

# Ideas of Community in *The Crying of Lot 49*

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## 1. We, They and Oedipa

In his famous essay "The Sacred, the Profane and *The Crying of Lot 49*," Edward Mendelson wrote, "The processes of *V.* isolate; those of *Lot 49* create community" (114). The main aim of this paper is to assess the second half of that statement. I intend to analyze some ideas of "community" that can be found in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. To do so, I will follow a double approach, sociological and rhetorical, in order to examine how communities are described in the novel, what tropes are used to refer to the relationships between members of those communities, and what role they might play in narrative development. My analysis will draw on some recent writings by Maurice Blanchot, Jean Luc Nancy, Alphonso Lingis, and J. Hillis Miller, all of whom have proposed models of community that seem particularly relevant for the analysis of the kind of collectivity portrayed by Pynchon in *Lot 49*.

Forms of collectivity that might be initially called "communities" are countless in Pynchon's second novel. The first two of them can already be found on the first page of the book, namely, the "tupperware party" Oedipa comes from and the law firm Warpe, Wistful, Kubitschek and McMingus. The general definition of community as "a body of people who have something in common" (*OED*) is wide enough to include those two and of course all the other communities any reader might have in mind (Inamorati Anonymous, The Peter Pinguid Society, and, obviously, Tryster).

Following early critical perspectives on the issue, I will trace an initial broad distinction between two groups of communities in *Lot 49*, a distinction that is embedded in the novel's story itself. In the first group, I include what Louis Althusser called "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs), tentatively corresponding to institutionalized communities such as the family, the government, the educational system or the media. These institutionalized communal structures are best summarized in the novel as "the Republic" (86) or "the American community of crust and mantle" (123).<sup>1</sup> According to Althusser, what characterizes these institutionalized communities is the fact that admission to them is fulfilled through a performative speech act or "calling," so that "the individual is addressed as a (free) subject in order that

he shall (freely) accept his subjection" (182). This condition is expressed in the American civil order in Uncle Sam's "I want you," a symbol brought in by Oedipa's vision during her first conversation with Dr. Hilarius in the novel (10). As a reward for his subjection to ISAs, according to Althusser, man is provided with a unified vision of himself as subject. In Oedipa's case, she is given a unified vision of herself as a young Republican "suburban housewife" transmuted into a princess locked away in her ivory tower waiting for her prince to rescue her from solitude.<sup>2</sup>

John Johnston rightly asks who the representatives of this sort of institutionalized community are in the novel, and concludes that there are actually none worthy of mention, except Pierce Inverarity, who is dead, and Oedipa herself (70). I would claim, quite to the contrary, that several other characters represent this order in *Lot 49*. There is, in the first place, the triad of husband, lawyer and shrink, representing different aspects of Oedipa's subjection to civil order: her husband, representing family links, her lawyer, Roseman, representing the legal system, and her psychiatrist, Dr. Hilarius, responsible for her inclusion into the category of "suburban housewives" (10). Of course, there are others representing scientific-technological, academic, artistic, and historical discourses. Most of the characters who are of any apparent help to Oedipa in the course of her quest share the feature of their being, at the same time, both inside and outside the system. They seem to be linked to the Trystero in some way, but they are also part of the civil order it supposedly opposes.

The second group of communities I have mentioned comprises all the other forms of collectivity described in the novel as opposed or alternative to officially sanctioned institutions, and could be encompassed by the Trystero. Most of them are listed by James Nohrnberg in the article "Pynchon's Paraclete" (155-57): Inamorati Anonymous, The Peter Pinguid Society, Conjuración de los Insurgentes Anarquistas, the Scurvhamites, the Alameda County Death Cult, etc. Tony Tanner has described these communities as "the kind of protoanarchic group with which Pynchon's work shows sympathy" (70), and they could be identified with other groups in Pynchon's fiction such as "the Whole Sick Crew" in *V*. Critics such as Frank Kermode, John Farrell, or James Nohrnberg have used different sociological and anthropological models in order to describe these groups as "socially segregated subuniverses" (Kermode 164; using Berger & Luckmann's model) or "liminal communities" (Nohrnberg 154; using Victor Turner's).

