

# Visions of America in Thomas Pynchon's Novels

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Fajt, Paula

Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2021

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Filozofski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:131:533114>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-04-19**



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Odsjek za anglistiku

Filozofski fakultet

Sveučilište u Zagrebu

DIPLOMSKI RAD

Visions of America in Thomas Pynchon's Novels – Continuity of Motifs from the 1960s to the  
Present Day

(Smjer: smjer Književno-kulturološki (amerikanistika))

Kandidat: Paula Fajt

Mentor: dr. sc. Stipe Grgas, redoviti profesor

Ak. godina: 2020./2021.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research paper is to discuss the continuity of motifs in three different novels written by the American author Thomas Pynchon. In the analysis, several formalist concepts (theme, fabula, syuzhet, motivation and classification of motifs) will be used because they offer a definition of motifs and give insight into their function within a written work, more precisely, within a novel. Formalism (or Russian formalism) began when two groups, Moscow Linguistic Circle and OPOYAZ (alternatively, OPOJAZ; Obshchestvo Izucheniya Poeticheskogo Yazyka; Society for the Study of Poetic Language) were founded in 1915 and 1916, respectively (Steiner 16-17). The members of this Russian school of literary criticism based their literary

theory on de Saussure's linguistic theory and symbolist notions of the artistic, i.e. literary autonomy. A literary text (poetry and fictional narratives) used language in a different way than other forms of discourse such as everyday speech (Steiner 16-18). Moreover, the "literariness" of texts was underlined: words were not only referring to extralinguistic entities but were objects in their own right (Steiner 23). The emphasis was put on the medium – language, form and technique were more important than content (Steiner 18). Formalists' main aim was to provide the tools necessary for a more objective and scientific discourse analysis (Steiner 15-17). Even though formalism opposed to Marxist criticism in its focus on the form and disregard for content or context, it remained important in the USSR until 1929 when it was condemned for its lack of a political dimension (Steiner 25).

Boris Tomashevsky was a member of OPOYAZ and his most important work was *Theory of literature*. "Thematics" – the last section of Tomashevsky's seminal work – is divided into five smaller parts which deal with some of the key notions in the Russian Formalism: theme, motif, fabula, syuzhet, motivation and hero. It is also important to note that these concepts were devised as tools for analyzing novels and are not entirely applicable to poems or plays.

Tomashevsky opens his "Thematics" with the discussion about theme and defines it as something that "unites the separate elements of a work" (63). The theme also includes the reader and the socio-historical context of the novel – the literary work has to spark and maintain interest in the reader by choosing its theme; the choice of theme is in turn dictated both by the expectations set by the literary tradition and historical moment at which the literary work is written and published (65). The theme is a unifying agent not only within each novel, but also serves as a link between all three Pynchon's novels. Although the novels *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge* were written several decades apart, they are unified by a

common theme of the semi-official search for answers conducted by a disadvantaged type of protagonist.

The theme can be divided into smaller sections: syuzhet, fabula and motifs. Fabula is sometimes translated as story and syuzhet as plot<sup>1</sup> and for the purposes of this essay, these terms will be used interchangeably. Fabula is “the aggregate of mutually related events reported in the work. No matter how the events were originally arranged in the work (...)”, fabula arranges these events chronologically and according to causal relationships between them (Tomashevsky 66). The artistic, literary arrangement of the events within a particular work of art is the syuzhet (Tomashevsky 68). The same thematic building blocks, i.e. events, take part both in the fabula and in the syuzhet, but their arrangement is different. The theme can be divided into even smaller sections that can have their own theme; the division can continue to its smallest parts, the motifs (ibid.). Tomashevsky also defines fabula and syuzhet, i.e. story and plot, with respect to motifs: “(...) the story is the aggregate of motifs in their logical, causal-chronological order; the plot is the aggregate of those same motifs but having the relevance and order which they had in the original work” (68). In addition, the arrangement of motifs in the syuzhet helps to maintain the reader’s attention (ibid.). The syuzhet needs to provide a particular experience for the reader in order to convey a particular artistic vision.

In Pynchon’s novels the basic fabula of the murder mystery is used and subverted. A murder investigation as the theme and the main crime is replaced with executing a will, investigating possible disappearances and suspicious business practices. A murder investigation is pushed to the outskirts of *Bleeding Edge* and non-existing in *The Crying of Lot 49*. In *Inherent Vice* the solution to all murders is either linked to a mysterious organization or conveniently wrapped up, so the protagonist ceases to investigate them.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of Tomashevsky by Lemon and Reis used in this essay also employs the terms plot and story.

Moreover, Tomashevsky introduces several different classifications of motifs<sup>2</sup> in this second section. Firstly, he divides motifs into bound and free motifs: “By simply retelling the story we immediately discover what may be omitted without destroying the coherence of the narrative and what may not be omitted without disturbing the connections among events. The motifs which cannot be omitted are bound motifs; those which may be omitted without disturbing the whole causal-chronological course of events are free motifs” (68). Fabula consists entirely from bound motifs; in contrast, free motifs are crucial for the shaping of the syuzhet. In Pynchon’s novels analyzed in this essay, the fabula of a mystery novel is used and a common bound motif is the protagonist that investigates murders despite their disadvantages or personal flaws (e.g. in *Inherent Vice* the protagonist is a former police officer and often under the influence of marijuana).

Moreover, Tomashevsky claims that the literary tradition governs the usage of free motifs and that each historical and cultural milieu has its own selection of free motifs (ibid.). For example, Pynchon’s postmodernism is echoed in his usage of free motifs from pop culture to blur the border between fact and fiction (e.g. in *Bleeding Edge* Microsoft’s Windows XP, a real computer operating system, is mentioned). Bound motifs help to establish causal and chronological connections between events of a fabula, whereas free motifs help to fulfil the artistic intention. Motifs can also travel from one syuzhet to another while preserving their integrity (ibid.). A similar procedure can be detected in Pynchon’s novels – several motifs that have been present in his earliest works reappear even in his latest novel thus creating a sense of continuity within Pynchon’s novels. The same Tupperware party that establishes Oedipa Maas as a housewife gets an ironic twist as Maxine Tarnow’s excuse for avoiding a stripper job while she tries to locate her next helper in her investigation. Moreover, the same free motifs help to blur

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this essay I will omit the discussion on static and dynamic motifs.

the border between the reality and the fictional world of the novel, which, in turn, signifies the novel's position within the postmodernist fiction i.e. the socio-historical context of the novel.

In addition, motivation helps to fulfil the reader's expectations, as it is a network of devices that validates the choice of motifs within a novel. The compositional motifs are connected to the economy of the literary text as they push the plot forward, can be used as a means of characterization or as a misleading motif. The lawyer's letter that starts Oedipa's execution of will is transformed into Shasta's postcard that prompts Doc to visit the golden, fang-shaped building and a forged financial report that incites Maxine's visit to hwwaahwgh.com headquarters. The realistic motivation fulfils the reader's need for grounding the illusion and lends lifelike qualities to an artificial object i.e. the novel as it reaches a compromise between the literary tradition and objective reality. Pop culture is used to anchor the novels in the 1960s and 2000s, respectively – popular toys, basketball games, high-profile murder investigations and descriptions of interiors are all used to underline the lifelike qualities of the novel. The third type of motivation is artistic – it includes the process of selecting motifs suitable for depicting in art and the procedure of defamiliarization. The descriptions of Oedipa's hotel room, Doc's apartment and the hotel that Maxine visits are long, elaborate lists of unusually highlighted details that defy the notion of coherence.

Furthermore, these classifications will link different aspects of the novel and the images of America. All main characters provide their own vision of America: while concerned with the vanishing possibilities, Doc does not elaborate on the USA directly; Oedipa maintains that the real legacy that she was sent to sort out is America, but she is unsure who will inherit it. Maxine, on the other hand, is the only main character that dreams about her country as a mousetrap within a building.

## THE CRYING OF LOT 49

Thomas Hill Schaub claims that each of Pynchon's novels deals with a different era, with the exception of the so-called California novels in which the author returns several times to the late 1960s Southern California (30). California novels are *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Vineland* (1990) and *Inherent Vice* (2009) (ibid.).<sup>3</sup> However, only *The Crying of Lot 49* was written during the 1960s, whereas the other two novels were written two and four decades later, respectively (ibid.). The oldest of California novels was written about the immediate socio-historical context, whereas the other two novels include a temporal distance. Schaub managed to highlight a sense of continuity in these novels presenting them as synecdoches of America. Schaub connects the social changes in California in the late 1960s that included large parts of American society with character development in Pynchon's novels (30).<sup>4</sup> I will argue later in my essay that even *Bleeding Edge* (2013), set in early 2000s New York, is the latest link in Pynchon's chain.

