

Sanctuary City Pynchon's Subjunctive New York in *Bleeding Edge*

Inger H. Dalsgaard

Abstract:

This paper considers the subjunctive implications of three relations in Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013) structured along the lines of inside/outside, real/virtual and now/then. Critics have applied the idea of the subjunctive and questions of Pynchon's experiments with time and space relations in earlier works to investigate ambiguity or multiple realities in his fiction. This analysis of his latest novel focuses on how Other figurations of New York commute between hopeful, subjunctive and pessimistic, indicative readings. The first of three relations identifies the way in which urban planning has been a locus for discussions of dispossession and colonization in Pynchon's work. In this text exemplified by the loss of diversity effected by Rudy Giuliani's sanitizing of Time's Square in the 1980s and the different outcomes projected for the bird sanctuary, Isle of Meadows, and for the landfill site containing it, Fresh Kills, before and after 9/11 in 2001. The second relation focuses on how different character remember the architectural past of New York city or rebuild it in a virtual and virtuous alternative form, though the Internet is a highly contested space in *Bleeding Edge*. The final relation overlays the two first spatial and virtual relations with the complicated temporal and modal relationship between the 2001 setting of the 2013 text and the present-day reader. Pynchon has often worked with the historically inevitable, deterministic closing down of subjunctive possibilities by the forward march of indicative, possessive, indexed world. Some elements of this this text, and not least the position of the reader in the flow of time between the historical facts presented in the text and the as-of-yet unknown outcomes of these in present-day real life, keeps some ambiguity about projected (negative) outcomes alive.

Keywords: Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, subjunctive, New York, urban planning

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When Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* was published in 1997, Brian McHale remarked on how his use of the subjunctive was highlighted (McHale 2000, 43). As a localized narrative strategy, it had been present in earlier works, but in late Pynchon elegiac musing on the hopes of what America could have become (had developers of the New World not reduced it, piecemeal, into a factual, present reality) moved to the forefront. Eventually, the potential of a subjunctive, American history makes way for what Pynchon describes variously as the "mortal world", the "ordered swirl" of urban planning which provide the houses we live in and the "indexed world" built for us to inhabit online. In *Mason & Dixon*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) the Old World clung to hope of a fresh start in the West, while also colonizing, infecting and reducing the possibilities represented by the New World. In Pynchon's three California novels - *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Vineland* (1990), *Inherent Vice* (2009) - this westward exploration of available borderlands is further replicated within the USA. It seems to drive characters' hopes of "shelter", "harbor" or "refuge" into the pacific though John Miller has argued the closing of the frontier in Pynchon is still subjunctive and endings are ambiguous, insofar as

California remains a “contested landscape” with “ongoing and unresolved” historical struggles (Miller 2013, 227).

This paper looks at subjunctive reading strategies in Pynchon’s most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge* (2013) in which he plays with the subjunctive space and time of New York around 9/11 in 2001. I give examples of how Pynchon engages with urban development in the real city of New York by letting characters recollect and project the fate of specific parts of the city. In doing so, his narration plays with the subjunctive mood - in a broadly narratological rather than narrowly linguistic sense - and conjures up an ‘Other’ New York among several possible cities. In the cross section between narrative technique and urban history, Pynchon suspends ideas of what that city might have been – in the future - in the gaps between the realities that characters from 2001 and readers from 2013 onward inhabit respectively. Their existence in the space and time between the narrative point of view and the act of reading have epistemological and ontological implications. Urban space, when combined with subjunctive time in a narration, accommodates “superpositional” states, where two or more contradictory outcomes can co-exist.

