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The Signifying Chains of Paranoia

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Résumé de synthèse

La paranoïa joue un rôle important dans des théories de Jacques Lacan à propos d'ego et de la connaissance, mais ce n'est pas exactement 'paranoïa' comme c'est régulièrement compris. Que Lacan signifie-t-il quand il dit que toute la connaissance a une structure paranoïde, ou que l'ego est constitué par une aliénation paranoïaque?

Cette mémoire travaillera par la théorie psychanalytique de Lacan afin de comprendre le concept de la paranoïa pendant qu'elle concerne la connaissance et l'ego. Elle fera ceci en analysant deux romans qui sont des modèles exemplaires des récits Nord-Américains de deuxième partie du 20 siècle: *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) de Thomas Pynchon et *Pattern Recognition* (2003) de William Gibson.

Mots clés

connaissance
ego
entropie
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Freud, S.
Gibson, W.
grand Autre
Lacan, J.
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Pynchon, T.

Abstract

Paranoia plays an important role in Jacques Lacan's theories of the ego and knowledge, but it is not exactly 'paranoia' as it is regularly understood. What does Lacan mean when he says that all knowledge has a paranoid structure, or that the ego is constituted by a paranoiac alienation?

This thesis will work through Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in order to understand the concept of paranoia as it pertains to knowledge and the ego. It will do this by analyzing two novels that stand as exemplary models of North American narratives of the late 20th century: Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) and William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003).

Key Words

big Other
ego
entropy
fragmentation
Freud, S.
Gibson, W.
knowledge
Lacan, J.
paranoia
Pynchon, T.

Table of Contents

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Introduction

Who are we? This is the question of the ego. How do we know this? This is the question of knowledge. Knowledge of the ego is one of the earliest forms of knowledge, but not the earliest. This knowledge is based upon a primary misrecognition of an earlier form of awareness. Before there is knowledge of the ego there must be more basic realization of self. In other words, this more primary realization turns around the indescribable Real of existence—that is, the Lacanian Real, the fact that before we *are anything* we simply *are*. It is the Real of existence without the possibility of naming the state of such an existence. The ego, on the other hand, is a late formation—an afterbirth—that arises in the Lacanian dimension of the Imaginary order. The crossing-over of these two Lacanian realms is incited by 'paranoia'. Even when the ego becomes a fully integrated subject in the Symbolic order do the hauntings of the paranoid alienation of the ego continue to influence its pull back to the Imaginary. The questions that must be asked are therefore: What is the ego? What is knowledge? And how is paranoia constitutive of both?

In Jacques Lacan's theories, the concept of 'paranoia' is given a status that far exceeds the common understanding of the term.[1] The word 'paranoid' and 'paranoiac' come to serve as explicating definitions to describe and support the crucial concepts of 'knowledge' and 'the ego'. The latter is constitutive of the former; Lacan remarks that "in studying 'paranoiac knowledge', [he] was led to consider the mechanism of paranoiac alienation of the ego as one of the preconditions of human knowledge" ("Some Reflections" 12). It is often true that

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[1] This is aside from his doctoral thesis that deals more with clinical cases as well as his in-depth inquiry into the case of Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber which is taken up in his third seminar published under the title *The Psychoses 1955-1956*.

in reading Lacan, readers are left to their own ingenuity to intuit his precise meaning when he uses one signifier to define another. For example: in Dylan Evans' *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, under the heading of "paranoia" one finds many samples (aside from the psychotic state associated with Schreber) of Lacan's: "the ego has a paranoiac structure… Knowledge (*connaisance*) is paranoiac… The psychoanalytic treatment induces controlled paranoia into the human subject" (134). Still, all that has been accomplished is a shift of signifiers, and indexical pointing from one concept to the next. Reading and understanding Lacan is therefore best accomplished when one does so *dans l'esprit* and not strictly *à la lettre*. For his expressions, neologisms, and roundabout explanations are not denotative in their nature—they are best described as *affective*. One must engage Lacan on his plane. Shifting signifiers is clearly a coordinate of Lacan's Symbolic universe where reality's supports and accessories can only make sense within a codified and (seemingly) rational structure similar to Saussure's form of structuralism. Thus, the special, 'Lacanian' kind of paranoia requires for its understanding an overview of many of Lacan's more general concepts, including the his Borromean triumvirate of Real, Imaginary and Symbolic, the Mirror Stage, Gaps and Lacks, Master Signifiers and Quilting Points and the fundamental misrecognition constitutive of any notion of self or selfhood.

This paper will examine two novels that are characteristic of later twentieth century American fiction through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in order to expose the paranoia at the heart of a seemingly coherent reality and the postmodern subjective stance. Indeed, it is the concepts of coherence,

rationality and meaningfulness that actually exist as phantasmatic screens in the form of highly organized *systems of knowledge* that cover up the fundamental alienation and paranoia. The two novels are Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003). This introduction will first give an overview of the Lacanian notions key to this project and then proceed to discuss the two novels in question: how they are related to each other and how they stand out as salient expressions in the context of the Western world's condition in the last half a century.

Modern thought since René Descartes has had a long tradition of championing the ego as the unified core of selfhood. Indeed, according to the old Cartesian adage, *cogito ergo sum*, the ego is both proof that knowledge is possible (knowledge of self), and obversely, that having knowledge was proof that an ego must exist (the act of thinking, being conscious). It is Sigmund Freud who initially posited the concept of 'ego' as that which "consciousness attaches to… [and] the arbiter that controls all the psyche's constituent processes" (*BPP* 108). But unlike the Cartesian certainty that an ego is synonymous with selfhood in all its conscious control, Freud, in his essay "The Ego and the Id," undermines this coherence when he states that "[p]art of the ego… may also be *Ucs* [unconscious], indeed, is undoubtedly *Ucs*" (109). This is to say that the ego is not entirely within the realm of the self's awareness and control but is rather split, with dimensions lying far from the system of rational and coherent selfhood. This split side of the ego that can not be easily incorporated into the self is crucial to the continuation of Lacan's program. Not only is the ego not a unified and

coherent whole, but it is also a fiction in itself. The ego is both fragmentary and imaginary; it is most definitely not real.

The Lacanian Real is both the fundamental beginning and the ultimate conclusion. It is the central core and the rejected leftover. It is the very truth of individuality, but a truth that exists precisely in its inability to be 'known', or in other words, to be understood and subjectivized by the individual (and far from being communicable through language). When a human being is born—before it has any concept of self and reality—it can be said to exist in the Real.[2] This is prior to both the individual's capacity to organize its visual perception into patterns of recognizable images, and the individual's acquisition and utilization of language to structure reality and assume a role within it. Biologically speaking, one's existence in the Real actually occurs before birth, in the womb. It is there that the individual is literally connected to his environment; existence knows no separation between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*—inner existence and external reality. Lacan often speaks of man's "veritable *specific prematurity of birth*" (*É* 78), referring to the notion that what is expelled from the womb is specifically not a coherent ego.[3] It is rather something that refuses to accept this severance and attempts to hold on, in an imaginary sense, to the bygone state of being umbilically tied to its environment. In other words, when born, the neo-nate is faced with the harsh reality of its broken existence as something 'cut off' from a

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[2] Speaking of the real is always an approximation, for terms like 'exist' are already symbolically over-determined. Nevertheless, this groping in the pre-linguistic dark is still necessary to understand the terms of the project. Without ever being able to clearly define the Real, one can still attempt to get *a feel for the Real.*

[3] One of Lacan's favorite metaphors which explains this is that man is much more Marsupial than Placental—that is, like the Kangaroo, the neo-nate still requires a second incubation period to become fully developed.

more primal and Edenic oneness. This is where the possibility of the ego arises: through the Mirror Stage of Imaginary identification.

"[T]he essential function of the ego is very nearly that systematic refusal to acknowledge reality (*méconnaissance systématique de la réalité*)"("Some Reflections" 12). The reality referred to here is the reality of fragmentation of both the universe and the body. It is, in short, the mark of trauma. Indeed, in that primal state of the Real, the body *is* one with the universe, and so with the realization of self arises the first rupture in the individual's existence. But the fragmentation continues at the more personal and physical level of the body. Just as one's sense of self has been depleted by its rupture from the universe, this crack continues to dissect the body into a mess of uncontrollable urges and poorly tuned motor skills. Unity has been delegated to a mythical status as an almost sublime origin. It also becomes the impetus that drives the individual forward to the assumption of an ego as unity comes to stand in for the goal of self-mastery. But "[t]his illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, entails a constant danger of sliding back again into the chaos from which he started" (15). This is the first instance of Lacanian paranoia as it threatens to shatter the illusion of unity always associated with self-mastery. Taken in everyday usage, is not one of paranoia's chief properties the fear that one's actions, or even thoughts, are not actually one's own but being controlled by some mysterious and sinister force? Paranoia is therefore the nagging reminder that one's mastery of self is always a fiction.

The Mirror Stage is literally understood as that point in the infant's development where he comes to recognize his image in the mirror. It is the first

time the infant sees a picture of himself in an entirety from head to toe. This image of a complete body in its entirety is the first formation of the ego, and "[i]n comparison with the still very profound lack of coordination of his own motor functioning, the gestalt is an ideal unity, a salutary imago" (*É* 92). But this recognition is based around a fundamental error: it is in fact a misrecognition. In an attempt to leap from the fragmentary existence to an appropriation of a whole image, one is always foreclosing the gap of the Real over which this leap must take place. It is a phantasmatic construction, or rather

> a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I call an "orthopedi" form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure (*É* 78).

What happens when one assumes a role in the drama of leaping from "insufficiency to anticipation" is that the very gap leapt over accompanies the ego through all of its later development. In other words, the gap is not left behind, but becomes a constitutive part of the next development of the individual: that of acquiring language and entering the Symbolic universe of the signifying chain.

Lacan uses one of his algebraic expressions to describe this: $ (not a dollar sign). It is the split subject, for when the ego crosses over from the Imaginary order to the Symbolic order, comma not semi-colon he goes from being an ego (an isolated but whole entity separate from external reality) to a subject (an integrated member of a larger community of subjects). Paranoiac alienation thus "dates back to the time when the specular *I* turns into the social *I*"

(*É* 79)—that is, the visual primacy of the Imaginary ego turns into the socially constructed Symbolic subject. So even though the individual has graduated from ego to subject, the so-called paranoiac alienation of the ego remains. Just as the individual negates the gap of the Real in order to become an ego, as a subject, this gap becomes delegated to the indecipherable question of the relationship between the subject and the big Other. The big Other is Lacan's term for the Symbolic order—it is the overall accumulation of all other little others into a structured network of relationships and signification. As the mirror stage comes to an end, "[i]t is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge [*savoir*] into being mediated by the other's desire" ("Mirror Stage" *E* 79). The major difference between the ego and the subject is that the former turns on the individual's perception of an ideal self (imago, ideal ego) existing in an external reality while the subject is the individual's perception of self through the lens of the entire structure of the big Other. As a subject, one has assumed a role in the big Other, a role made possible by an indescribably seductive gap within the order. The gap in the big Other is a form of desire that the subject interprets as his own but is always mediated by the Other. Here the standard concept of paranoia returns in the form of the famous Lacanian question *Che Vuoi? What do you want of me?* Or more appropriately, *what is it that is in me that makes you desire my subjective role?* There is something about the signifier that comes to represent the subject that only the big Other perceives, and it is this unknown *x* that is sought after by the Other. The paranoid idea that another (or Other) is after one for some unknown reason is at the heart of the subject's symbolic mandate. Paranoid knowledge is thus grounded in the fact that "a subject

intervenes only inasmuch as there are, in this world, signifiers that mean nothing and must be deciphered" (*É* 712). And of course, the first signifier that the subject desires to decipher is the signifier that splits his very being. For Lacan, the signifier "functions… only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier" (*SXI* 207) and thus to represent the signified to the rest of the register of signifiers. Like the spy who does not realize he is a double agent, or the patsy who is given up as having a role in a conspiracy he could never have fathomed, paranoid knowledge gets its force from *knowing that there is something that we do not know*, perceiving a plan that is too great to understand, and fearing that one's role is always-already determined without any proper initiation.

There is always an opposite side to paranoia that goes well beyond the standard fears of being controlled and persecuted for reasons none too clear. This parodic obverse side of the concept emphasizes the potential menace as not coming from outside but rather from inside—it is highly subjective from the beginning. It is the idea that there is no plan, no order, and that one's sense of self (as supported by being signified within the Symbolic order) is either entirely false, or worse, that there really is no self. This harks back to the initial realization of the individual of his own fragmented and inchoate existence. Fear of meaninglessness and disparity serve as paranoid influences that instigate the entire human drama of creating stories in order to explain things rationally. Stories of who we are, myths of origins, teleological projects, etc. are always over-invested with the paranoiac alienation of the ego from the self. Is not the first explanatory story the extremely simple statement of "that is I" when faced

with one's mirror image? Paranoia thus comes from two directions, outside and inside, but like Lacan's fascination with the Möbius strip, the differentiation of the two sides turns out to be an illusion. When perceiving over-arching patterns of conspiracy, "the subject does not recognize his productions as his own when he has ideas of influence or feels that an automatism is at work" (*É* 135). Fear of the automatism is both a human shirking in the face of the great big Other and its inexplicable desiring machinations, as well as the fear of one's own unconscious machinations, which are always caught up in the discourse of the Other (*É* 10); this is the Möbius structure of the illusion of an inside-outside distinction.

A final word should be said on some other concepts that will come up in the proceeding chapters, namely Master signifiers and quilting points (*point de capiton*). The Master signifier is a central signifier within the signifying chain around which all other signifiers revolve and are given a more or less stable significance. It is very similar to the quilting point in that they both serve to fix what would otherwise be free-floating signifiers. The difference is that while the quilting points can be any actual signifier (or discourse, ism, etc.) that is delegated to the role of 'fixer and fastener', the Master signifier is by is nature an empty signifier: a signifier without signified. Fear of an unknown but omnipotent and omniscient master is certainly a principle of paranoia. But paranoiac knowledge leaves room for the possibility of an empty space where a Master is supposed to reign. If everything one *knows* constitutes a complete makeup of knowable reality, and if this reality is kept regularly functioning by a master, than the idea that there is no master certainly makes this knowledge paranoiac. Even a king is someone who only plays the part of a king well. This is no less true of the

paranoid, as he is merely someone who has "assume[d] rather well the figure of [a] chosen victim" (*É* 140). As for the quilting point, it is best characterized as that which "produces the necessary illusion of fixed meaning" (Evans 149). One cannot read words like "necessary illusion" without one's ears being pricked by the wealth of philosophical history to which this alludes: from Plato's cave to Lacan's mirror stage. In the novels that will be analyzed in this essay, the quilting points of standardized reality and culture (that to which supposedly 'normal' people adhere) are constantly de-quilted by captivating objects and symbols which serve to restructure reality for the protagonists as they embark on their respective semiotic journeys through underground networks of signification. These objects are the Lacanian *objet petit a*, everyday things or images that suddenly become invested with a symbolic desire and thus serve to give reality a novel and highly subjectivized direction. After all, is not the paranoid one for whom all of reality has been designed and targeted against him personally? When one's quilting points come unfastened—when one no longer lives in the day to day shared reality of everybody else—it is these *objets a* that offer the coordinates that transform a meaningless reality into one symbolically invested with a paranoid desire.

The connections between *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Pattern Recognition* have not gone unnoticed in the literary world. *New York Times* writer Lisa Zeidner made the comparison between the two novels the focus of her review of Gibson's 2003 novel, quoting Gibson as having said that "Pynchon is a kind of mythic hero of mine." An overview of the basic plots brings out the salient

similarities. Both main characters are headstrong and independent females, both are charged with missions from powerful and wealthy patriarchal figures, both must use interpretive skills to navigate semiotic jungles and both must uncover mysterious origins and sources of underground networks. Finally, both novels appeared in the wakes of grand socio-political nodal points. In 1965, America had not yet forgotten the assassination of John F. Kennedy, troops were being deployed to Vietnam and the flames of the cold war were being further fanned. In 2003, America was till waiting for the ashes to settle from the fallen twin towers, the "war on terror" in Afghanistan was under way, there was the formation of the *USA Patriot Act* and later invasion of Iraq.[4] Between the suspicious climate of the Cold War and the dubious mechanisms of the *USA Patriot Act*, both writers must have been fully aware that the paranoid condition may well be one of the last remaining pseudo-meta-narratives structuring the social imagination of the West. Interestingly enough, this atmosphere remains part of the background of both novels, hovering and looming, perhaps pulling some strings, but daring not to "be revealed in its terrible nakedness" (Pynchon 40). Nevertheless, the setting is apt and unavoidable, and perhaps most effective as something that remains shrouded in a potential Real threat to the characters, the authors and the readers alike.

In many ways Gibson's Cayce Pollard lives an updated, 21st century existence of Pynchon's Oedipa Maas. While Oedipa becomes increasingly concerned with postal systems as a condensed metaphor for networks of

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[4] This may have occurred after Gibson completed the novel, but it is the atmosphere that is being emphasized.

communication, Cayce's main medium is the internet. The clues that Oedipa uncovers in her mystery are mostly images scrawled on walls, typos found in official documents, rare discrepancies among old books and especially direct and indirect accounts told to her—in other words, writings, drawings and oral traditions. Cayce, on the other hand, relies on video images, software design, digital watermarks, and search histories stored in virtual memories as the coordinates of her journey. Oedipa is married yet sexually liberated—a result of the sexual liberation of the 60s, while Cayce is single with a string exes in her past and an unexplored reluctance towards intimacy, a symptom of the blowback of the independence achieved by the modern American female.[5] They both have or had at one point regular psychotherapy, though Oedipa's is the German guilt-fueled Freudian variety while Cayce's resembles more of a new age self-help methodology. Most important however, is that both protagonists have special abilities in terms of spontaneous recognition of connections among seemingly disparate phenomena—or in the words of *Pattern Recognition*: apophenia. The difference again is that Oedipa only comes to discover her ability as she is assaulted by overwhelmingly strange coincidences, while Cayce, the postmodern working woman, has channeled her abilities into a highly lucrative career.

