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TERM PAPER

The Notions of Information/Noise, Communication/Meaning, Author/Literature
as a Self-Regulating Machine in Italo Calvino’s “Cybernetics and Ghosts” (1967)

and

Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966).

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Information society is one in which the production, processing and distribution of information are the primary economic and social activities. It constitutes a further step in the evolution of a society from its former bases in agriculture and manufacturing into an information economy. The transition to an information society is determined by the moment in which information work dominates the work force. This happened in the United States in 1960 when about 30 percent of employees were information workers. An ever-increasing amount of time began to be spent with communications media and information technologies, such as newspapers, telephone, radio, and television, which presuppose one-to-many communication. Straubhaar and LaRose define one-to-many communication as a situation in which “a message is communicated from a single source to hundreds or even thousands of receivers, with restricted opportunities for the audience to communicate back to the source” (Straubhaar and LaRose 2000, 16). The mass media such as television or the radio imply an exchange of information from the source, the originator of communication to the receiver, highlighting a relationship between people and the mass media, which become, as McLuhan suggests “human extensions” because of “the faithful and indispensable use of information technologies in people’s everyday lives” (McLuhan 1964, 30).

The new concepts of information, control, system and communication pointed out a new way of looking human beings. In the middle of the 1940s, Norbert Wiener captured the essence of the science of communication and control coining the term cybernetics: “the English pronunciation of the Greek word *kubernêtês*, which means steersman” (Conway and Siegelman 2005, 259). He tried to define the effects of the flow of information and communication on perception and personality, the power of mass communication to mould the lives of the individual, and the interaction of communication processes, which link people to the living world. At the same time, he gave voice to his worries about the consequences of cybernetics on human beings, above all the impact of Artificial Intelligence on workers of every kind. Wiener’s scientific revolution influenced many sectors of science and technique, from environmental science to modern economic theory, and from artificial intelligence to cognitivism.

Cybernetics also had a decisive impact on literature and arts across the 1960s on both sides of the Atlantic. As Shanken states “the impact was mediated by the aesthetic context that coincided with the scientific theory’s emergence in the late 1940s, and by the complementarities between cybernetics and central tendencies of twentieth-century experimental art” (Shanken 2002, 168). The influence cybernetics had on literature is evident on two authors: Italo Calvino and Thomas Pynchon. Calvino in his essay “Cybernetics and Ghosts”, published in 1967, highlights the impact of artificial intelligence on the notion of the writer, by developing the concept of “literature machine”. He also discusses the convergence of the notions of information and communication by pointing out the importance of the reader’s feedback, which allows a constant exchange of information between readers and artworks. In 1966 Thomas Pynchon published the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, defined by Porush David as a “cybernetic fiction, in which the author presents himself or his literature as a soft machine, a cybernaut-like hybrid device, combining human vulnerability and imagination with machine-like determinism” (Porush 1985, 22). The novel is about Oedipa Maas, a young wife who lives in Kinneret, California. One day, she receives a letter from her law firm with the news that her ex-boyfriend, Pierce Inverarity, has died and named her the executor of his estate. She decides to go through all of Pierce’s possessions in an attempt to put order into his chaotic affairs. Day by day, she uncovers what she believes to be an old world-wide conspiracy related to a phantomatic mail delivery system, eventually learning that she cannot understand it properly, because of the excess of communication it circulates, which makes it impossible to distinguish information from noise, and which, consequently, causes a failure investing all aspects of the communication, including her affectivities, thus making her relationships vague and meaningless.

The aim of this paper is to take into consideration “Cybernetics and Ghosts” by Calvino and *The Crying of Lot 49* by Pynchon with reference to three notions: author/literature, information/noise, and communication/meaning in relation to the notion of literature as a self-regulating machine. First of all, the paper explains the concept of author as a writing machine that creates a literature machine, playing over and over with linguistic combinations. Secondly, it

analyses the excessive flow of information that leads to noise in Pynchon's novel where distortions, misinterpretations and errors operate as noise; and finally, it sets out how communication becomes the source of many of the conflicts and much of the chaos in *The Crying of Lot 49*. The failure in communication highlights the absence of meaning, as well as the source of a new relationship between reader and artwork, in which their cooperation presupposes the establishment of meaning as an ongoing creation dependent on temporary connections with reality.