Linguistically, the subjunctive has been described as a non-factive or “subjunctive epistemic modality”, often associated with the future tense, expressing ideas of potentiality, intention, desire, “inference, supposition and prediction” (Lyons 1977, 848, 817). Pynchon critics who have sought to describe his epistemologically and temporally complex narrative strategies have more frequently looked to the intersection between narratology, science or philosophy than linguistics to explain how his textual experiments challenge our understanding of reality. To explain the complex relationship of his fictions they have worked with concepts such as subjunctive time and space, heterotopia, multiverses, chronotopes, attenuated reality, relativity and quantum mechanics (McHale 2000, Kolbuszewska 2000, Dalsgaard 2008, 2011, De Bourcier 2012, Hume 2013). It seems straightforward that in the “mortal world”, history (the progression of time)

eventually reveals which subjunctive hopes for the future make way for indicative reality in the present. In historiographic metafiction like Pynchon's, however, a text can be like the thought experiment in which "Schrödinger's cat" inhabited two "superpositional states": as long as the box in which its fate was decided remains closed to us the cat is simultaneously dead and not dead. The two superpositional states collapse into one or the other only once we observe the cat inside the box. Likewise, a text can be argued to hold multiple possibilities until we open it (observe, read, interpret) in which case the same collapse of superpositions or subjunctive hopes would apply as we see in science and history. What this paper explores, however, are instances where Pynchon's latest novel keeps superpositional possibilities available. Adding a linguistic concept like the subjunctive to time-space readings also restores the imaginative and moral power of language to this balancing act between multiplicity and potentiality. Intratextually, these ideas of superpositioned realities may not have ontological or moral equivalence – as I shall show, Pynchon's portrayal of the precarious existence of urban subjects in a capitalist world, where they risk dispossession, displacement, or even erasure, has become increasingly personal – but our act of reading takes place in a different episteme from the one projected into the future in the book. While we may have our own, subjective preferences, the passing of time adds an indicative aspect to our interpretation of now-past events.

This paper works with three time-space relations which have subjunctive implications for our understanding of a New York which exists within but also reaches outside of the novel in different ways. One is explored in the threat posed by urban development to failing sanctuaries inside the narrative and outside in history – exemplified in the shared fates of the Isle of Meadows and Times Square. Another is the future promise of alternate cities with different social networks – exemplified in Zigotisopolis and DeepArcher, a Deep Web program into which versions of New York and its inhabitants are coded. A third concerns the temporal

superpositions between the 2001 setting, the 2013 publication date and the “now” of reading – and how readers and characters respond to the gap between subjunctive projections and an indicative end point. Anticipating these subjunctive projections of New York is Pynchon’s description in his previous novels of the modal nature of real estate development, urbanization and, ultimately, colonization as we move into twenty-first century in which *Bleeding Edge* is set and read, so I begin by outlining his concern with the urban dispossessed.

Urban planning and dispossession in Pynchon

The future tense can be infused with expressions of “desire and intention” and with elements of prediction; the “so-called subjunctive of likelihood” or possibility (Lyons 1977, 818, 817). As such and because the human creative mind can conjure many possible future cities with varying degrees of likelihood and desirability, the future is open to superpositionality. The future tense can also include a deontic modality, so that statements indicate an ethical imperative as to what ought or ought not to happen in the future. Urban planning decisions require only one of the future cities be physically realized and the choice may have more to do with real estate logic than ethics. This would certainly be clear from Pynchon’s writing where what ought not to have happened to cities in the past, and to the people in them, is a recurring theme. Most Pynchon texts have very consistently looked back and pointed to the encroachment by real estate development on the American landscape and mindscape. Over the years, Pynchon has become increasingly clear about how dispossessed groups suffer at the hands of real estate developers who seek to fulfil visions of a new and better world or a cleaner, safer city – visions which exclude members of those groups either by reducing them to being health and safety hazards (which should be removed) or to nothing at all (and thus easily “disappeared” from one day to the next). In *Inherent Vice* (2009) a character named Tariq comes out of a stint in jail to find his neighbourhood simply vanished and replaced overnight,

and expression of the “[l]ong, sad history of L.A. land use . . . Mexican families bounced out of Chavez Ravine to build Dodger Stadium, American Indians swept out of Bunker Hill for the Music Center, Tariq’s neighborhood bulldozed aside for Channel View Estates” (Pynchon 2009, 17). *Inherent Vice* presents the idea that black neighbourhoods are wiped out as part of drives to improve the city (and earnings) so that gangs and their turfs can be replaced by “houses for peckerwood prices, shopping mall, some shit” or out of fear or anger directed at non-white Americans, which is Tariq’s own interpretation “more white man’s revenge” (Pynchon 2009, 17) for the recent race riots in nearby Watts. Pynchon has frequently populated his novels with the ghostly presence, the otherness of those who have been passed over, erased, rendered past tense subjunctive, that is, but remain in the interstices of dominant, indicative narratives as embodiments of unrealized possibilities.

