the ontological, see Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, London, Routledge, 1987, p. 10.

itself that has become distorted and displaced. This was a major concern in Dick's 1977 sci-fi noir as a way to express the post-Watergate paranoia[114], a concern that was already present in several noir of the period such as [1]Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) or Alan Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974). But in his film adaptation, Linklater consciously updates the 'problem of reality' to the present time. In a 2006 interview, Linklater claims

> Post 9/11 I re-read [*A Scanner Darkly*] and saw it in a whole new way. The way power works and surveillance and government control. All those elements make it more relevant than ever. What was paranoid then is our reality" (Russell 2006)

If the scramble suit was for Dick a perfect means to dramatize the fragmentation of both identity and reality, there could be no more effective way for Linklater to represent feelings of paranoia, disorientation and distortion than the use of the rotoscoping technique. Since rotoscoping reproduces in live-action images the realistic physical movement of characters[115], Linklater's use of this technique is a way to demonstrate that distorted reality is not merely a simulacra, a substitution or modification of it, but exactly the way in which we come to perceive it in postmodern society; in other words, rotoscoping reality is for Linklater the exact opposite of hyperreality. As Steven Shaviro suggests, rotoscoping, at least in Linklater's use of it, is rooted in the real, but the real has been somehow displaced or distorted — "with the implication that this displacement and distortion is itself, in a deeper sense, the bedrock Real of the society of addiction and control" (Shaviro 2006). Moreover, through rotoscoping, the director re-creates the blurred and confused reality which Dick put into prose; but it also reveals new shades of meaning as regards some devices such as the scramble suit. In an already-distorted reality – the visual reality presented by the rotoscoping – the scramble suit does not only result in the loss of identity but it also allows the wearer to assume a million

[114] In relation to the context of the novel's writing, Rob Stone stresses the importance of the fact that "Dick believed himself to have been identified as an enemy of "the establishment," which he was convinced had him under surveillance."

[115] Linklater often said that he always thought about his movie adaptation like a graphic novel come to life. In fact, also a graphic novel version of *A Scanner Darkly* was published in 2006, where the frames of Linklater's movie are put into a book version; it is an interesting operation which situates in-between a cinematic transposition of Dick's novel and a graphic novelization of Linklater's film, and which definitely needs further investigations.

different identities as a way to adapt to what Fisher calls the flexibility of the post-Fordist, control society" (Fisher 2009, 28), with its constantly shifting demands[116].

In this control society, Bob Arctor is no longer able to perceive his presence in time and space without having access, as Fred, to the surveillance room scanner which follows Arctor's movements 24/7, monitoring the life in the druggies' house. He is no longer able to access and have control of his life without mediation (the scanner). He has now become a camera for the New Path. It is ironic that Bob (as the agent Fred) must not only spy on his roommates but he also has to spy on himself. But is when Fred, during his investigation, becomes addicted to the Substance D and the police becomes aware that Bob and Fred are the same person, that the detective is really *doomed*; he has to renounce both his lives (the addict and the watchman and the watched), and thereby renounce any attempt to get to the truth. Bob and Fred are, in fact, surveilled by the holoscanner machine which sets to be the only source of knowledge in the society presented in the film. Paradoxically, the detective's search for truth in his dual guise as addict and undercover agent passes into the hands of a third entity (the surveillance room scanner) and it is only through this entity that reality is given to him. In the typical noir story, events and investigations are often a pretext, a way for the detective to explore his inner world and to come to terms with his feelings; this is a privilege that Bob cannot afford. His deterioration is such that forces him to think that a machine can get to know him better than he can himself.

> What does a scanner see? he asked himself. I mean, really see? Into the head? Down into the heart? Does a passive infrared scanner like they used to use or a cube-type holo-scanner like they use these days, the latest thing, see into me – into us – clearly or darkly? I hope it does, he thought, see clearly, because I can't any longer these days see into myself. (Linklater 2006)

The scanner will also tell Bob about his sexual fantasies, revealing his feelings about Donna (Wynona Ryder), the unattainable woman who does not let Bob touch her

[116] Also the question of identity becomes an ontological issue; as Bob asks himself in the novel" How many Bob Arctor are there? A weird and fucked-up thought. Two that I can think of, he thought. The one called Fred, who will be watching the other one, called Bob. The same person. Or is it? Is Fred actually the same as Bob? Does anybody know? I would know, if anyone did, because I'm the only person in the world that knows that Fred is Bob Arctor. But, he thought, who am I? Which of them is me?" (Dick 1991, 74–75)

because her drug addiction has cancelled her sexual desire. There is a scene – considered by Shaviro and Fisher the pivotal scene of the film – in which another moment of "ontological scrambling" takes place; Bob/Fred wakes up in the middle of the night next to a woman with whom he had sex and taken Substance D pills; we can perceive how the body of this woman slowly becomes the body of Donna and then back again. When Bob (as Fred) goes to the surveillance room he checks the video replay and he realizes that "the metamorphosis takes place on the tape as well"; as Shaviro claims, "the hallucination has been objectified: it plays out for the scanner, as well as for Arctor" (Shaviro 2006).

Donna can thus be considered the classic femme fatale; many film critics have suggested that the femme fatale expresses male fear of ungoverned female sexuality (Cassuto 2009, 115); ironically, in this case, it is the lack of sexuality which scares Bob. In fact, Donna's lack of sexual desire appears as a symptom of what Marcuse calls "the adjustment of pleasure to the reality principle". The reality of the society of addiction and control in which Bob and Donna live, "shapes the instincts as well as their needs and satisfaction" (Marcuse 1998, 12); but Donna's story goes beyond Bob's fear of and desire for her. By the end of the film, we will learn that Donna is also another undercover agent who is working in order to find out if New Path is also the manufacturer of the Substance D. It will be Donna who will bring Bob to the New Path rehabilitation clinic as a way to infiltrate him into this mysterious organization (a question to which I will come back later). Donna, as the femme fatale, "allegorizes all the forms of connection—economic, national, sexual, or racial—that the hard-boiled male disavows" (Breu 2005, 69). In fact, she also stands as a reminder for Bob of what he left before starting a new double life as an undercover agent and as a drug user; through a flashback, we come to know Bob's past as a family man, with a wife and two kids, a life he soon came to reject. After Arctor had hit his head on the corner of the kitchen cabinet door, Bob's voiceover monologue explains the frustration of his ordinary life.

> The pain so unexpected and undeserved, had for some reason cleared away the cobwebs. I realized I didn't hate the kitchen cabinet door: I hated my life, my house, my family, my back yard, my power mower. Nothing would ever change. Nothing new could ever be expected. It had to end. And it did. Now in the dark world where I dwell, ugly things and surprising things and sometimes little

> wondrous thing spill out at me constantly; And I can count on nothing (Linklater, 2006).

Bob Arctor leaves his family as an act of anti-conformism that can be traced back to the countercultural rejection of the family values in the 60s and 70s; but similarly to what happens to Coy Harlingen in *Inherent Vice*, he becomes nostalgic about his past life. The suburban family house, one of the Post-war symbols of the American conformism and Cold War containment becomes the site on which Bob projects his anxiety of instability.

> Something big is definitely going down in this house. This rundown, rubble-filled house, with its weed-patch yard, cat box that never gets emptied. What a waste of a truly good house. So much could be done with it. A family, children, and a woman, could live there. It was designed for that. Such a waste. They ought to confiscate it and put it to better use (Linklater 2006).

On the one hand, Bob shows the crisis of masculinity typical of both the hardboiled hero and the Cold War period, but Bob's tone also speaks of his melancholia regarding family values; in other words, the protagonist lays bare the contradictions of the position of the family in the Post-fordist society; as in the case of *Inherent Vice* and *Blood Grove*, "the family becomes an increasingly important place of respite from the pressures of a world in which instability is a constant" (Fisher 2009, 33)

It is both ironic and exemplary the fact that it is the New Path, the tentacular corporation supported by the federal government, that becomes for Bob the *nightmarish* substitute for the family. When he is sent to the New Path rehab and assumes his third and final identity as Bruce, one of the managers tells him:

> "These are closed operations. But you'll probably be going back once or twice a year. We have gatherings, "The next one," the manager said, again motioning for him to continue walking, "is at Thanksgiving…We'll be sending workers back to their residences-of-origin for that, for two days. Then back here again until Christmas. So you'll see them again. If they haven't been transferred to other facilities. That's three months. But you're not supposed to make any one-to-one relationships here at New-Path--didn't they tell you that? You're supposed to relate only to the *family* as a whole. (Linklater 2006, emphasis mine)

At the New Path farm, Bruce will experience his final stage of alienation, in which he cannot watch anymore, he can only be watched. Here he discovers the presence of tiny

blue flowers amongst a field of corn, the *mors ontologica*, the flowers from which the Substance D is made. We understand that not only is New Path a rehabilitation clinic for drug-users but also the manufacturer of the Substance. Precisely as the Golden Fang, the capitalist mega-network of *Inherent Vice*, New Path stands for the ultimate neoliberal organization which sells both the disease and the cure, representing what Fisher calls "the pre-emptive, formatting and shaping of desires" (Fisher 2009, 9) of capitalist culture. Ironically, after escaping one type of conformity – suburban family life – Bob Archer enters another updated sphere of conformity from which, this time, there is no escape. In "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization", Shoshana Zuboff explains exactly what seems to be Bob's condition;

> In a world of Big Other, without avenues of escape, the agency implied in the work of anticipation is gradually submerged into a new kind of automaticity—a lived experience of pure stimulus-response. Conformity is no longer a 20th century–style act of submission to the mass or group, no loss of self to the collective produced by fear or compulsion, no psychological craving for acceptance and belonging. Conformity now disappears into the mechanical order of things and bodies, not as action but as result, not cause but effect. Each one of us may follow a distinct path, but that path is already shaped by the financial and, or, ideological interests that imbue Big Other and invade every aspect of 'one's own' life (Zuboff 2018, 304)

It is interesting that Zuboff uses the word "path" to describe the 21st Century new order of surveillance capitalism which includes and prescribes individuals' paths. In *A Scanner Darkly*, New Path (which could also stand for New Pathology) is a drug rehabilitation clinic capable of modifying "the behaviors of persons and things for profit and control" (Zuboff 2018, 305). What Zuboff calls the Big Other resonates in the surveillance society of *A Scanner Darkly* but New Path is *only* a synecdoche of it. Moreover, since the society of the film is deeply rooted in the Seventies, this Big Other comes to represent the neoliberal dynamics of co-optation of countercultural impulses; psychedelic potential, consumerist hedonism and the dark dangers of the illegal drug addiction are finally incorporated in the logics of capitalist accumulation.

