# Postmodern Metamorphosis:
# Capitalism and the Subject in Contemporary American Fiction

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C O N T E N T S

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

## Postmodern Metamorphosis

This study seeks to locate itself at the crossroads where two problems--postmodernism and the subject--intersect with each other, in an attempt to address that particular problem which is to be found at the intersection, the problem of the "postmodern subject," in terms of metamorphosis. The way in which I thus propose my thesis here is based on my understanding that one of the defining characteristics of our subjectivity in "postmodernism"--what Fredric Jameson has called the "cultural logic of late capitalism"--is its close relationship with the notion of change, whether we associate this "change" with "something new" that may be the only thing we as consumers want or with the possibility of political intervention or social change. Exploring the postmodern subject's various forms of change--various forms of its compulsion and desire to change--and their implications both for the "real individual" and for culture as a whole, this attempt at a literary morphology of

"postmodern metamorphosis" not only aims to delineate and demystify dominant forms of transformation that may be in collusion with ideologies and institutions; it also attempts to excavate forms of metamorphosis that count as errors, accidents, anomalies, and mutations, which it, then, tries to connect with the possibility of survival as well as of critique.

But at the same time a sense of history also informs this attempt, despite the fact that the texts I will be dealing with here--texts that have been subsumed under the category of "postmodern American fiction"--are commonly assumed too "contemporary" to be ever called "historical," as well as that postmodernism is generally considered a historical period marked by its "dehistoricizing" tendencies. But by the "sense of history" I do not mean, for example, anything that can be automatically associated with the common expression, "That's past history," which is uttered when one wants to keep "that" "in its place" as something done with. On the contrary, by the "historical sense" I mean something more like the "historicity of the present," which is closely related to matters like contingency and chance, contradiction and conflict, singularity and mutations, the proper name and the performative, recurrence and atavism, the beginning and genealogy, happening and the "event"--matters most familiar to us when we imagine ourselves saying, "I don't know why, but somehow 'that' happens to <u>be</u>, here and now."[1] It is self-evident that given all these

characteristics postmodernist fiction can never be ahistorical.[2]

My conception of "postmodern metamorphosis" refers less to what the author himself (all the authors I will be discussing are male) experiences, "his own" metamorphosis he undergoes once involved in textual practices--which is an interesting topic in its own right, especially in view of the Foucauldian notion of the "author-function" as well as of Barthes's celebrated conception of "the death of the author." On the contrary, it refers more to the forms of metamorphosis experienced by the characters he creates and represents, or is made to create and represent, in his texts. Accordingly, more emphasis will be put in this study on representation and, to speak more "historically," the text as event. What I mean by all this is that close attention to the tension in a given text between these metamorphosing subjects--especially between the ways in which they remake and refashion their own bodies--and also to how one form of metamorphosis dominates there while others remain subordinate, enables us to retrieve, recover, and reactivate at least to a certain extent the conditions or a cultural matrix, including contradictions, conflicts, and accidents, that controlled the birth of that particular text. The unpeaceful play of warring metamorphoses which is barely visible in our texts' otherwise well-wrought texture is the principal lead, I would suggest, for their singularity, historicity, and heterogeneity to which I desire to bear

witness.

I

Before looking closely into what postmodern metamorphosis is like, I feel the need to specify some of the "postmodern conditions" which I take here as "givens," as realities or the structural limits within which we happen to be living and within which, consequently but contingently, our desires, identities, bodies, languages, and everyday practices are made to be what they are. None of these conditions is either shocking or scandalous: insofar as we individuals are constructed or "always-already interpellated" as subjects--as "the subjugated" --we are already dead or at least "abstract," are always born stillborn, and cannot exist except as "puppets" or "zombies," any one of which one should not consider too strained a trope (Althusser, Foucault, Barthes, but also Pynchon); social reality is pervasively commodified by the "logic of late capitalism," which is the "cultural dominant" of postmodernism (Jameson); its texture is therefore aesthetic, and everything--not only wrestling, fashion, and striptease but also commodities, bodies, sexual orientations, identities, and representations--is a text and subject to semiotic investigations, semiotics (or semiology) here understood as a science or study of signs as signifiers (Eagleton, Barthes, and de Man); since "meaning" is no longer related to any unitary term (even if it is called "the

signified," and however arbitrary its connection with the signifier may be) but conceived instead as a matter of "meaning-effect," signification, and the play of signifiers, our identity should be equally understood as an "identity-effect" because we are nothing but self-conscious signifiers (poststructuralism); because of the increasingly intensified commodification, fragmentation, and "spatialization" of history, the authentic temporality of the postmodern subject tends to the schizophrenic's "perpetual present" (Jameson); the logical consequence of this intensification is the postmodern crisis of "metanarrative," for which are now substituted, on the one hand, such a non-narrative form of legitimation as efficiency or "performativity" and, on the other, the little narrative (petit récit) or "paralogy" (Lyotard); the internal drive of postmodernism is the avant-garde aesthetics' desire to suspect, challenge, invent, and assay, a desire to become the paradoxical "future anterior [post modo]," and the postmodern is therefore not only part of or internal to the modern, but even prior to it (Lyotard); but meanwhile, if we set out to periodize this paradoxical impetus of postmodernism, we immediately find that this "dynamic of perpetual change is . . . not some alien rhythm within capital . . . but rather is the very 'permanent revolution' of capitalist production itself," and if, moreover, this ironic collusion of modernism with the logic of capital constitutes the "moment of truth" proper to postmodernism

(Jameson, Foreword xx), we are equally justified in assuming its historical "break" with modernism, rather than its connection with modernism.[3]

Given this rather cursory enumeration of some of the most characteristic features of postmodernism, we seem to be able to hypothesize two types of metamorphosis, of which I would say that they are the only possible forms of metamorphosis available to our postmodern heroes and heroines. The first type is bound up with the problem of <u>being</u> a subject, with matters such as death, the proper name, interpellation, representation, and capitalism, all of which in the last instance point to the process or mechanism of its <u>formation</u>. The most paradigmatic example of this type of metamorphosis is Foucault's celebrated notion of the "author-function," in which what is at issue is how intrinsically polysemous, transgressive, and "dangerous" texts are juridically and institutionally "attributed" to the proper name of an author in order to prevent anonymity and stabilize the otherwise free circulation of "fiction." But from the viewpoint of our concept of metamorphosis, what is particularly significant in his analysis of the "birth of an author" or of the "death of the real individual" (not the "death of the author") is its implications for the "dead individual" him- or herself. For the author-function not only affects what he or she writes or the mode of being of his or her texts, but also operates on the mode of <u>his</u> or <u>her</u> being, on <u>what he or she</u>

is, in such a way as to prevent him or her from becoming an indifferent, elusive, transgressive, hence unauthorized figure. The author-function, in other words, by flatteringly representing the author as an irreplaceable genius and thereby making him or her proud of his or her name, in reality serves to forbid him or her to become nothing else--it limits the author's own textuality.

But it is the striking analogy and interrelation between Foucault's analysis of the discursive construction of the "real" author-subject, on the one hand, and the philosophical reflections offered by one of the major postmodern writers on the concept of character in "fiction," on the other, that we must now turn our attention to, because what is at issue in the latter is also the problem of formation, of how the creation of fictional characters is in a similar way related to the stabilizing function of the proper name. "[T]here are some points in a narrative," observes William H. Gass, "which remain relatively fixed; we may depart from them, but soon we return. . . . Characters are those primary substances to which everything else is attached" (49). "[A]nything," he goes on to suggest,

> indeed, which serves as a fixed point, like a stone in a stream or that soap in Bloom's pocket, functions as a character. . . . Normally, characters are fictional human beings, and thus are given proper names. In such cases, to create a character is to give meaning to an

> unknown X; it is absolutely to define; and since nothing in life corresponds to these Xs, their reality is borne by their name. They are, where it is. (50)

In both Foucault's and Gass's cases, the proper name immobilizes and limits its bearer, either through the process of "attribution" or through that of "definition." (Tony Tanner once observed that "[t]hat which defines you at the same time confines you," speaking of a writer who, desiring to project his own fictional system, ironically ends up imprisoning himself in that system [City of Words 17].) This is to say that in both cases the proper name is bound up with the problem of positioning, with Foucault's authors who are kept "in their place" and Gass's characters that are reduced to just a matter of position--"the characters are, where their name is" among other signifiers. The only, yet absolutely crucial difference between the two cases is whether the subject at issue is real or fictional. (Strikingly, according to Gass's definition characters are not necessarily human beings; they are only "normally" human beings.)

But what if we have an intermediate example which radically disrupts this seemingly rigid distinction between real and unreal, and which thereby renders it less reliable and more problematic? Althusser, for instance, takes up as an example of the mechanism of how ideology always-already interpellates individuals as subjects the ritual surrounding the expectation

of a "birth," that "happy event" in a family. Describing the "forms of ideology (paternal/maternal/conjugal/fraternal)" in which an "unborn child" is expected, he says:

> it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is "expected" once it has been conceived. (176; emphasis added)

He then goes on to observe that "this familial ideological configuration" is "highly structured," and that it is in this "pathological structure" that "the former subject-to-be will have to 'find' 'its' place, i.e. 'become' the sexual [read 'gendered'] subject (boy or girl) which it already is in advance" (176). What are at issue here are again positioning, the proper name, and the fixating effect of "pre-appointment" (176). And at this point in the spectrum of subject-formations, we find ourselves all but incompetent to distinguish this as yet unborn child--indeed, is "it" a human being, this fetus, if no longer an embryo?--from a fictional character.

Now that we have examined the varied forms of subject-formation, what is required of us is to give a definition of the first type of postmodern metamorphosis, however tentative and banal it may at first seem. And here again I must have recourse

to Althusser. A metamorphosis as it relates to the formation of a subject happens, I would propose, when an individual shifts his or her subjective position by entering or "stumbling upon" an Ideological State Apparatus. From this perspective, Foucault's individual metamorphoses into an author because he or she gets involved, on account of his or her texts, in what Althusser calls the "cultural ISA (Literature)," and his own "unborn child" metamorphoses into a subject because it enters the "family ISA" (Althusser 143). Moreover, these metamorphoses are usually accompanied by highly conventional rituals or "initiation ceremonies" that are material in kind, such as a party to commemorate someone's publication of a book in the former case, and the cutting of the umbilical cord in the latter.

This definition of the first type of postmodern metamorphosis will remain insufficient, however, if inapplicable to another subject, which comes into existence in consequence of the individual's encounter with capitalism; indeed, what makes a culture distinctively "postmodern" is, as Jameson put it, the unprecedented "purity" of its capitalist economy: "late or multinational or consumer capitalism, far from being inconsistent with Marx's great nineteenth-century analysis, constitutes, on the contrary, the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas" (Postmodernism 36). And one of the

particularly important characteristics of the formation of what we may call here a "capitalist subject" is that its metamorphosis unlike others consists of two distinct and sometimes discontinuous stages. In order to fully appreciate the implications of this twofold character for the dynamic rhythm of postmodernism, we must first look at Marx's famous conception of "the Fetishism of commodities":

> A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. (82-83)

What Marx criticizes here is the presence of some distorting "mystery," or "magic and necromancy" as he paraphrases it a few pages later (87), in the world of commodities. It is related to fetishism or the worship of fetishes--which persists most notably, according to Marx, in "the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world" (83)--because it separates the producer of a commodity from the "social character" of his or her own labor expended upon it, turns it into a mere thing that nevertheless appears as an "independent being endowed with life" just like one's doppelgänger (83), and finally lets it levitate as if--

indeed, it is--by some spiritualistic means.

What is of particular interest here, however, is the existence of certain forms of labor in which a commodity is not produced by its producer, but rather the laborer's mode of being itself functions as a commodity. The examples of this kind of laborer, or more precisely, "provider" or "supplier," may include the prostitute, whose mode of being as a woman itself qualifies as a commodity, and the "Sixty Million and more" black people who died under slavery and to whom Toni Morrison dedicated her novel Beloved. "Always-already" possessed with their own inanimate and intractable matter--the vagina, the black skin--which nevertheless constitutes part of their own bodies, these people are obliged to incorporate fetishes-commodities into their very existence, thereby alienating themselves from their own "social character." They are, in a word, commodities in their own right--they work because they have internalized a "scission," a "division," and a "distance," to borrow the terms Foucault used in describing the author's internal dislocation ("What Is an Author?" 129).

The second stage of the capitalist subject's metamorphosis rather blatantly has to do with one of Marx's "two metamorphoses," the one which he describes as "the conversion of the commodity into money," or "selling" (115). At this stage, where we encounter money for the first time and see it functioning as the medium of circulation in capitalist economy,

our already dislocated and self-alienated commodity-subjects undergo a second dehumanization. Because in money, which according to Marx is "the radical leveller" that "does away with all distinctions," "every qualitative difference between commodities is extinguished" (142), after its introduction even the difference between the prostitute and the slave--their distinct identities, their mutual otherness or alterity, and their incommensurability--still remaining after the mysterious privation of their social character is violently reduced, or "leveled," to the mere quantitative difference between their prices (or even their equivalence).

We must now modify our definition of the first type of postmodern metamorphosis, and say: a metamorphosis as it relates to the formation of a subject also happens when an individual shifts his or her subjective position by encountering capitalism itself.[4]

## II

The second type of postmodern metamorphosis is connected directly with an attempt to survive, or if it is impossible then at least to make visible and tangible, this process of subject-formation and the concomitant celebration of a "birth." It is this alternative metamorphosis that makes the analogy between the real subject and the fictional character less demoralizing, only on condition that the character hereafter at issue will be

no longer the kind of character found in realist novels but rather a self-conscious "metacharacter," a character which somehow knows that "it" is only an effect of interacting signifiers and therefore owes its existence to the author's verbal act of naming, and which is also aware of its inevitable involvement in "His" conspiracy or "plot." (It is the kind of character on which Takayuki Tatsumi once reflected in relation to Larry McCaffery's conception of "Avant-Pop" [Tatsumi and McCaffery 43].) And what is worth particular notice here is its genealogical relationship, by way of too much self-consciousness, with the paranoid, one of the two authentic types of the "real" postmodern subject (the other being the schizophrenic).

This second type is again bound up with death, but only insofar as it is related to, on the one hand, Barthes's "death of the author," namely, his paradoxical and suicidal attempt to make the author "malfunction" and thereby give birth to an alternative subject, the "reader"--"the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" ("The Death of the Author" 148); and, on the other hand, insofar as it is related to the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia, that is, the impossible poetic endeavor to revivify and reactivate the dead body, as well as to the related art of necromancy, not in Marx's sense but in its sense of conjuration or communication with the already dead. Other relevant issues include the future anterior,

historicity, performance and the performative, the beginning, the "event," and co-optation--all of which I subsume under the single category, deformation, including all its pathological, medical, and clinical connotations.[5]

It is what Lyotard was blind to that is extremely pertinent here. Despite (or rather, because of) his valorization of the role of the aesthetic in the modern--particularly noticeable in his preoccupation with the avant-garde--and his highly important thesis that "post modern" must be understood according to the paradox of the "future anterior," which, I would stress, is indeed a thesis that atavistically reiterates and revives Marx's "salto mortale" (Marx 116)--despite all this, he limits the postmodern to the "artist" and the "writer" in their narrow, conventional senses:

> A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an event. . . . ("Answering" 81)

But meanwhile, if we look at Foucault's Baudelairean way of understanding modernity, we see Lyotard's postmodern aesthetics immediately cease to be exclusively tied to "works of art." This means that we should not look for the postmodern only in the "nascent state," as Lyotard puts it ("Answering" 79), of the modernist avant-garde, but also in the same state of Baudelairean "dandysme." It is precisely at this point where Lyotard's postmodernism and Foucault's modernity intersect with each other that our postmodern deformation of the subject witnesses its own birth. Foucault says:

> modernity for Baudelaire is not simply a form of relationship to the present; it is also a mode of relationship that has to be established with oneself. The deliberate attitude of modernity is tied to an indispensable asceticism. To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration: what Baudelaire, in the vocabulary of his day, calls dandysme. . . . [The dandy] makes of his body, his behavior, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art. Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not "liberate man in his own being"; it

> compels him to face the task of producing himself. ("What Is Enlightenment?" 41-42)

This modern man, however, if he is ever postmodern, does not take "dandyism" as one or another of the already established givens, as an already available set of "elegant" or "exquisite" styles. For a dandy is himself an event, and his essay to remake his own body, which is a dandy's counterpart to Marx's endeavor to take a "fatal leap," tends to produce, according to the rule of trial and error, extremely fantastic and grotesque forms, excessively effeminate and "queer" figures. His self-invention and self-production are therefore nothing but the production of errors, mutations, and accidents, and this state is constant. And these malformations and eccentricities are designated or defined as "dandy" only post festum.

The sense of history which Marx's salto mortale, Lyotard's postmodernism, and Foucault's Baudelairean modernity all imply is, therefore, totally incompatible with Jameson's historical sense. In "Periodising the Sixties," for example, he articulates his position that "History is Necessity, that the 60s had to happen the way it did" (125; emphasis added). But see how one of our postmodern heroines, who I would suggest is undoubtedly heiress to their sense of history, looks at the sixties differently:

> She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened

> here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. (Pynchon 181; emphasis added)

Although Jameson's conception of "cultural dominant" does not contradict what Raymond Williams has termed the "residual" and the "emergent" ("Periodising" 126; Postmodernism 6), it is nevertheless problematic, and will remain so, if it can only relate those exceptional forms of cultural production to "Necessity," which is in reality only a teleological myth constructed, again, post festum, after undefined and undefinable eccentricities, failed attempts, and leaps that did prove fatal are dealt with and, as Oedipa Maas puts it in the above passage, "excluded"--or what amounts to the same thing, after successful leapers are welcomed and included, their new rules put into practice.[6]

The postmodern deformation of the subject has much to do with what Oedipa describes as the "chances" of some other thing "happening"--this means, parenthetically, that it has also to do with what we may tentatively call a "cultural figure-ground reversal," which we will be discussing later--and it has nothing to do with Jameson's "having to happen." Here we must have recourse to examples outside literature and practices in the field of photographic performance, mainly because of the need to

demonstrate that this deformation (and the reversal) does happen there. Cindy Sherman, on the one hand, in her series of photographic self-portraits entitled Untitled Film Stills, repeatedly transforms herself in a characteristically postmodern schizophrenic fashion into versions of, to borrow Arthur C. Danto's phrase, "The Girl" (10), by self-consciously putting on those fetishized images of Hollywood and New Wave heroines which form an important part of our contemporary collective unconscious (fig. 1).[7] Jo Spence, on the other hand, in her self-portrait called Exiled exposes her own aging, ugly body, including its disfigured breast because of lumpectomy, with a text "MONSTER" inscribed upon it, in an attempt to reappropriate and reclaim that body which has become an object of the male-dominant medical discourse (fig. 2).

It is here that the link between performance and the type of utterance which J. L. Austin has defined as the performative ceases to be a mere pun or a not-so interesting example of metonymic contiguity; and it is also here that the relationship between the postmodern deformation of the subject and the performative becomes manifest. Indeed, what makes Sherman's and Spence's self-portraits "performances" should be located in the fact that they are implicit performatives or photographic equivalents for the explicit performatives, "I name myself The Girl," in Sherman's case, and "I hereby declare myself a monster," in Spence's. Moreover, it should not go unremarked

【図版はインターネット非公開】

Fig. 1. Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still, #2.

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Fig. 2. Jo Spence, Exiled (from Narratives of Dis-ease).

either that the aesthetic force of their nonverbal acts of naming and declaring derives less from their originality than from their parasitism; their performative "utterances" are repetitions and citations, made possible by their artistic medium, the camera, of the verbally self-effacing patriarchal imperatives/interpellations--"Hey, you there! I name you The Girl" and "Yes, you! I hereby declare you monstrous" (it is these "performative interpellations" that link Austin with Althusser)--that they keep encountering in the world as a normal course of events.

On the most basic level, it seems self-evident that their acts of self-consciously repeating the very patriarchal mechanism of interpellating and naming, as well as the resultant self-confinement in what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Guber called the ineluctable "angel/monster double bind" (36), are morbidly self-destructive, since in these processes they are subversive of their own identities as real individuals; Sherman and Spence seem deeply intent on repudiating and disowning their own "social character," to return to Marx, and perpetuating their primary status as male images through these self-disruptive performances.[8] Nevertheless, their apparent skepticism toward the possibility of escape, their self-imprisonment not only in the stereotypical images of femininity but also in such a dark chamber as the camera obscura, or what amounts to the same thing, their "claustrophilic" art of what we

may call "triple binding"--all these paradoxical and suicidal features seem indicative of something positive in them, which, I would say, is their necromantic desire to speak to their own already dead selves. This addressing is accomplished in their photographs; but the point is that this accomplishment is achieved by making an impossible attempt--a redundant and therefore excessive essay--to put to death once again the already dead individuals, namely, themselves, in the totality of their photographic performances. And importantly, this essay, a grotesque inversion of the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia, is at the same time an attempt to repeat and restage the process of subject-formation--or more succinctly, to "re-form" themselves.

But their photographic performances have even graver implications, and they are closely related, to use the word with which Foucault concluded "What Is an Author?" to the "indifference" (138) to the gender differentiation and the space where that indifference can happen, as well as to the link between repetition--or the "general iterability," as Derrida puts it ("Signature" 325)--and alterity.[9] On the one hand, their restaging or citation requires them to speak the very patriarchal language of the male interpellant; this means that in the process they become the represented object and the representing agent simultaneously, and hence both female and male at once. In this respect, their aesthetic practice of photographic performance is not so much feminist as postfeminist

because it produces, by empowering them to become "masters" of the art of repetition, androgynous individuals who embrace internal conflict, not neutral androgynes like those Virginia Woolf envisioned. Moreover, if the medium at issue, the camera, is basically a technological and therefore phallic extension to the male body, their reappropriation of it necessarily makes them self-warring hermaphrodites. Thus their photographic performances, or more precisely, what Austin would have called their "primary" utterances (69), are also reducible to another explicit performative, "I declare myself a man," which in effect constitutes a scandalous declaration of a difference--women simulating men--and an indifference: "What difference does it make which gender I belong to?"[10] It is because this declaration gives birth to an event and an accident--such elusive, anomalous, and "agendered" subjects as their deformed figures--that the postfeminism of Sherman and Spence must be designated postmodern; and it is also postmodern because in that process it provokes a question (mark): "Is it really happening?"[11]

On the other hand, if we turn our attention to the conditions for the "happiness" or felicity of this declaration, we immediately find that what Sherman and Spence in reality do with their photographic images is not only to give birth to these malformed subjects but, true to Derrida again, to engender or make happen a new space or context--photographic self-portrait, or performance art--in which these mutations, errors,

and indifferent beings are permitted to exist.[12] What is particularly relevant here is Austin's conception of "appropriate circumstances" in which saying something counts as doing something.[13] (Indeed, a general shift of focus is required in the field of theory and criticism, I would insist, so that more importance is given not to the performative utterance proper but rather to its relationship with its immediate context.) Austin says:

> Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, appropriate, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should also perform certain other actions, whether "physical" or "mental" actions or even acts of uttering further words. Thus, for naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her, for (Christian) marrying, it is essential that I should not be already married with a wife living, sane and undivorced, and so on: for a bet to have been made, it is generally necessary for the offer of the bet to have been accepted by a taker (who must have done something, such as to say "Done"), and it is hardly a gift if I say "I give it you" but never hand it over. (8-9)

All we need to do is reverse this formulation and say: if an

unprecedented performative, which is therefore most likely to be considered accidental and even erroneous, has somehow been uttered successfully or "happily," this necessarily means that we must suppose the existence of an accompanying set of new appropriate circumstances, a new context, a new convention--but at the same time a new ideology even--totally other than any preexisting total context. It follows that this new space--a postmodern space which abounds with its own "native" postmodern deformed subjects--appears to the inhabitants of the older ones as a totally different and indifferent, hence absurdly ec-centric, space which threatens to undermine the valuable "-centrisms" that their already established rules are meant to reinforce. It is precisely in this way that Sherman and Spence effect a cultural figure-ground reversal, reducing the formerly spotlighted "figure-world" to a mere foil.

A postmodern metamorphosis as it relates to the deformation of the subject happens, therefore, when an already "dead" individual subject essays to repeat the very ideological process of subject-formation in order to refashion or "re-form" him- or herself and thereby accidentally though self-consciously give birth to both an erroneous event-subject and a new space in which it can happen.

To return to Oedipa and her sense of history, it is precisely what she describes as the "chances" of something other "happening" themselves that exemplify the historicity of this

postmodern subject-deformation. But if we duly underscore the terms "chances" and "happening" in her remark, not the "other," then we find that this historicity is not only what one can depend on when he or she sets out to remake his or her body, but also what he or she was born with. Hence the following conversation with Sherman:

> NF [Noriko Fuku, the interviewer]: In an interview from around 1985, you said, "If I had not been born at this time and place, I would not have been able to use this form of expression, and if I had been a man I could not have created work based on my own experience in this way." Could you tell us more about "this time and place," and why being a woman enables you to create this work?
>
> CS: I was referring to being aware of everything going on in the media, which is really what has most influenced the work. If I'd been raised in Africa, I would have had a totally different set of cultural stimuli. And some people say my art is very American--although the Film Stills, I think, are influenced more by European films than American films.
>
> Even though I've never actively thought of my work as feminist or as a political statement, certainly everything in it was drawn from my observations as a woman in this culture. And a part of that is a love-

> hate thing--being infatuated with make-up and glamour and detesting it at the same time. It comes from trying to look like a proper young lady or look as sexy or as beautiful as you can make yourself, and also feeling like a prisoner of that structure. That's certainly something I don't think men would relate to. (Sherman 163)

"How has it ever happened, this American woman, this 'me,' with the chances once so good of my becoming, say, an African woman, an African man, or an American man?" It is this almost Nietzschean sense of contingency and groundlessness in the face of the singularity of one's existence--"I happen to be the way I am"--that at the deepest level makes Sherman's art what it is. But this singularity is by no means mysterious nor even religious but rather discouragingly ideological, and it is again Althusser and especially his notion of interpellation that is extremely pertinent here: since every interpellation is an asymmetric or "one-way" process, an encounter with it always-already appears to the interpellated subject as a coincidence, a contingency, an "event." It is this primary historicity of ideological interpellation that is prior to and makes possible the simulated historicity of the postmodern deformation (note that this observation does not contradict Althusser's proposition that "ideology has no history" [159]); indeed, our second type of metamorphosis is not only an attempt to create

contingencies but also to reactivate one's innate contingencies --it is a self-conscious attempt to approximate a contingency.

I can give two literary examples of this second metamorphosis, which have not usually been explicitly associated either with deformation or with postmodernism. The first one is those nineteenth-century women writers who, to borrow Gilbert and Guber's key phrase, "attempted the pen." Genealogically speaking, this "attempt" is not only feminist but also postfeminist and, above all, markedly postmodern, since, if the "pen" is a masculine technology and above all a "metaphorical penis" as they argue (Gilbert and Guber 3), then their "attempt" in effect constitutes a literary equivalent for the explicit performative, "I declare myself a man," just as Sherman's and Spence's performances are photographic equivalents for the same utterance. Hence swarms of hermaphroditic subjects, "freaks," "monsters." In retrospect, therefore, the alternative female tradition Gilbert and Guber and other feminists like Elaine Showalter have excavated--"a literature and a culture of their own," as they say (Madwoman xii)--cannot be anything but a postmodern eccentric space.

