INTO THE WOMB OF *INFINITE JEST*: THE *ENTERTAINMENT* AS SPECULUM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT……...iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……....iv

INTRODUCTION

THE SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF *INFINITE JEST*…….....1

-CHAPTERS-

1. GYNECOPIA……6

1.1. THE *ENTERTAINMENT* AND IRIGARAY'S *SPECULUM*….....10

2. *FIGURANTS*: A CRIB'S-EYE-VIEW……15

2.1. *LATRODECTUS MACTANS*……23

2.2. OTHER SUBJECTS...…….....28

3. MOTHER-DEATH-COSMOLOGY……...31

3.1. THE MOMS……...……..39

4. THE WOMB OF SOLIPSISM……45

CONCLUSION

INFINITE JEST (*V*) *OR* (*IV*)? WHAT'S IN A NAME?.....51

NOTES AND ERRATA..……....v

WORKS CITED……..….xvi

BIBLIOGRAPHY……,……xix

ABSTRACT

Many consider David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, an overtly *masculine* novel, in that most of it centers on or around male characters. Though one may locate powerful, influential, and even relatable female characters, it's difficult to pair them with a positive image or representation of the feminine. I argue that this lack of a positive representation is due to the novel's primary symbol and plot device, the deadly *Entertainment.* Using Luce Irigaray's *Spéculum de l'autre femme* ('Speculum of the Other Woman,' 1974) as a model, I examine *The Entertainment* as the key tool and target of my feminist critique. This ultimately sheds light on a fundamental "blind-spot" within *Infinite Jest*, as well as many scholarly readings of it.

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THE SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF *INFINITE JEST*

David Foster Wallace committed suicide September 12, 2008, at the age of 46, giving rise to an already growing academic and public interest in his work and personhood. Before his death, interest in Wallace's work came from both the academy and the public arena. Even after his death, this is still true. Published in the summer of 2010, Adam Kelly's "David Foster Wallace: The Death of an Author and the Birth of a Discipline," describes the "the network of interest in David Foster Wallace's *oeuvre* that ranges through but also well beyond the traditional academic channels" (par. 2). Meaning, Wallace's work is the subject of not simply esteemed academic work, but important public works as well. Indeed, Wallace's popularity amongst new media sources like the Howling Fantods (fan site), the *Wallace-1* listserv (email list) and Infinite Summer (book club/reading forum) is entirely fitting since mass media is a topic of such interest to the author himself.

In the area of academia, interest in Wallace began primarily with investigations of Wallace' influence on and influence by the postmodernism practiced by writers like Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon. Though the author himself has passed away, investigations into the importance and integrity of his work have only begun. We have yet to see the extent to which Wallace's work has or will affect the next generation of young writers and readers.

The esteemed academic work being done about Wallace now is due in part by the rising generation of young scholars, the release of Wallace's posthumous novel, *The Pale King*, the novelization of a never completed Rolling Stone interview with author and friend David Lipsky[1], and the opening of a major archive of the author's papers. It's clear that while many scholars have caught on to Wallace's talent, their work only represents "the initial map of the territory of what might be termed 'Wallace studies'" (Kelly par. 2).

With that said however, authors like Stephen Burn and Marshall Boswell have already set the pace for how Wallace is read and understood for the next generation of young scholars (including myself). For this study, I focus primarily on Wallace's masterwork of fiction, *Infinite Jest.* Stephen Burn especially, explains the particular difficulty of "mapping" out the "territory" that is *Infinite Jest* (Wallace p1017n110). Much like Michael Pemulis warns in the novel, Burn also begs his audience not to confuse the "map" with the "territory" (Wallace p1017n110). In other words, Burn's academic process, and subsequently his recommendation to other critics and researchers, is to "outline" the novel with the hope (also Hal's hope) that "the map [novel] speaks for itself" (Burn 25, Wallace p1017n110). Burn acknowledges that it is a common desire for scholars to research *Infinite Jest* in a way that reveals the entirety of its levels, meanings, themes, layers, etc. but he also points out that this kind of investigation is futile, proving to be an even more intimidating study than the novel itself—which is already 1079 pages! (Burn 22, 25) Again, this is another reason why, even after Wallace's death, our investigations of his work are not over. Not only has Wallace been truly prolific in his delivery of material to study, but his work also proves to be complex and dynamic in the most intriguing of ways. In as far as Burn is concerned, with respect to *Infinite Jest*, his *Reader's Guide* holds true to a Barthesian logic of analysis: that "everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered … writing is to be ranged over, not pierced" (Barthes 63). In accordance to Burn's logic, a deconstructionist method[2] is the best way to proceed when considering Wallace's *Infinite Jest.*

Marshall Boswell employs similar methods of critique in his *Understanding David Foster Wallace.* In it, Boswell importantly describes *Infinite Jest* as "circular" (121). This "circularity," Boswell suggests, "presents special problems for the critic who must decide where to start unpacking the plot, particularly since that plot achieves meaning through layering rather

than through traditional cause and effect" (121). These "special problems," Boswell explains, "reside in the way the novel's plot advances and retreats at the same time" (121). For example, the chronological end of the novel is revealed in the first seventeen pages, before, as readers, we are able to understand or make sense of what is happening. Subsequently, our first introduction to the character Hal is actually our last encounter with him. Boswell continues on the subject of *Infinite Jest*'s "special problems" remarking "the way the reading itself moves from body text to endnotes and back again" (120). To explain Boswell here, one might think about how some of the body text plots actually turn out to be film plots in footnote 24, "James O. Incandenza: A Filmography" (Wallace p991n24). For example, the "Eschaton" scene where the students from E.T.A. get together to play a "nearly incomprehensible nuclear strategy game with [old] tennis equipment," coincidently shares its plot with James' film *Baby Pictures of Famous Dictators* (Wallace p991n24). The similarities between narrative plot and footnoted film plot render the stability of the narrative as a whole quite treacherous and indeed problematic. Boswell's point is that Wallace complicates locating any sort of central or focal point even in a so called "circular" structure because of the layered way in which the narrative unfolds.

Thus, Boswell's analysis quells Burn's imagined overzealous and overanxious scholar by acknowledging, if not embracing the book's "special problems" (119). Like Burn, Boswell approaches *Infinite Jest* with deconstructionist methodologies. Instead of reducing the project that is *Infinite Jest* by connecting all the dots, explaining all the choices, and connecting all the themes, or even justifying the length, Boswell accepts the novel's irreducible complexity without diminishing the quality of its efforts. Subsequently, even though Boswell acknowledges the "difficulty" of locating a center or focal point, he does eventually place the *Entertainment*[3] at the "core of the story" (121, 126).

To further explain this choice, Boswell calls to Katherine Hayles, who writes "For such a novel any [conventional] starting point [in a critical argument] would be to some extent arbitrary" (qtd. in, 121). Though indeed "shrouded in mystery," Boswell argues that at the very least we meet victims[4] of the *Entertainment* as well as witness scenes of people watching / viewing the *Entertainment* (126).[5] He adds that we also get to decide upon the reliability of number of contentious / conflicting accounts of the film's content.[6] Boswell does well to point out that "we never get to see the film directly," but before casting the *Entertainment* off as arbitrary, contentious or unimportant, he assures us that the film acts as a plot device around which much of the narrative "advances or retreats," thus justifying its place at the center of the narrative (126, 127). Thus, for Boswell the film is not only the book's center or focal point, but its "absent center" (126). Given that no character survives viewing the film, any knowledge of it is gained tangentially (through three varying accounts of its content). So while the film is a major intersection in the novel symbolically, what is known about the film itself is rather incomprehensive.

Still, Boswell's recognition of the film as the novel's "absent center," suggests that he feels the novel has been symbolically emptied of something, yet he offers little suggestion for what that 'something' may be (126). Subsequently, for any critic following Boswell's lead here, with the *Entertainment* as the "absent center" around which to draw conclusions about *Infinite Jest*, one is led into treacherous waters (126). The *Entertainment* is integrally important, and at the same time, duplicitous and indefinite. Any critic or scholar investigating *Infinite Jest* faces numerous crisis of the indefinite, which Boswell would not find it a stretch to call the novel's other "special problems" (121).