As Schaub notes in his essay, *The Crying of Lot 49* opposed the realist-naturalist tradition that was deemed "a pernicious illusion" (32). The main aim of realistic fiction was to depict an ordinary course of events, i.e. mirror real life, to include typical characters in typical, realistically motivated settings and events; naturalism took this principle to the extreme (Abrams 260-261). Modernism challenged the conventions of realism by calling attention to form and technique (Levenson 2-3). Modernist art included a radical break with verisimilitude; it included experiments, new outlooks on already familiar genres (e.g., mystery novel) and artistic innovations (ibid.). Postmodernism engaged the realist-naturalist tradition, often including irony and parody, often exploiting artistic procedures that were considered conventional (Hutcheon 4-5). As Hutcheon notes, historical metafiction takes into account that fiction and history are

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this essay, I will omit the discussion on *Vineland*.

<sup>4</sup> These social changes are discussed in more detail by Schaub in his essay.



human products and thus, should be subjected to scrutiny and evaluation, rather than nostalgic indulgence (5). Postmodernism engages the proliferation of mass, popular culture and seeks to challenge its uniformity as a totalizing force (Hutcheon 6). As opposed to modernism, that still relied on grand narratives as a cohesive force (e.g. myth and art), postmodernism acknowledges the necessity and illusory character of these systems (ibid.). McHale states that all of Pynchon's novels conform to Hutcheon's notion of historical metafiction: Pynchon's fiction rejects the great narratives of the West (i.e. "the official" historical account of the late 1960s) and instead places "faith in the little narratives that sustain small-scale separatist cultural enclaves, such as the diverse undergrounds that come to light in the course of *The Crying of Lot 49*" (98). Pynchon engages with the grand narratives of the late 1960s (e.g. the politics symbolized by the presidential race of 1964), but leaves them on the outskirts of his novels – he turns his attention to characters that he places inside the mystery plot. *The Crying of Lot 49* is shaped around the protagonist, Oedipa Maas and her search for the truth, rather than detailed descriptions of her social and economic status as a housewife.

The theme of the novel *The Crying of Lot 49* is Oedipa Maas's executing of the will of her former lover Pierce Inverarity that ultimately leads her to search for the mysterious Trystero organization. Tomashevsky defines the theme as something that "unites the separate elements of a work" (63). Everything in this short novel is subordinated to Oedipa Maas's search for answers. Even though Oedipa is reluctant to go anywhere, she is pushed by male characters to the next location – her husband Wendell advises her to see their lawyer regarding Inverarity's will, who in turn encourages her to explore the matter on her own (*Lot 49* 9,11). Oedipa starts her exploration in a San Narciso motel by meeting the other co-executor of Pierce's will, the

lawyer Metzger (*Lot 49* 16). Her movement is emphasized by description of spaces that she moves through which will be discussed in greater detail later in the essay.

Tomashevsky concludes that the right theme maintains the reader's interest; in turn, the choice of theme is dictated both by the expectations set by the literary tradition and historical moment at which the literary work is written and published (65). Schaub underlines that the novel was written during the presidential contest of 1964 between Barry Goldwater and Lyndon Johnson (32). This is shown by Oedipa Maas's remark that she is a member of Young Republican as well as the fact that another character, Genghis Cohen, wears a Barry Goldwater sweatshirt (Pynchon 47, 59). Thus, Pynchon's novel reflects its immediate socio-historical context through subtle hints like these.

The basic fabula of *The Crying of Lot 49* follows the conventions of a murder mystery, but also subverts them. Stephen Knight outlines the conventions of the golden age of crime fiction, stating that although crime fiction of that period included other types<sup>5</sup> "it is still possible to identify a coherent set of practices which were shared (...) by most of the writers then at work" (77). Knight also emphasizes that the borders of that period are hard to pinpoint – while setting 1913 as its earliest starting point and the 1930 as an ending point (ibid.). However, texts in the same style were also produced after 1940 (ibid.). According to Knight, the basic conventions of this genre (the clue-puzzle) are: murder is the central crime, the story is confined to one place and one social class, the investigation is undertaken by an amateur or somebody disadvantaged in a way, the detection is semi-official, focused on circumstantial evidence, there are many possible suspects, the clues uncovered by the investigator are presented to the reader so

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<sup>5</sup> According to Knight, social and personal unease, the early types of the psychothriller and the procedural were often included in crime fiction of the golden period (77).

that they can also try to identify the culprit and the end of the story is the identification of the criminal (78).

This fabula is echoed in Pynchon's novel – Oedipa Maas is a housewife and fits Knight's criteria: she is an amateur, without any authority, but at the same time, her circle of friends and family does not include a police officer or a detective that is present in the clue-puzzle. In that way, Oedipa is deprived of a helper from the police force. Tanner points out that Oedipa is surrounded by male characters that are not helping her in her quest (61). She confides in her husband Wendell as soon as the letter arrives, but he quickly pushes her away:

“(...) [Y]ou got the wrong fella. Not me. I can't even make out our income tax right. Execute a will, there's nothing I can tell you, see Roseman.” Their lawyer. (*Lot 49* 9)

Oedipa tries to discuss Pierce's will with Roseman, who not only had no interest in helping her, but also tried to seduce her. For example, her husband became “less himself and more generic” under the influence of LSD (*Lot 49* 87). As Tanner notes, all Oedipa's supposed helpers end up mentally ill, cannot separate fantasy from reality or simply elope with a young girl like Metzger (61). The male characters are subverting the convention outlined by Knight – they point Oedipa to the next helper, but when she returns to her helpers with a new piece of information, they are not able to answer her questions.

However, the novel deviates from the convention – no murder was committed, but Oedipa is nevertheless left to investigate on her own terms. Knight presents homicide as the main crime in the clue-puzzle (77). The convention is subverted, even parodied in *The Crying of Lot 49* – Oedipa, after receiving the news about executing Pierce's will, remembered the “bust of Jay Gould that Pierce kept over the bed on a shelf so narrow for it she'd always had the hovering fear it would someday topple on them. Was that how he'd died (...)? That only made her laugh, out

loud and helpless: You're so sick, Oedipa, she told herself (...)." (6). Oedipa's memories about Pierce include this bizarrely placed statue of Jay Gould that was regarded as one of the most ruthless American businessmen ("Jay Gould"). The placement of the statue may signify Pierce's own business model, but there is no further confirmation – the reader is left to fill out the blanks. Only Oedipa was concerned with the fall of the statue on both of them, but there are no indications that she felt the same way about Pierce's enterprises or him personally. This is also the only time that the cause of Pierce's death is even being considered.

The identification of the criminal is replaced by a different kind of search for truth. The agenda briefly presented in the first sentence of the novel becomes the driving force of the protagonist and the entire novel – as Oedipa tries to sort out Inverarity's assets, she stumbles upon a new layer of mystery i.e. the Trystero organization. As Tanner notes, *The Crying of Lot 49* works like an inverted detective story – in a traditional detective story, the seemingly disparate clues accumulate, but in the end help the investigator to reconstruct the whole crime and reveal the culprit; Oedipa seems to discover more and more clues about the Trystero that might be real, might be a hoax or even a hallucination (56). Oedipa gathers her first bit of information about the Trystero in *The Scope* (*Lot 49* 32). The next clue is the 17<sup>th</sup> century revenge play *The Courier's Tragedy* – the tone of the tragedy changed halfway through it and it was made clear that some actions and words would not be spoken or shown onstage (44). For example, the main character is being approached by three men in black, but the lights went out before they approached him; the next scene contains only a short report about his death. Additionally, just after Trystero is mentioned onstage, the lights go out and the play ends (*Lot 49* 46). In hopes to discover more about the Trystero, Oedipa speaks to the director of the play, Driblette, but he refuses to provide a definitive meaning of the play and only gives her the next

clue: Driblette mentions the used books store where he bought the play. According to Tanner, the play draws Oedipa and the reader into a new mode of expression that is positioned between literal and metaphorical (59). Clues are revealed, but not explained, the text gives hints to a meaning, but no final reveal takes place, even at the end of the novel.

Oedipa finally, at the end of the novel, realizes that Pierce left something more than money and real estate as his legacy: “She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America” (Pynchon 111). By then, numerous male characters have collided with Oedipa, providing her with the next clue, ultimately leaving her in complete isolation. In the last chapter, Oedipa finishes her phone call to the last male helper whom she has met in another bar in San Narciso (*Lot 49* 110-111). After he hangs up, her isolation is complete and she realizes that San Narciso, i.e. Pierce’s assets, have lost its uniqueness through being attached to Inverarity; it becomes a place like any other in America: San Narciso “(...) became a name again, was assumed back into the American continuity of crust and mantle. Pierce Inverarity was really dead.” (*Lot 49* 111). Tanner notes that Oedipa has no way of telling what is real and what she is only imagining, how much of her quest was planned and how much was accidental, but she accepts this paradox and does not try to solve it (71). It is unclear to Oedipa what this America is, and who will inherit its legacy, she simply poses questions, does not answer them or offer any conclusion (*Lot 49* 111-114).