What the members of these communities share, what they have "in common," might be completely different in each case—political ideas, cosmologies, suicidal tendencies. However, they all share some features that allow us to include them in the same group; from a sociological perspective, they are all secret societies and opposition to official ideas or socio-political structures defines them. They are, in Pynchon's own terms, "counterforces" (as in *V*. or *Gravity's Rainbow*). From a rhetorical point of view, they are

conspiratorial communities described as dark, underground, marginal, or peripheral to the Republic. Finally, from the point of view of the novel's story, they all gather around the muted horn symbol used as leitmotif in Oedipa's quest. In this sense, it can be claimed that if they somehow constitute a community of communities it happens so by virtue of "epistemological contiguity" in the hermeneutic chain favored by the quest structure.

The divisions I have traced between groups of communities in the novel underline the dialectic or oppositional structure (Tanner 56) according to which there is an "Us/We" and a "They," each one depending on the existence of the other. Pynchon himself in *Gravity's Rainbow* best explained the workings of this dialectics: "Of course a well-developed They system is necessary—but it's only half the story. For every They there ought to be a We. In our case there is. Creative paranoia means developing at least as thorough a We-system as a They-system" (638).

In *Lot 49*, this dialectical structure is complicated by Oedipa's unstable position between the two opposing systems. For Oedipa, who is the main focalizer in the novel, "They" means entirely different things at different moments. When she first meets Metzger, the narrator uses the capitalized "They": "Oedipa thought at first that They, somebody up there, were putting her on" (17). Be it the underground Trystero—"they've saturated me" (122)—or the civil order composed by "the innocent, the virtuous, the socially integrated and well adjusted" (84), the fact remains that Oedipa never gets to become part of a "we." It seems that her problem is not so much one of confronting "otherness," as some critics have claimed, but of becoming incorporated into some sort of "we." She rejects becoming part of ISAs (by rejecting participation in Dr. Hilarius's experiment, for instance) but she does not get to become part of the Trystero either. By the end of the text, Oedipa is still on the verge of becoming part of the Trystero, as she ponders: "Perhaps she'd be hounded someday as far as joining Trystero itself" (125). As Johnston points out, Oedipa's quest only enlarges her isolation, which is expressed through the recurrent phrasing: "There was nobody who could help her. Nobody in the world" (118); "her isolation complete" (122); "you have nobody else to tell this to" (77).

The passage in which Oedipa lists the alternatives for her quest in terms of the invention or the real existence of Trystero has been analyzed by some critics as a dichotomy between paranoia and conspiracy. This dichotomy can also be read as one between solitude (the paranoid is one who thinks everyone else is "in on it" but him or her) and community (if the Trystero is real and she knows about it, it means she can become part of it). If conspiracy means, etymologically, "breathing together," Oedipa's exclusion from the community of conspirators is formulated in the novel in terms of her breathing in the void: "teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum. For this, Oh God, was the void" (118).

Patrick O'Donnell uses the term "paranoid community" (14), but term is contradictory because paranoia necessarily implies being alone, not being part of the community whose existence can be only hinted at. According to Deleuze and Guattari in their seminal work *Anti-Oedipus*, the paranoid is precisely the one who creates communities in which he is not included: the paranoid, they claim, is the artist of great molar formations, of gregarious formations and organized masses. The idea of Oedipa being just "paranoid"—etymologically "out of herself," echoed in the text as "out of your skull" (118), and according to O'Donnell, elsewhere, the most popular social disease during the sixties—would confirm her role as creator of a community to which she longs to belong.

## 2. Being "In on it:" The Intent to Communicate

As already stated, Oedipa Maas does not belong to any of these communities at the beginning of the novel, but during her inquiry about Inverarity's estate, she learns about them. Her search can be interpreted as a quest to find new community links after the conventional ones start to fail. From this perspective, what triggers Oedipa's quest is not so much curiosity about Pierce Inverarity's estate, but her need to establish some contact, her "intent to communicate" (15).

The communities Oedipa meets, moreover, qualify as "epistemological collectivities": their existence depends upon shared knowledge. In order to become a member of any of them, Oedipa would need to be "in on it," that is, to have enough information about the group's existence to grant her membership. The difficulties of being accepted in any of these alternative communities is stressed in the novel in terms of what she is allowed to know, to hear and to see: "You weren't supposed to see that" (35), says Mike Fallopian when she witnesses the Yoyodine inter-office mail delivery at The Scope. Her frustrated attempts to enter the realm of secret communities by talking about them to others is cut off again and again by the "ritual reluctance" she perceives around her (48, 54).