Just as Cayce has a predecessor in Oedipa, so does Hubertus Bigend, the powerful marketing mogul in *Pattern*, have his forerunner in *Crying*'s Pierce Inverarity. Bigend is a real character in the flesh of the novel—he lives and

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[5] A popular example of this backlash is the television program *Sex in the City*. The show deals with women who have put their independence and careers before considerations of relationships, marriage and families. The result, however, is that these successful 30 something women have all developed their own unique neurotic attitudes towards traditional dating, as the program chronicles their successive (and often comically doomed) attempts to 'settle down.'

interacts with the characters in both real and virtual time. Pierce, on the other hand, is an absent Master. Pierce is much closer to Lacan's notion of the *Nom-du-Père* law: a patriarchal father figure whose control over the Symbolic universe is wielded precisely in his absence. Whereas Bigend hires Cayce to go in search of the mysterious source of 'the footage,' Oedipa's summons by Pierce occurs after he has died, through the epistolary networks of wills and letters. Bigend is interested in buying and controlling international means of expression and communication, mostly through his marketing firm. Pierce, it turns out, may just be the totemic king who actually does 'own' everything: California, America, history and the entire reality as it exists in Pynchon's novel.

Next is the connection between the 'footage' of *Pattern Recognition* and the muted post horn symbol, as well as the acronym 'W.A.S.T.E.' in *The Crying of Lot 49*. As was said above, the 'footage' is based upon unequivocally contemporary technology, as technology itself comes to play a large part of Gibson's universe.[6] It is literally video footage, and is watched and collected by internet junkies with penchants for underground communities. Cayce herself is part of this community in the beginning of the novel and is well versed in its grammar and vocabulary. When Oedipa comes across the crucial picture and acronym, they appear as totally new and completely obscure symbols. What she comes to learn in the course of her journey is that an ever increasing number of groups and disconnected people have been utilizing and communicating through these networks whether they are aware of the overall significance or not. Unlike

[6] As Gibson is credited with the coining of the term 'cyberspace', his novels have always dealt with technology as the harbingers of new systems of communication, identification and reality.

the technological dependence of *Pattern Recognition*'s internet video clips, the 'W.A.S.T.E.' system functions on suspiciously archaic principles: word of mouth, secret meeting spots under overpasses, secret codes, "strange words in Jacobean texts" (Pynchon 83), etc.

What is most significant in the comparison of these two networks are their origins. Gibson's novel can be said to be a modern story set in a postmodern world. It is modern because of the structure of mystery-clues-and-resolution. The mysterious origins of the 'footage' are uncovered by Cayce in the conclusion, and go no further than the creative outputs of a solitary and injured individual in Moscow. Indeed, the resolution of the novel in the former U.S.S.R. only strengthens the postmodern reality in which it takes place. In a post-cold war era, communication between the east and west is facilitated and elevated above the national boundaries that have kept the hemispheres in strict antagonistic check for most of the 20th century. *The Crying of Lot 49* has all the furnishings of 'modern America' as its initial coordinates: consumerism, conformity, and an intellectual climate informed by a Berkeley and Cornell grass roots mentality. But it is no doubt that this novel is one of the greatest examples of the postmodern novel ever. Pynchon plays with the structure of mystery-clues-and-resolution only as red herring of narrative expectancy. Indeed, like the 'footage' maker in Gibson's novel, the 'W.A.S.T.E.' conspiracy does have an origin in the murderous Tristero System that dates back to a apocryphal historical figure named "Hernando Joaquín de Tristero y Calavera, perhaps a madman, perhaps an honest rebel, according to some only a con artist" (Pynchon 131). But this is in no way a satisfactory conclusion, or origin, to the conspiracy spiraling outward round

Oedipa throughout her quest. Every piece of information offered as a clue comes complete with its own hint of inauthenticity, a grimace of a practical joke, or worse, the trappings of mass paranoid delusion.

This modern-postmodern reversal is the reason that this essay will treat these two novels in an order opposite to their chronological emergence. Chapter one, entitled "Patterns and *Mis*recognitions" deals with the Gibson novel and introduces the concept of 'apophenia' as central to Cayce's condition. One can say that apophenia is a mild form of paranoia that has been controlled and disciplined to serve a utilitarian function. In the modern context of free individuals[7], apophenia is the human's triumph over the exaggerated workings of a mind bent on linking signifiers into paralyzing chains. Cayce is all too hyper-aware of the potential of slipping into paranoia from the active linking of chains of signification. If knowledge of self and reality depends on constructing connections, telling narratives and fastening down the free-floating signifiers of the Symbolic universe into an orderly chain of signification, than it is more Pynchon's Oedipa Maas who exemplifies the danger when the links of the chain become too tight. *Pattern Recognition* serves as introductory template to understand the ego's need to create connections in the first place. The second chapter dealing with *The Crying of Lot 49*, entitled "*Shall I Project a Universe*" warns of the consequences when one has failed to maintain a necessary distance between the ego and its seduction toward conspiratorial universality. Cayce, as

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[7] This comment is best considered an exaggeration of something Jean-Paul Sartre would say about being 'condemned to be free'. Indeed, the freedom championed and feared by existentialists like Sartre and Erich Fromm is one of the first tenets to be dismantled in postmodern theory, and no doubt also according to the constructs of the Freudian and Lacanian mind.

the modern hero, learns lessons about herself, others and reality. Oedipa, on the other hand, increasingly needs the conspiracy of the Tristero as a coordinating field of identification as her seemingly modern existence dissolves. Through Oedipa's paranoid development, the opportunities for escaping the chains of over-signification diminish beyond an event horizon that only leaves a singular infinite on one hand and an ever-expanding platitude of nothingness on the other. Or so it seems, for between the grandest of all conspiracies and the projections of a solipsistic "nut" is the rejected and excluded middle. But like Lacan's Real, its very impossibility is the source of its strength. "As Pynchon has taught us" Zeidner says in her review "the right answer isn't necessarily either/or. It may well be both/and. (Even the paranoid can be followed.)."

This essay is entitled "The Signifying Chains of Paranoia" as an obvious play on the polyvalence of the word "chains." Lacan uses the expression "signifying chain" as synonymous with "Symbolic order" and "big Other". But paranoia can clearly be experienced as a prison; one feels chained up by the surveillance and control of a sinister mysterious force. But the ego itself, with is constitutive paranoiac alienation, also traps the individual, like a "donned armor [chain mail?] of an alienating identity" (*É* 78) that fits so snug threatens to border on suffocation. The question thus becomes whether we know we are paranoid or are we rather paranoid of what we know. And is the ego's liberation from the fragmented mess of the Real just another link in the chain of the subject who knows that Other will always know more than the individual knows about himself?

Chapter One: Patterns and *Mis*recognitions

Ego Formations and Image Obsessions in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*

William Gibson's eighth novel, *Pattern Recognition* (2003), tells the story of Cayce Pollard, a freelance marketing consultant who is hired to seek out the mysterious origins of an underground internet phenomenon. Cayce's abilities in her job, and what makes her suitable for the cyber-detection for which she is hired, depend on her ability to 'feel' or be sensitive to the potential for images, objects and ideas to be formed into a coherent and meaningful pattern. The novel is a neo-cyber postmodern detective story, which draws on its influences not as a nostalgic rejuvenation of old forms, nor as a secondary parody, but simply on the spatialized plane of many eras and discourses. This chapter will weave postmodern theory with the psychoanalytic concept of the ego from Lacan to offer a look at the world as it is lived today, both outside in reality, in the real of our isolated subjectivities as well as in the new boundless world inhabited on the virtual plane.

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APOPHENIA

There is an important character in the novel whose relation to Cayce is determined by his absence. He is named Win Pollard, and he is Cayce's father—indeed, the absent father. Win is an ex-government security-man from the cold-war era, and who went missing in New York City on September 11th, 2001. Cayce recalls a key concept of which Win often spoke: *apophenia*. He defines it as the circumstance in which "each thing perceived [is] part of an overarching pattern of conspiracy" (Gibson 304). One might say that apophenia is the broader genus of a much more familiar species of perception: paranoia. Apophenia, however, need not be solely concerned with paranoid conspiracies but may be a

part of a much more commonplace framework of perception. Indeed, apophenia is exhibited everywhere in Gibson's novel. But it is not only in the novel, but outside the novel as well, for it is constitutive as to how we read novels, or appreciate any work of art. It is what makes us connect not only the events in the plot into a coherent narrative, but also what brings together symbols and metaphors into a unified thematic structure. This is not to say that readership always involves the creative invention of patters within narratives, for authors are usually intentional of the patterns they create. It is the degree to which such patterns are obvious or encrypted that affect the reader's flow of regular linear story ('and then… and then… and then…') by the punctuated instances of repeated moments of signification. In the novel *Pattern Recognition*, Gibson is able to cleverly encrypt the *theme* of pattern recognition behind the more obvious *act* of pattern recognition that Cayce and other characters perform. Indeed, the ultimate pattern to be recognized is possibly the one that links elements from the novel's thematic forms and actual content with the externalized world of the reader and literary interpreter or critic. Thus apophenia functions on three levels: the literal act performed in the novel, the thematic forms that structure the novel, and the literary framework that makes the novel not only readable and comprehensible, but ultimately more satisfying as it resonates with deeper levels of the human mind's desire for coherence and order.

This chapter will explore the reason that apophenia is so seductive. It will explore the direct relation between the drive to connect things—to create narrative wholeness and thematic unity—and the individual's sense of identity. The inquiry of this relation will go back to the beginning of the life of an

individual as explained through Sigmund Freud's theories about how the new-born child experiences the universe, and then to Jacques Lacan's theories of the formation of the ego in what he calls the "mirror stage" of imaginary identification. While going through psychoanalytic theory, it is important to keep in mind the context in which this novel is produced and in which the events take place, that is, the 21st century. Indeed, it is no mere coincidence that Frederic Jameson, in his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* alludes to cyberpunk (the subgenre of science fiction originated by William Gibson) as "the supreme *literary* expression, if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (ix n.1). Psychoanalytic theory must be continually probed through the lens of postmodernism and postmodernity, specifically such notions as pastiche, simulacra, and the primacy of form over content.

It is helpful to begin this exploration by looking closely at one of the novel's central elements, indeed, the element that sends the characters in a race around the world in search of answers—looking for patterns. It is called, simply, 'the Footage'.

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THE STRUCTURE OF IMAGES

In the world of *Pattern Recognition*, there exists an underground phenomenon known as the 'the Footage'. It consists of 134 extremely short, black and white video clips that are uploaded onto the internet from various unknown sources (clip #135 'surfaces' in the beginning of the novel). The clips can contain a man standing, or waving, or a couple kissing. Because of the fact that all the action is completely non-descript—un-contextualizable in place or in time—it is

easily interpolated into any kind of narrative scenario; simply to discern the period in which the characters live is deeply ambiguous. The male character, assumed to be the same actor each time, "might be a sailor, stepping onto a submarine in 1914, or a jazz musician entering a club in 1957. There is a lack of evidence, an absence of stylistic cues, that Cayce understands to be utterly masterful" (23). Cayce Pollard, the novel's heroine, is part of the intense sub-culture known as 'footageheads'. Sitting down to watch the latest piece of found footage, Cayce likens the experience to giving "herself to the dream" (23) and "wants nothing more than to see the film of which this must be a part" (24). But a part of what?[1] This question is one of the most heated ongoing debates discussed on the online message board for footageheads called "Fetish:Footage:Forum" ('fff', as an echo of its host: 'www'), that is, *what is the relationship all the fragments have with each other?* One camp argues that the clips are part of a completed work: this camp is called "The Completists," while the other camp, arguing for a work in progress, are called "The Progressives" (49). But it is not so much that these two camps are in complete opposition to one another, but more that they are different positions of enunciation of the same statement.[2] That

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[1] Synecdoche is "a figure by which a more comprehensive term is used for a less comprehensive or *vice versâ*" *OED Online*. Freud made much use of synechdochal function, called condensation in his work on dreams. The process of condensation translates "the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts" or latent content into "brief, meager and laconic" (*ID* 313) dreams or manifest content.

So what is the connection between the condensing work of dreams, and Cayce's likening the footage to giving "herself to the dream"? Perhaps the answer lies in an unorthodox comparison of Freud's theory of dream-condensation to his theory of the primal instance of the infant's separation from the mother. Is not the infant merely a (condensed) part of the mother that has been ruptured off? Is not the pregnant woman a condensed form of the mother-child relationship, temporarily held together in a unified package? Much more elaborate discussion of these ideas are below.

[2] The Completist versus The Progressive debate could be understood according to Lacan's topological use of the Möbius strip. While both sides seem opposed to each other (on opposite

statement, in which both camps believe, is essentially that the clips *are* formally related and that the work of critical reception is to restore the missing dimension of totalizing unity or coherence. This can be interpreted as a kind of apophenia utilized by almost everyone when critically considering any work of art, but especially art that has temporal duration, i.e.: film, literature (and to some degree, music). It is what causes us to connect a metaphor used in one phrase with an event that occurs later, or a visual reference with an overall thematic structure. All works of art, and the footage is no exception, rely on the reader's, viewer's, listener's, etc. capacity to organize its various and recurring motifs, tropes and qualities into coherent connections. But the footageheads are presented with an extra challenge precisely because they have no master initiator[3] (author, filmmaker), nor do they have a material assurance of its unity (as opposed to the material book or DVD which serves as container for its content) to offer any guarantee of its overall pattern. In fact, the internet, which is the 'virtual container' of the footage, is the complete opposite of the traditional material container: it exists outside space, it is non-appropriable by any one possessor, its content is ever-changing and fluid, etc. Yet for the footageheads, it does not matter that there is no outside assurance of a meta-relation, nor that there is

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sides), the only thing truly separating them is the time it takes to view and piece together the whole film. Even the Progressives believe in its ultimate completion; they see it as a "*work* in progress, something *unfinished* and still being generated by its *maker*" (49 emph. added). Thinking with Roland Barthes, words like 'work' (defined in his opposition to 'text') still imply a 'maker', thus an intention, which in itself means a teleology for something only temporarily 'unfinished'.

[3] The myth of the author, according to Barthes, is that the author is imagined as the *origin* of the work, the guiding principle, the intention, etc. In this sense, the footageheads are not only without any 'master' figure, but also lack a 'master-mythology'. Does this orphaned sub-culture thus not prove to be the crystallization of postmodern identity politics? They are identified as a group solely on their *a posteriori* interests; they have no connections of history, blood, land, faith, etc. For more, see Barthes' essays "The Death of the Author" and "From Work to Text" found in the volume *Image – Music – Text*.

nothing overt in the footage to suggest such a relation, but something about being a footagehead is being driven to the act of "assembling, consciously or unconsciously" because, as Parkaboy (an obsessed footagehead whom Cayce only knows virtually through 'fff') says: "[h]omo sapiens[4] are about pattern recognition… Both a gift and a trap" (23). Like the Möbius strip topology used by Lacan, Cayce's abilities are both gifts and traps; it merely depends on how far into the novel one has traversed.

Cayce is by profession, a freelance marketing consultant who specializes in two fields: logo assessment and 'coolhunting'. The first kind of work implies simply making judgments on the potential success of corporate logos, as she is likened "to a very specialized piece of human litmus paper" (13). It is not products or commodities specifically which she judges, but their image. In other words, she is concerned with the marketability of form, and not content.[5] Part of her contract entails that she is not required to offer any explanation or justification for her assessments precisely because her reaction to logos functions automatically and is thus not capable of discursive representation. Her talents depend on her ability to channel apophenia into a subtle but tactical yardstick with which she measures a logo's potential for creating and adhering to patterns.

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[4] Parkaboy's use of the expression "homo-sapien" is worth considering because of its connotations of the origins of mankind as we know it today. This is the first man defined specifically by his mental capacity (*sapientem* = to be wise), as opposed to his physical capacity (*Homo erectus* = man that stands upright). So not only is the 'mental man' driven to create patterns as a product of his wisdom (in an a-temporal sense), but in terms of origins (whether of the species *or* the individual), what defines man is the step from physical uprightness to mental inquisitiveness. The connection between the origins of *Homo sapien* and the origins of the ego in the individual and how they relate to pattern recognition will be dealt with in detail later.

[5] Speaking in terms of 'truth' Jean-François Lyotard defines the goals of postmodernism as "no longer truth but performativity" (46). This means that it is not so much the content that is being judged as 'true' or 'false' but rather *how something is performed*—that is, its form. This certainly resonates with all the emphasis placed on the marketing of commodities rather than their design in the early chapters of the novel.

She must decide whether an image has the power to be successfully copied into the imaginations of the masses. It is whether a certain meme[6] has a high probability of survival in its environment against all other memes (will it adapt into the patterns of successful reproduction, will it stick and be passed on, etc.). Her other ability is similar: instead of assessing a corporate logo— someone's intentional attempt to integrate a new pattern—she also acts as a 'coolhunter'. This means finding something random or unintentional with potentially high memetic reproductive capabilities. It's about seeking out what could become the avant garde: it is always already the avant garde in the literal sense, but it needs to be identified or labeled as such by the coolhunter to have the status of the avant garde. The idea is that the trendy new 'cool' is out there, with a life of its own. The coolhunter simply elevates an organic trend through an indexing and fixing it to larger brand names with wider consumer potentialities. What is immediately recognizable to the coolhunter must be plucked from the obscure and propped in the obvious. To stay within the real avant garde and locate the cool, Cayce uses her extra-sensitive quality to pick up on, sometimes by accident, an idiosyncratic style which she foresees has the power to become a popular trend. But really the distinction between people buying into an image (or buying a product) and making it cool on one hand, and on the other hand something being cool first and popular afterwards is never so clear cut. Though it is her job to notice 'cool'

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[6] A meme is a piece of cultural information similar to how a gene is a piece of biological information, both are subjected to a form of 'selection' and 'survival of the fittest', meaning what survives has the best reproductive capabilities in its environment. For more, see Richard Dawkins' book *The Selfish Gene* (1976), chapter 11 entitled "Memes: the new replicators."

before anyone else, the process is still bound to the formula that "no customers, no cool" (88). As Cayce explains:

> "It's about group behavior pattern around a particular class of object. What I do is pattern recognition. I try to recognize a pattern before anyone else does."
> "And then?"
> "I point a commodifier at it" (88).