By the same token, a rethinking of Chinua Achebe's postcolonial reading of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness seems urgently required so that we can deal more adequately with the novella's postmodernity. According to Achebe, what worries Conrad is "not the differentness [between the River Congo and

the Thames, which are metonyms for Africans and Europeans respectively] . . . but the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry" (263); thus he insists that Conrad's racist attitude is most pronounced in the passage, "what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly" (Achebe 264; Conrad 69). From our perspective, however, it is precisely this "ugliness" that makes these "prehistoric" black men--who appear to be saying, despite their "bestiality" and deformity, "We declare ourselves human beings, your 'kith and kin,'" but at the same time also appear to be defiantly talking back, "What difference does it make whether we are men or beasts?"--paradigmatic "postmodern" subjects living in another genuine postmodern space, the Dark Continent.[14]

I hasten to add, however, that this postcolonial example may be seriously misleading if we are not careful about the link between the postmodern deformation and self-consciousness. For the postmodern self-deforming subject's essay to remake its own body, or its endeavor to approximate a contingency, can only be a self-conscious attempt; this is exactly the reason that both Lyotard and Foucault associate postmodernism/modernity with art. It is this self-consciousness, however, that is entirely absent from Conrad's Africans. To put this another way, they lack agency, which I define as the individual subject's capacity for such a self-conscious attempt to deform oneself, an attempt that

often takes the form of an oxymoron, a paranoid attempt to transform oneself into a schizophrenic.[15] Moreover, as long as our notion of human agency embraces forms of schizophrenia, the personality or "identity" of such a subject is necessarily discontinuous and fragmentary.[16] In light of all this, the postmodern self-deforming subject emerges primarily as an agent, or better still, a critic who, knowing that his or her identity is always-already ideologically constructed, uses his or her own local identity crisis as a material means of bringing social system as a whole to a crisis.

But ironically, this critical moment that certainly evidences the actuality of resistance coincides with Jameson's "moment of truth" of postmodernism, since the self-deformed subject thus given birth to is so easily co-opted by capitalism, "re-formed" as a capitalist subject, and falls prey to its dynamic rhythm of commodity production. Or if this is not the case, then it is only that its salto mortale just proves fatal, contributing only toward making it excluded, invisible, hence nonexistent. It is exactly this latter group of unsuccessful leapers that Deleuze and Guattari wanted to foreground when they introduced the notion of "sick schizos," those "mad" subjects rescued, however, at least from oblivion:

> Our society produces schizos the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars, the only difference being that the schizos are not salable. How then does one

> explain the fact that capitalist production is constantly arresting the schizophrenic process and transforming the subject of the process into a confined clinical entity, as though it saw in this process the image of its own death coming from within? Why does it make the schizophrenic into a sick person --not only nominally but in reality? Why does it confine its madmen and madwomen instead of seeing in them its own heros [sic] and heroines, its own fulfillment? And where it can no longer recognize the figure of a simple illness, why does it keep its artists and even its scientists under such close surveillance--as though they risked unleashing flows that would be dangerous for capitalist production and charged with a revolutionary potential, so long as these flows are not co-opted or absorbed by the laws of the market? Why does it form in turn a gigantic machine for social repression-psychic repression, aimed at what nevertheless constitutes its own reality--the decoded flows? (Deleuze and Guattari 245)

But Deleuze and Guattari's powerful articulation to the contrary, we are quite familiar with "salable" schizophrenics, the examples being Sherman and Spence. Indeed, it is only after, first, the institutional process of definition--Althusser's cultural ISA includes "the Arts" (Althusser 143)--and the

capitalist processes of "re-formation" and the extraction of surplus value are completed, and then their hard-won "eventness" is thus dealt with and they themselves are turned into "fashionably sick schizos," that is, it is only post festum, that the otherwise perpetually nameless postmodern space they have engendered--"photographic self-portrait," "performance art"--comes to be known as such. And significantly, this co-optative process of institutionalization or, to borrow again the phrase Achebe employed in characterizing Conrad's racist attitude, of "keeping something in place" (Achebe 264), is marked not by direct confinement but by its generosity. Hence the appropriateness of Deleuze and Guattari's idiosyncratic use of spatial terms "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" in describing not the "coding" but the "axiomatizing" function of money. It is the totalizing power of this capitalist process of co-optation, which makes even such critically self-deforming agents as Sherman and Spence formally indistinguishable from commodities like "Prell shampoo" and "Ford cars," that finally enables us to realize the full implications of Marx's salto mortale. Indeed, what Marx referred to was the fatal leap of the commodity itself, when it is involved in its first metamorphosis or sale. Accordingly, in capitalism this leap proves doubly fatal: if it is fatal in Marx's sense, the "former commodity-to-be," to appropriate Althusser's way of designating the unborn child, can never

become a commodity, can never be born and visible in the first place, and therefore can never find its place in a capitalist system (though it can become irrecoverably "sick"); but if its leap is successful, this only means that it has undergone the leveling process of commodification, which constitutes the capitalist counterpart to the ideological process of subject-formation. It follows that if social reality, including postmodern self-refashioning agents, is totally commodified, what awaits them cannot be anything but either co-optation or nonexistence--that is, what awaits them is <u>either death or death</u>.

I would argue that, if the moment of truth of postmodernism comes in the form of this inability to escape from the capitalist double bind, the key to surviving it can be found in a temporality totally other than the schizophrenic's "perpetual present" that Jameson deems the authentic postmodern mode of relating to time ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 119), a temporality that is still less compatible with Deleuze and Guattari's spatial approach to the logic of late capitalism. This alternative temporality is the paranoid's durability--paranoia, unlike schizophrenia, is not characterized by breakdowns--and it is his or her excessive, and almost solipsistic, self-consciousness indispensable to this durability that enables the already (re-)formed agent to deform him- or herself over and again, that is, to metamorphose into another

new form ad infinitum. We must count this duration as one of the defining features of the agency of the postmodern self-deforming subject. Furthermore, we must add that this agency is inseparable from the Kantian theme of the sublime: the masochistic sentiment in which pleasure derives from pain, which, in other words, is a contradictory sentiment caused by the conflict between one's faculty to conceive of something and his or her faculty to present that something.[17] For on the one hand, the self-disfiguring paranoid, by virtue of his or her chronic capability for metamorphosis, inevitably appears to others as a sort of plastic subject whose impending another transformation is expected, the exact form of which, however, is both unpresentable and unpredictable (since it has all the characteristics of an accident). On the other hand, his or her sentiment embraces neither disconnection nor discontinuity but a contradictory combination of pleasure and pain: the pain that his or her attempt to criticize society should be made at the cost of his or her identity, but the pleasure that it is this very pain that should give him or her the power to critique. This postmodern sublime subject, accordingly, has no alternative but to become an ascetic who substitutes agency for the pleasure of an identity.

## III

My thesis on postmodern metamorphosis presupposes that man

is by definition a performer, that what makes him (and her) what he (or she) is is his (or her) performances. This notion of performance, however, should not be exclusively related, among others, to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's use of the term. According to him, men and women become performers because what makes their being meaningful in their culture is their "acting" in accordance with the prescriptions or the "set of control mechanisms"--"what computer engineers call," says Geertz, "'programs'"--specific to that culture (35-36, 44); in this semiotic view, performance is basically both "social and public" (45). On the contrary, my notion (also semiotic) of performance, indebted as it is to Geertz, allows for the possibility of a "meaningless," or more precisely, "negatively meaningful," performance, which is often accidental and anomalous and is achieved mainly by individuals, and which therefore deviates from those cultural rules and thereby paradoxically possesses the power to bring them into visibility.

Such an idea--that is, "man as performer"--would have been impossible if it had not been for two books in the field of studies in contemporary American fiction, not to mention the innumerable critical and theoretical works on the issue in other literary and nonliterary areas (including Geertz's The Interpretation of Cultures). They are Tony Tanner's City of Words, in which he wrote of "man the engineer" (29), and Larry McCaffery's The Metafictional Muse, in which he introduced the

related notion of "man-the-fiction-maker" (253). But while their approaches are predominantly literary and do not necessarily address the theoretical issue of the subject, mine seeks to attend as much to precisely those theoretical concerns as to reasonably literary matters. This is the primary reason that in most of the chapters that follow I attempt to juxtapose extraliterary, "real" persons with our fictional characters, in the hope of better treating the problem of performance--and also, that of metamorphosis--in postmodern culture: in Chapter 1, Oedipa Maas's inability to self-project will be discussed in relation to Sherman's and Spence's performative art of photographic self-portrait; in Chapter 2, J. Henry Waugh's self-destructive playing of his baseball game will be regarded, to speak most simplistically, as what "makes possible" Jenny Holzer's critical intervention through her verbal installations; in Chapter 4, Wilder's body as a playground will be set against Barbara Kruger's "body as a battleground," and Jack Gladney's "fear of death" will be interpreted as symptomatic of the cultural contradiction that prevents his body from realizing its full metamorphic potential. Chapter 3 is somewhat exceptional because it appeals to no "real" person in dealing with the figure of the Dead Father, though it does address the problems both of his body and of its metamorphosis into a frictionless matter. I take this methodological juxtaposition of real and fictional figures to be critically profitable; after all, as I

have already pointed out in Section I, they are both formed just as Althusser's unborn child is predetermined to be ideologically formed as a subject (and they are also capable of "deforming" or "re-forming" themselves). That is, characters are artifacts, just as individual subjects are, as Geertz has influentially put it, "cultural artifacts" (51).[18]

The form of subjectivity valorized in this study is marked by its "dissident" tendencies. The term refers less to Paul Maltby's Dissident Postmodernists than to Alan Sinfield's Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading. But stress is placed differently: while cultural materialism associates dissidence with collectivity, I take it to be equally possible to argue for the alternative form of dissidence that is inexplicable unless one attributes agency to, pace Lisa Jardine, individual subjectivity;[19] if this personal form of dissidence is ever understood in terms of the collective, the dissident individuals can only be grouped under the category of "the deformed," and they can never be given already established designations such as Jardine's "non-élite men" and "all women" (125).

I intend my readings to be dissident in a similar way, even when in some of the chapters I end up severely criticizing the character in question mostly for lack of dissident agency (hence the title of Chapter 1). For strictly speaking, the site of dissidence is not the individual subjectivity itself, nor is it

the text itself; it is in between--the act of reading. I want to read my texts as when individual subjects "read" their own subjectivities.

# C H A P T E R I

## Anti-Oedipa: The Crying of Lot 49

If we read Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 as a text that addresses the problem of subjectivity, we soon realize that it centers on the predicament of an imprisoned woman. The central imagery of this female confinement undergoes a series of outward and visible modulations as the story proceeds: first, we have the portrait of the female protagonist Oedipa Maas as a stereotypical contemporary American housewife, which finds its allegorical representation in the image of a "captive maiden" in the "tower" (21), a representation that both of the novel's two intertexts, Grimm's fairy tale "Rapunzel" and Remedios Varo's painting Embroidering Earth's Mantle, offer us; then, there are the haunting "muted post horns" that not only obsessively multiply themselves but also "immobilize" Oedipa during her nightmarish drifting in San Francisco (124), and the recognition she eventually arrives at by way of this omnipresent "Tristero" that she is predestined to be an heiress to the whole Republic,

that "the legacy was America" (178); and finally, we have the auction in a locked-up room that she attends at the end of the novel. All these representations of female imprisonment or immobilization point to the inevitability of an impasse or, in her own words, "the exitlessness" (170): "She had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that . . . there'd been no escape" (21). It is this impossibility of escape that concerns 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, nor does it entail a form of female subjectivity completely at the mercy of the ominous omnipresence of what could only metaphorically be called the Wall. For the novel also provides us with a contrapuntal thread of enlightenment, which illustrates the way in which the incarcerated female subject at least manages some psychological escape:

> If San Narciso and the estate were really no different from any other town, any other estate, then by that continuity she might have found The Tristero anywhere in her Republic . . . if only she'd looked. . . . Becoming conscious of the hard, strung presence she stood on--knowing as if maps had been flashed for her on the sky 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," as well as other related phrases that describe her peculiar ways of having revelations ("what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away" [20]; "She was meant to remember" [118])--all these indications of Oedipa's psychological development show that her enlightenment or recognition has precisely to do with the problem of visibility, with blindness and its overcoming, just as is the case with her mythical namesake. But what she has come to "see," more specifically, 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 one reason to argue for an internal awakening or "consciousness-raising" on the part of our female subject; as some critics suggest, this awakening itself can be regarded as a practical deliverance from the exitlessness.[1] At this point, her semi-paranoiac awakening turns out to be a legitimate, though solipsistic, postmodern version of the Greek anagnorisis. In short, Oedipa's claustrophobic search for a way out of the tower is within the novel effectively displaced into more

psychological and therefore more personal terms, into a search for a self-consciousness about where and how she is situated inside the doubly stratified American cultural totality.

I would argue, however, that this otherwise profitable focus on the personal, the psychological, and various versions of the thematics of "awakening" and "liberation" in many of the significant readings of The Crying of Lot 49 is nevertheless problematic, especially when the point at issue is female subjectivity, because of its residual humanist overtones that have made it impossible for these readings to allow for that cluster of elements in the novel which are at odds with those very liberal thematics. And I would further argue that masochism and self-portrait, two cultural practices that embrace forms of self-abnegation and self-annihilation, offer themselves as alternative critical perspectives more focused on the task of countering this predominance of the conscious, and that it is this demystifying process made possible by their commitment to self-reflexivity that we can depend on if we want to reveal how the ostensibly liberating instance of Oedipa's personal awakening is in reality co-opted in the service of the larger hegemonic cultural discourse. Here the apparently arbitrary juxtapositions of the novel not only with Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's Venus in Furs but also with photographic self-portraits by Cindy Sherman and Jo Spence--which result from my thesis that such distinct texts, or more precisely, historical "events," as

an American postmodernist fiction of the 1960s, a continental novel of the later nineteenth century, and photographic works by American and British female artists of the post-1960s, are not only intertextually but also genealogically related, and that they all arise out of a common Western cultural matrix or force field in their own contingent and accidental ways--nevertheless seem critically promising, since they all refer to a single topos (both "topic" and "place"), the imprisonment of the female subject and its prison houses, which is not restricted to English-language literature. There are three major critical advantages, I would suggest, that these juxtapositions will bring us: first, the juxtaposition of The Crying of Lot 49 with Venus in Furs allows us to see the gender relations in Pynchon's novel primarily as variations of the specifically masochistic master-slave relationship; a second juxtaposition of the novel with Sherman's and Spence's photographic works makes us more alert to the problem of artistic medium itself, to the fact that the figure of the imprisoned female subject, insofar as it is something represented, can only be a material representation, and it consequently shows us how the aesthetic and the materialistic concerns, or representation and the material means of producing representations, are inseparable; and finally, a third juxtaposition of the novel with their self-portraits 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 ultimately point to a more general problem of which they are but local manifestations: the problem of the position of the female subject within the totalizing masculine discourse of capitalism. From this vantage point, Oedipa Maas will figure, as I hope I will have persuasively made clear, as a woman marked not only by the heroic capacity to reposition herself through internal awakening, but also by an ironic incapacity to recognize the ideological implications of that metamorphic, consciousness-expanding experience.

I

My proposition, as a working hypothesis, that the gender relations represented in The Crying of Lot 49 are better understood as versions of the masochistic domination-subordination relationship reflects a will, let me begin by confessing--that is, 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 so-called masochistic master-slave relationship not a more plausible sadomasochistic one? But the first thing we should understand 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 on Sacher-Masoch's Venus in Furs. It is partly because of this textual evidence, found in the originary literary material that is also a singular historical event which is responsible for the beginning of masochism, but which is also responsible for the ironic inauguration of something more problematic, "the masochistic," that I would argue that recourse to S/M is, at least for our present purposes, unnecessary. 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 ("'Inverarity owned that too,' Metzger said. 'Did you know that?'" [39]). I would suggest that her explicit reference to sadism and her implicit one to sadomasochism are in reality better understood as indices of the ideological workings that displace masochism into some kind of more problematic sadomasochistic entity or myth.[2] My will, therefore, is a will to demonstrate that it is possible and even urgent to set out to dissociate S/M by giving due attention to the singularity of the originary heterogeneous event, Sacher-

Masoch's Venus in Furs, which is simultaneously literary, aesthetic, pathological, sexual, historical, and biographical.

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 how the masochistic discourse these dominators are involved in maintaining is predicated on the elaborate mechanism 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, on the one hand, but displaced, metonymic manifestations of the Male Master who is assigned an essentially structural task of immobilizing her, and, on the other hand, material signs of the disequilibrium inherent in male-female power relations.[3] 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; note how such an authentic capitalist mode of distributing legacies as auction is here referred to as an aesthetic form of performance). 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 "something truly terrible" that she keeps "waiting on" like a slave girl (169)--that is, as some portentously amorphous, powerful presence.

The sense of incarceration Oedipa experiences in her predicament should not be literally reduced, however, to some corporal punishment or torture which her male masters inflict on her body, without reconsidering the distinct way in which it constitutes the principal site into which the masochistic discourse inserts itself. This kind of reduction is itself a mystification, and to avoid this we have instead to see, as we have already seen, how the gender relations in which Oedipa is trapped are fraught with semiotic mechanisms of substitution, displacement, or any other kind of figuration. It is such an insight that enables us to see the essentially linguistic nature of masochistic sexuality--to realize that such platitudinous

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, in fact ignore the structuring principle of the masochistic master-slave relationship: the contract. "The masochist appears to be held by real chains," as Deleuze observes in his treatise on masochism, "Coldness and Cruelty," "but in fact he is bound by his word alone" (75). This must be taken as meaning, to be more specific, that if there is such a thing as a masochistic conjuncture 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 ("Agreement between Mrs. Wanda von Dunajew and Mr. Severin von Kuziemski") by which the male protagonist Severin von Kuziemski 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:

> "Mr. Severin von Kuziemski ceases from this date to be the fiancé of Mrs. Wanda von Dunajew and renounces all rights pertaining to this state; in return he undertakes, on his word as a man and a gentleman, to

> be the slave of this lady, until such time as she sets him at liberty.
>
> "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 <u>naming</u> Oedipa executrix of his estate by his <u>will</u>, 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 on 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 chiastic reversal of the master/slave roles, the 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, but which is also found 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 reactionary.

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 femininity as the imaginary

product of men's desire, forms the basis for the whole masochistic drama of domination and subordination. It is typically enacted, for example, in the following scene in which Wanda and Severin first play the roles of mistress and slave (it should not go unremarked that the precession of an image also forms the basis for the relationship between Sacher-Masoch himself and Aurore Rümelin, a real woman transformed or fictionalized into the real simulacrum of the novel's dominatrix, into "Wanda" von Sacher-Masoch, who eventually became his wife and made the above contract with him):

> "Slave!"
>
> "Mistress!" I kneel and kiss the hem of her gown.
>
> "That is better."
>
> "Oh, how beautiful you are!"
>
> "Do I please you?" She postures in front of the mirror and looks at herself with proud satisfaction. (Sacher-Masoch 185)

As her complacent as well as complaisant self-reference to her own role-playing, "Do I please you?" indicates (and as is further demonstrated by her other remarks such as "I have remained entirely faithful to you. . . . I have done all this merely to be agreeable to you, to fulfill your dreams . . ." [Sacher-Masoch 230]), Wanda the dominatrix not only does not object to or resist against her practical submission to her slave, but she is completely unaware of it in the first place.

More importantly, 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.[4] 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 found in Pierce's act of naming Oedipa finally become obvious,

given the idea of male masochism as a cultural apparatus for paradoxically reproducing and circulating patriarchal discourses through self-annihilation.[5] 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 masochist. Considering all this, we may even postulate that it is not sadomasochism but this one-sided mechanism of interpellation, this appropriation and "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 ever gains power over her master.[6]

## II

Both Cindy Sherman and Jo Spence show us that photographic

self-portrait is an art form that is also a political practice. Indeed, they exemplify a form of postfeminist intervention in the ruling patriarchal power structure, which as we have seen is marked by the asymmetrically masochistic mechanisms of imprisonment and naming. On the one hand we have Sherman, who in her Untitled Film Stills repeatedly transforms herself in a characteristically postmodern schizophrenic fashion into anonymous stereotypes by self-consciously putting on those fetishized and desperately desired images of Hollywood and New Wave heroines, those now almost internalized cinematic representations, which form an important part of our contemporary collective unconscious. We have Spence, on the other hand, who in her Exiled exposes her own aging, "ugly" body, including its disfigured breast because of lumpectomy, with a preemptive "caption"--"MONSTER"--inscribed upon it, thereby reappropriating and reclaiming that body which has become an object of the male-dominated medical discourse. The point is that photographic self-portrait such as theirs is one of the female slave's ways of resisting the Male Master; and the decisive element which makes their artistic practices effective as forms of critique, and which also helps us to understand how the practitioners themselves relate to masochistic discourses, is what I would call their "masochistic performativity."

Indeed, we may say that if there is a doctrine that both of the two female "artists" practice--though Spence would reject

this epithet, since she defines herself more specifically as a "cultural sniper" (Cultural Sniping 204)--it will be, in a word, "masochism for masochism." For given Sherman's imprisonment of herself in the contemporary images of "angel" by naming herself the nameless "Girl," as well as Spence's willed projection of herself as "monster," it is not difficult to see how their photographic performances are predicated on the local repetition or enactment of the very masochistic mechanisms they intend to criticize.[7] That is, they rename and reimprison themselves by employing those very patriarchal mechanisms in the service of their own artistic purposes, in an attempt to "freeze" themselves in their photographic images.

It is precisely at this point that their photographic "performance" turns out to be inseparable from the linguistic "performative." (Of course I am referring here to J. L. Austin, but Althusser is also relevant.) For their self-portraits are implicit performatives or photographic equivalents for the explicit performatives "I name myself The Girl" (Sherman) and "I declare myself monstrous" (Spence), whose original utterances enunciated by men in patriarchal society are "Hey, you there! I name you The Girl" and "Yes, you! I declare you a monstrous other." What they do with their photographic self-portraits is to cite these imperatives and interpellations--in this sense they transform themselves into ventriloquists, who speak the very language of the dominator, the colonizer, and the

misogynist--and then transplant them to a different context in order to make them opaque, that is, in order to "materialize" them.[8] Their way of criticizing patriarchy may be called, therefore, a kind of aesthetic homeopathy, and thanks to it they manage to make visible what is culturally invisible:[9] not only the otherwise latent masochistic mechanisms of naming and confinement in general, but also the specific technology of doing so, the ineluctable "angel/monster double bind."[10] Their skepticism toward the possibility of escape or a world elsewhere, their self-imprisonment not only in the stereotypical images of femininity but in such a dark chamber as the camera obscura, in short, their "claustrophilic" art of what we may variously call "triple binding" or "active autism"--all these paradoxical tendencies are aspects of their photographic self-representation's (re)appropriative use of masochism. Importantly, this is another way of saying that it is inseparable from self-abnegation and self-annihilation; that, moreover, it is closely connected with self-reference. Theirs is a self-projection which requires them to play the roles of both master and slave simultaneously, in a way that makes it necessary for them to call into question their own distinct identities; which also demands that their female bodies be offered as perceptible scenes of (this reenacted) masochistic drama.

If we consider the problem of gender at this point, it

turns out that this idea of Sherman and Spence being simultaneously master and slave, and as a corollary, simultaneously male and female, is one manifestation of the problem of androgyny. Indeed, I would argue that their versions of postfeminist intervention are androgynous. But this problem and the accompanying problems of indeterminacy, polysemy, and "both/and" must be further elaborated in terms of what I will be discussing immediately below. Suffice it to say here that the important point is that their versions of androgyny are by no means harmonious, unlike the one Virginia Woolf envisioned, but rather contain internal conflict and are therefore self-warring.[11] (This is precisely the reason that it seems inappropriate to label their practices as "feminist.")

The force of Sherman's and Spence's masochistic local enactment of the larger cultural masochism, however, does not have exclusively to do with aesthetics and gender; it has also to do with materialistic concerns. This means that we must focus more on the determining power of <u>matter</u>, that we must take account of the materiality of their artistic medium, the photograph, and then see it as their material means of aesthetic production. It is an imperative shift of focus, since we can no longer disregard the implications of the fact that within masochistic discourses the aesthetic--the photograph, painting, and the photographer and the painter themselves--is always-already appropriated by those in power; and 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, for example, this is testified by the calculated use of the mirror which Severin sees as the defining characteristic of Titian's Venus with the Mirror (fig. 3), a portrait that once offered the image of his ideal woman. He says of the painting:

> "She is also a Venus in furs," he said, smiling subtly. "I do not think the venerable Venetian had any ulterior motive; he simply painted the portrait of some distinguished Messalina coldly inspecting her

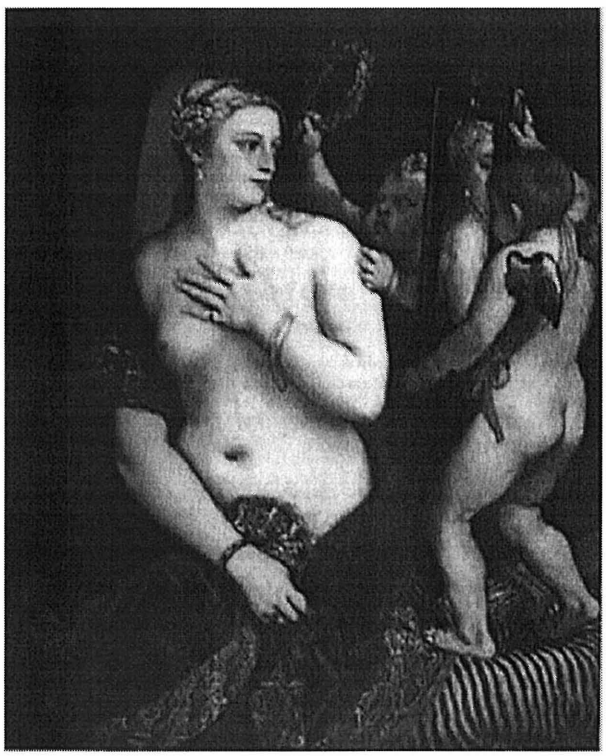

Fig. 3. Titian, Venus with the Mirror.

> 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 the lady's beauty, so does the painter's picture itself (and it also functions as a means of circulating the stereotypical image of "Venus")[12]--it is not difficult to see how 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; only the mirror image, or the mold into which those women aspiring to be "Venuses" (that is, all women) are supposed to cram themselves, is already there. Indeed this precession, as we have already seen, is the very mechanism that controls instances of what we might call the masochistic tableau vivant, including the scene of simulation in which Wanda first plays the role of dominatrix before the mirror and is consequently constructed as such. In these tableaux is enacted, as is also demonstrated by the passage below, the process, or even temporality of having Wanda, that "Grecian woman" (Sacher-Masoch 162), frozen in a predetermined image--that is, of coaxing her into a tableau mort. But in the present context the following bathroom scene has less to do with precession than with matter:

My eyes alighted by chance on the massive mirror that hung opposite and I let out a cry: our reflections in its golden frame were like a picture of extraordinary beauty. It was so strange and fantastic that I felt a deep pang of regret that its forms and colors would soon vanish like a cloud.

