Anti-Oedipa: Masochism, Self-Portrait, and The Crying of Lot 49

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Thomas Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49, to the extent that it centers on the predicament of an imprisoned woman, is a text that addresses the problems of gender and subjectivity. The allegorical representation, given by the novel’s two intertexts, Grimm’s fairy tale “Rapunzel” and Remedios Varo’s painting Embroidering Earth’s Mantle, of the female protagonist Oedipa Maas, a California housewife, as a “captive maiden” in the “tower” (21), the haunting muted “post horns” that “immobiliz[e]” Oedipa during her nightmarish drifting in San Francisco (124), the recognition she eventually arrives at by way of the omnipresent “Tristero” that she is predestined to be an heiress to the whole Republic, that “the legacy was America” (178), and the auction in a locked-up room that she attends at the end of the novel — all these instances of female confinement, imprisonment, and immobilization point to the inevitability of an impasse or, in her own words, “the exitlessness” (170). It is this impossibility of escape that ought to concern any attempt to deal with the female subject Pynchon presents in the novel.

But this impossibility does not necessarily make Oedipa a totally passive individual, completely at the mercy of the ominous omnipresence of what could only metaphorically be called “the Wall.” For the novel also contains an accompanying thematic strand of enlightenment that illustrates the way in which the incarcerated female subject at least manages some psychological escape: “Becoming conscious of the hard, strung presence she stood on — knowing . . . how these tracks ran on into others, others, knowing they laced, deepened, authenticated the great night around her. If only she’d looked. She remembered now old Pullman cars . . .” (179). “If only she’d looked,” “becoming conscious,” “knowing,” and “remembered now” — these are indications of enlightenment or

* An earlier version of this paper was given at the 36th ALSJ Conference at Keio University, Tokyo, 11th October 1997.
recognition on the heroine's part, and they have precisely to do with the problem of visibility, with blindness and its overcoming, just as is the case with her Sophoclean male namesake. But what she has come to "see" is not only the continuing presence of the law of the "excluded middle" that, by foreclosing on the possibility of "diversity," underpins both the national identity and the unity of America (181); she has come to see the cultural hierarchy that such binary power relations — either the visible, "official" America or the invisible, unspoken America — legitimate. Indeed, this is precisely the reason to argue for an inner awakening on the part of the female subject in this novel; commentators have spoken of Oedipa's "raising her consciousness" (Cowart 26), "a change of consciousness" (Kolodny and Peters 82), and her "open[ing of her] eyes" (Palmeri 99).\footnote{But Palmeri discusses Oedipa's "opening of her eyes" in terms of "unenlightenment" (99).} And some critics, including Cowart, take this awakening itself as her way of negotiating exitlessness, as a testimony to her accomplished "escape" (Cowart 26) and "emancipation" (Tanner 73). Oedipa's claustrophobic search for a way out of the tower is, within the novel, effectively displaced into psychological and therefore personal terms, into a search for a self-consciousness about where and how she is situated inside the doubly stratified American cultural totality. This is Pynchon's postmodern version of Greek anagnorisis, paranoiac and solipsistic as it is.

What I wish to attempt in this essay, mainly in order to demonstrate that this otherwise profitable focus on the personal, the psychological, and various versions of the themes of "awakening" and "liberation" in many of the significant readings of the novel is nevertheless problematic, especially when the point at issue is female subjectivity, is to describe the gender relations in The Crying of Lot 49 as variations of the masochistic master-slave relationship elaborated in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's Venus in Furs. This juxtaposition of an American postmodernist fiction of the 1960s with a continental novel of the later nineteenth century is based on my conviction that the births of the two texts, or more precisely, the two "historical events," are conditioned by the same Western cultural matrix, and it is intended as a way of accounting for that cluster of elements in Pynchon's novel which is at odds with the "consciousness-raising" strand that has been privileged so far. But I must hasten to
add that in order to complement the juxtaposition, in the course of my discussion I will let a third text — one of Cindy Sherman’s photographic self-portraits — “interfere” with it. I do this because I am also convinced that these self-portraits, produced by an American female artist less than a dozen years later than Pynchon’s novel, are not only intertextually but also genealogically related to the two texts, and that they are born of the same cultural matrix in their own contingent way. After all, they all point to a single *topos* (both “topic” and “place”), the imprisonment of a woman and her polymorphous prison house, which is not restricted to English-language literature. Not only do Sherman’s “photographic” self-portraits make us more alert to the problem of artistic medium and the inseparability of the material and the aesthetic in masochism. Her photographic “self-portrait” also enables us to recognize the important difference in cultural and political implications between the female subject passively imprisoned by men in their representations and the forms of female subjectivity produced by women’s self-consciously imprisoning themselves through praxis. These issues are ultimately linked up with a broader problem of which they are but local manifestations: the problem of the position of the female subject within the totalizing masculine discourse of capitalism, a problem in relation to which we must recast the “figure” of Oedipa Maas and delimit its subjective contours.