While some would attribute an almost mystical dimension to these abilities, akin to a "sensitive", they have also been compared to more of an "allergy, a morbid and sometimes violent reactivity to the semiotics of the marketplace" (2). Not being able to put into words her 'allergic and semiotic' reaction likens this sense to a proprioceptive intuition of the Lacanian Real: unexplainable but powerful enough to induce a severe nausea or vertigo.[7] Her reaction to a Tommy Hilfiger display is compared to someone with peanut allergies whose "head swells like a basketball. When it happens to Cayce, it's her psyche" (17) and further described as a "pure reaction, like biting down hard on a piece of foil" (18). Like Parkaboy's comment that pattern recognition serves simultaneously as gifts and traps, Cayce's talent is offset by this sickness, and her success depends on her ability to withstand an unexplainable and incurable malaise of the 21st century: mass consumption.

In the beginning of the novel, she is called upon to assess an athletic footwear logo, a harmless job. But it is her special abilities that lead her to embark on a dangerous mission around the world involving corporate espionage,

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[7] I am reminded of Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), where the character of Barton Keyes (played by Edward G. Robinson) has an ulcer which he refers to as his "little man" and acts up whenever he intuits a client is attempting to defraud the insurance company where he works as a claims manager.

internet perversities and ex-Soviet mafia. It is a world where 'gifts' become 'traps', as when she is given a laptop that is used to monitor her web activities, trapping her under perpetual, virtual surveillance; or when a harmless Perrier is dosed with inhibiting drugs. But it is also a world where a 'trap' can easily become a 'gift', as when the Russian prison (likening 'traps' with cages) in which she finds herself after consuming the toxic Perrier turns out to be an institution for rendering digital video, where the inmates are safe, healthy, and receive a salary to send home to their families (as opposed to every other Russian prison which are hothouses of rape, HIV and corruption).

It is not a stretch, then, to assume that Cayce has found an ultimate 'cool' in the footage—that she can appreciate, before the masses get a hold of it, the potential allure of such a mysterious entity. Is it a product in itself, or merely a kind of advertisement that points to something else (but what?). I think the footage offers Cayce the opportunity to have found something with which she is spared the task of merely pointing towards it a commodifier. Compared to corporate logos and patterns of dress and style, the footage is a refuge for Cayce and her sensitive abilities to feel and dream without the pressure of buying and selling. But the average footagehead (like Parkaboy) does not have Cayce's abilities. So aside from Cayce's work and preoccupations, what is it about the footage that is so special for everyone else?

There is no doubt that the footage is on equal footing with footageheads as religion is to the devout. With religion, there is some "sensation of 'eternity", a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, 'oceanic'… that is seized upon by the various Churches and religious systems" (Freud *CD* 11)—in

other words, a form of 'transcendence'. Just as the religious institutions locate something within the mind to "seize upon", the corporate institutions and commodity makers also depend on some more basic mental longing in perpetuating their images and lifestyles. The Lacanian Thing (a modification of *das Ding* from Freud), is such an object of the real around which desire continually circulates. The important thing here is that this circling remains perpetual—it never attains the Thing-in-itself. This "triumphant circularity" around things or commodities is the basis of 'coolhunting'—that is, "[t]he act of discovering what's cool is what causes cool to move on" (Gladwell 78). The Thing not only sets desire in motion, but keeps it spinning around in circles while keeping its satisfaction always at a distance like Achilles to the tortoise.

But what about the footage? I argue that this is much closer to religious sensations than to consumer drives precisely for its *un*interpretable and mystical qualities. The fact that the claims made by religious institutions are impossible to justify empirically only strengthen the will to faith, which is, in essence, belief, not only without proof, but more so in spite of it. Likewise with the footage: footageheads' obsessions can not possibly be derived from the *meaning* of the footage (its plot, its theme, etc.) because there is such awesome ambiguity there. What they have is faith in a bigger (moving) picture that is strong enough to sustain their devotion despite its lack of any guarantee. This is easily comparable to the religiously devout and their belief in reality bigger than the one presentable to the senses and scientific discovery. In both cases, uninterpretable faith triumphs over any material assurances. Put simply, they are both about finding meaningful patterns in the random, the chaotic, and the quotidian.

To return to this 'oceanic' feeling and its relation to the footage, it is helpful to go in search for the origin of apophenia itself, that is, the need to bring things together—to create a unity out of disparity.

In Lacan's continuation and modification of Freud, the 'sensation of eternity' or the 'oceanic' is increasingly associated with the longing for that primary oneness the infant had with its mother. Is this longing related to the human tendency towards pattern recognition, whether patterns are found or created? Answering this requires putting Freud on hold for a moment to dwell a little on the mind's proclivity for patterns, which is especially prevalent with visual imagery. Afterwards this exploration will continue to work backwards towards the primal dislocation of 'self' from 'eternity', which will be the basis for the formation of the ego, one that is inherently split, and thus charged with the drive to re-connect.

So back to the footage. Before examining the huge import of 'the image' taken in isolation right away, an exploration of what happens when images are sequenced should be considered. One of the passions shared by various footageheads is to create their own edits. If it's "one of the best, it's as though it's all new" (Gibson 125) at least according to the viewer. This statement emphasizes the notion that originality—or *original meaning*—is more derived from *form* rather than *content*. The order or presentation and perception of the thing defines the thing itself, whereas the thing taken by itself lacks its constitutive significance through its absence of formal positioning. But all this is only significant for the viewer of these 'edits', viewing these experimentations for the first time. One must not forget that there is an 'editor' (a maker to the second

degree?). Many editors result in a proliferation of the sequences, each adhering to different narratives. This demonstrates the ease with which a series of images can be ordered by a wide variety of human minds with their own intentions. But aside from the multiplicity of perspective, there is still the need to make a whole unity out of distinct elements. Just as the Completists and Progressives disagree on the process of the footage's genesis (as different edits disagree on the order), none abandons the idea and hope of a coherent narrative.

Apart from the operations of close reading, one doesn't ordinarily consider an image in isolation if it is presented as part of a sequence. The perception of images is thus shaped by their position in the sequence—their meaning is determined structurally and temporally by from their relation to every other image in the structure. Cinema offers an example of how the mind perceives, and thus manipulates images in order for them to conform to a sensible whole. There is a fitting anecdote about Lev Kuleshov, a pioneering Soviet film theorist, and his experiment with *montage* which made use of random stock footage.

> Using a single, lengthy take of an actor's face with a neutral expression, Kuleshov sliced it into three equal segments and intercut these with images of a bowl of steaming food, a dressed out corpse and a child playing. When he projected his completed film to an audience barely conversant with the new medium, however, they praised the actor's subtle ability to convincingly portray the emotions of hunger, grief, and joy (Douglas np.).

This example clearly demonstrates how the image's reception is always organized by what surrounds it, by its context. It also exhibits the ease with which a master editor can control an audience's perceptions. But it is not merely the work of an

artist or manipulator; it is simply that Kuleshov understood some human prerogative to transform images into a narrative whole (for him, 'editing' was the essence of cinema). What Kuleshov did is extremely similar to what the rogue editors of the footage do, that is, they create a montage with pre-filmed material, and derive meaning from these novel combinations. It shows not merely that the artist or editor has a proclivity to assemble, but also that an audience 's basic understanding lies in *assemblage*—isolated instances cut and spliced together to form one continuous whole.

So the binary between unity and disparity is always biased toward, or privileges, the former. It is with this in mind that we go back to Freud and his theories of the infantile realization of its autonomy, and distinctness, from its mother. This realization is, in a sense, a primary and traumatic learning experience; it is a knowledge of separation and fragmentation which ultimately leads to knowledge of self. Once this consideration of Freud is understood, this chapter shall proceed to lead into Lacan and his concept of the imaginary stage of ego development.

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PRIMAL TRAUMAS

In Sigmund Freud's work *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he refers to the concept of an 'oceanic feeling,'[8] which is "a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole" (12). This is the feeling that a neo-

[8] It is an exaggerated and unexplainable love of life, or better yet, a strong reluctance to die—to leave this world with which one feels so connected. But the world of the new born is far more personal and subjective (practically solipsistic) than the one experienced by the adult. In *CD*, it is Freud's friend, Romain Rolland, who describes this feeling as the source of religious emotion for adults. It is Freud who connects this feeling with that of the neo-nate.

nate has in terms of how it perceives and orders the entirety of reality. It is dependant on the infant being unable to make any distinction between the limits of its body and the rest of the external world. It is, in other words, an *autarchic fiction*—the be all and end all of everything that exists. Freud goes on, "[a]n infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in upon him" (13) meaning, if the mother's breast is the source, it must actually be a part of the infant. Now, at some point, because of the baby's needs[9] (food, warmth, etc.) he will come to realize that his needs are not satisfied by his *needing* alone, but dependant on *others*—a separate, and sometimes uncaring or hostile, external reality. What is significant here is the distinction between this initial, primary pure state of being, where all is unified and whole, versus the shattering of that state into a world of separation and difference—in other words, disparity, with its psychological connotations of separation, loneliness and alienation.

This is the primal trauma that forces the infant out of its autarchic fiction and into a world of others. It is, so to speak, a reenactment of birth[10]—a second expulsion from the Eden of the womb[11] (in the literal sense, the pre-nate in the

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[9] The word 'need' adheres perfectly to Lacan's three stages of *need*, *demand* and *desire*, which parallel the stages of *real*, *imaginary*, and *symbolic*. The neo-nate, before realizing the distinction of egos (imaginary), and way before acquiring language (symbolic) is in the *real* state of a primal unity where, for example, the need for milk *automatically* produces the breast to satisfy it. This state will eventually be shattered in the mirror stage (pun intended).

[10] The "*trauma of birth*" is echoed after the first six months of "*physiological prematurity*" as "*the trauma of weaning*" (Lacan *É* 152). Also, the infant's relation to the breast is "specified in the function of weaning which prefigures castration" (719), thus enforcing the link between the realization of one's disparity (symbolized by the fragmentation of castration) and one's separation from the external world (as the breast is among the first of objects which will come to symbolize what is not part of the individual infant's corporeal body).

[11] The Garden of Eden is a very apt metaphor for the womb: Adam and Eve were at one with their surroundings, before separating themselves off from nature through their shame and their clothing (which literally acts as a separating layer between one's body and the environment). And is not

womb is physically attached via the umbilical cord to its environment, it is literally attached to the source of its nourishment, so the need of sustenance and the acquisition of nourishment is truly contained in one, single being). But something different occurs this time. Because this trauma has been repeated, its consequences are dealt with in a very different fashion. Slavoj Žižek describes something similar to this notion when he says that something (traumatic) "can succeed only as a repetition of a first failed attempt" (*SOI* 60).[12] The very first birth (the real/literal birth) does not succeed in awakening the neo-nate into a consciousness of 'self' as distinct from others—the infant continues to believe in his autarchic fiction for some time. In other words, the trauma is immediately repressed and the infant continues to live obliviously. But when the trauma is repeated, this time as only a shadow of the original (because the infant is already born, in the literal sense), its effects do not have the same traumatic power as before. Instead of repressing and returning once again to the fiction of unity, this time the infant is forced to deal with the trauma by beginning to accept the existence of others.[13] That is, instead of escaping the trauma by returning *inwards* once again, now the infant is forced *outwards* as his only refuge from the trauma of birth and awareness of self. The acceptance of fragmentation and discontinuity is the residue of this trauma of separation.

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the biblical legend of the Expulsion from Eden a religious way to symbolically come to grips with the trauma of birth? Does not the emphasis on the pain of childbearing (the divine curse on Eve and all women) symbolize the fear of fragmentation, as the child is ruptured from the mother? Most importantly of all, let us recall that the fall, expulsion and subsequent curses (mortality, painful pregnancies) is the result of Adam and Eve's eating from the Tree of Knowledge. This is all a symbolic retelling of mankind's first instance of knowledge, which is knowledge of self (as our couple became all too shamefully aware of their own bodies).

[12] Žižek is speaking of Hegel's historical necessity, but the analogy works here as well

[13] The 'others' being referred to here corresponds to Lacan's *petit autre* of the imaginary stage. With the acquisition of language, the entire symbolic dimension of *all others* is transformed to the Lacanian *grand Autre*, the 'big Other'.

So if the trauma of biological birth is repressed, denied, the second is inescapable. After being literally born the infant still clings to the notion of his ultimate oneness with the universe. But once that fiction is dissolved through his needs (that is, the need of and reliance upon others who may not always be directly available), and the infant becomes all too aware of his separation, he then begins the task of attempting to re-connect with the world—to get back to that pure state of being. Here we have a glimpse of the allure of apophenia: what might be the motivation for *bringing things together* as both a return to this pure state of being, and, as we shall see, the need to connect events into meaningful stories—to look for patterns.

It is at this point we come to the importance of Lacan's 'mirror stage' because of the way he returns to Freud and modifies his original thinking on this crucial phase of an infant's psychic development. For Lacan, the first instance that an infant will understand the concept of a whole unified entity is when the infant sees a reflection of himself in the mirror *in toto*. This is the initiation of the concept of an 'ego'. It is not, however, the Cartesian ego that is supposed to be the core of an individual's self. For Lacan the ego is immediately tied to an illusion, that is, something the infant *sees* when looking out toward the external world. So although this ego is a reflection of the corporeal baby itself, it is important to hold onto the fact that it is nothing but a specular reflection—not the baby itself. First of all, the reflection in the mirror appears to the baby as complete gestalt, while when the baby tries to look down at himself, it can only glimpse fragments—the gestalt is denied him (while the baby can see its two arms, it cannot see the point at which the two arms are connected, that is, the

where the shoulders meet the upper torso). "The fragmented body" is, for Lacan, the condensation of the anxiety that arises out of this discord between the reflection and the self (*É* 78). It is the same anxiety that emerges in the wake of the destruction of Freud's oceanic feeling, keeping in mind that 'fragmentation' *is* the breaking up of something whole (or the illusion of ontological wholeness). This anxiety then serves to encourage (often prematurely) the formation of the ego by associating it with its complete image in the mirror. So the second import of the mirror stage is the fact that the initial instance of *self* is grounded in the visual appropriation of *another*,[14] for a reflection is not the same as what it reflects[15]. In order for the baby to assume a whole identity founded in its image, it must cross over from its fragmented *Innenwelt*, and project an ego *out there*, in the *Umwelt*. Thus for Lacan, going further than Freud (and completely against the grain of Descartes), the ego is not the core of the individual, but instead the first instance of the individual's reaction to his specular encounter with the negation of his personal unity, formed out of the anxiety caused by the threat of fragmentation.[16] As Lacan states in regards to the ego, it is "only a privileged symptom, the human symptom par excellence, the mental illness of man" (*S1* 16). What this essentially means is that the entire idea of having a single unified ego is the product of a *mis*recognition, or in the more extreme psychoanalytic terms of 'mental illness', it is a delusion. We can go on to say that what initiates this

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[14] "[T]he first effect of the imago that appears in human beings is that of the subject's *alienation.* It is in the other that the subject first identifies himself and even experiences himself" (*É* 148).
[15] Recall René Magritte's critique of mistaking the representation for the thing itself with his famous painting "La Trahison des Images", which is a painting of a pipe with the caption "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." Magritte's painting dates from 1929, forty years before Lacan delivered his paper "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function" as a lecture to the International Congress of Psychoanalysis.
[16] Often manifested in the form of castration anxiety (*É* 78).

illusion/delusion is the demand for complete unity, while the materials used to shape this illusion are the visual tools of the images of others. It is images, both in the mirror (ego) and then later in the figures of others like parents, role models, teachers, sports heroes, political leaders and rock n' roll superstars (*imagos*, or ideal egos) that direct (or mislead) the subject's attention away from the radical disunity of the self, from the environment (*Innenwelt* from *Umwelt*), and into the specular misrecognition of a newly-formed, seemingly coherent ego. What must be emphasized a final time is that the identification with *imagos* is the effect of a sense of disparity with the self and the demand to be whole again.

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NARRATED IDENTITIES

Moving beyond the subject's drive to appropriate the other's image as the constituting factor of the ego, it is time to return to 'the footage' and its captivating abilities.[17] Is there a connection between the imperative to sustain an illusory unity of self and the recognition of patterns as narratives (i.e.: the footage)? Of course the answer is yes. For what is self if not a narrative that sustains connections between memories from the past with situations in the present with projections of the future? Taken synchronically, it would be hard to identify the stumbling baby with the university student with the aged old man, for what really connects them?[18] Here is the importance of creating a logical chain diachronically, as a baby *becomes* a student who then *becomes* a senior. It has

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[17] For many scholars, the entire basis of psychoanalytically-oriented film theory turns upon the Lacanian Mirror Stage. See Mayne, Judith. *Cinema and Spectatorship*. London: Routledge, 1993; Silverman, Kaja. *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis ad Cinema.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988.