Furthermore, in the third section of “Thematics”, Tomashevsky discusses the concept of motivation – individual motifs are placed within a certain literary work according to the reader’s expectations (78). To avoid poorly constructed works, Tomashevsky proposes a “network of devices justifying the introduction of individual motifs or groups of motifs” i.e. motivation (ibid.). In my essay, I will try to show that Pynchon sometimes conforms to the conventions

outlined by Tomashevsky, and at certain points, the motifs in his novels defy any such classification.

Motivation is classified into three different groups: compositional, realistic and artistic (Tomashevsky 78-87). Compositional motivation is connected to the economy of the literary text i.e. they help the literary work to reach its end (ibid.). One of such motifs is the symbol of the muted post horn:

“On the latrine wall, among lipsticked obscenities, she noticed the following message: (...) “Interested in sophisticated fun? (...) Get in touch with Kirby, through WASTE only. Box 7391. L. A.”

WASTE? Oedipa wondered. Beneath the notice, faintly in pencil, was a symbol she’d never seen before (...)” (Pynchon 31-32).

The muted post horn moved the plot forward because after its discovery, Oedipa began to investigate the alternative postal system WASTE. At the beginning of chapter 4 Oedipa decides to read Inverarity’s will more carefully and visit Pierce’s company Yoyodyne. Oedipa gets lost at Yoyodyne and immediately stumbles upon Stanley Kotecks, an employee, drawing the muted horn symbol (*Lot 49 55*). Oedipa tried sorting out Inverarity’s other assets and visited a home for senior citizen that he built (*Lot 49 57*). There she encounters an old man who inherited a ring with the WASTE symbol from his father, who distributed post and took the ring from a stranger he killed (*Lot 49 58*). The stranger dressed in black and postal services echo *The Courier’s Tragedy* and prompt Oedipa to look further into Trystero.

Moreover, compositional motifs can be used as a means of characterization, but Tomashevsky insists that they “must be appropriate to the story” (80). The novel opens with the

description of Oedipa's return from a Tupperware party. The opening sentence introduces the reader to the main character, Oedipa Maas:

“One summer afternoon Mrs. Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million dollars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary.” (*Lot 49* 5)

Plastic containers for keeping food were invented in the late 1940s in the United States of America and since then sold at Tupperware parties (“Tupperware Parties”). Beitzel discusses the Tupperware motif as a means to “situate Oedipa in a distorted world where the commercial is integrated into the domestic world” (199). Beitzel describes the direct sales model and the whole world of *The Crying of Lot 49* as distorted because there is no clear line between the business and home (199-200). Contrary to Beitzel's claims, Tupperware parties are not portrayed in a negative manner in the novel itself because they represent Oedipa's participation in an activity that not only drives business into the home, but also prompts women of similar status to leave their domicile and socialize with one another. Tupperware as a compositional motif helps to represent Oedipa as a housewife in the 1960s that frequently leaves her home, but eventually circles back to it. The first sentence depicts Oedipa's typical day and illustrates her everyday life – socializing and consuming goods outside of the house. Furthermore, throughout the first chapter Oedipa goes to a downtown market, herb garden, her lawyer's office, but circles back to her home and making dinner for her husband, Wendell “Mucho” Maas.

However, Tomashevsky also takes the so-called misleading motivation into consideration, stating that these kinds of motifs may be used to distract the reader from the “real situation” (80). The misleading motifs are also a means of parody; they exploit expectations set by tradition and lead to unexpected outcomes (ibid.). Pynchon uses the conventions of the mystery novel in extreme and unexpected ways: misleading motifs multiply and the reader is left in a maze of dead-ends. One of the crucial clues in Oedipa’s investigation of The Trystero was the play *The Courier’s Tragedy* – Oedipa watched the show, spoke several times to the director Driblette and an English professor about it, but she could neither verify the historical accuracy of the play nor the existence of Trystero. *The Courier’s Tragedy* and the people included in the interpretation of the text could not help Oedipa in her search for Trystero. In the end, the play turned out to be a misleading motif.

The second type of motivation that Tomashevsky discusses is the realistic motivation. Tomashevsky describes the need for illusion, a demand that the world created in a literary work is lifelike, that it conforms to reality (80-81).

The men inside the auction room wore black mohair and had pale, cruel faces. They watched her come in, trying each to conceal his thoughts. Loren Passerine, on his podium, hovered like a puppet-master, his eyes bright, his smile practiced and relentless. He stared at her, smiling, as if saying, I’m surprised you actually came. Oedipa sat alone, toward the back of the room, looking at the napes of necks, trying to guess which one was her target, her enemy, perhaps her proof. An assistant closed the heavy door on the lobby windows and the sun. She heard a lock snap shut; the sound echoed a moment. Passerine spread his arms in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some



remote culture; perhaps to a descending angel. The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49. (Pynchon 114-115)

In the section quoted above, the motifs connected to the auction room – the heavy door, the lock – these details help to visualize the room and help to create a certain atmosphere. Only some details in the auction room were singled out – the doors, the lock, the podium for the auctioneer. The eerie claustrophobic atmosphere is also supported by highlighting the black details in the room. The description of seating is also omitted, which draws almost all focus on the door as the division between the outside world and the auction room. At the end of this section, the reader can easily imagine how it was inside this auction room; the tension and anticipation become almost tangible.

The third type of motivation is the artistic motivation. Not everything in real life is well suited for depiction in art and even the realistic motifs must be carefully selected and artistically justified (Tomashevsky 85). The artistic motivation includes both a process of selecting motifs and illuminating them in a special light (ibid.). One of the chief procedures used in this respect is defamiliarization (Tomashevsky 86). Artistic motifs give the literary work new qualities that set it apart from reality. Pynchon uses the procedure of defamiliarization in describing places – e.g. at the beginning of chapter two, Oedipa drives to San Narciso and stays at a motel. The only detail that is described is the entrance sign:

A representation in painted sheet metal of a nymph holding a white blossom towered thirty feet into the air; the sign, lit up despite the sun, said “Echo Courts.” The face of the nymph was much like Oedipa’s, which didn’t startle her so much as a concealed blower system that kept the nymph’s gauze chiton in constant agitation (...). She was smiling a lipsticked and public smile (...). Oedipa pulled into the lot, got out and stood for a

moment in the hot sun and the dead-still air, watching the artificial windstorm (...).  
Remembering her idea about a slow whirlwind, words she couldn't hear.

The room would be good enough for the time she had to stay. Its door opened on a long courtyard with a swimming pool, whose surface that day was flat, brilliant with sunlight.  
(*Lot 49* 26-27)

The motel's description centers on the nymph, without moving the plot forward i.e. having a compositional function. Oedipa's is startled by the moving sign that is later contrasted by the stillness of the pool outside of the room. In the short description the similarity between the nymph's and Oedipa's face is highlighted which tempts the reader to fill in the gaps, to compare and contrast the metal sign and the protagonist. Whereas the nymph's smile is discussed in more detail, a similar description of main character's facial features is fully omitted. Oedipa's dynamism while pulling into the lot is only briefly interrupted by a moment of stillness when she looks at the sign that is constantly moving. The nymph is constantly staying in the same space, even though her tail flaps incessantly. Oedipa's moment of stillness and her constant travels from one place to another are even further highlighted by these paradoxical movements of a metal sign.

*The Crying of Lot 49*, set into the late 1960s Southern California, represents a synecdoche of America that defies the realist-naturalist tradition by subverting conventions of the murder mystery genre and engaging the past, sometimes with an ironic twist. Although written with minimal temporal distance, the novel engages with the history and (popular) culture of that period. Brief references to the American presidential contest of 1964 anchor the novel in time, but the main focus of the novel is put on Oedipa's movement through space. The theme that unites the separate elements of the novel is the protagonist's search for answers. *The Crying of*

*Lot 49* includes elements of crime fiction such as a disadvantaged main character i.e. a housewife whose status is underlined with compositional motifs from American popular culture such as Tupperware. However, the first sentence in the novel indicates that the conventional murder and the accompanying search for a culprit will be replaced by Oedipa's attempts to impose order on Pierce's possessions. Oedipa's musings about her ex-lover's death end with a grotesque, yet funny image of the toppling of a Jay Gould statue on Pierce as a possible cause of death. At the beginning of her search for truth is the description of the Echo courts motel where she meets the co-executor of the will, Metzger, the lawyer. The description is artistically motivated and its main focus is the nymph on the entrance sign and her likeness to Oedipa. While disentangling Pierce's possessions, Oedipa stumbles upon the muted post horn, one of the most important compositional motifs in the novel – Oedipa's first encounter with this symbol marks the start of her search for the Trystero and later guides Oedipa to the next clue about the organization. In addition, several misleading motifs are introduced, e.g. *The Courier's Tragedy*. Oedipa is drawn to the play because the Trystero is mentioned in it, but neither the play and its written versions nor the people involved in its staging and studying bring her any closer to the organization itself. At the end of the novel, Oedipa arrives at the conclusion that Pierce's legacy is America – San Narciso and Pierce's assets lose their uniqueness due to their connection to the deceased man and become like any other place in America. Oedipa has no clear idea and only poses questions about what this America and its heir is. In contrast to artistic motivation behind the description of the motel, at the end of the novel and after Oedipa's realization about Pierce, a realistic motif is placed – the description of the final space that Oedipa occupies, the auction room where she waits for the crying out of the titular lot 49, Pierce's stamp collection.