"What is it?" asked Wanda.

I pointed to the mirror.

"Ah, yes, it is beautiful," she said. "What a pity we cannot capture this moment."

"Why not?" I asked. "Would not the most famous painter be proud if you allowed him to immortalize you? I shudder to think that this extraordinary beauty, these mysterious green eyes and wild fiery hair, and all the splendor of this body should be lost forever. It fills me with the terror of death and nothingness. But the artist's hand must save you from this. You must not, like the rest of us, vanish irrevocably without leaving any trace of your existence. Your image must survive long after you have turned to dust; your beauty must triumph over death."

Wanda smiled.

"What a pity there is no Titian or Raphael in Italy today," she said. (Sacher-Masoch 240)

The masochist thus regards the artist only as something

complementary to the mirror, as one material means among others of stabilizing the otherwise ephemeral, and sometimes disobedient and too demanding, ideal woman. (Predictably, the novel does not forget to provide us with a young German painter who fulfills exactly this task.)

The photographic self-portraits of Sherman and Spence foreground precisely these materialistic problems, only they do 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 their practical insistence on the importance of women's private ownership of material means of image production; for example, Spence concludes Putting Myself in the Picture by writing, "Long live amateur photography!" (215). But we need to describe this more "thickly" and say that their 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, on the one hand, by the way in which it forms the defining characteristic of the very mechanism that makes Sherman's Untitled Film Still #2 possible in the first place, a self-portrait that deals with exactly the same motif as Titian's portrait of Venus before the 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 agency, 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 the camera. This primacy of the material, on the other hand, applies to Spence as well, and we can easily see how the mechanism works if we simply displace the object of representation from the angelic to the monstrous woman. Her Exiled alone would suffice, but we have her "mammogram" episode by way of a more illuminating example, in which what is at issue is the insertion of the medium into a cultural site where it is normally not allowed:

> Passing through the hands of the medical orthodoxy can be terrifying when you have breast cancer. I determined to document for myself what was happening to me. Not to be merely the object of their medical discourse but to be the active subject of my own investigation. Here whilst a mammogram is being done I have persuaded the radiographer to take a picture for me. She was rather unhappy about it, but felt it was preferable to my holding the camera out at arm's length and doing a self portrait. (Spence, Putting Myself 153)

In other words, in this episode she effectively translates the interventionist doctrine into "a camera for a camera."[13]

Nevertheless, what their photographic performances foreground is not only the potentialities of the female artist's paradoxical use of the very masochistic technologies and rhetoric of female confinement, which necessarily involves those materialistic problems we have been discussing. It also foregrounds the fact that in the process, the performer herself becomes a paradox, a lived contradiction--that, in terms of subjectivity and gender, she is a self-warring androgynous agent, 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, however self-deconstructive that embrace may prove.

III

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, is made to function, predictably enough, 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": "So began, for Oedipa, the languid, sinister blooming of The Tristero. Or rather, her attendance at some unique performance . . ." (54). But most relevant in the present context is her

eventual determination to become a directress/actress/artist--namely, a performer--whose business 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 "internal 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 actual effect is more problematic than beneficial in terms of larger political and cultural issues. 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, once attuned to this kind of rethinking, we cannot help but realize that Oedipa is literally a machine, and an appropriated one at that. We realize, in other words, that her projection in effect constitutes a private contribution to the reproduction, circulation, and maintenance of the law of the "excluded middle" which underpins the dominant cultural hierarchy, "the official/unofficial America"; we realize, moreover, that her personal awakening itself functions 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 the problem of co-optation; and it is directly addressed in the following passage on "redistribution," though, significantly yet predictably, Oedipa herself is unable to perceive even the existence of such a problem (and even Pynchon himself seems incapable of foregrounding it):

> 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"--note that the label serves as the title of Spence's "monster" photograph--is nevertheless problematic, since hers is a redistribution of Tristero's exile among those already exiled, those disfranchised and disinherited people who already inhabit the unofficial America. By virtue of this, it only contributes to keeping the dominant cultural hierarchy unaltered as well as invisible.

The Crying of Lot 49 contains a number of interesting props that can be conceived as allegorical manifestations of precisely

those problems which are intrinsic to redistribution and projection. We have Maxwell's Demon, for example, a tiny scientific intelligence that is yet only a hypothetical and therefore impossible existence, so that its "sorting out" of molecules in fact never violates the Second Law of Thermodynamics and effects no reconfiguration of a given system.

A similar problematic attempt at projection is represented more dramatically by Varo's painting Embroidering Earth's Mantle (fig. 4). 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 "trick" that triumphantly makes visible her accomplished escape from the tower (fig. 5). 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 not to inscribe but to erase any sign of confinement from the surface of her tapestry, and thereby to make the fact of her own imprisonment, in terms of the larger cultural and historical context, nonexistent.[14] It is, therefore, like Oedipa's awakening to projection/redistribution, an instance of blindness, or at least of myopia--a self-satisfied practice that

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Fig. 4. Remedios Varo, Embroidering Ear h's Mantle.

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Fig. 5. Remedios Varo, Embroidering Earth's Mantle (Detail).

fails to take account of its effect on the immediate context.[15]

The central point at issue in dealing with The Crying of Lot 49 should be, therefore, its residual liberal humanism, which is represented by such artist-figures as Oedipa and her double, the embroidering maiden--indeed, the former is a characteristically postmodern paranoiac and solipsistic version of the self-determining individual--and which is in conflict with the possibility of criticizing society as a whole. In Oedipa's case, moreover, this appears as a conflict that involves economic concerns, since her relationship with Pierce indicates the inseparability of her immediate context from patriarchal capitalism. Significantly, it is here that the problem of the invisibility of the dominant cultural hierarchy becomes most foregrounded. As a crucial example, we have Oedipa's quasi-religious sense of "revelation" she experiences on first coming to San Narciso:

> San Narciso lay further south, near L.A. Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts--census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own free way. But it had been Pierce's domicile, and headquarters: the place he'd begun his land speculating in ten years ago, and so put down the plinth course of capital on which everything afterward had been built, however

> rickety or grotesque, toward the sky; and that, she supposed, would set the spot apart, give it an aura. But if there was any vital difference between it and the rest of Southern California, it was invisible on first glance. She drove into San Narciso on a Sunday, in a rented Impala. Nothing was happening. She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses . . . and 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 card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there 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); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding. (24)

Faced with the two equally invisible layers of America described in this passage, we must be able to discern the antithetical ways in which they make themselves culturally invisible. On the one hand, the "outward" America, represented by the "capital"

Pierce put down, paradoxically makes itself invisible by becoming omnipresent and quotidian--"Nothing was happening." On the other hand, the other America, which remains indiscernible unless one "tries to find out," literally makes itself invisible by being "concealed."

But we have to be careful about the further implications of this invisibility. For this doubly invisible cultural hierarchy on which is founded the national identity of America has to do with that very medium which makes capitalism possible in the first place: money. Such a relationship is not only apparent, as we have already seen, in the connection of the "outward" America with capital. It is also apparent in the fact that one primary reason that the descendants of "The Disinherited" (160), whose presence Oedipa comes to know through Pierce's legacies, become exiled is lack of money: "She remembered now old Pullman cars, left where the money'd run out or the customers vanished . . ." (179). Moreover, this relationship is also hinted at in her reflections, following the recognition, on American "diversity" that was once possible:

> She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead,

thick, maybe endless. (181)

It is not only because, I would suggest, the 0's and 1's that constitute the digitized texture of America's cultural matrix are an appropriate metaphor for the law of the excluded middle but also because they are a metonym for money as well--or more precisely, for the denominations printed on dollar bills--that America is presented here as a country that is by definition opposed to diversity. (Most relevant here is Marx's observation in Capital that "Just as every qualitative difference between commodities is extinguished in money, so money, on its side, like the radical leveller that it is, does away with all distinctions" [142].) Finally, America's inseparability from this "radical leveller" culminates in auction, and this is etymologically appropriate: "auction," as is partly indicated by the Latin verb from which it derives, augere or "to increase" (hence "a public sale by increase of bids"), is a duplicitous apparatus for insidiously reinforcing that other thing which also originates from the same verb, namely, authority, while its economic mechanism of redistribution apparently contributes only toward maximizing the quantity of the circulating medium--money.[16]

Oedipa's problem--or her blindness, which exhibits a piquant contrast to her ancient counterpart's blindness, both physical and allegorical--resides in the ironic fact that the projecting and redistributing agent herself unknowingly

functions as an efficient "relay" that receives, amplifies, and, in her own word, "spreads" patriarchal/capitalist discourses, in the process helping them to pervade the cultural circuit more thoroughly. It is such an incapacity for intervention, or her inability to make herself visible, that qualitatively distinguishes her projection from Sherman's and Spence's self-projection. Further, we should conceive this difference to be a verbal one as well, since Oedipa's utterance, "Shall I project a world?" is in fact an emasculated version of the nonexistent interventionist slogan that would be a veritable caption under which the whole enterprise of Sherman's and Spence's photographic self-portraiture 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 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 dominant patriarchal/capitalist discourses equally refer to itself or "loop," thus making it visible. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Oedipa is a female subject that is denied (but not wholly) the power to name, which belongs almost exclusively

to men: those male individuals who name her are not only Pierce, but also Arnold Snarb (who pins his ID badge that reads, "HI! MY NAME IS Arnold Snarb!" to Oedipa's breast [110]) and even her husband, Mucho Maas ("'Thank you, Mrs Edna Mosh,' he wrapped up . . ." [139]).[17]

Not wholly, and almost exclusively, that is. To do her justice, we must immediately add that this denial of the power to name, structurally predetermined as it is, is in no way 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-portrait, 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 play of positionings, they are, predictably enough, closely bound up with that material which makes both gazing and being gazed possible at the same time: the mirror. First, we have the following scene toward the end of the novel that combines naming with the mirror:

> Change your name to Miles, Dean, 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 the 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, even with the mirror, as these passages clearly show, 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--herself--in the mirror as a "mistake" or something forbidden, while in reality her "laughing" at her own mirror image is equally able to count as an effective strategy for demystifying the male image of feminine obedience.

The crucial role of this material means of image production being accounted for, Oedipa's blindness turns out to be a cultural complex that is simultaneously materialistic, aesthetic, and gendered. Indeed, she is herself a problematic invisible site or an overdetermined "blind spot," nurtured by 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."[18] 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 would be rendered possible only after 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. That is, unlike Sherman and Spence, Oedipa is an individual not living capitalism enough--in terms both of gender and of materialism, she is neither paradoxical nor masochistic enough to be not a colonized object of the dominant patriarchal/capitalist discourse but a postfeminist androgynous agent who is capable of criticizing it.[19]

IV

I believe that our immediate task is to ask ourselves what it means to have two radically distinct types of postmodern female subjectivity in terms of agency, and why it is by being juxtaposed with masochism that Sherman and Spence, on the one hand, and Oedipa, on the other, are thus differentiated. But whether this distinction is due to the temporal or historical disjunction between the sixties and the post-sixties--what is called the "generation gap"--or on account of the difference in gender between the (self-)representing agents (it is a male

writer, Thomas Pynchon, who represents Oedipa), it seems that we are not yet in a position to view this problem in its proper historical perspective;[20] all we can do is "speculate" (in all its senses) and treat the problem as one pertaining to our culture. Besides, the problem engenders further problems--have women, just in the course of a decade or so, internalized and adapted themselves to the (interventionist) masochistic form of subjectivity that necessarily calls into question the humanist notion of unified identity? And if they have, what is the specific historical/cultural conjuncture that has effected this internalization or adaptation? But whatever the cause of this break in female agency, the important thing is not failing to see that the light that awakens Oedipa is accompanied by its own shadow--that such a dramatic irony dominates our cultural product, Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, because it dominates Oedipa who is another such product.

# C H A P T E R II

## Fiction as Installation: The Universal Baseball Association

What characterizes the history of the critical commentaries on Robert Coover's second novel The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop. is the persistent underestimation, or even disregard, of the figure of J. Henry Waugh, the novel's protagonist who invents his own imaginary baseball league, the "Universal Baseball Association," as a human being. This persistence strikes rather strange and even mystifying--I will not say "ideological"--especially in view of frequent reference made by many Coover critics to his sudden disappearance from the last chapter. Coover himself acknowledges, though negatively, the relevance of Henry's effacement; when asked by an interviewer to "[o]nce and for all . . . clear up exactly where Henry is in the last chapter," he returns a flat negative: "No" ("Interview" 73). Despite the undeniable seriousness attached not only by this "No" of the author himself, but also by the plot's internal development

itself, to the problematic disappearance of a man, however, the critics' responses to it continue to be at best lukewarm; to cite an example, the indifference is best exemplified by the following observation by one of those "mainstream" commentators: "Any speculation about where Henry is or what his state of mind would be useless. . . . We are led to these possibilities but are convinced by the novel that the problem is insoluble and does not matter, for the world Henry created remains alive" (Shelton 89).

But it is possible and even irresistible, I would say, to address a "problem" insofar as it is problematic, however insoluble and intractable it may appear. What seems to justify the kind of disregard and indifference I have just pointed out has to do with the notion of "fiction," the "world Henry created"; or more precisely, it has to do with the notion of "fiction-making."[1] Larry McCaffery's powerful thesis, "man-the-fiction-maker" (253), keeps functioning, it seems to me, as a kind of iterable performative that has legitimated, and continues to legitimate, this typically postmodernist valorization of man's transhistorical tendency to invent myths, narratives, and other forms of fictional system. "[A]lthough The UBA deals with the fictions of religion and history," thus he insists in his book The Metafictional Muse, "its primary focus is on the more general fiction-making activities of myth and art" (42); and soon afterwards he posits, rather predictably,

that "The UBA, like his earlier novel, deals primarily with the relationship between man and his fictions . . ." (55).[2]

Indeed, given Coover's own statement in another interview that "I felt we had to loosen fiction up and reinvest it with some of its old authority as a self-aware artifact, a kind of self-revealing mode, as it were, for the universal fictionmaking process,"[3] as well as his recognized status as one of the masters of metafiction, it may seem nothing problematic if some critics are tempted to reinforce, rather than rethink, the dominance of this "meaning-making" approach, thereby recirculating the consensus of critical opinion, that The Universal Baseball Association is primarily a metafiction, a postmodern allegory of the "universal" myth-making process. But in that case, the problem is that as the attention to Henry's UBA narrative, its internal logic and the process of self-transformation it undergoes, and the fictional author's relationship with it becomes increasingly sophisticated, Henry himself tends to be defined only in these terms; in other words, the history of the novel's reception into academic circles approximates the history of representing its protagonist as a non-contradictory, one-dimensional figure. This seems to culminate (at least for the time being) in Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso's recent formalist account of the UBA narrative's inner development from what he designates "mimetic" into "self-conscious" stage. After introducing two conceivable ways of

accounting for Henry's disappearance from the scene of the last twenty pages, which he attributes to the shift in Coover's narrative point of view, he presents a third possibility:

> A third view--the most accurate, as I see it--combines the two preceding ones. This approach accounts for the majority of the reflexive concerns of the novel. It requires that we take the figure of Henry only as a textual frame of reference, so that we can look at the UBA not so much as an object in itself but as an unfolding plurality of processes. . . . Instead of taking the game as the aim of some representational mechanism, whether mimetic or self-conscious, the novel can be studied exclusively in terms of its inner development, apart from the more or less significant figure of the fictional author. The UBA narrative allows for this kind of "fabulationist" view that accounts for the purely narrative progress of the novel without giving up the mimetic qualities I have mentioned earlier. According to this third approach, Henry's figure can still be regarded as the pivotal element between the two sides (mimetic and self-referential) of the creative process; but, and this is crucial, he now appears more as a formal constituent of the whole creative process that he sets in motion. In this regard, Henry emerges as an element Coover

> introduces in order to thematize his dominant reflexive interest; but, however meaningful, this growth is not to be taken as a direct consequence of authorial intervention but as what, Coover implies, is the natural outcome of the meaning-making metaphor he wants to explore. As a meaning-making process in itself, this metaphor--the construction of a fictional system--comprehends all the levels and aspects of the UBA story, from the simple act of creating a baseball game to the imaginative recreation of the players' lives and the degree of self-consciousness they enjoy in the final chapter. Henry's disappearance would not, then, be a strategy that substantially changes either the novel's reflexive element or the course of the narrative. This does not mean that the effacement of the author produces no effect on the story. Rather, the fictional author's absolute detachment constitutes a purely formal device that greatly helps to understand the evolution from mimesis to self-consciousness in the UBA. Conceiving of the author as a vehicle, then, makes Coover's concern in this novel to be the creation and development of a fictional system. (104-05; emphasis added)

This consummates the abstraction of J. Henry Waugh; and it is an ultraformalist translation of the following more or less

traditional ventilation of the desire to erase Henry's "life":[4] "The protagonist's life--his increasing alienation from those around him--represents a rather conventional story and offers little interest to a discussion of the interplay of baseball and narrative. I do not intend to examine the poverty of the protagonist's relations with other human beings. . . . In the system of this paper, Waugh's personal life will be subordinated to his role as proprietor, creator, and God of the Universal Baseball Association. His accomplishment, not his failure, will be my subject" (Caldwell 163).

But my subject, pace the "I" in the above quotation, will be his failure. To focus on it seems all the more pertinent because his is a failure of a white man. In my view, The Universal Baseball Association should not be conceived merely as a fiction about the general fiction-making process; rather, it should be conceived primarily as a story about the exclusion of a white male individual from the world. But my intention, I must hasten to add, is not to privilege the latter viewpoint to the exclusion of the former, more traditional "fabulationist" attitude; what I would want to attempt is a shift of emphasis that I hope will serve to expose the close and complicated interrelation and dialogue between the metafictional and postmodernist concerns of the novel and the heretofore neglected problems of culture and history. And moreover, by endeavoring in this way to demonstrate that the novel deals not only with the

relation between Henry Waugh and his fictional system but also with the interaction between, on the one hand, Henry and his Association and, on the other, the outside world as a whole, I also aim to draw attention to a crucial fact that is extremely relevant to any investigation on the relationship between Henry as author and the world: that what coincides with his disappearance from the last chapter is, as a corollary, another disappearance--the disappearance of his own voice, or the effacement of the third person "he" that has kept "saying." In this regard, the final chapter, presenting the UBA only from within and therefore offering no trace of the fiction's interaction with its immediate context, emerges as the culmination of the gradual but steady process of his alienation from society because of what he and his verbal construct have done to it; the chapter is the <u>effect</u> of a breakdown in communication--"Language problem," as the novel puts it (172), but one caused by the voice of a white male.

The argument I have just detailed makes it all the more relevant to explore the implications of another absence in the novel. Many critics have repeatedly reminded us of the importance of the eight-chapter structure of <u>The Universal Baseball Association</u>; and Coover himself explains his design behind this structure that has, according to him, resulted from his determination to use the Bible as his basic structuring device:

> The Henry book came into being for me when I found a simple structural key to the metaphor of a man throwing dice for a baseball game he has made up. It suddenly occurred to me to use Genesis I.1 to II.3--seven chapters corresponding to the seven days of creation--and this in turn naturally implied an eighth, the apocalyptic day.[5]

Few critics, however, have actually mentioned, much less discussed, the possibility and the potential of a ninth chapter (and its nonexistence) in a novel whose subject matter is baseball, though Coover himself is explicit about this matter.[6] For example, in the same interview in which he refused to give information about the whereabouts of Henry in the final chapter, he answers "Yes" in response to a question as to whether he has decided to omit a ninth chapter so as to make the novel "open-ended": "Keeping things open-ended, you mean. Is that one of the reasons why your last chapter is the <u>eighth</u> chapter, rather than the ninth--which we might have expected, in keeping with your baseball metaphor?" ("Interview" 73). (And it seems that we may further assume that the novel itself self-consciously alludes to its own possible nine-chapter structure: "Of course, nine, as the square of three," it says, "was also important: nine innings, nine players, three strikes each for three batters each inning, and so on . . ." [206].)

What we need to ask, then, is whether this typically

postmodernist or avant-gardist "open ending" of The Universal Baseball Association is not correlated with Henry's disappearance from the final chapter; in other words, we need to ask whether the missing ninth chapter is not a logical consequence or the completion of Henry's gradual introversion, the progressive process of his expulsion from the world, and the eventual loss of his own voice in the "concluding" eighth chapter. In short, it remains to be investigated whether this powerful absence is, no matter what the author's original design may be, in reality not the true apocalypse, which has been achieved at the expense of--or rather, thanks to the deprivation of--his ability to speak and speak to.

This is a thesis and a speculation that inevitably leads to a further speculation, which is connected directly with the title of the novel. Is it "politically correct," this second speculation would wonder, to call a white male individual's personal predicament "universal"? The postmodernist concerns of The Universal Baseball Association are thus closely interrelated with issues pertaining to gender (and of course, it is equally interrelated with the problem of race, but to focus on it is not my concern here), but this interrelation is extremely complex. For this reason, my second speculation is not necessarily compatible with those highly predictable arguments "against" this supposed universality. On the contrary, it argues that this androcentric "universality" must be, to speak most

simplistically, "retained" because the same cultural dynamics that exclude our failed white male individual paradoxically contribute toward giving birth to those women artists who attempt to resist and critique. It prompts us to recast the figure of Henry accordingly, so that we can define him in relation to this complexity. It encourages us to demonstrate, in other words, that his voice, his language, and his body--that is, the totality of his gendered subjectivity that is marked by failure--serve to show how responsive to each other male and female language games can be.

I

The divorce between the Association and America, and accordingly, between its author/proprietor and the world, begins with Henry's almost simultaneous estrangement from two persons, a B-girl named Hettie and his friend and fellow worker, Lou Engel. Hettie leaves Henry when she realizes that she has hurt him by laughing at his childish identification--for the purpose of having successful intercourse with her--with one of his imaginary ballplayers, and that her deepest apologies will be of no avail:

> She blinked. And then she laughed. Opened her baggy jaws and whooped. "A game!" She looked back at the table, a light dawning. "You mean. . . ? Then that's. . . ! Hey!" She jumped up to paw heedlessly through

the papers. "I'll bet old what's his name, Swanee's here, ain't he?" She cackled, rummaging and clawing. "Lookit these names! We can have a orgy, Henry!" Her laughter tore clean through him. She turned on him and tweaked his nose: "Henry, you're a complete nut!" Laughing, grinning, she looked down on him, sighed. "But you're awful sweet, just the same." She leaned down and deposited a spongy sour-sweet kiss on his forehead.

He watched her pull her wraps on, unable to rise from his chair. "Come on!" she laughed. "Don't take it so hard, I'm only kiddin'! . . . Anyway, who ain't crazy? I sure ain't got no sense!" She stared out the window, preparing herself, then turned back to him. "Listen, ain't every man can still please a woman old as you are, Henry." Everything she said was wrong. Just, maybe, but merciless. All he could do was sit there, dumbly taking it. . . .

When she realized he wasn't following her, she turned. "Come on, Henry, say good-bye." He only stared. Ugly and old. She was. They were. Her smile faded. "Don't be a sorehead. We had a good time, didn't we? I don't wanna leave without . . ." She meant the benedictive slap on her bottom. She always thanked him for it, said if a man didn't give her one

on the way out, she always felt somehow she'd failed. "Henry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean . . ." He shook his head. Suddenly, astonishingly, she burst into tears. "Ah, go to hell, you loony bastard!" she cried. She dug agitatedly in her purse, pulled out his money, and, hands shaking, threw it into the room, then, still bawling, slammed out the door and down the stairs. He heard her heels smacking down the wooden stairs and scrapeclicking out into the world, and for a long time he just sat there. (174-75)

Lou also leaves Henry on account of the game; when he accidentally spills beer all over the scoresheets and logbooks on the table, it instantly makes Henry, hopping mad, lose control of himself:

"Lou!" screamed Henry. He leaped for the towel, but Lou, in shock and drunkenness, stood up suddenly, and they collided. "You clumsy goddamn idiot!" Henry cried, and shoved around him. He snapped up the towel, turned back to the table to find Lou there, dabbing pathetically at the inundation with a corner of his handkerchief.

"I'm sorry, Henry," he mumbled tearily.

"Just get outa the way!" Henry shouted. He toweled up the beer as fast as he could, but everywhere he looked ink was swimming on soaked paper. Oh my God! He

> separated sheets, carried them into his room and spread them out on the bed. At some point, he heard the door close, Lou's heavy footfalls descending the stairs. (198-99)

It is Lou himself who calls Henry (sleeping well into before noon) the next day on behalf of DZ&Z in order to tell him about his dismissal.

The problem we need to address at this particular point may be tentatively called the rhetoric of exclusion. It is a rhetorical strategy whereby an individual who performs the act of excluding some other person--in other words, an individual who is so situated as to function, within the order of a given discourse, as the (grammatical) subject that does the act designated by the verb "to exclude"--is empowered to disguise him- or herself as a person excluded, namely, the "object" both of exclusion and of the verb. This question is highly relevant because it is precisely this rhetoric that is at work in the two scenes of estrangement. Is it really Hettie and Lou, we had better ask accordingly, who are banished and then disappear on account of their "intrusion," as some critics argue?[7] The case seems to be quite the opposite, however, despite the two trespasser's "I'm sorry"'s; for both Hettie's and Lou's apologies are better understood as a kind of rhetorical figure that serves to mediate between the ostensible object and the real subject (and between the ostensible subject and the real

object) of the verb "to exclude," thereby effecting a significant displacement, the disguise. As for Henry's imperative, "Just get outa the way!" we are tempted to interpret it, by the same token, as effected by another displacement--Lou ventriloquizing, or Henry speaking, or forcibly made to speak, for Lou (for it could have been Lou's imperative as well--and Hettie's, for that matter--which, then, would have been a collective imperative uttered by the entire society). The divorce becomes total when Henry himself thus completes his own exclusion.[8]

Any discussion as to who the real agent of exclusion is in The Universal Baseball Association, however, and any attempt to criticize the rhetoric of representation--the object of exclusion mystifyingly turned into its subject--which is inscribed in the text, will be incomplete unless they also have something to say about the cultural structure that may feed on that particular rhetoric. We need a "poetics of culture," in other words, which enables us to see Hettie and Lou as synecdoches for contemporary America as a whole--a poetics we can rely on when we set out to describe how America itself exiles Henry even as he is represented as banishing its accountant and B-girl, and to show, accordingly, that his estrangement from the two persons in reality signifies his exclusion from, and in the interest of, the culture and society they metonymically stand for.