My thesis that the gender relations inscribed in *The Crying of Lot 49* are masochistic domination-subordination relationships reflects a will, let me begin by confessing: a will to resist a facile and predictable interpretation which relies upon that other sexual perversion which also involves the problems of power, domination, and control. Indeed, given my kind of thesis, one question would immediately arise: why is this seemingly masochistic master-slave relationship not a more plausible sadomasochistic one? The first thing we should remember is that a master-slave relationship is not limited to sadomasochism, nor is a master necessarily a sadist, or a slave necessarily a masochist; but that a master-slave relationship is also found in and even constitutive of masochism, and that therefore it has its own unique kind of master, as we will see shortly in our discussion of Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*. It is mainly because of this textual evidence found in the originary literary work, which is as much autobiographical as it is fictional, that I would argue that recourse to sadomasochism is, at least for our present purposes, unnecessary, and that it is possible and even urgent to set out to dissociate S/M by giving due
attention to the singularity of this heterogeneous event. And I insist on this despite the following way in which Oedipa at one point responds to one of her "masters": "Sadist," she says when she realizes that she has no alternative but to submit herself to Metzger, her mysterious co-executor, who has access to knowledge unknown and unknowable to her (39). I would suggest that her explicit reference here to sadism and her implicit one to sadomasochism are better understood as indices of the cultural workings that displace masochism into some kind of more problematic sadomasochistic entity or myth.¹

In this respect, the view that Oedipa is a masochistic slave-figure can be justified first by an all-too-clear profusion of those male figures who are literally "masters." But here we must also note the way in which the masochistic discourse these dominators are involved in maintaining is predicated on elaborate mechanisms of displacement. Of all those dominators, Pierce Inverarity, the late real estate mogul and Oedipa’s former lover, stands out as most representative, as is patently demonstrated by his status as "master" in relation to his stamp collection that was once, in a characteristically displaced manner, "his substitute often for her" (45). The point here is that Oedipa is in submission not so much to Pierce as an individual male figure as, through him, to the patriarchal in general, and that the multitude of figures and events she encounters are therefore but displaced, metonymic manifestations of the Master who is assigned an essentially structural task of immobilizing her. Hence the multitudinous forms in which those displaced "masters," including Pierce, obsessively present themselves before Oedipa. She is supposed to report all obscene mail to her "POTSMASTER" (46), and in the closing scene of the novel she sees the auctioneer Loren Passerine hovering on his podium like a "puppet-master" (183). Moreover, this omnipresent Master inserts himself into Oedipa’s personal orbit not only by means of these insidious yet tangible mechanisms of displacement, but also by occasionally becoming himself something invisible yet total, something only felt, there. This happens when Oedipa, sensing something lurking behind The Tristero — a hoax, Pierce, paranoia, a miracle, or The Tristero itself — can nevertheless describe it only as some portentously amorphous and powerful presence, "something truly terrible" that she keeps "waiting on" (169), just as

¹ On the problem of sadomasochistic entity, see Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," especially the chapter entitled "Are Sade and Masoch Complementary?" (37–46).
a slave girl does.