Though set in L.A., *Inherent Vice* does not just reflect negatively on urban planning *per se* but on the idea of colonization in a wider sense – a “persistent leitmotif in Pynchon’s California trilogy” (Berressem 2014, 41). In *Bleeding Edge* Pynchon expands on the fate, similar to Tariq’s, which befell actual Puerto Rican neighbours of two fictional main characters, Maxine Tarnow and March Kelleher, who “discovered they’d been living only blocks from each other all this time, March since the late fifties when the Puerto Rican gangs were terrorizing the Anglos in the neighborhood, and you didn’t go east of Broadway after sunset.” Nonetheless, March hates the Lincoln Center, “for which an entire neighborhood was destroyed and 7,000 *boricua* families uprooted, just because Anglos who didn’t really give a shit about High Culture were afraid of these people’s children” (Pynchon 2013, 55). Such descriptions, from Pynchon’s recent novels, are strikingly different to those in *The Crying of Lot 49* from 1966 where the “ordered swirl of houses and streets” in suburbia and the “pro-longed scatter of wide, pink buildings, surrounded by miles of fence topped with barbed wire” (Pynchon 1966, 24, 25) along the highway into

L.A. reads almost as if progress through real estate development is a victimless crime. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, European infrastructure and cities lie in ruins, acted upon by invisible forces behind World War II, and produce countless, fugitive “DPs” – Displaced Persons – who roam through the altered landscape. Some are anonymous homeless European refugees, others are African colonial subjects; “Hereros”, who struggle with whether to accept or fight the German annihilation order applied to their ancestors. Bringing these to the fore means they regain their historical fate and an identity to which readers can relate at more than a conceptual level. Pynchon’s Zone-Hereros are fictional but the historical plight of Hereros becomes real.

As Pynchon’s works have progressed, he has given more up-front space to the return of the dispossessed raising awareness also of the price paid in vibrancy to achieve urban singularities. In 2013, the critique of a general concept of colonization is still negotiated through changes to the cityscape but is not so disembodied – it becomes grounded in specific historical events in e.g. New York’s past. In the act of describing the sterilization and “Disneyfication” of Times Square, Maxine repopulates it with memories of the now-missing “dope dealers . . . pimps . . . three-card monte artists . . . kids playing hooky” (Pynchon 2013, 51) whose presence she did not appreciate in the past but whose absence she mourns as a loss of subjunctive possibility and diversity. Memories of a more colourful community in *Bleeding Edge* can be full of regret but also energy. An example of future-oriented engagement is found in March Kelleher’s feisty activism among “neighborhood gadflies, old lefties, tenants' rights organizers” (Pynchon 2013, 54). Colonization and assimilation are also concepts cast forward as risks encroaching on new communities with a deadening effect. The digital community emerging in DeepArcher is as vulnerable to commercial colonization as it is a new harbor to the vibrancy – nefarious and life-reaffirming alike – of its inhabitants.

Urban development and failing sanctuaries

In *Bleeding Edge*, March and Maxine both engage with the fate of dispossessed New Yorkers, but one seems to act where the other reacts. Where March fights for a different future, Maxine often seems resigned to what will come. On the one hand, March pursues oppressors with righteous anger and a set course. She is literally ready to throw lye in the face of landlords who were “reverting to type and using Gestapo techniques to get sitting tenants to move” (Pynchon 2013, 54). On the other hand, Maxine Tarnow reacts with empathy, melancholy and restraint. She is moved by people, buildings and facts which her wide-ranging fraud investigation uncovers but she herself is also geographically moved around by what happens to her. She often goes along with the flow, emotionally and literally, and though a sense of indignation does emerge in passages where Maxine observes injustice it can be unclear whether it can be attributed to her or the narrator.