The expulsion is effected by Henry's fiction, the Universal Baseball Association; but no interpretation can satisfactorily account for this effect if it conceives of the Association exclusively as a "self-enclosed" system, as Neil Berman's argument does: "The remarkable richness and vitality of Henry Waugh's Association mark it as a self-enclosed world. . . . The Association has its own metaphysics and must be seen as the product of a godlike creative act. Henry's initials--J. H. W.--identify him with the Hebrew god Yahweh" (211).[9] On the contrary, the effect must be ascribed primarily to the system's dependence on reality or its parasitism, which necessarily makes it a hybrid between fiction and fact and thereby renders its "fiction" heterogeneous and contaminated. Seen from this perspective, Paul Maltby's recent criticism of Berman deserves particular attention:

> [Berman's] observations are fairly representative of readings which, while perceptively commenting on the metafictional and metaphysical elements of the text, nevertheless strip them of their political and historical significance. . . . [F]ar from being a "self-enclosed world," Henry's Association shows every sign of being an extension of the culture and society in which he lives, namely, contemporary America. Indeed, as I shall argue, the political and cultural dynamics of Henry's society are reproduced in his

fabricated world. (Dissident Postmodernists 88)

But despite its powerful argument that Henry's Association is an "extension" or "reproduction" of the texture of American culture, as well as its ambitious attempt to bring a shift of emphasis away from "What is the Universal Baseball Association?" ("It's a self-contained world") toward "What does the UBA do?" ("It reproduces America"), Maltby's reading is unsatisfactory at least in one respect: taking no account of the effect of this reproduction/extension--which is not necessarily an end product, as Maltby's reading seems to suggest, but rather the act of reproduction and extension performed by the author Henry--on the world, it necessarily fails to see the relationship of Henry's fictional system (and his act of creating it) to the world as perlocutionary. In other words, it neglects to further investigate specifically what it means for a fiction to reproduce and extend its immediate context. The Association has a centrifugal as well as a centripetal force, and it is this power to effect, influence, or speak to, that causes the exclusion of its creator from America.

But to return to the question of reproduction, what exactly is it that Henry's fiction-making act reproduces in its attempt to make the imaginary UBA simulate real American baseball? It is at this point that the problem of "universality" takes on particular importance. This "universality" has little to do with, for instance, metaphysics or religion, nor with the

identification of "Universal" with "American."[10] It has primarily to do with, I would suggest, what are taken for granted in American baseball--and by extension, in America--or its "universals," which the totality of Henry's myth-making act reproduces. Of these "American universals" I will focus only on two: on the one hand, capitalism (or more precisely, late capitalism) as it has been redefined in terms of what Jean-François Lyotard has called "the postmodern condition";[11] on the other hand, patriarchy as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has reconsidered it in terms of what she calls "male homosocial continuum."[12] What seems to justify and maintain both of these two "universals" is their commitment to "power and control," to use Haymaker manager Rag (Pappy) Rooney's pet phrase (33); and it is precisely this commitment that makes not only baseball but also Henry's game "THE GREAT AMERICAN GAME" (19).

In what Lyotard has influentially designated the "postmodern condition" in which prevail forms of "incredulity toward metanarratives," and therefore in late capitalism in general, what legitimates power is, according to him, performativity: "In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power [which decision makers intend to increase] is based on its optimizing the system's performance--efficiency" (Postmodern Condition xxiv). This "logic of maximum performance" follows the same principle as technical devices do, for the "operativity criterion is

technological" (Postmodern Condition xxiv-xxv). This principle is, Lyotard explains, the "principle of optimal performance": "maximizing output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process). Technology is therefore a game pertaining not to the true, the just, or the beautiful, etc., but to efficiency: a technical 'move' is 'good' when it does better and/or expends less energy than another" (Postmodern Condition 44).

In The Universal Baseball Association, the analogy drawn by Henry's boss Zifferblatt between baseball and the business he and Henry are in, namely, accounting--"Oh yes, baseball. . . . The great American game. . . . After business, of course" (138) --exposes in an interesting way that both of these two activities follow the same performativity principle detailed by Lyotard. "Well, then, accept a little advice, my friend," says Zifferblatt, "Accounting like baseball is an art and a science and a rough competitive business. Some make it and some don't. The ones who make it keep their heads up, their eyes open, their minds on their job, and pull their part without belly-aching. Wages are based on performance, Mr. Waugh . . ." (139). It is precisely because of this "capitalist economy" of American baseball disclosed by Ziiferblatt's extended simile that Henry's simulated baseball league is both saved and jeopardized by one great player or "performer"--Damon Rutherford. Henry's juxtaposition of Meo Roth's dying Skylight Protection Company

with his own collapsing Association centers on this correlation:

> Exit from competition: true, that was both his prospect and his problem. Roth had a bin full of glass and junk that was only costing him money to keep; Henry had a kitchen full of heroes and history, and after heavy investment, his corporate account had suddenly sunk to zero. Accretion of wasting assets. No flexibility. Roth had blundered in his inventory scheduling: if he could dump that glass and steal a load of plastic or fiberglass skydomes, he still might, with drive and imagination, make it. But what was Henry's solution? There must be a way, he thought --but then he remembered that absurd ball game back on the table that the bad guys were winning, 18-to-1. What did he mean, "bad guys"? Because, damn it, they killed the kid. And it was the kid who'd brought new interest, new value, a sense of profit, to the game. You mean, things were sort of running down before. . . ? Yes, that was probably true: he'd already been slowly buckling under to a kind of long-run market vulnerability. . . . What had happened the last four or five league years? Not much. And then Damon had come along to light things up again. And maybe that was it: Casey had put out the light and everybody was playing in the dark. An 18-to-1 ball game, they <u>must</u>

be playing in the dark! (135-36)

This juxtaposition of economic terms with baseball must be understood as more than a likening; any local system, whether fictional or real, marked by a low input/output ratio necessarily makes itself unfit to count as an American game.

The second American universal bears on social bonds between men, or what Sedgwick calls "male homosocial continuum."[13] In The Universal Baseball Association, this continuum consists mainly of ballplayers and managers (other members include "old-timers" and politicians). The point here is that this homosocial structure of baseball parallels the patriarchal structure of a male-dominated kinship system, where what count are relationships between male members, namely, fathers and sons ("the sons and the fathers, the sons and the fathers," Knickerbocker manager Sycamore Flynn's mind sloshes [116]). This is why Henry's Association abounds with "fathers," "sons," and "brothers": Damon Rutherford is Brock Rutherford's second son; the tragic game at Pioneer Park on Brock Rutherford Day is called "a duel of dynasties" because "Jock Casey came from a noble line, too--went way back to Year I and the great Fancy Dan Casey" (65); "Brother to the father," Pioneer manager Barney Bancroft is "a father to the son" (88). Moreover, Henry assumes a "son," rather than a "daughter," when Lou asks whether the deceased Damon left any family: "A son? Yes, he could have, he could have at that, and his name. . . ?" (88). (Similarly, he

takes it for granted that young Brock's child will be a "boy": "How would his son--Henry assumed it would be a boy--turn out? Grandpa's genes dominating probably, and that was okay, he'd need some of that raw power, hopefully a touch of his uncle's grace . . ." [159].)

But what is most interesting for our purposes in Sedgwick's theory of male homosocial bonds is its dependence on a simple graphic schema, the triangle, whose theoretical advantage is its capability to allow for the bonds of "rivalry" as well as of "love." And following René Girard, she makes the crucial point that "in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved." Within a male-centered power structure, this triangle necessarily takes the form of one "in which two males are rivals for a female" (Sedgwick 21).

This perfectly applies, at least as regards that part concerning the male homosocial bonds of "rivalry," to the relationships between the "great and glorious heroes" that make up Henry's Universal Baseball Association. Indeed, it is precisely these bonds that are foregrounded when "rivals" gather at the wake for Damon Rutherford at Jake's (which is itself a homosocial place):[14]

> Wonderful old man. Hall of Fame. Trench wanted to wrap his arm around him, show the old guy he cared, and that he'd truly be sorry when he died. Tomorrow,

> Rooney was his worst enemy. If Trench didn't get his Cels out of the cellar, he was through, and he had to start tomorrow, had to knock off Rooney's Haymakers. But still, tonight, he could put his arm around the old bastard and swear blood oaths: I'm with you, man. (108)[15]

But where can we find the "beloved" in this relationship of male rivalry that apparently consists only of two terms, therefore not forming a triangle? The truth is, we can find "her" in the stadium, not at Jake's--the crowd of spectators or what in the novel is called "the whore of whores, Dame Society" (229), functions as the "beloved" for whom two rival teams or groups of men compete (because "She" is the one who spends money for their professional heroic deeds). But we must immediately add that "She" is not the only beloved-figure, nor is Hers the only triangle, in Henry's Association (or in real baseball, for that matter). The point is that the UBA is made up of many male-female-male triangles and therefore it has as many "beloveds," whom men use or, to employ the term in anthropology which is indispensable for Sedgwick's theory of male homosocial continuum, "traffic in" for the purpose of maintaining and reinforcing its patriarchal structure. Quoting Lévi-Strauss--"The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman . . . but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the

objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners between whom the exchange takes place" (Lévi-Strauss 115)--Sedgwick explains that the male traffic in women is "the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (25-26). Accordingly, each of the female figures in the UBA functions basically as one or another form of intermediary or "in-between" through the medium of which male members become each other's "true partner[s]" (Sedgwick 26), meanwhile strengthening not only their homosocial bonds but also the patriarchal power structure of their system as a whole. This is the reason that we find frequent references to various forms of "marriage" (and its variations, "sex" and "rape") in The Universal Baseball Association: Dame Society, as the novel puts it, "in all her enmassed immortal fervor, fixes her immortal eyes thereupon, missing not one mote and mentally putting the measure to the royal shillelagh--well, a whit bulkier than last year's, though not so far reaching perhaps, nothing to compare with the Hall of Famer of two years past, to be sure, but 'twill do for a bit of a turn, dearie, 'twill do" (229); Long Lew Lydell's rape of Fennimore McCaffree's daughter, Fanny, while leading him to marry her, eventually enables him to become political partner with the UBA Chancellor, his father-in-law; and it turns out that Harriet, Sycamore Flynn's daughter, has played "matchmaker" between Damon and her own father, who finally becomes manager of

the Pioneers, the team for which Damon pitched when he was killed.

But this practice of using women, and the patriarchal economy of Henry's Association--and of America--that depends on this use (significantly, the anthropological economy of the UBA is structurally identical with capitalist economy: the tripartite male-female-male relationship parallels Marx's famous formulation, commodity-money-commodity, and thus equates women with money),[16] are not necessarily for the benefit of individuals--even male individuals. Rather, they are primarily for the benefit of the system as a whole and its maintenance and preservation, as is evidenced by the conclusion Melbourne Trench, having seen the "bigger picture," arrives at just before his internal monologue cited above: "All came out the same in the end, he saw that now. Some won, some lost, it didn't really matter; what mattered was . . . well . . . the Association, this whole thing, bigger than all of them, that they were all caught up in" (108). The same is true of the other "American universal"; the driving force behind capitalist economy in the postmodern condition, as I have already discussed, is its built-in desire to optimize the performance or efficiency of the whole system. It is this commitment to totality and the accompanying will to totalization, I would suggest, that make the two powerful American norms what they are.

One way to understand what Henry Waugh's mythopoeic act of

reproducing America does to the totality of that world is to concentrate on what he has come to be represented as by that world. This is the same as asking: "What name(s) does he earn when his identity--the identity of an (white) American male accountant who is in principle supposed to be not antagonistic to the two 'American' universals--is defined not only in relation to these pervasive norms but also in relation to his reproduction's effect on them?" What is he required to be, in other words, when his talking to himself--"I've been talking to myself all my life" (160)--happens to become an act of speaking to the world? The broadest terms in which his identity is defined are tightly linked up with the notion of madness: Hettie, when she dismisses (rather than "is dismissed by") Henry, calls or "names" him a "complete nut" and a "loony bastard." (Significantly, Henry himself thinks of himself in relation to insanity: "he heard himself talking to a wooden kitchen table all too plainly, and he thought: what a drunken loony old goat you are, they oughta lock you up" [127].) But more importantly, this "loony" can be further translated in more specific or "universal" terms, masked and apparently invisible as these possible further translations or designations may be. For one thing, in terms of capitalism in its postmodern stage, his maniacal commitment to his game, or his excessive "masturbating"--"He'd played too much" (171)--is nothing but a "disturbance" (35), a cause of dysfunction; all it does is check

the optimization of the system's performance, just as his "Book"--which is one too many because what both baseball and business need is, according to Henry, only someone "to keep the books" (138), namely, the record books and the ledgers--only leads to a further Book, Barney Bancroft's The UBA in the Balance, and possibly to an even further supplementary and redundant Book ad infinitum. For another, from the viewpoint of male homosocial bonds, Henry's bachelorship--"A man like Brock Jr., with nothing else to do, could marry; Henry couldn't. That was all. . . . Henry had chosen the loner's life, the general pain, because . . . because . . . he couldn't help himself" (160)--not only functions as a kind of foreign element within the patriarchal economy founded on the practice of male traffic in women; it automatically makes both his supposed impotence ("but they say he can't do it . . ." [34]) and his identification with Damon Rutherford--"'Call me . . . Damon'" (29)--Swanee Law, and other male ballplayers, or his passionate desire to "become one with" them, "symptomatic" of indulgence in homosexuality, regardless of its actuality. (Our second universal norm is tightly connected with homophobia; one of its manifestations in the UBA is the phrase "Buncha pansies!" hurled by a team against its opponent [68].) In this way what he does with his fiction compels the world to see him as a homosexual antithesis to the postmodern principle of optimal performance, a possible subversive element completely indifferent to the

economic health--in terms of both capitalism and patriarchy--of the whole system.

What has produced this incomprehensible anomaly in the human form of a game player who is characterized by a plurality of indifferences--we must add that Henry is also indifferent to the distinction between fiction and reality--is tightly connected with the notion of repetition. In fact, Henry's fictional reproduction of Americanness must be regarded primarily as a deconstructive act of quotation or "iteration." And significantly, his is an exemplary act of repetition because it enables the repeated sources or "hosts" to deviate in its process of imitating and borrowing from them. An essentially textual practice, this process of putting something (in Henry's case, "universality") in quotation marks cannot be either a self-effacing or a transparent process, for it is always involved not only with materialistic problems like economy but also with other equally worldly and personal problems such as the gender and sexual preferences of the agent who quotes. Quotation, accordingly, tends to give birth to an unprecedented mixture--especially of subject-formations; quotation marks are signs of deviation and deformity. And it is precisely this problem of quotation (marks) that has been addressed by the question, "What is it that Henry's 'reproduction' of America in effect does to the world at large?" It is now clear that the answer goes as follows: replicating the "universal" texture of

American culture, or to put this in more immediately relevant terms, forcibly putting the "American universals" in the position of the grammatical "object" of the verb "to replicate," the Association and its proprietor cooperate to postulate a speaking "subject," or more simply, a voice, that seems to have the paradoxical power to objectify, demarcate, and even use up completely all that belongs to these norms--which are supposed to have an unbounded reach of influence--even as it itself partakes of their "universality." Henry's act of turning universality into "universality," in other words, suddenly makes their limits--quotation marks themselves--and "some other world" (142), to which the anomalous likes of Henry belong, appear simultaneously. It is on account of this occultism of sorts, a necromantic act of evocation--of boundaries, of a voice, of "the altered states of america," and of an american "man"--that he has fallen victim to American terror and become silenced.[17]

II

One of the important metafictional aspects of The Universal Baseball Association is that its protagonist can be taken not only as a self-portrait of the author Robert Coover himself but also as a portrait of postmodernist novelists in general. As these novelists exploit familiar myths and cultural stereotypes (including the conventions of literature itself) for parodic use to produce their own imaginative narratives, so Henry repeats

and reproduces various elements of America and American baseball in his fictional system; just as one of their main concerns is, according to John Barth, another master of metafiction, to write "novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author" (72), so he is primarily interested to mystically invoke an "america" which imitates the form of America, invented by an author--jhwh--who imitates the role of Author/God. What Henry does thus parallels what novelists in the "postmodern condition" have been compelled to do, and as a corollary, it also parallels what Cervantes did to the ossified conventions of the romance. For as Coover explains in his idiosyncratic prologue put in the middle of his collection of short stories Pricksongs and Descants, Cervantes's stories "struggled against the unconscious mythic residue in human life" (77), giving birth, as a result, to a "new" mythic form or literary genre that is simultaneously parodic and anomalous--the novel.

But the immediately apparent similarity among these authors with their respective metasystems--the UBA, postmodernist fiction, and Don Quixote--becomes more interesting when we look at the paradoxical twofold ways in which Henry and his Association relate to the idea of "exhaustion," an idea Coover introduces in order to explain the apocalyptic literary climate of the United States in the 1960s, which according to him resembles the literary circumstances that concurred to give

birth to Cervantes's novelas. "But, don Miguel," he writes in the same prologue,

> the optimism, the innocence, the aura of possibility you experienced have been largely drained away, and the universe is closing in on us again. Like you, we, too, seem to be standing at the end of one age and on the threshold of another. We, too, have been brought into a blind alley by the critics and analysts; we, too, suffer from a "literature of exhaustion," though ironically our nonheros [sic] are no longer tireless and tiresome Amadises, but hopelessly defeated and bed-ridden Quixotes. (Pricksongs 78)

The important point is that in Henry's case, this notion of "exhaustion" not only relates to "exhausted" American baseball ("real baseball bored him" [45]) and what he calls the "American scene," or people on the streets who somehow gave him a "sense of fatality and closed circuits" (141)--two instances of proximity to apocalypse or cultural heat death which are tightly connected with his initial determination to create his own personal myth that is his counterpart to Cervates's and the postmodernist novelists' parodic narratives. In his case, it not only relates to a response to "exhausted" conditions but also indicates a crucial reversal: an act of "exhausting" something or creating an "exhausted" condition, an act that is inseparable from the paradoxical image of what Barth called in his famous

essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" the "attempted exhaustion of possibilities" (73). For his parasitic act of replicating and demarcating American universality is also an act of forcibly using up or exhausting its terms of "universality," of producing a sense of ultimacy, or at least of turning it into one of what Barth has called "felt ultimacies" (67). In other words, Henry acts like Scheherazade in (Borges's version of) the 602nd night of The 1001 Nights; just as she, by accidentally beginning to "tell the King the story of the 1001 nights, from the beginning," has somehow managed to present him with each and every tellable story and thus exhausted "literary possibilities" (Barth 73; moreover, she is now capable of narrating forever, therefore solving her problem), so Henry paradoxically opens some of America's cultural circuits by first making them felt closures with his quotation marks. In this way, deliberate imitation is not only a writer's tool for transcending exhaustion; it creates a state that has to be called "exhaustion," making one feel that the imitated object or state of affairs has been put an end to. (If he or she is ever afraid of such a condition, he or she is not unlike "primitive people" who, as Susan Sontag says in On Photography, "fear that the camera will rob them of some part of their being" and thus drain them of life [158].)[18]

Therefore, Henry's attempted exhaustion, whether intended or accidental, of possible terms of Americanness, his forcible

checking of the further development of its "plot," is incompatible with the idea of progress or of diachrony; in other words, it is essentially a spatial act. This spatiality, coupled with its relationship with American baseball and a female character, tempts us to suspect Henry's possible connection with an American woman artist, Jenny Holzer. In fact, her installation of words on the Sony jumboTRON scoreboard in San Francisco's Candlestick Park (fig. 6) and her use of the electronic sign in Buffalo's Pilot Field (fig. 7) can be both considered to be variations on Henry's fiction-making act: voices that appear unexpectedly in the world, anomalies born of the appropriation of the material texture of American culture which, in our case, is metonymically represented by ball stadiums--"the real American holy places," as Henry says (166). And this "appropriation" is the name given to Holzer's art of quotation and imitation, or her "art of exhaustion." Predictably, Holzer's installation of words in the stadiums, like Henry's Association, is tightly linked up with capitalist economy; "Holzer is fascinated by the idea of stadiums," as Michael Auping says, "a public architectural form where people go to be entertained by spectacular events often sponsored and accompanied by the imagery and language of corporate America, a major instrument in determining public ideology" (47). Sharing space with Sony, Budweiser, and Ford, her hardly consumable Truisms with their characteristically unconventional content

【図版はインターネット非公開】

Fig. 6. Jenny Holzer, Selection from Truisms.

【図版はインターネット非公開】

Fig. 7. Jenny Holzer, Selection from Truisms.

given the medium--"RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS THE SAME WAY" and "SLIPPING INTO MADNESS IS GOOD FOR THE SAKE OF COMPARISON"--seem to be functioning primarily as a declaration of indifference to the commercial mechanics of American advertising and the principle of optimal performance they obey. Therefore her voice inevitably appears as a voice from without; as Auping says, it appears as "a metaphor for a melange of individual voices--voices outside the power politics of big business--that have not been heard in some time" (29). In this way, the juxtapositions her texts create become indications of local conflicts, not only between "her" rebellious guerrilla voices and the official Voice of American capitalism, but also between the disparate economies they belong to--that is, they are signs of clashes of interests.[19]

Not only is the tension that makes Holzer's installation so powerful and even "useful" ("I hope that my work is useful," says Holzer in an interview with Michael Auping [110]) related to capitalist economy. It is also related, just as Henry's idiosyncratic myth-making act, with patriarchal economy. But in Holzer's case, the tension is not necessarily produced because her performance--even her text "RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS THE SAME WAY"--explicitly constitutes an act of resistance or indifference to the American economy based on the male-centered practice of traffic in women, nor because it goes against that economy's homophobic grain. Rather, the tension is caused

because the totality of her performance constitutes, in its own highly complicated way, an attempt to subvert the male/female gender distinction. In order to understand this, we must first see how part of the subversive power of her appropriation derives from the fact that it is an appropriation of the male voice of authority. In this respect, Auping's account is useful (though he is not referring to the Truisms installed in the stadiums):

> Although it is becoming easier to recognize Holzer's style or approach, many people initially assumed her early posters had been done by a man. In retrospect, some explain this as simple chauvinism by an art world run essentially by men. Holzer would agree, but she also sees her stark format and bold type faces as being "designed to project something larger and more powerful than gender: the voice of authority." As Holzer describes it: "The Truisms, the typeface and the way they were presented, were meant to project a certain neutrality. The typeface was chosen for its boldness but also its lack of personality, which I think is more effective than something specific. It was meant to look institutional. Since some men think of themselves as institutions . . . maybe that's the connection." (21)

Not only this strategy for obtaining the neutrality that is

automatically associated with maleness (which is also the strategy that characterizes her electronic installations that appeared in the ball parks), but also the rhetoric she employs so that her "male" voice and the hard yet convincing content it carries may reach a general audience is based on the imitation of patriarchal institutions. For example, Holzer herself explains how her art is meant to "interpellate" people just the way those institutions do: "The bold typeface was a practical decision. When your posters are up with others, yours have to be eye-catching and be visible from a good distance. The bold type wasn't just for emphasis. It was chosen so people would be drawn to the posters and be able to read them easily" (Interview with Michael Auping 80). And when she later began to use electronic signs--for example, those in baseball stadiums--instead of posters, what she intended was essentially the same: "I felt," Holzer says in another interview, "that the signs were the official voice of everything from advertising to public-service announcements. . . . Plus I'm attracted to the way they look. They're modern and they appeal to me the same way they do to a lot of people. They flash and have nice colors and all that stuff" (Interview with Diane Waldman 32). In light of all this, we may say that if her appropriation produces sufficiently authoritative and therefore neutral male voices that speak through the intermediary of "official" mediums--in our cases, the signs in stadiums--what she in reality achieves is to give

the public or spectators the impression, or make them feel, that the speaking agent lurking behind must be an eccentric and exceptional male who keeps communicating things out of the ordinary; that somehow an unprecedented mixture of subject-formations has been born into the world.

But then, this act of making visible possible differences among men that is carried out by Holzer's intensely political installation should not be conceived as unproblematically triumphant. What I mean by this is, first, that we must insist on the fact that Holzer's association of "neutral" with "male" is contradictory and therefore symptomatic of a problem; second, as a corollary, that we need not take what she says at face value, for example her statement: "I have made much of my work sex blind and anonymous so that it wouldn't be dismissed as the work of a woman or the work of an individual. Also my interests aren't only what are traditionally known as 'women's issues.' Because the Truisms are gender neutral, maybe they seem to be male" (Interview with Michael Auping 79). In short, we need to rethink what Holzer says about the problem of gender because she seems to be unaware of, or unconsciously urged to sidestep, the important problem having to do both with gender neutrality and with women who coexist with male elements--the problem of androgyny. Indeed, one of the achievements of the totality of Holzer's performance is its contribution toward transforming the artist into an androgynous agent who has access to both male

and female faculties. The problem is, however, that it is impossible to attribute the achieved neutrality, "sex blindness," or the apparent transcendence of the gender differentiation to the "co-operation," as Virginia Woolf said in relation to the greatness of the androgynous mind (98), between the male and female parts in Holzer, be it harmonious or not; nor is it attributable to her ambition to address problems larger than gender or "women's issues"--when she speaks of this ambition, she seems to be overlooking her art's dependence on her being a woman, namely, its inability to become neutral in terms of gender; hence no need to take her statement at face value. The problem is, in short, the displacement in Holzer of this "neutrality" into exclusively male terms (of which she is aware herself, but whose implications escape her) because of the mediums at issue. To sum up, in dealing with the problem of androgyny as it relates to Holzer, we not only need to ask, following Elaine Showalter, whether the concept of "true androgyny--full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements"--is indeed not a "utopian" ideal (263); we also need to ask whether this concept is in reality not materialistically untenable--whether it is not untenable in stadiums.[20] But even more important, it is precisely this untenableness, the conflict and the gap between the ideal of androgyny and its realization, and the irony accompanying Holzer's eccentric male persona--despite her

intention to make it male, a suggestion of femaleness is certainly discernible in her "male" voice (and this makes it ironically androgynous)--that produce the tension which is the power of her art.

The various elements that have served to justify the juxtaposition of Henry with Holzer--apparitions born of repetition and appropriation, her commitment to being incommensurable as well as her will to demarcate "Americanness" and exhaust the material means for its maintenance, and baseball as representative both of American capitalism and of the gender relations intertwined in its fabric--enable us to see Henry's fiction-making act itself as a form of installation; indeed, his speech act is equally site-specific. But the crucial difference is that while Henry has been forcibly excluded and silenced, Holzer hasn't. On the contrary, in 1990 she was even chosen to "represent" the United States at the Venice Biennale. Nevertheless, this permission to speak that has been generously accorded her seems consequent upon the same terror that eventually led Henry to disappear; it is only that she has been domesticated or co-opted, instead of being violently left out, first by being aestheticized--even before Holzer (or more precisely, her proper name) becomes visible as author (or the focal point) of her anonymous texts, the kind of political installation she is famous for is unlikely to be "taken at face value," her intention to the contrary; or what amounts to the

same thing, it is likely to be "dismissed as art," despite its worldly concerns[21]--and then by being commodified--the film director Alan Smithee (aka Dennis Hopper) in 1989 made her art an integral part of his Catchfire.

III

> We have accustomed ourselves to believe in the existence of two realms, the realm of purposes and will and the realm of chance; in the latter everything happens senselessly, things come to pass without anyone's being able to say why or wherefore.
>
> --Nietzsche, Daybreak, Book II, Section 130

Henry's act of repetition belongs to both of Nietzsche's two realms: it is a purposive act of making some pattern or order out of a "chain of pure accidents" (Coover, Universal Baseball Association 224), of turning things unpredictable into things intelligible. A form of dice game, his fiction-making act depends in the last instance on chance. Therefore, since it also constitutes an act of history-making--"More than just another ball game now: history! And Damon Rutherford was making it" (3) --it follows that history also involves such ingredients as chance, accident, and contingency; as the novel puts it, the "mindless and unpredictable--one might even say, irresponsible--

dice" are "heedless of history yet makers of it . . ." (40, 16). It is precisely this irresponsibility or indifference which belongs to Nietzsche's second realm and is the defining feature of the dice, that makes history what it is: it is the historicity of history.