The sense of incarceration Oedipa experiences in her predicament should not be automatically ascribed to some corporal punishment or torture which her masters inflict on her body, without considering the distinct way in which it constitutes the principal site into which the masochistic discourse inserts itself. This kind of ascription is itself a mystification, and to avoid this we have instead to see, as we have already seen, that the gender relations in which Oedipa is trapped are based on semiotic mechanisms of substitution, displacement, or some other kind of figuration. It is such an insight that enables us to see the essentially linguistic nature of masochistic sexuality — to see that such prevailing, clichéd ideas of masochism as, in Gilles Deleuze's phrase, a "pleasure-pain complex" (71) and of the masochist as one who perversely delights in physical sufferings such as imprisonment, ligature, and flagellation, are in fact symptomatic of inattentiveness to the structuring principle of the masochistic master-slave relationship: the contract. "The masochist appears to be held by real chains," as Deleuze observes, "but in fact he is bound by his word alone" (75). This can be taken as meaning that if there is something in masochism that binds language to the body, it should be located in the verbal act of naming.

The transformative quality of naming is based on the synecdochic mechanism of substituting part for whole, name for a person's subjective totality. Indeed, in Sacher-Masoch's Venus in Furs when the beautiful dominatrix Wanda von Dunajew draws up a contract, an "agreement," by which the male protagonist Severin von Kuzienski is to commit himself to be her slave, this inherently performative discourse includes a stipulation that requires him, in altering his subjective status, to change his name: "As the slave of Mrs. von Dunajew, he will take the name of Gregor . . ." (Sacher-Masoch 220). But what is even more striking is the fact that of the two contracts to the same effect that Sacher-Masoch himself made with two women, Fanny von Pistor and Aurore Rümelin, the one he made with "Wanda" (Aurore's pseudonym) after the novel's publication requires him to give up his self in a way that helps to make it clearer that Oedipa's status as a female slave is indeed the effect of the same masochistic performative discourse:

My Slave,
The conditions under which I accept you as my slave and tolerate you
at my side are as follows:
You shall renounce your identity completely.
You shall submit totally to my will. . . (Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch 278)

Insofar as the will is a person’s “last will” that is supposed to be effectual after his death, we may consider Pierce’s originary act of naming Oedipa executrix of his estate by his will, of forcibly repositioning her — “One summer afternoon Mrs Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party . . . to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity . . .” (9) — to be another instance in the novel in which the asymmetric gender relations inscribed in it reveal themselves — as variants of the masochistic master-slave relationship.

Yet in terms of the politics of naming, there is a crucial difference between the contractual relationship between Oedipa and Pierce, which is based on his will, and the same relationship between Severin/Sacher-Masoch and “Wanda”: it is the chiasmatic reversal of the master/slave roles: one with the master naming his female slave and the other with the mistress naming her male slave. To account for this inversion — a corollary of the hierarchy inherent in the gender relations dramatized in novels like Venus in Furs or The Crying of Lot 49, which is also the hierarchy operative in real gender relations — we need to map the position of male masochism and figure out the meaning or “value” it has in the patriarchal cultural system as a whole. In other words, we need to reconsider whether this sexual perversion is in reality transgressive or reaction- ary.

In Venus in Furs Wanda is given significance, we must be reminded, only because she is the embodiment, like “Pygmalion’s statue” to which Severin likens her on encountering her in the park (Sacher-Masoch 156), of his “image of the ideal woman,” an image, originally evoked by his aunt, of a beautiful tyrant in furs with a whip in her hand (Sacher-Masoch 175). This precession of a particular image that is the defining feature of Wanda’s “characterization,” or even of femininity in general if it is an imaginary product of men’s desire, forms the basis for the whole masochistic drama of domination and subordination. It is typically enacted, for example, when Wanda and Severin first play the roles of mistress and slave before a mirror and, satisfied with her own perfor-
mance, she asks him: "Do I please you?" (Sacher-Masoch 185). As this complacent, as well as complaisant, self-reference to her own role-playing indicates, Wanda the dominatrix not only does not object to or resist her submission, in practice, to her slave; but she is completely unaware of it in the first place. More important, she even unconsciously reinforces her status as an embodiment of a particular male image, as a fleshed-out image, through her blind acceptance of her gratifying "mirror image" as herself. Thus even in such an allegedly transgressive gender relationship as the masochistic one dramatized in Venus in Furs, it is still the male figure who desires, and the dominatrix is but his desired object and even in practical collusion with him, despite the ostensibly female-dominated power structure. To put this another way, male masochism, or a masochism in which the masochist is male, regards the dominatrix only as the male slave's instrument for realizing or concretely representing his ideal image of femininity; and this depends on his capacity for ironically manipulating images, representations, and the mirror that is the authentic material means of producing images and representations. At this point we realize that the dominating power that the male masochist paradoxically wields over the dominatrix is inseparable from the aesthetic. That masochism is fundamentally linguistic, as well as that the slave Severin is characterized as a man endowed with a natural inclination toward "aestheticism" (Sacher-Masoch 175), is an inevitable corollary of the fact that male masochism is by definition an art of masculine power.