## INHERENT VICE

*Inherent Vice* (2009) is the most recent addition to the California novels – the setting is the fictional Gordita Beach in Los Angeles from late March to May 1970 (Schaub 30). Schaub puts emphasis on the continuity between *The Crying of Lot 49* and the two more recent novels, *Inherent Vice* and *Vineland*, which were written decades later. Both novels take place in the same geographical region at the end of the same decade. As I will argue later in my essay, *Inherent Vice* serves as a continuation of the same themes and characters presented in *The Crying of Lot 49* and also includes a new perspective on the late 1960s Southern California.

The common theme in the two California novels is the search for answers – both Larry “Doc” Sportello and Oedipa Maas are searching for several persons or organizations, respectively (Schaub 30). Tomashevsky outlines the theme as a force within a written work that connects its different elements (63). In that aspect, both Oedipa’s and Doc’s search for answers conform to Tomashevsky’s notion of theme as a unifying agent in a novel. The novel closely follows Doc’s movements through Southern California as he gathers information and tries to locate various persons. Similar to *The Crying of Lot 49*, the protagonist is tasked with an investigation by a former love interest: Doc, a private investigator, is visited by his former girlfriend, Shasta Fey Hepworth who wants him to investigate a possible plot against her current boyfriend, the real-estate mogul Mickey Wolfmann (*Inherent Vice* 2-4). Pierce Inverarity’s death is echoed by Shasta’s disappearance (*Inherent Vice* 34). In that way, Shasta is removed from the novel and Doc is left to look for other helpers in his search for answers or rely on memories about Shasta.

According to Tomashevsky, the literary tradition and the immediate socio-historical context in which the novel is written and published govern the choice of the theme; however, the

theme must also maintain the reader's interest (65). The introductory quote "Under the paving-stones, the beach!" references the beach as an alternative that is covered by the streets (Schaub 40). Later in the novel the quote is expanded by visions of America as "endless middle-class cycle of choices that are no choices at all" and Doc's musing about sixties as a "parenthesis of light" that he fears losing (*Inherent Vice* 38, 254-255). Manson murders also put an end to "a certain kind of innocence" (*Inherent Vice* 38) and signal a change. In contrast to Oedipa, Doc does not voice his concerns about the meaning and the real heirs of America, but is simply concerned by a threat that the present state will change and that the alternative to the mainstream America will completely disappear.

Numerous references to the Manson murders scattered throughout the novel also help to anchor the novel in time: Doc dates Penny, junior District Attorney in "Evelle Younger's shop", who subsequently shouts at the "eleven-o'clock news, taken up (...) by developments in the Manson case, about to go to trial. "Give it a rest, Bugliosi," she snarled at the screen while the lead prosecutor was having his nightly couple of minutes with the cameras." (*Inherent Vice* 4, 280). Younger was the District Attorney in Los Angeles County and later Attorney General of California during the Manson trials (Linder). Details like these anchor the novel in space and time, but the grand narrative of the Manson trial is moved to the periphery and gives way to the mystery plot. In that way, the opinion on det. "Bigfoot" Bjornsen voiced by det. Pat Dubonnet can be read as metacommentary on the whole plot: "Well, Mr. News at Ten's got himself another case of the century now, since Mickey Wolfmann's gorilla got wasted... Let the others have Benedict Canyon and Sharon Tate (...)" (*Inherent Vice* 48). The comment is placed in chapter three of the novel when Doc is still gathering initial information on the case and highlights the fact that the attention of the novel be turned away from Manson and his victims to other crime(s).

The basic fabula of *Inherent Vice* both follows the conventions of the clue-puzzle and reworks them. One of the conventions places murder as a central crime (Knight 77). However, Pynchon subverts this convention by placing the disappearance of Mickey Wolfmann in center of Doc's (and the reader's) attention. The same theme is multiplied: Hope Harlingen hires Doc to investigate her husband's alleged death; Tariq Khalil wanted to locate his former cellmate Glen Charlock, currently employed as Wolfmann's bodyguard, but all these plotlines quickly merge (*Inherent Vice* 15, 40). Even though Doc quickly learns that Coy Harlingen is still alive and hired to infiltrate government opposing groups, Doc is unable to return him home so he does not investigate further at this point of the novel (*Inherent Vice* 85). Doc's initial focus on Wolfmann case is further cemented by his visit to Mickey's latest development, Chanel View Estates, where Charlock is instantly murdered and Doc finds out that both Mickey and Shasta disappeared (*Inherent Vice* 22, 34). Carswell notes that the reader can easily forget about the Charlock murder and focus entirely on the search for Mickey (125). The early assimilation of the Charlock plotline into the Wolfmann case is further supported by Tariq Khalil, who wanted to locate Charlock in the first place: he phones Doc to announce his disappearance as soon as Charlock was killed (*Inherent Vice* 34). All of these various factors push Doc to concentrate on Mickey's disappearance, rather than the Charlock murder.

However, *Inherent Vice* tries to incorporate the conventions of the clue-puzzle as it includes multiple instances of homicide. One of the most notable murder victims is det. Bjornsen's former partner, det. Vincent "Vinnie" Indelicato who was murdered by Puck Beaverton, the partner of Adrian Prussia, a contract killer for the Los Angeles Police Department (*Inherent Vice* 271, 331). The solution to all murders was tied to Doc and offers an end for the murder-plotlines: Both Puck and Prussia tried to kill Doc because he became too inquisitive, but

Doc killed them in self-defense instead (*Inherent Vice* 327-328). As he aids Doc in fleeing the crime scene, det. Bjornsen revealed that Puck and Prussia's death is convenient for the police: "(...) [J]ust rest assured the boys are only too happy to be rid of him. And Puck too, because now they can say Vinnie's murderer's been ID'd at last, met a violent end but justice was served (...) and we pick up x million more from the feds." (*Inherent Vice* 333). According to this comment, even the Los Angeles police seem to rely on a semi-official mode of investigation. In his model Knight focuses on a single person that solves crimes and Prussia represents a negation of this model – he solves problems that the police cannot until he becomes the problem that needs to be solved (78). The police, represented by det. Bjornsen again select a person that is outside of their ranks to eliminate Prussia and Puck.

All murders also point to other organization(s) that operate outside of the limelight: Tariq Khalil revealed to Doc that Charlock wanted to use his connections to an organization that "[w]orked out of some weird-ass building look like a big tooth (...)" to cement his status within a gang in prison (*Inherent Vice* 293). Later, Puck got Charlock killed as both were Mickey's bodyguards – Puck claimed that Charlock became a burden for the gang and the Golden Fang (*Inherent Vice* 319-320). Doc speculates briefly on Golden Fang's motives to kill Charlock, but he can only pose questions without answers (*Inherent Vice* 293, 350). Similar to Oedipa Maas, Doc stumbles upon the mysterious organization Golden Fang multiple times in the novel. Det. Bjornsen, while helping Doc escape from the murder scene, found Golden Fang's heroin and placed it in Doc's car. Doc decides to exchange the Golden Fang's heroin for Coy Harlingen's safe return to his wife Hope and child (*Inherent Vice* 346). Unlike Oedipa, he does not pursue the investigation on Charlock or the Golden Fang any further after the footage and photographs of

the murder do not provide a conclusive answer and as soon as Coy is safe at home again (*Inherent Vice* 351).

Moreover, the boundary between crime and voluntary movements of the characters is destabilized. During his investigation of another disappearance in Las Vegas, Doc is offered to bet on the fact whether Mickey had actually arranged his own kidnapping (*Inherent Vice* 237). The final confirmation of a crime arrives in the mail in the form of a check for 10 000 dollars and a cover letter that states that Mickey “was in fact abducted against his will, and (...) his abductors remain inaccessible to ordinary legal remedy” (*Inherent Vice* 361). Thus, a written document placed at the end of the novel confirms Shasta’s fears from the beginning of the novel and provides a conclusion to this plotline.

There are multiple plotlines, crimes and suspects, but Doc does not simply search for culprit. Carswell suggests that the novel moves beyond the “solution of a single crime (...)” because the plot continues after Mickey is returned home (126). The plot continues even after Shasta and Coy are returned home and their disappearance is explained (*Inherent Vice* 257, 306-308). The novel does not simply continue beyond the crime and defy the expectations set by Knight’s model of clue-puzzle (79). At the end of the novel, Doc is able to confirm that Trillium Fortnight, Puck’s girlfriend, was released from the hospital and is recovering from the injuries inflicted by Puck (*Inherent Vice* 366). The novel does not stop until Doc makes sure that everyone is taken care of and only then he is comfortable enough to drive away on the freeway.