But the problem--not only Henry's, but also ours--is that this historicity, since it implies "nothing, nothing at all," as Hardy Ingram tells us (225), is something which we must somehow negotiate, especially by exercising our myth-making or fictionalizing faculty--that is, by exerting our power to historicize; hence our obsessive need for "history" in its sense of "a written narrative," as Henry says to Lou:

> "History. Amazing, how we love it. And did you ever stop to think that without numbers or measurements, there probably wouldn't be any history? . . . At 4:34 on a wet November afternoon, Lou Engel boarded a city bus and spilled water from his hat brim on a man's newspaper. Is that history? . . . Who's writing it down?" (49-50)

But besides "numbers" and "measurements," there are other ways of giving this sense of history--not historicity--or continuity to the otherwise isolated, and therefore meaningless, entities; there are other ways of "inventing time and place" (82). One of the most powerful of these devices is naming, which, as Henry explains, enables each of his imaginary baseball players--or <u>us</u>,

for that matter--to have his (or her) own "personal history":[22]

> Henry was always careful about names, for they were what gave the league its sense of fulfillment and failure, its emotion. The dice and charts and other paraphernalia were only the mechanics of the drama, not the drama itself. Names had to be chosen, therefore, that could bear the whole weight of perpetuity. Brock Rutherford was a name like that; Horace (n) Zifferblatt wasn't. Now, it was funny about names. All right, you bring a player up from the minors, call him A. Player A, like his contemporaries, has, being a Rookie, certain specific advantages and disadvantages with the dice. But it's exactly the same for all Rookies. You roll, Player A gets a hit or he doesn't, gets his man out or he doesn't. Sounds simple. But call Player A "Sycamore Flynn" or "Melbourne Trench" and something starts to happen. He shrinks or grows, stretches out or puts on muscle. Sprays singles to all fields or belts them over the wall. Throws mostly fast balls like Swanee Law or curves like Mickey Halifax. Choleric like Rag Rooney or slow and smooth like his old first-base rival Mose Stanford. Not easy to tell just how or why. Or take Old Fennimore McCaffree. He was "Old" the year he came up to play third base for the Knicks. And not just

> because he'd got an unlucky throw of the dice on the Rookie Age Chart and started in as a thirty-year-older, but because that was simply who he was: Old Fennimore. . . . Then, suddenly, he was not just old, he was too old. . . . A spectacular career as manager might be enough more to do the trick, he figured. So he talked Woody Winthrop, by then the champion Knickerbockers boss, into quitting his job to enter Association politics, while he himself, wily Old Fenn McCaffree, took over as manager of the team Woody had built. . . . Twelve years, six championships. And so he did make it: Hall of Fame. And now he was even the UBA chancellor. And whom did he succeed? Woody Winthrop. Looking back, it seemed all but necessary. Strange. But name a man and you make him what he is. . . . [T]he basic stuff is already there. In the name. Or rather: in the naming. (46-48)

History, in other words, is an aesthetic construct; it is associated with necessity because "looking back," it seems as if all the events composing the totality of a given history had been designed to take place so that they might form an organic whole, as harmonious as a poem a New Critic would favor. (Indeed, Henry calls a coincidence in his game that turned out favorable to making his retaliation more dramatic "[p]oetic" [200].) This is exactly what Patricia Waugh meant when she

quoted Hegel: "Hegel, in fact, suggested that history be contemplated as a work of art, for in retrospect it 'reads' like a novel: its end is known" (48; emphasis added).

In light of all this, there is indeed good reason to argue that Henry's preoccupation with his dice game is a unique manifestation of the "universal" need humanity has to displace--to cast historicity into history, contingency into necessity, and accident into meaning--for the purpose of mythopoeia; it is in need of something significant to review "in retrospect" that he is interested not so much in the inherently conflictual nature of his game as in its forgetting. In fact, he is so fascinated by his Association because it is the embodiment of what we may call his "will to retrospection"; for example, what he finds in the "Book," the "OFFICIAL ARCHIVES" of the Universal Baseball Association, is not only the beautiful pattern the UBA history has traced (for into the Book goes only things which he thinks are "worth keeping" [55]), but also the equally beautiful life histories of his dead players: "it was just this rounding off in the Book of each career that gave beauty to all these lives" (214). This indulgence in retrospection, the need to aestheticize the past and to write history (including biography), culminates in his--or more precisely, Barney Bancroft's--MetaBook, The UBA in the Balance:

> Maybe that was it, thought Henry, maybe that was the project for this blue season: a compact league

> history, a book about these first fifty-six years. Needn't be an official history, could even be a little controversial, the exposure of some pattern or other. . . . Cover it all, the origins, the early stars, the making and breaking of records, the growth and transformation of the political structure. . . . It was all there in the volumes of the Book and in the records, but now it needed a new ordering, perspective, personal vision, the disclosure of pattern. . . . (211-12)

Indeed, "in retrospect," what initially led Henry to baseball as his project also had to do, we are reminded, with the aestheticization of the past; it was the epiphany he experienced when he picked up his "scoreboard" a few days after being bored by another real baseball game: "Suddenly, what was dead had life, what was wearisome became stirring, beautiful, unbelievably real. . . ." Greatly enjoying retrospectively reliving the game in his imagination, he says: "I found out the scorecards were enough. I didn't need the games" (166).

But this kind of argument must be supplemented by a further argument. For it is when it so happens that history becomes subjected to historicity, the "drama" to its mere "mechanics," beauty to accident, necessity to the dice, names to "something else" that is unnameable yet "tangible" (116-17), and finally, retrospection not to prospect but to the "here and now"--that

is, it is when it so happens that the conflictual nature of the game becomes too obtrusive to disregard--that the crisis comes to Henry. In other words, it is when the sudden possibility of the death of Damon Rutherford compels him to think, "Of course, think now, it never happened before, why should it now?" (71), and then its actual "occurrence" (the term suits well because it happens while Jock Casey is pitching to Damon on the "Extraordinary Occurrences Chart") overturns the assumed hierarchy of types of temporality--or destroys its "balance," to use a term more appropriate to our protagonist--that the process of his exclusion from the world really begins.[23] For it is his unnecessary death that has eventually turned--because "Damon Rutherford meant more to him than any player should" (38)--Henry's act of repetition into a "real commitment" (201), meanwhile ensuring his anomaly and giving the world all the more reason to define him in terms of "looniness." This indicates, significantly, that the alterity attributed to Henry is deeply connected with his game's aleatory character. Still more important, his dice game--as a corollary of this connection, presumably--has paradoxically transformed this embodiment of otherness itself, namely, J. Henry Waugh himself, into something which can only be designated as accidental, an event, an "Extraordinary Occurrence" that "just happened. Weirdly, independently, meaninglessly" (224).

This tempts us to associate Henry with a minor character in

The Universal Baseball Association: Hettie Irden, "first woman ballplayer in league history" (27). Indeed, Henry shows a closer affinity to this female figure than to the male players, like Damon Rutherford, with whom he ardently desires to identify himself, for she is herself a similar accidental and anomalous figure: "I am an Extraordinary Occurrence," she says (28). Significantly, this extraordinariness of Hettie has much to do with her mastery over the art of repetition, which too justifies our association of Henry with her, but which also enables us to discuss her in relation to Holzer because her art also transfigures her into an androgynous aberrant--but unlike Holzer's, it transfigures her into an explicitly androgynous anomaly:

> Hettie Irden stood at the plate, first woman ballplayer in league history, tightening and relaxing her grip on the bat, smiling around the spaces of her missing molars in that unforgettable way of hers, kidding with the catcher, laughing that gay timeless laugh that sounded like the clash of small coins, tugging maybe at her crotch in a parody of all male ballplayers the world over. . . . (27)

Just as Henry's act of repetition threatens to disrupt the patriarchal economy in terms of sexuality, so Hettie's much as Holzer's demonstrates that it is possible to become indifferent to the gender distinction. (In this regard, we may relate

Hettie--and by extension, Holzer--with the literary female figures discussed by Gilbert and Guber; she is also a woman who "attempts the pen," like those nineteenth-century women writes, if we can take the "[bull]pen" as synecdochically meaning baseball as a whole.) Moreover, our association of Henry with Hettie is further justified by the fact that she makes people "laugh" (27), just as he does the real Hettie. But our association does not stop here; it leads to a further association of Henry/Hettie with that which is nonhuman--"Extraordinary development," orchids are the "[p]erfection of the imperfect. . . . Unisexual. Utterly impotent without insects. A loner. Exquisite" (80; emphasis added). Whether this account of the "gender" and "sexuality" of orchids is accurate or not, the point is that here again the disruption precisely in these terms are associated with accident (orchids are an "exquisite imperfection"), solitude, and an occurrence that is out of the ordinary.

These associations being established, we realize that it is what both Henry and Hettie do in the fictional space invented by Coover's imagination that Jenny Holzer has managed to do in the real world. That is, what she has attempted to do with her installations is, in terms of the issue in question, to reanimate historicity: she consciously intends to present her unidentified, abrasive voices as accidents, as happenings that catch us off guard--while Henry transforms himself into one

unintentionally (meanwhile Hettie, like Holzer, is self-conscious about her status as an extraordinary event, devoid as she is of the artist's intention to critique). Here again, what is at issue is repetition, as well as its disposition to produce aberrant forms. The strategy characterizing Holzer's earlier works is also appropriation, and her Truisms, which are marked by their commitment to simultaneously using and abusing the dominant mediums, may be understood in this respect as a mature form taken by her early experimentation with "public art"--which, we may say, was meant to "abuse a given environment"--done while she was at the Rhode Island School of Design:

> At the beach I would make paintings on long pieces of fabric and leave them so that people would come along and wonder what this thing was that had obviously been left by someone hoping to tickle their imaginations a little bit. Downtown I'd put bread out in abstract patterns so people could watch pigeons eat in squares and triangles. People looked bemused, befuddled and vaguely interested as they walked on by. But the works weren't beautiful enough or compelling enough or understandable enough to make people stop.[24]

Holzer attributes the unsatisfactory consequences of her early public projects, their inability to "stop" people "in their tracks," to her failure to come up with "the proper subject matter": "If you want to reach a general audience, it's not art

issues that are going to compel them to stop on the way to lunch, it has to be life issues" (Interview with Diane Waldman 31). By contrast, like Henry himself her texts from Truisms installed in the stadiums successfully deal with "life issues," not necessarily by finding proper content, but by the indifferent way in which they challenge the dominant patriarchal and capitalist economies; thus indifference is compelling. Besides, the "propriety" of Holzer's "subject matter" also has to do with the fact that in the very process of becoming indifferent, she also raises important ontological issues--of history and historicity; for what Auping gives us as the typical response from people coming across Holzer's works, "What was that?" (34), is better understood as an idiomatic translation of the more complicated question we utter when shocked, like Henry, by something unexpected, an Extraordinary Occurrence: "Why should it happen at this time and place, here and now?"[25] We must be reminded, however, that for all the affinity of Henry/Hettie/Holzer (and the Association/androgyny/installation, respectively) with chance accident, they differ from one another in the degree of self-consciousness--in particular, in the degree of critical intent. Yet conversely, it is precisely this difference that enables us to take Henry as the archetype of these female figures, especially of Holzer, a woman artist and a critic who has her own voice at her disposal. (But this does not mean that he temporally precedes her, for he can be postulated

as the beginning only logically, genealogically, and post festum.) We must remember, however, that this archetypal figure is also a nihilist; once recognized as the prototype, he acquires the retroactive power to make us suspect that the feminine gender of Holzer and Hettie might be another aleatory occurrence.

IV

"[Y]ou can take history or leave it, but if you take it you have to accept certain assumptions or ground rules about what's left in and what's left out," says Henry to Lou at one point in the course of the story (49). That Henry himself, a male accountant, has been "left out" while Holzer, a female artist, has been "left in" tempts us to wonder what kind of "assumption" or "ground rule" governs the "history" they themselves contribute toward making. If their activities can be both taken as textual (I assume that they are), we can rephrase this problem of history more specifically as a question of what Louis A. Montrose has called "the historicity of texts": what exactly is the defining feature of the "cultural specificity" of postmodernism and its process of "social embedment" (20), in relation to which their texts--and they themselves--must be analyzed? Both Henry's and Holzer's textual practices are marked by transformation made possible by acts of repetition. This is to say that Henry and Holzer themselves are material instances

of textuality, as Barney Bancroft's MetaBook The UBA in the Balance is: "Barney Bancroft had discovered that perfection wasn't a thing, a closed moment, a static fact, but process, yes, and the process was transformation . . ." (212). The specificity of postmodern culture seems to reside in the fact that it not only includes or excludes cultural products born of this process of transformation according to their profitability (namely, their performativity), but it first welcomes every such product; that is, postmodern culture internalizes or feeds on the very principle of change. The point is that this cultural mechanism specific to postmodernism does not exclude chance elements; that it is not incompatible with the notion of contingency. This is the reason that I consider Montrose's second, predominantly epistemological thesis, "the textuality of history," to be unsatisfactory, especially in dealing with the historical period called postmodern, namely, postmodern culture (though I admit that his argument about the "complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement" is so powerful).[26] As a substitute for this (otherwise strong) thesis, we need a more ontologically oriented critical perspective on textuality that is attuned to the difficult task of allowing for the contingent nature--that is, the historicity--of the birth (and also, the death) of our historical and cultural, not necessarily past, texts.

# C H A P T E R III

## Father for Sale: The Dead Father

The increasingly dominant critical tendency to see the vanguardism of postmodernist fiction, which is distinctly marked by thematic exhaustion as well as by formal innovation, as constituting one of the literary forms of political engagement generally calls attention to how this self-conscious aesthetics with its predilection for textual autonomy indeed takes a critical stance on the world in an active and activist way. To take a couple of examples, this line of criticism includes an attempt, first, to relocate the text in a worldly context of the cultural and the political, so as to see the self-reflexive texture of postmodern artifacts mainly as a political discourse, as an oppositional or combative mode of literary discourse against the dominant social structure;[1] second, it includes a similar attempt to shift the point of literary "engagement" from realist mimesis to the "argument" of innovative fiction.[2]

But we must not overlook the fact that this emphasis on the

political intervention on the part of postmodernist fiction hardly does justice to another equally important fact that its participation in the culture is as much a "passive" or predetermined participation as it is an "active" one. In other words, the problem with this kind of politically interventionist reading is that it has been incapable of seeing the extent to which the culture itself intervenes in the aesthetic--of seeing how postmodern literary production is in essence no different from any other kind of cultural production that invariably inhabits the social space of capitalism. Fredric Jameson's influential thesis--postmodernism as the dominant cultural logic of late capitalism--immediately comes to mind.[3] But it must be noted here that prior to Jameson, Gerald Graff had already identified the position of postmodern vanguardism in relation to capitalist economy: "the real 'avant-garde' is advanced capitalism, with its built-in need to destroy all vestiges of tradition, all orthodox ideologies, all continuous and stable forms of reality in order to stimulate higher levels of consumption" (8).[4] In short, what we must add to the recent political reading of postmodernist fiction is another but by no means new reading that is properly focused on the important role co-optation plays within the cultural field of advanced capitalism--a reading that takes account of its inherently circular logic which feeds on the very possibility of deviation, counterforce, and self-criticism.

Given this postmodern situation where literary production is no longer possible without the pervasive process of commodification, it seems quite natural to further assume that today not only aesthetic vanguardism but even subjectivity in general can be defined only in relation to that particular process. This is to say that now the postmodern subject is to a large extent a subject that comes into being through the medium of commodities.[5] Thus, on the one hand, the postmodern writer finds him- or herself inserted at the point of production, while on the other the postmodern reader at the point of consumption, both of whom equally find themselves inside the machinery of capitalist economy. It is here that we realize the especial importance of a specifically materialist perspective on the issue of postmodern subjectivity, but only on condition that the clear-cut distinction between the point of production and the point of consumption be dismissed as no longer valid, inasmuch as these two activities have become increasingly indistinguishable and undifferentiated in such privileged postmodern literary devices as pastiche and appropriation, which require the writer to be both producer and consumer at the same time. Nevertheless, the materialist mode of questioning per se--its close attention to the material conditions and means of aesthetic production, as well as to the position it occupies within varied social relations (especially the material relations between production and consumption)--remains, I

believe, as pertinent to the problem of subjectivity as ever.

These problems of vanguard aesthetics and of capitalism as that which materially conditions and positions postmodern artifacts and subjects will not make it irrelevant if I put forward a thesis: taking account of the role of matter is indispensable when we aim to demystify the relation between the text, the subject, and the cultural totality designated the postmodern. What I call "matter" here has as much to do with artistic medium and its materiality as with that particular critical attitude made possible by a specifically materialist perspective. Donald Barthelme's novel The Dead Father figures as such an exemplary postmodern cultural product that it not only testifies to the important role matter plays in our contemporary culture, but is open to a paradoxical reading in terms of what is totally absent from the text. Hence my proposition that the Dead Father's funeral procession is an allegorical staging of the process of capitalist co-optation, and that his death coincides with the birth of a commodity. This has much to do with his male body, to be dealt with not only in terms of modernist aesthetics and the continuing presence of its patriarchal technology, but also in terms of how such a legitimate postmodern artist as Barthelme pays his debt to his modernist "dead fathers." My reading depends particularly on the singular fact that the Dead Father is both dead and not dead, that he is represented as a body that speaks. It is this twofold

attribution of materiality and subjectivity to the figure of the Dead Father that enables us to bring our critical attention to bear on that precise point, both within the text and in the larger context of postmodern culture as a whole, at which matter and subject meet together. The materiality of his body, on the one hand, invites us to read the text, The Dead Father, first allegorically in terms of the materiality of its artistic medium, and then in terms of a more general problem--the problem of the late-capitalist (literary) mode of mediating individual attempts at engagement. On the other hand, the Dead Father as a subjective being not only conveys something like the "general truth" about the empirical reality of postmodern subjects in their material relations with cultural goods, but also embodies the dominant psychological reality--which is marked by the rhetorical figure of irony--of those subjects whose positions in the world are determined almost exclusively in relation to the circular logic of capitalism. And paradoxically, this dominant rhetorical mode of capitalist subjectivity is identified only when materialistic problems are fully taken into account, in such a way as to show that the subjective and the material form not a deterministic but rather an inevitably ironic, dialectic relationship with each other.

## I

What is striking about the introductory italicized section

that presents the body of the Dead Father is that it hardly describes his "dead" body but rather his dead body. Thus what figures foremost in the entire section--which includes lines like "The Dead Father's head" and "The eyes a two-valued blue, the blues of the Gitanes cigarette pack" (3; note how at this early stage commodities slip into the texture of the novel)--is not death at all. On the contrary, what figures is the materiality of the body, as well as its continuing presence (hence the entreaty, "We want the Dead Father to be dead" [5]). This materiality is further reinforced, first by the nakedness of the right foot, and then by what the Dead Father incorporates into his body, his "left leg, entirely mechanical" (4). The artificial leg underscores his bodily existence not only on account of its genuine artificiality but, paradoxically, on account of its exposure of the fact that his body has one of the limbs missing. Moreover, the materiality is yet again reinforced, this time not by something that has anything to do with matter but rather by something linguistic, the definition of "dead man": "n. 1. a log, concrete block, etc., buried in the ground as an anchor" (4).

This foregrounding of the materiality of the Dead Father's body makes it almost unavoidable to see those two activities, sex and slaughter, which he becomes engaged in as particularly predicated on the material dimensions of the body. On the one hand, his sexual desire is so indiscriminate that he even

desires his daughters Emma and Julie--"the father will want to sleep with his beautiful daughter," explains A Manual for Sons, a book-within-the-book embedded within the text, "who is after all his in a way that even his wife is not" (133)--and, what is more, he "overdoes it" with Tulla (36). On the other hand, the two instances of slaughter are no less marked by indiscrimination and excess.

But more importantly, this prosopopoeic representation of the Dead Father as someone undead is so uncanny that we are tempted to consider whether the two activities have anything in common with each other in terms of the materiality of the body, despite the apparent antithesis between what they eventually bring about. Indeed, it soon becomes apparent that they both require a specific body part or its extension, the penis for sex and the sword for slaughter, for carrying out the respective purposes. And it is precisely the presence of these phallic objects that enables us to see that the two apparently antithetical manifestations of the materiality of the body are in fact two expressions of the same physical quality, friction, the rubbing of one body against another, which accompanies the body whenever it meets another body. As a matter of fact, the penis and the sword each constitute a point of contact of one surface with another, never failing to engender one or another form of friction that is specific to the type of contact. Thus the "touch nonesuch" that the Dead Father enjoys during the sex

with Tulla makes him "filled with furious joy" (36), whereas the deadly contact that the musicians and the animals experience ends up with death. In this sense, to speak of the Dead Father in terms of the materiality of the body is tantamount to saying that what is important is the friction that attends him and the varied forms it takes. This inevitably leads to one crucial recognition: that most representative of the forms of friction found at the many points of contact in the text is in fact neither sex nor slaughter; rather, it is the central action of the novel itself, that is, the hauling of the Dead Father by his twenty-three children, "to haul and haul and haul and haul . . ." (6). In this way we find that the novel turns not merely on the material aspects of the body but also on their inseparability from forms of connectedness and contact that are inherently frictional.

But friction does not confine itself within the realm of the material, because of its characteristic mode of being as that which is always in-between. It is intermediary like any medium, and this indicates that it is always present insofar as there exists one or another form of point of contact, whether material or immaterial. It is here that the fact that he speaks comes to take on particular significance, inasmuch as it presupposes the presence of those who are spoken to, that is, points of contact. "Fathers have voices," the manual says, "and each voice has a <u>terribilità</u> of its own" (122). This

"awesomeness" represents one of the exemplary forms of friction taken by the relations between the Dead Father as a speaking subject and other hailed or "interpellated" subjects. Thus, on the one hand, the "memory" of the Dead Father under whose control every subject perpetually remains necessarily takes the form of an internalized voice, an "inner voice commanding, haranguing, yes-ing and no-ing--a binary code, yes no yes no yes no yes no, governing your every, your slightest movement, mental or physical. At what point do you become yourself? Never, wholly, you are always partly him" (144). This internalized patriarchal code is, understandably, complementary to an outer code, the "ukase," on which the Dead Father, as soon as he has hanged an indocile hussar, says, "Nobody disobeys a ukase of mine" (9). On the other hand, his "outer voice" or speech itself also comes into conflict with those who encounter its idiosyncratic linguistic system. "In considering," he begins his speech, "inconsidering inconsidering inconsidering the additionally arriving human beings annually additionally arriving human beings each producing upon its head one hundred thousand individual hairs some retained and some discarded-- . . ." (49-50). What we must note here is that the manual defines this "babble" as another patriarchal code that every subject must respect and conform to: "you can do not much for a mad father except listen, for a while, to his babble. If he cries aloud, '<u>Stomp it, emptor!</u>' then you must attempt to figure out

the code" (116). Furthermore, this idiolect demands assimilation on the part of the subjects, forcing them to adopt its symbolic order: "If he cries aloud, '<u>The fiends have killed your horse!</u>' note down in your notebook the frequency with which the words 'the' and 'your' occur in his tirade" (116). This confrontation with the total otherness of the Dead Father's language eventually leads Emma, after the speech is over, to ask, "what did it mean?" (51); she thereby reconfirms unawares the power of the patriarchal imperatives whose imposition is by definition independent of meaning.

The verbal forms of friction that accompany the Dead Father as a speaking subject point to something that is as pertinent to friction in general, whether material or linguistic, as the medium, the point of contact, and the "in-betweenness." Here we must note how, in response to Emma's question, the Dead Father replies. His answer is, "it meant I made a speech" (51). It is this self-reference that we must identify as that which distinctly marks the Dead Father as a body that speaks. This is to say that the meaning of his speech should not be looked for in its content but rather in the speech act itself, in the very fact that he speaks. Thus the significance of the patriarchal codes lies not merely in their "pertinaciousness"--"The Father's voice is an instrument of the most terrible pertinaciousness" (123)--or in their idiosyncrasy;[6] rather, it lies in the very fact that they are <u>there</u>, codified and imposed exclusively by

him. The same self-consciousness about "being there" applies to his body as well, inasmuch as the materiality of the body, the hauling, and friction all point to the continuing presence of that body. It is this self-referential affirmation of just being, as well as the self-referential affirmation of just saying, that underlies friction; self-reference implies that what matters is not merely the kind of friction or the many points of contact it entails, but rather its presence itself. We have come full circle; the Dead Father, through the medium of friction, represents himself as a speaking body that <u>is</u>.

II

Traditionally, critics have tended to see the tautological affirmation of being that marks many of Barthelme's fictions as a self-referential commentary on his texts themselves, and they have generally stressed the notion of textual autonomy or immanence that has rapidly obtained the status as "the" postmodern mode of formal innovation and literary subversion.[7] On the level of textual strategy, this foregrounding of the presence of a text has much to do with the problem of artistic medium. In an interview, for example, responding to a question about the "metaphysical advantage possessed by painters," Barthelme himself replies that it is the "physicality of the medium--there's a physicality of color, of an object present before the spectator, which painters don't have to project by

means of words. I can peel the label off that bottle of beer you're drinking and glue it to the canvas and it's there" ("Interview" 36). Thus there is essentially nothing irrelevant, we must admit, with the dominant critical attempts to see how the novel is autotelic or about itself, that is to say, how the Dead Father the character is a portrait of The Dead Father the text; how the body that speaks represented in the text is itself as much a dramatization of language as an artistic medium as it is an allegorical foregrounding of its materiality, or how its subject matter is "matter" itself; and how language is itself a bodily existence, a body that speaks.[8]

Indeed, like other novels and short stories by Barthelme, the novel self-referentially calls attention to its presence as a verbal art object in a number of ways. First, the text contains instances of what we may call a diagrammatic arrangement of words, most representative of which is definitely Julie's "new seating plan" (54), where the persons and the dishes are, just like a Magritte painting, superseded by their verbal designations. Then mise-en-abyme, one of the increasingly commonplace metafictional artifices in postmodern literary experimentation, figures as a second example. The singularity of Barthelme's use of this device, however, derives from the fact that it goes far beyond its ordinary sense of the internal embedding of a story within the frame story; the "Chinese box" effect of the text is brought about not so much by a tale-

within-the-tale as by a "book-within-the-book," A Manual for Sons that is integrated into the structure of the text. This foregrounding of the spatial structure of the text--how one book frames another--and the diagrammatic deployment of words have much to do with the typographic technology of bookmaking: the title page, the table of contents, and the spatial arrangements of words on the page. In this sense, the self-consciousness about the materiality of language as an artistic medium, as well as about the presence of the text as an art object, presupposes, in Barthelme's case, an awareness that it is first of all a book, an artifact, a material object among other material objects in the world. Indeed, this awareness is exactly what Ronald Sukenick euphorically extols as the basis for the "new tradition" in fiction: "A novel is both a concrete structure and an imaginative structure--pages, print, binding containing a record of the movements of a mind. The form is technological, the content is imaginative. The old novel tends to deny its technological reality, but . . . the book is 'a spatial phenomenon by its very essence'" (38). And Barthelme himself openly upholds this new materialist orthodoxy. "With Mallarmé," he writes in his essay, "Not-Knowing,"

> the effort toward mimesis, the representation of the external world, becomes a much more complex thing than it had been previously. . . . Mallarmé's work is also, perhaps most importantly, a step toward establishing a

> new ontological status for the poem, as an object in the world rather than a representation of the world. (514)

It is because the text ultimately represents nothing other than itself, this aesthetic tradition reminds us, that it can present itself as a nonrepresentational technological object in its own right.