The implications of the inversion of the master/slave roles in Pierce's act of naming Oedipa become obvious, given the idea of male masochism as a cultural apparatus for paradoxically reproducing and circulating patriarchal discourses through self-annihilation. It is because their contractual relationship, unlike that between Severin/Sacher-Masoch and "Wanda," is not consensual but unilateral, exactly like the act of giving — indeed, what his will does is to give, and it is itself a "given" — that Oedipa remains incapable of having the initiative, even though as a slave named by her master she formally occupies the same position as the male

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1 Precession also forms the basis for the relationship between Sacher-Masoch himself and Aurore Rümelin, a real woman transformed into the real simulacrum of the novel's dominatrix, into "Wanda" von Sacher-Masoch, who made the contract already quoted with him. This makes Venus in Furs a partly Baudrillardian "preposterous" autobiography.

2 For a full account of male masochism as "the art of power," see Mansfield.
masochist. Considering all this, we may even postulate that it is not sadomasochism but this one-sided mechanism of interpellation, this appropriation or "mastery" of the potentially transgressive rhetoric of masochism which is by definition consensual, that is precisely the basis for all patriarchal discourses and their power. Because of this asymmetric structure which in fact accompanies any "happy" performative discourse (whose desired perlocutionary effect is also achieved successfully), the potentially revolutionary female-masochistic gender relationship between Oedipa and Pierce ends up being implicated in and part of the dominating and "orthodox" patriarchal structure, with no possibility that the female slave will ever gain power over her master.

Cindy Sherman's photographic self-portrait exemplifies a form of postfeminist intervention in the ruling patriarchal power structure that is marked by these asymmetrically masochistic mechanisms of imprisonment and naming. The point is that her aesthetic practice is one of the female slave's ways of resisting the Master; and what not only makes it an effective critique but also helps us understand how the practitioner herself relates to masochistic discourses, I would call her "masochistic performativity." Indeed, we may say that if there is a doctrine that Sherman practices, it would be called "masochism for masochism." Given her imprisonment of herself, in her Untitled Film Stills, in the stereotypical, fetishized, and desperately desired images of Hollywood and New Wave heroines by naming herself the nameless "Girl," it is not difficult to see that her photographic performances are predicated on the local repetition or enactment of the very masochistic mechanisms she intends to criticize.¹ She renames and reimprisons herself by employing those very patriarchal mechanisms not to please the Master but in the service of her own artistic purposes, in an attempt to "freeze" herself in her ironic photographic images. Her way of criticizing patriarchy may be called, therefore, a kind of aesthetic homeopathy, and thanks to it she manages to make visible or rather "visualize" what is culturally invisible, namely, the otherwise latent masochistic mechanisms of naming and confinement. Her skepticism toward the possibility of escape or a world elsewhere, and her self-imprisonment not only in the stereotypical im-

¹ Significantly, Arthur C. Danto observes that "The Girl" Sherman approximates through her photographic performances is like Oedipa "the contemporary realization of the Fair Princess in the Far Tower" (14).
ages of femininity but in such a dark chamber as the camera obscura — these paradoxical, “claustrophilic” tendencies are aspects of her photographic self-representation’s reappropriative use of masochism. But what is most important is the self-abnegation and self-annihilation her self-projection entails, because it requires her to play the roles of both master and slave simultaneously in a way that makes it necessary for her to become indifferent to her own individual identity.