After giving a list of development in cybernetics, such as the creation of machines that can read, machines capable of learning, machines that perform a linguistic analysis of literary texts, and machines that make summaries and translations, in the essay "Cybernetics and Ghost", Calvino asks some questions: "will we have a machine capable of replacing the poet and the author? Will we also have machines capable of conceiving and composing poems and novels?" (Calvino 1967, 12) By means of a series of reflections on cybernetics, the author introduces the concept of literature as a combinatorial play, independent of the personality of the poet and of any search for meaning and effect. Literature-as-machine creates stories the narrative power of which consists in the words' ability to connect to other words on the plane of discourse. As a result, the "I" of the author is dissolved in writing, and his personality becomes the instrument and the product of the writing process. Literature-as-machine gives life to the concept of author as a writing machine, and whose traditional figure is destined to death, as Roland Barthes theorizes in the essay entitled "Death of the Author" in 1966.

Calvino also argues that, all of a sudden, the compositional play, that is "the constant attempt to make one word stay put after another by following certain definite rules", is invested with an unexpected meaning given by the values of a society, and filtered through the author (Calvino 1967, 15). Therefore, the role of the reader becomes crucial, because he cooperates to the activation of meaning. On the same lines and around the same years, Roland Barthes highlighted the importance of the reader, writing that "the essential meaning of a work depends on the impressions of the reader, rather than on the passions or tastes of the writer" (Barthes 1967). Reading is defined by Calvino as "the decisive moment of

literary life in which the work continues to be born, to be judged, to be destroyed or constantly renewed with the eye of the reader” (Calvino 1967, 16). Indeed, the role of reader in literary theory became more and more prominent from the 70s in the reception theory in Germany, in reader-response criticism in the United States, and in deconstruction on both sides of the continent. The conference held by Hans Robert Jauss in 1967 at the University of Constance in Germany marked the beginning of a different approach to the analysis of reader-text relationship, because it diverted the focus of literary hermeneutics to responses to the literary text rather than on the text itself.

In the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, Thomas Pynchon fictionalizes the relationship between reader and artwork through the character of Oedipa Maas. The novel contains a play entitled *The Courier's Tragedy*: a Jacobean revenge drama written by Richard Wharfinger in the 17th century and directed by Randolph Driblette. Oedipa and Metzger, the lawyer assigned to help her, go to see the play and she remains speechless as soon as she hears the word Tristero at the end of the fourth act. She goes backstage and gets a script from Driblette, and then she asks him some questions about the play because she wants to discover the mystery that is driving her crazy. The author of these last lines, Driblette, is conceived as a writing machine; indeed, he defines himself as “the projector at the planetarium”, trying to explain to Oedipa that there is not any deeper meaning to be looked for and that it was simply written to entertain people like horror movies (Pynchon 1966, 54). On the contrary, Oedipa overanalyzes the play, above all the last lines containing the word ‘Tristero’, as well as every kind of information she receives to create order; but in doing so she alienates herself from the real world she is trying to organize. As O’Donnell states “the position in which Oedipa finds herself is similar to a linguistic space between outside and inside, between a reductive literalism in which words are mere tools for things, and a speculative symbolism in which words are signs capable of pointing toward realities which transcend those signs” (O’Donnell 1991, 9).

Besides, Oedipa’s position is similar to that of the reader who waits for the revelation of the mystery while reading the novel. Indeed, the problems that she faces are the same as those faced by all readers of the novel. These are due to the

impossibility of receiving the information properly, or 'safely', because of the larger amounts of information diffused in the novel, which becomes unprocessable. For instance, during the night at the Echo Courts Motel, Oedipa and Metzger watch a movie on television and from time to time commercials break attract Oedipa's attention because they seem to be related to Inverarity's estate. Into the commercial break now "roared a deafening ad for Beaconsfield Cigarettes, whose attractiveness lay in their filter's use of bone charcoal, the very best kind" (Pynchon 1966, 21). In the other room, "the TV was blaring a commercial for a Turkish bath in downtown San Narciso, wherever downtown was, called Hogan's Seraglio" (Pynchon 1966, 25). Metzger tells her that they all are of Pierce's interests but he does not explain anything more provoking her fury. At the end, the succession of films fragments, the commercials, the boozing, and "the tireless shivaree of voices and guitars from outside drive her mad and a headache begins to flower behind her eyes" (Pynchon 1966, 27).