Oedipa's craving for information about the Trystero is repeatedly interrupted in the novel, and in each case, she is finally rejected as an alien to each community.<sup>3</sup> She is then caught in a catch-22 situation: she cannot become a member of the secret communities unless she knows about them, and she will not learn about them unless she is part of them. Tony Tanner summarized this epistemological contradiction with the phrase "Those Who Know, know" (Tanner 59). According to J. Hillis Miller, this kind of paradox is typical of parabolic writing. According to Miller, a parable is "a mode of figurative language which is the indirect indication, at a distance, of something that cannot be described directly, in literal language" (*Tropes* 135). The Trystero in Pynchon's novel fits that definition of what cannot be named

directly, but only through indirect representation, that is, through parables. A parable needs to be decoded according to a key only a few people know about and this, according to Miller, is what constitutes its paradoxical nature. Writing about Jesus's parable of the sower (Matthew 13: 1-23), Miller claims: "Unless you understand the Word already as such, unless you are already fertile grounded in it, which means somehow already grounded in it, sown by it, you will not understand it when it is expressed in parable" (*Tropes* 140). In other words, "if you can understand the parables, you do not need them. If you need them, you cannot hope to understand them" (141).

Oedipa's recurrent feeling of being on the verge of revelation can be read, in this light, as the imminence of rupture in this circularity. In all the underground communities that populate the novel, the circular sharing of information is what makes visible the existence of the community. We should also remember that community and communication come from the same etymological root. Moreover, they share the prefix "com-," indicating reciprocity, with other recurrent terms in the novel such as contact, consensus, conspiracy or connection. All these images are incarnated in the circle of children Oedipa meets in Golden Gate Park: "The night was empty of all terror for them, they had inside their circle an imaginary fire, and needed nothing but their own unpenetrated sense of community" (82).

In all cases, what brings together a group of people in the novel is the sharing of information or knowledge, thematized in the plot by means of the Trystero, a postal system. It should not be forgotten that, above all, the Trystero is a mechanism to exchange messages in situations where physical contact is not possible. According to Jean Luc Nancy in *The Inoperative Community*, the verbal activity in which the members of a community are involved is precisely what constitutes their status as a community. A community, claims Nancy, is born in the act of telling the story of its own origins, what he calls the "mythical scene":

They were not assembled like this before the story; the recitation has gathered them together. Before, they were dispersed. [. . .] Myth arises only from a community and for it: they engender one another, infinitely and immediately. Nothing is more common, nothing is more absolutely more common than myth. [. . .] [M]yth is the unique speech of the many, who come thereby to recognize one another, who communicate and commune in myth. [. . .] Myth communicates the common, the being-common of what it reveals or what it recites. (Nancy 50)

In the case of *Lot 49*, the community of conspirators is born in the verbal act of talking about themselves. Belonging to the community is signaled by knowing about it, which in turn gives you the right to share your information: if you are "in on it," you are part of the group and you can exchange information with

other members. Communities in *Lot 49* are communities of secret-sharers. In the light of Nancy's ideas, Oedipa's longing for "the cry that might abolish the night" can be read as her desire to enter the community of conspirators, a community that is unnamable: "that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, The Word" (125).

Sometimes the exchange of messages is the only ostensible activity for these communities. In *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, Alphonso Lingis presents his model of community in terms borrowed from information theory, claiming that an irrational, alternative form of community is born between human beings in situations where "what is said is hardly important, but the saying itself is the essential requisite" (109). This is the principle on which groups such as Inamorati Anonymous or the Peter Penguid Society seem to work, communities in which the phatic function of language is taken to its extreme (35).

### 3. Weaver or Woven?

The epistemological and the communitarian logics operating in *Lot 49* are brought together by means of a recurrent rhetorical device. The novel uses metaphors relating the notions of community and communication to threads. The opening scene features a brief flashback in which the reader learns of Oedipa's last conversation with her former lover Pierce Inverarity. Pierce's call comes from an unknown location—"from where she would never know" (6)—a fact that is underlined in the novel while at the same time pointing to the idea that the telephone line unites the two characters at both ends while the conversation lasts: "That phone line could have pointed any direction, been any length" (6). The phone line works in the novel as the first of a series of metaphors related to threads, wires or cords of all sorts joining characters together. Princess Rapunzel throws her plaits down from a window for her prince to climb up to her (12), the party by the pool in Chapter 2 brings together The Paranoids "after plugging extension cords into all available outlets in the other rooms and leading them in a bundle out a window" (25), and the muted horn sign is said to work as a "cuff-link" (85) between the disinherited of America.