What should not go unremarked in discussing Sherman’s masochistic local enactment of the larger cultural masochism is the problem of the extent to which it is inseparable from materialistic concerns. By this I mean that we must focus more on the determining power of matter, take account of the materiality of her artistic medium, the photograph, and then see it as her material means of aesthetic production. It is an imperative shift of focus because we can no longer disregard the implications of the fact that within masochistic discourses the aesthetic — the photograph, painting, and even the photographer and the painter themselves — is always already appropriated by those in power; and that when they are male as in patriarchy, those artistic mediums and the artists themselves are exploited as material means of reproducing images of femininity. In Venus in Furs this is testified, for example, by the calculated use of the mirror which Severin sees as the defining characteristic of Titian’s Venus with a Mirror (Fig. 1), a portrait in which he finds the image of his “ideal” (Sacher-Masoch 154). He says of the painting: “I do not think the venerable Venetian had any ulterior motive; he simply painted the portrait of some distinguished Messalina coldly inspecting her majestic charms, and he was tactful enough to paint in Cupid holding the mirror. . . . The picture is merely a piece of flattery . . . 。” (Sacher-Masoch 149). If we focus on the politics underlying the picture’s self-referential quality in terms of the use of the aesthetic — as Cupid’s mirror redoubles “Messalina”’s beauty, so does the painter’s picture itself — it is not difficult to see that the picture itself, with its “flattering” manner of gratifying a woman’s vanity that is in fact an elaborate male technology of objectifying femininity, serves as a specular surface.

Sherman’s photographic self-portrait foregrounds precisely these materialistic, “specular” problems, only it does so in a way that discloses the impossibility of imagining a materialistic problem that is not gendered. The recognition of this impossibility is precisely what motivates her practical insistence on the importance of women’s private ownership of ma-
terial means of image production. But it seems more appropriate to say that her self-representation also constitutes a further insistence on the importance of the reappropriation of the Mirror by the slave herself. The continuing relevance of this kind of production-based materialism is clearly demonstrated by the way in which it forms the defining characteristic of the very mechanism that makes Sherman’s *Untitled Film Still #2* (Fig. 2) possible in the first place, a self-portrait that deals with exactly the same motif as Titian’s portrait of Venus before a mirror: it is made possible because Sherman successfully occupies two subjective positions at once, the female position of the represented object and the male position of the representing agent, exactly the position of Titian the male painter; but then, this simultaneous positioning and repositioning is impossible unless she is materially competent in the first place — unless she has access to that specular means, the camera. But what her photographic performance foregrounds is not only the potentialities of the female artist’s paradoxical use of the very masochistic technology and rhetoric of female confinement, which necessarily involves these materialistic problems. It also foregrounds the fact that in the process, the performer herself becomes a paradox, a lived contradiction, made possible by privately owning that masculine means of image production, the
camera, which she reappropriates in order to demonstrate that her identity as a woman can nevertheless embrace the patriarchal logic of masochism for the purpose of revitalizing indeterminacy and polysemy, however self-destructive and "masochistic" that embrace may prove.

Throughout *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas, a "puppet" woman hailed by the aesthetic discourse of masochism and trapped in its male-dominated power structure, functions primarily as an aesthetic subject. This we can see, for example, from her way of referring to the looming of The Tristero before her as a form of "performance" (54). But most relevant in the present context is her eventual determination to become a directress/actress/artist — namely, a performer — whose business it is to make a coherent story out of Pierce’s entangled legacies. Thus Oedipa remarks at the midpoint of the novel, "Shall I project a world?" (82), which is the utterance that marks the beginning of the process of her "inner awakening."