As Mark Fisher argues, "*A Scanner* is about the painfully drawn-out end of the Sixties – the collapse of psychedelic expansiveness into sulphate pyschosis" (Fisher, 2006). In fact, Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* rightly emphasizes the most

autobiographical and intimate aspect of the novel, that is the deterioration of mental health as a gradual death. The blue flower from which Substance D is made is considered by the New Path manager as the flower of the future but it is something that is denied to Bob (as the manager tells him, "you've had too much of the good thing already"); Bob's mental deterioration is the closing of the horizon of possibilities and it stands for "the slow cancellation of the future" that, as Franco 'Bifo' Berardi argued, "got underway in the 1970s and 1980s" (Berardi 2011, 18). If Arctor's past and present are crystallized in the scanner hypersurveillance, not much different is reserved to his future.

The "slow cancellation" is exemplified through a new ontology of space and time to which Bob must surrender. The struggle between Bob's consciousness and his new ontological vertigo metaphorically results in brain damage – exemplified by the conflict between the two hemispheres of his mind – to the point he becomes Bruce, an empty body, brain dead, which is "a suspension of time and activity, a kind of cruel parody of actual death" (Palmer 2003, 188). This brings me to a reflection about postmodern "subjectless" affectivity and to Fredric Jameson's articulation of "the so-called death of the subject, or, more exactly, the fragmented and schizophrenic decentering and dispersion of this last" (Jameson 1991, 413). Jameson interestingly links the perpetual dispersion of late capitalism to the "the bad trip" of the countercultural Sixties;

> If the great negative emotions of the modernist moment were anxiety, terror, the being-unto-death, and Kurtz's "horror," what characterizes the newer "intensities" of the postmodern, which have also been characterized in terms of the "bad trip" and of schizophrenic submersion, can just as well be formulated in terms of the messiness of a dispersed existence, existential messiness, the perpetual temporal distraction of post-sixties life. Indeed, one is tempted (without wishing to overload a very minor feature of Gehry's building) to evoke the more general informing context of some larger virtual nightmare, which can be identified as the sixties gone toxic, a whole historical and countercultural "bad trip" in which psychic fragmentation is raised to a qualitatively new power, the structural distraction of the decentered subject now promoted to the very motor and existential logic of late capitalism itself. (Jameson 1991, 117)

The decentralism inherent to the postmodern condition is evoked in *A Scanner Darkly* through Bob's inability to relate meaningfully to time and space; this schizophrenia is

for Jameson part of the postmodern syndrome[117]. But, at the same time, the schizophrenic process, as claimed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), can also become a possible site of antagonism towards capitalist conformity and repression. In this respect, I agree with Rob Stone's argument in his analysis of *A Scanner Darkly*, according to which the schizophrenic subject in the film can be

> "capable of resisting the 'normalization' of conformist Western society in which citizens are trained to desire their own repression. At least the schizophrenic may have half a mind to revolution. It may not be enough to take up arms, but sufficient introspection might still engender enough resistance to conformity to posit stubborn inactivism as a revolutionary act that might be objectively identified as slacking (Rob Stone, 159).

Of course, this possibility is already present in Dick's novel, but the author's real-life involvement in the autobiographical events he narrates may not guarantee the necessary emotional and 'historical' distance that we eventually find in Linklater's adaptation. In the film, in fact, it is Dick's own experience that is historicized; in the process of *unforgetting* such experience and those who were victims of it, the film shows an additional layer of introspection (a sort of memory of the memory) which could invite us to consider, in the context of the 21st Century, mental disease as an expression of (un)politicized rebellion.

7.2
Unforgetting "the fallen": schizophrenia and antagonism

"Back to work, Bruce" (Linklater 2006), are the last words that the protagonist of *A Scanner Darkly* hears from another human being, the executive director of New Path. At the end of the film, we see Bruce condemned to meaningless work for the evil network which ruined his life, a condition that is antithetical to the form of *slacking* represented by the drug subculture; this is not simply evoked by the language of the movie – a hippie,

[117] Here Jameson, on the backdrop of Lacan's theories about the interaction between signifier and signified, concludes that when such interaction is missing, "we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble or distinct and unrelated signifiers" (Jameson 1991, 72)

stoner slang – but, more interestingly, by the mix of psychedelic consciousness expansion and anti-work ethic that we find in its alienated characters. Such characters are thus the kind of figures that Marcuse considered "politically significant", namely "those who don't earn a living, at least not in an ordinary and normal way" (Marcuse 2002, 62). While "such characters, and the forms of life with which they were associated", as Fisher claims, "would come to the fore in the counterculture" (Fisher 2018, 778), in *A Scanner Darkly* the psychotic, schizophrenic subjects come to represent the collapse of the countercultural experience. However, their mental condition should also be problematized and intended as what Marcuse calls a "struggle against necessity". In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse addresses the problem of psychosis which would also influence the abovementioned works of Deleuze and Guattari, Fredric Jameson and Mark Fisher and their approach to the question of mental disease in late capitalist society. Starting from Sigmund Freud's proposition that civilization is based on the permanent subjugation of the human instincts, Marcuse writes:

> Theoretically, the difference between mental health and neurosis lies only in the degree and effectiveness of resignation: mental health is successful, efficient resignation — normally so efficient that it shows forth as moderately happy satisfaction. Normality is a precarious condition. "Neurosis and psychosis are both of them an expression of the rebellion of the id against the outer world, of its 'pain,' unwillingness to adapt itself to necessity — to ananke, or, if one prefers, of its incapacity to do so". This rebellion, although originating in the instinctual "nature" of man, is a disease that has to be cured — not only because it is struggling against a hopelessly superior power, but because it is struggling against "necessity." Repression and unhappiness must be if civilization is to prevail. (Marcuse 1998, 246)

The necessity is regulated by the New Path rehabilitation clinic which does not merely represent the way in which the circularity of capital is guaranteed (through selling drugs and rehabilitating druggies)[118]; the capitalist mega-network also makes sure that external agents do not interfere with the process. This means that New Path actually fears schizophrenic symptoms because they may be seen as representing a sign of its dysfunctionality; Linklater also insists on this aspect, especially when the narrative

[118] In *Capital* (Volume I), Marx insists on the "unceasing movement of profit-making." He argues that "The ceaseless augmentation of value, which the miser seeks to attain by saving his money from circulation, is achieved by the more acute capitalist by means of throwing his money again and again into circulation" (Marx 1990, 254)

focuses on the representation of the symptoms of the mental disease from which the characters suffer. As James Barris (Robert Downey Jr) tells the paranoic Charles Freck (Rory Cochrane), "You see, all symptoms are purposeful, be they positive or negative" (Linklater 2006).

From the perspective of the 21st Century, *A Scanner Darkly* also raises questions about the commonness of mental disorders in contemporary society; in line with Oliver James's book *The Selfish Capitalist*, where the author links the rising rates of mental distress and the neoliberal mode of capitalism, Mark Fisher argues that mental health is a paradigm case of how capitalist realism operates. "In the 1960s and 1970s", Fisher claims,

> radical theory and politics (Laing, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, etc.) coalesced around extreme mental conditions such as schizophrenia, arguing, for instance, that madness was not a natural, but a political, category. But what is needed now is a politicization of much more common disorders. […] I want to argue that it is necessary to reframe the growing problem of stress (and distress) in capitalist societies. Instead of treating it as incumbent on individuals to resolve their own psychological distress, instead, that is, of accepting the vast privatization of stress that has taken place over the last thirty years, we need to ask: how has it become acceptable that so many people, and especially so many young people, are ill? The 'mental health plague' in capitalist societies would suggest that, instead of being the only social system that works, capitalism is inherently dysfunctional, and that the cost of it appearing to work is very high. (Fisher 2009, 19)

In *A Scanner Darkly*, the strategy of unmasking what, in the words of Fisher, is the inherent dysfunctionality of capitalism, appears to be, most of all, a strategy against the de-personalization of the late capitalist culture I've discussed in the previous paragraph. The most effective way in which Linklater's film comes to implement this strategy is through a reiteration of the tragic, personal elements of Dick's novel. In the end credits, as well as at the end of Dick's text, we find the writer's dedication with a list of real-life casualties:

> This has been a story about people who were punished entirely too much for what they did.
> I loved them all. Here is a list, to whom I dedicate my love.

To Gaylene deceased
To Ray deceased
To Francy permanent psychosis
To Kathy permanent brain damage
To Jim deceased
To Val massive permanent brain damage
To Nancy permanent psychosis
To Joanne permanent brain damage
To Maren deceased
To Nick deceased
To Terry deceased
To Dennis deceased
To Phil permanent pancreatic damage
To Sue permanent vascular damage
To Jerri permanent psychosis and vascular damage

. . . and so forth.

In Memoriam. These were comrades whom I had; there are no better." "They remain in my mind, and the enemy will never be forgiven. The "enemy" was their mistake in playing. Let them all play again, in some other way, and let them be happy.

Philip K. Dick (Linklater 2006)

The "enemy" to which Dick refers is a general term that obviously alludes to something beyond the simple cause-effect of drug use; Linklater's film follows Dick's intention to unmask, only gradually, the different ways in which the enemy imposes his strength. But Linklater's focus on the psychic disorder of his protagonists and the alienation they experience demonstrates how, as Fisher claims at the end of *Capitalist Realism*, "affective disorders are forms of captured discontent" (Fisher 2009, 80) that can turn into effective antagonism.

Moreover, one of the anxieties that Dick's characters share in the novel and that is repeated and emphasized in Linklater's adaptation, is concerned with the fear of being forgotten and never understood. In the movie, the undercover agent with whom Donna plans to infiltrate Bob Arctor into New Path, shares this concern with her;

> The whole the process lies hidden beneath the surface of our reality, it will only be revealed only later; and even then, the people of the future, our children's children will never truly know this awful time we've gone through, and the losses we took…maybe some footnote in a minor history book. Some brief mention with no list of the fallen (Linklater 2006).

The reiteration of "the list of the fallen" at the end of the film, is a paradigm example of what, in this thesis I defined as the strategy of *unforgetting* which, this time, does not concern so much a revisitation of places or specific events – as in the case of Revoyr's *Southland* or Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* – but engages in the recollection of specific people.[119] Linklater shows again an interest in the communitarian structure – in this case, the dopers as a subcultural group – as a way to challenge, though just temporarily, the reality principle. In the last scene, we see Bruce picking up a blue flower growing amid the corn, before disappearing into the homogeneous vastness of the cornfield, and pronouncing the final words of the movie: "a present for my friends, at Thanksgiving" (Linklater 2006). If in the course of the narrative, *A Scanner Darkly* demonstrates a tendency to move the noir discourse and structure towards ontological questions, by the end of the film the epistemological comes to the fore, as exemplified by the list of casualties in the end credits. Noir becomes, also for Linklater, a preferred way to investigate the failures of the past, using both the epistemological and ontological qualities of the genre in order to detect the process which lies "hidden beneath the surface of reality" (Linklater 2006). His updated version of *A Scanner Darkly* suggests that *unforgetting* the people who got (and still get) trapped underneath this surface, may be the first step to "tear a hole" in it and to re-open the horizon of possibilities.