But if we take account of what is unconsciously at work here in terms of postmodernism as the dominant cultural logic of advanced capitalism, or what is innocently absent from Barthelme's affirmation of textual presence as a book--for absence usually implies that something powerful is too taken for granted to be articulated explicitly--it becomes evident that his nonrepresentational poetics, which derives not only from Mallarmé but also from such (later) modernists as Beckett and Robbe-Grillet,[9] has as much political and cultural implications for the materiality of language as an artistic medium as it does aesthetic ones. What is needed is an ontology other than the one Barthelme is talking about, an ontology that takes into consideration the fact that in our contemporary culture no object can ever <u>be</u> without first being a commodity, including both literary objects--the book--and nonliterary objects.[10] In this sense the commodity--inserted both at the point of production and at the point of consumption, and thus shot through with the material texture of capitalist economy--must be

seen as the postmodern spatial form par excellence. In short, what is absent from Barthelme's apparently harmless account of the "literary object" as "something that is there, like a rock or a refrigerator," something that the reader "bump[s] into" ("After Joyce" 4), is a further account of its position, being where, within the boundaries of the cultural complex designated late capitalism--an account of the fact that the reader "bumps into" the text as something on the market--where any new literary formal innovation counts merely as a new gadget, as another instance of "technological" innovation which is the driving force behind the social energy of capitalism.[11] That is, what is missing is an account of the literary text as a material object on which both social and aesthetic discourses are inscribed. What matters in a capitalist economy is difference or novelty. It follows that no literary attitude is more congenial to its logic, paradoxically, than the postmodern affirmation of textual autonomy (which is indeed a literary form of fetishism in which what is merely the effect or product of a set of material relationships is taken to be intrinsic to a given text) inasmuch as its aesthetics of self-reference is new or innovative and is all the more lucrative than the old realist aesthetics of mimetic reference--this alone is sufficient to make it part of the dynamic structure of capitalism.

Now we can reconsider friction within the framework of the capitalist processes of commodity production and commodity

consumption, since the figure of the Dead Father has turned out to be a figuration of the text The Dead Father as a (potential) commodity. It is here that the process of hauling his male body appears as an allegorical dramatization of the process of co-optation, of the way in which the initially new and subversive modernist aesthetics of presence in the course of time becomes situated and ends up as something typically postmodern, a consumable "style" on the market; it is a dramatization of the metamorphosis of something frictional into something frictionless, or of the way in which postmodernism and Barthelme himself reposition modernism so that it may form an apparatus for the absorption of surplus value. We can go so far as to say that the process constitutes a story on the use of the aesthetic; and giving "late modernist" aesthetics the market value it has received can be seen as one of the most appropriate ways in which those living "after Joyce" mourn the dead masters (for the capitalist process of the absorption of surplus value draws on capitalism's systematic integration of mourning into its economy). To put this another way, the Dead Father's burial with bulldozers indicates, besides the death of friction, the inevitable shift of position of what is initially frictional that the circular logic of capitalism necessitates. This position is not only spatial, moreover; it also implies a temporal gap between the birth of friction and its eventual extinction, and therefore the Dead Father's funeral procession

must be seen as an allegory of the capitalist process of repositioning the displaced in terms of both spatiality and temporality.[12]

If we turn to the problem of postmodern subjectivity, it is the way in which the Dead Father as a speaking subject responds to the burial that enables us to map not only the shifting position of potential commodities but also the ontological position of the subject in its material relations with these commodities. Moreover, it also shows how the psychological reality of the postmodern subject that is inseparable from the material--the commodity might be seen in this regard as the postmodern "objective correlative," an adequate equivalent for the capitalist mentality--is indeed also inseparable from the rhetorical:

> I wasn't really fooled, said the Dead Father. Not for a moment. I knew all along.
>
> We knew you knew, said Thomas.
>
> Of course I had hopes, said the Dead Father. Pale hopes.
>
> We knew that too.
>
> Did I do it well? asked the Dead Father.
>
> Marvelously well, said Julie. Superbly. I will never see it done better.
>
> Thank you, said the Dead Father. Thank you very much. (176)

We see that here between the speaking subject and its point of contact with capitalism, to cite what Gérard Genette says about rhetorical figures, "there is a gap, a space, and like all space, it possesses a form." And this form he calls a "figure" (47). The rhetorical figure that mediates the subject's insertion at this material point is irony, and it is twofold: first, the Dead Father's dissimulation of ignorance or "doing otherwise"--"doing well"--that is comparable to the "saying otherwise" of verbal irony; second, a situational irony, "We knew you knew." But we must further point out that despite the fact that it is eventually countered by this capitalist mode of cosmic irony, the capacity for corrective as well as protective irony that the Dead Father demonstrates here may function as a mode of agency in dealing with the circular logic of capitalism, inasmuch as this self-consciousness secures the subject some degree of "critical distance," invariably internalized as it is.[13] This has to do with the capacity to "already know" as opposed to the Greek anagnorisis: the subject at the point of commodity production already knows that it is only through the medium of market economy that its cultural product can encourage engagement, while the subject at the point of commodity consumption (perhaps) knows that everything subversive on the market is there because it is already absorbed.[14] It is this "knowing" that enables us to consider the figure of the Dead Father to be a point of contact between existentialism and

capitalism--between knowing one's own death and knowing one's own involvement in the process of co-optation.

III

The postmodern male body of the Dead Father constitutes a cultural site on whose surface the materialistic and the rhetorical, matter and subjectivity, the technological and the poetic, modernism and postmodernism, the temporal and the spatial, ontology and epistemology, and capitalism and the aesthetic all inscribe themselves, coming into contact and conflict with one another. His scope never going beyond the aesthetic, and himself innocently unselfconscious about his own involvement in capitalist economy, Barthelme seems not to know even the existence of these dialectic relationships, and only senses that something ironic is at work.

Let me pass one last remark not irrelevant to this postmodern irony: the body of the Dead Father is by no means limited to a single subject. On the contrary, it has precisely to do with the intersubjective, inasmuch as his burial is also a paradoxical finding or "excavation" on the children's part of the critical potentialities of irony, not necessarily its actuality, since their "recognition" of them comes only at his death, belated; and they themselves repeat and reproduce the same irony ad infinitum. This "being-always-out-of-time" holds true with the reader of The Dead Father as well, who is at the

point of contact with this object found on the market, and whose intersubjectivity is made possible only by that belatedness.

# C H A P T E R IV

## The Economy of Figures: White Noise

The problems surrounding the subject and subjectivity have made it impossible to imagine a body that is not a cultural space or a site of struggle where various discourses keep intersecting with each other on a day-by-day, and even minute-by-minute basis. The recent, increasingly sophisticated debate on gender is undoubtedly among the many that heavily draw on this conception of the body as a prime point of discursive intervention.

If this particular "debate" has its own force as well as uniqueness, however, it seems to come from the fact that it is a "debate" that cannot be limited to academic fields such as literary criticism, cultural studies, and "theory," but one that is open to forms of "practice"--forms which are not only aesthetic/artistic but also highly political. Thus, to take one salient example of such practice, we have Barbara Kruger's 1989 poster with which she covered walls in lower Manhattan, and on

which is inscribed, "Your body is a battleground" (fig. 8)--a metaphorical aphorism that flatly contradicts Susan Sontag's statement given, however, in a different context: "The body is not a battlefield" (AIDS 183).[1] "Designed in support of abortion rights and targeted," according to Kate Linker, "for the April 9, 1989, march on Washington (a march that would call attention to the Supreme Court hearing on a case that might overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade decision)" (Kruger 87), the poster attempts to reveal that the female body--especially as it relates to pregnancy and abortion--as a discursive site, and the female identity as an effect of interacting discourses, are both problems that are important on a "street" basis; it attempts to

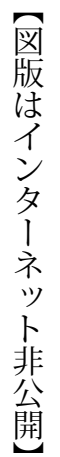


Fig. 8. Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your Body Is a Battleground).

make visible or rather "visualize" the transparent mechanism by which the juridical discourse inserts itself with impunity into these bodily sites. What characterizes these attempts is Kruger's strategic use of the dominant patriarchal means of representing women and circulating male images of femininity: the poster. Hers is an interventionist reappropriation aiming at effecting a "consciousness-raising," which helps women to understand that the personal pronoun "you," whether Kruger's or the ubiquitous one found everywhere in the media (particularly relevant here is Althusser's discussion on interpellation, ideology, and the Ideological State Apparatuses), refers to no one but themselves and that the body re-represented as a "battleground" is no one else's but their own. Significantly, however, Kruger's political/artistic attempt at intervention involves a paradox: because this "feminist" work, by virtue of its reappropriation of the masculine medium as well as its rhetoric, not only undoes both the "female" and the "feminine" but at the same time demands that she become "master" of this phallic extension, it inevitably transfigures the artist into a kind of androgyne--not the harmoniously integrated androgyne which Virginia Woolf envisioned, but a self-warring androgyne with internal conflict and identity crisis.[2]

But insofar as the body as a discursive site is part of the larger problem of the subject in general, it must be discussed further in terms other than gender which, however, are not

antagonistic but complementary to it. It is because of this that I argue that the bodies represented in Don DeLillo's White Noise, his first commercially successful novel published four years before the overnight proliferation of Kruger's posters in lower Manhattan, should be approached in terms of what I here call the "economy of figures," which is an aesthetic and materialistic logic controlling these bodies. This approach is an attempt to look at the bodies as cultural spaces or "grounds" in and out of which "figures" continue to come and go, and to connect this essentially aesthetic circulation--the subject's semiotic practices of producing, distributing, and consuming various "rhetorical figures"--with "economy." I suggest that it is this intercourse between formalism and materialism made possible by this particular viewpoint that enables us to grasp the full implications of the fact that the two cultural phenomena treated in the novel, namely the media (television) and money (shopping), are both versions of mediation; that it is this intercourse, moreover, that enables us to reconsider the novel's central problem of death and the phobia about it in terms of the relationship between the medium in general and the subject. Such a rethinking of death is the key to exposing the apparently invisible and "natural" cultural hierarchy that the novel seems to take for granted and that the author himself unconsciously reinscribes in his text. And importantly, it is a hierarchy that appears to us only as the contradiction embodied

and acted out by the novel's protagonist, Jack Gladney.

I

In White Noise, the problematic relationship between the body and the circulation of "figures" is most dramatically highlighted when it deals with the media and their representations. What characterizes its way of approaching these problems is its particular emphasis on the role of television in postmodern culture. This emphasis helps us to properly focus on the way in which the medium incorporates its raw material, namely bodies, into its mechanisms of image production and thereby transforms them into depthless surfaces for distribution, consumption, and other institutional purposes. As the first example of this, we have the "televised" Babette who (or "which"?) deeply confounds her husband, Jack Gladney:

> The face on the screen was Babette's. . . . Confusion, fear, astonishment spilled from our faces. What did it mean? What was she doing there, in black and white, framed in formal borders? Was she dead, missing, disembodied? Was this her spirit, her secret self, some two-dimensional facsimile released by the power of technology, set free to glide through wavebands . . . pausing to say good-bye to us from the fluorescent screen?
>
> A strangeness gripped me, a sense of psychic

> disorientation. It was her all right . . . but her appearance on the screen made me think of her as some distant figure . . . a walker in the mists of the dead. If she was not dead, was I? . . .
>
> With the sound down low we couldn't hear what she was saying. But no one bothered to adjust the volume. It was the picture that mattered, the face in black and white, animated but also flat, distanced, sealed off, timeless. It was but wasn't her. . . . Waves and radiation. . . . She was shining a light on us, she was coming into being, endlessly being formed and reformed . . . as the electronic dots swarmed. . . .
>
> The kids were flushed with excitement but I felt a certain disquiet. I tried to tell myself it was only television--whatever that was, however it worked--and not some journey out of life or death, not some mysterious separation. (104-05)

Second, if a metonymical displacement from body to death is permissible, then we have another instance of this "two-dimensional facsimile" of a body that technology gives birth to. In this case Jack's own being is at stake:

> I think I felt as I would if a doctor had held an X-ray to the light showing a star-shaped hole at the center of one of my vital organs. Death has entered. It is inside you. You are said to be dying and yet are

> separate from the dying, can ponder it at your leisure, literally see on the X-ray photograph or computer screen the horrible alien logic of it all. It is when death is rendered graphically, is televised so to speak, that you sense an eerie separation between your condition and yourself. A network of symbols has been introduced, an entire awesome technology wrested from the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying. (141-42)

Two things link these two quotations. First, they both present a sense of fear that is to be distinguished from the "fear of death," despite their intimate connection with death. For the "fear" that Jack feels in the face of Babette being televised, and the "horribleness" and "eeriness" which he thinks are intrinsic to a televised death, are both more directly linked with repetition and difference; they are variations of the fear of textuality, whose further variations include the fear associated with the mirror, twins, one's own shadow and doppelgänger, and other instances of displacement.[3] Second, the two quotations both describe, not only a sense of alienation and strangeness involved in this kind of separation, but also its inherently "mysterious" nature.

It is not difficult to see how the two quotations almost automatically remind us of Jean Baudrillard's highly influential thesis on the "precession of simulacra." But what should not go

unremarked here is their further affinity with the phenomenon which Marx called the "fetishism of commodities," as well as the genealogical relationship of Baudrillard's conception of simulation itself to the latter. According to Marx, the commodity is also marked by separation and mystery: "A commodity is . . . a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour" (82-83). The problem of the commodity proper will be discussed later; suffice it to say here that what will be at issue is its structural inseparability from the "figure." What <u>is</u> at issue here is another fetishism, the fetishism of images, which television, or more precisely "tele-vision," necessarily involves; the medium is a material means of image production which separates, displaces, deprives a body of its rawness, its "social character," and mysteriously lets its own end products levitate, precede, and stand on their own as if they were, as Marx eloquently says of the fetishes, "independent beings endowed with life" despite their "objective character" (83).

However, what we want to clarify in particular is to what extent and in what way these materialistic problems of production, fetishism, and television are bound up with formalism. In other words, the point at issue is the extent to which material structures are shot through with the aesthetic. Significantly, if we first draw on semiotics which argues that

the "meaning" of every textual practice in culture is only an "effect"--now called a "meaning-effect"--of a certain interaction of signifiers now including bodies and images,[4] and then stop limiting "figures" to "rhetorical figures" and take them more "literally," we find that "tele-vision" is in reality no different from figures of speech such as "metaphor" and "synecdoche": it is a name given to the form of mediation between "television"'s two signifiers, a body (or any object of representation) and its image. Indeed, this is a formulation obtained when Gérard Genette's characteristically formalist definition of rhetoric and the rhetorical figure is reformulated in terms of materialism. "We see that here, between the letter and the meaning, between what the poet has written and what he thought," observes Genette, "there is a gap, a space, and like all space, it possesses a form. This form is called a figure . . ." (47). He goes on to explain that this "meaning" or what a poet has "thought," namely, a particular signified, is "obviously merely another signifier offered as the literal one" (47), thereby making sure that what he is dealing with is the form of the space created between two signifiers. In our case, however, what is at issue is the "form" taken by the fissure between a body and its televised image; it is this particular "figure" generated by the medium--which, like a rhetorical figure, transforms and, to borrow the important term Genette uses in describing what it is supposed to perform, "translates,"

both Babette herself and Jack's death into other material signifiers--that concerns our attempt at an intercourse between formalism and materialism. (The problem of the "figure" also concerns the unique cultural phenomenon featured in the novel's third chapter, "the most photographed barn in America"; but the crucial difference is that in its case more emphasis is put on the "aura" of the barn itself.) It is the "rhetorical effect" of "tele-vision," whether enchanting or disorienting, produced by this formal distance between its two signifiers that is responsible for the fetishism of images; indeed, a fetishism, or the worship of objects as such, is a corollary of any formal structure, whether linguistic or material. We here obtain the following materialist/formalist formulation in place of Genette's purely linguistic one, "Signifier--Figure--Signifier": Body--"Tele-vision"--Image. What is particularly important about this formulation is its exclusion of the human agent from itself. This exclusion of the agent--having much to do with Marx's opening remark in Capital, "A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us" (45), as well as with the "birth" of the "subject"--derives from the fact that television mediates not so much between agents such as the sender of an image and its receiver (as Murray Jay Siskind describes, the medium is "self-contained, self-referring" [51]), as between an object and its image; the role of the agent is to make him- or herself the "human host" of parasitic "figures."

It is this formulation, the body as a "host" of parasitic "figures," that enables us to interpret the fear of death as fundamentally a rhetorical disease. It is caused, this interpretation would suggest, by an injunction against the free circulation of "figures," which contributes toward keeping the signifier "death" as isolated and monologic as possible, and making its meaning or "meaning-effect" as "literal" as possible, corresponding, if possible, to one referent only; it is an injunction that intends to render death as stereotypical and predictable as possible, thereby making it into a commonplace cultural phenomenon absolutely antithetical to any polymorphous signifier.

It is the cultural logic founded on this process of producing "clichés" that is responsible for thanatophobia, which the two subjects in White Noise, Jack and Babette, both develop.[5] But it can be brought into bold relief only negatively, when juxtaposed with Wilder's intimate relationship with both death and the "figure." What takes on particular importance here is the way in which the infant plays, since "play" is a self-referential signifying practice formally identical to figuration that is the autotelic signifying practice--by embracing "effective" interactions between material signifiers and excluding from itself both the human agent and the referent, it makes language relate to itself or loop.[6] Most relevant in this respect is his "mystically charged" tricycle

riding across the highway:

> Here the women began to call. Hey, hey, they said, a little tentative at first, not ready to accept the implications of the process unfolding before them. . . . Hey, sonny, no. . . . Wilder, meanwhile, ignoring their cries or not hearing them in the serial whoosh of dashing hatchbacks and vans, began to pedal across the highway, mystically charged. . . . The drivers could not quite comprehend. In their knotted posture, belted in, they knew this picture did not belong to the hurtling consciousness of the highway. . . . What did it mean, this little rotary blur? Some force in the world had gone awry. They veered, braked, sounded their horns down the long afternoon, an animal lament. The child would not even look at them. . . . The women watched him regain a firm placement on the seat. Stay, they called. Do not go. No, no. Like foreigners reduced to simple phrases. . . . Cars dodged, strayed, climbed the curbstone, astonished heads appearing in the side windows. The furiously pedaling boy could not know how slow he seemed to be moving from the vantage point of the women on the porch. The women were silent by now, outside the event, suddenly tired. How slow he moved, how mistaken he was in thinking he was breezing right along. (322-23; emphasis added)

Wilder's tricycle riding is "effective" to the extent that it "effects" a metamorphosis; it transfigures his body, on which is inscribed the stereotypical image of "a child on its plastic tricycle," into some iconoclastic and indifferent other body that displaces the image: the foreign body of a liberal-minded child on his tricycle who gives his own body too much play--or, to put this another way, the body of a precociously poetically-minded child on his three-wheeler who senses his own body's metonymic contiguity with dashing four-wheelers on the highway. His tricycle riding, therefore, is a kind of trope, something that "turns"--a signifying practice that confers on his body a new, alien "figure."

The problem at issue here is not only the form of the fissure between the supposed "literal meaning" of Wilder's body and its "figurative" displacement, however (its importance is suggested by the driver who utters, echoing Jack before the televised Babette, "What did it mean?"). Equally important is the problem of how this fissure is produced. This means that we must pay particular attention to the close connection of Wilder's "play" first with the problem of the medium and then with that of "vision," which adds up to saying that we must pay particular attention to its possible connection with television. Indeed, his tricycle riding, while reconfiguring the relationship between his body and the image inscribed upon it, at the same time gives birth to an unexpected "vision," a new

"picture" as the drivers call it, that is simultaneously incomprehensible, accidental, "mistaken"; hence its displacement of the image. But what deserves particular attention at this point is the fact that this displacement is the outcome of his licentious use of his own medium, the tricycle, which like "tele-vision" mediates between two forms of a body. We can go so far as to say that his self-destructive tricycle riding effects a re-representation of his already image-stricken body; that he plays to imagine a polymorphous body that resists any "literal meaning."[7] His body is therefore not only a "battleground," pace Kruger, but a playground, an open field in and out of which diverse "figures" keep coming and going. Wilder is not afraid to "translate" himself; he has no fear of textuality.

But the crucial point is that White Noise represents Wilder's re-formed--or to put this more precisely, "deformed"--body as an object of repression. The reason for this is that what he appears to be performing, a suicidal attempt, contradicts the dominant binary logic prevailing in its America --"killer/dier." Wilder is a paradox in that he is both a "killer" and a "dier" simultaneously, and therefore indeterminate; by virtue of his self-annihilative performance that nevertheless successfully displays an intimate and therefore alternative relationship with death, he threatens to expose the ideological character of "natural death" that this binary cultural logic ("My life is either/or," says Babette

[53]) has given birth to by excluding any paradoxical forms of death. The women's "no," as well as their mentioning of Wilder's attempt as a "mistake," occurs from this perspective not so much because it is dangerous for him as because it threatens to undo this dominant binary discourse. The aberrant form taken by Wilder's relationship with death, therefore, has no alternative but to become an object of surveillance and censorship, something that must be placed under a ban, the moment it emerges.

"Natural death" or simply Death--the only culturally accepted form of death that is invented by imposing a definition, a "literal meaning," or a referent on this otherwise polymorphous signifier and at the same time a breeding ground for promiscuous connections--is the product of an institutionalization: the cultural process of turning this potentially "noisy" (not "white-noisy") field into a static ground, of <u>concentration</u>. This is evidenced by the only "ground" in the novel explicitly associated with death--the burying ground. It describes "THE OLD BURYING GROUND: Blacksmith Village" as follows:

> The headstones were small, tilted, pockmarked, spotted with fungus or moss, the names and dates barely legible. . . . I stood and listened.
>
> I was beyond the traffic noise, the intermittent stir of factories across the river. So at least in

> this they'd been correct, placing the graveyard here, a silence that had stood its ground. The air had a bite. I breathed deeply, remained in one spot, waiting to feel the peace that is supposed to descend upon the dead. . . .
>
> I stood there, listening. . . . Then I stood and listened.
>
> The power of the dead is that we think they see us all the time. The dead have a presence. Is there a level of energy composed solely of the dead? They are also in the ground, of course, asleep and crumbling. Perhaps we are what they dream. (97-98)

The silence and the homogeneity--the passage refers to "the dead" and their representations, the "headstones," only collectively--that characterize this institutional space and that are thus responsible for its stagnation or "peace" are symptoms of an injunction--an injunction to prevent any accidental circulation of deaths through it and, if there is ever one, to make domesticated and invisible, namely, to re-present, the anomalies it brings in. Such aberrant forms of death that somehow elude the institutionally constructed "Death"--the life after death, ghosts of superstars, UFOs, the Bardo Thödol or The Tibetan Book of the Dead, metempsychosis, necrophilia, suicide--all these exceptional instances of cultural "poetic license" end up finding themselves, however, in

place: supermarket tabloids and the Department of American Environments at the College-on-the-Hill, also known as the "popular culture department" (9), are two most salient cultural spaces that are open to these marginal forms of death. The crucial point is that the correlation between thanatophobia and these cultural mechanisms of interdiction, repression, and hierarchization is totally invisible in DeLillo's America.

II

The problem that immediately arises from the antithesis between the two forms of subjectivity--on the one hand, the "rhetorically illiterate" Jack who is blind to the ideologically veiled forms of death, and on the other, Wilder who senses how body/death "plays" ("play" in its sense of "to have free 'play'")--has to do with the possibility of resistance. What is at issue is whether or not a critical intervention in the cultural mechanisms of representation, which are basically formal mechanisms, is available to subjects.

At first sight, it seems that a positive answer to this problem of agency is already given by Wilder: his self-representation is so effective that it does undermine at least part of the entire ideological logic of image-production. But the important point is that his kind of intervention, which involves reappropriating the dominant cultural rhetoric, necessarily entails some degree of self-destructiveness; to put

this otherwise, we can even say that it necessitates something like a "masochistic self-reference" or "suicidal openness"--that it requires him to employ the very material means of producing stereotypical images of children in order to make his own body an object of counter-representation. His performance is therefore based on the same paradoxical strategy as that of Kruger's interventionist practice of re-representation: a homeopathic (similia similibus curantur) strategy of reappropriating the very masculine medium of representing women for its feminist purposes. I suggest that the possibility of agency depends on how intimate a subject is with this "open" type of self-reference--or the "loop," to appropriate a critic's key term--and the concomitant self-destructiveness, both of which accompany any attempt at critical self-representation.[8] Otherwise, the subject only works as an efficient cultural "relay" that receives, amplifies, and redistributes the rhetoric of representation and thereby facilitates the transparent circulation of what Stephen Greenblatt has called "social energy" (Shakespearean Negotiations 6), as does Jack who, by virtue of his unselfconscious relationship with his medium, the "plot" against Willie Mink, does serve to a certain extent to maintain and reinforce the ideology of "killer/dier." This intimacy, however, does not necessarily depend on the linguistic competence of an agent, as is demonstrated by Wilder who is the personification of the etymological meaning of "in-fant," the

unable-to-speak. Rather, it depends on how receptive he or she is to the radical figurative character of signification.

III

The inaccessibility of agency to Jack is closely connected with the market economy he is involved in. This suggests that his antipathy to the radical figurativeness of televised images, his blindness to the critical potency of self-referential counter-representation, and his exclusion from the aesthetic area of textuality caused by his phobia about it, must be all ascribed to the fact that he is not a subject living capitalism sufficiently.

The key to this apparent paradox lies in his harmonious relationship with the supermarket (or the mall) and its formalism. The most important scene in this respect is the following one in which he "shops":

> The encounter [with Eric Massingale] put me in the mood to shop. . . . Babette and the kids followed me . . . puzzled but excited by my desire to buy. . . . The two girls scouted ahead, spotting things they thought I might want or need, running back to get me, to clutch my arms, plead with me to follow. They were my guides to endless well-being. . . . My family gloried in the event. I was one of them, shopping, at last. . . . I kept seeing myself unexpectedly in some

> reflecting surface. . . . There was always another store. . . . I shopped for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it. . . . I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed. . . . Our images appeared on mirrored columns, in glassware and chrome, on TV monitors in security rooms. I traded money for goods. The more money I spent, the less important it seemed. I was bigger than these sums. These sums poured off my skin like so much rain. These sums in fact came back to me in the form of existential credit. I felt expansive, inclined to be sweepingly generous. . . . (83-84)

Capitalist subjects that participate in a market economy exchange commodities through the medium of money--"I traded money for goods." The point here is that the structure of market economy is formally identical to the structure of the sign in general. If we temporarily leave out the human agent in order to concentrate on its purely formal character--as Marx did in Capital: "A commodity is . . . an object outside us"--then we find that the relationship between the commodity and money parallels the relationship between the signifier and the figure. As Genette defines a "figure" as the "form" taken by the gap between two signifiers, so Marx defines money as the "form" of

the space between a commodity to be sold and a commodity to be bought: the money form. It is evident from this parallelism that his formulation "Commodity--Money--Commodity" (115), which illustrates this purely formal relationship between commodities and money, is the economic variation on the general formal structure of the sign (Signifier--Figure--Signifier). According to this formalist view of market economy, just as figures by virtue of their mediating function serve to circulate signifiers, so money functions as the medium of commodity circulation--"As medium in the circulation of commodities money acquires the function of the means of circulation" (Marx 124).