But if Oedipa’s determination to become a "projector," the "dark machine in the centre of the planetarium" (82), which is induced or rather "prompted" by Randolph Driblette, the director of *The Courier's*
Tragedy who also plays the part of Gennaro, constitutes an integral part of her eventual consciousness-raising, its effect appears rather problematic from political and cultural perspectives. For at this point we had better ask ourselves to what extent and in what way the metaphorical rendition, "Oedipa as a machine," is appropriate as a "metaphor." Indeed, what coincides with our rethinking in this way is our suspicion that Oedipa might be literally a machine, and an appropriated one at that; that, in other words, her projection, if executed, might necessarily constitute a private contribution to the reproduction, circulation, and maintenance of the law of the "excluded middle" that underpins the cultural hierarchy, the official America/the unofficial America; and further, that in that case her personal awakening itself might function as an effective "means" of reinforcing not only such a binary logic but eventually the national identity itself, about which she is beginning to be skeptical. What is at issue here is a form of the problem of co-option, and it is clearly articulated in the following passage on "redistribution":

How many shared Tristero's secret, as well as its exile? What would the probate judge have to say about spreading some kind of a legacy among them all, all those nameless, maybe as a first installment? Oboy. He'd be on her ass in a microsecond . . . proclaim her through all Orange County as a redistributionist and pinko . . . and so much baby for code, constellations, shadow-legatees. (181)

Her awakening, as a "redistributionist," to the possibility of sharing the legacy America with the nameless "exiled" is nevertheless problematic, because hers would be a redistribution of Tristero's exile among those already exiled, those disenfranchised and disinherited people who already inhabit the unofficial America. By virtue of this, it would only contribute to keeping the cultural hierarchy as it is, thus invisible.

This problematic attempt at projection/redistribution is in the novel allegorically exemplified by the failure of Maxwell's Demon to, so to speak, "change the world" because its "sort[ing] out" (86) of molecules in fact does not contradict the Second Law of Thermodynamics. But it is exemplified most dramatically by Varo's painting Embroidering Earth's Mantle. No doubt the projected upside-down scene of tryst with which Varo's heroine secretly embroiders her tapestry functions, as the painter herself says, as a "trampa" that triumphantly makes visible her accomplished escape from the tower (Cowart 27). But what renders this "trick"
problematic has to do with the very idea of visibility: since what makes the heroine’s deliverance visible at the same time makes the very fact of imprisonment invisible, the embroidered world, to the advantage of the hooded “Great Master” (Kaplan 19), is able to maintain its “official” appearance — a world with no maiden prisoners. That is, what her romantic projection in effect does is to prevent any sign of confinement from appearing on the surface of her tapestry, and thereby to make the fact of her own imprisonment, because it is unknowable to those living in the tapestry-world, nonexistent. It is, therefore, like Oedipa’s awakening to projection/redistribution, an instance of blindness, or at least of myopia — a self-satisfied practice that fails to take account of its effect on the immediate context.

It seems appropriate to say that the central point at issue in dealing with The Crying of Lot 49 should be to what extent and in what way the personal as evoked in the novel is in conflict with the possibility of criticism — or criticism of “the world,” to be more specific — if not with lamentation. In Oedipa’s case, this criticism should involve economic concerns because her relationship with Pierce makes her immediate context inseparable from patriarchal capitalism. Significantly, it is here that the problem of the invisibility of the ruling cultural hierarchy becomes most accessible. The crucial example is the episode in which Oedipa experiences a quasi-religious sense of “revelation” on first coming to San Narciso (24). What is described there is not only the two-layered America, but also the way in which it makes itself doubly invisible; and we must be able to discern the antithetical ways in which its two cultural layers make themselves invisible: on the one hand, the “outward” America, represented by the “capital” Pierce put down, paradoxically makes itself inconspicuous by becoming omnipresent and quotidian: “Nothing was happening”; on the other, the other America, which remains indiscernible unless one “tries[s] to find out,” literally becomes out of sight by being “concealed” (24).