[119] As Linklater claimed, "I said everyone who works on the film had their own list, and we all do. We all do. You can't live too long in this culture and not be acquiring your own list of casualties who you feel in an almost unfair way went way too soon" (Johnson 2012, 339)

Concluding remarks

The corpus analyzed in this thesis is composed of stories that we could define as *from below*; they are often told from minoritarian and community perspectives and non-institutionalized points of views, particularly as regards race and class; the 21st Century noir narratives at the core of my investigation thus recuperate a certain aesthetic and political antagonism from the Sixties which they try to re-project in the present time.

This also means that another possible approach to the revisitation of Los Angeles in the Sixties in contemporary crime narratives – that could be considered in the future development of this thesis into a book – would be focusing on narratives which deal with a statist perspective (a history *from above*), in which the protagonists are actually part of the institutionalized power. One could think of James Ellroy's *Blood's A Rover* (2009), the third and final act of the Underworld Trilogy where real personalities of the time, such as Howard Hughes and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, are at the center of the narration.

Since I emphasized the multicultural quality of these narratives which allowed me to investigate several aspects of the Sixties Los Angeles in relation to races and economics from a 21st Century perspective, it was not possible to focus on the proliferation of African American narratives which dominated the representation of the city in the 1990s. Several crime novels, such as Gary Philips' *Violent Spring* (1994) and *Inner City Blues* (1999) by Paula L. Woods deal with the 1992 Los Angeles Riots and their legacy; South Los Angeles is the setting of several 1990s hood films such the Hughes Brothers' *Menace II Society* (1993), John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood* (1991), and Stephen Milburn Anderson's *South Central* (1992).

At the end of the 1990s, when the Coen Brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1998) came out, we began to witness a first attempt in popular film to come to terms with the legacy of the Sixties both in aesthetic and political terms. Even though the Coen Brothers' neo-noir is not set in the Sixties, its characters seem to be stuck in that era. A throwback to the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the film is concerned with the many failures of the decade (the nightmare of Vietnam, the collapse of the counterculture) but it also reiterates, through the figure of the Dude, an anti-work ethic typical of the countercultural sensibility of the "long decade". The Dude's rejection of productivity

would be a starting point for an exploration of the relation between work and the detective in 21st Century Crime narratives.

Moreover, it seems to me that there is still a lot of room for the exploration of the legacy of the Sixties as the Civil Rights decade. A focus on the feminist movement and its influence on the female figures of noir, their sexual identities, and the relation between gender and power, would open up new perspectives as regards the revisitation of the Sixties in contemporary noir.

As I mentioned in the premise, this thesis is a first and partial attempt to come to terms with the open questions of a decade which continues to haunt our present and our imagination. I've tried to demonstrate that, in the 21st Century context, noir becomes again a preferred way to investigate the relation between individuals and society in the neoliberal era. In the words of Herbert Marcuse, the task of every authentic work of art should be "breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and opening the horizon of change (liberation)" (Marcuse 1978, xi). Only by challenging the petrification of history, can noir open up new spaces for the free play of the aesthetic and political imagination.

Appendix

A Conversation with Steve Erickson

Hollywood, Los Angeles.
February 20, 2023.

Fade-in

SE: Los Angeles attracts a sort of psychological exiles, people who are desperate, people who are hopeful people who are narcissistic. And of course the really totemic noir writers were here. Chandler, Cain was here. They have come from somewhere else and they didn't like it here. And there is a certain amount of toxicity in their feelings about Los Angeles that informs the work, that informs the perception of the city, that informs what they write about the city, the way they present the city. Especially in the case of Chandler, at some point L.A. becomes a character. The more the books progress, by the time you get to *The Little Sister* and *The Long Goodbye*, those books are more? about L.A. than anything else.

ADV: Totally. And you can feel that every noir or Los Angeles writer who came after Chandler have read his writings.

SE: Of Course, absolutely. But even outside of LA and outside of literature. A certain kind of music, or Punk music…I mean Lou Reed was a huge Raymond Chandler fan. And you can sense that hard edge.

ADV: Yeah, even though he was a real New Yorker kind of writer, but you know, *Transformer* or *Coney Island Baby* definitely drew on that kind of Chandleresque noir imagination.

SE: Yes. Lou Reed despised Los Angeles but he still drew on Chandler. And even *Transformer* or *Coney Island Baby* have a sort of noir quality in those songs, even when he is singing about New York. And Chandler was that kind of exile, as you probably know better than I do because you probably researched that. You know he was born in

U.S., he was raised in England. He wanted to be a poet, then gave it up. Then he did other jobs, he was in the Oil Business.

ADV: A lot of writers in the 30s and 40s did different jobs before becoming a writer. Take Horace McCoy, he picked lettuce and was a bouncer at Santa Monica Pier, which inspired *They Shoot Horses Don't They?*.

SE: Yes! Also Jim Thompson was a bellboy in a hotel or something. They did a lot of work. By the time all those guys came to writing, they have been through a lot, they were pretty fucked up. Chandler was a raging alcoholic, he had a very strange relationship with his mother, and a lover and a wife that was old enough to be his mother, suicidal, alcoholic… so he started writing, you know. And that probably kept him sane for twenty years. The author himself was a kind of noir character.

Did McCoy grow up in L.A.?

ADV: He was born in Tennessee, he basically grew up in Dallas, Texas where he worked as a journalist and then he moved to L.A to become an actor. He wrote something for Hollywood, until he found his favorite form of writing, always somewhere between the Hollywood novel and hardboiled. He was interested in this combo of Depression/Hollywood setting, in a sort of Nathaniel West way.

SE: I was just about to say. He came along before noir but there is a lot of noir in Nathaniel West too even if you wouldn't call him a noir writer. But you know that's part of the mythology of L.A. It is hard to come out of LA and not be informed by noir. When I was hired to teach at UC Riverside, they originally brought me there to teach noir, and I have taught classes of noir, fiction and film, and sometimes I stuck to the classic stuff and sometimes I tried to go beyond the classic stuff to the kind of neo-noir. I kind of think of Vertigo as the beginning of neo-noir.

ADV: Yeah I think it is, along with *Kiss Me, Deadly* maybe, even if it is considered as the end of film noir.

SE: Totally. When I teach *Kiss Me Deadly*, that is much about nuclear, post-noir, I teach it as the end of film noir but I always thought that you can definitely teach it like the beginning of neo-noir. You know, *Vertigo*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *Touch of Evil*…

ADV: I've read somewhere else *Vertigo* may be your favorite movie ever.

SE: It's up there. I do not know if it is my favorite but it is in my top 10, even top 5. I've seen it many times and I've shown it in class many times.

ADV: Steve, you were born in Santa Monica but you basically grew up in the Valley and attended UCLA School of Film and Television in the late Sixties. What are your memories of that period as a student who went to UCLA and as a former San Fernando Valley resident? What do you remember about the socio-political atmosphere which characterized those days? The Watts Riots, Campus revolts, the Manson Murders.

SE: That's a big question. You know growing up in the Valley, it changed it a lot. When I was a little kid, it was like the San Fernando Valley in Chinatown, with the orchards and all of that. In the 1960s Kennedy said we're gonna go to the moon. That completely changed the Valley and completely changed Los Angeles. Because all of those rockets were tested in the San Fernando Valley and the Valley went from being very rural to very…not just suburban but mega suburban. And that happened very quickly. In a handful of years the Valley completely changed. And it became a kind of a bubble to a lot of what was going on. There weren't a lot of things that pierced the bubble; but now and then something did. I remember when the Watts Riots happened; people in San Fernando Valley, which was virtually all whites, except a lot of Asian American working for the aerospace company, and a number of Latinos from the eastern Valley but not a lot of Black people. So the Valley that was very white and very conservative got alarmed. They've seen the rioters would have come to the Valley… which seemed absurd but as the city progressed the Valley which was very representative in a way of a 50s mindset and 50s conformity, found itself in the middle of a huge transformation, and it felt like completely challenged by what was happening in the Sixties.

By the time I got to UCLA, the counterculture and the counterculture that was responding to the war in Vietnam, it was in full motion…it was real counterculture. UCLA was more the center of that than any other campus except Berkeley, and sometimes Santa Barbara. But UCLA…I was at UCLA when Kent State happened. UCLA was on the verge of blowing up, all the classes shut down, those grassy areas outside Royce Hall, all the UCLA was the place of protest. And that was also the moment when the kind of hippie dream was beginning to fade.

ADV: What is the exact moment that represents this collapse for you? The Manson Murders?

SE: I think it's earlier than that. I'd say Bobby Kennedy, when he was shot. When Martin Luther King was shot in April, that was huge. When two months later Bobby Kennedy was even more profound because he was running for president. As you know he was shot here at the Ambassador Hotel which was never the same again. That was 1968. '68 was arguably the most convulsive year after WWII. Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King, The Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia…

ADV: Paris Protest

SE: Paris. all of that stuff. At the same time, the world was on the verge of landing on the Moon and we were on the verge of Woodstock. So there are two extremes going on. The utopian extreme, and the murderous extreme that the Mansons embody.

ADV: Do you remember when the Tate-La Bianca murders happened?

SE: Absolutely. But we didn't know anything. We didn't know it was Charles Manson for a while. You know people in the Laurel Canyon, the Benedict Canyon, Bel Air…they used to live with doors unlocked at night. That changed overnight, that changed very quickly. That probably contributed to the end of the utopia but, again, I think it was a year and a half of dark. From the Tet Offensive in early '68, the assassination of K, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, The Paris Protest, up through Manson and Kent State. There were two years basically in which everything fell apart.

I agree that Manson is probably a good metaphor, he was kind of the cherry on top. In part because he was a sort of hippie… so that's when the image of the hippie being all about peace and love and flowers blew up because it was not what he was about….when everybody's got fears that if you are a totally anarchic entity, and if you took LSD all the time, some darkness is gonna bubble up and take over.

ADV: So you think that there were some subversive elements that ended up in hedonism and which led the hippie dream to end.

SE: That's a great way to put it. The nightmare consumes the dream. It fell in the political agendas of those who never liked the dream. They used it. Nixon used it. Nixon talked about Manson. I remember there was a whole wave of denunciation of Nixon because a president of the United States should not be commenting about a murder trial going on in L.A. But Nixon knew. He knew that was a thing he could use to tarnish the entire counterculture, including the protest against the war. So, it became political, as everything became political at that time.

ADV: All the three parts of your novel *Rubicon Beach* converge in 1968, when Bob Kennedy died. In *Zeroville*, Vikar arrives in Los Angeles on the day of the Manson Murders and he's one of the suspects for the murders. And also in *The Sea Came at Midnight*, Paris 1968 becomes a metaphor for this crossroads in an apocalyptic calendar. So do you think the revisitation of the Sixties in your fiction is more like coming to terms with a failure or trying to reinvigorate the potentiality of a hope that is kind of lost?