To justify why this "thread" imagery is relevant for my topic, I will briefly address Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibile*. In the city called "Ersilia," its inhabitants lay threads from window to window to indicate the relationships existing between them. Each kind of relationship—family, business, friendship—is signaled by a different color. When there are so many threads that they can no longer walk or see anything, they leave, taking their houses with them, but leaving the threads as evidence of the community patterns

created throughout the years. The threads in Calvino's story remind us of how often they are used in common language as a metaphor for the relationships between human beings.

In *Ariadne's Thread*, J. Hillis Miller analyzes the metaphor of the line or thread in connection with the notion of visible links among human beings, but also as a metaphor for narrative development (20). In *Lot 49*, the fields of interpersonal relationships and narrative development are brought together by using metaphors of the line. Terms such as web, net, yarn, or tie are used in the novel as images of connection in this double sense ("complex web" [24], "tie in with the word Trystero" [65]); other recurrent images include knitting or weaving, starting obviously with Remedios Varo's painting "Bordando el manto terrestre" (13; see also "woven into the Trystero" [56]).<sup>4</sup> The term "connection" itself comes from the Indo-European root "ned," meaning "to bind, to tie" ("I want to see if there is a connection" [52]).

It is my claim that, in *Lot 49*, both uses of this metaphor are interwoven in such a way that narrative development is only possible through the tending of threads from one character to another. The two meanings of "thread" are united in a single metaphor, just as the two interpretations of "entropy" are brought together in Maxwell's Demon. The two fields are mixed in the quest structure following the conventions of the *Prüfungsroman*. This has been analyzed in detail by John Johnston (though he does not use that term) and it can be summarized as the notion that plot development in the novel takes place as a series of encounters with different men, each one representing an epistemological position, as in allegories of knowledge such as Boetius' or Langland's (Johnston 54-55).

The metaphor of the thread, moreover, establishes a logic of contiguity among the constituents of the plot or community in the novel. The repeatedly frustrated exchanges of information between members of the secret societies and Oedipa work as knots in a rope that brings her closer and closer to actual affiliation, to the disentanglement of the Trystero mystery and to narrative denouement.

In *Design and Debris*, Joseph M. Conte claims that "Pynchon's fictions (including Herbert Stencil's pursuit of the eponymous character in *V.* and Oedipa Maas's inquiries after the Trystero System in *Lot 49*) do not attempt to unravel plots but to become complicit in a process of intrication" (172-73). In Pynchon's own words, "this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive knotting into" (*GR* 3). Talking specifically about *Lot 49*, I would claim that the quest structure of the novel depends at the same time on Oedipa's disentanglement of the Trystero mystery and on her becoming "woven" into it. Thomas Schaub noted in *The Voice of Ambiguity* that Oedipa "is not sure whether she is weaver or woven" (34). This inclusive logic corresponds, as I will claim, to what J. Hillis Miller calls the "auto-immunitary logic" of the communities described in the novel.

The thread, moreover, can be seen as an “extension of man” in McLuhan’s sense, so that it allows, in the metaphorical realm (the thread is a physical vestige of presence), to keep the idea that communication among human beings is a question of touching the other. Touch is precisely the second metaphorical field most widely used in the novel to refer to communication, including all the expressions using the idea of physical contact as metaphor for communication processes. The expression “to keep in touch” is used at least four times in the novel in the sense of keeping connected or related to someone (80, 102, 116, 126). Correspondingly, “losing touch” is used in the reverse sense (110). Metaphors of communication as physical contact are relevant to my analysis because they impose a rhetorical regime of presence as the condition for the transmission of information. In our Baudrillardian world, this sort of metaphorical expression reveals some nostalgia for modes of communication requiring physical presence of the parts involved. Moreover, this rhetorical regime suggests a metonymic logic, that is, one operating by contiguity among elements, so that the connection that guarantees the information exchange is established thanks to physical proximity.

From this perspective, it should be considered that communication within the communities portrayed by Pynchon is presented in the novel in hierarchical relationship with other kinds of communication as a truer, deeper sort of contact: “A network by which X number of Americans are *truly* communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system” (117; emphasis added). This hierarchy is reproduced by many critics (not necessarily in a conscious way, I would say) who have read the novel as a nostalgic claim for the need to reinstall pure reality that has been clouded by the realm of simulacra in the postmodern California of the 1960s. The Trystero, in this reading, represents the promise of return to a communitarian pre-lapsarian status of the sort described by Jean Luc Nancy.