Moreover, Doc fits well into the Knight’s model of an investigator – he is a private eye and former debt collector, but his acquaintances include police officers such as det. Bigfoot Bjornsen and Pat Dubonnet (*Inherent Vice* 46). In contrast to Oedipa, Doc has a small office and his own business – by the end of chapter two, Doc was hired to look for the real-estate mogul



Mickey Wolfmann and sax-player Coy Harlingen; additionally, Wolfmann's bodyguard Glenn Charlock was already dead. The interconnectedness of characters and ease of access seemingly give Doc an edge in his investigations. As shown in chapter three, Doc exploits Pat's hatred of Bigfoot and self-pity for his own agenda:

“(...) how *desperate*, man, blood out of a turnip, even the most wasted spare-change artist up on Hollywood Boulevard knows enough to pass *me* by anymore, but not that Bigfoot, oh no.”

You could see a struggle going on here in Pat's mind, between two major cop reflexes—envy of another cop's career versus hatred of hippies. Envy won out. (*Inherent Vice* 48)

Pat and Bigfoot both began their careers in the same place, Bigfoot got promoted, whereas Pat stayed at the Gordita Beach station. Pat was the police officer that called Hope Harlingen with the news that her husband is dead and made her identify Coy only over the phone. In this respect, Doc subverts Oedipa's method of investigation – Oedipa was surrounded by male helpers who ultimately abandoned her, whereas Doc pushed Pat's buttons and found out that Bjornsen is leading the high-profile investigation of murder of Glen Charlock (*Inherent Vice* 48). Doc as an investigator fits well into the conventions outlined by Knight because he successfully manipulates police officers and other characters to attain the information he needs.

Tomashevsky also examines the concept of motivation i.e. “network of devices justifying the introduction of individual motifs or groups of motifs” (78). The first type of motivation is the compositional motivation (ibid.). The chief function of these motifs is to move the plot forward (ibid.). Furthermore, realistic motifs may mislead the reader or the characters and may be used as a means of parody (ibid.). Additionally, they might be used as a means of characterization (ibid.).

The motif of a written document that pushes the plot forward is relocated from San Narciso to Gordita Beach:

Waiting on Doc's doorsill at work was a postcard from some island he had never heard of out in the Pacific Ocean (...). The cancellation was is French and initialed by a local postmaster, along with a notation *courrier par lance-coco* which (...) must mean some kind of catapult mail delivery involving coconut shells, maybe as a way of dealing with an unapproachable reef. The message on the card was unsigned, but he knew it was from Shasta.

"(...) Remember the day with the Ouija board? (...) Nothing was supposed to happen this way, Doc, I'm so sorry." (*Inherent Vice* 163).

The description of the postcard references postal systems and revenge play *The Courier's Tragedy* that were one of the main motifs in *The Crying of Lot 49*. However, the accompanying translation that immediately imposes a comical interpretation on the French expression that further emphasizes that everything in the novel is filtered through Doc's point of view. The two written documents have a different form: instead of the formal letter from a law firm that bestowed Oedipa with the task of entangling Pierce's various possessions, Doc is greeted with an unsigned postcard that expresses regret. In both novels, the written document pushes the plot forward and the protagonist into a new location (previously unvisited in the novel). The postcard makes Doc remember "one of those prolonged times of no dope" when the Ouija board sent him and Shasta to an "empty lot with a gigantic excavation in it" (*Inherent Vice* 163-166). In turn, Doc decided to revisit the same address and discovered a building shaped like a golden fang and a mysterious organization, Golden Fang Enterprises, inc. (*Inherent Vice* 167-168). By placing

similar motifs into a new literary context, the author achieves a sense of continuity between the two novels beyond the same general setting into the late 1960s Southern California.

The second type of motivation is the realistic motivation (Tomashevsky 80-81 “[E]ach motif must be introduced as a probable motif in the given situation” (Tomashevsky 81). Tomashevsky is also aware that the notion of realistic changes according to expectations set by socio-historical context in which a certain work of art is read (Tomashevsky 82-83). Pat Dubonnet mentions the murder of Sharon Tate and Benedict Canyon in the third chapter (*Inherent Vice* 48). The looming presence of the Manson crimes in this chapter serves to anchor the plot of *Inherent Vice* in the late 1960s United States of America. In addition to the Manson crimes, it is possible to reconstruct the novel’s timeline because of numerous references to basketball matches (Levey 44). In the last chapter, Doc turns off the TV as soon as it became clear that the Lakers would lose to Knicks in the NBA 1970 Finals (*Inherent Vice* 364). Game 7 that is explicitly mentioned in the novel took place on May 8, 1970 ([www.espn.com](http://www.espn.com)). From that point, the references such as “next morning” earlier in the chapter can be attributed to specific dates between late March and May 8 1970.

Artistic motivation includes motifs help to shed a new light on certain parts of the novel (Tomashevsky 85). Artistic motifs do not move the plot forward, nor help the world constructed in the novel to seem more lifelike (*ibid.*). Defamiliarization is frequently employed as a means of achieving artistic motivation (Tomashevsky 86). Indoor spaces, such as Doc’s flat and office are highlighted with elaborate descriptions. The description of Doc’s flat is abundant with details:

[H]e’d seen her looking around at everything that hadn’t changed, the authentic English Pub Dartboard up on the wagon wheel and the whorehouse swag lamp with the purple psychedelic bulb with the vibrating filament, the collection of model hot rods made

entirely of Coors cans, the beach volleyball autographed by Wilt Chamberlain in Day-Glo felt marker, the velvet painting and so forth, with an expression of, you would have to say, distaste. (*Inherent Vice* 4).

The whole description is rendered in one continuous sentence with a plethora of bizarre details – various knick-knacks in Doc’s living room are described, whereas the furniture is actually not mentioned. The final adjective imposes value-judgment on the whole space. Doc’s actual furniture such as the couch is only mentioned when Doc is using it. The description is also full of culturally specific items such as Coors cans that underline the overall atmosphere. The details also confuse the reader and discourage them from piecing together how the depicted space actually looks like. The described objects are of no practical usage, not furniture in the traditional sense of the word, further highlighting the artistic motivation behind the choice of these motifs. In this aspect, the space that Doc occupies is described in the same manner as the Echo Courts motel room. The description of the hotel room centers on the metal sign outside, whereas Doc’s domestics space is entirely dominated by unusual pieces. Both descriptions invite the reader to compare and contrast the protagonist and the space they inhabit, but are also examples of defamiliarization because they shed a new light on everyday objects.

*Inherent Vice* is the most recent part of the California novels connected by a similar chronotope, the late 1960s Southern California. Oedipa Maas occupied fictitious cities, whereas Larry “Doc” Sportello roams the fictitious Gordita Beach. The same themes and similarly constructed characters continue in the latter novel, but shed a new light on the same chronotope. The realistic motifs such as the Manson murders and references to the NBA semi-finals and finals help anchor the novel between late March and early May 1970. Larry “Doc” Sportello and Oedipa Maas are both searching for several persons or organizations and try to navigate through

a complex network of people, places and information. The basic fabula of *Inherent Vice* follows and reworks the clue-puzzle conventions as outlined by Stephen Knight. The protagonist is a private investigator that fits well into the semi-official modes of investigations with his connections to multiple police officers such as Dubonnet and Bjornsen that he uses to his advantage. In addition, the plot is pushed further by Shasta's postcard – this compositional motif both connects Doc to Oedipa and facilitates his encounter with the Golden Fang. Other motifs also provide a sense of continuation between the two novels: artistically motivated depictions of space prompt a comparison between the protagonist and the space they occupy. Ultimately, the abundance of details sheds a new light on Doc's flat and produce defamiliarization. Murder as the most important crime is mostly displaced by a different kind of search. The Mickey Wolfmann case overshadows the Charlock's murder, Shasta's disappearance, the murder of det. Indelicato and Coy Harlingen's role as a reluctant informant. The boundary between crime and voluntary movements of the characters is also blurred – a check informing Doc that he won a bet serves as a final confirmation of Mickey's abduction. The missing person's cases and murders multiply as the novel progresses and serve to further subvert murder as a central crime. The murders also point to other organization(s) that operate in the background: Charlock was connected to the mysterious Golden Fang organization and the Los Angeles police hired a contract killer. Unlike Oedipa Maas, Doc does not investigate the Golden Fang outside of unintentional encounters. Additionally, the conventional identification of the murderer at the end of the story is replaced by multiple storylines: Doc is unable to identify Charlock's murderer in spite of the footage and photographs of the murder, but he successfully exchanges the Golden Fang's heroin for Coy Harlingen's safe return home. Only when Doc is sure that all persons in his life are taken care of, he drives away on the highway. The open end of the novel and

continuation beyond revealing the culprit subvert the conventional ending of the murder mystery. The similarities between the two novels are highlighted by the role of the protagonist's former love interest, as Doc is tasked by Shasta to investigate a possible plot against her current boyfriend Mickey. Moreover, an important compositional motif, a written document that pushes the plot forward, is transplanted from San Narciso to Gordita Beach. The formal letter is transformed into a postcard with a cancellation that takes a comical spin on postal motives from *The Crying of Lot 49*. Even though Doc worries about the end of the present innocence and possibility for an alternative, he does not directly mention America as Oedipa does.