SE: Wow, that's a good question, that's a good question. I think both of them. Because it was, for all the darkness, an exhilarating time. I mean, everybody felt alive and the music was great, the counterculture was feeling its potency right up to till the moment it collapsed. And so even all the way it was nightmarish, there were still something attractive. You know, the upside of chaos is freedom. People reveled in a certain amount of chaos until…until something about the chaos became Tourettic. So yeah it was very much a double edge story, and I think both of things you've said were true, and that's part of what makes it so fascinating. It is much like best time/worst time kind of time.

ADV: You know in Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*, this chaos you're talking about is translated in a kind of gathering fog which describes Los Angeles in the Sixties. In a passage of the novel, the narrator describes the Sixties as a "little parenthesis of light". Do you agree with this definition?

SE: Yeah I think it is a pretty good definition. Of course, like all definitions it is reductive.

ADV: Speaking of definitions. For the critics of your work it has always been hard to define. Larry McCaffery in 1995 included you in the Anthology of Avant-Pop writers; someone associated you with a late postmodernist fiction…

SE: You know, I never knew what Postmodern is. Most postmodern works are aware of their artificiality, which becomes most of the point of the work. And that's never what I wanted to do. I wanted my work to be immersive. I didn't want my work to be calling attention to itself, in a way that I feel a lot of postmodernist works do.

ADV: Ok, that's clear and I do believe that one of the qualities of your fiction is precisely the fact that it avoids any kind of rigid framework or label. Still, it seems to me that pop culture in your fiction is totally rooted in the structure, in the texts and subtexts and the narrative in general. It's not simply something to refer to but something to start with, capable of generating new meanings and new structures as well. Are we all as cineautistic as Vikar? It's like you're suggesting that pop culture is also rooted in our sensibility as modern human beings like God or religion, for example?

SE: Maybe. Do you feel this is true for your generation as well?

ADV: I think my generation is much more about atheism or agnosticism; it is obsessed with pop culture, retro-mania and tv series, in a way that also reflects the post-cinematic transition of the digital era. You know, I was born in 1995, and in the late 1990s and 2000s, television has probably a prominent role but in a different way

compared to the role it had in the 60s…In high school it was very difficult to see students reading a novel or poetry or whatever.

SE: Interesting. I teach a writing workshop and especially at the undergraduate level…we're sitting around discussing the stages of a written work and they're never referring to other books or writing, they're always referring to the TV. My sense is that TV has become the medium for at least the generation that's coming along now. A lot of the new came on to TV at the same time as *The Sopranos*.

The Sopranos changed everything, its impact was massive. In my day, TV didn't have the same impact that cinema had, that music had or literature.

ADV: Television for Vikar is a way to watch or rewatch old movies that he couldn't watch when they came out…

SE: Yeah and that's the way I think people watch movies today. They don't go to the theater and sit with a crowd of people, they stay home and watch them alone. The upside is, these days If I wanna see some old movie I can probably find it on TV or on Netflix or Amazon. Back in the day you had to wait that hopefully might come to your art-house theatre.

ADV: Do you ever go to see that restauration film or original 35mm screening?

SE: I went to the Egyptian Theatre to see a middle-sixties Russian version of War and Peace restauration. But a lot of these theatres are being shut down.

ADV: So do you think this is a good way to keep the theatres open?

SE: It would be nice to keep the theatres open. But, you know, we can lament all we want the fact that movies are changing, and the ways of seeing movies are changing, and the fact that the way of seeing movies is changing I think is gonna change the movies. We can lament that, but what's the point? I mean that is the way it's gonna be. Movies is not going to become a different kind of medium because people are going to stay at home and watch them alone. I would be like the person that laments the

Gutenberg printing press because he will no longer be able to listen to the storyteller stand on a rock and tell the story. Well…storytelling just changed. And the more it changes the more it moves from the communal to the individual.

ADV: Yeah, I think that is also what *Zeroville* is about. But I think that cinema restauration and this kind of nostalgia thing that is going on now, is beautiful, it helps to keep the art-house theatres open, but it's not going to save cinema.

SE: Totally. It's not going to save cinema. But it's not going to save cinema as we have known it. Cinema is gonna become something else. I mean, in America, cinema or movies become more and more about spectacle, all of the best writing is now on TV. It's gonna become a different thing, and that's just the way it is. And yeah, in part this is what *Zeroville* is about. And in part, and this is tangential to that, it is about movies that is more and more taken over by two kinds of people. People who make movies about making movies and people who knew nothing about movies. So in *Zeroville*, Vikar is gonna meet a burglar or a Spanish revolutionary who love and care and know about movies more than Hollywood.

ADV: And *Zeroville* is also written like a script, and in a certain way sometimes the prose is also suggesting the angles and the movements of the camera. This is probably one of the reason why I found Franco's adaptation quite disappointing, maybe because of the nature of the writing I already had my personal film.

Vikar's characterization is influenced by the life of Paul Schrader, with this Calvinist education and his peculiar approach to the cinema. Paul Schrader was also one of the great directors of the new Hollywood. Maybe the reference is also a homage to the Sixties and Seventies in terms of creativity and freedom in arts?

SE: Yeah I think that's all true. And maybe I am repeating myself but I had a clear intention to write *Zeroville* the way that I did. When I first started writing the novel it was more literary but I realized I wanted the energy of a movie. So it's a very linear novel in a way that none of my other novels are. It tells the story as much as possible in terms of action and dialogue. It does not worry so much about motivating the character. Of course we do have some kind of Paul Schrader-like motivation for Vikar.

But more often a novel dictates its own style. I dictated the style to the novel. I made a decision how I wanna tell that story.

ADV: You also have written three books of non-fiction*, Leap Year*, *American Nomad* and *American Stutter* which was published last year. They all deal with politics and also American history. A lot of fiction and non-fiction books, films of the recent years tried to revisit the Sixties, partially because of the 50th anniversary of 1968 and 1969 (just think Once upon a time in Hollywood and all the movies and tv series about Charles Manson). But after the George Floyd's murder and Black Lives Matter demonstrations and also after Capitol Hill, a lot of journalist and scholars suggested a sort of return of the Sixties in terms of aesthetics and political atmosphere, by referring to the 1965 Watts Uprising and the polarization of politics. What is your opinion about that?

SE: We are going to find out how true it is. I think the last 7 years were the most dangerous years for this country that I have lived through. Also more than the Sixties. In the Sixties you felt like American society was coming apart, the last 7 years you felt like the American idea was coming apart.

ADV: Do you refer to the idea of the American Constitution?

SE: That's my idea. But what we have found out in the last 7 years is that 35/40% of the country has a whole different American idea. They have a whole different idea of the country racially, sexually, in terms of patriarchy, we now have the State American oligarchy I don't think we had before, we have more of an American oligarchy than we had in a hundred years, since before the Depression. In the Sixties the American idea was not being challenged as profoundly as it is now. American policies were being challenged, history was being challenged in a sense. But there were certain vary basic notions that I think we held in common; people might have defined those notions in different ways, they might have different ideas about how those notions were best fulfilled…life, liberty, security, opportunity, justice and the pursuit of happiness. I don't know there are all those things we held in common now. You know, a few years ago I was watching a news show, there was this kind of town hall taking place somewhere in

the Midwest and there was one woman who got up and said "If we have to have a dictator, I hope it's Donald Trump". In the Sixties they would have not said that, nobody would have got up to say "If we have to have a dictator, I hope it's Richard Nixon". I don't remember anybody saying that. Something even more profound has changed over the last 40 years, in particular, going back to the early 80s, American capitalism has gone off the rails.

ADV: Or it is shaped in new forms that are less evidently exploitative.

SE: There are certain ways in which society is more liberal than it has ever been, like gay people getting married. But the counter-reaction is more like quasi-fascistic that it has ever been. So the extremes are more extreme. In the 1960s the American public changed its mind about Vietnam, the American public supported Vietnam in 1965 but by 1968 nobody thought it was a good idea. People had different idea about what we should do and how we should get out of it and if we could get out of it. But there was a fluidity in the Americans' attitude or willingness to change their minds about things, about sexuality, about African-American. That kind of dynamic, I don't know if it exists now.

ADV: After George Floyd's assassination, one of the most important Black Lives Matter demonstrations took place here in Los Angeles.

SE: I was in it, I was marching. I think Black Lives Matter is not only a good thing but an obvious thing. But the left in particular always finds a way to sabotage itself. So when you know, the first time I heard somebody say "Defund the Police", one of the rallying cries around Black Lives Matter, "stop funding the police", that's illusive. Most people are not going to buy that, even if you take it as a good idea. That was the kind of thing that the white could latch on to, "You see, they don't even want the police". And I think it is much of a Sixties kind of call, that's why probably it was not a good idea.

ADV: So you think that the reappropriation of the aesthetics of the Sixties protest is bad?

SE: I think there are a lot of things about the Sixties that have come to have a bad association for a lot of people, a kind of clueless association. There are a lot of people that think about the Sixties as a foolish time, kind of soft-head thinking. The first time that someone in the 60s burnt an American flag, we lost the next 50 years. Direct your anger and rage at government policies, but burning an American flag… the first amendment protects your right to do that, but in terms of political effectiveness, it is just very counterproductive and a clean metaphor that the right could use to challenge all the good things that the Sixties brought up. Burning the American flag, and Charles Manson's killings, that's when the hippie dream died.

It was a single moment of stupidity that took over the conversation for the next half century. You can still hear people on Fox News talking about people burning the flag, even though I don't know anybody who's done that in the last 50 years.

ADV: All your fiction has a lot to do with Los Angeles or a post-Los Angeles, particularly in relation to the time and the space. Vikar refers to Hollywood as a heretic city in connections to the forgetfulness of Hollywood, a city that has forgotten and also sacrificed its children. And you refer to *Blade Runner* describing Los Angeles as a city in which the past is reset at zero and the future is reset at zero? Do you think of Los Angeles as a city without memory?

SE: Yeah that's a great way to put it! And I think that's what is attractive to a lot of people about Los Angeles. You can come here and you can kind of reset your own life. And when you've got a city full of people like that, who have come to Los Angeles for exactly that, because it is a blank slate, that changes the city too. It is circular.

ADV: Noir was important for Los Angeles as Hollywood in a certain way found a way to represent the city through the noir aesthetics. As a Los Angeles native writer, to what extent do you think Los Angeles noir or also literary noir have influenced your writing?

SE: A lot. It influenced my way to look at LA and the way I wrote about the city. The influence is there in *Rubicon Beach*, *Amnesiascope*, *The Sea Came at Midnight* and *Zeroville*, of course.