[18] Biologically speaking, there is not a single cell in my body now that was present in when I was a child.

already been pointed out that the man in the footage is assumed to be the same person (*actor*?) every time, when really he is composed of

> [m]ere scraps of found video. How once a man had stood on a platform in a station, and turned, and raised his hand, the motion captured, the grainy image somehow finding its way, however much later, to one of Nora's [the footage-maker] subsidiary screens. To be chosen, today, by the roving, darting cursor. Elements of a man's gesture becoming aspects of the boy in the dark coat, his collar up (Gibson 315).

It turns out that the male character from the footage is not at all one and the same actor, but rather created from footage taken at different places and times—"mere scraps of found video". The identity of the man in the footage turns out to be just like the subject's sense of personal identity; it is really a piecemeal assembly of scraps of memory—archived footage from our mental editing suites.

The notion of reworking old material, that is, creating something new by rearranging something old, is significant in the postmodern setting of the novel and its ideas. But the significance of this will have to be put on hold for the time being. Before exploring the full import of the footage (as if Cayce's quest had already come to its conclusion) it is worth considering how Cayce came to be initially charged with the 'case' of uncovering the maker of the footage.

Pattern Recognition is a novel dealing with corporate espionage in the world of global marketing (among many other things). The character named Hubertus Bigend (a reified version of Pierce Inverarity from *The Crying of Lot 49*), is the founder and owner of Blue Ant, a marketing firm. Like his namesake St. Hubert, he is perpetually in good spirits and optimistic, no doubt related to his immense wealth and success. But St. Hubert was also fond of the hunt, similar to

how Hubertus Bigend hopes to hunt down the maker of the footage, albeit by proxy through Cayce and Boone Chu. His company, Blue Ant, is described as "more post-geographic than multinational, [sic.] the agency has from the beginning billed itself as a high-speed, low-drag life-form in an advertising ecology of lumbering herbivores" (7), a description highlighting the company's aggressive and predatory nature in overtly primitive terms. Bigend's wealth is inestimable, but it is sufficient to warrant near-diplomatic status any where in the world (he has an all-access parking pass for his Hummer anywhere in London, where parking for compact cars is already scarce). In a coy metaphor, the company Blue Ant is said to have "sprung from [his] smooth and ironic brow" (7). This metaphor is quite curious at close inspection; it immediately brings to mind the goddess Athena being born from the brow of Zeus. Likening Bigend to Zeus is not much of a stretch, for Bigend's wealth does indeed afford him god-like powers, including an all pervasive surveillance of his employees and his competition as if from the lofty heights of Olympus (a London office in SoHo, other offices in New York, Tokyo, etc.). But likening the company Blue Ant to the goddess Athena is also worth examining. Athena is the goddess of *wisdom* (Blue Ant's ability to predict new marketing schemes and novel commodity phenomena, thanks to hiring people like Cayce), *war* (the competitive nature of marketing, Blue Ant's use of corporate espionage and sabotage), and *weaving* (the ability to insert new market memes into the network of consumerism and brand-name logo-centrism). These qualities produce interestingly enough, the shorthand of 'www', likening Blue Ant's ubiquity to that of the World Wide Web,

which is a major source of its success[19]. But this interpretation is getting carried away in drawing connections from one literary text to another (Gibson to Greek Mythology), assuming everything points to something else and all is connected. This is literary apophenia in action.

Bigend hires Cayce to do some freelance work with her special "litmus"-like abilities. It may seem complicated, but the chain of contracts goes something like this: Blue Ant (marketing firm), hired by Heinzi & Pfaff (graphic design firm) to assess a logo they designed for yet another company, a manufacturer of athletic footwear, goes on to hire Cayce (freelancer). All this work and outsourcing has nothing to do with any product itself, nor necessarily with how it will be marketed, but simply with the logo alone, that is, with the primary visual signifier. Cayce's contract stipulates that she is to offer no suggestions or explanations for her 'consultation', but merely to say, yay or nay, whether the logo will work. The average consumer is expected to misrecognize the desire for the logo or brand name (signifier) as the desire for the product itself (signified). Karl Marx theorized that one facet of the transition from the Feudal era to the modern industrial era was the replacement of relations between people to the relations between commodities. The transformation is defined as "a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes [perceiving the shift to capitalism], the fantastic form of the relation between things" (Marx 83).[20] In the pre-capitalist

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[19] To dwell a little longer on the symbolic significance of Blue Ant, the name refers to the insect Diamma Bicolor, which is not an ant at all but a wasp. This recalls Magritte and that nothing is what it seems. The Diamma Bicolor is also a famous hunter of other insects.

[20] This "fantastic relation between things" is Marx's celebrated 'commodity fetish' which elevates ordinary physical objects of exchange to phantasmatic dimensions of desire among humans. This is similar to Hegel's theory that Desire is always directed "toward another Desire" (Kojève 6), which in turn is reiterated by Lacan as the desire of the (big) Other.

feudal era everyone's place and position in society was rigidly outlined in well known hierarchies. A lord would trade with his vassal appropriately, with fees and tithes paid out more according to the rank of the individuals involved and less to do with the specific commodities or services. Likewise, members of different guilds would barter their products among each other in ways that strictly protected each member's specialized right to their own trade and regulated the worth of its products. For example, butchers and bakers did not trade meat for bread, but rather cooperated as one butcher to one baker in a mutually protected agreement between both people[21]. Then the early modern era freed individuals from the confines of their medieval social positioning by unshackling trade from the historical chains of guilds. But with this freedom man has been reduced to nothing more than a mere buyer or seller of commodities.[22] Thus when two individuals engage in some sort of transaction, they do so as invisible agents and allow the things (products, services) to take over the role of exchange. Money,[23] the most empty signifier of them all, has simplified the process by reducing everything to a common value scale where the products and services themselves get further reduced to mere bearers of value, thus becoming invisible themselves.

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[21] "When, in pre-capitalist society, the production of commodities has not yet attained universal character—that is, when it is still so-called 'natural production' which predominates—the proprietors of the means of production are still themselves producers… the proprietors themselves work and sell their products on the market" (Žižek *SOI* 22).

[22] "The predominant and determining form of their interrelations is not domination and servitude [feudal] but a contract between free people who are equal in the eyes of the law… two subjects meet, their relation is free of all the lumber and veneration of the Master… they meet as two persons whose activity is thoroughly determined by their egoistic interest… the other person is for him wholly delivered of all mystical aura" (Žižek *SOI* 25).

[23] Lacan bluntly states that money is "the signifier that most thoroughly annihilates every signification" (*É* 27). Žižek elaborates further on the emptiness of the signifier 'money' in regard to the commodity fetish by stating that "money is in reality just an embodiment, a condensation, a materialization of a network of social relations—the fact that it functions as a universal equivalent of all commodities is conditioned by its position in the texture of social relations" (*SOI* 31).

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THE FORMAL SHIFT

This brings up the transition from the modern to the postmodern; if Marx's transition to the modern era was a replacing of people with things, than the new transition replaces things with images and/or symbols, in other words, pure signifiers. Money was the first pure signifier that could point to everything with no intrinsic connection to anything. All this leads to the extreme emphasis placed on the marketing of a company's image (as in their logo) instead of their actual products or services. The power of logos functions by penetrating directly into everyone's fear of being internally fragmented, torn by a complex matrix of desires beyond one's conscious and control. If the modern era deprived individuals of their solid statuses as members of society's hierarchy, than the postmodern rids individuals of their solid statuses as individuals themselves—coherent and unified egos. Bearing in mind Lacan's theory of the fragmented ego as the origin of the ego's formation itself, as well as Freud's ego which is itself torn and controlled by sources seemingly foreign to the conscious mind, it becomes quite obvious why such an emphasis is placed on image. To get at the thing itself is impossible, for the closer it is approached, the more its symbolic (over)determinations will expose themselves and demonstrate the thing (whether commodity, or individual ego) as essentially fragmented and *un*real. Even more frightening is the exposure of one's own desire as embodied in the illusory 'thing'—that is, one sees the vulgar materiality of the everyday thing and thus loses the coordinates of desire around which one has structured their symbolic reality. Yet the image conveys the illusion of wholeness much more effectively.

In the consumer society in which Cayce Pollard works and Hubertus Bigend thrives, the appeal of completely buying into the imagery of a company is a much wiser investment than the consumer's fast and easy consumption of products. Image loyalty and obsession thus becomes a safe haven from the derision caused by fallible and fragmentable sensations[24] derived by the cheap, transient 'stuff' of reality.

It is also worth considering the fact that Cayce doesn't need to explain or justify her assessments of a company logo. When she is first shown the athletic footwear company's logo, "[s]he knows immediately that it does not, by the opaque standards of her inner radar, work. She has no way of knowing how she knows" (13). While one might know why *this* shoe, for example, is superior to *that* shoe (regarding actual things), the fact that one has bought into[25] *this* corporate image over *that* one (through their marketing schemes like logos) is much less concrete. It is the postmodern triumph of form over content. Because the determinations of a signifier is only relevant in relation to that of other signifiers, and not to the signified thing itself. When one buys into the 'meaning' of a company or corporation (what it represents in the consumer meme pool), it is a meaning much removed from the products—*one doesn't buy the company's content, but rather buys into its form*. Cayce's concern has nothing to do with getting people to buy the shoes; it is to create a pattern of logo recognition. In

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[24] For my purposes here I am using the word 'sensations' as opposed to 'perceptions' in the sense that with the latter I am referring to the registers of the visual and (and sometimes aural) senses while the former I am using to connote more that of touching. The difference is that a company's logo and overall image is recognized visually (and perhaps its theme tune registered aurally on radio and television advertisements) while their products are physically used (or tasted, etc.).

[25] It is crucial to keep in mind the difference between literal 'buying' (spending money to acquire something) and figurative 'buying into' (a metaphor for adhering to an ideology, belief, obsession, fad, etc.).

other words, the more she highlights the potential success of a logo, the more its repetition in public and publicity will ingrain a pattern in the consumer's imagination. Musing about the success of logo reproduction, she wonders "[w]ould it work its way into their dreams, eventually? Would their children chalk it in doorways before they knew its meaning as a trademark?" (13).[26] There is no explicit concern here for whether they will want to buy the shoes, an act that can be viewed as merely an affectatious follow-up to the primary effect.

Cayce's initial contract for Blue Ant does not stop with the footwear, however. Once Cayce's work is done on the H&P job, Bigend has another project for her, one that he considers to be more of a partnership than a paid service: to find the maker of the footage. The reasons for his desire are a complete mystery to Cayce at first, but the explanation is more than obvious. He considers it "the most effective piece of guerilla marketing ever" (67), because of the fact than nobody knows exactly *what* the footage *is*. In other words, it has sold people[27] on the advertising without even introducing a product, or as Bigend puts it, "I saw attention focused daily on a product that may not even exist… The most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century" (67). Here we return once again to the primacy of form over content, but in a new context. Prior to this realization, that is, when considering only the footageheads' addiction to viewing and editing the footage, it was solely the ordering of the footage that created pattern-like appeal. But, as similarly mentioned earlier in regard to corporate logos, for

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[26] This quote points to the muted post horn symbol in *The Crying of Lot 49* which will be explored in the next chapter.

[27] Like the distinction between literal 'buying' and figurative 'buying into', the difference between literal 'selling' (trading commodities for cash) and figurative 'selling' (a metaphor for convincing people of an idea, persuasion, etc.) is also worth keeping in mind.

Bigend it is the assumption that the footage is only an advertisement for something else—the form imposed upon an object in order to interest the consumer in 'owning' a content that does not, in any case, exist. What makes the footage that much more special than the corporate logo and company image, is that nobody is even certain whether any content exists beyond these elusive forms. And Bigend, however, is also aware of something else at work with the footage.

It is highly probable that what attracts a multi-millionaire marketing mogul to this sub-culture phenomenon is exactly the hidden association of the mind's attraction towards potential unity, both primordial and narrative, discussed earlier. Bigend goes on to describe his theories of marketing in relation to his interest in uncovering the mysterious creator, and intention, of the footage. In response to Cayce's admonition that she "knows in [her] heart" that the footage must be parts of a whole, Bigend replies

> The heart is a muscle… You 'know' in your limbic brain. The seat of instinct. The mammalian brain. Deeper, wider, beyond logic. That is where advertising works, not in the upstart cortex. What we think of as 'mind' is only a sort of jumped-up gland, piggybacking on the reptilian brainstem and the older, mammalian mind, but our culture tricks us into recognizing it as all of consciousness. The mammalian spreads continent-wide beneath it, mute and muscular, attending its ancient agenda. And makes us buy things… all truly viable advertising addresses that older, deeper mind, beyond language and logic" (71).

Thus Cayce's 'heartfelt' feeling (and perhaps desire) that the footage is, or will be part of a narrative whole is believed by Bigend to be one of the most instinctual

("mammalian") tendencies of the mind.[28] But he is not referring to the mind of "language and logic" which is, according to Lacanian theory, the symbolic mind of linguistic and semiotic structure. This is the "older, deeper" mind that touches back upon the initial formation of the ego.[29] It is what causes the infant to hastily reach outside of itself in order to flee the anxiety that the self is already incomplete. Because the infant will rush prematurely toward the image gestalt in the mirror in hope of covering up his basic fragmentation—lack of ego—it is a much more instinctual demand than those mediated by a logical mind. Speaking of a six month old infant, Lacan remarks on

> the striking spectacle of a nursling in front of a mirror who has not yet mastered walking, or even standing, but who… overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the constraints of his prop [*trotte-bébé*] in order to adopt a slightly leaning-forward position in an instantaneous view of the image in order to fix it in his mind (Lacan 75).

Does not this excited "leaning-forward" before one is able to properly stand remind one of the concept of impulse buying and the abuse of credit in contemporary consumerism? This is precisely what attracts the likes of Bigend: making purchases based on their immediate and instinctual appeal without thinking them through; spending money on a credit card when one does not necessarily have the means to pay it back. It is just like hastily going forward without the proper support (*trotte-bébé*) to keep one standing on one's two feet. And it is just this kind of attitude exploited by the marketing gurus in their quest

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[28] Yet Bigend's notion of 'instinctive and "mammalian" is not some primeval animal striving, but is probably much closer to some form of neo-primitivism encouraged in western culture and consumer societies (primal hording of possessions, herd instincts of 'fitting it', etc.).

[29] Like Freud's "compulsion to repeat" it is "more primal, more elemental, more deeply instinctual" (*BPP* 61) to the secondary drives that merely seek pleasure and satisfaction in the realm of the symbolic. And what more could a company want from its customers than blindly repeated consumption of its products, whether or not they actually provide identifiable pleasure

for consumer loyalty. How could a Hubertus Bigend ignore a loyalty as deep and profound as that exhibited by the footageheads?

Bigend has certainly read up on his pop-psychoanalysis. To be sure, he is well aware of the advantages of catering towards a Freudian Id in advertising, as it is the "seat of instinct" and more closely related to the human being's "mammalian" and primitive ancestry. This targeting of the primitive instincts in man (within a cultural milieu) has just as much to do with the beginnings of the individual's life (the infantile realization of self and separation) as it does with the beginnings of all of human life (mammalian instinct). Good marketing gets people to desire a product, and better marketing makes them demand it, but the best marketing turns its products into fundamental needs,[30] and this is what Bigend is attempting to achieve in understanding the footage. In fact, the genius of his marketing is knowing how to get subjects to *misrecognize their desires for needs*—in other words, to imbed a fundamental elision between the two concepts. He knows the powerful appeal there is in exciting an association with that initial unity the child has with the mother. The baby does not 'know' in any complicated sense why it has certain needs, and he certainly has no comprehension of the process by which his needs are satisfied. For during the earliest stages of infancy, the triad of attraction, need and satisfaction are inextricably linked. *Need* does not require justification; it exists for itself. Similarly, think of the mysterious attraction that the footage commands. The fact that nobody knows exactly *what* it is demonstrates that its meaning is not integrated into the symbolic network of signification. *But this is not its weakness but part of its strength*, the fact that it

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[30] Refer back to footnote number 7 for the specificity of the concepts 'desire', 'demand' and 'need'.

short-circuits itself beyond logical contemplation and directly into the pure network of immediate satisfaction.

The connection between the footage and Lacan's theory of the pre-symbolic or pre-linguistic stage[31] of mental functioning is further enforced towards the end of the novel. After several dangerous trips around the globe and a few shady deals, Cayce does succeed in locating the maker of the footage. The artist behind the enigmatic video clips turns out to be a young Russian woman named Nora Volkova, who was hospitalized after a bomb attack that killed her parents. The attack was due to her relation to Andrei Volkov, her uncle. In post-Soviet Russia, it is often assumed that the line between powerful businessmen and the mafia is practically non-existent. As Cayce's nemesis, Dorotea, explains, Volkov is

> [t]he invisible oligarch. The ghost. Very probably the richest of them all. He rode out the Bankers' War in ninety-three, untouched, then emerged to take even more. His roots are in organized crime, of course; it is natural here. Like many, he has suffered personal losses. His brother. That had more to do with what you think of as politics, than crime, but to make that distinction here has always been naïve (324).