Information that becomes unprocessable is similar to noise because it provokes degradation, stagnation, banality pushing a variety that borders on randomness. As Dretske explains "Information Theory identifies the amount of information associated with, or generated by, the occurrence of an event (or the realization of a state of affairs) with the reduction in uncertainty, the elimination of possibilities, represented by that event or state of affairs" (Dretske 1999, 4). But from the very first pages, Oedipa is trapped in a monotonous redundancy, in messages in which information is lost, distorted, irrelevant, ambiguous, complicated and overloaded. The literalization of the notion of noise is given by the representation of her uncertain world, which is dominated by voices, sirens, commercials, movies, songs, pop music, electronic music, lyrics that are omnipresent in every place, for instance in cars, buses, houses, motels, and pubs. On executing her duty, she tries to be what Driblette was, "the dark machine in the centre of the planetarium, to bring the estate into pulsing stelliferous Meaning, all in a soaring dome around her" (Pynchon 1966, 56). Her fault consists in confusing information with meaning. At the beginning, she travels to San Narciso, which is Pierce's hometown, where she meets the lawyer, Metzger, assigned to help her, with whom she spontaneously begins an affair.

Starting with Pierce's stamp collection, she begins going through all of Pierce's possession in an attempt to order his chaotic affairs. Oedipa begins to consider every information, signs, symbols and words as 'constellations' that she must decipher in order to reach the truth about the Tristero. Therefore, as Dutta suggests "she does not realize that the more information that she gains about Tristero, the more confused and disorderly her thoughts become, pushing her to the point where reality and fantasy butt heads" (Dutta 1995).

In the first chapter, Oedipa receives a letter from a law firm, which announces that Pierce died back in the spring and she has been nominated the executor. She reads it in her sitting room after coming home from a party. She is alone and drunk. She speaks the name of God and stares at the TV tube. This moment highlights her isolation, her self-imprisonment in a high tower waiting for someone to ask her to let her hair down, as she imagines herself at the end of the chapter. On reading the novel, one could notice that drunkenness, God and television are associated many times with the reception of information. For instance, in the second chapter Oedipa goes to Kinneret, California, and while driving, she has a kind of religious epiphany. She thinks of the first time "she opened a transistor radio to replace the battery and saw her first printed circuit" (Pynchon 1966, 14). Driving on, she observes the houses and the streets, noticing the same unexpected clarity as the circuit card had. This leads her to believe that they both try to communicate her some important information, although what exactly that knowledge is she does not know.

As soon as Oedipa arrives in Kinneret, she rents a motel room at the Echo Courts Motel. She meets a man whose name is Miles, one of the hotel's manager, who sings in a band called The Paranoids with Dean, Leonard and Serge. At night, Metzger, the lawyer reaches her to give a help in the job to execute the estate. The information that the lawyer gives her about her duty are interrupted by television's images of a child, who appears to be the lawyer when he was a child actor named Baby Igor. Then, they begin to drink a very large amount of tequila making bets about what will happen at the end of the movie. This seems to suggest that Oedipa receives signals that lead to noise from television: the film *Cashiered* and loud commercials as those for Fangoso Lagoons and a Turkish

bath in downtown San Narciso, which are of Inverarity's interests. In addition to that, she receives information from songs. In fact, the Paranoids sing songs outside the motel, thus fulfilling the function of the Greek chorus. Their songs are typical 1960s rock songs of rebellion and youthful angst and seem to be referred to Oedipa's situation, as if they tried to communicate her something. They sing a song entitled *Serenade*, which refers to a lonely girl in her flat, leading her to decide to spend the night with Metzger.

In the third chapter, Oedipa and Metzger go to a bar called The Scope, which is a haunt for electronics assembly people from Yoyodyne, who are all drunk. They sit down at a table in the back, and all of a sudden, "a chorus of whoops and yibbles burst from a kind of juke box" (Pynchon 1966, 31). Electronic music invests them while they are having a chat with Mike Fallopian, a member of a right-wing fanatical organization called the Peter Penguid Society that opposes the U.S. mail monopoly and uses its own private mail system. Then, Oedipa goes to the bathroom and she notices a symbol, which she later learns that it represents a muted post-horn in a stall, under which there is written the name Kirby and the acronym WASTE. On returning from it, she receives her first lesson about the history of the postal system in the United States, learning how it was conceived as an opposition between monopolized systems and private systems. Moreover, Oedipa and Metzger take a trip to Fangoso Laggons, an area in which Pierce owned a substantial amount of land. The Paranoids accompany them singing their songs. There, they meet Manny di Presso who tells them that he recovers and sells human bones to Inverarity to make a special charcoal from Lago di Pietà in Italy, the site of a horrible massacre in World War II. One of the Paranoids recognizes the similarity of this story with the plot of Richard Warfonger's *The Courier's Tragedy*. From this moment on, Oedipa receives information endlessly, which leads her to think that everything is connected. As a result, she experiences what McLuhan defines "a mental breakdown of varying degrees, which is provoked by endless new pattern of information" (McLuhan 1964, 25).