If we then turn our attention to how this purely formal--and therefore even aesthetic and rhetorical--character of market economy affects human agents, we find that it is this very characteristic that is highly responsible for the formation of the "subject" and the formalization of both men and women in a capitalist society. Moreover, it is this capitalist process of abstraction, a further deprivation of what Marx called "men's social character," that links not only his formulation C--M--C but others such as Genette's S--F--S and ours B--T--I to what is generally known as the "figure-ground" concept. Most important here is the paradox--Marx would have called this "contradiction"--that what guarantees the capitalist subject's "fullness of being," as Jack puts it (20), is its incorporation into market mechanisms; in Jack's case, it is because an act of

shopping, an act that situates him on the "purchase" side of Marx's formulation (M--C), does turn him into a functional element among countless others that serves to facilitate the circulation of commodities, that he is able to obtain "existential credit" (84) and, moreover, discover himself--to "find new aspects of himself," to "grow," "expand," or change incessantly ("Buy me; I'll change your life," says one of Kruger's pieces; and shopping provides him with an "endless well-being" because there is "always another store"), just as playing affords Wilder's body a new "figure." This inevitably leads to a proposition: that shopping is by definition a rhetorical signifying practice, an art of metamorphosis (significantly, the above quotation juxtaposes shopping with "images," "mirrors," and "TV monitors," things associated with textuality and displacement)--it is an exchange of fetishes through the medium of money, a mysterious ritual that enables consuming agents, who trade the representations of their own "social character" with other similar representations, to simulate other persons. Hence the particular relevance of "The Metamorphosis of Commodities," the title Marx gave to the subsection of Capital in which he introduced C--M--C (C--M being the "First metamorphosis, or sale," while M--C "purchase. The second and concluding metamorphosis of a commodity" [116, 120]). But what we want to particularly underscore in pointing out the connection of his C--M--C (and S--F--S/B--T--I) with the

"figure-ground" concept is the power relations inscribed in these apparently neutral formalist formulations: they are all linked up with the psychologist Edgar Rubin's trick picture which can be seen either as an urn or as two human faces turned toward each other, and which <u>can</u> be reformulated into "Ground--Figure--Ground." This reformulation, marked by its hierarchization, illustrates why the transforming human agents, once positioned within the formal structure of shopping, end up playing the role of "ground" or "sub-ject" as against which "figures" an inanimate object, money (like Rubin's urn which does figure at the expense of the two human figures).[9]

This predominance of money over human agents that is one of the defining characteristics of DeLillo's America (at least as portrayed in <u>White Noise</u>) tempts us to rethink in these very terms the meanings of the three institutional spaces featured in the novel: the campus, the supermarket, and Jack's home. Indeed, the campus is a place for labor, where he first transforms himself into a fetish (chairman of the Department of Hitler Studies, who goes by the name of "J. A. K. Gladney") then into money; the supermarket is a place for consumption, where he exchanges his money for other fetishes. In this respect, the two places are complementary to each other in terms of economy, in that the former initiates and the latter concludes the currency of Jack's money.[10] His home, on the contrary, has no place in this currency; it is a stagnant space useful only for the

hoarding of commodities that have fallen out of the sphere of circulation--in economic terms, it only functions as a burial ground for these non-circulating commodities.

At issue here is, again, death. Indeed, it is only when the homologous relationship between this culturally disguised "burying ground" and its institutional or "official" counterpart, the graveyard in Blacksmith, is fully exposed that the economic implications of Jack's (and Babette's) thanatophobia can be revealed. This is to say that the fear of death must be placed in juxtaposition with the "horribleness" of the "dead" commodities or the garbage that the Gladneys produce --"I came across," says Jack, "a horrible clotted mass" (259)-- because it is, I would suggest, closely interrelated with their appalling rigor mortis. And the enormous "presence," the stasis, and the collective identity ("The compressed bulk sat there like an ironic modern sculpture, massive . . ." [258-59]) of these domestic wastes, of this "dark underside of consumer consciousness" (259), are all reminiscent of the graveyard and its inhabitants. It is therefore not difficult to infer from this similitude that if viewed in terms of capitalism, thanatophobia--a rhetorical disease invented by the cultural process of checking the circulation of "figures" of death, of closing the "ground," of concentrating deaths into "Death"[11]--is also an economic disease caused by an anti-capitalist injunction against free circulation; that it is a symptom of some

ideological logic of fixation and repression--that is, of some "economic" stagnation and rigor. In short, the fear of death is another "dark underside of consumer consciousness," caused by death's withdrawal from the sphere of capitalist circulation.

But the implications of this pathological correlation between rhetoric and economy for the subject seem even more scandalous because it necessarily entails a crucial tautology: it follows from this interrelation that the capitalist subject has no alternative but to participate in what can only be called "Capitalist Economy"--a kind of universal "market economy" where purely formal relationships between fetishized commodities/material signifiers are formed and re-formed on the basis of exchange/circulation mediated either by money or by the "figure"--first by similarly fetishizing or formalizing itself, whether consciously or automatically. (Note Jack's wonder at the beauty of the automated teller machine and his "secret code," as well as his "pleasing interaction" with the "system": "The system was invisible. . . . But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies" [46].) Otherwise it risks stasis, standstill, "fear." Jack has no "fear of shopping" because he is, in terms of market economy in its ordinary sense, a perfect specimen of this type of capitalist subject. But in terms of the "economy of figures," his "capitalist" subjectivity is rather problematic; this is why he has another fear, a fear of textuality, including a fear of

interventionist self-representation as well as of representation in general--despite the fact that the former is the only means possible to master his morbid fear of death and its "stiffness."[12] (By the same token, the crisis of "J. A. K. Gladney" can be ascribed to the pseudonym's increasing inelasticity or staleness; it has hardened into a cognominal equivalent of "dead metaphor.")

But we must hasten to emphasize that Jack's harmonious relationship with the supermarket, shopping, and market economy (in its ordinary sense) and agency are two different things, though the former does immunize him against stasis. If he senses that shopping, like playing, is intrinsically autotelic and that the use value of a commodity is secondary to its exchange value ("I shopped for its own sake"), it does not mean that he is self-conscious about his relationship with this formal signifying practice. Here, most pertinent is again Kruger. Her proposition "I shop therefore I am," boldly inscribed on her 1987 piece Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am) (fig. 9), presents us with a self-consciousness that aims to defamiliarize shopping by essaying a confession. This commercialized Cogito of Kruger's "I" therefore contrasts strikingly with Jack's unselfconsciousness, which only serves to reinforce the logic of capital, and accordingly we have two completely antithetical attitudes toward capitalism. But what deserves special attention here is the precise location of the force of Kruger's

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Fig. 9. Barbara Kruger, Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am).

image/text: its critique of capitalism is powerful and successfully keeps ironic distance because its confessional, and therefore highly self-conscious, self-representation is a form of self-reference, and it is this "loop" as distinct from (but not unrelated to) circulation that makes possible an interventionist intercourse between the two apparently discrete signifying practices, shopping and representation. In terms of the medium in general, it is therefore not just an eclectic pastiche of the Cartesian ego but rather an extremely self-deconstructive aesthetic/political practice aiming at criticism, namely, at bringing capitalist society as a whole to a local crisis by installing the artist's own identity crisis--by

revealing, in other words, the mediated nature of her moneyed "I" while foregrounding the self-distantiation or rather self-fetishization necessarily involved in its autobiographical attempt to indelibly reinscribe itself. Her piece demonstrates, in short, how the problems of the subject, money, and representation are inseparable from one another.

IV

Actively participating in market economy by frequently going shopping and thereby having himself mediated by money, but at the same time denied by his twofold fear access to the practical potentialities of re-representing his own body/death through the intermediary of the "figure," Jack as a subject does little but faithfully reflect (not "refract") the workings of an ideology--of the cultural logic of repression and hierarchization that violently makes uneven his receptivity even to formally identical "economies," thereby precluding the possible intercourse between the two otherwise intimate signifying practices we have analyzed. It is precisely this discrepancy perceived in a person's subjectivity that is the symptom of the contradiction of the dominant cultural logic. But the problem is that insofar as this contradiction is something to be "reflected," or more precisely, something to be "displayed" in someone's problematic subjectivity, it necessarily remains invisible--it never "figures"--because of its

transparency and despite (or again, because of) its ubiquity, only to be "peacefully" reproduced and recirculated.

What assumes particular importance here is the capacity of agency to make visible and to allow visualization of this contradiction. But if agency presupposes a high degree of self-consciousness as well as an equally high degree of intimacy with self-reference and self-annihilation accompanying any critical attempt at interventionist self-representation, White Noise contains, I would conclude, no character endowed with it: Wilder is an infant prior to self-consciousness, and even the pop-semiotician Murray Jay Siskind is blind to the potentialities of self-reflexivity (which is why he is the one who ushers Jack into the ideology of "killer/dier"). With respect to Jack himself, his self-incurred incapacity to gain access to agency comes from his total unselfconsciousness about his own formalized nature--which means that he is a capitalist subject not living capitalism sufficiently to become paradoxically and self-consciously aware of his own subjugated desire to open intercourse with other economies, economies that then operate surely to transform his petrified body into fetishes (the plural is used advisedly) that are "noisy" enough to wake the dead.

The absence of agency and the further absence of an alternative vantage point from which to foreground that absence itself are sufficient to make us want to describe White Noise as conservative.[13] Given such a failure in or, more precisely, a

kind of self-imposed injunction against distantiation, I suppose it is even imperative for us to argue that the novel just like Jack is neither resistant nor interventionist, but rather constitutes one of the "parts" that make up what we may call the "cultural infrastructure" and that function as material means of reproducing and recirculating various contradictions.[14] This view seems all the more justified if we consider the fact that this award-winning novel is also the first of DeLillo's works to "'break through' to a mass audience" (Lentricchia 6). We cannot help but assume the presence of some overdetermined cultural mechanism working behind this popularity; we cannot help but assume the existence of something invisible and reconfirmed, something toxic and airborne, which as a result of this popularity has been "rediffused" throughout culture. The postmodern conditions White Noise portrays are so stereotypical and feel so familiar that, ironically, it certainly risks being another cultural product/consumer item that is far from satiric (indeed, DeLillo himself has said of the novel that "[p]erhaps the supermarket tabloids are . . . closest to the spirit of the book"[15]). Any attempt to excavate the possibility of postmodernist critique which it nevertheless lets us glimpse, but of which the author himself is unaware, must be strong enough to face this ironic reality.

# C O N C L U S I O N

If there is a "feeling" that prevails in this study, it is a feeling of ambivalence toward the postmodern culture of late capitalism. I am willing to acknowledge its necessity--it is a necessary condition for our subsistence, and its existence all but seems a historical necessity. But at the same time I feel a fissure between this cultural totality (and the totalizing culture) and myself; and it is very much like what Paul Civello, discussing American literary naturalism, calls "the rift that opens . . . between the self and the material world" (2). In this sense, the problems of naturalism are, as he argues, still ours.

The novels discussed here present various fissures between the selves of metamorphosing individuals and contemporary America that is their material world. Speaking of "the current situation of the novel," Philip E. Simmons says that the novel has become a "'residual' form" because of "the larger shift from

'print culture' to 'electronic culture'" (195). But this "form," I would say, should be referring more specifically to various forms of mediation in general, since the problem to be addressed is not so much the rise of electronic culture with its electronic mediums as the persistent dominance of the medium of circulation: money, or more generally, something that fetishizes. The present cultural situation is one in which the residual novelistic form has been incorporated into the order governed by the logic of this dominant medium; the residual medium has the material texture of the dominant ideology and reproduces its idioms. Considering this, it is no wonder if the "content" of this residual "form" has come to reflect the dominance of the circulating medium; indeed, our character's metamorphoses are basically conditioned by the game rules of capitalism. But it is also these rules that accidentally give birth to deformations, or the second metamorphoses that criticize (though, as we have seen, some of the characters fail to manage this type of metamorphosis). Our tasks in reading postmodern American fiction are: first, to be an eyewitness not only of the apparition of those individuals who somehow accomplish this second metamorphosis but also of the simultaneous birth of postmodern subcultures in which they are happy, but which are ironically contained in the incorporated residual medium (this means that the individuals are also confined there); second, if the apparition and the birth fail,

at least never to fail to describe the failure as thickly as possible.

# Notes

## Introduction. Postmodern Metamorphosis

[1] We may include in this list of terms pertaining to history and historicity Jean-François Lyotard's "occurrence" or "the Ereignis," which he insists is to be distinguished from capitalist "innovation." See Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde." Indeed, his essay must be understood above all as one on history and historicity, though it does not explicitly refer to these topics.

As for the "event," Mikhail Bakhtin's influential use of the term in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics is highly pertinent, and his translator's note on it is worth quoting: "Sobytie (event) and its adjective sobytiinyi (full of event potential) are crucial terms in Bakhtin. At their root lies the Russian word for 'existence' or 'being' (bytie), and--although the etymology here can be disputed--so-bytie can be read both in its ordinary meaning of 'event,' and in a more literal rendering as 'co-existing, co-being, shared existence or being with another.' An event can occur only among interacting consciousnesses; there can be no isolated or solipsistic events" (6).

[2] It is also self-evident that this particular "sense of history" that I am referring to must be distinguished from that

connoted by Linda Hutcheon's conception of "historiographic metafiction." Her "sense of history" is clearly articulated, for example, in her observation that the "term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should . . . best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past" ("Historiographic Metafiction" 3). My contention, on the contrary, is that "history" does not necessarily automatically refer to things "past."

[3] Lyotard himself notices this "collusion between capital and the avant-garde" ("The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" 209).

[4] With respect to the other constituent of Marx's two metamorphoses, "buying" or "the re-conversion of the money into a commodity" (115), we may say that it retransforms the already priced commodity-subject into yet another commodity-fetish.

[5] These connotations are not unrelated to Roman Jakobson's formalist use of the term in "On Realism in Art." Indeed, we should note here formalism's close link with the material. The important point is that in discussing "realism in art," Jakobson relates "deformation" to the problem of "reality":

> [The] conventional, traditional aspect of painting to a great extent conditions the very act of our visual perception. As tradition accumulates, the painted image becomes an ideogram, a formula, to which the object portrayed is linked by contiguity. Recognition

> becomes instantaneous. We no longer see a picture. The ideogram needs to be deformed. The artist-innovator must impose a new form upon our perceptions, if we are to detect in a given thing those traits which went unnoticed the day before. He may present the object in an unusual perspective; he may violate the rules of composition canonized by his predecessors. . . . The motivation behind this "disorder" was the desire for a closer approximation of reality. The urge to deform an ideogram usually underlies the Sturm und Drang stage of new artistic currents. (21)

Thus deformation implies the plurality of reality; it entails the conflict of multiple realities, each of which aspires to obtain cultural hegemony. Notice also the notion's historicity--and, accordingly, its close relationship with capitalism--suggested by "Sturm und Drang," or trial and error.

6 Concerning "their" sense of history that is antagonistic to the notion of "necessity," note also Foucault's and Deleuze and Guattari's following observations: "We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference" (Foucault, "Nietzsche" 155); "First of all, universal history is the history of contingencies, and not the history of necessity.

Ruptures and limits, and not continuity. For great accidents were necessary, and amazing encounters that could have happened elsewhere, or before, or might never have happened, in order for the flows to escape coding and, escaping, to nonetheless fashion a new machine bearing the determinations of the capitalist socius. . . . In a word, universal history is not only retrospective, it is also contingent, singular, ironic, and critical" (Deleuze and Guattari 140).

[7] Her self-deforming tendencies are becoming increasingly explicit as her career progresses, and they are especially pronounced in Disasters, Fairy Tales, Civil War, and Sex Pictures. (I am indebted to the critic Rosalind Krauss for these titles and the grouping of her works. See Krauss, Cindy Sherman 1975-1993.)

[8] For example, Craig Owens remarks that "Sherman's women are not women but images of women, specular models of femininity projected by the media to encourage imitation, identification; they are, in other words, tropes, figures" ("Allegorical Impulse" 77).

[9] Drawing in his characteristic fashion on etymology, Derrida observes that "iter, once again, comes from itara, other in Sanskrit" ("Signature" 315).

[10] This declaration also raises the problem of the "rhetorical question." On its close connection with deconstruction, see Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading (9-12).

Suffice it to say here that their rhetorical question engenders the following tension between its literal and figurative meanings, hence an indifference: while the male interlocutor, taking it literally, is urged to reply, "It makes all the difference," they have the power to dodge and say, "I just meant it figuratively--that is, I don't give a damn what the difference is."

[11] "The event happens as a question mark 'before' happening as a question," Lyotard writes in "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde." He goes on to suggest that "It happens is rather 'in the first place' is it happening, is this it, is it possible?" (197).

[12] "Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity," argues Derrida, "can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring" ("Signature" 320).

[13] I fear that my simultaneous recourse to Derrida and Austin may appear to be a deliberate misappropriation, based on bad faith, for my own strategic purposes, especially in light of Derrida's criticism of Austin. But we should not forget that

Derrida's primary intention is not so much to defeat as to supplement Austin, however parasitically. Thus he says in "Signature Event Context":

> Above all, I will not conclude . . . that there is no relative specificity of the effects of consciousness, of the effects of speech (in opposition to writing in the traditional sense), that there is no effect of the performative, no effect of ordinary language, no effect of presence and of speech acts. It is simply that these effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them term by term, but on the contrary presuppose it in dyssemtrical fashion, as the general space of their possibility. (327)

In other words, performative utterances are deconstructed only in the last instance.

[14] On the link between bestiality and the "cyborg," see Haraway (152). Note also Deleuze and Guattari's attribution of revolutionary potential to both bestiality and negritude; quoting Rimbaud, they say: "No, I am not of your kind, I am the outsider and the deterritorialized, 'I am of a race inferior for all eternity. . . . I am a beast, a Negro'" (105).

[15] My formulation of "agency" must be distinguished, therefore, from Paul Smith's definition of the "human agent" in which self-consciousness plays no part: "The term 'agent' . . . will be used to mark the idea of a form of subjectivity where,

by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressure is allowed for (even though that resistance too must be produced in an ideological context)" (xxxv).

[16] I insist on this point despite feminists like Nancy Miller, who once urged us to forget Barthes in order to save identity: "So why remember Barthes, if this model of reading and writing by definition excludes the question of an identity crucial to feminist critical theory?" (22).

[17] But Lyotard does not forget to point out that "[t]here is something of the sublime in capitalist economy" ("The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" 209). On the relationship between the sublime and masochism, see Lyotard, "Answering" (77), and Nick Mansfield, Masochism: The Art of Power (23-32).

[18] See also Geertz (15-16). Stephen Greenblatt, influenced by Geertz's anthropological view of man, also writes in Renaissance Self-Fashioning of the risk in drawing a line between "literary characters" and "humans," especially when one wants to call his or her critical approach "a poetics of culture":

> And with representation we return to literature, or rather we may grasp that self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between

> literature and social life. It invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves. Such boundaries may, to be sure, be strictly observed in criticism, just as we may distinguish between literary and behavioral styles, but in doing so we pay a high price, for we begin to lose a sense of the complex interactions of meaning in a given culture. We wall off literary symbolism from the symbolic structures operative elsewhere, as if art alone were a human creation, as if humans themselves were not, in Clifford Geertz's phrase, cultural artifacts. (3)

Note also Lisa Jardine's following remark in "'No Offence i' th' World': Hamlet and Unlawful Marriage": "Those 'events' (as I choose to call such socially meaningful sets of relationships) are the expressed form of Desdemona's 'lived experience,' and I mean that, since in my view it will not make a significant difference whether the 'person' who is presented via this shaped version of experience is real or fictional" (126).

[19] See Jardine (124). Sinfield writes: "I believe feminist anxiety about derogation of the individual in cultural materialism is misplaced, since personal subjectivity and agency are, anyway, unlikely sources of dissident identity and action.

Political awareness does not arise out of an essential, individual self-consciousness of class, race, nation, gender, or sexual orientation; but from involvement in a milieu, a subculture" (37). This makes us suspect that his problematic attribution of dissident potential solely to collectivity may be the result of his association of the individual with "essence."

## Chapter 1. Anti-Oedipa: The Crying of Lot 49

[1] "Thus Pierce's legacy is important," observes David Cowart, "because it may--in the parlance of the sixties--be a means of 'raising her consciousness' so that she can in some sense escape from the tower at last" (26). Tony Tanner, though not referring to "consciousness-raising" that is closely associated with the black and the women's liberation movements in the 1960s, exactly the decade in which the novel was published, also sees Oedipa's awakening to the formerly unrecognized part of the world itself as liberating:

> The law of the excluded middle would say that either it was there or it was not there. Quite apart from considerations of logic, such a rigidity forecloses on the possibility of unforeseen "diversity" and irresolvable dubiety. Yet it is into just such an area of possible diversity and dubiety that Oedipa has

> stumbled. . . . Oedipa is mentally in a world of "if" and "perhaps," walking through an accredited world of either/or. It is part of her pain, her dilemma and, perhaps, her emancipation. (Thomas Pynchon 72-73)

[2] On the problem of this sadomasochistic entity, see Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," especially the chapter entitled "Are Sade and Masoch Complementary?" (37-46).

[3] I employ this "Male Master" with capital Ms following Althusser's way of designating a "Unique, Absolute, Other Subject" as "Subject with a capital S" (178).

[4] Rosalind Krauss's following comment on the shift of critical focus within feminism from "images of woman" to "woman-as-image" is particularly relevant here:

> Indeed, almost two decades of work on the place of woman within representation has put this shift into effect, so that a whole domain of discourse no longer conceives of stereotype as a kind of mass-media mistake, a set of cheap costumes women might put on or cast aside. Rather stereotype--itself rebaptized now as "masquerade," and here understood as a psychoanalytic term--is thought of as the phenomenon to which all women are submitted both inside and outside representation, so that as far as femininity goes, there is nothing but costume. Representation itself--films, advertisements, novels, etc.--would

> thus be part of a far more absolute set of mechanisms by which characters are constructed: constructed equally in life as in film, or rather, equally in film because as in life. And in this logic woman is nothing but masquerade, nothing but image. (41-44)

Note how she speaks of "characters" in terms similar to those employed by Gass, terms that are, therefore, also similar to those used by Foucault and Althusser as well as by Geertz, Greenblatt, and Jardine. See Introduction.

[5] Nick Mansfield, in his recent analysis of masochism (to which I owe much of my discussion on male masochism and its manipulation of power) that regards this complex phenomenon primarily as "the art of power," argues its self-annihilative aspect in terms of "indifference" (9).

[6] As Emile Benveniste observes in his important essay on the Oxford philosophers and the performative, "Analytical Philosophy and Language," a performative utterance "has existence only as an act of authority" (236). On the temporality of an utterance, or what Timothy Gould calls "illocutionary suspense" or "perlocutionary delay," see his essay, "The Unhappy Performative," especially the fourth section (28-31).

[7] Significantly, Arthur C. Danto observes that "The Girl" Sherman approximates through her photographic performance is like Oedipa "the contemporary realization of the Fair Princess in the Far Tower." But in spite of this, he insists that "the

stills are not . . . merely feminist parables. The Girl is an allegory for something deeper and darker, in the mythic unconscious of everyone, regardless of sex" (14).

8 On the citationality--or more precisely, the "iterability"--of performative utterances and its deconstructive implications for "context," see Derrida, "Signature Event Context," which is his attempt at communication with Austin.

9 As to the homeopathic aspect of Spence's photographic self-portraiture, one important point is that it is for her not only a means of acting upon the outside world but also a more personally oriented "healing art," which she calls "phototherapy." On this therapeutic side of her photographic practice, see the chapters in Cultural Sniping, "Phototherapy: Psychic Realism as Healing Art? (with Rosy Martin)" (164-80) and "Phototherapy: The Potential for a Benevolent and Healing Eye?" (181-89), as well as "Photo Therapy: New Portraits for Old" in Putting Myself in the Picture (172-93).

10 It is Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Guber who have most influentially elaborated on the "angel/monster double bind." For example, in their view "literary women like Anne Finch [bemoaned] the double bind in which the mutually dependent images of angel and monster had left them . . ." (36).

11 As I will demonstrate later, what constitutes a vital issue for Oedipa is the possibility of this self-warring androgyny.

[12] Note how this complicit self-reference differs from Sherman's interventionist self-reference: it is not "flattery" but rather irony that is involved in her photographic self-portraiture's self-conscious repetition of feminine "beauty."

But understandably, this ironic intent can be ambiguous and even "misunderstood" (Krauss 89) because of the very form or style of her artistic practice. For example, Sherman's Centerfolds, a series initiated in 1981 by a commission for a centerfold for Artforum magazine (but none of the images she submitted was published by the magazine), was criticized by some feminists for "not . . . deconstructing the eroticized fetish but . . . merely reinstalling it--'Her images are successful [says Mira Schor] partly because they do not threaten phallocracy, they reiterate and confirm it'" (Krauss 207). In other words, her horizontal images that intertextually refer to the pictures we encounter in "girlie magazines" were, ironically enough, not "happy."

[13] We may say that Spence's insertion (and also Sherman's) is her own postfeminist version of Deleuze and Guattari's materialist way of challenging the predominance of "Oedipus":

> We have been triangulated in Oedipus, and will triangulate in it in turn. From the family to the couple, from the couple to the family. In actuality, the benevolent neutrality of the analyst is very limited: it ceases the instant one stops responding

> daddy-mommy. It ceases the instant one introduces a little desiring-machine--the tape-recorder--into the analyst's office; it ceases as soon as a flow is made to circulate that does not let itself be stopped by Oedipus, the mark of the triangle. . . . (312; emphasis added)

If we shift our attention to American literature, we find the same technique in William S. Burroughs's (and Brion Gysin's) "cut-up":

> only way to break the inexorable down spiral of ugly uglier ugliest recording and playback is with counterrecording and playback the first step is to isolate and cut association lines of the control machine carry a tape recorder with you and record all the ugliest stupidest things cut your ugly tapes in together speed up slow down play backwards inch the tape you will hear one ugly voice and see one ugly spirit is made of ugly old prerecordings the more you run the tapes through and cut them up the less power they will have cut the prerecordings into air into thin air (217)

[14] It is this ironic aspect of the "trick" and its political (not personal) implications that Janet A. Kaplan fails to consider in the following valorization of the captive maiden's "escape," which she thinks is attributed to the

painter's parodic or "ironic" treatment of such traditionally female work as embroidery:

> Among the girls working diligently . . . Varo's rebellious heroine has "embroidered a trick [or "trampa," to use Varo's own word, which also means "trapdoor" (Cowert 27)] in which one can see her together with her lover" . . . their rendezvous subtly visible in a rendering hidden upside-down within the folds that flow from her table. In a masterful variant on the myth of creation, she has used this most genteel of domestic handicrafts to create her own hoped-for escape. Unlike Rapunzel and the Lady of Shalott, Varo's young heroine imprisoned in the tower is not merely a metaphor for confinement, but also an agent of her own liberation. To free herself from the strict academic tradition of faithfully recreating nature according to preordained rules and from the anonymity of being one among an indistinguishable many (all the girls have the same face) she connives to flee the tower that isolates her from the very life she is expected to create. (21)

In other words, what she fails to take into account is the implications of the absence of self-referential mise-en-abyme in Varo's painting. Also in favor of the personal, Cowart too regards the "trick" as liberating in itself: "The Tristero may

or may not exist, but whether delusion or discovery, it is Oedipa's salvation, the trampa she embroiders to escape a world of conventional and deadly reality for a world of richer personal reality" (29).