Still, it is fair to say that Boswell is not limited by *Infinite Jest*'s "special problems," its "absent center," or the incomprehensibility of the *Entertainment* itself (121, 126). Both Burn's and Boswell's work prove that *Infinite Jest* presents the critic with not only *problems* and predicaments, but also *infinite* opportunity. In the text's "refusal to fix meaning" the critic is afforded the opportunity to actively participate in the creation of meaning (*Death of the Author*, 147). [7] In this way, the novel constantly revises itself by changing and reweighing the importance of some its own central concerns, thus supporting an investigatory tactic that embraces the indefinite, the duplicitous, and the ambiguous. Meaning in so many words, there is equal justice in investigating the small things, the contentious, and the seemingly unimportant. After all, the novel is called *Infinite Jest*—we must expect there to be some trickery afoot.

GYNECOPIA

"*Gynecopia*" is a term used by *Infinite Jest's* endearingly[8] misogynistic Orin Incandenza (Wallace p1008n110). What Orin literally describes here is a cornucopia or abundance of female genitalia. When considering the masterwork *Infinite Jest*, the female figure (let alone her genitalia)[9] is not the first theme, symbol, or character to come to mind. *Infinite Jest* is widely labeled by the general public as a 'boys' club,' perhaps not written strictly for men—but definitely about men. This label is not my point of contention. In fact, I believe *Infinite Jest* is rightly and justly labeled as a 'boys' club,' in that the main protagonists are predominantly male, the three main narratives involve mostly male characters, and finally that the political and social atmosphere in which the narrative takes place is patriarchal in nature. Yet, in consideration of the feminine, there is one part of the novel that stands out—the deadly *Entertainment*.

In the 'Introduction' to this study I claimed that Boswell was onto something in calling the *Entertainment* the "core," and "absent center" of *Infinite Jest* (126). Indeed, I agree that the *Entertainment* is everything Boswell says it is. However, in order to go beyond Boswell's thinking, I also claim that there is a more troubling absence in *Infinite Jest*, due to the existence of the *Entertainment* in the first place. This absence is the feminine.

Though the *Entertainment* abounds with imagery of the feminine, there is nothing genuinely 'female' in the film's representation of her image. Because the *Entertainment* is, as Boswell calls it, the "book's primary symbol" and "core" it is the crossroads for the rest of the novel, and so it must become the lens through which we explore the representation of the feminine throughout the narrative as a whole (126). In other words, even though the *Entertainment* is the most flagrantly reductive representation of the feminine, it is also the most defining.

Almost everything we learn about the *Entertainment* is egregious in one way or another. The film attains its status as the sullied lens through which we come to know the feminine through a series of complicated gestures which basically add insult to injury, yet occur simultaneously in the film. If this study seems to be organized by the severity of the *Entertainment*'s offenses against the feminine, it is only because of the limited perspective of each of the characters who talk about the film. From these characters, we will come to learn that: the filmic lens of the *Entertainment* reductively hones in on the female body, marking it with sexual difference. The film also demonizes the traditionally feminine role of motherhood. And finally, the film offers itself up as a replacement to its uniquely perceived failure of the feminine. By this means, the *Entertainment* thoroughly empties *Infinite Jest* of anything genuinely feminine, and what we see of female characters outside the scope of the film is nothing but a mere reflection of the film's sentiment.

Infinite Jest is a novel so thoroughly emptied of anything genuinely feminine, that even the female's themselves are empty—reduced to a mere shell, they are merely outlines of themselves, left to perform the role the feminine without the usual honor, dignity, and empowerment that goes with it. To be sure, there are plenty of scholars who examine *Infinite Jest* with an eye toward gender inequality, Andrew Steven Delfino[10] and Maria Bustillos[11] being primary examples. Although their work represents two different approaches to the topic of gender in *Infinite Jest*, both seek to dismiss the importance of a focus on the feminine/female characters. In an attempt to reach "the book's real concerns," Delfino and Bustillos have cast the female/feminine aside, almost as thoroughly as the book itself has (Bustillos, *Wallace-I)*.[12]

The tactic of using the *Entertainment* as a window into the feminine even with all its faults is not an original concept. French feminist, Luce Irigaray, uses a similar tactic in her

doctoral thesis *Spéculum de l'autre femme* ('Speculum of the Other Woman,' 1974). Though published roughly two decades apart, 'Speculum of the Other Woman' employs tactics of critique that complements Wallace's work. Additionally, Irigaray is dedicated to a life-long project of unraveling "discourses which necessarily contain a repressed or unconscious 'feminine' element" (Grosz "sexual difference," 103). Thus, in order to salvage the feminine and gain a more genuine perception of it, I deconstruct *Infinite Jest* primarily with Irigaray's method of critique in 'Speculum,' yet I will also include additional concepts and themes from her other works, as well as complementary theorists.

Luce Irigaray is a French feminist trained in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics. Irigaray is often compared to Hèléne Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, and Julia Kristeva for her use of psychoanalytic theory as a means of establishing an *écricture au feminine* ('woman's language'). Though her feminist partners often discuss sexual difference, Irigaray is most often critiqued for her insistence on it in her personal project of questioning. Most of Irigaray's critics find the notion of sexual difference itself oppressive. Yet, as Ofelia Schutte points out, to Irigaray "the notion of sexual difference is only oppressive when posited from the standpoint of a masculinist logic or set of values" (52).[13] To apply this quote to the situation here—while the "notion of sexual difference" represented by the *Entertainment*, being very much a "masculinist logic or set of values," is "oppressive," the film itself *can* be used to locate as an alternative "standpoint" to explore "sexual difference" in order to locate new or unacknowledged representations of femininity (52).

The final goal of my study is to give voice, purpose, and meaning back to all things feminine in *Infinite Jest*. Grosz summarizes Irigaray saying, "The feminine has thus far functioned in muted, suppressed, or unheard ways," and the same is true of *Infinite Jest* (Grosz

"ethics of alterity," 179). At the end of this study, my hope is that the silence of the feminine within the novel will be deafening. In order to make that transition, I must first locate what passes for the feminine and answer how we (the audience, the reader) are reading her in light of her repression. Irigaray's method of investigation is uniquely qualified to accomplish this task, as she is dedicated to a life-long project of this (re)location.

The importance of this study is that it points to a fundamental 'blind-spot' in scholarly readings of *Infinite Jest*, which seem to have disregarded and repressed the feminine as thoroughly as the novel has. Still, this study presents the feminine with a chance to reclaim the spotlight. While *Infinite Jest* may not (at first) offer us a flattering or more genuine *gynecopia*, an Irigarayan reading allows the 'feminine' to drift to the surface to reveal itself as a "repressed or unconscious" element often overlooked in the face of such a patriarchal text (Grosz "sexual difference," 103). By (re)locating the feminine in this way, the first step toward her inclusion in the novel is made. Irigaray's mode of questioning will illustrate that when the feminine is examined in the proper light, she is not as easily cast aside and no longer an absent figure of *Infinite Jest.*

THE *ENTERTAINMENT* AND IRIGARAY'S *SPECULUM*

Luce Irigaray's "Speculum of the Other Woman" is designed as a "hollow surface on the model of the speculum/vagina" (Moi 130). At exact center of the 'Spéculum' section (and of the whole book) is an analysis of Descartes framed by two massive sections of Freud and Plato. Toril Moi writes, "it is as if the middle section (on Descartes) sinks between the solid, upright volumes of the master thinkers" (130). Since Irigaray's analysis of Descartes "sinks into the innermost cavity of the book, in a phallic, instrumental move the speculum illuminates him while simultaneously pointing his position within the feminine" (Moi 131). It is clear from this summary that Irigaray's work abounds with both phallic and feminine imagery and that the boundaries between the two are sometimes blurred. Yet, ultimately, through her rather unique mode of questioning, Irigaray seeks to demonstrate that "woman constitutes the silent ground on which the patriarchal thinker erects his discursive constructs" (Moi 131).