It is interesting to note his 'invisible' and 'ghost'-like status. We learn not only that he is responsible not only for the bomb that hospitalizes Nora (in the sense it was he and his brother, Nora's father, who were targeted), but also that he is responsible for Nora's access to the facilities that enabled her to create the footage. In addition, he invested huge amounts of money to disseminate the

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[31] Playing on the polyvalence of the word 'stage' where it could mean a temporal stage, i.e.: a phase or step in a process, or the spatial stage, i.e.: the stage of acting (out), the scene. This is convenient when moving away from notions such as the 'mirror stage' as the time in the infant's life (six months) towards a synchronic graphing out of the multiple functions and orders co-existing (not necessarily peacefully) with each other in a more developed ego.

footage (almost) anonymously on the internet. This elusive figure is a kind of "mirror world" version of Hubertus Bigend, the eastern counterpart to massive surveillance and immense business. When the two later meet thanks to Cayce's efforts (but against her wishes), the meeting is described "like watching spiders mate" (342), a precarious and potentially volatile swapping of information. Volkov is the link between the footage being generated and the 'marketing' of the footage for the public. Yet his invisibility in the process, as well as his reasons for being a part of it at all, remain mysterious—he does not seem to fit into the pattern. Cayce's father once warned her in regard to apophenia that "while comforting yourself with the symmetry of it all… you stood all too real a chance of missing the genuine threat, which was invariably less symmetrical, less perfect" (304). If Volkov is an eastern counterpart to Bigend, it is still not a symmetrical relationship, for Volkov's motives are not as easily reducible to capital gain, and therefore must satisfy more profound desires. It turns out he does this because it is the only thing that keeps his wounded niece from falling into complete inactivity, and thus character suicide. If Nora Volkova stops editing footage, she is reduced to a catatonic state, thus surrendering up all of her symbolic identifications. As Nora's sister Stella says of Nora's work on the footage, "[w]hen she is not working, she is not there" (313). Giving Nora the opportunity to keep working is a way to hold on to some sense of familial continuity for Volkov, as he has no children and the girls have no parents. Perhaps this is a reversal of the child trying to re-connect with its mother: the father figure going beyond superficial motivation to hold on to the connection of the Volkov family name.

. Nora was a film student in Paris before the bomb attack. After the explosion and during her recovery she completely ceased to speak; it is as if the trauma of the explosion had caused her to regress back to the pre-symbolic, pre-linguistic world. Not only did she refrain from verbal communication, but had become unable (or unwilling) to recognize everyone close to her, especially her twin sister. Nora had been thrust once again into that oceanic state where all she is aware of is all that exists and everything outside is null. In other words, reality had become completely reduced to her own personal psychic reality, and whatever from outside does not 'make it in' to her mind, simply does not exist. When Nora does recommence communication with others, it is at first strictly with her twin sister, Stella, "and in a language that had been [theirs] in childhood.

" 'Twin talk'?"

"The language of Stella and Nora" " (298).

Nora begins to communicate, not with the commonly shared language norms of society—those held together by the Lacanian Master Signifier—but in a private language known only to her and her *semblable*. She speaks only with Stella, her twin, in other words, her mirror image.

The novel does not specify what kind of twins the girls are, but when Cayce is first introduced to Nora (who cannot actually be introduced since she does not acknowledge people) by Stella, she remarks that "[i]t is Stella's face, but some fault bisects it vertically, not quite evenly" (314). Nora sustained greater injuries from the bomb than did her sister Stella. A precarious piece of shrapnel had gotten lodged between the lobes of her brain and was impossible to remove without killing her. The "fault" which Cayce notices that "bisects" her face can

be interpreted as her fragmentation—it is what keeps her from being a complete and 'even' subject. Thus for Nora, seeing her twin sister Stella relatively unharmed or at least completely healed, offers Nora the image of the whole and unified version of herself. It is this reason that her first re-embarkment into communication is solely with this image. It is only afterwards that the "other language returns" (298) yet that does not last long at all, for Nora soon slips back into complete isolation, except for one activity, footage making.

In an attempt to ease her recovery, and perhaps coax her back into the everyday shared reality of symbolic relationships[32] and common language, her powerful and well-connected uncle arranges for an editing suite to be provided for her where she can resume working on her student films from Paris. The first film they give her, her last work-in-progress from film school, does not register, according to Stella. They then give her the last completed film she made, and this "she saw, but it seemed to cause her great pain. Soon she began to use the [editing] equipment. To edit. Recut" (298). For Nora, recovering from a bomb attack, the art of film has lost its original creative capacity in the sense of 'filming things', i.e.: finding new images from 'out there' in external reality and capturing them 'in there', on celluloid, in the world of the screen. An example of this is when the doctors obtain for her footage from the security cameras in the hospital; Nora becomes transfixed with the image of a man and isolates a single frame of him. So in real life, "they brought him to her, but she had no reaction. She ignored him" (299). Cinema has become purely internalized with everything

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[32] What Lacan would call, by way of referencing Juvenal, "realities defined by the common assent of healthy minds in healthy bodies" (*É*136). Not only do they want to make Nora healthy again, but to reincorporate her into the 'body politic' of everyday life.

needed for its content already captured in its medium. All that was left to do for Nora was to edit, recut, create patterns.

The idea of doing away with original source material and instead simply rearrange already-used materials of the past is a central notion for postmodern theory. Frederic Jameson refers to this concept as *pastiche*, which is defined as "the random cannibalization of all styles of the past" (Jameson 18). For one thing, the footage certainly exhibits a pastiche of styles attributed to many auteurs. Whereas Cayce views a clip of footage that has been compared to style of Tarkovsky, she notes that the footage is notorious for "claiming every possible influence. Truffaut, Peckinpah… The Peckinpah people… are still waiting for the guns to be drawn" (Gibson 4). But to getting back to the point, it is not merely *style* (i.e.: form) that is being reused and pastiched, but actual material (i.e.: content). Whether the source footage comes from a student film, a security camera, etc., does not intrinsically matter; there is no primary or master source. This is what separates postmodern pastiche from modern parody; the latter "deviate[s] from a norm" (Jameson 16) whereas the former asserts the heterogeneity of all forms, thus eliminating the notion of 'norms'.

Another postmodern staple is also at work here: the simulacra, or "the identical copy for which no original has ever existed" (Jameson 18). To be sure, there was once an original male homosapien who was once recorded on a security camera before ending up on Nora's editing suite. But this man has no connection with the elusive character created in the footage, the character that has been copied and downloaded copious times and viewed over and over round the

globe.[33] Further evidence is that there have been several male homosapiens caught on tape at different times and in different places that wind up composing the sole man from the footage. So it is not an original person *as content* that matters, but only when placed on screen, in the context of the footage, do they then *take on the form* of the man with the dark jacket.

Another aspect of the footage's appeal is the neutrality of the image of the man or the woman. I have already mentioned that the footage is devoid of clues as to the *who*s, *when*s and *where*s of the footage's content. Perhaps it is just this neutrality that creates a maximum effectiveness for imaginary identification. That is to say, in regard to Lacan's mirror stage, these characters are designed to be ideal egos. Their 'ideality' arises not because they may possess 'perfect' or ideal character traits; rather, it is through their 'openness'— that is, their not having any hard, specific traits at all— that they avoid offering the viewer any contradictory traits that would bar the viewer from creating a total identification. In other words, the more specific, detailed and 'full' the characters hypothetically 'are,' the more 'closed off' they would be to the ordinary view who attempts to 'connect.' To give some previously terms a new spin, they are empty form, devoid of content.

Returning to Nora, her last-completed film project was shown at the Cannes Film Festival. After the explosion, she begins to re-edit, and the film finally becomes completed once it is reduced to a single frame, that of an out-of-focus bird in flight. According to Stella, "she went inside, after that" (Gibson 298). What this means is that Nora once again reverted back to her own isolated

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[33] We can say with Magritte, "Ceci n'est pas l'homme".

and semi-catatonic existence, talking to absolutely no one, let alone being aware of their presences and existences, even Stella. She has once more rejected external reality for her own private and exclusive psychic reality. Just as the narratives she constructs out of found footage begin and end with what is already locked up on film, her existence begins and ends with the machinations of her mind, which is nothing more than an extension of a video editing suite. Everyone from Stella and her uncle, to hordes of prisoners working on rendering her film (at Volkov's expense) revolve around the workings of this pure drive, *sans* ego. But we do not have to stop there. For the source can go deeper than Nora and right to the fragmentation of the brain itself; it is "[o]nly the wound, speaking wordlessly in the dark" (316).[34] The drive to create, to reorder the world of images into something beautiful but incomprehensible, the enterprise of obsessed footageheads desperately trying to piece together the pattern, has its primal origins in the fundamental split that is the wound in Nora's ego.

Whether it is for the maker of the footage, one of the independent editors of a sequence, or the multitude of spectators, they all share the common proclivity to create order out of fragmentation. The desire to order and unify drives every individual to reach out to an incomprehensible and hostile world and hopefully take back into themselves a new sense of unity and wholeness. It is what makes art worth creating, as for Nora, just as it is what makes it worth appreciating, for Cayce, the footageheads, and all of us looking in.

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[34] Cathy Caruth explains this as a "sorrowful *voice* that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*" (2). Since Nora does not actually speak (i.e. use her voice), the editing of the footage comes to stand in for her mode of outward expression.

Chapter Two: "*Shall I Project a World?*"

The Paranoid Structure of Knowledge in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

Thomas Pynchon's second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), is the story of Oedipa Maas, a thirty-something married suburbanite who embarks on a semiotic quest through the underbelly of America and its tangle of untold histories. Always perched on the fence between the grandest of conspiracies and an all-encompassing paranoia, Oedipa's perception of self and reality take the characteristic of apophenia to either enlightening or delusional heights. This dual ultimatum depends on which side of the fence we as readers lay: in the words of the novel "inside, safe, or outside, lost" (105). Using many Lacanian concepts (such as the letter, the *point de capiton*, the object, the Borromean triumvirate of orders, etc.) this chapter explores the dubious nature of 'meaning' and 'order' as a potential delusional screen for meaninglessness and chaos, and how the apopheniac or paranoiac's subjectivity is intimately chained to such projectile screens. The initial two investigations are on how one is summoned out of the Imaginary order and into the Symbolic signifying chain. The chapter then proceeds to probe the dualistic nature (meaning/meaninglessness, order/chaos) through the concept of *entropy* to finally unmask the true relationship between interpretation and paranoia.

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LETTERS OF ARRESTATION[1]

The novel opens with Oedipa returning home to find that she "had been named executor, or she supposed executrix[2]" (1) of a wealthy ex-boyfriend's

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[1] Although the word sounds invented, there is an entry for it in the *OED Online*: "The action of arresting; arrest… Stopping."

[2] Note the specificity of inflecting executor into executrix, as if Oedipa's subjectivity is predetermined by her role and sex. One can say that Pierce's posthumous 'naming' her as executrix is a kind of assault on her personal life, as in a figurative rape. Indeed, this foreshadows

estate after his unexplained death. This is clearly an example of being 'arrested by the letter'[3]—that is, interpellated (in the Althusserian sense) into a specific subjective role or symbolic mandate. Pierce Inverarity, the ex-boyfriend, remains a hidden figure in the novel, but one who "had assets numerous and tangled enough" (1) to make him a proverbial 'Master' figure, or rather, in Lacanian terms a 'Name-of-the-Father' figure. Unlike a literal paternal figure whose foremost symbolic role is prohibitive of primary, incestuous sexual relationships, this father 'figure' signifies more Pierce's omnipotence and elusive ubiquity: absolute, but never overtly present. He comes to represent the central and inherently absent signifier at the center of the entire symbolic order or the big Other. And it is the letter which Oedipa receives in the opening of the novel which is in a way her invitation to enter the symbolic order—an open position for her to fill. But to fill this space, she must determine through decipherment,[4] interpretation and detection *what it all means*—in other words, what *is* the big Other of which Pierce Inverarity is the elusive central signifier and of which his will is testament and law. The beginning of the novel enforces this idea by creating a pattern with

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the multiple attempts by male characters to bed Oedipa in one way or another: Roseman, Metzger, Miles, John Nefastis, etc.

[3] In the "Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"", Lacan uses the actual letter that is circulated between the Queen, The Minister and Dupin in Poe's story to represent "the material medium [*support*] that concrete discourse borrows from language" (*Ė* 413)—that is, the letter is a representative of the symbolic order itself. It is a signifier of the order, but thus must signify nothing in itself, except pure signifiance—that is, absence. Lacan demonstrates in the seminar that the network of relations among all the characters (and indeed, their subjective determinations) is contingent on their position in regards to the purloined letter. "We shall see that their displacement is determined by the place that a pure signifier—the purloined letter—comes to occupy in their trio" (10). This serves as a specific instance of the overall claim that "it is the symbolic order which is constitutive of the subject" (7): the letter is the material signifier of an absence in the symbolic order, and it is this absence that allows the subject's entry into it. But because "[t]he signifier persists as a meaningless letter which marks the destiny of the subject and which he must decipher" (Evans 100), the subject, like Oedipa, is constituted by the charge of interpretation.

[4] From *OED Online*, "The action of deciphering; *esp.* interpretation of hieroglyphics or of obscure inscriptions."

another elusive master/father figure who interpellates symbolic mandates: Uncle Sam,[5] whom Oedipa envisions with "eyes gleaming unhealthily, his sunken yellow cheeks most violently rouged, his finger pointing between her eyes. I want you" (8). Uncle Sam is a pure symbol in the sense that he is an image with no actual, historical person as the image's source[6]. This declarative "pointing" is precisely the kind of statement made by the big Other that draws one inwards while at the same time making us beg the Lacanian question, *Che Vuoi?*, what do you want from me? Similar to how Oedipa becomes defined through the letter and subsequently the symbol of Uncle Sam (which morphs into the face of her psychiatrist—a symbol for mental normality), Pierce himself (for whom Uncle Sam is an exaggerated icon) is possibly killed by a "whitewashed bust of Jay Gould [he] kept over the bed" (1). This causes Oedipa to wonder whether he was "crushed by the only ikon in the house" (1)—in other words, stricken from Real existence by the Sign (like Pierce, Gould symbolizes immense wealth and power

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[5] "Common folklore holds origins trace back to soldiers stationed in upstate New York, who would receive barrels of meat stamped with the initials U.S. The soldiers jokingly referred to it as the initials of the troops' meat supplier, Samuel Wilson of Troy, New York" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Sam#_ref-0). This is interesting to note because one of Pierce Inverarity's first so-called ambassadors whom Oedipa encounters is a representative from the law firm that handles Pierce's estate, named Metzger. *Metzger* is one German word for Butcher. Medieval German Butchers traveled from town to town and also subsequently began acting as mail carriers, which thus resonates with the rest of the novel's pre-occupation with the postal histories and communication in general. For an elaboration, see Grant. *Companion*. p.11.

[6] Uncle Sam can be considered an image of the "National Symbolic" which Lauren Berlant, in her book, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life*, describes as

> the order of discursive practices whose reign within a national space produces, and also refers to, the "law" in which the accident of birth within a geographic/political boundary transforms individuals into subjects of a collectively-held history (Berlant 20).

This transformation from "individuals into subjects" according to the "National Symbolic" relies on a sense of conformity with the contingent mythologies and ideologies of a certain select group of subjects to be located in a defined space and specific period of time. In this way, Uncle Sam serves as a fine parodic inverse of Pierce, who may come to stand behind the W.A.S.T.E. system and the Tristero, both being collections of individuals separated by continents and centuries, underground groups who refuse to conform or are rejected from the mainstream.

and potentially corrupt undertakings). These various symbols of people and the letters that act as their ambassadors serve as the initiators in determining Oedipa as a subject of the big Other's incomprehensible desire.

It is a letter that kick-starts the novel itself and it will be another letter which sparks Oedipa's suspicion of a greater conspiracy that occupies the rest of the novel. While in San Narcisco with a lawyer named Metzger (employed by Pierce's law firm), Oedipa receives a letter which "had nothing much to say" from Mucho (her husband), in an answer to "her dutiful, more or less rambling, twice-a-week notes to him" (32). The fact that the letter was full of meaningless *content* is quite crucial to the attention she gives to the *form* of its delivery. Stamped by the government on the envelope itself is the words "RETURN ALL OBSCENE MAIL TO YOUR PO*TS*MASTER" (33 emph. added).[7] As this becomes an important clue, we cannot fail to see the repetition of the significance of a letter, literally, as a sort of cryptic calling. But this time the call emanates specifically from the typo on the envelope, not anything written in the letter, which was "newsless inside" (33). One must take note that the true message to be received here is the envelope and not the letter—in other words, it is the carrier of the message and not the message itself. Lacan's famous algorithm of "S/*s*" (*É* 414) from his essay "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud" sums up this basic insistence that the signifier is always over and above the signified. Like the Minister in Poe's "The Purloined Letter" who "has *turned* the letter *over*… in order to free the virgin space in which to write a new

[7] As an intriguing symptom of National Paranoia in the Cold War Era, there was a huge anti-smut campaign that involved the US Post Office. For more, see *The Scarlet Professor: Newton Arvin: A Literary Life Shattered by Scandal* by Barry Werth.

address" (*É* 25), the emphasis on *addressing the letter* (as opposed to simply writing one) is the primary determinant of its effect for both sender and sendee. The virgin space "is the symbol of but an absence" (*É* 17) in the symbolic order which serves as Oedipa's invitation to fill it in.

Oedipa eventually learns of the secret W.A.S.T.E. postal system that operates under the nose of the official government monopoly. Instead of overtly standing out and apart from official mail, they function by minute misprints and stamps with slight but delicate modifications. The underground W.A.S.T.E. postal system is not an outright opposition, but rather a function of the inconsistencies inherent in official systems themselves. But even with its fundamental secret existence, it is in many cases not secret information that is kept hidden from the official postal radar (as in war time codes).[8] The importance of W.A.S.T.E.'s accomplishments lies exactly in *the act of communicating* through alternative channels, not in the communications. It is the principle of the subordination of enunciated statements to positions of enunciation. The *action* itself may be meaningless (as many of the postal correspondences turn out to be), but the perpetual *acting* is what sustains the impossibility of a singular and ordered system of communication.[9] Indeed, it is not only communication that is at stake, but the entire idea of coherence as it

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[8] The scene with Mike Fallopian (pp. 34-39), which is another example of this, is discussed below.