ADV: Speaking of Los Angeles noir and of sixties, I don't know if you watched Paul Thomas Anderson's film adaptation of *Inherent Vice* by Thomas Pynchon. The protagonist's look was inspired by Neil Young in the early Seventies and the soundtrack also includes two Neil Young's songs, "Harvest" and "Journey Through The Past". Your article about Neil Young is one of my favorite pieces of your writing. Do you think he was able to capture late Sixties early Seventies utopia? And also when I think about the apocalyptic visions of Los Angeles I always think of Neil Young's song *After the Gold* Rush and his song *L.A.* from 1973. Did he contribute somehow to create this dystopic/utopic image associated with the city?

SE: Yeah, I think so. You know he also came out of The Buffalo Springfield, a pretty important band in the mid-Sixties. You know he wrote *Harvest in L.A. and After the Gold Rush* in L.A., in the Topanga Canyon. He is definitely part of that L.A. musical aristocracy, such an idiosyncratic artist… sometimes it is hard to be sure of what he represented besides himself. But those songs that you mentioned…for sure.

ADV: One of the first lines of *After the Gold Rush* goes like "There was a band playing in my head and I felt like getting high"; *Zeroville* is also about music, so are *These Dreams of You*, and *Shadowbahn* of course…you're very interested in the way in which music is infiltrating in our consciousness, that is something really *unconscious*, like getting high. Do you believe music was the true art of the 20th century along with cinema?

SE: The novel is dominant up to WWII. I think the true art of 20th century I think it's movies. But there was a point in time, and was Sixties, when music was more important than anything. And from 1965 to 1967, L.A. was the center of American music.

Not to disrespect anybody, but Bob Dylan meant more to me in the Sixties than John Updike did, or John Cheever or writers like that. Nothing against them. I am just

saying. He meant more to me as an aspiring writer. I've never aspired to be a musician, I have aspired to be a writer. The afternoon I heard Dylan's *Highway 61* and *Blond on Blonde* back to back for the first time, that changed me more than anything. That is why I don't understand the complains…I have no objection to Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize, because he changed me as a writer.

ADV: If you have to pick a song which can represent the end of the Sixties utopia?

SE: Oh that would be *Gimme Shelter* by the Stones.

ADV: And what about L.A. bands?

SE: There were 4 bands which defined L.A. Music in the Sixties, The Beach Boys, The Byrds, The Doors and The Mamas and Papas. You had the Buffalo Springfield, and a lot of other bands that were about peace and love, the music of L.A. was very *utopian*… until The Doors came; they weren't about peace a love, they were about sex and death; that was the nocturnal side of L.A. that nobody had expressed.

ADV: It seems to me that in your writings you have tried to revisit American and Los Angeles history through apocalyptic and catastrophic elements, not only in terms of metaphor but also as a continuum in the discourse of American culture. I want to start from the very beginning. In *Days Between Stations*, published in 1985, you decided to bury Los Angeles in a sandstorm during a cataclysm time, as if Los Angeles is suddenly erased, and I think much of the book is about the protagonist Lauren trying to understand how to face this problem of the erasure exemplified by the problem she has with understanding her memories. Of course this is one of your books which most resonate today that climate change and disaster are at the center of the discourse. Were you thinking about this discourse when you wrote your first novel?

SE: It was something that came up. I started the novel, I got to a point in which I was stuck, I was stuck about 6 months. Then I wrote the scene of the sandstorm…even though if I was not entirely sure, even though I understood in some intuitive level that I was now entering the ground of the uncategorizable. I was making myself difficult to

label. And it took 2 and an half years to publish the novel, rejected by twelve publishers, and so that became the story of my career.

ADV: In *Ecology of Fear*, Mike Davis wrote about your fiction, especially in relation to your second novel, *Rubicon Beach*, tracing back the narration to the concept of uncanny which he identifies as "This unsettling conjugation of eerie geography with unspeakable acts, the marvelous with the monstrous". But *Rubicon Beach* is also one of your most noirish and (anti-) detective stories. Maybe this uncanny has to do also with some of the surreal and incandescent versions of Los Angeles Noir? Not like *Kiss me Deadly* but much as a David Lynch noir? Perhaps I always associated your literature with Lynch's cinema.

SE: I remember when my first novel came out and somebody was asking me who could make it into a movie, and for me it was David Lynch. There are some aspects of my writing that I don't understand, even after all this time. In the beginning I didn't think about these events happening in my books in terms of apocalypse or catastrophe, but in terms of transformation and often destructive transformation. And I think that came from my experience of growing up in L.A. Things changed very quickly, I was too young to understand how strange that was, until I went to Europe where some places or some parts haven't changed in hundreds of years. Like a lot of people, I had to get away from L.A. to understand how unusual L.A. is. I had no reference point. The misunderstanding, and the later understanding of how strange city L.A. is, you know both the two things….But I didn't set out to be an apocalyptic writer, that was a label that got fixed on me…I don't disagree with that, but I wasn't thinking of me in those terms. I wasn't always thinking about the ending of the world, I was thinking about the world changing into something very different.

ADV: The main difference between the two things is the degree of possibility…

SE: Exactly! There are always possibilities in transformations, even a destructive transformation. We were talking about the Sixties, that for all the darkness, they were exhilarating times. Because the possibility, the sense of possibility that was more vibrant than it was in 70/80s…where the transformation felt to be very shut.

ADV: You were born and raised in Los Angeles, between the Valley and Hollywood. I bet you've felt so many earthquakes in your life as a Los Angeles resident. I've recently read this book by David Ulin called *The Myth of Solid Ground,* about earthquake predictions and predictors in California that is somehow about coming to terms with the instability and the possibility of an explosion in everyday life. To some extent, do you think this California natural aspect and innate imagination of disaster also affected your literary imagination?

SE: I think it is probably baked in. You know it is a thing that kind of came naturally to me…for somebody like Ulin who comes from New York, earthquakes are a very L.A. phenomenon. And earthquakes are a good metaphor for a lot of things about the city. It is part of that transformation which is natural to me, but maybe it is not for somebody who comes from somewhere else.

ADV: In *Arc D'X*, your reconfiguration of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings seems to point directly to a vision of the American history and history in general as a series of catastrophes (and that's what partially happens also in *Sea came at Midnight*), but also of contradictions. I like to read *Arc D'X* mainly as an attempt to show the process of a utopia, which contains the contradiction of something that may be but is not, or that could have been and at the same time can only be projected in the future. It's like you're suggesting that both freedom and slavery are example of catastrophe, especially when you have to project this freedom in the future.

SE: That's correct. Utopia and catastrophes have to do with possibilities and the presentation of new possibilities. They are the two sides of possibilities. You know, the Constitution deals with both utopian and catastrophic, because it makes a promise that immediately breaks with the acceptance of the institution of slavery. There is no way that slavery could be reconciled with the promise the Constitution was trying to fulfill.

ADV: In *Amnesiascope*, Los Angeles is a post-apocalyptic ghost city where many things are destroyed, and as you suggest also with the title, this landscape serves also

as a background to represent the problem of memory. I was thinking about the protagonist, this film critic's inner imagination of Los Angeles that is partly fictional and partly real. It also features the Death of Marat, this non-existent film among other real films of what you call the cinema of hysteria. This happens also in *Zeroville*, where fiction, dreams and reality get mixed and you cannot really distinguish them. Is this feature at the core of Los Angeles imagination for you?

SE: Yeah, in the sense that I don't think that story could take place anywhere else, like in New York or a European city, it can only take place in Los Angeles. And All those things we talked about, what I call the city of the blank slate, what you called the erasure of memory. I think all your questions and my answers are getting at the same thing. And maybe whatever the L.A. imagination is…it becomes interchangeable with my own imagination.

ADV: Interesting. Maybe that is why your return to non-fiction with *American Stutter* was curious to me, almost as if the last years events, covid, Trumpism, required a withdrawal from the typical imagination of your writing…

SE: Absolutely. I started *Shadowbahn* in 2014, I finished the draft of *Shadowbahn* the month that Donald Trump declared his candidacy for the presidency. The novel came out in the first months of Donald Trump's presidency, and I had already basically written a Donald Trump novel by the time he became president. Reality was outracing my imagination. I went through a period and I think I still am in that period, when fiction is not speaking to me like it did. It feels like a distraction from more momentous things that are actually going on now. I feel like I know that crisis isn't past. The crisis is still there. I can't speak to it in fictional terms, I can't.

ADV: You get it as less serious or…

SE: Yes, yes. I can't imagine my fiction being momentous enough to speak to the moment. And the moment is too huge, and it's too darkening, and it's too scaring. I've gone back to writing in the last month and a half. I'm writing something that, first of all, I don't expect any New York publisher would care about publishing. It's a sort of

hybrid journal and rumination, there is a sort of vague science fiction narrative undercurrent to it, but is not full-out fiction because I can't go back to that right now. Maybe I will be able to in 5-10 years if I am still here. But not right now, now in this moment it feels irrelevant. With the planet burning up, democracy on the run, capitalism gone berserk, and all of that… the moment is feeling too big.

Bibliography

Abbas, Niran, edited by. *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003.

Agger, Ben. "Marcuse in Postmodernity", in *Marcuse: From the New Left to the Next Left*, edited by John Bokina and Timothy J. Lukes, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994, pp. 27–40.

AlSayyad, Nezar. *Cinematic Urbanism. A History of the Modern from Reel to Real.* London: Routledge, 2006.

Altman, Robert. *The Long Goodbye*. 1973.

Andersen, Tom. *Los Angeles Plays Itself*. (DVD with booklet featuring essays by Mike Davis and Thom Andersen), 2003.

Anderson, Paul Thomas. *Inherent Vice*. (Final Shooting Script), Warner Bros., August 7, 2013.

Anderson, Paul Thomas. *Inherent Vice*. Warner Bros., 2014.

Anderson, Paul Thomas. *Magnolia*, Ghoulardi Film, 1998.

Arango, Tim. "The Ghosts of Rodney King and Watts Rise Again", *New York Times*, 02/14/2020.

Attewell, Nadine. "'Bouncy Little Tunes': Nostalgia, Sentimentality, and Narrative in *Gravity's Rainbow*," *Contemporary Literature* 45, 1, 2004, pp. 22–48.

Avary, Roger and Tarantino Quentin. The Video Podcast Archives. 05/19/2023

Avellino, Peter. "Captive on the Carousel of Time", *The New Beverly Blog*, September 28, 2019. https://thenewbev.com/blog/2019/09/captive-on-the-carousel-of-time/ Last Visited: 07/07/2023

Backman, Jennifer. "From Hard Boiled to Over Easy: Reimagining the Noir Detective in Inherent Vice and Bleeding Edge", in *Thomas Pynchon, Sex, and Gender* edited by Ali Chetwynd, Joanna Freer, and Georgios Maragos, Athens: Georgia University Press, 2018, pp. 19-35.

Baetens, Jan. "Novelizations, a Contaminated Genre?", *Critical Inquiry* 32, 1, 2005, 43–60.

Bailes, Jon. *Consciousness and the Neoliberal Subject: A Theory of Ideology via Marcuse, Jameson and Zižek*. London: Routledge, 2020.