## **BLEEDING EDGE**

Pynchon's latest novel *Bleeding Edge* (published in 2013) opens with a quote from Donald E. Westlake about New York. Westlake conceives New York as a character in a mystery – neither the investigator, nor the perpetrator, but the secretive suspect “who knows the real story but isn't going to tell it.” (Winn). Westlake's two brief sentences direct the reader's attention to the city portrayed in the text and announce its theme: the search for meaning where New York plays a crucial part. New York provides a sense of continuity as the space in *the* American chronotope of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. I will also explore the shift of Pynchon's focus from the west coast to the concrete pavements in the east.

In the first chapter, New York is introduced as a new synecdoche of America (as opposed to Californian cities that were represented in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Inherent Vice*). The protagonist of the novel, Maxine Tarnow takes her children to school the description of Upper West Side:

As Maxine watches, sunlight finds its way past rooflines and water tanks to the end of the block (...) Steel shutters are being rolled up, early trucks are double-parking, guys are out with hoses cleaning off their piece of sidewalk. Unsheltered people sleep in doorways (...) work crews wait in front of buildings for the super to show up. Runners are bouncing up and down at the curb (...). Kids, parents, and nannies wheeled and afoot are heading in all different directions for schools in the neighborhood.” (*Bleeding Edge* 1-2)

The description of the *Bleeding Edge*’s chronotope is mediated through the protagonist’s perspective and centers around the usual morning activities of the people who inhabit it. The transition to a new time and space is signaled through the description of Vyrva McElmo:

Vyrva McElmo, (...) taking much longer than she has to, a West Coast thing, it seems to Maxine. Vyrva is a sweetheart but not nearly time-obsessed enough. People been known to get their Upper West Side Mom cards pulled for far less than she gets away with. (...) Vyrva has a degree from Pomona but no day job. She and Justin are transplants, Silicon Valley to Silicon Alley. (...) Maxine hasn’t been in the business she’s in for this long without growing antennas for the unspoken. (...) [N]oting a slow California double take as she exits the stoop, kissing her kids on top of their heads on the way past, and resumes the morning commute. (*Bleeding Edge* 3-4)

Vyrva is formed in the gaze of a typical New Yorker i.e. Maxine – positioning Maxine as the one who looks and describes Vyrva (and not the other way around) signals a departure from the Californian characters and their more laid back style. The depiction of Vyrva also signals a departure from the type of female protagonists that inhabit California in the 1960s. Vyrva is unemployed, but attends a meeting with Gabriel Ice, CEO of the computer-security firm hashslingrz to discuss the software, DeepArcher that her husband Justin and his partner Lucas

have developed (*Bleeding Edge* 36). Vyrva echoes Oedipa, Shasta Fey Hepworth and Hope Harlingen – she is a homemaker, changes her appearance because of the meeting with Ice, but unlike her 1960s counterparts, she neither waits for her husband to arrive home, nor relies on men as a gate to information: she personally attends the meeting and discusses Ice’s true motif behind acquiring DeepArcher with Maxine (*Bleeding Edge* 36-37). At this point Maxine symbolically takes the torch from her Californian predecessors and begins her investigation of Ice and his company.

The main character’s search aligns well with Tomashevsky’s concept of the theme as a unifying force within a written work (63). The protagonist of this novel is again female – Maxine Tarnow’s chaotic movement through time and space acts as an adhesive between her disparate interests, each evolving into a separate story arc. Maxine’s acquaintance Reg Despard was making a documentary about a computer-security firm hashslingrz and sought Maxine’s help so he could access vital information about the company and their CEO Gabriel Ice (*Bleeding Edge* 9-10). In addition, Maxine’s friends designed a piece of software, DeepArcher that Gabriel Ice wanted to buy and use to cover his tracks (*Bleeding Edge* 36-37). After conducting an analysis of the company, Maxine finds out that money is being drained from hashslingrz and decides to investigate further (*Bleeding Edge* 42). Maxine’s search for truth and meaning includes a homicide investigation, but the case gets cold and she pursues other interests; Lester Traipse, the victim “barely gets onto the local news upstate” in the last chapter (*Bleeding Edge* 468). Pynchon subverts the convention of murder being the central crime as outlined by Knight. The murder story arc ending reflects its role as a motif – it was a small, short interest of Maxine’s, and thus, received an equally concise conclusion.



*Bleeding Edge* was published in 2013, more than a decade later than the events portrayed in the novel. The first chapter opens on the first day of spring in 2001 with a description of a pear tree blossoming (*Bleeding Edge* 1). The last chapter ends in late winter or early spring of 2002: “(...) pear trees have exploded into bloom. Even this time of year, there could still be snow (...)” (*Bleeding Edge* 475). Pear trees form a frame, a sense of completion and cohesion. According to Tomashevsky, the theme of a novel cannot be defined without taking the reader, the society and time at which the novel was created (65). The reader and the novel are connected through provoked interest; the suitable theme not only sparks interest, but is also a reflection of the expectations set by the literary tradition and historical moment at which the literary work is written and published (ibid.). Pynchon placed the novel and its characters into the indented socio-historical framework by using different events that took place in the United States of America in 2001. One of the events is 9/11.

The terrorist attacks on September 11 are mentioned in the last third of the novel, more precisely, parts of the 29<sup>th</sup> chapter are dedicated to depicting the characters’ reactions to the event (*Bleeding Edge* 316). Chapters 29 and 30 provide similar motifs to those used in the concluding chapter in *The Crying of Lot 49* – they speak about the United States of America. On one hand, Oedipa ponders on America as Inverarity’s true legacy – the real estate that he owned was all interconnected with an equally entangled organization and system of communication (*Lot 49* 178). Oedipa expresses her solitude and separation from the town of San Narciso, Inverarity and men in general – they have all become dead, drugged or insane (*Lot 49* 177).

In contrast to Oedipa who is wide awake when she ponders upon America, Maxine has a dream about being a mouse falling into a trap in an apartment building that represents America (*Bleeding Edge* 318). The mousetrap is a limbo containing other mice, a place between the

wilderness and afterlife into which all of the mice will eventually be released (*Bleeding Edge* 318-319). Maxine's friend Heidi maintains that regardless of the official narrative, one should always look at "the margins, graffiti, uncontrolled utterances, bad dreamers (...)" (*Bleeding Edge* 322)." In the following chapter the control of the official narrative is slowly being established – reality is the smell of chemicals, smoke and death, whereas the official narrative is being transmitted through television and condensed into one spot, Ground Zero (*Bleeding Edge* 327-328). The expression is linked to the 1960s and borrowed from the Cold War rhetoric with a specific purpose: "(...) to get people cranked up in a certain way. Cranked up, scared, and helpless." (*Bleeding Edge* 328). The Internet and other sources provided darker and less unifying alternatives to sense of shock and War on Terror (*Bleeding Edge* 327). However, it remains unclear whether these ponderings are Maxine's thoughts or whether they belong to a separate entity i.e. the narrator.

Tomashevsky divides the theme into smaller sections – syuzhet (plot), fabula (story) and motifs. The basic fabula of *Bleeding Edge* follows the conventions of a murder mystery, providing a sense of continuity throughout all three novels. One of the key elements, more precisely bound motifs (and carriers of this type of the story) is a specific kind of protagonist. Maxine's "at most semi-official detection" fits within the frame of Knight's definition of the main character in mysteries (78). Maxine Tarnow used to be a CFE (Certified Fraud Examiner) until her license got revoked due to conflict of interest and now runs a small fraud-investigating agency (*Bleeding Edge* 18). Maxine has enough resources to conduct an investigation, but does not have to conform to strict rules that e.g. police officers have to.