In the fourth chapter, Oedipa goes to a stockholders meeting where she meets Stanley Koteks, who is sitting at his desk drawing the Tristero symbol (the muted

post horn). He tells her about the Nefastis Machine. This machine, which was invented by John Nefastis, a Berkeley scientist, theoretically violates the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Maxwell's Demon is the basis for the machine because it works against entropy by separating and sorting molecules of different heat. In physics, the concept of entropy is central to the description of the thermodynamics, heat-transfer properties of molecules, heat engines, and even the universe as a whole. On the other hand, the concept of entropy plays an important role in information theory, where it denotes the tendency of communication to become confused by noise or static. Koteks tells her that only people designed as 'sensitives' are able to operate the machine, which relies on a certain amount of mental ability to function. On getting the Nefastis machine work, Oedipa can impose an order in her life, in communication, in physics, and in the novel, which are completely in disorder. Indeed, she is supposed to create with her body, her energy an understandable order: a situation in which it is possible to foreshadow that all heat molecules will be in a precise part of the machine without setting to zero the life of the system, which depends on the movement of molecules toward greater confusion. In other words, her energy should make up for the increase of entropy, imposing order on disorder. Therefore, she goes and see John Nefastis to test the Machine. She attempts to do it while "highpitched, comic voices issued from the TV set" (Pynchon 1966, 73), but she fails, and discovers that she is unable to communicate with the device that works against entropy by separating and sorting molecules of different heat. She realizes that she cannot impose meaning on her world, that is why she is incapable of receiving the information whirling around her; as Dutta states "she is trapped within the thermodynamics entropy of her system" (Dutta 1995).

In the fifth chapter, Oedipa decides to wander around in San Narciso where she meets people who bring a Tristero symbol, as the man that she meets in The Greek Way, a gay bar, and who does not give her any information about it, and an old man in rooming house with a post horn tattoo in his left hand, who gives her a letter and asks her to deliver it to the 'horn' people, who are located under the freeway. Also Oedipa begins to see the muted post horn all around her, in a bulletin board, in a gang jacket, in the anarcho-syndicalist paper *Regeneraciòn*,

on the back of a seat, at a Laundromat, in a bathroom, and at the airport. Moreover, in the buses all night “she listens to transistor radios playing songs in the lower stretches of the top 200” (Pynchon 1966, 84). Information is repeated and duplicated provoking redundancy in messages, and reaching the state of noise. This is due to the fact “that the more information is repeated and duplicated, the larger the scale of diffusion, the greater the speed of processing, the more opinion leaders and gatekeepers and network, the more filtering of messages, the more kinds of media through which information is passed, the more decoding and encoding, and so on – the more degraded information might be” (Klapp 1986, 126).

In the last chapter, Oedipa returns to Echo Courts where she finds again The Paranoids hanging around the pool. Serge gives her information about the fact that Metzger fled with his girlfriend to Nevada singing her a song about Humbert Humbert, the main character in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*. Then, she decides to go to see Professor Emory Bortz, who shows her a Vatican copy of *The Courier’s Tragedy* explaining to her that a Puritain group (the Scurvhanites) might have added the mention to Tristero. Moreover, he gives Oedipa a copy of *An Account of the Singular Peregrinations of Dr. Diocletian Blobb* by means of which she gets to know the real story about Tristero, which concerns a battle between the Thurn and Taxis and the state monopoly, for the postal monopoly dates back to mid-16th-century Europe. Tristero was one of the heirs of the Thurn and Taxis system, who decided to destroy it in order to set up his own covert system. Finally, Oedipa discovers that the French revolution saw the end of the Thurn and Taxi monopoly. These historic sources do not help her to resolve the mystery; that is why she becomes more and more separated from the information she receives, beginning to see her search as futile. Finally, she realizes that every single route that has led her to the Tristero belongs to Pierce Inverarity Estate. Thus, she becomes obsessed by the fact that Pierce has brought every person she has met and asked him or her to pretend helping him to orchestrate the joke. At the end, Oedipa goes to the auction in which a mysterious bidder appear, who may be the key to understand the whole mystery. She sits down nervously waiting for the crying of Lot 49. The novel finishes with a lack of information,

without finding out who the 'crier' is. The abrupt ending highlights the failure in information, which invests the entire novel, as well as the communication breakdown motif, which constitutes a source of chaos through the novel.