Baker, Jeffrey S., "A Democratic Pynchon: Counterculture, Counterforce, and Participatory Democracy," *Pynchon Notes* 32–33, 1993, pp. 99–131.

Baudrillard, Jean. *America*. London: Verso Books, 1988.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Beekman, E. M. "Raymond Chandler & an American Genre." *The Massachusetts Review* 14.1 (1973): 149-173.

Berardi, Franco. *After The Future*, Chico: AK Books, 2011.

Berger, James. *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1999.

Berger, Roger A. "The Black Dick: Race, Sexuality, and Discourse in the L.A. Novels of Walter Mosley", *African American Review*, Summer, 1997, Vol. 31, No. 2 pp. 281-294.

Berressem, Hanjo. "Economies of greed in 'late Pynchon': America and the logic of capital" in *Textual Practice*, 33,3, 2019, pp. 433-449.

Bloom, Alexander, "Introduction: Why Read about the 1960s at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century?", in *Long Time Gone: Sixties America then and Now*, edited by Alexander Bloom, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 3-10.

Bloom, Alexander, edited by. *Long Time Gone: Sixties America then and Now*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 8th ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2001.

Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Botta, Enrico. "The Truth in the Script and the Untruth in the Movie: Tarantino's Rewriting of American History", *Iperstoria*, 18, 2014. 234-256.

Bradshaw, Nick. "Lost in the Loop", *Sight & Sound* 16, 8, 2006, pp. 40-43.

Breu, Christopher. *Hard-Boiled Masculinities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Brody, Richard. "Quentin Tarantino's Obscenely Regressive Vision of the Sixties in "Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood", *The New Yorker*, 27/07/2019

Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books, 2015.

Browne, David. “There Was a Little Part of David Crosby in All of Us, Whether We Knew It or Not”, in *Rolling Stones*, January 23, 2023.

Camp, Jordan T. and Heatherton, Christina. “Introduction: Policing the Planet”, in *Policing The Planet: Why The Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*, edited by Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, London: Verso, 2016, pp. 8-14. (Ebook)

Carswell, Sean. *Occupy Pynchon*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017.

Cassuto, Leonard. *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Cha, Steph. “Riot/Rebellion: The Legacy of 1992”, in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 32, 2021, pp. 192-202.

Chamerois, Gilles. “Science and Technology”, in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 225-232.

Chandler, Raymond. *Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler*. Edited by Frank MacShane. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

Chandler, Raymond. *The Long Goodbye*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

Chandler, Raymond. *The Simple Art of Murder*. New York: Vintage, 1988.

Chandler, Raymond. *Trouble is My Business*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950.

Chaney, Jen. “On the Troubling Subtext of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*”, *Vulture*, 08/09/2019. https://www.vulture.com/2019/08/once-upon-a-time-in-hollywood-and-its-troubling-subtext.html#comments Last Visited: 06/17/2023

Chiu, Monica. *Scrutinized! Surveillance in Asian North American Literature*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014.

Christopher, N. *Somewhere in the night: film noir and the American city*. Emeryville: Shoemaker Hoard, 2006.

Cichosz, Maria. “Postmodern Allegory and 1960s Melancholy in Pynchon’s *Inherent Vice*”, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 58, 5, 2017, pp. 521-537.

Coale, Samuel Chase. “Conspiracy and Paranoia”, in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 211-216.

Coates, Tyler. “How ‘Once Upon a Time in Hollywood’ Re-created Lost L.A. Locations”, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 02/02/2020.

Cohen, Joshua. “Establishing Shot: A Conversation with Steve Erickson”, in *Conversations with Steve Erickson*. Edited by Matthew Luter and Mike Miley. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2021, pp. 172-176.

Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Colquhoun, Mark. “Introduction: No More Miserable Monday Mornings”, in Fisher, Mark. *Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. London: Repeater Books, 2020, pp. 10-38.

Constable, Catherine. *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood’s Aesthetics*. New York: Wallflower, 2015.

Copjec, Joan, edited by. *Shades of Noir*. London: Verso Books, 1993.

Cowart, David. *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011.

Cronenberg, David. *Maps to the Stars*. 2014.

Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. "Almost Cut My Hair", in *Déjà Vu*, 1970.

Davis, Mike and Wiener, Jon. *Set The Night On Fire. L.A. in the Sixties*. London: Verso. 2020.

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

Davis, Mike. *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination Of Disaster*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998.

De Jarnatt, Steve. *Miracle Mile*, Columbia Pictures & Hemdale Film Corporation, 1988.

Debord, Guy. *The society of the spectacle*. London: Rebel Press, 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscript on the Societies of Control” October, vol. 59, pp. 3– 7. 1992.

Di Cicco, DT. “The Public Nuisance Paradigm: Changes in Mass Media Coverage of Political Protest since the 1960s.”. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 87, 2, 2010, pp. 135-153.

Di Vilio, Antonio. “Inherent Vice: Thomas Pynchon beyond the Postmodern Fiction and Anti-Detective Novel.” *Bibliotekarz Podlaski*, 47, 2, 2020, pp. 283-94.

Di Vilio, Antonio. “Security and Surveillance: Los Angeles Police and Land Abuses in Thomas Pynchon’s Inherent Vice”, *JamIt!*, 5, 2021, pp. 13-36.

Dick, Philip K. ‘The Android and the Human’, Lawrence Sutin (ed.), in *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Dick, Philip K. *A Scanner Darkly*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Didion, Joan. “The White Album”. *Joan Didion: The 1960 & 70s*. Edited by David L. Ulin. New York: Library of America, 2019, pp. 745-910.

Dreyer, Carl Theodor. *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. 1928.

Duggan, Lisa, *The Twilight of Equality? : Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Illusions of Post Modernism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Eike, Ann M. “An Investigation of the Market for Paperback Romance Novels”, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 10, 1, 1986, pp. 25–37.

Ellroy, James. *American Tabloid*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Ellroy, James. *Blood’s A Rover*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Elwes, Jay, “Startlingly sadistic: Once Upon a Time in Hollywood, by Quentin Tarantino, reviewed”, *Spectator*, 7 August 2021. Last Visited: 10/26/2023 https://www.spectator.com.au/2021/08/eye-popping-misogyny/

English, Daylanne K.. “Being Black There: Racial Subjectivity and Temporality in Walter Mosley's Detective Novels” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* , 42, 3, 2009, pp. 361-365.

English, Daylanne K. “The Modern in the Postmodern: Walter Mosley, Barbara Neely, and the Politics of Contemporary African-American Detective Fiction”, *American Literary History*, 18, 4, 2006, pp. 772-796.

Erickson, Steve. “Amazon’s Bosch Channels Classic Detective Noir”, *Los Angeles Magazine* 10 March 2016. https://www.lamag.com/steveerickson/amazons-bosch-channels-classic-detective-noir/. Last Visited 20/08/2021.

Erickson, Steve. “Paul Thomas Anderson & the Cinema of Outcasts.” *Los Angeles Magazine* 26 January 2015. https://www.lamag.com/longform/paul-thomas-anderson-cinema-outcasts/. Last Visited 20/08/2021.

Erickson, Steve. "Road Hazards." *Los Angeles Magazine* 1 October 2011. https://www.lamag.com/steveerickson/road-hazards/. Last Visited 18/11/2021.

Erickson, Steve. *Amnesiascope*. New York: Open Road Books, 2013.

Erickson, Steve. *Amnesiascope*. New York: Henry Holt, 1996.

Erickson, Steve. *Days Between the Station*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1985.

Erickson, Steve. *Our Ecstatic Days*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Erickson, Steve. *Rubicon Beach*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1986.

Erickson, Steve. *Shadowbahn*. New York: Blue Rider Press, 2017.

Erickson, Steve. *Leap Year*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1993.

Erickson, Steve. *The Sea Came at Midnight*. New York: William Monroe, 1999.

Erickson, Steve. *These Dreams of You*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Erickson, Steve. *Arc d'X*. Trans. Tommaso Pincio. Roma: Fanucci, 1999.

Erickson, Steve. *Zeroville*. E-book Edition. New York: Open Road Media, 2013.

Erickson, Steve. "Maps to the Stars Grapples with the Movie Business's Most Complicated Character: Hollywood Itself." *Los Angeles Magazine* 1 October 2014. https://www.lamag.com/steveerickson/maps-to-the-stars-grapples-with-the-movie-businesss-most-complicated-character-hollywood-itself/. Last Visited 20/08/2021.

Eve, Martin Paul. *Pynchon and Philosophy: Wittgenstein, Foucault and Adorno,* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Ferguson, Roderick A. *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference.* University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Field, Allyson Nadia, et al., edited by. *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.

Fine, David. *Imagining Los Angeles: A City in Fiction*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1996.

Fine, David. "Introduction" in *Los Angeles in Fiction* (Revised Edition), Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 2006, pp. 1-27.

Fisher, Mark. "'A social and psychic revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude': Popular Culture's Interrupted Accelerationist Dreams", *e-flux*, June 2013.

Fisher, Mark. "Mors Ontologica", in *k-punk* (blog), September 21, 2006. http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/008427.html Last Visited: 01/13/2024.

Fisher, Mark. “Acid Communism.” In *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)*, edited by Darren Ambrose, London: Repeater Books, 2018.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism,* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009.

Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014.

Fisher, Mark. *Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. London: Repeater Books, 2020.

Fisher, Mark. *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016),* edited by Darren Ambrose, London: Repeater Books, 2018.

Fitzgerald, Scott F. *The Last Tycoon*. London: Penguin Classics, 2010.

Fitzpatrick, Samuel. *Descent into the Easy Rawlins mysteries series: Walter Mosley and the return of the Black detective*, (Ph.D. Dissertation), University of Iowa, 2018.

Ford, Elisabeth V. “Miscounts, Loopholes, and Flashbacks: Strategic Evasion in Walter Mosley's Detective Fiction” *Callaloo*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 1074-1090.

Freer, Joanna. “Politics and Counterculture” in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 172-179.

Freer, Joanna. *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson and Gilmore Craig. “Beyond Bratton”, in *Policing The Planet: Why The Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*, edited by Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, London: Verso, 2016, pp. 116-131. (Ebook)

Glaseby, Joanne. “Profile: Walter Mosley”, *Esquire,* December 1995.

Godard, Jean-Luc. *Alphaville: A Strange Adventure of Lemmy Caution*. 1965.

Goeller, Alison D. “Identity Politics: the Private Eye (“I”) in Walter Mosley’s Detective Fiction”, in *Polar Noir: Reading the African-American Detective Fiction*, edited by Claude Julien, François-Rabelais, 2017.

Gounari, Panayota, *From Twitter to Capitol Hill Far-Right Authoritarian Populist Discourses, Social Media and Critical Pedagogy*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Gourley, James. "Terror and Anarchy", in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 217-224.

Harcourt, Bernard E. "Political Disobedience." *Critical Inquiry* 39, 1, 2012, pp. 33–55.