Evidently, Irigaray's "deconstruction of phallocentric representations of women and female sexuality relies on psychoanalytic theory to provide both a deconstructive 'tool' and a major [target] for her criticisms" (Grosz, "sexual difference" 113). Clearly, Irigaray's critical technique runs the risk of "reproducing an unrecognized phallocentrism" in that her "critique relies on what it criticizes" (Grosz "sexual difference," 113). Simultaneously however, Elizabeth Grosz evokes Gayatri Spivak and cites the fact that "there is no pure position outside of phallo- or logocentrism," and so Irigaray's use of "psychoanalysis to criticize itself" is actually her best method of "providing a starting point in the positive construction of other images and representations" (Grosz "sexual difference," 114). In this way, "like the Derridean 'double science' of deconstruction, [Irigaray's] work is both duplicitous and double-dealing" (Grosz

"sexual difference," 113). Markedly, the "double-dealing" and "duplicitous" instrument/ target of Irigaray's critique is the *speculum* itself (Grosz "sexual difference," 113).

Generally, a *speculum* is a medical tool used for investigating body cavities with a structure dependent on the body cavity for which it is designed. Irigaray's *speculum* is a concave mirror, but also a focal point or foci, able to concentrate light. Accordingly, as a gynecological instrument, the *speculum* "penetrates and illuminates the female body (vagina)," literally able to "shed light on secrets and pierce the mystery of the woman's sex," which is both accommodating and egregious (Moi 130). As a tool of critique, Irigaray's *speculum* is utilized as a "looking glass" through which she is able to (re)locate the "unconscious or unacknowledged feminine" in order to "exploit [that in her] critical feminist analyses of other's texts" (Shutte 52, Grosz "sexual difference,"109). While Irigaray's *speculum* does in fact probe Freud, Plato, and Descartes with a phallic gesture, the act itself is merely a means of uncovering the repressed feminine elements in these texts. This act of recovery makes Irigaray's probing different from the other texts in that her mode of questioning results in a positive representation of the feminine, while the others repress and misappropriate the feminine image (especially the female body).

Still, there is something a bit uncomfortable about Irigaray's *speculum* which is why it is also a target for her criticisms. Irigaray notes that the *speculum* is able to "illuminate the female body only by virtue of its concave shape," so "while it imitates its object, it also objectifies the object of its gaze" (Moi 130). So, even though the *speculum* is in fact invasive, "objectifying," and misrepresenting, for better or worse, it is Irigaray's means of getting up close and personal with the feminine (Moi 130). Likewise, in order to reach something genuinely feminine within *Infinite Jest*, we need to get up close and personal with the "woman's sex" in much the same way

that Irigaray's *speculum* is able to, however "double-dealing" her tool for critique may be (Moi 130, Grosz "sexual difference," 113).

Irigaray's *speculum* is able to illuminate various "points of repression (of the feminine)" which Irigaray calls "blind spots" or "residues" (Grosz "sexual difference," 109). According to Grosz, these "blind-spots/residues" indicate points where "one subjectivity (the masculine) has taken it upon itself to represent the other (the feminine) ("sexual difference," 103, 109; "ethics of alterity," 179). [14] Since both Irigaray's *speculum* and *Infinite Jest*'s *Entertainment* occupy the "exact center" of their narratives, both can be used to illuminate the rest, from their positions within "the innermost cavities" (Moi 131). Thus, the *Entertainment* will be my *speculum*, i.e. both a major "tool" for and "target of criticism" (Grosz "sexual difference," 113).

As a "tool," the *Entertainment* is uniquely able to illuminate and/or locate other sites of repression in the novel from its position at the "center" of the narrative (Grosz "sexual difference," 113, Moi 131). However, the film is also the most egregious example of a "blind-spot/residue," in that it is the most defining representation of the feminine (Grosz "sexual difference," 109). In other words, the *Entertainment* "takes it upon itself to" stand-in for the feminine, both imitating and objectifying her (Grosz "ethics of alterity," 179, Moi 131). Sometimes with subtlety, but mostly with flagrancy, the *Entertainment* both mocks and objectifies women by its essentialist logic of sexual difference, its misappropriation if the female body, its demonization of traditionally feminine roles, and finally its attempt to rectify all that is wrong with femininity by offering itself up as rightful replacement. This is why when one looks for femininity in *Infinite Jest*, one immediately thinks of the film as the first place to look, which is worrisome at best—making the *Entertainment* my primary "target of criticism" (Grosz "sexual difference," 113).

Accordingly, the *Entertainment* itself must be understood before the rest of the novel can be properly illuminated. In the same way that Irigaray uses "psychoanalysis to criticize itself," I will turn the "perceptual eye" of the *Entertainment*'s camera lens in on itself, deconstructing it until "a starting point in the positive construction of other images and representations," or more specifically "a starting point the positive construction of [feminine images and representations]" is found (Grosz "sexual difference," 114; Wallace 835).

The film draws several blows against the feminine, and the more we find out about the film through Irigaray's critical methodologies, the more we realize what *Infinite Jest* is truly missing—a genuine representation of the feminine. It is thus that the feminine is the true "symbol" and "absent center" of *Infinite Jest*, since the *Entertainment* has done everything in its power to replace her (Boswell 126). Hereafter, the *Entertainment* can be thought of as a *speculum* with a structure (that of film) specifically designed to explore the real "absent center" of the narrative—i.e. the novel's female figure (Boswell 126). Luckily, Irigaray aims at rectifying the feminine by returning her to a genuine state. In other words, the female/feminine is the missing piece of *Infinite Jest* which must be set right before any new insight can be gained on how to read and interpret this vastly complicated novel.

To unravel the puzzle that is the *Entertainment*, I will look at three testimonies articulated by Joelle Van Dyne (star of the film), Molly Notkin (friend of Joelle Van Dyne) and the wraith (ghost-like figure of James Incandenza who describes the film to Gately as he (Gately) recovers from a bullet wound). All three testimonies offer a unique perspective on what the film consists of, including everything from scenery, to dialogue, and subject matter. On top of that, they also offer varying interpretations of the film's meaning, i.e. what it is meant to do and whom it is meant for. However, all three testimonies are also unreliable and problematic, each in their own

way.[15] Nevertheless, even with the unreliability of each character's testimony and the fact that there are three variations competing for validity, each converge on the subject of the feminine and none of the representations are very flattering. Though each report has slightly different implications for how the feminine is perceived, there is no question that the *Entertainment* "has taken it upon itself to represent the feminine" draining the novel of anything genuinely feminine (Grosz "ethics of alterity," 179).

FIGURANTS: A CRIB'S-EYE-VIEW

> "Human scenery … seen (but not heard) … sort of human furniture. *Figurants* the wraith says they're called, these surreally mute background presences whose presence really [reveal] that the camera, like an eye, has a perceptual corner, a triage of who's important enough to be seen and heard v. just seen"—Gately in clairvoyant conversation with the wraith (Wallace 835).

The female/feminine is "important enough to be seen and heard v. just seen" in the *Entertainment*, yet just because she is the feature/focus of the film, doesn't necessarily mean that she is represented fairly by the film/lens (835). Though the film features the feminine, the other female figures of *Infinite Jest* resemble the *figurants* described above, i.e. "human scenery … sort of human furniture … surreally mute background presences whose presence really" link us (the reader) back to the film itself because of its defining and "perceptual eye" (835).

In order understand the "perceptual eye" of the *Entertainment* we will begin our investigation from the point of view of the film's star: Joelle Van Dyne, perhaps better know by her stage name 'Madame Psychosis' (835). Because Joelle is the only person alive who was actually in the *Entertainment*, she is able to answer a small piece of the puzzle by telling us how she (the female/feminine) was framed, with what kind of lens, and with what result.