When Oedipa faces the old sailor, close to what Nohrnberg calls her “*pietà*” (153), she suddenly feels the need to touch him: “She was overcome all at once by the need to touch him” (87). Oedipa’s feeling of empathy is here literally expressed as a need to touch the other person. More important than that, however, is the way in which Pynchon finishes that sentence, turning her into a “Doubting Thomas”: “as if she could not believe in him, or would not remember him, without it” (87). The literal and metaphorical senses of “being in touch” are fused in this passage as Oedipa enacts the exchange of information with the old sailor in terms of a close embrace.

#### 4. Miracles of Consensus

Physical proximity is the realm of metonymy in rhetoric. The epistemological regime of conspiracy is also one of contiguity among constituents—breathing

together—possible only because those involved exchange words/breath. All the elements that constitute the literary description of communities in the novel have to do with touch and physical proximity. Both elements are felt to be lost in the contemporary world. When Oedipa claims that people are *truly* communicating through the Trystero, she is implying that other conventional forms of communication—telephone, official mail and so on—are less “true,” thus reinforcing the hierarchical structure.

Waste is the final metaphor for the workings of WASTE, also operating through a metonymic logic working on contiguity, contact, contagion, like a chain or thread linking together its members. The alternative communities in the novel bring together people who are normally excluded from the other, institutionalized communities: isolates, disinherited, the Preterite. In the rhetorical-sociological structure created in the novel, those who are expelled from the institutionalized community (the Republic) are gathered together in several underground communities, “a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery” (86). The excluded ones belong to the underground, live in darkness (while the official institutionalized communities take place “in public light”) and belong to the margins (whereas the ISAs constitute the core of the system, the city center, etc.).

*Lot 49* exemplifies through this centrifugal mechanism what J. Hillis Miller calls the “auto-immunity” logic of all communities, an idea that he takes from Jacques Derrida’s late work.<sup>5</sup> In order to keep itself safe and pure, the community needs to expel everything that threatens it—Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* expressed the same idea in anthropological terms. In doing so, however, the community threatens and exposes its own vulnerability as a unified whole. The paradoxical structure Miller talks about “is like that of the body’s immune system repelling foreign invaders and then turning its immune system against itself in what is called ‘auto-immunity’” (“Postmodern Ethics”). In *Lot 49*, the official community “of crust and mantle” expels all those individuals who appear as a threat to it, disinheriting those who seem to have nothing in common with the rest of its members and dooming them to isolation.

What Pynchon’s novel proposes is that a new community can be born among the disinherited and the isolates in a spontaneous way, like Jesus Arrabal’s “anarchist miracle” of consensus (82). Arrabal’s formulation is quite close to some recent theorizations of alternative communitarian forms, like Maurice Blanchot’s in *The Unavowable Community*:

They are there, they are no longer there; they ignore the structure that could stabilize them. Presence and absence, if not merged, at least exchange themselves virtually. That is what makes them formidable for the holders of a power that does not acknowledge them: not letting themselves be grasped, being as much the dissolution of the social fact as the stubborn obstinacy to reinvent the latter in

a sovereignty that law cannot circumscribe, as it challenges it while maintaining itself as its foundation [. . .] Inert, immobile, less a gathering than the always imminent dispersal of a presence momentarily occupying the whole space and nevertheless without a place (utopia), a kind of messianism announcing nothing but its autonomy and its unworking. (33)

This description of a community of the disinherited also matches Lingis' idea of "a community of those who have nothing in common." It is similar to something Schaub had already hinted at: "the word 'community' here is a metaphor for the lack of community we all share" (40). Schaub's description of what he called "the communion of withdrawal" (41) shares many features with recent theorizations of what a community is beyond the institutionalized limits of ISAs.

According to Lingis, a community of those who have nothing in common is born out of the exclusion of some of the members of the rational, institutionalized communities: "The community that produces something in common, that establishes truth and that now establishes a technological universe of simulacra, excludes the savages, the mystics, the psychotics" (13). The same idea is described by Blanchot when he claims that "[it] differs from a social cell in that it does not allow itself to create a work and has no production value as aim" (11).