Kostas Kaltsas compares the two female protagonists – while Oedipa represents an ultimately failed attempt of "resistance to the threat of the world", Maxine lives in a world where

this threat is already fulfilled (36). He highlights the fact that they both fulfill numerous feminine and unfeminine roles that are sometimes greeted with resistance (ibid.). Kaltsas connects the “insider-outsider, (...) sort of detectives” position with their gender (37). In turn, some of the restrictions that are imposed on both women overlap with Knight’s definition of the main character in mysteries as somebody who is on the fringe, on the edge, never truly inside and never fully an outsider (78). Even though the role of the executor of Pierce Inverarity’s will is assigned to Oedipa, it pushes her out of her suburban domestic space into the next city, San Narciso. Oedipa transcends her stereotypical traditional feminine roles as a home maker and a wife by interacting with men, who are willing to share their knowledge with her, at last to some extent – Oedipa poses no threat to the men therefore she is awarded with access to information (Kaltsas 38). In the first sentence of *The Crying of Lot 49* Oedipa returns from a Tupperware party, goes shopping and waits for her husband to return home (9-11). However, the emphasis is immediately put on the written word – Inverarity’s will, i.e. Metzger’s letter, bestows Oedipa with the power to seek and a right to access information that is connected to Inverarity. The deceased man owned Yoyodyne shares, which opens the company’s door to Oedipa who stumbled upon Stanley Koteks (*Lot 49* 84). Oedipa used the writings on the bathroom wall to engage with Koteks; her attempt at posing as an insider provided her with the next name, next piece of the puzzle (*Lot 49* 87). Oedipa’s power to transgress the boundaries of her suburban domicile stems from the written word, but only when she decides to use it.

Both Doc and Maxine run their own business from a small office space and both are sent on a quest by their former love interest and acquaintance. In this aspect Maxine Tarnow has more in common with the private eye Larry “Doc” Sportello than Oedipa Maas who is a home maker. The boundaries between the personal and professional are blurred in both cases, but in a

slightly different manner. *Bleeding Edge* opens with a paradox: Maxine drops off her children at school i.e. her private life is presented in a public space (1-3). By the end of the same chapter, she arrives at her office and is greeted by an old friend, Reg Despard who wants her to investigate hashslinrz and Gabriel Ice (*Bleeding Edge* 9-10). Maxine is literally in a walking distance between her apartment, office and her sons' school. Doc is greeted by work at home and arrives later at his workplace – Shasta comes to Doc's apartment in the evening in the first chapter (*Inherent Vice* 2) and another client, Tariq Khalil in his office the next day (*Inherent Vice* 14). Doc ex-girlfriend Shasta fears for her new current love interest, the real-estate mogul Mickey Wolfmann because his wife and her lover are plotting against Wolfmann; Shasta tasks Doc with the investigation (*Inherent Vice* 2-4). Wolfmann' bodyguard Glen Charlock on the other hand owns Khalil money (*Inherent Vice* 15). Their semi-official businesses are attracting people who place them halfway between business and casual, giving them another borderline space to occupy.

According to Tomashevsky, there are several different classifications of motifs (68). Firstly, he divides motifs into bound and free motifs according to their relation to the fabula and syuzhet, respectively – the fabula consists only from bound motifs, whereas the syuzhet includes both types of motifs (ibid.). I have already discussed several bounds motifs in my essay i.e. various elements of the fabula. Next, I will discuss free motifs that can be omitted from the novel without disrupting the causal-chronological course of events (ibid.). Important free motifs in the novel are cultural references – for example, Maxine and a young programmer named Driscoll discuss Ice, but Driscoll mentions that she really wanted the Jennifer Aniston haircut from *Friends*, but soon realized that her attempts were futile (*Bleeding Edge* 49). Jay Serafino highlights that the complicated “Rachel” hairstyle gained huge popularity in the mid-nineties

with imitators among celebrities and ordinary women (Serafino). The usage of the “Rachel” haircut as a free motif is governed by the socio-historical context of the novel – the events take place in 2001 and early 2002 in New York.

Tomashevsky also examines the concept of motivation i.e. “network of devices justifying the introduction of individual motifs or groups of motifs” (78). The first type of motivation is the compositional motivation that moves the plot forward; these motifs may mislead the reader and characters until the end of the novel or may be used as a means of characterization (ibid.). Additionally, misleading motifs can serve as a means for parody i.e. they help to exploit expectations set by the tradition and lead to unexpected outcomes (ibid.). Pynchon’s novel thrives on parodying the expectations set by usage of motifs in the clue-puzzle. As I have already discussed, the murder of Lester Traipse is pushed to the side and only briefly mentioned in the last chapter.

According to Tomashevsky, some motifs may be transferred from one novel to another without much change (68). As Kaltsas notes, the Tupperware party from the beginning of *The Crying of Lot 49* is echoed (49). Maxine goes to a strip club during her investigation and rejects the audition for a job as a stripper by stating “Tuesday is my Tupperware party.” (*Bleeding Edge* 220). The repetition of the Tupperware party evokes a sense of continuity, but also parodies Oedipa’s return from such party – just after mentioning Tupperware, Maxine improvises a dance routine in full stripper costume so that she could look for Eric Outfield, whereas Oedipa finds out that she is the executor of the Inverarity’s will and begins her search for Trystero.

One of the compositional motifs early in the novel is the company named hwgaahwgh.com. As Maxine starts to examine Gabriel Ice and his company, she notices that hashslingrz makes regular payments to hwgaahwgh.com even though it went under (*Bleeding*

*Edge* 41). After analyzing its expenses and concluding that the numbers do not add up, Maxine decides to visit the hwgaahwgh.com headquarters (*Bleeding Edge* 42). In the abandoned offices she meets Driscoll Padgett, who temporarily worked for Ice; Driscoll reveals to Maxine that Ice is recruiting hackers because of an upcoming war in the Middle East (*Bleeding Edge* 47-48). Maxine is provided with the next clue – Ice’s mansion in the Montauk woods, the supposed site of a boot camp – after a lunch with a venture capitalist investor Rocky Slagiatt (*Bleeding Edge* 61). Maxine visits the Montauk mansion in person, but enters the room only in Deep Web with the help of Eric Outfield (*Bleeding Edge* 240-243). Maxine started to investigate hashslingrz because Reg Despard had limited access to their finances while making a documentary about them, but she soon discovered possible preparations for the next war and that Ice’s money might come from government contracts. Similarly to Doc and the postcard he receives from Shasta, hwgaahwgh.com and financial records prompt Maxine to visit a building she previously did not visit and encounters a new helper, Driscoll. The official records connect her to the lawyer’s letter that Oedipa Maas receives at the beginning of *The Crying of Lot 49* – Maxine is (unlike Oedipa) able to analyze the financial records and concludes that these are forged. The hwgaahwgh.com not only pushes the syuzhet forward and is a vital motif to the fabula, but helps to achieve a sense of continuity between the novels.

The second type of motivation is the realistic motivation (Tomashevsky 80-81). The realistic motifs make the novel more lifelike, including the ever-changing notion of realistic that is reflected by the expectations of the socio-historical context in which a certain work of art is read (Tomashevsky 82-83). Maxine’s friend Vyrva has “been out running some arbitrage hustle with the trendy stuffed-toy/beanbag hybrids.” (*Bleeding Edge* 39). Vyrva buys the Beanie Babies directly from China and sells them to the West Side stores; she collects the Beanie Babies,

placing them in her daughter Fiona's room in hope that their worth will skyrocket one day (*Bleeding Edge* 39-40). Maxine's son Otis points out that only really rare and carefully preserved Beanie Babies might have some worth some day (*ibid.*). Carswell highlights that toys like Beanie Babies teach the younger generation to accumulate consumer goods, but Otis and Fiona reject this collector's frenzy (150). Otis and Fiona play instead with toys and do not obsess with having every kind of it in their possession. Pynchon's usage of the motifs from pop culture is postmodern – he blurs the boundary between fact and fiction – characters from the novel not only seem to be lifelike, but also step out of the boundaries of the novel.

The third type of motivation is the artistic motivation that includes motifs that neither move the plot forward nor give the novel lifelike qualities – these motifs help to illuminate certain aspects of the novel in a new, unexpected way (Tomashevsky 85). One of the chief processes that help to fulfill the artistic intentions is the defamiliarization (Tomashevsky 86). For example, the description of Deseret is an accumulation of the building's features:

She grew up across the street from where it still looms over the neighborhood, trying to pass as just another stolid example of Upper West Side apartment house, twelve stories and a full square block of sinister clutter—helical fire escapes at each corner, turrets, balconies, gargoyles, scaled and serpentine and fanged creatures in cast iron over the entrances and coiled around the windows. In the central courtyard stands an elaborate fountain, surrounded by a circular driveway big enough to allow a couple of stretch limos to sit there and idle, with room left over for a Rolls-Royce or two. Film crews come here to shoot (...) [I]t's far from Maxine's social circle, key money even for a studio in The Deseret said to run \$300,000 and up. (...)

This went on until the fitness craze of the eighties, when it dawned on The Deseret management that the pool on the top floor could serve as the focus of a health club, open to visitors, and be good for some nice extra revenue, which is how Maxine was finally allowed upstairs – though, (..) she still has to go around to the back entrance (...). (*Bleeding Edge* 27-28)

The description consists of enumerating various architectural features, with decorative pieces placed around the places of communication with the outside world – fire escapes, doors and windows. However, the key elements highlighted in the description are connected to money and finances – expensive cars, rent and capitalizing the rooftop pool. The abundance of details is contrasted with Maxine's desire to penetrate The Deseret's surface, to see beneath the concrete exterior. Even when Maxine was finally granted access to the pool, she was only allowed to access it through a back door. The mystique and eerie atmosphere created by this description of The Deseret is reintroduced later in the novel, when the sinister looking building becomes a crime scene – Lester Traipse's body is discovered in the space beneath the pool. The tone set by the description mirrors the descriptions of the Echo Courts and Doc's flat that also underlined unusual details and constructed similar to lists.