Much of Joelle's testimony about the *Entertainment* is revealed in the passages leading up to her attempted suicide, which occurs at Molly Notkin's house party, in celebration of Notkin's "A.B.D. pre-doctoral status in Film & Film-Cartridge Theory at M.I.T." (223). Before Joelle gets to the party, it is mentioned that Notkin has "no idea that Joelle's been in a cage since Y.T.S.D.B. (Year of the Trial-Size Dove Bar)" or whether or not Joelle and James were "lovers or what, whether Orin left because they were lovers or what or that Joelle now lives

… on a trust willed to her by a man she unveiled for but never slept with, the prodigious punter (Orin's) father, infinite jester, director of a final *opus so magnum* he'd claimed to have had it locked away" (228). The rhetorical device being used here is *dramatic irony*, meaning that while the anonymous narrator explains what Notkin is "not aware of," the reader becomes *aware*, and thus goes into the next scene having more knowledge than Notkin. From this passage the reader finds out that "Joelle's been in a cage since Y.T.S.D.B.," that she "never slept with" James, and that James "locked away" his "*opus so magnum* (the deadly *Entertainment*)," while Notkin learns nothing (228). The use of dramatic irony in this passage is especially funny and ironic because audience/reader knows more about the "mysterious" *Entertainment* going into this scene than Notkin does, even though she is celebrating her apparent skill in "Film Cartridge Theory" (Boswell 126, Wallace 223).

This passage is also important because it accounts for one aspect of Joelle's unreliability as an authority on the *Entertainment*. If the passage were told through Joelle directly (making it first-person) the passage might have read: "[Molly] has no idea *I've* been in a cage since Y.T.S.D.B." (228). However, the passage is told in *third-person-intimate* narration, which complicates its meaning even further.

Third-person-intimate narration has the advantages of *omniscient narration* in that it announces a character's thoughts, feelings, knowledge, etc. The only difference between omniscient narration and third-person-intimate narration is that the latter focuses on a specific character and presents the scene from his/her point of view. Thus, third-person-intimate cannot explain the thoughts or feelings of everyone in a scene, only the specific character whose point of view it is focused on. As we see in the scenes leading up to Joelle's suicide attempt, Wallace uses third-person-intimate narration to hone in on Joelle's point of view. The narration often

moves to the people, objects, and things that Joelle is "watching" (229). Phrases like "Joelle can see" and "Joelle now sees," prove that although we don't hear from Joelle directly, we are meant to, at the very least, see things from her point of view (230). Although this technique is afforded the same advantages of *omniscient narration*, there is a peculiar focus only on what Joelle can see, yet nothing of Joelle's more intimate thoughts and feelings, of which, no doubt, the narrator would be aware. Joelle does eventually speak in this scene, but there is already evidence of the "perceptual eye" of the camera lens in that our attention (as readers) is focused on what Joelle is "watching" rather than what she is thinking or saying/speaking—i.e. she is "seen (but not heard)" (229, 835).

Actually, *third-person-intimate* narration has a lot more to do with film theory than what's been suggested. *Third-person-intimate* is generally accepted as the perspective closest to that of film. The analogy here is that in a novel with central concerns for entertainment and film, this narrative technique literally evokes the presence of a camera lens. As a result, not only is Joelle the star of the *Entertainment* and the muse behind that camera lens, but her character is also being presented to the reader through a 'lens-like' perspective. The perspective's association with a camera may explain why it is so limited in its explication of the attempted suicide scene. The lens-like/camera-like perspective in this scene actually impedes the *omniscience* this narration is supposedly capable of, and thus links once again back to the deadly *Entertainment.* What I mean here is that the "perceptual" judgment of the *Entertainment*, its filmic lens, is distorting in its narrow view of the female figure, much like the narration described above (835).

Not surprisingly, this 'lens-like' perspective pops up in many places outside of Joelle's report on the *Entertainment*. For example, Joelle describes Avril Incandenza, widow to James as "eminently photogenic … apparently a real restaurant-silencer-type beauty even in her late

forties" (790). Though Avril is beautiful to Joelle, her beauty is also measurable by the frame or lens of a camera, which diminishes the compliment. Here, we also learn that Avril's full name is "Avril Mondragon Tavis Incandenza, Ed. D, Ph. D. She is 197 cm. tall in flats," but again what does this reveal, if anything, about her as a character? How can we come to know Avril more intimately? (898) Even when describing herself, Joelle also focuses on the physical; "I am 1.7 meters tall and weigh 48 kilograms. I occupy space and have mass. I breathe in and breathe out" (234), which is accurate and exact, but also reductive. Sure, Joelle and Avril are obviously very physically present, but what about their personality, opinions, tastes, etc.?—do these hold any 'weight' for their characters? What we are really seeing here is an emphasis on the corporeality of the female figure and essentialism of sexual difference. Joelle is so effused by a masculine logic or set of values that she can only think of herself as a corporeal object.

From narrative techniques that evoke its presence, to occasionally stepping into the spotlight of their own accord, the female figures of *Infinite Jest* are inundated by the lens of a camera. The female/feminine is quite literally framed by the narrow focus of the film-like lens and it takes everything in their power just to be seen, let alone heard. It is no surprise then that the feminine takes on reductive perspectives in relation to one other and even themselves.

The camera lens is only one aspect of the film that is ultimately responsible for the suppression and disappearance of the female figure in *Infinite Jest*. Moving back to the party scene leading up to Joelle's suicide attempt, we learn that Joelle is standing next to Molly Notkin, with Notkin's "one dirty-nailed hand on Joelle's arm" (228). Consequently, while we (the reader) have knowledge that Notkin does not, we must not forget that Notkin is as much of an audience for Joelle's conversation and observations as we are. This might explain why, when Molly Notkin is captured by the U.S.O.U.S. (the United States Office of Unspecified Services),

she seems to know a whole lot about Joelle Van Dyne, as well as her role in the *Entertainment*; more so than even Joelle herself reveals.

Nevertheless, thanks to Joelle's testimony, we learn that she has "never seen the completed assembly of what she'd appeared in, or seen anyone who's seen it … he [James] never let her see it, not even the dailies," leaving Joelle to ponder; "Had the tape been cut into something coherent (228, 230)? Importantly however, Joelle adds that she "doubts that any sum of scenes are pathologic" (228). Nor does she believe the scenes she filmed "could have been as entertaining as he'd said the thing he'd always wanted to make had broken his heart by ending up" (228). To put that clearly, Joelle believes James committed suicide because his masterwork, the film, turned out to be lethally entertaining. However, Joelle doesn't see how the film, or in fact any film could be so entertaining that it becomes lethal to view, indicating her disbelief in the *Entertainment* as the source of the apparent mental fracture that spectators undergo from viewing it.

The scene leading up to Joelle's attempted suicide (described above) is about all we hear of Joelle's interpretation of the *Entertainment* until the end of the novel nears. It is then that Joelle is finally picked up by the U.S.O.U.S. for interrogation regarding her involvement with the *Entertainment*. Interestingly, Joelle's confession reads more like an interview than an interrogation. This is because Joelle is by all accounts interviewed by Helen "Hugh" Steeply[16], a cross-dressing spy for the U.S.O.U.S., undercover as a reporter. Molly Notkin's confession on the other hand, sounds forced, and rather much more like the interrogation it is supposed to be. This could be for two reasons; one being that Steeply's motivations are questionable[17], and two being that by the time the U.S.O.U.S. obtain Notkin they may be more desperate to prevent the release of the *Entertainment* to the American public. Still Joelle's confessional is the only scene

where we (the reader) get to hear Joelle speak from her own voice in reference to the *Entertainment*. Not only is Joelle's voice undigested by a 'lens-like' narration, she is also uninterrupted by Steeply, her muted interviewer.[18]

After much adieu, Joelle confesses to Steeply that; "I was in two scenes. What else is in there I do not know. The first scene I'm going through a revolving door … as I go in I see somebody I know … And instead of going in I keep going around in the door to follow the person out" who is still "revolving in the door to follow me in, and we whirl in the door like that for several whirls" (938, 939). In the second scene, Joelle explains; "I leaned in over the camera in the crib and simply apologized" (939). Here there is a pause in the narrative and the next line reads "Q," indicating that Steeply has asked a question, yet we do not get to know what that question is (939). Joelle answers Steeply's muted question by elucidating "Apologized. As in my lines were various apologies. 'I'm so sorry. I'm so terribly sorry. I am so, so sorry. Please know how very, very, very sorry I am.' For a real long time" (939). She asserts "I doubt he used it all, I strongly doubt he used it all, but there were at least twenty minutes of permutations of 'I'm sorry'" (939).