Communication is one of the central themes in *The Crying of Lot 49*. For instance, mail normally occupies an important role as clear and direct form of stable communication in our society, but in the novel, it is ultimately meaningless. In the first chapter, Oedipa receives a letter from a law firm, which apparently communicates her important information: her old boyfriend has died, leaving her with an enormous task to sort out. However, this information may itself be meaningless, since it is the first step in what may be nothing more than a big joke played on her. In the third chapter, Oedipa receives vapid letters from her husband, Mucho, updating her about what is going on in Kinneret, basically nothing. Then, the novel contains a mail-delivery group that requires its members to mail a letter once a week even if they have nothing to say. Therefore, as McLuhan suggests, "the meaning or message is not just the content, but is the medium, because it shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan 1964, 16). Consequently, the communication breakdown in *The Crying of Lot 49* does not only depend on the incomprehensible content of the messages that Oedipa receives, but it is inherent in information technologies and communications media, which master Oedipa's world.

Another important medium of communication is the phone, but even this one appears to be useless. In the first chapter, Oedipa recalls to mind the last time she heard about Pierce. It was on the phone, a long-distance call. Pierce is represented as a voice without a precise origin and manifested as a kind of mockery of media's voice. In fact, Pynchon writes: "his voice begins in heavy Slavic tones as second secretary at the Transylvanian Consulate, looking for an escaped bat; modulated to comic-negro, then on into hostile Pachuco dialect, full of chingas and maricones; then a Gestapo officer asking her in shrieks did she have relatives in Germany and finally his Lamont Cranston voice, the one he'd talked in all the way to Mazatlán" (Pynchon 1966, 6). Pierce called to tell her non-sense things. Indeed, he said that he had just come from Commissioner Weston, and the same blowgun that killed Professor Quackenbush had murdered an old

man in the fun house. Besides, Pierce finished the call saying a senseless sentence: I think it is time Wendeel Maas had a little visit from The Shadow, which Oedipa deciphers as a foreshadowing. Later that night, Oedipa's doctor, Dr. Hilarious, calls her at 3 a.m. and asks her to participate in a drug experiment he is conducting. The experiment relates in some way to LSD, although we do not find out many details. She hangs up telling the doctor that she is hallucinating then and she does not need drugs for that. After the doctor's call, Oedipa is unable to get to bed.

Similarly useless from an information vantage point is the radio. The growth of FM radio in the 1960s revived radio's success with the audience becoming a successful commercial medium. The tendency to narrowcast, that is, to focus on segmented audiences with more specific formulas and formats was a development in radio programming occurred in those years. What is more, in 1960s the radio became a medium to communicate rebellion, transgression, vitality by means of rock & roll, whereas in the novel, music is reduced to "a fraudulent dream of teenage appetite" (Pynchon 1966, 9), or "to melodies and lyrics that would perish as if they had never been sung" (Pynchon 1966, 84), thus revealing the degradation of the message. The fact that Oedipa's husband, Mucho Maas, is a disc jockey on KCUF station and suffers from regular crises of conscience because of his work, in which it is necessary to show delivery and personality, emphasizes the impossibility to create meaningful feedback loops between source and receiver.

In addition to the mass-media, the communication failure concerns all Oedipa's relationships. At the end of the novel, she becomes increasingly isolated from other people. As Poirer states "efforts at human communication are lost among Pynchon's character in *The Crying of Lot 49*, nearly all of whom are obsessed with the presumed cryptography in the chance juxtaposition of Things, in the music and idiom of bars like the V-note or The Scope" (Poirer 1966). She loses her husband, Mucho Maas, because of drugs. In fact, when she meets him, she gets to know that he has become a victim of the world of LSD, forcing him to withdraw from standard human interaction and changing his life to the point where Oedipa does not even feel as though she knows him. When they meet after

some weeks and decide to go to a pizzeria in order to have a chat, Mucho is struck by the Muzak, that is the background music broadcast in bars, pubs, and supermarkets. Indeed, he says: "It's extraordinary. There are seventeen violins on that cut, and one of them – I can tell where he was because it's monaural here, damn" (Pynchon 1966, 98). Then, he goes on saying that "the songs, it is not just they say something, they are something, in the pure sound" (Pynchon 1966, 99). Therefore, Oedipa discovers a different man with whom she is unable to communicate. LSD gives Mucho the possibility to hear and see things, but it also increases the social distance between he and his wife.