Oedipa’s problem resides in the implied possibility, which seems almost a necessity, that the projecting and redistributing agent herself might be unknowingly functioning as an efficient “relay” that would receive, amplify, and, in her own word, “spread” patriarchal discourses of capitalism and the hierarchy they legitimate, in the process helping them pervade the cultural circuit more thoroughly. It is such an incapacity for intervention, or her inability to make herself visible, that qualita-
tively distinguishes her projection from Sherman’s self-projection. Further, we must conceive this difference to be a verbal one as well, since Oedipa’s utterance, “Shall I project a world?” should be considered as a domesticated version of the nonexistent interventionist slogan that would be a veritable caption under which the whole enterprise of Sherman’s photographic self-portrait might be presented: “Shall I project myself as projected by you, Master?” Her limitations, in other words, result from the fact that she is not self-conscious enough, not self-conscious about “myself as projected by you.” And this means that she is blind to the potentialities of becoming slave and master simultaneously — that is, of masochistically renaming herself just the way “They” (170) name her, and reimprisoning herself just the way “They” imprison her, so that she may, by virtue of this act of referring to herself, paradoxically become able to make the invisible circulation of the patriarchal discourses of capitalism equally refer to itself or “loop,” thus making it visible. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Oedipa is characterized as a woman who is denied (but not wholly) the power to name, which belongs almost exclusively to men: those male individuals who name her include not only Pierce, but also Arnold Snarf (who pins his ID badge that reads, “HI! MY NAME IS Arnold Snarf!” to Oedipa’s breast [110]) and even her husband, Mucho Maas (“‘Thank you, Mrs Edna Mosh,’ he wrapped up . . .” [139]).

Not wholly, and almost exclusively, that is. To do her justice, we must hasten to add that this denial of the power to name is not total. Or to put this another way, The Crying of Lot 49 contains instances of what we may call Oedipa’s further awakening to self-portraiture, or even her “second anagnorisis,” which is just about to be achieved and yet is instantaneously defeated. Moreover, insofar as these instances of emergent but failed self-projection involve one or another form of simultaneous positioning and repositioning, they are, predictably, accompanied by that material means which makes both gazing and being gazed possible at the same time: the mirror. First, we have a scene toward the end of the novel that combines naming with a mirror: “Change your name to Miles, Dean,

1 One exceptional instance is the scene in which Oedipa herself gives her name as “Grace Bortz” to a gynecologist, thinking she is “pregnant” (171). But note that it is only after facing a mirror and renaming herself “paranoia” — a scene we will be discussing shortly — that she has come to possess this power to name, and that even this renaming is radically different from self-portraiture.
Serge, and/or Leonard, baby, she advised her reflection in the half-light of that afternoon's vanity mirror. Either way, they'll call it paranoia. They” (170). And back in chapter 2, there is the game of “Strip Botticelli” that leads Oedipa into facing a mirror: “She made the mistake of looking at herself in the full-length mirror, saw a beach ball with feet, and laughed so violently she fell over, taking a can of hair spray on the sink with her” (36). Still, as the passages clearly show, with all these mirrors self-projection is an unimaginable practice for Oedipa because she is, on the one hand, incapable of seeing how renaming herself “paranoia,” if performed appropriately, can paradoxically function as a critical self-reference or interventionist self-portrait, rather than as an indication of the presence within herself of some internalized imperative that forces her to address herself as a social pariah; on the other hand, it is also unthinkable because she can only think of her act of looking at the figure of a caricatured and deformed woman in the mirror — namely, herself — as a “mistake,” while her “laughing” at her own mirror image has a chance, under appropriate circumstances, of becoming an effective strategy for demystifying the male image of feminine obedience.

Oedipa's blindness is a cultural complex that is simultaneously materialistic, aesthetic, and gendered. Indeed, she is herself an overdetermined invisible site which has failed to become her world's troublesome "blind spot," and which is born of her own ignorance of the fact that by holding any medium of representing women not up to nature but up to themselves, the projected women themselves can self-consciously and self-referentially reveal the workings of "culture" (patriarchal, capitalist) disguising itself as "nature." And for a woman like Oedipa who is not only a sympathizer with the dispossessed but is dispossessed herself, this alternative mimesis or self-portrait will be rendered possible only if she purchases, reappropriates, or privately owns the Mirror — the camera, the canvas, the stage, a will naming a man executor, or any such specular material means. This means that unlike Sherman, Oedipa is an individual not living capitalism enough; that she is not masochist enough to make it possible for others to see the Wall.
WORKS CITED