Joelle goes on to explain that when James "talked about this thing as the quote 'perfect entertainment,' terminally compelling—it was always ironic … It was entirely clear that it was an ironic joke. To me" (941). If Joelle is correct here, and James really didn't intend on making the "perfect entertainment," then the ironic joke is on James because the *Entertainment* really does end up being "terminally compelling" (941). Again, this explanation reaffirms Joelle's notion that there's no way she believes that the *Entertainment* is deadly.

The most important thing that Joelle reveals about her role in the creation of the *Entertainment* was that in the film she is "not exactly veiled," but that "[her] face wasn't

important" (940). What "was" important was the fact that the "point of view was from the crib, yes. A crib's-eye view" with a lens fitted with "an auto-wobble" which "no doubt was supposed to reproduce an infantile visual field" (940). When Joelle explains that "[her] face wasn't important," it must mean that James didn't go out of his way to make sure that Joelle was recognized (940). Meaning, that Joelle herself is not the sole subject of the film, and thus her alluring beauty is not either, and so her presence is not the source of the film's lethal entertainment.[19] Though Joelle's alluring beauty has similar affects to the *Entertainment*, we know that the *Entertainment* is filmed after Joelle's "traumatic deformity," so her alluring beauty is no longer as deadly (794). If Joelle (the individual) is not the reason that the *Entertainment* is lethally entertaining, then there must be something else about what is being depicted that makes it lethal. Additionally, if Joelle is not the sole subject of the film, then her role in the film must have been to represent some other female/feminine subject.

No doubt, the "crib's-eye view" of the camera lens casts Joelle's as the *maternal* feminine (940). Elizabeth Grosz summarizes Irigaray explaining that;

> In order for the feminine, for women, to be able to speak and be heard as autonomous beings, a series of wide-ranging upheavals is necessary … most particularly, the cultural debt to women's maternity must be openly acknowledged. (Grosz "ethics of alterity," 179)[20]

What isn't said in this quote, but is conceptually important to Irigaray's work, is that femininity and maternity can be two separate things. That is to say, females are not always maternal. Thus, the destruction of this conflation is one of the "necessary upheavals" needed in order for women to be seen as "autonomous beings" (179). To be clear, when Irigaray talks about "women's maternity" she is not herself conflating the feminine with the maternal. Rather, Irigaray insists

that the feminine can exist independently of the maternal; however when the female chooses to merge the two roles, a "cultural debt" to this duality must be paid (179). On the contrary, with what Joelle describes above as "permutations of 'I'm sorry,'" it's obvious that the *Entertainment* depicts a scene that evokes the exact opposite of "cultural debt" being paid to "women's maternity" and rather an apologia from the maternal figure for this confused duality (Wallace 939, Grosz 179). James O. Incandenza makes no apologies for casting Joelle in the role of groveling maternal figure. Though Joelle's revelation of the "crib's-eye view" of the camera lens discloses who Joelle is apologizing to in the role of groveling maternal figure, she doesn't clarify what the apology is for (940). For Joelle "there was nothing coherent in the mother-death-cosmology[21] and apologies she'd repeated over and over," however this study will bring clarity to its meaning, and in that clarity we will come to see how villainous the content and lens of the *Entertainment* truly is (Wallace 230).

From Joelle's testimony we can already begin to see the vague outline of what the *Entertainment* sought to represent in its content.[22] However "wobbly" or "infantile" the perspective of the lens may be, it still powerfully diminishes and narrows our view of the female figure (940). In order for the female figure's situation to be reversed in *Infinite Jest*, i.e. in order for her to be both "seen and heard," and the "necessary upheavals" to be accomplished, the "perceptual eye" of the camera lens must be turned in on itself (Wallace 835, Irigaray "Grosz" 179).

LATRODECTUS MACTANS

With the *Entertainment* standing-in as not simply the feminine, but the maternal, it's hard to imagine there being more for her to lose. Yet, the feminine is emptied of meaning in all directions, either symbolically, or figuratively, and eventually we will learn, quite literally.[23] "*Latrodectus Mactans Productions*," happens to be the name of one of James O. Incandenza's self-created film production companies (Wallace p987n24). While "*Latrodectus Mactans*" is not the production company credited with the deadly *Entertainment*;[24] the name doesn't bode well for James' intentions in his other films (p987n24).

Latrodectus Mactans translates from Latin as (southern) Black widow. This highly venomous species of spider is particularly well known for the distinctive black and red coloring of the female. The female spider's distinct coloration and hour-glass shape on its abdomen make it instantly recognizable, and add to its already intimidating, dangerous, and beautiful legend. Perhaps even more so, the female Black Widow is particularly well known for the fact that it will occasionally eat her mate after reproduction. The Black Widow's story is one of associative leaps. 'Red' is interpreted as a color meaning 'danger' and this 'dangerous' red symbol is located on her abdomen, a place commonly associated with reproduction. Thus, her abdomen, i.e. the location of her reproductive organs is read as 'dangerous.' It is not far off to say then, that the spider's nature is read, if symbolically, from her body.

As we know, Avril Incandenza is the wife of the late James O. Incandenza. Accordingly, one can easily accept the fact that Avril is often referred to as "the widow or the-widow-to-be" (791). However, the term 'widow' can mean one of two things; firstly, it refers to a woman who has lost her husband, a name for which Avril certainly qualifies, secondly, it is also the nickname

commonly given to the Black Widow spider, so it is not a waste of time to consider Avril's legend.

First of all, more than a few characters (including Orin, Steeply, and Molly Notkin) see Avril's infidelities as reason enough for James' creation of the deadly *Entertainment* and his suicide. Andrew Steven Delfino notes that Avril's "sexuality threatens the men around her," as well as Notkin. Delfino goes as far to say that even Avril's maiden name, Mondragon, can be read as threatening. He writes "if we can read Mon-as a reference to the *mons pubis* ("pubic mound") and "Dragon"-as the mythical aggressively fire-breathing torturer of man, then we see that Avril possesses an aggressive 'toothed vagina'" (22n4). This is also reductive in that Delfino hones in on only Avril's physical assets. Delfino's appraisal of Avril is the result of the same "oppressive notion of sexual difference" that Shutte points out as coming from a "masculinist set of values" (52). I agree that Avril is sexually promiscuous and aggressive, but these qualities are not always threatening. Avril is misread in the same way that the Black Widow spider is misread. A cursory glance at just physical features is not enough to make an adequate judgment of character. Avril and the Black Widow are both capable of killing their mates after reproduction, but that ability shouldn't characterize their entire existence.[25]

Avril's connection to the Black Widow spider however, doesn't end there. It is said that during the production of James Incandenza's *opus so magnum*, he had the delusion of "black-widow spiders in his hair" (870). The term "in his hair," generally means that something is "bothering or annoying" James. James's annoyed state could be the result of an existential crisis leading to his suicide 90 days after the filming of the deadly *Entertainment.* However, given Avril's link to the "black-widow spider," James delusion is more likely his way of acknowledging what is truly bothering him, Avril (870).

The difference between James' film moniker, *Latrodectus Mactans* and the deadly *Entertainment*, at least according to Molly Notkin's account, is the fact that the deadly *Entertainment* skips the metaphors and analogies and instead goes right for the intended target. Instead of a "black-widow spider" standing in as a symbol for women or Avril herself, the *Entertainment* goes directly for its mark to represent the universal feminine.