One such example comes on an unplanned boat trip, which Maxine happens to join one night, and where we are presented with an Other, abjected New York which is often passed over. March’s ex, Sid, takes them from Tubby Hook Marina on Manhattan to “the intersection of Fresh and Arthur Kills, toxicity central, the dark focus of Big Apple waste disposal, everything the city has rejected so it can keep on pretending to be itself” (Pynchon 2013, 166). Fresh Kills on Staten Island is a landfill site, a dumping ground for garbage, first opened in 1948 and changing the topography around it as it grew over the next half-century, and as such also a field Pynchon mines for waste metaphors and realities resulting from the irresponsible urban development and teeming human life of New York City. Within the boundaries of the vast landfill at Fresh Kills lies the Isle of Meadows, a bird sanctuary which seems like a divine exemption from the sins of urban development. The landfill itself was officially closed in the first quarter of 2001 and the invisible

machinery she hears from the dump is the sound of it being graded, capped and turned into a park thanks to “Giuliani, the tree-hugger”(Pynchon 2013, 166). Rudy Giuliani’s move to close the landfill was more likely a reward to Staten Island for delivering his victory in the latest mayoral race. When Maxine hears “moving around somewhere close, heavy machinery, much too deep into these early-morning hours”, it is also a foreshadowing of the imminent reopening of Fresh Kills after 9/11 as a staging ground for sorting through the debris of the World Trade center for evidence and human remains.

Present day readers with no particular knowledge of New York history a generation ago, nor the specific history of which Fresh Kills is about to be part at this point in the narration, may be as unaware of the indicative future of the site as are the 2001 characters. Nonetheless, to characters and readers alike, the connotations of topographical names – ominous (“Fresh Kills”) and idyllic (“Island of Meadows”) – support the subjunctive gap between what Sid and Maxine know at this point and what we and the narrator might or ought to know about what would happen soon after. The Isle of Meadows – “100 acres of untouched marshland, directly underneath the North Atlantic flyway, sequestered by law from development and dumping, marsh birds sleeping in safety” - is a rare refuge in the middle of all this refuse, but the narration quickly turns negative, because

given the real-estate imperatives running this town, it is really, if you want to know, fucking depressing, because how long can it last? How long can any of these innocent critters depend on finding safety around here? It's exactly the sort of patch that makes a developer's heart sing—typically, ‘This Land Is My Land, This Land Also Is My Land.’ (Pynchon 2013, 166)

In subjunctive terms, this statement rests between the deontic and the predictive: an event which ought not to happen but which probably will. By 2013, the actual Isle of Meadows itself has not been developed, so was this postdated burst of aggressive negativity about its future misplaced? That depends on whether you agree that the as-of-yet not quite realized ideas for developing the capped landfill site surrounding

the nature reserve, has indeed turned them into what Sid dismissively foresees will be “another family-friendly yup resource” (Pynchon 2013, 166).

While the impending doom of 9/11 hangs over the New York in this novel, the slow moving disastrous effects of yuppification on the original, culturally diverse fabric of the city, is clear to characters in the novel. Lest readers think March is the optimist to Maxine’s pessimist throughout the novel, tables are turned when they lunch at the Piraeus Diner, a traditional place Maxine labels “eternal.” Between “the scumbag landlords and the scumbag developers,” March retorts, “nothing in this city will ever stand at the same address for even five years, name me a building you love, someday soon it’ll either be a stack of high-end chain stores or condos for yups with more money than brains.” As with the bird sanctuary, the Piraeus is living on borrowed time, March asserts. “Any open space you think will breathe and survive in perpetuity? Sorry, but you can kiss its ass good-bye” (Pynchon 2013, 115).¹ Rudy Giuliani is emphasized as the insidious urban developer, the sanitizer of New York, who supports the “ordered swirl of houses” ethos and the planned waste these produce over the creative chaos which preceded them. When Maxine visits the new Times Square, its mainstreaming by the urban planning of “Giuliani and his developer friends and the forces of suburban righteousness” make her feel

nauseous at the possibility of some stupefied consensus about what life is to be, taking over this whole city without mercy, a tightening Noose of Horror, multiplexes and malls and big-box stores it only makes sense to shop at if you have a car and a driveway and a garage next to a house out in the burbs. (Pynchon 2013, 51-52)