[9] Can we equate ACTING/*action* as Lacan does "S/*s*" (*É* 414) or rather the standard postmodern maxim of *form over content* (F/*c*)? Perhaps the answer can be found in Judith Butler's notion of 'reiterated acting', where the powers that be (governments, wealthy patriarchs, e.g.: Pierce Inverarity) are "what makes the subject possible" which is afterwards "reiterated in the subject's 'own' acting" (14). The Yoyodyne employees (discussed below) use the mechanisms of power which constitute them as subjects in order to "eclipse[] power with power"(14)—that is, to form the Peter Pinguid Society.

relies on singularity and order. This is most salient in the case of history and narratives, which are structurally undermined throughout the novel. History is the narration of a series of actions, but the more Oedipa acts as executrix (and 'detective'), the further she becomes from being able to communicate her actions (and the actions of history) coherently.

There is another instance of the act of sending content-less messages through alternative channels of communication soon after. Oedipa and Metzger wander into a bar called The Scope,[10] "a haunt for electronics assembly people from Yoyodyne" (34), where they encounter Mike Fallopian. The corporate connotations of Yoyodyne and assembly lines bring to mind the uniformity and lack of individuality that is characteristic of society's superficial victimization. Everyone "all wore glasses and stared at you, silent" (34), as if the blank and paranoid gaze of the big Other demand of Oedipa and Metzger that they reveal their purpose for intruding on Yoyodyne's 'after-work drunken revelry'. It is also worth noting that the bathroom of the bar is where Oedipa first sees the word W.A.S.T.E. and the symbol of the muted post horn scribbled on the wall. When they witness an impromptu "Mail call", they question Fallopian about its odd occurrence at night and in a bar. Fallopian explains that he and many of his co-workers are members of an underground organization called the Peter Pinguid Society. All the members are encouraged to exchange mail through the Yoyodyne inter-office mail as a form of rebellion against the government postal

[10] Aside from the obvious connotations of the name "The Scope" being related to vision (as Oedipa sees the W.A.S.T.E. message and muted post horn symbol on the bathroom wall), we can also explore its Greek origin, '*skopós*' as meaning 'aim'. Oedipa thus walks into an 'aim', thereby becoming a target. She will later wonder if she is the target of a conspiracy or just a hoax.

monopoly. Even though the letters are as meaningless and message-less as Mucho and Oedipa's correspondences,[11] Mike claims "[i]t's the principle" (39). Not what the letter says, but the act of exchanging messages in some sort of grander political statement. The carrying case or system of the message, whether the actual envelopes used or the system of inter-office mail, is the message.[12] It does not matter if the message is never one hundred percent clear, or even important in any way. We obviously can conjure up Marshall McLuhan's famous adage that "the medium is the message."[13] But like the typo on the envelope that reads "POTS" instead of "POST" we should probably modify the adage to say that *the distortion of the message by the medium is the message*.

There is yet another letter that is quite crucial to the plot, less so of *The Crying of Lot 49* but more to the play within the novel: *The Courier's Tragedy*.[14] Oedipa and Metzger initially hear about the play from the motel employees/mod band known as "The Paranoids". When the four band members and their "chicks" attempt to explain the plot, they render it "near to unexplainable by eight memories unlooping progressively" (49) like an exaggerated confusion of multiple summaries; this is another example of the impossibility of achieving a

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[11] Not to mention many of our own contemporary chat board communications.

[12] Think of the relish with which people utilize every new on-line message board, chat board, networking service (MSN Messenger, ICQ, MySpace, Facebook, Friendster, etc.) while basically continuing to engage in empty conversation and exchange meaningless messages, 'wtf'?

[13] "Medium" for McLuhan, is defined as "any extension of ourselves" (7) and we can take this to mean that the systems of communication (a form of "any new technology") can extend one's symbolic identity beyond the standard institutionalized norm. Perhaps the underground Peter Pinguid Society, who feel targeted by official government monopolies and corporate pressures of uniformity, use their meaningless mail system so as to slide their symbolic subjectivity under the official radar to avoid the cessation of their own individual extension.

[14] An attempt to summarize the plot of this Jacobean revenge drama would be quite quixotic in fewer words than Pynchon uses himself. But it helps to know that the story involves a disinherited duke who poses as a courier to seek revenge against his usurper. His plan is eventually foiled by a secret gang of marauders posing as couriers themselves, and who take the name Trystero.

singular coherent narrative. The play is set during the time when the Thurn and Taxis held the postal monopoly in most of the Holy Roman Empire. The play's good guy, Niccolò, is secretly posing as a courier for Thurn and Taxis while the villain, Angelo stubbornly refuses to use their service in place of his own private messengers. There is a scene where the Angelo convinces his sister (with whom he had been having sex for many years) to marry one of his allies who also happens to be his sister's son (but not his). This quasi-fatherly endorsed incest between mother and son is quite the parodic inverse of the standard Lacanian incest taboo, where the father serves as obstacle to sexual desire. The father's prohibition is what normally allows the son to let his *demand* for the mother-sex-object metonymically slide to *desire* for another women. This inverse situation deteriorates the entire name-of-the-father law which regulates the symbolic order, thus explaining the unfettered lust, incest, and violence that permeates *The Courier's Tragedy*. Serving as a sort of Shakespearean *Mouse Trap* within the novel, this macabre production teasingly reminds us of the contingency and superficiality of so-called normal social order.

Angelo, in anticipation of an attack by the good guys, composes a letter to forestall the invasion by proclaiming honourable intentions (which of course is a lie). The key to this scene is not necessarily the deception written in the letter (for his duchy is illegitimate and his intentions still treacherous), but rather the ink itself, which is "*a pitchy brew* [that] *has ris'n, from deeps untold*" (54). It turns out that the ink is fatally fashioned because it is made from the human bones of a lost guard once murdered on Angelo's command. The letter is intended to be a death sentence, as it is Angelo's weapon of deceit until he can

muster his army. But the message of the letter is not the proclamation of war and promise of death.[15] The deceit comes directly from the poisonous ink, the literal material from which the false message is composed. As Oedipa had been earlier 'arrested by the letter', Angelo's letter bears with it the memory of a lost guard arrested from life.[16] If the letter is the material support of the signifier in a Lacanian sense, then in this case the ink is the material witness to a forgotten history.

Pierce Inverarity's estate, an underground postal system, and an exotic reference in an obscure Jacobean revenge tragedy become inexplicably linked in Oedipa's quest for a rational explanation of why she has been chosen to for "the job of sorting it all out" (1). The attempts to make sense of these elusive connections that often travel over continents and across centuries is for Oedipa the construction of a history that has persisted outside of any official symbolic recognition. But the danger is not only the possibility that she might be the central figure around which this conspiracy has been brewing. For as she continues to learn more and gather clues, the potential truth does not become more graspable, but rather widens uncontrollably into a disordered tangle of

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[15] Compare this to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where the letter contains an order for execution. Hamlet changes the letter so as to sentence the carriers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to execution. As Hamlet must live to avenge his father and die gloriously in the play's climax, the accidental death of the two tools proves once again that "a letter always arrives at its destination" (*É* 30).

[16] This is similar to the scene in which Oedipa drinks Genghis Cohen's homemade dandelion wine. He picked the flowers from what once was a cemetery but now has been turned into the East San Narcisco Freeway. Cohen states that "in spring, when the dandelions begin to bloom again, the wine goes through fermentation. As if they remembered" (79). Oedipa thinks to herself that it is "[a]s if the dead do persist, even in a bottle of wine" (79). The bones and the dandelions' memory insist on the fact that the signifier, once done away with its original signified, still lingers in the symbolic order, sliding down the signifying chain (to ink and wine respectively).

narratives and histories through which it is nearly impossible to envision a direct and coherent path.

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FROM IMAGINARY SAMENESS TO SYMBOLIC DIFFERENCE

The sense we have of Oedipa's life before the 'arrival of the letter' is one of cozy domesticity, superficiality and stagnation. This is perhaps best exemplified by her snacking on kirsch-filled fondue at a suburban Tupperware party, an event no better than any other to stand out in "a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn't she be the first to admit it?) more or less identical" (1). So it is interesting to speak metaphorically of her 'arrestation' which would normally imply a halting of activity. Indeed, the opposite is the case, where Oedipa's inertia is halted in anticipation of gross change and exponential diversification, in herself, those around her, and the entire symbolic universe. But the ultimate question of whether it is Oedipa's perception of reality that changes or the entire symbolic universe is one of the novel's core ambiguities.

Another thing worth noting is the difference between an existence whose daily activities are identical and repeatable versus one where people are constantly changing and new events always occurring. The regular characters of her pre-narrative existence (that life of Tupperware parties she had before the events of the novel) are also drawn out of their normality and become very changed when she re-encounters them later. They begin as simple egos, driven by a direct demand to gain satisfaction and avoid displeasure. Mucho, who had once been the simple ego striving for simple gratification—his occasional infidelities with "Sharon, Linda or Michele, seventeen and what is known as a hip

one" (32)—later becomes "less himself and more generic. He enters a staff meeting and the room is suddenly full of people… a walking assembly of man" (115). This loss of distinction corresponds to the metaphoric trend of entropy (discussed in detail further on). It is as if his subjective determination within the symbolic order has failed to secure him with a positive identity. Perhaps, after Oedipa 'abandons' him in her search for her ex-boyfriend's legacy, he over hastily penetrates the signifying chain, and so instead of becoming a solid link, he becomes trapped in its coils of multiple signification. As he explains of his new found powers of poly-identification: "Everybody who says the same words is the same person" (116). If coherence of identity is based upon unique distinctions, then Mucho has certainly lost his identity among the structural order of signification by becoming a talking piece of generic chaos.

Another case of characters from her old life undergoing radical change is Oedipa's psychiatrist, Dr. Hilarius. At the beginning of the novel, he is also narrowly self-motivated, in this case by his own striving for medical success and recognition. His concern with his career is constantly overshadowing any sincere attempt to help patients. He tries to recruit Oedipa for his experiments with "LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, and related drugs on a large sample of suburban housewives" (8). Also, Hilarius employs another radical technique: that of making faces at patients; "[h]is theory being that a face is symmetrical like a Rorschach blot, tells a story like TAT picture, excites a response like a suggested word" (8), thus emphasizing the non-verbal, pictorial aspect of his technique. This clinging to images over words places him in the Lacanian imaginary domain of the ego. But when Oedipa encounters him much later, he finally succumbs to

his own paranoid delusions that Israeli soldiers have come to kill him because of his dubious past as a German scientist at Buchenwald. But unlike Mucho who becomes a generic "assembly of man", Hilarius states:

> [t]here is me, there are the others… with LSD… the distinction begins to vanish. Egos lose their sharp edges. But I never took the drug, I chose to remain in relative paranoia, where at least I know who I am and who the others are (111).

Mucho's ego has lost all its edges because he took Hilarius's drug. Hilarius, on the other hand, has retreated so far into his own narcissistic delusional sphere (there are no Israeli soldiers, only the Kinneret police) that he no longer shares a commonly recognized symbolic identity. His signifying chain has become too penetrated with by his own phantasmatic obsessions. If Hilarius had been Oedipa's psychiatrist, and thus (in a cliché sense) her standard for normality and adjustability (hard enough to fathom in a Pynchon novel, no doubt), then his breakdown, like Mucho's dissemination, indicates the massive displacement of symbolic relations that occur as a result of her venturing out from her safe, imaginary life and into the symbolic mysteries heralded by the dying wishes of Pierce Inverarity.

Oedipa's life before the arrival of the letter can be described as being ahistorical and atemporal ("a fat deckful of days which seemed… more or less identical")—in other words, similar to the existence of an animal or primitive being. What is interesting here is that animals and primitive beings do not have complex symbolic languages but rather live in a direct relationship with their surroundings. This is the Lacanian Imaginary order where signs and language have not yet separated the living being from its world and itself. It is a kind of

primary Eden, so to speak, and certainly Oedipa's home town of 'Kinneret-Among-The-Pines' evokes such biblical settings. Like Adam and Eve after they gain knowledge from the forbidden fruit and must thus separate themselves from nature with fig-leafed fashion,[17] "[s]he felt exposed" (3) by the letter naming her executrix, as if her overdue rent for living in the bliss of Eden has been transformed into a final eviction. Without language, things remain the same day after day, generation after generation. It is only when we begin to name things do we impose our subjective, human dimension on to the natural world, which gives us the ability to determine (or rather invent) what something *is*, and more importantly, to continually pass on this information to later generations, sparking an endless distancing from the original thing-in-itself through modification and progress. Oedipa's summons by the letter is the summons out of this Imaginary, this simple existence of stagnation, and into the symbolic world of difference and perpetual sliding change.

Before submitting to the charge, however, she tries three times to hold on to the protective coating of her safe, imaginary life: "Oedipa stood in the living room, stared at by the greenish dead eye of the TV tube, spoke the name of God, tried to feel as drunk as possible. But this did not work" (1); here we have television as a synechdochal stand-in for mass (yet empty) culture, God as

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[17] Clothing can be here understood as the origin of culture; it is artificial modifications made to natural materials—using nature in novel ways not originally part of its purpose (fig leaves for underwear). Lacan defines fashion as a "procrustean arbitrariness… it contradicts, in advanced societies, respect for natural forms of the human body" (*É* 85). The allusion to Procrustes enforces the idea that nature does not produce standardized, from-fitting creatures, and that only culture can artificially modify (in the Greek myth, by stretching or severing limbs, which again recalls Lacan's notion of the fragmented body) the animal man into a symbolic subject. The idea of conformity implied by the same allusion also resonates with the entropic tendency in modern society—the de-individualization of subjects (discussed in detail below).

religion and/or spirituality and alcohol as the physical and mental form of relaxation and escape. But let us look closer at each of these three systems. The first, that of mass superficial culture, offers the individual a sense of community, but one without real responsibility. We all share in the same preprogrammed experiences of laughter and tears as we channel surf from sitcom to melodrama; we all desire the same lifestyle and commodities as is dictated by advertisements. But we do not actually have to come into contact with each other, listen to each other, experience each other in the flesh[18] (even if we watch together, we look ahead and not at one another; even if we laugh together, our laughter is incorporated into the canned laughter of the program). Yet this notion of mass and massively shared culture (without depth) will be juxtaposed to many characters and organizations later in the novel as Oedipa drifts into the margins of society, encountering the disinherited and the underground (metaphorically speaking, 'underground' connotes depth, the opposite of 'superficial' which exists strictly on the surface. Some examples of these underground organizations are The Peter Pinguid Society, Deaf Mute Assemblies, The Alameda County Death Cult, The Inamorati Anonymous, The Scurvhamites, etc.) Religion, too, offers much of the same kind of community as mass culture. But religion also mythologizes origins, provides *Weltanshauungen* (world views) and indexes teleologies . In other words, aside from community, religion proffers meaning for life and explains this meaning through coherent narratives—*it plots the meaning of life* from a beginning to an end (Genesis to Revelation, for example). Finally

[18] There is a chapter in Žižek's book, *The Plague of Fantasies*, which is titled: "Love Thy Neighbor? No Thanks" that best sums up this petty disgust.

there is alcohol, or any substance offering escape. It is interesting to interpret the artificial 'highs' achieved through substance as a form of regression into an earlier state of (im)maturity.[19] In the Lacanian sense, we can say this is a refusal to enter the symbolic order and to thus remain fixed in the narcissistic state of physical self-pleasure. It is not the subject committed to understanding its role in the symbolic order by seeking to fulfill the *desire* of the Other, but the ego narrowly and selfishly repeating its own personal game of *demand* and gratification. Another form of evidence for this regression is that our ability to communicate coherently is often severely impaired when under the influence, thus reinforcing the user's demand to remain tied to the pre-responsible phase of subjective development. Aside from the standard literal meaning of speech impairment as drunken mumbling, etc, there is also the more significant figurative meaning: do we not often mistakenly admit some personal truths while drunk we would otherwise wanted to keep a secret?[20] This is because when intoxicated, and reverted to more imaginary and primary states of being, we do not have that conscious and calculating separation between our inner demands and our outer symbolic expressions—they are short-circuited. If language and symbolic subjectivity is a form of difference and separation, than getting drunk or high is

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[19] A great and very funny example of this can be found in Alfred Hitchcock's *North By Northwest*, where Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) is bullied and forced into drinking and entire glass of booze by Communist thugs who think he is a spy. Thornhill escapes his assailants by getting picked up for drunk driving by the police. At the station, he drunkenly behaves like an obnoxious child. And finally when they let him make his phone call, presumably to his lawyer, he calls his mother instead, just like a little mama's boy. This emphasis of the attachment to the mother in a drunken state corresponds to the regression from the post-Oedipal phase and into the narcissistic/dualistic tie to the maternal object.

[20] Or rather, do we not sometimes get drunk because we *wish* to admit some personal truths? Perhaps the truth that can not be faced soberly is precisely the fact that being a mature subject always-already feels false—like a game. At least while drunk we are relieved of the pressure to 'take ourselves seriously'.

an artificial suturing of this separation. Hence substance escapism is a form of regression.

So it becomes clear how each of these three devices (TV, God, drunkenness) are used by Oedipa as a kind of knee-jerk reaction to her being hailed out of her comfortable life. But when these devices fail, her thoughts turn to "a hotel room in Mazatlán whose door had just been slammed, it seemed forever" (1). The allusion to this city resonates with the idea of her being 'arrested', for Mazatlán, which means in Nahuatl "place of the deer", reminds one of the classic image of a deer 'arrested' by the headlights of a car: caught unawares and about to experience a life changing (or threatening, or terminating) course of events. Then there is the image of 'a door being slammed shut', a popular trope in our impression of prisons. But it is probably best to think of it as her forever being *locked out* of the simple and routine life of a prisoner (or the idyllic and uncomplicated life of a deer) and expelled into the unfamiliar world where anything can happen.