> —Molly Notkin tells the U.S.O.U.S. operatives that her understanding of the après-garde Auteur J.O. Incandenza's lethally entertaining *Infinite Jest (V or VI)* is that it features Madame Psychosis [Joelle] as some kind of maternal … figure … sitting naked, corporeally gorgeous, ravishing, hugely pregnant, her hideously deformed face either veiled or blanked out (788).[26]

In the film, we see that the female figure (Joelle) is represented through just that—her figure. The *Entertainment* hones in on Joelle's "naked body," and her "hugely pregnant" belly (788). Joelle's "nakedness" is less sexy than it is an emphasis on her being "pregnant" (788). Just like the spider's abdomen, Joelle's belly is marked as a site of reproduction by the camera's focus. She is not only "gorgeous," but "corporeally gorgeous;" the difference being that the former implies a sort of inherent quality, yet the latter places the emphasis back on Joelle's body (788). Joelle's beauty/body is "ravishing," which is innocently enough just a synonym of "gorgeous," yet to ravish also means to rape, or seize and take away by force (788). The double-meaning of the word "ravishing" evokes a representation of the feminine as not only sexually aggressive (which is not always a bad thing), but whose aggression is seen as a violent and bad trait (788).

Arachnophobia, a fear of spiders and other arachnids, is among the most common forms of zoophobia, a fear of certain animals. An arachnaphobic would certainly see a spider as hideous and repelling, which is why arcachnaphobics typically won't enter a room they believe

to harbor a spider. On the other hand, they may act out violently to defend themselves against the spider. This violent outburst is usually an 'act-first-ask-questions-later' type scenario where the individual instinctively lashes out at the object of its fears because of whatever evidence they have making them believe they have seen a spider. Whether it's just a web, or they have seen an indistinct black outline, their fear overrides the violence of their action—and the spider ends up snuffed out on the bottom of a boot, a newspaper, or whatever the individual prefers. "[Joelle's] hideously deformed face [is] either veiled or blanked out" already, so her appearance poses somewhat less of a threat than the spider's (788).

Still the film hones in on the distinctiveness of Joelle's body and her most precious physical features, yet the film isn't simply about Joelle herself, but about the more universal maternal feminine. The film depicts only what is instantly recognizable as the maternal feminine, and thus Joelle and the female figure are transformed into an object, an outline, a figure, a body. Her legend (the feminine), like the Black Widow, is constructed only from her instantly recognizable external assets.

Not only is the female figure represented by essentialist logic, but even the imagery used to describe her is dubious. To explain, when the red hourglass on a spider's abdomen is enough to bring to mind the image of a Black Widow spider, the offense becomes clear. Not only is the spider diminished to a single physical feature, but that feature (a red hourglass) is given meaning and symbolism of its own. The red hourglass is read as a kind of warning to the spider's deadly intentions. Without ever getting to voice herself (not that she can), the Black Widow is first represented by one distinct physical feature and additionally interpreted by what one distinctive physical feature symbolizes, which is in this case 'danger.' The same can be said of the women of *Infinite Jest*. Before we get to hear anything they have to say, we are forced to perceive them

through the narrow focus of the camera's "perceptual eye," not only in the *Entertainment* itself, but as we have seen through a lens-like narrative technique and James' dubious production moniker (835).

OTHER 'SUBJECTS'

"It's poignant somehow that you always use the word *Subjects* when you mean the exact obverse"—Hal to Orin (during a phone conversation) (Wallace p1008n110).

Orin Incandenza is a complicated and interesting character whose hyper-masculinity and relentless seduction strategies, place him directly into the crosshairs of this study. The exact obverse of the word *subject* is *object*. Hal's words hope to inspire Orin to admit his objectification of women and to "call it what it is" (p1008n110). Yet, Orin persists in his distorted and vilifying notions of femininity, an outlook which eventually catches up with him when Luria P. plays out the "murder" portion of the "mother-death-cosmology" (230).[27] Orin's situation is a kind of analogy for masculinity in the entire novel. Even though a masculine subjectivity (not just James' or Orin's, or even Wallace's) persists in its distorted and vilifying notions of femininity until the feminine is all but snuffed out, that outlook will eventually catch up with it.

Though Orin does not find the redemption that Hal hopes for him, when Orin talks about his "Subjects," he reveals how some women adapt to being emptied of meaning (566). As Orin suggests, certain women, albeit "a kind of narrower demographic psychological range of potential 'Subjects,'" use sex as a means of adaptation (p1009n110). However, even Orin admits that "he never said" any of his tactics were "no miss" (p1009n110). Orin explains that his sexual conquests are:

> Never [about] love … rather hope, an immense, wide-as-the-sky hope of finding something in each Subject's fluttering face [that will somehow] pay its tribute [to Orin's] need to be assured that for a moment he *has* her … he has *won* her … he *has* her and [that] he is what she sees and all she sees, that it is not conquest but

> surrender … that he has *it,* [*her* love] … that for one second she loves him too much to stand it, that she *must* (she feels) have him … or else dissolve into worse than nothing; that all else is gone; that her sense of humor is gone, her petty griefs, triumphs, memories, hands, career, betrayals, the death of pets— that there is now inside her a vividness vacuumed of all but his name: O., *O.* That he is the One. (*original emphasis,* 566)

Primarily, the first thing Orin looks for in "each Subject," is "something [that will somehow] pay its tribute [to Orin's] need to be assured" (566). Elizabeth Grosz writes;

> Man is unable to accept the debt of life, body, nourishment, and social existence he owes the mother. One could go as far to say that the idea of God is nothing but an elaborate unconscious strategy for alleviating man's guilt about this debt … Born of woman's body, man devises religion, philosophy, and true knowledge not simply as sublimations of his desire, but as forms of disavowal of this maternal debt. ("sexual difference," 121)[28]

Orin obviously doesn't bring up the maternal, but Grosz's point is that "man" creates all kinds of myths and philosophies in order to "alleviate [his] guilt about this debt," or in order for Orin to fulfill his "need to be assured" (121, Wallace 566). Because Orin does not bring up the maternal, I would argue that he is unconscious of the root of his desires. In fact, this particular "strategy" is only one in a long list that Orin performs in order to seduce women. There's no real evidence for how many strategies Orin actually has, but the above is "4," and there are at least "7" (Wallace p1009n110, p1008n110). Clearly, Orin has created multiple "sublimations of his desire," all linking back to his "disavowal of this maternal debt" (Grosz "sexual difference," 121).

What's also disturbing about Orin's description is the fact that; "for a moment he *has* her … he has *won* her … he *has* her and [that] he is what she sees and all she sees, that it is not conquest but surrender" (Wallace 566). Hence, the woman really has no choice in the matter, in the face of Orin's overwhelming presence, she "surrenders" her will (566).[29] Orin seems less interested in what the women's face reveals about the women themselves, and more interested in what the women's face reveal about him. The notion that Orin can even read all of this information in the "Subject's fluttering face" is another example of how the masculine misreads the feminine according only to her physical traits, and not things like "her petty griefs, triumphs, memories, career, betrayals, the death of pets," which might make her character more substantial (566).

This "narrower demographic psychological range of potential 'Subjects" that Orin seeks lose themselves in him, they lose their identity in him, becoming empty "vacuum[s] of all but his name" (p1009n110, 566). What's interesting is that this has already happened to the feminine. Indeed, the female-figure is already "nothing," and Orin merely exploits that (566). Whatever Orin's "Subjects" had before they were seduced by him, is more than they were given in the novel itself. In fact, I would love to know more about Avril, or Joelle, or Notkin's "petty griefs, triumphs, memories, hands, career, betrayals," or even the "death of pets" (566). Any detail might be a nice respite from the fact that the *Entertainment* has already drained the feminine of all that she stands for. Orin might come along and try to pick up the pieces, but his motivations are selfish, like most of the masculine presences in the book. It seems that in more than one instance in the novel, the masculine converges on the idea that they can and must "have" the feminine (566). Thus, the feminine becomes truly "vacuous," her once "vividness" gone, now with nothing left at her center but the overwhelming presence of the masculine (566).