[15] It is interesting to note to what extent the maiden's effacement of the fact of immurement is analogous to the "ritual reluctance" of The Courier's Tragedy:

> Heretofore the naming of names has gone on either literally or as metaphor. But now . . . a new mode of expression takes over. It can only be called a kind of ritual reluctance. Certain things, it is made clear, will not be spoken aloud; certain events will not be shown onstage. . . . The Duke does not, perhaps may not, enlighten us. . . . Vittorio knows: every flunky in the court . . . knows. It is all a big in-joke. The audiences of the time knew. Angelo knows, but does not say. (71–72)

Both of the two signifying practices function as means of maintaining the status quo; only the one does so by involuntarily resuppressing what has been kept unsaid but is about to emerge, while the other by intentionally "unsaying" what goes without saying.

[16] Elaborating on the various etymological senses of the word "authority," Edward W. Said observes that "this power [of an individual to begin] and its product are an increase over

what had been there previously" and that "authority maintains the continuity of its course" (83). But we should keep in mind that authority and its power do not relate to the individual alone; on the contrary, they must be understood as having to do with something corporate, institutional, and discursive as well. On the relationship between "authority" and feminism, see Gilbert and Guber, The Madwoman in the Attic, especially the chapter, "The Queen's looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity" (3-44).

[17] One exceptional instance is found in 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 the 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-portrait.

[18] Note how Roland Barthes commented on this culture/nature dichotomy in his preface to the 1970 Points edition of Mythologies:

> I had just read Saussure and as a result acquired the conviction that by treating "collective representations" as sign-systems, one might hope to . . . account in detail for the mystification which transforms petit-bourgeois culture into a universal nature. (9)

But from the contemporary viewpoint, this dichotomy cannot be conceived only as a semiotic problem because, as is demonstrated by Oedipa's blindness/invisibility, Sherman's and Spence's photographic self-portraiture, and other such postfeminist aesthetic practices--Barbara Kruger's Untitled (We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture), for example--it is basically a problem of how the semiotic relates to other but relevant issues such as subjectivity and agency.

[19] Thus in terms of the problem of androgyny, it is the failure to become an androgyne (whether feminist or postfeminist) that Oedipa dramatizes. In this respect, my argument constitutes an attempt to dispute Cathy N. Davidson's claim that she "is" androgynous. See her essay, "Oedipa as Androgyne in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49." However, I agree with her that "feminist perceptions prompt [Oedipa] towards androgyny" (42), though I would substitute "postfeminist" for "feminist." By the same token, I totally disagree with Tracey Sherard's conclusion that "Lot 49 [is] about the birth of Oedipa's subjectivity" (73), since she has yet to be born.

[20] Although Spence was born in 1934, exactly two decades before Sherman--which means that Spence is contemporary with Pynchon--it is in 1979 that she started BA in Film and Photographic Arts at Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster), and therefore it would not be a

distortion to regard the two female artists as contemporaries.

## Chapter 2. Fiction as Installation: The Universal Baseball Association

[1] It has also to do with the controversial ending of the novel itself, because in order to privilege the image of immediacy--the presence or "being here" of the ball--finally attained and accepted in the last scene, critics are obliged not to take Henry into consideration; for it is not Henry himself who holds it, but Hardy Ingram and Paul Trench, two of the players he has imagined. As a result, whenever they refer to the ending, their observations, some of which I quote immediately below, necessarily leave the problem--Is the immediacy available to Henry or not?--unaddressed (what may be even more important is the fact that the critics themselves seem totally unaware of the implications of their exclusion of Henry from their speculations, whether that exclusion is explicit or implicit): "These two players [Hardy and Paul], at least, attain a balance equivalent to a comic reconciliation: everything else is ignored in the intensity of the present" (Shelton 88); "Yet, despite this promulgation of uncertainty, Coover ends on a note of acceptance and affirmation" (Schwartz 147); "The Universal Baseball Association leaves us with this final image of the

ball, source of all Waugh's stories, image of the only meaning possible in a world become a game" (Caldwell 170); "The fact that in the last chapter Coover chooses to present the UBA from within is also relevant. . . . Although there seems to be no balance between Henry's game and the real world from the very beginning of the story, the final chapter reestablishes a sense of equilibrium within the game. (Miguel-Alfonso 101).

[2] Other commentators who focus on these "fiction-making" aspects of The Universal Baseball Association include Roy C. Caldwell, Jr. ("The true subject of Coover's novel is not the playing of baseball but the making of fiction" [162]) and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso ("After The Origin of the Brunists, Coover's interest in the examination of cultural paradigms became 'limited' to the categories of fiction-making" [92]).

[3] Robert Coover, "Interview with Robert Coover," The Racial Imagination and the Liberal Tradition, by C. W. E. Bigsby and Heide Ziegler (London: Junction, 1982) 81-82, qtd. in Gordon 2.

[4] Miguel-Alfonso's "abstraction" of Henry Waugh should not be confused with Althusser's (and therefore my) "abstract" individuals (Althusser 176) touched on in Introduction. While Miguel-Alfonso's "abstraction" concerns purely narratological issues, Althusser's (and mine) has to do with the ideological process of "abstracting" real individuals so as to turn them into subjects.

Besides this problem of narratological abstraction of our

protagonist, there is another important problem in Miguel-Alfonso's reading: it is highly problematic whether the "growth" of the UBA story is, as he argues, really the "natural outcome of the meaning-making metaphor." This problem has much to do with issues such as historicity, chance, and dice, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

[5] Robert Coover, Interview with Frank Gado, First Person: Conversations on Writers and Writing, by Gado (Schenectady: Union College P, 1973) 149, qtd. in McCaffery 43.

[6] One of the few critics who have discussed in some way or other this problem of a "ninth" chapter in The Universal Baseball Association is Lois Gordon, who writes: "An important effect of [Coover's fluid and metamorphic] design, also typical of the avant-garde, is that it never 'finishes.' In The Universal Baseball Association, for example, after the reader is offered, in eight chapters, a concatenation of varied responses to a series of human dilemmas, he is left to his own devices to provide the essential and concluding chapter 9, like the final inning of a baseball game" (6). See also Berman (222).

[7] For example, Gordon writes: "He tries to share his game with Lou, but 'clumsy' Lou . . . spills beer (a 'flood'?) all over Henry's papers. 'Oh my God,' cries Henry ambiguously, after which he dismisses Lou, much as he had Hettie" (38; she also observes that "Hettie, then entering the real world of time, disappears from his life" [38]). Other critics include McCaffery

and Berman: "Suddenly Henry's fragile universe is upset, completely 'inundated' when Lou spills a can of beer all over the game. Lou is banished by Henry . . ." (McCaffery 51); "Since the play-world is a product of Henry's imagination--and Lou, of course, is not--Lou must be seen as an intruder" (Berman 218).

[8] The truth is, however, that the divorce between Henry and the world is not really "total." For one thing, in terms of work he is, at least according to what he himself says to his employment agency, only "semi-retired" and even wants "half-time work"; for another, he has "a drawerful of checks he'd never cashed" (213). But the point is that his relationship with the world is no longer based on anything but money (this is why he can still order groceries from Diskin's), and this seems to justify the "totality" of the divorce. (It is because she wants to get rid of the medium which can serve to establish a relationship with Henry that Hettie, when leaving, returns to him the twenty dollars he gave her.)

[9] Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso also regards the UBA as essentially self-contained: "the UBA self-consciously withdraws itself from reality to become a self-enclosed structure" (93).

[10] "[T]he ascription 'Universal Baseball Association' forewarns the reader," observes Berman, "that nothing as petty or parochial as 'American' or 'national' is intended. The Association has its own metaphysics and must be seen as the product of a godlike creative act. Henry's initials--J. H. W.--

identify him with the Hebrew god Yahweh" (211). Note how Maltby, in direct opposition to this remark made by Berman, argues for America as universal: "[T]here is nothing 'petty or parochial' in identifying 'Universal' with 'American'; after all, as a global power, the United States commands the resources (e.g., communications technologies, exporting capacity) to universalize her culture" (Dissident Postmodernists 88).

[11] It is Fredric Jameson who has taught us the importance of reconsidering capitalism, by raising in his foreword to Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition the crucial question whether Lyotard's notion of the postmodern relates to capitalism: "is this moment of advanced industrial society a structural variant of classical capitalism or a mutation and the dawning of a wholly new social structure. . . ?" Rephrasing the question as a "question about Marxism," he raises a second, more relevant question: "do the categories developed there for the analysis of classical capitalism still retain their validity and their explanatory power when we turn to the multinational and media societies of today with their 'third-stage' technologies?" His answer to this "Marxist" question is an affirmative one: "The persistence of issues of power and control, particularly in the increasing monopolization of information by private business, would seem to make an affirmative answer unavoidable, and to reconfirm the privileged status of Marxism as a mode of analysis of capitalism proper" (Foreword xiii). In The Universal Baseball

Association, Haymaker manager Rag Rooney also speaks of "power and control" (33).

[12] In her discussion of the structural link between male homosocial bonds and power, Sedgwick has constant recourse to Heidi Hartmann's definition of patriarchy in terms of "relationships between men." Patriarchy, according to Hartmann, is "relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Sedgwick 3).

[13] I will continue to use "male homosocial continuum" instead of "male homosocial desire," though the latter is the term more central to Sedgwick's argument. The principal reason is that the juxtaposition of "homosocial" with "desire" is, as she herself acknowledges, contradictory; "'Homosocial desire,'" she says, "is a kind of oxymoron," for it "hypothesize[s] the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual," while by definition the former is to be "characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality" (1). My preference for "continuum" over "desire" reflects my position from which I would argue that homosexuality is better understood in relation to homophobia, and that "homosocial" and "homosexual" must therefore be distinguished.

[14] Paul Maltby also discusses this scene in terms of "male camaraderie" (Dissident Postmodernists 95).

[15] The last phrase that denotes "blood brotherhood" is also found in Zifferblatt's office: "Under black-bordered photos of the late lamented Abe Zauber and Marty Dunkelmann, the inscription: They are with us still" (138). This definitely indicates that what structures capitalism is also one or another form of male homosocial bond.

[16] For a more detailed account of this formulation, i.e., Marx's notion of the "money form," see Chapter 4, "The Economy of Figures."

[17] Lyotard's explanation of terror is especially pertinent here. According to him, terror can be formulated into an imperative: "be operative (that is, commensurable) or disappear" (Postmodern Condition xxiv).

Having recourse to Derrida, Maltby's reading of Henry's use of citation or quotation nevertheless differs from mine. "Through Henry's games with names," he writes, "Coover illustrates how words may be freed from their established significations and transferred into contexts which animate them in fresh ways. It is this affirmation of the creative potential of language--the recognition that we can inhabit the world through meaning-systems alternative to those that prevail--which is the book's optimistic message" (Dissident Postmodernists 97). My contention, on the contrary, has been that its "message" is far from optimistic; Maltby fails to take into consideration the (self-)destructive and tragic consequences of Henry's parodic

use of citation.

[18] Sontag gives us an interesting literary example relating to this issue, which is taken from Nadar's memoir published in 1900: Balzac's "'vague dread' of being photographed." According to Nadar, Balzac's reasoning was as follows: "every body in its natural state was made up of a series of ghostly images superimposed in layers to infinity, wrapped in infinitesimal films. . . . Man never having been able to create, that is to make something material from an apparition, from something impalpable, or to make from nothing, an object--each Daguerreian operation was therefore going to lay hold of, detach, and use up one of the layers of the body on which it focused" (On Photography 158; emphasis added). Significantly, at one point in On Photography Sontag discusses photography in terms of quotation: "A photograph could also be described as a quotation . . ." (71).

[19] In at least two instances, Holzer saw these clashes develop into "real" clashes. "The first incident occurred in 1982," as Diane Waldman explains, "when the artist was invited to show her work at the Marine Midland Bank in New York. The exhibition, which was installed in the lobby of one of their branches, was taken down after a staff member noticed that one of the Truisms read IT'S NOT GOOD TO OPERATE ON CREDIT" (19). The second incident, according to Auping, took place in 1987, when "Holzer was invited to participate in the exhibition

Independent Sites: Sculpture for Public Spaces held in Philadelphia. Holzer's contribution took the form of a large electronic display signs at The Bourse, a restored Victorian shopping center and office complex that was originally home to Philadelphia's stock exchange. Holzer's signs were effectively integrated with the decorative molding surrounding the shopping concourse. Programmed with excerpts from Holzer's Truisms and The Survival Series, the interjection of Holzer's unsettling meditations and observations--PEOPLE ARE NUTS IF THEY THINK THEY ARE IMPORTANT, WHAT COUNTRY SHOULD YOU ADOPT IF YOU HATE POOR PEOPLE? or IT'S FUN TO WALK CARELESSLY IN A DEATH ZONE--into the essentially commercial space of The Bourse provoked some controversy. The problem centered around the sponsoring site's fear that shoppers might not be able to distinguish between Holzer's work and The Bourse's own signage. Holzer's signs were turned off at one point, and then subsequently turned back on, but only with the proviso that the text be 'augmented' by disclaimer notices. After some negotiations, the disclaimers were finally removed, and Holzer's texts were allowed to stand alone" (26-28). It must be reminded that the point of these incidents in our present context is not the clashes themselves; the point is that the political contexts of these two instances of "real" clash of interests are inextricably intertwined with capitalist economy--a bank and a shopping center.

[20] Toril Moi severely criticizes Showalter's reading of

Woolf's notion of androgyny. But given her criticisms leveled against Kristeva ("Equally noticeable is the lack of materialist analysis of social relations in Kristeva's concept of 'marginality'" [171]), her own deconstructionist--that is, Derridean and Kristevan--reading of the same notion only reveals itself as equally materialistically untenable. See Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (13, 15, 171-72).

[21] "And because the content of the writing is taken at face value [outdoors], it is not dismissed as art," says Holzer (Interview with Diane Waldman 33). Compare this statement with Michael Auping's following observation, and see the irony: "Those of us walking the streets--particularly the side streets --of lower Manhattan in the late 70s will not likely forget coming across her early Truism street posters. One had the uneasy feeling that they might not be art--the posters were unsigned and made no mention of author--but their minimalist simplicity and sharp, critical content made you want to think they were art" (21).

[22] Another equally powerful way of giving a sense of continuity is "statistics." For example, Arlen J. Hansen, in an attempt to combat widespread misunderstandings about the implications of quantum theory that are largely attributable to Einstein's misleading yet famous fictionalization of quantum mechanics as "God playing dice with the universe," underscores the "statistical reliability of quantum mechanics and its

consistency as predictable by Schrödinger's formulation." "After all, when a set contains many, many occurrences," he says, "the laws of probability become very compelling and firm. Moreover, the Schrödinger equation accounts for the knowable and deterministic shifts in probabilities as the atomic system 'ages.'" In other words, statistics introduce the diachronic temporality of history, a teleology of sorts, into the synchronic temporality of historicity--into the spatiality of the dice. Hence his weird conclusion: "God <u>does</u> play dice with the universe, but the dice are loaded" (58). But we in turn are able to combat Hansen's account by appealing not to Einstein himself but to Nietzsche: "Those iron hands of necessity which shake the dice-box of chance," he writes in <u>Daybreak</u>, "play their game for an infinite length of time: so that there <u>have</u> to be throws which exactly resemble purposiveness and rationality of every degree" (Book II, Section 130).

[23] We must avoid romanticizing or "humanizing" Damon's death, as Lois Gordon has most representatively done, because it means forgetting its intrinsically accidental nature, whether it refers to the throw of the dice or Casey's bean ball. Gordon writes: "Thus, although Henry has designed a world of every diverse human interaction within a system where statistical likelihood and biological parameters are still obeyed, the very <u>human</u> elements that provide his excitement or comfort ultimately cause his isolation and despair. Perfection is process, and

process is time, and time fells all men and their accomplishments. Damon may one day defy chance and pitch a perfect game, but the next day he may die." Significantly, she rounds off her argument with Wallace Stevens's reflection on death's aestheticizing function: "Death . . . is the 'mother of beauty'" (45). See also Berman (215).

[24] Jenny Holzer, "Wordsmith: An Interview with Jenny Holzer by Bruce Ferguson," Jenny Holzer: Signs, exh. cat. (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 1986), 66, qtd. in Auping 17.

[25] In this respect, Schwartz's following observation is worthy of special attention: "moreover, [Coover] uses the baseball vehicle to ask the big existential questions: why are we here? . . ." (145).

[26] "By the textuality of history," Montrose writes, "I mean to suggest . . . that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question--traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement" (20). Note that his "history" is exclusively associated with retrospection.

## Chapter 3. Father for Sale: The Dead Father

[1] See what Paul Maltby has to say about the "dissident" tendency of postmodernist fiction: "The conception of a dissident postmodernist fiction raises questions about what, in the postmodern culture of late capitalism, constitutes the political and what constitutes an oppositional mode of writing" (Dissident Postmodernists 1).

[2] Richard Walsh defines the "argument" of a novel as "the formal articulation of its substance, the substance articulated in its form" (x). It is this complementarity as well as the inseparability of the two terms, he argues, that marks innovative fiction with its "capacity to extend the possibilities of fictional engagement beyond mimesis" (2).

[3] "What has happened," says Jameson, "is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" (Postmodernism 4-5).

[4] It must also be pointed out, however, that Graff's sound advice that "reason" and "rational understanding" be restored to literature so that we may comprehend our reality (239) is not entirely workable, since it does not take into account the ironic fact that they too are equally subject to capitalist

absorption if they are "profitable" reason and "marketable" rational understanding.

[5] Takayuki Tatsumi also addresses the issue of postmodern subjectivity, in his case from the perspective of capitalism and "metacharacter":

> It turned out that cyberpunk let us know we were surrounded by a metafictive network of advanced capitalist ideology, our own subjectivities constructed as a sort of "cyborg," in Donna Haraway's term. Good-old metafictionists in the late 60s narrated the fate of metacharacters in the Chinese-box-like structure of fiction-within-fiction, whereas in the late 80s we have come to live the life of the metacharacters ourselves, with our own identities as the very narrative effects of hyper-media that we invented and have been talking about. Metafiction made us aware that what fiction can tell us is not reality itself but a narrative version of reality. But in the post-Foucaudian hyperreal age we have come to realize that our contemporary lives are all ideological versions of reality, with us characters within narratives. It isn't so much that metafiction is now out-of-date, but that it's no longer an avant-garde literary device. It's part of the popular life we are leading now. (Tatsumi and McCaffery 43)

We can rearticulate and summarize this (somewhat lengthy) passage so that it may fit into our present argument: what must be taken into account in any discussion on postmodern subjectivity is the implications of the temporality of capitalist absorption (though the temporal sequence he presupposes is, as such, open to argument).

[6] On the "pertinaciousness," see Régis Durand, "On the Pertinaciousness of the Father, the Son, and the Subject: The Case of Donald Barthelme."

[7] Take, for example, Alan Wilde's remark on the "thereness" of the balloon in Barthelme's short story "The Balloon": "In brief, the story tells how various New Yorkers respond to this curious presence . . . how they manage (or don't manage) to accept the 'unmeaning' particularity of the balloon" (171).

[8] William H. Gass, one of the leading exponents of postmodern aesthetic vanguardism, provides a theoretical basis for the issue. According to him, a "word is a concept made flesh. . . . An unreasonable body" (29).

[9] Note, first, how Beckett comments on Finnegans Wake: "Here form is content, content is form. . . . It is not to be read--or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself" (117); then how this logically leads to Robbe-Grillet's more radical poetics of "presence": "Instead of this universe of 'signification' (psychological, social, functional),

we must try, then, to construct a world both more solid and more immediate. Let it be first of all by their presence that objects and gestures establish themselves . . ." (21). Given this apparent affinity of Barthelme's postmodern affirmation of being with modernist aesthetics, it is quite natural that Linda Hutcheon should conclude that his fiction as well as the French New Novel belongs to "late modernist extremism" (Poetics of Postmodernism 52), though her account that exclusively concerns the "poetics of postmodernism" must be supplemented by a further account of the cultural processes of capitalist commodification and absorption that clearly distinguish the postmodern from the modern.

10 In this sense, metafictional disillusionment that has the effect of exposing the status of a given text as a mere fiction--Barthelme's use in Snow White of the questionnaire inserted in the middle of the narrative, for example--must be seen as having another important effect of revealing its status as a commodity.

11 This enables us to reconsider Walsh's notion of the "argument" of innovative fiction. "[I]nnovation, far from being a refusal of engagement," he says, "is an attempt to extend fiction's capacity for thinking about the world" (18); and on the problem of the location of "aboutness," he concludes: "The concept of the argument of fiction provides a means of relocating the site of a fiction's aboutness. It is not to be

found in its substance, nor in its form, but in the formal achievement of its substance" (165). What we must add to this formulation is an account of the cultural implications of the "formal achievement" where the site of a fiction's aboutness is, according to Walsh, to be located: we must not forget that an innovative fiction can be "about the world" because its "formal achievement" entails both an enactment and an acceptance of "commoditiness" that constitutes the very texture of the world. In this sense, its engagement is a sort of literary homeopathy.

[12] Deleuze and Guattari address the problem of the temporality of capitalism from the viewpoint of "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization": "there is the twofold movement of decoding or deterritorializing flows on the one hand, and their violent and artificial reterritorialization on the other. The more the capitalist machine deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatizing flows in order to extract surplus value from them, the more its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize, absorbing in the process a larger and larger share of surplus value" (34-35).

[13] Note how negatively Jameson addresses the issue of "critical distance" in terms of its "abolishment": "distance in general (including 'critical distance' in particular) has very precisely been abolished in the new space of postmodernism. . . . [O]ur now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates

and practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distantiation" (Postmodernism 48-49). For all what Jameson claims powerfully, I would argue that "distantiation" is possible even in the new postmodern space, and that irony--especially the internal self-dislocation it makes possible--is what "critically" contributes to this distantiation.

[14] In this respect, Barthelme's utopian remark on "not-knowing"--"the writer is one who, embarking upon a task, does not know what to do" ("Not-Knowing" 509)--may be best regarded as an inverse confirmation of the impossibility of innocence in the postmodern culture of late capitalism--because everyone "already knows," at least that everything is on the market.

## Chapter 4. The Economy of Figures: White Noise

[1] Another feminist practitioner who applies this military metaphor to the body is Jo Spence: "My body (which is the centre of the battlefield) should become an area where sexuality, health, leisure and labour can become integrated" (Putting Myself 93).

[2] Frederick Garber discusses this paradox or duplicity/complicity characteristic of Kruger's works from the viewpoint of "speaking as if," "masquerade," or "a bitter, ironic ventriloquism" (224).

[3] On the "parataxic" aspects of this displacement or the postmodern juxtaposition of "embodiment" and "weightlessness," see Hayles.

[4] For a purely linguistic account of this semiotic mechanism of signification, see Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (119).

[5] "White noise becomes the societal equivalent of cliché," argues Arthur M. Saltzman, "the uniform influx in which particularity dissolves into static, and the metamorphic potential of words may not be heard above the universal monotone toward which all utterances tend" (812).

[6] Note in this regard the following remarks made by Jacques Derrida (in the context of Foucault's reading of the Cartesian Cogito) and by Marshall McLuhan (in the context of "Games"): the "play" of every language is its "relation to itself, or 'sedimentation'" (Derrida, Writing and Difference 308); "Games, then, are contrived and controlled situations, extensions of group awareness that permit a respite from customary patterns. They are a kind of talking to itself on the part of society as a whole. And talking to oneself is a recognized form of play that is indispensable to any growth of self-confidence" (McLuhan 243).

[7] My assumption, which might be already plain, that Wilder is already represented regardless of whether he is inside or outside "representation" (such as television)--that he can never

be except first as a host of parasitic images--must be considered in conjunction, again, with Rosalind Krauss's comment on the shift of focus within féminism from "Images of Woman" to "woman-as-image." See Chapter 1, note 4. Quoting Hélène Cixous's remark--"One is always in representation, and when a woman is asked to take place in this representation, she is, of course, asked to represent man's desire"--Craig Owens also argues for the psychoanalytic notion of femininity as "masquerade, that is, as a representation of male desire" ("Discourse" 75).

[8] On the "loop" (and its connection with "living systems," not with the self-destructive agent), see LeClair (226).

[9] On the "subject" as "something that is sub-jected, thrown beneath," see Paul Smith (xxxiii).

[10] Gerald Graff once pointed out the intimate connection between the campus and the supermarket, but he discussed it exclusively in terms of consumption: "The atmosphere of the campus is less and less distinguishable from that of the supermarket, the shopping center, and the 'funky' boutique; students are trained to shop for humanities courses and to evaluate them by consumer criteria. In this atmosphere, the vanguard professor-intellectual becomes a new kind of celebrity --his notoriety often extends far beyond the limits of the campus" (116).

[11] See Maltby for an argument for the "nonfigurability" of death ("Romantic Metaphysics" 269). See also Wilcox on death as

something transcendental, as "the ultimate signified, the single natural event which ultimately cannot be subsumed into simulacra, models, and codes," and the "last vestige of the real, the final border of the self" (353). In my opinion, the problem with Wilcox's account of death--"the existential 'fear and trembling' in the face of death" (361)--is that it takes it for granted that death is <u>intrinsically</u> something to be feared. Indeed, this is exactly how DeLillo himself views death, especially when he speaks of the "extraordinary dread" or the "death fear" in an interview: "I think it is something we all feel, something we almost never talk about, something that is <u>almost</u> there" ("Outsider" 63). I would say, however, that if death is a sublime phenomenon just like the "airborne toxic event" and the "postmodern sunset," it not only causes fear or pain but necessarily embraces some kind of pleasure.

[12] I owe this ingenious idea of the universality of capitalism to Deleuze and Guattari, who write: "it is correct to retrospectively understand all history in the light of capitalism, provided that the rules formulated by Marx are followed exactly" (140). To which I would add that it is equally correct to understand all forms of subjectivity in the light of capitalist subjectivity.

[13] Maltby discusses DeLillo's conservatism in terms of its "Romantic politics of vision" ("Romantic Metaphysics" 275).

[14] An argument against this reading of mine would be found,

for example, in John N. Duvall, "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's White Noise." Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's conception of "postmodernist parody," he argues that "the parodic impulse of the novel prevents it from being completely co-opted by the cultural logic it delineates . . ." (148).

[15] Don DeLillo, "I Never Set Out to Write an Apocalyptic Novel," Interview with Caryn James, New York Times Book Review 13 Jan. 1985: 31, qtd. in Maltby, "Romantic Metaphysics" 268.

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