¹ It would be interesting to find out if the fate of any real Piraeus Diner on Columbus Avenue was indeed to be replaced by a Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts. A New York University digital humanities project, NYWalker, conceived as a literary map based on distributed data collection and visualization for literary analysis (Williamson 2017, 7) fittingly leads to a dead link: nywalker.newyorkscapes.org/books/bleeding-edge-2013

Pristine sanctuaries or lacunae of dis-order in *Bleeding Edge* both appear vestigial refuges from the commercial consensus of the “indexed world” (Pynchon 2013, 476). Inhabitants roaming the urban or dark-web underground find it increasingly hard to escape the forces of order, planning and uniformity. The question is whether there are hopeful ways to continue an open life – a present tense subjunctive of sorts - without being reduced to a dispossessed, ghostly existence in the interstices between the superpositional futures which once seemed possible but which have now been overwritten by the indexable, indicative present as a singular past.

Negotiating alternate future city spaces

Maxine’s two early-adolescent boys, Ziggy and Otis, grow up in New York, but they also encounter and create digital versions of New York which affect their perception of a “real” or stable city. Before the World Trade Center towers fell in 2001, destabilizing adult ideas of what New York stands for, the two children had already found themselves rattled by one possible future New York shown to them by a couple of “suburban normals” (Pynchon 2013, 291) they meet while playing an ancient arcade game, Time Crisis 2, in Iowa. Another game reveals to them

a postapocalyptic New York half underwater here, suffocating in mist, underlit, familiar landmarks picturesquely distressed. The Statue of Liberty wearing a crown of seaweed. The World Trade Center leaning at a dangerous angle. The lights of Times Square gone dark in great irregular patches, perhaps from recent urban warfare in the neighborhood. (Pynchon 2013, 292)

Their reaction is to prepare in the “realworld” for such an eventuality in ways which seem practical to children, asking for a lifeboat to be moored in their flat as “a necessary for Big Apple disasters to come, including but not limited to global warming” (Pynchon 2013, 293).

Maxine’s boys have previously used gaming as negotiation of realworld problems though playing out alternate scenarios. A first-person shooter, developed as a “Valentine to the Big Apple” (Pynchon 2013, 34) by IT developer friends of

Maxine, allows players to clear New York streets of social nuisances, yups mainly, from “the inexhaustible galleries of New York annoyance, zapping loudmouths on cellular phones, morally self-elevated bicycle riders, moms wheeling twins old enough to walk lounging in twin strollers” (Pynchon 2013, 34). These friends have also developed DeepArcher, a “product” described as “journey” more than a “place” on the Deep Web (Pynchon 2013, 37). After 9/11 Maxine’s children use DeepArcher to write their own digital New York: the “personal city of Zigotisopolis rendered in a benevolently lighted palette taken from old-school color processes like the ones you find on picture postcards of another day”(Pynchon 2013, 428) which creates a virtual New York exempt from urban developments of the recent past. In their version of NYC Times Square and other landmarks return to an almost prelapsarian past “before the hookers, before the drugs”(Pynchon 2013, 428) whereas “the cityscapes of Maxine's DeepArcher are obscurely broken, places of indifference and abuse and unremoved dog shit, and she doesn't want to track any more of that than she can help into their more merciful city [...] this not-yet-corrupted screenscape” in which they, unlike her, seem “unconcerned for their safety, salvation, destiny ...” (Pynchon 2013, 428-29). Maxine it should be noted, is less black and white in her own negotiations with and attraction to the seedier, decaying side of the real New York. Though she avoided the pre-sanitized Times Square, in 2001 she misses the lack of “consensus about what life is to be” (Pynchon 2013, 52) which it represented. On the other hand, Zigotisopolis represents a “nostalgia for the future”: a past futurism insofar as their point of departure is in a back-dated New York which speaks to their mother’s regrets about what urban development erased, rather than being based on a New York they have known themselves.