*Bleeding Edge* opens with a Westlake quote in which New York is conceived as a secretive suspect in a mystery novel. The quote introduced the clue-puzzle in a new American chronotope in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, providing a sense of continuity between Pynchon's earlier works and his latest novel. The California novels were set in the Southern California of the 1960s, whereas *Bleeding Edge* takes place in early 2000s New York. The shift of Pynchon's focus from the west coast to the concrete pavements in the east is signaled by the change of scenery and characters. The female lead, Maxine Tarnow is once again the main, albeit semi-



informal investigator, and this time she is accompanied and contrasted by other characters that echo California novels (e.g. Vyrva McElmo). Oedipa's non-threatening homemaker femininity is opposed by small-business owner Maxine whose blurred boundaries between the personal and professional bring her closer to private-eye Doc. Pynchon subverts the convention of murder as a principal motif in a clue-puzzle – Lester Traipse's murder was a small, short interest of Maxine's, and thus, received an equally concise conclusion. It served as an important compositional motif, but proved to be a misleading motif in the end. Lester's murder can be compared to the murder of Glen Charlock who is almost instantly murdered, but the ensuing murder investigation gets absorbed by the Mickey Wolfmann plot. Realistic motifs from popular culture such as Beanie Babies represent the frenzy and rejection of consumerism – characters seem to step out of the boundaries of the novel by commenting on and distancing themselves from collecting toys that were later deemed as prized collector's items. Other motifs from the popular culture were transposed from earlier novels into *Bleeding Edge* – for example, the Tupperware from *The Crying of Lot 49* as a symbol of femininity and home-making from the 1960s is mentioned again by Maxine Tarnow with an ironic way. However, the Tupperware presents a contrast to the continuation of the plot that takes place immediately after the introduction of the motif. Artistic motifs such as the description of the Deseret provide another link between the three novels – the abundance of luxurious, but impenetrable façade help to create a mystique and eerie atmosphere comparable to Echo Courts. Another unifying factor is the protagonists' ponderings on America. Unlike Oedipa's musings about America that provide no final answer, Maxine dreams about an America which is a mousetrap within a building. The novel was placed in its indented socio-historical framework by using events such as 9/11. 9/11 is discussed in terms of establishing control with the help of the official narrative transmitted

through television. Reality is thus being condensed into one place, Ground Zero that links the early 2000s to the 1960s and Cold War rhetoric of fear and helplessness. In contrast, the Internet and other sources provided darker and less unifying alternatives.

## CONCLUSION

Both *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Inherent Vice* take place in the late 1960s Southern California, whereas *Bleeding Edge* takes place in early 2000s New York. All three novels represent Pynchon's vision of America. The novels also reject the realist-naturalist tradition and rework the conventions of the murder mystery. Of the three, *The Crying of Lot 49* was written with the smallest temporal distance. Despite that, the history and (popular) culture of that period were included in the novel (e.g. the American presidential contest of 1964) and serve to anchor the novel in that period of American history. Similar motifs and themes in *Inherent Vice* shed a new light on the same chronotope. In this novel, the anchoring forces are multiple basketball games and Manson murders. Both *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge* open with a quote that signals the time and space that the novel will occupy: the beach and the New York City.

Murder as the main crime was replaced by Oedipa's attempt to disentangle Pierce's various possessions. Soon her attention turns to the Trystero. In *Inherent Vice* Doc focuses on Wolfmann's disappearance. Even though the missing person's cases and murders multiply, all of it is absorbed by Mickey's disappearance. The murders also point to the mysterious Golden Fang organization and the contract killer hired by the police. In contrast to Oedipa, Doc does not actively investigate the Golden Fang. Lester Traipse's murder in *Bleeding Edge* was used as a misleading motif, as it was a short-lived interest of Maxine's. Additionally, the conventional identification of the murderer at the end of the story is also subverted. Oedipa only poses

questions, but does not find the answers. Charlock's murderer remains unknown, but Coy Harlingen safely returns home. The open end of the novel and continuation beyond revealing the culprit subvert the conventional ending of the murder mystery in *Inherent Vice*. Lester's murder remains unsolved and is only briefly mentioned.

A sense of continuity between Pynchon's earlier works and his latest novel is provided by a common search for answers that acts as a theme and unifies the disparate elements of the novels into a coherent literary work. The three novels feature three different main characters that each fit into the disadvantaged investigator – Oedipa Maas is a housewife that is tasked with the execution of her former lover's will, the private-eye Larry "Doc" Sportello investigates searches for several missing persons and Maxine Tarnow, the owner of a small fraud-investigating agency, scrutinizes a suspicious computer-security company. Two of the novels feature female protagonists – while Oedipa Maas is a housewife without any access to police officials and relies solely on men in her life e.g. her husband as helpers, whereas Maxine is a small-business owner who relies on modern technology in addition to actual people. In that aspect, Maxine is closer to the private-eye Larry because both occupy the same borderline space between business and casual: Shasta visits Doc at home in order to discuss her concerns about her current boyfriend and Reg Despard is looking to hire Maxine to investigate Gabriel Ice and his company. Maxine's helpers echo California novels (e.g. Vyrva McElmo), but share some of her tech-savvy features that help them navigate through the 9/11 New York. Similar to Maxine, Doc is able to continue his investigations with the assistance of multiple police officials.

Oedipa's femininity and housewife status are supported by compositional motifs from American popular culture such as Tupperware; in turn, the same motif is incorporated into *Bleeding Edge* with an ironic take and serves as a contrast to Maxine's posing as a stripper to

obtain new clues. One of the most important compositional motifs in *The Crying of Lot 49* is the muted post horn that marks the start of Oedipa's search for the alternative postal system Trystero. During Oedipa's search for Trystero the play *The Courier's Tragedy* proves itself as a misleading motif because it does not bring her closer to the actual organization. The written document that pushes the plot forward is transformed from the lawyer's letter in the first sentence of *The Crying of Lot 49* into an important compositional motif, Shasta's postcard that led Doc to encounter the Golden Fang. The cancellation on the postcard and its accompanying translation from French parody the postal motifs from *The Crying of Lot 49*.

The realistic motif *The Crying of Lot 49* is placed at the end of the novel – the depiction of the auction room where Oedipa waits for the crying out of the titular lot 49 that once belonged to Pierce. The realistic motifs in *Inherent Vice* such as the Manson murders and references to the NBA semi-finals and finals play a different role: they help place the events from the novel between late March and early May 1970. Realistic motifs such as Beanie Babies in *Bleeding Edge* not only serve the same functions as the Mason case in *Inherent Vice*, they are also a commentary on consumerism and the need to collect, rather than use or play with toys.

A sense of continuation between the two novels is provided by artistically motivated depictions of spaces that the protagonists inhabit. The same description provides an effect of defamiliarization by depicting spaces in an unexpected way. The abundance of details completely disorients the reader whether they read about Echo Courts, Doc's flat or the Deseret.

All main characters provide their own vision of America. Oedipa concludes that Pierce's legacy is America and at that moment, San Narciso and Pierce's are reabsorbed into America. Oedipa's musings end with questions about America and its heir, but she provides no ultimate answer. Doc is concerned that the present possibilities of the sixties will disappear, but he does

not elaborate his musings on America directly. Maxine, on the other hand, is the only protagonist that dreams about America; her vision of America takes the form of a mousetrap within a building. 9/11 provides *Bleeding Edge* with a cultural, temporal and spatial dimension. Television, as a source of the official narrative, provides an interpretation of events such as 9/11 that centers on Ground Zero rhetoric that links the early 2000s to the 1960s Cold War. Darker and less unifying alternatives can, in turn, be found on the Internet.

## **ABSTRACT**

Tomashevsky describes several key notions in the Russian Formalism that can be used as tools for analyzing novels. In this essay, concepts such as theme, several different classifications of motifs and the notion of motivation are being used to analyze three novels by the American author Thomas Pynchon. Even though only two of the three novels share the same chronotope, the author achieves a sense of continuity using and subverting the same clue-puzzle structure of the fabula. The conventional search for the murderer is replaced by other criminal activities. Each investigation is conducted by a protagonist that fits well into the disadvantaged type required by the conventional murder mystery. Compositional motifs from popular culture that migrate from one novel to another also help shape a sense of continuity between the literary works. Descriptions of spaces are artistically motivated in all three novels, whereas realistic motifs anchor the novels in space and time and provide social commentary.

**KEY WORDS:** Pynchon, America, formalism, motivation, motifs

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