Haynes, Doug. "Under the Beach, the Paving-Stones! The Fate of Fordism in Pynchon's Inherent Vice." *Critique* 55.1, 2014: 1–16.

Herman, Luc and Bart Vervaeck. *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. Second Edition ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019.

Herman, Luc, and Steven Weisenburger, *Gravity's Rainbow, Domination and Freedom*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013.

Hitchcock, Alfred. *Vertigo*. 1958.

Hite, Molly, "'Fun Actually Was Becoming Quite Subversive': Herbert Marcuse, the Yippies, and the Value System of Gravity's Rainbow," *Contemporary Literature* 51, 4, 2010, pp. 677–702.

Hopper, Dennis. *Easy Rider*. 1969.

Horsley, Lee. *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Huehls, Mitchum. "Historical Fiction and the End of History," in *American Literature in Transition, 2000–2010*, edited by Rachel Greenwald Smith, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 138–151.

Huehls, Mitchum and Rachel Greenwald Smith. *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Hughes, Keith. "Walter Mosley, Socratic Method, and the Black Atlantic", in *Finding a Way Home: A Critical Assessment of Walter Mosley's Fiction*, edited by Owen F. Brady and Derek C. Maus, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 30-43.

Hutcheon, Linda and Valdés, M. J.. "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue". *Poligrafías. Revista De Teoría Literaria Y Literatura Comparada*, 3, 2012. 18-41.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*, New York, Routledge, 2006.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, London and New York, Routledge, 1988.

Hutcheon, Linda. “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History.” *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, edited by Patrick O’Donnell and Robert Con Davis. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989. 3-32.

Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”, in Hal Foster edited by, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983, p. 111–25.

Jameson, Fredric. “Periodizing the 60s (1984),” in *The Ideologies of Theory Essays 1971-1986, Volume 2: Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the logic of the late capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

Jameson, Fredric. *Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality*. London: Verso, 2016.

Jenkins, Philip. *Decade of Nightmares : The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Johnson, Cedric. *The Panthers Can’t Save Us Now*, London: Verso, 2022.

Johnson, Cedric. *After Black Lives Matter: Policing and Anti-Capitalist Struggle*, London, Verso, 2023.

Johnson, David T.. *Richard Linklater*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

Joy Division. “Shadowplay.” *Unknown Pleasure*. Rhino Records. 2015.

Kaplan, E. Ann, edited by. *Women in Film Noir*. Edited by Ann Kaplan. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.

Kellner, Douglas. “Introduction to the Second Edition”, in Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Kellner, Douglas. “Introduction: Radical Politics, Marcuse, and the New Left”, in *The New Left and the 1960. Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse. Volume Three.* Edited by Douglas Kellner, London Routledge, 2015, pp. 1-37.

King, Geoff. *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction.* London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2002.

Klein, Norman. *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*. London: Verso, 2008.

Kołakowski, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Krutnik, Frank. In a Lonely Street. Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity, London: Routledge, 1991.

Kubrick, Stanley. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. 1968.

Kurashige, Scott. *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black And Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Kurashige, Scott. "Game Over For Holiday Bowl?", in *AZINE (Asian American Movement Ezine)*, Summer 2001.

Langman, Lauren. "From Great Refusals to Wars of Position: Marcuse, Gramsci, and Social Mobilization", in *The Great Refusal*: *Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*, edited by Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter N. Funke, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017, pp. 367-388.

Lasch, Christopher. *Haven in a Heartless World*. New York: Basic Books, 1979.

Liner, J. "'Utopia and Debt in Postmodernity; or, Time Management in Inherent Vice", *Orbit: Writing around Pynchon*, 4, 4, 2016, pp. 1–63.

Linklater, Richard. A Scanner Darkly, 2006, Core Collection, Production files, Margaret Herrick Library.

Linklater, Richard. *A Scanner Darkly*, Section Eight, Detour Filmproduction, 3 Arts Entertainment, 2006.

Lipsitz, George. "Policing Place and Taxing Time on Skid Row", in *Policing The Planet: Why The Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*, edited by Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, London: Verso, 2016, pp. 80-90. (Ebook)

Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House", in *This Bridge Called My back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983, pp. 98-101.

Luter, Matthew and Mike Miley. *Conversations with Steve Erickson*. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2021.

Lynch, David. *Blue Velvet*. 1986.

MacCannell, Dean. "Democracy's Turn: On Homeless Noir", in *Shades of Noir*, edited by Joan Copjec, London: Verso, 1993, pp. 279-297.

Maggitti, Vincenzo. *Lo schermo fra le righe. Cinema e letteratura del Novecento.* Napoli: Liguori Editore, 2007.

Maher Bill. "Ep. #570: Quentin Tarantino, Max Brooks, Dan Carlin", *Real Time with Bill Maher*, HBO, 06/25/21.

Maher, Sean W. *Film Noir and Los Angeles*. London: Routledge, 2022.

Maher, Sean W. *Noir and the Urban Imaginary*, (Doctoral Thesis), Queensland University of Technology, 2010.

Mahlknecht, Johannes. "The Hollywood Novelization: Film as Literature or Literature as Film Promotion?" *Poetics*, 33, 2, 137-168.

Malatesta, Errico. *"Verso l'Anarchia". Malatesta in America 1899-1900.* Milano: Zero in Condotta, 2012.

Marcuse, Herbert. "Forward to the Second Edition", in Löwenthal Leo and Guterman Nortber, *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techinques of the American Agitator*. London: Verso 2021, xlil- xliv.

Marcuse, Herbert. *An Essay on Liberation.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation. Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse. Volume Four*. Edited by Douglas Kellner, London: Routledge, 2007.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

Marcuse, Herbert. *The New Left and the 1960. Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse. Volume Three.* Edited by Douglas Kellner, London Routledge, 2015.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I.* London: Penguin Classics, 1990.

Mattessich, Stefan. *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

McCaffery, Larry, edited by. *After Yersterday's Crash: The Avant-Pop Anthology*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

McCann Sean. *Gumshoe America: Hard-boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

McCannell, Dean. "Democracy's Turn: On Homeless Noir", in *Shades of Noir*, edited by Joan Copjec, London: Verso, 1993, pp. 279-297.

McClintock, Scott and John Miller, edited by. *Pynchon's California*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014.

McClure, Daniel Robert. *Winter in America: A Cultural History of Neoliberalism, from the Sixties to the Reagan Revolution*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021.

McClure, Daniel Robert. *Winter in America: A Cultural History of Neoliberalism,*

McConnell, Will. "Pynchon, Foucault, Power, and Strategies of Resistance," *Pynchon Notes,* 32–33, 1993, pp. 152–68.

McCoy, Horace. *I Should Have Stayed Home*. New York: Signet, 1951.

McCoy, Horace. *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* New York: Open Road Iconic Ebooks, 2012.

McGregory, Jerrilyn. "Fearless Ezekiel: Alterity in the Detective Fiction of Walter Mosley" in *Finding a Way Home: A Critical Assessment of Walter Mosley's Fiction*, edited by Owen F. Brady and Derek C. Maus, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 84-96.

McHale, Brian. "Postmodernism", in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 289-297.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*, London: Routledge, 1987.

McWilliams, Carey. *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1973.

Melnick, Jeffrey. *Charles Manson's Creepy Crawl*. E-book Edition. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2018.

Michaels, Walter Benn. "Plots against America: Neoliberalism and Antiracism." *American Literary History*, 18, 2, 2006, pp. 288–302.

Miller, Anthony. "Steve Erickson Interviewed by Anthony Miller." 2008. *Conversations with Steve Erickson*. Edited by Matthew Luter and Mike Miley. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2021. 151-171.

Mims, Kevin. *The Last Great Crime Novel of 1975?: Once Upon a Time in Hollywood by Quentin Tarantino*, August 4 2021. https://somethingisgoingtohappen.net/2021/08/04/the-last-great-crime-novel-of-1975-by-kevin-mims/ Last Visited 07/07/2023

Mintz, Steven, Randy Roberts and David Welky. *Hollywood's America: Understanding History Through Film*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016.

Mosley, Walter. *Blood Grove*. New York: Mulholland Books, 2021.

Mosley, Walter. *Black Betty*. New York: Pocket Books, 1994.

Mosley, Walter. *Little Scarlet*. New York: Little Brown, 2004.

Mosley, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress*. New York: Pocket Books, 1990.

Mosley Walter. *Folding the Red into the Black*, London: OR Books, 2016.

Mosley, Walter. *What Next: A Memoir Toward World Peace*, Baltimora: Black Classic Press, 2003.

Mosley, Walter. *White Butterfly*. New York: Pocket Books, 1992.

Mosley, Walter. "The Black Dick" in Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, 7, edited by Philomena Mariani. Seattle: Bay Press, 1991.

Moss, Richard. "What Would Charlie Do? Narrowing the Possibilities of a Pornographic Redemption in Thomas Pynchon's Novels" in *Thomas Pynchon, Sex, and Gender* edited by Ali Chetwynd, Joanna Freer, and Georgios Maragos, Athens: Georgia University Press, 2018, pp. 109-124.

Naremore, James. *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Newell, Kate. *Expanding Adaptation Networks: From Illustrations to Novelization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Nezar, Alsayyad. *Cinematic Urbanism: a History of the Modern from Reel to Real*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Nicol, Bran. "The Urban Environment", in *Edgar Allan Poe in Context* edited by Kevin J. Hayes, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 74-84.

Noys, Benjamin. *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014.

O'Bryan, Michael. "Pynchon and New Political Activisms", in *The New Pynchon Studies*, edited by Joanna Freer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 141-156.

O'Neill, Tom. *Chaos: Charles Manson, the CIA, and the Secret History of the Sixties*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2019.

O'Neill, Tom. "Five myths about Charles Manson" *The Washington Post*, 08/23/2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/five-myths/five-myths-about-charles-manson/2019/08/22/4a6ac204-c42a-11e9-b72f-b31dfaa77212_story.html Last Visited 06/26/2023

Pagello, Federico. *Quentin Tarantino and Film Theory: Aesthetics and Dialectics in Late Postmodernity*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Palmer, Christopher. *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and the Terror of the Postmodern*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2003.

Palmeri, Frank. "Other than Postmodern? Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics" *Postmodern Culture*, 12,1, 2001.

Palumbo-Liu, David. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Pease, Donald E.. *The New American Exceptionalism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Pepper, Andrew. "Race, violence and neoliberalism: crime fiction in the era of Ferguson and Black Lives Matter". *Textual Practice*, 33, 6, 2019, pp. 963-982.

Pepper, Andrew. *The Contemporary American Crime Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Pepper, Andrew. *Unwilling Executioner. Crime Fiction and the State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Pfeil, Fred. "Home Fires Burning: Family Noir in *Blue Velvet* and *Terminator 2*", in *Shades of Noir*, edited by Joan Copjec, London: Verso, 1993, pp. 227-260.