Unlike the official, institutionalized address performed by ISAs to include citizens in the life of the Republic (Uncle Sam's calling), becoming knotted into the Trystero is an apparently spontaneous act on the part of a number of people.<sup>6</sup> The mere existence of this kind of community can be seen as a threat to the official, institutionalized ISAs because it questions their apparent omnipotence by challenging the idea that an individual can be such only if he is recognized by ISAs and that America is a "true continuity" (either us, or nothing). After Oedipa's night rambling, during which she meets countless bits of evidence of the WASTE community's existence, she concludes that the underground margins of the world are a real place: "Since they could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world" (86). The fact of their being ignored by power structures makes the members of this community deliberate in their attempt to definitely withdraw to this alternative space beyond America's "true continuity." Again, in Blanchot's words, "That is what makes them formidable for the holders of a power that does not acknowledge them: not letting themselves be grasped, being as much the dissolution of the social fact as the stubborn obstinacy to reinvent the latter in a sovereignty that law cannot circumscribe, as it challenges it while maintaining itself as its foundation" (33).<sup>7</sup>

In my reading of *Lot 49* as presenting a model of community, the final question to be answered necessarily is whether Oedipa's quest does finally bring her out of her tower and into some form of community with others

(Johnston 53). Keeping in mind the strict dialectical structure I have analyzed up to this moment, the answer to that question would be “no.” A wiser Oedipa does not return to her place as subject defined by ISAs at the end of her quest, nor does she definitely abandon her suburban housewife life to join the underground crusade against The System. A third possibility might be proposed, however, one which depends upon the acceptance of one of those “excluded middles” mentioned in the novel.

A third sort of community might be identified, one that stands in between the two other groups, participating in both yet escaping the closed dialectical structure they propose. This community would be based on the epistemological structure that has been described in this paper and it would include most of the characters that are of any help to Oedipa during her quest. They all share the feature of their being, at the same time, inside and outside the system, linked to the Trystero in some way, but also part of the civil order it opposes. At first sight, they all seem perfect representatives of different ISAs and their official discourses: lawyers, scientists, university professors, doctors, war veterans, playwrights, etc. On the other hand, all of them provide Oedipa with clues and hints about the Trystero, thus proving that the conspiracy is not a perfectly sealed, closed system, but one with many leaks. They become threads in Oedipa’s own “tapestry of the Trystero” by virtue of the quest structure she sets in motion in her inquiry about Inverarity’s legacy.

In trying to disentangle the Trystero mystery, Oedipa contributes to the weaving of a new net into which she is herself woven (Schaub 34). Moreover, the fact that the plot remains open, that there is no closure to Oedipa’s quest, suggests that this new form of community can extend indefinitely as long as a new connection can be made, a new person can be knotted into it by bringing in a new piece of information. A final connection can be made, I would claim, by paying attention to the metaleptic turn by means of which each of us is included into Oedipa’s quest in each of our readings, thus joining the community of searchers triggered by Pynchon.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pynchon. *The Crying of Lot 49*. 1965. London: Vintage, 2000. All further references are to this edition. However, I would like to acknowledge the variations between “community” and “continuity” in this passage in different editions of the novel.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the connection between Oedipa’s reverie and Remedios Varo’s painting “Bordando el manto terrestre” in terms of the character’s feeling of isolation, see Cowart, 23–30.

<sup>3</sup> The term alien is used at the end of the novel—reinforcing the way in which

she is cut off from any community; she is the “fully other,” which is the etymological meaning of “alien.”

<sup>4</sup> In *The Art of Allusion*, David Cowart analyzes the influence of Remedios Varo’s paintings in *Lot 49*, pointing to the use of the embroidery metaphor in the novel. He does not mention, however, the recurrent symbols related to sewing and embroidering in Varo’s work, of which “Bordando el manto terrestre” is only one example.

<sup>5</sup> Miller draws on Derrida’s *Foi et savoir* (“Faith and Knowledge”) to claim that every community operates on a paradoxical logic and borrows the term “community as common auto-immunity” (cf. Derrida 87): “What Jacques Derrida calls the auto-co-immunity logic of the community, in which those who should protect the community’s safety endanger and damage it, in which the community turns destructively against a group within itself, part of itself” (“Postmodern Ethics”).

<sup>6</sup> The spontaneous gathering together of this community, together with the need to find a way of *truly communicating* finds an echo in Pynchon’s statement in “A Journey into the Mind of Watts”: “Far from a sickness, violence may be an attempt to communicate, or to be who you really are.”

<sup>7</sup> I would claim that this community, however, is never fulfilled in the novel. The power that emerges from it is kept on a potential realm, as a pre-lapsarian state to be recovered, represented in the romantic image of the circle of children Oedipa meets in Golden Gate Park (82) or as the prophecy of an Apocalypse at the end of the novel (125).

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