To Maxine, the innocence and trusting nature of children like Ziggy and Otis, who are “ready to step out into their peaceable city, still safe”(Pynchon 2013, 476) is also nostalgia for a future she believes will never come to pass, because

market forces, “spiders and bots” inevitably invade and colonize even DeepArcher “in the name of the indexed world” (Pynchon 2013, 476). Once the creators of DeepArcher opened its source code to users, capitalist forces created a back door into it and, Maxine laments, “there goes the neighborhood” (Pynchon 2013, 355). But are all the “faceless and uncredited”(Pynchon 2013, 355) code writers really just “claim jumpers”(Pynchon 2013, 240) for the indexed world or could they also represent a deserving part of the dispossessed, the amateurs DeepArcher was opened up to give a space? Maxine finds that now, as with Times Square, the “Core is teeming with smartasses, yups, tourists” but also with “twits writing code for whatever they think they want and installing it, till some other headcase finds it and deinstalls it” (Pynchon 2013, 403). Open source democratizes and subjunctivizes the space. It opens up for numerous superpositions, including, necessarily, the one in which it will eventually be sanitized and suburbanized, controlled and indexed. However, this openness to claim-jumping and colonization is also what allows Ziggy and Otis in to create their own version of New York. Ultimately, though DeepArcher’s status as a sanctuary hidden in the Deep Web is compromised, it also comes to host “refugees from the event at the Trade Center” whose status as alive or dead is uncertain “though its creators claim not to Do Metaphysical” (Pynchon 2013, 427). Deceased people are resurrected as avatars with whom communication in the afterlife can happen. They start Weblogs, write code and add these to the program files (Pynchon 2013, 358). Even past events are edited in ways which flow over into “meatspace” as indicative facts.

One prominent example is when one of the villains of the novel, Nicholas Windust, has good deeds inserted into the dossier of his dark past after his death. This goes counter to the direction of the flow of time, in which we trust outside of sci-fi and experimental fiction. It threatens ontological breakdown like the one Maxine experiences when worlds with different rules for mood and tense leach into each other. We accept that Maxine lives in a world where characters can be

rewritten as subjunctive but, unaware of the fictionality of her own ontology, she cannot easily accommodate another. On the other hand, when readers immerse themselves in her world, as part of the reading contract, they have to suspend the rules of their own world and move along empathetically with her experience of a time-space conundrum in which present indicative can still be changed into another superpositional state. It is a kind of time-travel but not as esoteric or science fictional as you might think. It is a property of the Internet when it “has become a medium of communication between the worlds” (Pynchon 2013, 427) across barriers of time. This is not that different to what writing – historically about the past and visionary about the future – has always been doing when we let ourselves be moved and moved along with its flow.

Inside Maxine’s world, she eventually has to cut through the superpositional states and chose one to continue forward in time. The ideal reconstruction of New York City as a past city, Maxine realises, is also as a “city that can never be” (Pynchon 2013, 428), not just because it is an idiosyncratic collage of New Yorks of the past but because a the New York of the past could not - like the Piraeus Diner probably can’t - stay intact, stable or static. It seems a lesson here is that a “static” projection of the past is not an antidote to the uniformity Maxine fears from (sub)urban planning. Both are guilty of denying the diverse and multiverse possibilities or ideas suspended by the subjunctive. She can hope that when she finally lets her boys go out into the city to take their chances, this will not reduce them. She resisted the idea that the benign nostalgia of their digital refuge inside DeepArcher could also be subject to the same suburban imperative that applies to the realworld. Conversely, when she sees her boys virtually replicate the idyllic scene from Zigotisopolis at the very end of the book as they walk away from her to go down into the New York City streets on their own, she has, reluctantly, to accept their DepArture.

“It’s all right, Mom. We’re good.”

“I know you are, Zig, that's the trouble.” But she waits in the doorway as they go on down the hall. Neither looks back. She can watch them into the elevator at least. (Pynchon 2013, 477)

Life lived forward is subjunctive – it holds multiple future possibilities as you go forward. Life is only perceivably indicative when you look back. While what New York has actually become since 2001 can be investigated and the value of it opined upon, *Bleeding Edge* itself remains open ended, especially as far as the post-2001 fate of its fictional characters are concerned.