The same thing happens with Oedipa's physician, Dr. Hilarious, who has become insane. After her strange encounters following a W.A.S.T.E. mailman, Oedipa decides to return to Kinneret because she wants to see her psychiatrist. Indeed, she resolves to meet with him in the hope that he will tell her that she simply dreamed of everything. However, as she arrives at Hilarious' house she discovers that he has become crazy. He has locked himself in his office with his rifle shooting at everyone. She tries to talk with him but no meaningful communication is possible. In addition to that, she loses her lover Metzger because he falls in love with a young girl. In the end, the impossibility to resolve the mystery of Tristero is due to another communication breakdown: Driblette's suicide. Indeed, the real problem of Oedipa is why Driblette referred to the Tristero in his production of *The Courier's Tragedy*, but Driblette's sudden and unexplained death prevents her from ever finding out. Finally, she becomes aware that part of her own mystery can never be solved because she cannot find one absolute meaning.

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, even the character's names can be seen as the effects of the operations of a combinatorial play, just like literature, in Calvino's essay, can be seen itself as a total combinatorial machine. Thus, establishing a relationship with the novel, the reader receives messages and signals by the characters', which appear to communicate some useful information. For instance, Oedipa is the female form of Oedipus, a tragic character of the Theban Cycles, a series of three plays by the Greek dramatist Sophocles. His tragic essence consists in the absence of every fault, apart from the fact that he cannot avoid to

violate the principles that give life to a society. Without knowing it, Oedipus rex kills the King, who is his father and get married to his mother. On doing so, he provokes a divine's curse on the city that only his sacrifice and departure could correct. However, he saves the city thanks to his ability to resolve the riddle of the Sphynx. Hence, Pynchon's character seems to share with Oedipus the ability to uncover mystery. Besides, Pierce Inverarity "sounds like 'piercing variety' or 'peers in variety' an identification that could be supported by Pierce's use of many different voices and vast array of dissimilar land-holdings" (SparkNotes Editors). Mucho is the Spanish translation of much/many. It implies a redundancy, probably linked to his addiction to LSD. The Paranoids is the name of the band, which is associated with the paranoia of Miles. Moreover, Dr. Hilarious communicates through his name the whimsicality and oddity of his actions and experiments. Nefastis, the scientist, is called with a name that sounds in Italian language as nefasto, which means inauspicious. This is due to the creation of his machine, which violates the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

In conclusion, the concept of communication in *The Crying of Lot 49* is, on the one hand, conceived as an exchange of information and a relationship between characters with restricted opportunities, which is due to the intrinsic impossibility of the mass-media to establish a feedback mechanism between the source and the receiver in order to regulate the flow of information. On the other hand, the notion of communication is conceived as an outcome of the systematic feedback loops between readers and artworks. Despite the difficulties of the references, the reader may be able to establish a meaning and communicate with the source, that is, the text, by filling the blanks, which are the portions of text that the author leaves indeterminate, thus attaining an awareness that leads him to observe the reality in a different way. In the last part of his writing, Calvino analyses the essay by the German poet and critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger entitled *Topological Structures in Modern Literature*, in which the author states that "every orientation presupposes a disorientation" (Calvino 1967, 25). Similarly, Oedipa's orientation in her world, as well as the reader's orientation in a labyrinthine novel, presupposes a disorientation. It amounts to saying that "only someone who has experienced bewilderment can free of it" (Calvino 1967,

25). The labyrinth that the reader must overcome reading a novel such as *The Crying of Lot 49* ceases at a certain point to be a challenge to human intelligence and establishes itself as a facsimile of society, thus showing how Oedipa's world and our world are intertwined because of the same excess of information, which provokes degradation and stagnation of communication once it turns into noise. In this perspective, as Enzensberger argues, literature works as a critical and creative force, turning into a narrative asset the awareness that "the world is essentially impenetrable, that any communication is impossible" (Calvino 1967, 26). But this is a possibility that only the reader may activate, independently of the author's intentions.

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