Polanski, Roman. *Chinatown*, Paramount, 1974.

Pye, Michael, and Lynda Myles, *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation Took Over Hollywood*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979.

Pynchon, Thomas. "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?". *New York Times*, 1984.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Against the Day*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2006.

Pynchon, Thomas. "A Journey Into The Mind Of Watts", *New York Times*, 1966.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Bleeding Edge*. New York: Penguin Press, 2013.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. New York: The Viking Press, 1973.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Inherent Vice*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2009.

Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. New York: Bantam, 1966.

Pynchon, Thomas. *V.*. London: Vintage, 1995.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Vineland*. Boston Toronto London: Little, Brown & Company, 1990.

Rajewsky, Irina. "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality" *Intermédialités / Intermedialities* 6, 2005, pp. 43-64.

Randles, Liam. *Theme and Technique in Steve Erickson's Fiction*. Ph.D. Thesis. University of Liverpool, January 2019.

Rankine, Claudia. "The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning" *The New York Times*, 06/22/2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-blacklife-is-one-of-mourning.html.

Ravetto, Kriss. "Shaking down LA Cool: Hopping up Neo-Noir", *Emergences*, 9, 2, 1999, pp. 207-227.

Reft, Ryan. "Not Bowling Alone: How the Holiday Bowl in Crenshaw Became an Integrated Leisure Space", *PBS SoCal / KCET*, August 22, 2013. https://www.pbssocal.org/history-society/not-bowling-alone-how-the-holiday-bowl-in-crenshaw-became-an-integrated-leisure-space? Last Visited: 01/14/2024

Revoyr, Nina. *Southland*, New York: Akashic Books, 2002.

Revoyr, Nina. "California Book Club: Nina Revoyr Transcript", *Alta* (online), March 19, 2021.

Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addition To Its Own Past*. London: Faber and Faber, 2011.

Rhodes, Chip. *Politics, Desire, and the Hollywood Novel*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008.

Roche, David. *Quentin Tarantino: Poetics and Politics of Cinematic Metafiction*. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2018.

Rogan, Joe. *#1675 – Quentin Tarantino*, "The Joe Rogan Experience", Podcast, June 2021.

Russell, Mike. “The CulturePulp Q&A: Richard Linklater” *CulturePulp*, July 1. Online)

Sandberg, Eric. “Inherent Vice, Bleeding Edge , and Thomas Pynchon's Hardboiled” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 18, 1, 2020, pp. 125-148.

Sandberg, Eric. “Popular Culture”, in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 138-145.

Sandberg, Eric. “Thomas Pynchon and Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Inherent Vice*(s) and the Affective Politics of Nostalgia”, *Adaptation*, 13, 3, 2020, pp. 295–312.

Savvas, Theophilus. *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011.

Scaggs, John. *Crime Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Schutzbach, Lukas. *There Is an Alternative. With Herbert Marcuse and Mark Fisher Towards a Political Aesthetics of Neoliberalism*. Berlin: J.B. Metzler, 2023.

Scola, Ettore. *Dramma della gelosia.* Dean Film, 1970.

Scorsese, Martin. *Taxi Driver*. 1976.

Scott, A.O., “‘Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood’ Review: We Lost It at the Movies”, *New York Times*, July 24, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/movies/once-upon-a-time-in-hollywood-review.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article Last Visited: 06/17/2023

Scott, Ridley. *Blade Runner*. Warner Bros., 1982.

Shaviro, Steven. “A Scanner Darkly”, in *The Pinocchio Theory* (blog), July 16, 2006. http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=507 Last Visited: 01/13/2024.

Shaviro, Steven. *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Winchester: 0-Books, 2010.

Shaviro, Steven. “Zeroville”, *The Pinocchio Theory* (Blog), September 18, 2007. http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=613 Last Visited: 01/30/24

Shiel, Mark. *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*. London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

Short, Sue, *Darkness Calls: A Critical Investigation of Neo-Noir*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019.

Shumway, D. R, "Countercultures," in McHale, B. and Platt, L. edited by, *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 112–126.

Silver, Alain and Ursini, James, & Ward, Elizabeth. *L.A. Noir: The city as character*, Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2005.

Simonetti, Paolo. "A Mystery's Redemption: Thomas Pynchon and the "Inherent Vice" of Detective Fiction", in *Thomas Pynchon and the (De-)Vices of Global (Post)Modernity*, edited by Zofia Kolbuszewska. Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 2012, pp. 287-296.

Slade, Joseph. "Religion, Psychology, Sex and Love in *Gravity's Rainbow*," in *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow*, edited by Charles Clerc. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983, pp. 153–98.

Soja, Edward W. "Taking Los Angeles apart" in *Postmodern Geography*. London: Verso, 1989, pp. 59-84.

Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 1996.

Spanos, W. V.*,* "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination" *Boundary 2*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Autumn, 1972, pp. 147-168.

Stevens, George. *A Place in the Sun*. 1951.

Stevenson, Nick. "Herbert Marcuse as a Critical Intellectual: The New Left and Alternative Socialist Futures", *Rethinking Marxism*, 34, 1, 2022, pp. 81-98.

Stone, Rob. *The Cinema of Richard Linklater: Walk, Don't run*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Stubbs, Angela. "An Interview with Steve Erickson." 2007, in *Conversations with Steve Erickson*. Edited by Matthew Luter and Mike Miley. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2021. 137-143.

Sweeney, David. "Licensed Fiction and the Expansion of Fictional Worlds", *International Association of Tie-In Writers*, 2015. http://iamtw.org/articles/licensed-fiction/. Last Visited 07/05/2023

Tani, Stefano. *The Doomed Detective*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.

Tarantino, Quentin. *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*, Miramax, 2019.

Tarantino, Quentin. *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, New York, Harper Perennial Paperback, 2021.

Tarantino, Quentin. *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*, Sony Pictures Entertainment - Columbia Marketing Group, United States, 2019.

The Velvet Underground. "Pale Blue Eyes", *The Velvet Underground*. Ims-Polydor, 2015. (Min. 05:39).

Thomas Jones, "Call It Capitalism", *London Review of Books*, 31.17, September 10, 2009, pp. 9–10.

Thomas, Samuel. *Pynchon and the Political*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Toth, Josh. 'Historioplastic Metafiction: Tarantino, Nolan, and the "Return to Hegel"', *Cultural Critique*, vol. 99, no. 1, University of Minnesota Press, 2018, pp. 1–30.

Tyree, J.M. *The Counterforce: Thomas Pynchon's Inherent Vice*. New York: Fiction Advocate, 2021.

Vernet, Marc. "Film Noir on the Edge of Doom", in *Shades of Noir*, edited by Joan Copjec, London: Verso, 1993, pp. 1-32.

Ward, Elizabeth and Alain Silver. *Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles*. Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1987.

Webb, Jack, created by. *Dragnet 1967*, 1967-70.

Webb, Lawrence. *The Cinema of Urban Crisis: Seventies Film and the Reinvention of the City*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014.

Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.

West, Mark. "The Contemporary Sixties Novel: Post-postmodernism and Historiographic Metafiction", in *21st Century US Historical Fiction Contemporary Responses to the Past*. Edited by Ruth Max. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 209-228.

West, Nathanael. *The Day of the Locust*, London: Penguin English Library, 2018.

Whalen, Terence. "Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy." *American Quarterly*, 44, 1992, pp. 381–417.

White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in Canary, Robert H. and Kozicki, Henry, *The Writing of History: Literary form and Historical Understanding*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978, 41–62.

Wilder, Billy. *Sunset Boulevard*. Paramount, 1950.

Willis, Ellen. *Beginning To See The Light: Sex, Hope and Rock-and-Roll*, Middletown. CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1992.

Witzling, David, "Reflections on the "Ownership Society" in Recent Black Fiction", *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies*, 1,2, 2014, pp. 87-113.

Žižek, Slavoj, *Looking Awry*, Cambridge, MA: October Books / MIT Press, 1991.

Žižek, Slavoj. "'The Thing That Thinks': The Kantian Background of the *Noir* Subject", in *Shades of Noir*. Edited by Joan Copjec. London: Verso Books, 1993. 199-226.

Žižek, Slavoj. *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. London: Verso, 2008.

Zuboff, Shoshana. "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism And The Prospects Of An Information Civilization", in *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*, edited by Torin Monahan and David Murakami Wood, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 302-306.

Summary

Starting from the 21st Century, a series of novels and films, by using and renewing the distinctive traits of the noir genre, revisits the 1960s in Los Angeles, a crucial decade in American history from a political, social and aesthetic point of view. This thesis aims to investigate this major trend and to identify a new sub-genre in the vast and heterogeneous Los Angeles noir; the corpus of my analysis includes 5 novels and 3 films: Thomas Pynchon's Inherent Vice (2009) and its filmic adaptation directed by Paul Thomas Anderson (2014), Walter Mosley's Blood Grove (2021), Nina Revoyr's Southland (2003), Steve Erickson's Zeroville (2007), Richard Linklater's A Scanner Darkly (2006) and Once Upon a Time in... Hollywood by Quentin Tarantino (2019) and his eponymous novelization of it published in 2021. By focusing on the intermedial and intertextual nature of these works, constantly in dialogue with their respective literary and film adaptations, I try to demonstrate how such novels and films revisit not only the history of Los Angeles but also the filmic and literary imagination which, up to the 21st Century, characterized the representation of the city. I argue that the detection has to do with the recognition and the rehabilitation of collective memory, what I define as a strategy of unforgetting, in regards to both Los Angeles and the Sixties, as an aesthetic reaction to the problem of the erasure of memory that had always characterized the history of the city. Particular attention is be paid to the critique of late capitalism and the political aesthetic of neoliberalism, for their relevance in the dialogue between the Sixties and the 21st Century, especially as regards the absorption of racial difference in post-Civil Right society and the incorporation of the Sixties countercultural politics. Starting from the tradition of Marxist critical theory, from Herbert Marcuse to Frederic Jameson, whose theories are reconsidered in the works of Mark Fisher, I analyze the trilateral relationship between the noir, the Sixties and the 21st Century American society. In particular, I focus on the multiculturality inherent to Los Angeles society which is mirrored in the heterogeneous corpus of the analysis; such diversity plays an essential role not only in the historical shifts in the genre but also in highlighting crucial issues of contemporary neoliberal society. In fact, through revisitation of the Sixties –

that is, the end of the countercultural utopia, the crisis of Vietnam, the militarization of the police and the enforcement of ghettos, the War on Drugs – the noir of the Twenty-first Century interrogates the contradictions of the neoliberal society, a society based on the surveillance, control and incorporation of diversity within the capitalist productive system. In this sense, if the hardboiled originates from disillusionment with the idea of liberal democracy expressed by the New Deal Liberalism, the noir of the 21st century, while coming to terms with the political and social climate of the late Sixties, continues to question the significance of democracy and justice in American society in the aftermath of 9/11, the War on Terror and the crisis of policing.