The opening chapter goes on to characterize her prisoner-like status with two very powerful and related allusions.: that of Rapunzel, and that of a Remedios Varo painting titled "Bordando el Manto Terrestre" ("Embroidering Earth's Mantle"). Rapunzel, as we know, was a prisoner in a tower, and in the novel, her valiant knight comes to be represented by Pierce himself, for whom Oedipa "happily pulled out the pins and curlers" (10) of her hair for him to climb. But the comical turn this takes is when "halfway up, her lovely hair turned… into a great unanchored wig, and down he fell, on his ass. But dauntless, perhaps using one of his many credit cards for a shim, he'd slipped the lock on her tower

door" (11). This *alternative route* of rescue also serves as an alternative version of a well-known tale. Alternative routes and alternative versions of stories become an extremely important current in the novel as Oedipa discovers clandestine postal services (alternative routes of communication) as well as alternative versions of history related to her by all the disinherited and marginalized characters she encounters. It also demonstrates Pierce's incredible, Jay-Gouldian financial power ("using one of his many credit cards") which later is evidenced by his immense holdings which may or may not include the entire country. As Oedipa, later in the novel, ceases to actively search for new connections in the larger pattern, but begins simply to allow this evidence to pour freely upon her, she thinks back to when she "had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America" (147). As he has the means to forge new paths of action through old and worn out itineraries, the entire country may alternatively be a giant plot of his in which to trap Oedipa Maas—like Rapunzel, the wealthy magnate as the parodic alternative to the valiant knight.

Just as the letter from Pierce's lawyers call to mind for Oedipa her "curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl" (10) as well as the hotel in Mazatlán, where she and Pierce vacationed, the signification continues to an "exhibition of paintings by the beautiful Spanish exile[21] Remedios Varo" (11) that

[21] 'Exile' can be seen as another form of being trapped, not in the sense of *locked in* but rather *locked out*. Varo was exiled from Spain to France during the Spanish Civil War and then from France to Mexico during the Nazi occupation. It is interesting to note how her exile was caused by the inability to conform to massive political movements and shifting national identities. She is thus a kind of precursor to the many exiles and disinherited encountered later in the novel.

they saw there while on that vacation in Mexico. The painting depicts golden haired girls locked up in a tower and forced to perpetually weave a giant tapestry. This tapestry spills

> out the slit windows and into the void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: for all other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world (11).

Oedipa cries upon viewing this painting, feeling the sadness of their imprisonment. Yet it is not solely because these girls are 'symbols of prisoners' (or rather prisoners of symbols) that Oedipa comes to identify with them, but more importantly, they are prisoners in a tower woven from their own cloth—trapped in a world which is of their own making. In other words, they are trapped within their own subjectivity—prisoners of the never-ending process of symbolization of which they simultaneously constitutive and constituted.[22] This is precisely one of the tenets of the paranoid structure of knowledge that is key to this novel: aside from the fear that reality is a giant plot devised by some unknown despot which is centered around, and directed against you, there is always the nagging fear that everything in which one has come to believe and that reality's foundations are nothing more than projections of one's own solipsistic fantasy. Indeed, Oedipa will come to face this binary opposition to greater and greater extents as the novel progresses. Either she is at the center of a huge

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'Exile' can also connote a *longing to return*, and thus resonates with Oedipa's initial reaction to being *assujeter* by Pierce's letter and her attempts to return to her primary state of a simple narcissistic life (as discussed above).

[22] Their embroidering is analogous to Butler's conception of 'power' which is simultaneously "always prior" to the subject and "the willed effect of the subject" (14). For Butler, the phrase "the subject *of* power" is doubly significant in that "'*of* connotes both 'belonging to' and 'wielding'" (14).

elaborate plot or she is just crazy. Either she has discovered a grand conspiracy, or is the butt of an absurd practical joke (this detailed either/or is elaborated on page 141 of the novel and discussed further on in this chapter).

But to return to the significance of the Varo painting and the idea of being trapped in one's subjective projections, or rather, 'embroiderings': does this not bring to mind the most obvious allusion of all, that of Oedipa's proper name? Aside from Freudian implications of this name, let us examine its original Sophoclean meaning. Oedipus is a detective, charged with solving the mystery of the murdered king. As we all know, the culprit he seeks is himself, yet he is figuratively blinded to this answer in the beginning, which is precisely what provides the possibility for his deeper detection (had he any inkling of the truth, he would not have looked so hard to uncover it). As Oedipa becomes deeper embroiled in the Tristero mystery, she adopts her namesake's blindness in an almost suicidal exaggeration. When she is told she might actually get the opportunity to meet a representative of the Tristero, she begins "to drink bourbon until the sun went down and it was a dark as it would ever get. Then she went out and drove on the freeway for a while with her lights out" (145), as if afraid to soberly face the light of truth (or just the possibility of truth) that it is either menacingly real or she is hopelessly insane. Whereas the Theban King is literally ignorant (figuratively blind) of the truth, the Californian housewife can only attempt to achieve his blissful ignorance in a practically suicidal exaggeration. Oedipus is so trapped in his subjective questing he cannot see how intimately he is responsible for the creation of such a quest. On the other hand Oedipa is too shrewd to overlook it. Like the girls in the tower who both create and dwell

within worlds of their own materialized spinning, Oedipus is always both cause and effect of his inescapable prison of fate. When Oedipa contemplates the painting she knows that it had "only been woven together a couple thousand miles away *in her own tower*… and so Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there'd been no escape" (11 emph. added), just as Oedipus' attempted escape of his fate is exactly the condition for it to be realized—the path to truth must be strewn with ignorance, or blindness. But though Oedipa's prison is both her life and her ego, she knows that her ego is "only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all" (12). What is the trap of the paranoid prisoner? It is the very *incidentalness* of the malignant plot: the fact that that it arrests the subject "for no reason at all".

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THE NEFASTIS MACHINE AND ENTROPY

Many critics interpret the name "Nefastis" to mean "unpleasing to the gods", "unholy, unclean, abominable", "evil or impious" (Grant 67) possibly because of its derivation from the word 'nefarious'. But there is another allusion worth exploring, that of the similarity in names of "John Nefastis" to 'John the Baptist'. To 'baptize' or 'christen' someone is to give that person official status within the Christian symbolic order. It is a form of mandating a name onto someone that is to be registered and recognized by a greater institution. John the Baptist was famous for his acts of baptizing Jews in the River Jordan as well as for being one of the first to 'recognize' Jesus as the messiah. This act of recognition adheres to the idea of bestowing a name or title and thus imparting an

official mandate. In other words, Jesus became the teacher/messiah only after being called or baptized as such, since naming determines the identity and meaning of the thing itself.[23] This John had the power of creating new things, like creating Christians out of Jews and a messiah out of Jesus. Returning to John Nefastis, he is described as "somebody who still invents things" (68) by Stanley Koteks. Koteks works at Yoyodyne[24] and complains of the reduction of individual ingenuity "which stifles your really creative engineer" (67) within the gigantic corporate workforce. His "ax to grind" is mainly against Yoyodyne's forcing their employees to sign away patent rights. Koteks lauds Nefastis and even keeps a copy of Nefastis' patent for his "Nefastis Machine". John Nefastis, because he is outside of the corporate world, can still create new inventions and then baptizes them with his own name. Just as the 1st century preacher had the unique ability for selecting elect individuals to bring to the fold of enlightened Christianity, so does Nefastis, with his machine, determine whether or not one is a "sensitive". Like the baptized Christians who were so because they 'recognized' Christ as the messiah (they were 'sensitive' to his divine attributes), those who are deemed "sensitives" by Nefastis are so because they have engaged in a quasi-divine relationship with a whole new kind of spiritual entity: Maxwell's Demon.

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[23] This is similar to the story of Adam in the Garden of Eden, where God instructs him to name the animals, thus determining not only what they are, but also his mastery over them.

[24] Like another Yoyodyne employee, Mike Fallopian, their names represent a de-masculinization that comes with being a corporate cog. Not venturing to say that this means they are becoming increasingly feminine (that is a whole other can of phallic worms), perhaps one can say that their 'inseminating' ability to create has been stifled (castrated?). This makes sense when compared to Nefastis's independence from corporate America and his ability to invent things.

Fallopian tubes are the path through which the ovum passes from ovary to uterus, and can thus connote a single step in a much larger process of fruition, much like the de-individualized Yoyodyne employee. Kotecks brings to mind 'Kotex', a device not directly related to fruition but rather that which 'sops up the mess' made from the larger process of generating 'living' work.

The Nefastis Machine is a simple construction which can, according to Koteks's definition, contradict the second law of thermodynamics if and only if the user of the machine is what is called a "sensitive". This thermodynamic law states that in any closed and active system (where energy is being used) the level of entropy will continually increase. In other words, a system that is producing energy, say for example a heat engine like 'an internal-combustion engine', cannot continue to function forever without a decrease in energy until the system ceases to work. This is why heat engines, among other energy producing systems, require something to go into the system in order to get something out of it. The Nefastis Machine supposedly can produce energy in the form of a moving piston without any physical energy (say, heat, for example) going in. How does this work? Through a metaphorical similarity and an actualization of an idea called "Maxwell's' Demon". First, this Demon was hypothesized by James Clerk Maxwell as a tiny intelligent entity that can sit in a box filled with both hot and cold molecules and sort them out into different sides, thus producing heat in one side which can drive a heat engine. *Action is thus produced only when things are properly classified and separated.* Or in the words of Norbert Wiener (a pioneering figure in Cybernetic theory): "the entropy of a system is a measure of its degree of disorganization" (110). What makes the Demon so special it that is has knowledge of each molecule—it knows its temperature and corresponding speed as well as its location. This knowledge of each unique molecule makes classification and sorting possible. When one speaks of the increase of entropy, one can mean the increase in a uniformity and homogeneity of entities. In a figurative sense, Koteks feels he is part of an entropic community of engineers at

Yoyodyne[25] because everyone's individual work gets assimilated into big, anonymous projects. In physics, the closed box of molecules with a high degree of entropy would mean that they are extremely uniformly mixed up and very difficult to classify—every part of the box would appear the same. Entropy is thus the opposite of order which depends on knowledge of different components and subsequent diversification and separation into ordered compartments; entropy is chaos and chaos is uniformity. Nefastis claims to have actually created the Demon, and here is where the coincidence of metaphors and the importance of being a "sensitive" come into play.

A "sensitive" is someone who is able to communicate with the Demon by a kind of telepathic concentration. The Nefastis Machine is a small box with two pistons sticking out and a picture of James Clerk Maxwell. One stares at the photograph and concentrates deeply on one of the two pistons, and if one is "sensitive" to the Demon, it will respond and move said piston. The entire mechanism functions because of the similarity between the mathematical formula for thermodynamic entropy and another "to do with communication. The equation for one, back in the '30's, had looked very like the equation for the other.

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[25] While the company name most probably parodies *Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne, Inc*, a manufacturer of rocket engines, there are also many connotations of the name.

First, in true Pynchonia, the image of the Yoyo (his 1963 novel *V.*'s main character, Benny Profane, is described from the very first page as a "human yoyo") leaps up (and drops down, and leaps up, etc.). This often symbolizes "energy expended in a cycle of activity which, for all its apparent dynamism, is essentially meaningless mechanical repetition" (Abernethy 27-28). Keeping with the metaphor of entropy, as a yoyo continues to spin, it slowly loses momentum until it all activity is halted.

Second, there is the connotation of 'anodyne', which according to the *OED Online*, means "Having the power of assuaging pain" or "Anything that soothes wounded or excited feelings, or that lessens the sense of a misfortune". We can perhaps take this to mean that the company, in its stripping of individuality, and thus individual responsibility, eliminates the "pain" or "excited feelings" that come with being a true human subject by turning one into an insensitive and unfeeling robot.

It was a coincidence" (Pynchon 84). The idea is a tradeoff: communicate with the Demon and it will respond by creating energy. What is crucial here is the connection between information and action. The Demon in the Nefastis Machine "makes the metaphor not only verbally graceful, but also objectively true" (85). It creates the link necessary for any detective between the accumulation of clues and the progress in solving a mystery—that is, progressing the plot. In other words, action is possible only with the acquisition of information, or so it seems, for this very notion will come under attack as the novel unfolds.

First if all, Koteks states that "the Demon only sat and sorted, you wouldn't have to put any real work into the system" (68). This is entirely unconvincing to Oedipa who retorts "Sorting isn't work?... Tell them down at the post office" (68). Being an executrix to an estate, her entire *raison d'être* as the protagonist of this novel is that of sorting out a will, which constitutes much work. Oedipa also references the post office which plays such a central role, literally and thematically in the book. Aside from literally discovering an underground postal network, the figurative connotations of postal services bring to mind the fact that no message ever travels directly but is mediated though institutions, ones often fallible and corrupt. In other words, to follow the post office metaphor, there is always an amount of work and labour involved in the distribution and channeling of communication. One must also keep in mind the amount of energy that the Nefastis machine requires in order to be able to produce output. If one is a proper "sensitive" and has been able to communicate massive amounts of information to the Demon, the only payoff is a slight twitch in a piston. This seems like an extremely unfair trade:

> The sensitive must receive that staggering set of energies, and feed back something like the same quantity of information. To keep it all cycling. On a secular level all we can see is one piston, hopefully moving. *One little movement, against all that massive complex of information*, destroyed over and over with each power stroke (84 emph. added).

The idea of a "massive complex of information" being traded for "one little movement" sums up Pynchon's entire undermining spin of the classic detective novel. The more information Oedipa gathers, the bigger the mystery becomes. To pursue this further, the model of entropic closed systems must be expanded metaphorically from boxes and engines to overall realities. These realities can be either America (as it is in the novel) or the world that Oedipa uncovers while *acting* in her quest. Indeed, the entropic model can expand over the novel itself—that is, the novel *qua* system of *information* undergoes the chaotic victimization of entropy.

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INTERPRETATION AND PARANOIA

One can interpret the idea of Pierce's will as a kind of cryptic text, and thus the charge of "sorting it all out" would seem to make Oedipa a kind of literary critic. It is as if, under the auspice of the hermeneutic tradition, that Oedipa's quest must pass through the converging vectors of both literature and law. This sense of literary interpretation is doubly emphasized when Oedipa intuits a mysterious proper name, 'Trystero' or 'Tristero' (mentioned above), uttered in an obscure Jacobean revenge drama she attends at the Tank theater. In Lacanian terms, Tristero at first serves as a *point de capiton*, a quilting point, something that holds together instances of signification so that they all make

sense within one structure. Like the characters in Poe's "The Purloined Letter" who are assigned symbolic roles as they enter into the network of the implicating letter, the instances of signification in *Lot 49* can only make sense when assigned to the network called 'Tristero', however unpredictable and improbable they may seem at first. In his seminar on *The Psychoses*, Lacan states that "[e]verything radiates out from and is organized around this signifier… It's the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively" (*S III* 268). We can take Lacan's reference to "retroactive" and "prospective" as indicating both a backwards and forwards approach to temporality and thus narrativity, meaning the *point de capiton* not only helps organize meaning within signifying structures, but also narrative coherence within plots—it provides beginnings, middles and ends. The Tristero, the muted post horn symbol, and W.A.S.T.E. symbolically define Oedipa in the present as a 'sorter of wills' and "a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts" (83). These definitions also connect her with a legitimate mystery whose roots stretch back in a potentially real but chaotically convoluted historical context. It gives her life a meaning, her quest a coherent plot. The two major fields of signification that Oedipa wrestles with are on one hand Pierce Inverarity, his will, estate and legacy, and on the other hand a clandestine postal service called W.A.S.T.E., used by underground groups and marginalized citizens. Oedipa is given no concrete evidence in the beginning to lead her to pursue the connection between the two fields of signification. What rather occurs is that her attention is tripped up by a mysterious word, 'Tristero', which has no obvious meaning yet terrorizes those who know of it. Before it is actually uttered, its

silent implication is enough to create "a new mode of expression… a kind of ritual reluctance" (55) while everyone who 'knows' (the actors in the play at the Tank) begin "exchanging Significant Looks" (55). The word itself becomes almost materially solid with its presence; it "hung in the air… hung in the dark to puzzle" (58). After this she simply allows herself to become increasingly sensitive to more key words, clues and (hi)stories, until the end when she locates her object that potentially holds the key to the connection: Pierce's stamp collection being auctioned off as 'lot 49'. This is clearly Lacan's *objet petit a*, a regular object suddenly invested with symbolic desire and a potential flourishing of signification. (The stamps and the conclusion of the novel will be discussed more below) As Oedipa's old identity of bored Californian suburbanite disintegrates, the sign of Oedipa Maas relies more and more on the sharp thread of the quilting point to button her down to a meaningful role within the larger symbolic order of Inverarity's America and Tristero's History.

Before deciding what the meaning of Pierce's will is, and why Oedipa has been mandated to execute it, we can initially ask: who is Pierce? What points button down his identity? Is he really a single coherent person? After all, he does not exist in the real world of the book; he exists only as a memory, a will, and a conspiracy. But existence as a living being is not what matters. The sign of 'Pierce Inverarity' lingers beyond the body's death. In the case of the novel, he can "survive death, as a paranoia; as a pure conspiracy against someone he loved" (148). He is not there, but his name continually insists in his absence. It is possible that his name "only holds the place of a certain lack" although it is "perceived as a point of supreme plenitude" (Žižek *SOI* 99). In this sense, he is

the Master signifier, pure paranoia incarnate; the fear that what holds everything together is a 'signifier without signified'.