MOTHER-DEATH-COSMOLOGY

The testimony gleaned from the U.S.O.U.S.'s interrogation of Molly Notkin reiterates a lot of Joelle's own descriptions of her role as star of the *Entertainment*. Given that Notkin was not involved in the creation of the film, we have to assume that she received most of her information from Joelle. That being said, it is not explicitly clear as to what degree Notkin summarizes Joelle's personal views and interpretations of the film and how much she reveals of her own. Likewise, the manner in which Notkin receives the information from Joelle is not made clear, which leaves us wondering if Notkin's testimony is an act of betrayal to a friend who may have confided in her? Given Notkin's unclear bond with Joelle, these doubts about Notkin's character compromise the validity of her testimony. Yet, whatever Notkin's motivations are in her testament to Joelle's own account of the film, she clearly isn't making it all up. In fact, at certain points in her testimony, Notkin seems reticent.

For what it's worth, Notkin informs her interrogator that (Joelle) "had never mentioned the fate or present disposition of the unreleased cartridge entitled *Infinite Jest (V)* or *Infinite Jest (VI)*, and had described it only from the perspective of the experience of performing in it, nude, and had never seen it" (789). Indeed, Joelle's knowledge of the lethal samizdat revolves around the perspective of the lens, since this is either all Joelle can remember of the "experience," or all she discloses (to either her interrogator or to Notkin) (789). Notkin's testimony on the other hand, is less about the film's perspective/lens, and instead more concerned with the "present disposition" of the film's "substance" (789, 788). Again, there's no way to tell by exactly what means Notkin obtains such detailed knowledge of the deadly *Entertainment*, but her interest in it's content most likely comes from her "pre-doctoral status in Film & Film Cartridge Theory"

(223). In other words, Notkin is more than capable of spinning her own theories about the film's "present disposition" from whatever or however Joelle had informed her.

> —Molly Notkin tells the U.S.O.U.S. operatives that her understanding of the après-garde Auteur J.O. Incandenza's lethally entertaining *Infinite Jest (V or VI)* is that it features Madame Psychosis (Joelle) as some kind of maternal instantiation of the archetypal figure Death … her hideously deformed face either veiled or blanked out … anamorphosized into unrecognizability as any kind of face by the camera's apparently very strange and novel lens. (788)

Though Notkin presents on an 'either-or' scenario to explain whether Joelle's face was veiled or blanked she settles on the fact of Joelle's face being "unrecognizable," which at the very least substantiates Joelle's insistence that "[her] face wasn't important" (788, 940). Since both women agree on that particular fact, it follows that Notkin would not perceive Joelle to be the sole subject of the film.

Given that Notkin is confronted about her involvement with the film in a rather unorthodox way,[30] there is reason enough for her play down the extent of her knowledge. Yet, if Notkin is sort of 'playing-dumb,' then it's the explicit detail of her confession and her choice of words that give the act away. She confesses that the cartridge features Madame Psychosis:

> —explaining in very simple childlike language to whomever the film's camera represents that Death is always female, and that the female is always maternal. I.e. that the woman who kills you is always your next life's mother. This, which Molly Notkin said didn't make too much sense to her either, when she heard it, was the alleged substance of the Death-cosmology Madame Psychosis was supposed to deliver in a lalating [sic] monologue to the viewer, mediated by the

> very special lens … that this is why mothers are so obsessively, consumingly, drivenly, and yet narcissistically loving of you, their kid: the mothers are trying frantically to make amends for a murder neither of you quite remember. (788, 789)

To begin, we can see that what appears to be "explained simply," is not "very simple" at all (788). Though Notkin starts off sounding unsure of "who" the "film's camera represents" it's in the her choice of the word "lalating" [sic] that gives the act away (788). *Lallation* of course describes the mispronunciation of the letter "R" to sound like the letter "L," which is commonly associated with infantile gibberish and baby-talk. Notkin obviously does realize that the "weird wobble-lensed 'I'm-so-terribly-sorry monologue scene" is directed toward what is by all accounts[31] "the visual field of an infant" (230).

Both Notkin and Joelle give the impression of being confounded by the "alleged substance" of the film's "Death-cosmology," given that Joelle's calls it "incoherent" and that "it didn't make too much sense to [Notkin] either" (788, 230). However, I think Joelle's befuddlement is more genuine than Notkin's, and that Notkin's confusion is rather feigned. But whether or not this is true, it's not the validity of either woman's testimony that should worry us the most, it's the "alleged substance of the Death-cosmology" itself (788). There is far too much at stake to say that neither woman's testimony is valid or true, because there is still the question of what makes the film so lethally entertaining? However unreliable and even questionable both Joelle and Notkin's testimonies are, to say that they are made up or that they account for nothing is a dead end for solving the mystery of the film's deadly appeal.[32]

Both Joelle and Notkin suspect that not only is the subject of the film a 'feminine figure' (and not simply Joelle), but a maternal one. To add insult to injury, Notkin tells us that this

maternal figure also represents "the archetypal figure Death" (788). So, whether Notkin wants it to or not, whether she realizes it or not, the "alleged substance of Death-cosmology" begins to take shape (788). Notkin states that "the woman who kills you is always your next life's mother," so if motherhood implies murder then by giving birth and giving life, mothers are solely responsible for mortality. This must be why mothers are so doting and affectionate to their children, because they are trying to make up for the fact of bringing a child into a world of where death is inevitable. Since neither the mother nor the kid "quite remember" the murder, the mother's overwhelming affection comes off as natural (789).

The culpability of the maternal, as expressed by the film, is similar to Simone de Beauvoir's myth of the "eternal feminine" (Beauvoir, *Introduction*). Beauvoir's myth functions as a description of all the terrifying processes of fertility and reproduction that arise from male discomfort with the fact of his birth and the inevitability of his death. Beauvoir points out that man often conflates woman with her womb. He lumps all those mysterious processes of life and reminders of death, which both confuse and frighten him, under a single dismissive myth or conflation (*Introduction*). To be sure, the *Entertainment* too lumps the mysteriousness of woman and her womb under one single dismissive representation—i.e. the "mother-death-cosmology" (Wallace 230). This isn't a surprising logic for the *Entertainment*, since we already know that as a *speculum* the film is able to "shed light on secrets and pierce the mystery of the woman's sex" (Moi 130). What is surprising about both the film and Beauvoir's myth is the supposed "cosmic" origin of the "mother-death" logic, and the "eternal" element of Beauvoir's myth which suggest that these dismissive representations have been around a long time (*Introduction*).

Cosmology is the study of the nature and origin of the universe. If "mother-death" is *cosmological*, it must mean that the female/feminine has been humiliatingly conflated with

"death" ever since the universe originated (Wallace 230). The same case can be made for Beauvoir's myth. If woman is "eternally" conflated with her womb, than the myth of the feminine stretches outwardly toward the future as well as back to the creation of the universe (*Introduction*). Thus, if both logics have been around for a long time, then what makes the content of the film so troubling now?

Elizabeth Grosz argues that the "culture's debt to maternity" has not yet been paid, but the truly distressing thing about the film, which Notkin's testimony reveals, is that the film depicts not simply a maternal-Death figure, but a maternal-Death figure apologizing to a camera lens we already know to represent "the visual field of an infant" (Wallace 230, Grosz "ethics of alterity," 179). Grosz writes;

> Man is unable to accept the debt of life, body, nourishment, and social existence he owes the mother. One could go as far to say that the idea of God is nothing but an elaborate unconscious strategy for alleviating man's guilt about this debt … Born of woman's body, man devises religion, philosophy, and true knowledge not simply as sublimations of his desire, but as forms of disavowal of this maternal debt. ("sexual difference,"121)

Accordingly, "one could go as far to say that the idea of [a mother-death-cosmology] is nothing but an elaborate unconscious strategy for alleviating man's guilt about his debt to maternity" (Wallace 230, Grosz 121). Clearly man has created the philosophy of "mother-death-cosmology" as the ultimate "form of disavowal" to the maternal and to the feminine (121). What I mean here is that not only does the existence of a "mother-death-cosmology" in the film "alleviate guilt" and "disavow man's debt to maternity," it also displaces this guilt onto the maternal-Death figure herself (Wallace 230, Grosz 121). To be clear, the film doesn't simply represent the maternal as

deserving little credit for her role as life-giver, but depicts her as feeling bad about it and even apologizing for it.