Temporal superpositions: a New York that never will have been

By writing historiographic (meta)fiction, Pynchon is prophesying accurately about the future - but with 20/20 hindsight. Anyone can comfortably do this from the vantage point afforded by predictions made about the past events such as 9/11 in *Bleeding Edge*. Characters, for example, have no particular expectations for the 11th of September - their future is open - but from our vantage point in time we readers know that date will become the iconic “9/11” and so we invest the day with portent, finality and closure as they move unwittingly towards it. This gap not just between what they and we know, and how we have this knowledge, but also the way we rewrite the world of those characters from our perspective creates space for a kind of “Nostalgia for the Future”.

John Miller identifies Pynchon’s California novels - *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Vineland* (1990) and *Inherent Vice* (2009) – as a “kind of contested writing surface, on which alternative versions of the future (and the past) are in the process of being inscribed” (Miller 2013, 226). Pynchon’s latest New York novel does the same. Pynchon shows, not just “alternative versions of the future (and the past)” as Miller said, but alternate spaces being overwritten before and after 2001. His 2001 character, Maxine Tarnow, recalls a New York before the erasure perpetrated in the eighties by urban developers like Donald Trump and political figures like mayor Rudy Giuliani specifically – a recollection which can be wistful, elegiac and

nostalgic, but ultimately moot, or which, to the next generation unburdened by history, can literally be a re-collection of lost bits and pieces to form an alternate new New York with the potential for overwriting what New York had become by 2001. The ontological crisis emerges because the subjunctive future such recollections point to would partially exists in our past – the time between the 2001 setting and the 2013 publication or a 2019 reading. This suggests that the reader has the ability or duty to collapse the superpositions, the multiple future New Yorks which seemed possible in 2001, to one indicative reality of what New York actually became.

The subjunctive future does not always have to be reduced to the indicative mood by the reading process: while 9/11 did happen, some futures projected are left open for the time being: though the fate of the Isle of Meadows is given dire predictions in the 2001 narration, when the landfill site surrounding it had caught the attention of urban developers, it may not have been as degraded in 2013 as feared. Because this sanctuary is a real place, in 2019 or later, readers may actually look into the state of that New York City sanctuary and find the 2001 prognosis closer to realized. As recent criticism is starting to recognize the political and environmental Pynchon (O'Bryan 2016), it is possible that the text would encourage such engagements with the outside, real world and even politicize readers to have an opinion on whether what the NYC Parks plans for the Freshkills Park Project surrounding the wildlife preserve is an improvement or not.²

Other subjunctives in *Bleeding Edge* may be harder to transport to an indicative mood: Because DeepArcher and Zigotisopolis are fictional by nature, being story worlds in their own right, transcending the chronotope of Pynchon's invention, and because they demonstrate the narrative potential of new digital technologies as source of both social construction of space and spatial construction

² "The Park Plan", *Freshkills Park - Recycling the land, revealing the future*, The Freshkills Park Alliance, access date, 28 September 2018, <https://freshkillspark.org/the-park/the-park-plan>

of the social (Laszczkowski 2016, 14-15), they point to a future outside of the story space of the printed novel. They become genuinely subjunctive because there is no closure we can investigate, neither within the novel in the time passed between the 2001 setting and the 2013 publication, nor in the real world as it has developed up to now. In an act showing the transgressive potential of digital technology which reaches outside of the novel, March Kelleher's weblog "tabloidofthedamned.com", her contribution to politicizing the web, has an internet presence in at least two forms. It is a redirection to the Pynchon Wiki for *Bleeding Edge*, and <http://tabloidofthedamned.blogspot.com/> which allows any claim jumper online to make of it what they want.

To conclude, in Pynchon's text, whatever his intentions with this latest novel may be, the interaction between his characters and readers and between fiction and history, remains somewhat open to interpretation. We cannot help approaching fiction also as another frontier to be indexed; a thought-experiment box to be opened so that the superpositional states of what it may contain collapse. Like real estate developers and colonizers, we cannot resist this instinct the end-result of which could be reduction of diversity though some sort of critical "consensus-building" (McHale 2000, 43). Luckily, the complexities of such intentions, interactions and interpretation cannot be so easily reduced. Where Pynchon texts used to seem so apparently pessimistic and heavily-laden with the indicative determinism of history (Dalsgaard 2001), his Other New Yorks, the Isle of Meadows and Zigotisopolis, keep the subjunctive alive in the interstices between imaginative fiction and the factual world.

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