Just like the notion of proliferation of meaning we have come to expect from the narrative, Pierce himself seems to be characterized as a multiplicity of personalities. Oedipa recalls the last time she spoke with him: he had telephoned in the middle of the night and proceeded to speak as if he was a "secretary for the Transylvanian Consulate… comic-Negro… hostile Pachuco… a Gestapo officer… and finally his Lamont Cranston[26] voice" (2), the last characterizing the shadowy aura under which his potentially true identity is hidden. Her adventure into his estate begins in San Narcisco. First off, this name characterizes the narcissistic and superficial attitude of southern California that is the butt of much of Pynchon's humorous scorn. It also foreshadows Oedipa's own journey: that even though she has been forced out of her own little cozy world, that much of the expansive outer world she encounters, and its dubious plots and conspiracies, may always threaten to be the products of her own search for an ordered explanation. San Narcisco is also "Pierce's domicile and headquarters… built, however rickety or grotesque, toward the sky" (13). Does this image not bring to mind the story of Babel, a rickety "tower, whose top may reach unto heaven" (*King James Version* Genesis 11:4)? This serves as a key symbol for many of the main themes of the text. It symbolizes a proliferation of languages,[27] which in turn leads to a multiplicity of realities. Because of this difference in tongues, any

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[26] Lamont Cranston is "[t]he best-known alter ego of radio's Shadow" (Grant 14).

[27] "Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there *confound the language of all the earth*: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (*King James Version* 11:9 emph. added).

form of direct communication becomes impossible. Indeed, the impossibility of honest and direct communication is a key *mise-en-scène* of the novel. As was mentioned before: rather than simply medium as message, it is *the medium's distortion of the message that is the message.* We can continue to see evidence of this kind of distortion everywhere. When Oedipa first sees San Narcisco from aloft,

> She thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit had had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, they were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out) (14).

Radios are means of communication, and we have an early indication of their service to this symbolic register when we learn that Oedipa's husband, Mucho, is a radio jockey. Later in the novel, when he interviews Oedipa for his station, KCUF, he calls her Edna Mosh, claiming that he was "allowing for the distortion on these rigs" (114), demonstrating the necessary amount of change or 'noise' that accompanies and transforms every message[28] from enunciator through the position of enunciation. But returning to the radio example above, here Oedipa

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[28] In Cybernetic theory, every system's ability to function efficiently by the use of *information feedback* is dependant on the ability to reduce the noise that accompanies the feedback. "We often find a message contaminated by extraneous disturbances which we call *background noise*" (Wiener 10).

Many song lyrics come to mind in regards to this section. David Byrne's "Marching Through the Wilderness" begins "Yeah, we are the noise/ The noise between stations". Radiohead's "Karma Police" goes "He talks in maths/ He buzzes like a fridge/ He's like a detuned radio". Byrne's song uses the figurative language of the wilderness to describe the modern city, creating a veritable 'forest of symbols' out of buildings and money. Radiohead's song is about slow dehumanization and the modern roboticism encouraged in man. In both cases the entropic nature of modernity is highlighted, and electronic noises seem to be the harbinger of the lack of (human) distinction characteristic of entropy.

recalls learning something not from the message being spouted by the voice coming from the radio (top ten hits, world wars, and traffic or weather reports) but actually intuits some kind of message from visually examining its innards. Even the reference to hieroglyphics is interesting, as they are a form of writing very different from standard alphabetizations. Each symbol is itself an ideogram or logogram—its meaning is not received through 'reading' them in the technical sense, but rather 'understanding' in a visual pictorial sense. Sense comes from form rather than content.[29]

Oedipa begins as a kind of literary critic with her major source being an omni-valent last will and testament. But as she comes to accumulate knowledge as to what is entailed in the Pierce's will, or rather what is included in the dead man's estate, her interpretive skills must be turned outwards to reality and she must upgrade her status from textual critic to postmodern detective. As the mysterious and murderous history of the Tristero becomes more aligned with the holdings of Inverarity, text and reality often threaten to collapse into one another. Discovering that more and more of San Narcisco's business and buildings are owned by Pierce, from the Tank theater where she saw *The Courier's Tragedy*, to Zapf's Used Book Store where she procured a copy of the play, and even San

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[29] The hieroglyphic nature of the muted post horn calls to mind the doubloon form *Moby Dick*. The doubloon from chapter 99 of *Moby Dick* is described as "untouchable and immaculate to any foulness… For it was set apart and sanctified to one awe-striking end" (359). This intangibility and distinction perhaps finds its sinister counterpart in the insignia of the muted post horn, found on a ring possessed by Mr. Thoth. Like the doubloon as a reward for the first sailor to spot the whale, Mr. Thoth got the ring from his grandfather who rode for the Pony Express and cut off the finger of a member of the Tristero. Normally as elusive as the whale, this is the one instance where someone seems to have defeated the Tristero riders. Like his namesake (Thoth was the Egyptian god conflated with the Greek Hermes, god of messengers among other things), he has a message (information, clue) ready for Oedipa even though she encounters him purely by chance (pp. 72-74). The connections between Melville and Pynchon are illuminated by many critics (for example see Palmeri, Frank's *Satire in Narrative: Petronius, Swift, Gibbon, Melville, and Pynchon*).

Narcisco college—"heavily endowed by the dead man" (140)—where Prof. Emory Bortz specializes in Wharfinger plays (*Courier's* author), Oedipa takes a moment to remark that "[e]very access route to the Tristero could be traced also back to the Inverarity estate" (140). What is occurring here is that Oedipa's involuntary apophenia (her 'seeing' or discovering patterns among seemingly unrelated data) becomes coupled with her increasing sense of being persecuted. This common marriage of apophenia and persecution elevates standard apophenia into full fledged paranoia. Lacan sees the "paranoiac structure of the ego… highlighted by Freud in the three delusions: jealousy, erotomania, and *interpretation*" (*É* 93 emph. added). What must be paid close attention to in this quote is that the third term for Freud is not "interpretation" but rather "persecution."[30] By conflating persecution with interpretation, Lacan subtly exposes the paranoiac's projection of his or her own subjective *interpretosis*[31] onto a hostile external reality. Oedipa remains constantly aware of the frightening realization that she is projecting. She contemplates the possibility that her role is "the dark machine in the center of the planetarium, to bring the estate into pulsing stelliferous Meaning, all in a soaring dome around her" (64) which lead her to scribble the words "*shall I project a world?*" (64). It is not an assurance, but remains an open question *she poses to herself.* This self-interrogation emphasizes the split: one that keeps the 'ego Oedipa' who is trapped

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[30] From the *Standard Edition* XII.

[31] *Interpretosis* is a nifty term used by Deleuze and Guattari to describe "humankind's fundamental neurosis" (*ATP* 114). Compare this to Lacan when he states that the ego is "the human symptom par excellence. The ego is human being's mental illness" (*SI* 22). The important distinction to keep in mind is that for Lacan, *interpretosis* would come as a result, not of the ego, but of the ego's transformation into a subject (but it is likely that Deleuze and Guattari were not using 'ego' strictly in the Lacanian sense of the Imaginary order).

in her narcissistic tower, split and separate from the 'subject-Oedipa' situated in the center of a "soaring dome" of incomprehensible meaning and the centrifugal target of some impossible Other's desire .

But there is always the possibility it "is all a hoax, maybe something Inverarity set up before he died" but "Oedipa had been steadfastly refusing to look at that possibility directly" (138). For since her old life had disintegrated, without the possibility of a real Tristero all that would be left for her is to undergo a social death, a symbolic suicide into solipsism. All the people around her have been caught up, directly or indirectly, in the Inverarity affair and have either run off, gone mad or died. In order for her to avoid a similar fate, a part of her needs the Tristero to exist, to endow all that's happened with meaning, and to give her a purpose. In the case that everything has not been a conspiracy or a hoax, she is left with the possibility that she is completely insane. She puts this final option to herself: "you are fantasying some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull" (141). She speaks her own name, emphasizing her symbolic signifier, trying to remain attached to some sort of coherent identity beyond being caught in a solipsistic delusional fantasy or the center of a conspiracy.[32]

In other words, the fissure between Oedipa's subjective interpretations and the world she inhabits comes to be sutured over, as if she is the heart-faced girl embroidering the earth's mantle from the Varo painting, a product of her own creative invention. She is like "the questing characters [who] look forward to

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[32] Actually, there are four options—"those symmetrical four" (141)—at this point, but the distinction is a little shady. 1) It is all a true conspiracy she has stumbled upon; 2) She is crazy. These two options are the extreme cases of 'all or none'; 3) It is a plot or hoax or practical joke against her; 4) she is not totally insane but still hallucinating these connections (a victim of over active apophenia, but not a total paranoid delusional). These last two options are much less all-encompassing and can actually be seen as milder versions of options 1 and 2 respectively.

occupying a vantage outside their experience" but "such characters find themselves irrevocably inside the stories they construct, so that in various ways the end of the narrative threatens to finish them" (Hite 18). Paranoia is not only limited to being the center of some external malignant force; it always carries its outer limit—its positive negation—that the one's projections are potentially the cause of the circle which encompass the subject herself. Pynchon describes "the true paranoid [as someone] for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself" (104). In other words, the malignant circles not only close in on the paranoid, they radiate, or "pulse" from the subjective center outwards.

But before completely asserting this, Pynchon always leaves open a back door through which we might discover the opposite is true. This is no straight up political thriller, nor is it the psychological twist-tale ("it was the hero himself the whole time", "she has multiple personalities", or any other Hollywood clichés). Indeed, this binary between all or none and excluded middles permeates the narrative. As an early indication of this, before Oedipa's suspicion is even prepped for what is to come (the three initial major clues ("POTSMASTER", "W.A.S.T.E." and "Tristero"), she and Metzger see a program on television in which the child actor Metzger, named "Baby Igor", starred. Yet she suspects that "[e]ither he made up the whole thing… or he bribed the engineer over at the local station to run this, it's all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction, *plot*" (20). This constant 'either/or' continually undermines the traditional mechanisms of mystery and conspiracy. The passage also highlights the seductive character of plots in general, in the sense that we are drawn to organized narratives as a fantasy

getaway from a potentially meaningless and chaotic reality. Placing 'plot' under this kind of suspicion makes the novel's formal structure as a detective story (literary analysis, uncovering histories, explaining mysterious deaths and disappearances) serve more as a model of its parody than any rigid formula leading in a straight, diachronous line from ignorance to enlightenment. Indeed, this novel's most salient feature as a piece of postmodern cannon is the fact that its conclusion concludes nothing at all—it is not about a solution that is deferred by a mystery, but rather how mysteries are perpetuated by the delusion of solutions.[33] As one critic says "the desire for escape only apotheosizes the law it seeks to transgress by perfecting the illusion of freedom that supports it" (Mattesich 3). This freedom is the liberation from uncertainty and chaos and into one of narrative order. The desire is what keeps Oedipa going at first, and what keeps the newcomer to Pynchon turning pages. But the book forces us to look outside its own universe of narrative mystery and solution, and into the paranoid depths of solipsistic desire, unsettled by its hindrances but even more fearful of its possible (but like Achilles) never attainable satisfaction. Let us examine more closely the tenets of postmodern detective structures.

The standard (modern) detective structure is that reality has been punctured by a kind of mystery—a piece of knowledge is missing, there is an overwhelming *presence of absence* within the symbolic order. Slavoj Žižek characterizes this as a classical "logic-and-deduction" narrative where

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[33] This is like desire in Lacanian theory, whose goal is not satisfaction of desire, but perpetuation of desire itself. It is also the incomprehensible desire of the big Other, *Che Vuoi?* Why am I here? There is no answer, but to be overly conscious of the fact that there is no nanswer would cause one to retreat from all symbolic communities into subjective psychosis. Desire is, then, the desire to hang on, to stay in the game, but also to keep the game going, for when you win, you lose.

> the moment, at the novel's end, when the flow of events is integrated into the symbolic universe, narrativized, told in the form of a linear story (the last pages of the novel when, upon identifying the murderer, the detective reconstructs the true course of events), brings about an effect of pacification, order and consistency are reinstated (*EYS* 151).

As the detective gathers clues (gains knowledge) he or she begins to develop a kind of narrative ("linear story") that explains away the mystery and fills in the gaps of the symbolic order with knowledge. And thus, when the all the clues have been properly aligned, a coherent narrative comes to replace the initial mystery and reality is once again complete. When at first there are several hypotheses (the detective begins with speculating, witnesses give faulty or dishonest accounts, criminals lie, the chief urges for a quick resolution based on the most obvious scenario, etc.), the conclusion of the standard detective story reduces this multiplicity into a singular succession of events. In terms of knowledge, what happens is that the more one learns, the less uncertain reality becomes—interpretation becomes narrowed into understanding.

In a postmodern version of the detective structure, knowledge has the opposite effect. As Oedipa gathers clues and learns more about Pierce's estate, the narrative does not narrow down into clear understanding, but rather continually, and exponentially expands into a chaotic proliferation of possible meanings and alternative narratives. One critic puts it thus:

> Where the object of a detective story is to… isolate in a named locus the disruptive element in a story's world, *The Crying of Lot 49* starts with a relatively simple situation, and then lets it get out of the heroine's control: the simple becomes complex, responsibility becomes not isolated but universal, the guilty locus turns out to be everywhere, and the individual clues are

> unimportant because neither clues nor deduction can lead to the solution (Mendelson 123).

This wholly contradicts the idea that history (world history, the missing piece to a mystery, etc.) is composed of singular linear story. Indeed, there are dominant orders and narratives. But what Oedipa comes to encounter more and more are the various alternative narratives that have survived, albeit in the margins of popular knowledge, that continually disrupt any sense of a clear and coherent narrative order.

Oedipa's postmodern detective quest is a direct result of this metastatic swelling of clues. Whereas a standard modern detective narrative always progresses with every new clue—as in the detective gets a lead, follows it which results in new leads—the more information Oedipa receives, the more futile her search becomes. The clues begin to preempt themselves: Oedipa is bombarded with "intuitive high[s]" (140), and gets to the point where she does not even need to ask questions or actively seek out answers. When she is given a book by Bortz, the Wharfinger scholar, she feels it was "bought, no doubt he'd tell her in the event she'd asked, also at Zapf's" (140) where she bought her copy of Wharfinger. But she does not ask, for she has become too conscious of her own desperate gaze's power to find the things she longs to see or fears to know. Unlike a standard detective who has to know where to look, determine who is lying, and navigate between half truths a red herrings towards the truth, "she might have found The Tristero anywhere in the Republic… if only she'd looked" (148). The problem here is not the obscurity of clues, nor just their overabundance. What is really occurring on the postmodern level is that the clues

do not take one closer to the conclusion of the mystery, but only expand the horizon of the mystery.

> Each clue that came is supposed to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night (95).

This "Word… that might abolish the night" is also The Word that initiates the entire symbolic order.[34] But for Oedipa, it could be "God or a digital machine" (25) or an extremely wealthy eccentric, or a deadly anti-government-monopoly postal service, that might, if uncovered, bring light to the mystery of W.A.S.T.E.. The night in question can be read as Oedipa's night journey through San Francisco, which follows in strict Pynchonian parody the clichés of the classic film noir. But even though Pynchon takes the reader out of the fictionality of San Narcisco and into the real city of San Francisco, the surreality of the events there **is** increased exponentially. Here Oedipa locates the muted post horn repeatedly, as if the image is imprinted upon her retina—a stamp or watermark on her symbolic gaze. As the "the private eye sooner or later has to get beat up.[35] This night's profusion of post horns, this malignant, deliberate replication, was their way of beating up" (100). She is literally violated and attacked by a pure sign, increasingly severe by its "deliberate replication". Indeed, she is haunted by all that could have been but remains just outside the symbolic registry. Every radical revolutionary, drunken sailor, eccentric theater director she meets, every tale she

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[34] "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*King James Version* John 1:1). The beginning of John's Gospel is unique among all the other Gospels, and thus best represents the idea of alternative narratives.

[35] The standard Spades and Marlowes normally take a good beating by some Spinks in the late second act or early third act of a good private eye story.

has heard of secret histories, can only partially stand in for that "for that magical Other who would reveal herself" (149) and answer everything. But alas, final solutions are denied, and every path towards revelation remains left over. But as the Lacanian Real is both the hard kernel at the center and the excess or remainder left over on the periphery, so does Oedipa's quest and existence remain poised between the 'all or none' of Real Symbol, or just a symbolic reality.

The central symbol of these 'leftover' narratives is the symbol of "W.A.S.T.E.", the refuse or excrement perpetually outside the symbolic order of knowledge. Precisely because this waste continually asserts itself and disrupts Oedipa's quest for order is it related to the Lacanian notion of the Real. For the "W.A.S.T.E." symbol, the muted post-horn, and the elusive Tristero organization never allow themselves to be fully understood and interpreted seamlessly into the common order of the Symbolic or incorporated into a coherent historical narrative. They persist as being there, yet stubbornly refuse to yield up any clear notion of what they truly are. The very end of the novel only affirms this, as Oedipa finds herself at the threshold of discovery. She has been led to an auction where Pierce's collection of W.A.S.T.E. stamps will be 'cried' as 'lot 49' and which will potentially force the Tristero to reveal itself. The scene is a threshold of revelation, with "[e]ither Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero" (150). And yet it is this moment, while she awaits her answer and imagines that the auctioneer is "star[ing] at her, smiling, as if saying, I'm surprised you actually came" (152) that we, as readers, are thrust back out of the novel and into the reality of reading as such. Because the last line repeats the title: "Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49" (152), the reader is made

all-too consciously aware of the text as text, the story as mere content of a book in hand, which smiles at us, as if saying, 'I'm surprised you actually made it this far, did you actually think we would surrender up a truth?'. This is the 'grimace of the Real'. There is no definitive answer for Oedipa, nor for the reader. Yet this quest is the single most important constitutive factor for reading in the first place. For this, the story, like the Tristero, is the Real: unspeakable, un-locatable, and yet, from title page to closing line, it is that which always returns to itself. *The Crying of Lot 49* is truly a letter which "always arrives at its destination" (*É* 30).

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