So then, we see a reversal of Grosz's logic in the *Entertainment*. Instead of man owing debt to maternity, maternity owes debt to man, and the film functions as the means through which that message can be distributed.[33] The film is supposed to be James Incandenza's masterpiece and *most* entertaining film. In fact, the film is so compellingly entertaining that it is deadly to view. Once the viewer makes the choice to watch the film, he or she is powerless to resist and will go on watching the film at the cost of their will, and eventually their life. While something similar to the logic of "mother-death-cosmology" may have been around for a long time, it seems that the film's depiction of this logic is creating new and unpredictable effects (Wallace 230). Yet, is it the message or "substance" of the film making it lethal to view (788)?

Both Joelle and Notkin have already ruled out Joelle's alluring beauty as the source of the film's new and unpredictable effects. Rémy Marathe explains that locating the original cartridge and then disseminating it to U.S. citizens is not simply revenge for the "Reconfiguration" or a desire to kill anyone, but moreover to prove that Americans will choose "death from pleasure" (318). I think Marathe is onto something here when he describes watching the film as "death from pleasure" (318). The "pleasurable" aspect of the film must mean that there is a comfort in being made aware of a "mother-death-cosmology" (318, 230). Since neither the mother, nor the kid can "quite remember the murder," it must follow that they are also not aware of the "cosmology" (789). Perhaps the film's deadliness derives from the viewer becoming aware of "mother-death-cosmology," which seems to have been around for a very long time, yet continually forgotten (230). Ultimately, from watching the film, the 'victims' are able to recall

who is responsible for their murder (their mother), yet in the meantime basically kill themselves from being so rapt with attention—i.e. "death from pleasure" (318).

We can already read many signs of the *Entertainment*'s as "taking it upon itself to represent" and even replace the feminine and the maternal (Grosz "ethics of alterity," 179). In an ironic reversal of the film's own logic, we see that the film assumes her so-called 'role' so completely, that it becomes responsible for murder and death in its own right. But before we get too lost in the effects of the *Entertainment* on the 'victims' who see it, let's consider the effects of a logic of "mother-death-cosmology" on those who live amongst it (Wallace 230).

To begin, Notkin admits that "Madame Psychosis had confessed to her that the widow (Avril Incandenza) struck her as very possibly Death incarnate … and that it [was] bizarre that it was she, Madame Psychosis (Joelle), whom the Auteur kept casting as various feminine instantiations of Death when he had the real thing right under his nose"—meaning Avril (790). For Joelle, Avril literally embodies the role that she merely performs. However, even though Joelle dislikes Avril, and even sees her as "the real Death incarnate," she does not cite Avril alone as the subject of the *Entertainment* (790). Notkin tells us that "Madame Psychosis tended to believe [the creation of the film] had represented little more than the thinly veiled cries of a man at the very terminus of his existential tether" even remarking that the "Auteur [was] extremely close to his own mother, in childhood" (789). Joelle offers no further motive for the film's creation, nor does she accuse anyone else of being the film's subject. She simply assures us that nobody in James' life, including his own mother, could have been inspiration for the *Entertainment,* except for James 'Himself' (16).

Notkin, on the other hand, does not hesitate to point the blame. Not only does Notkin believe that the content of the film was inspired by Avril, she also believes that James' "self-

erasure (suicide)" was prompted by her as well (791). Notkin imagines "that the intolerable stresses leading to the Auteur's self-erasure had probably way less to do with film … but rather much more likely to do with the fact his widow-to-be (Avril) was engaging in sexual enmeshments with just about everything with a Y-chromosome … including possibly the Auteur's son (Orin Incandenza), as a child" (791).[34]

At this point, though several characters have other theories, there is plenty of evidence which marks the *Entertainment* as depicting not one individual female, but as the maternal feminine whose cultural role is demonized, yet ultimately subsumed. As the "book's primary symbol" the *Entertainment* has drained all other more genuine representations of femininity from seeing the light of day, or even being considered (Boswell 126). Likewise, as a *speculum* the *Entertainment* illuminates other representations of the maternal, in order to see how the film's logic has changed and tainted how they must be read.

THE MOMS

By the subject "The Moms," I speak of both Avril Incandenza, whom her sons cleverly nickname "The Moms" and of the other mom(s) who appear in the text (Wallace 11). The logic implied by a "mother-death-cosmology" carries weight for not only all of the females within the text, but for mother's especially (230). If Notkin can be trusted, and the logic of the film followed accordingly, then "the female is always maternal" and so there is no differentiation between a female that is without child and a female that is with child (788).

"The Moms," Avril Incandenza, is mother to Orin, Mario, and Hal, and widow to James (Wallace 230, 11). In the opening groundwork of the novel, we meet the characters Hal and Orin for the first time. In a flashback, the reader is taken to a memory of Hal's childhood where Hal eats mold and is showing this to his mother. Yet, this event is not even Hal's own memory. In reality, Hal does not remember this event. Hal describes the flashback as his "retelling" of Orin's "first memory" of "the Moms" (10, 11). Thus, our introduction to the first female character in the novel becomes a tale told twice-removed through male perspective. Orin's memory of his mother is particularly vilifying. As Hal retells it, Orin's "first memory" of "The Moms," was that her "path around the yard [was] a broad circle of hysteria (in reaction to Hal's "I ate this" [mold] confession)" (11). In Orin's memory, Avril does nothing to save her son, nor does she rush him to the hospital; she simply paces in a sort of perfectly geometrical state of madness, yelling "Help! My son ate this!" (11).

Although Avril is rather physically present in this scene and executes a strangely perfect geometric form even in her hysteria, she isn't really there for her sons as a traditional mother-figure. She's there corporeally, but not intimately. This non-intimate portrayal of Avril is most likely the result of the remembrance being told as twice removed in the male-perspective, not to

mention the fact that Orin is not the biggest fan of Avril. What I mean to say is that the maternal-feminine is depicted from the perspective of a male subjectivity, not once, but twice in this case. As Ofelia Shutte reminds us, to Irigaray, "the notion of sexual difference is only oppressive when posited from the standpoint of a masculinist logic or set of values" (52). Thus, the depiction of Avril as present corporeally, but not intimately (though it may be accurate) is "oppressive" because it is "posited from a masculinist standpoint of value" (52). Indeed, Orin does not lovingly ponder over his mother, instead she occupies his nightmares.

A bit later in the narrative, the reader meets "The Moms" again—not as a character in and of herself, but as the "mother figure" that haunts Orin's dreams (Wallace 46). This haunting "dream scene" is the first time that "The Moms" actual name is revealed as "Mrs. Avril M. T. Incandenza" (46). Presenting her full name, i.e. surname, middle initial and last name of her late husband is professional and serious. Being officially named *should* allude to Avril's authority; however the description that follows contradicts this interpretation of Avril. Orin goes on to describe the disturbing dream where "the Mom's disconnected head [is] attached face-to-face to his own fine head, strapped tight to his face" (46). Unlike Orin's "first memory" of Avril where she is corporeally present, Avril has now become a disembodied head (11). Yet, no matter how disembodied Avril may appear in this scene, the image of Avril's "disconnected head … strapped tight to [Orin's] own fine head" effects a rather clear image of smothering (46).

In her essay called "Anti-Interiority: Compulsiveness, Objectification, and Identity in *Infinite Jest*," Elizabeth Freudenthal writes "Avril's compulsiveness facilitates more control over the sights, smells, objects, and people of her domestic space than she'd ever get by directly embodying either traditional motherhood or its opposite (200, 210). I think Freudenthal is right, but I do think that Avril "embodies" both "traditional motherhood and its opposite" in other

ways (210). Grosz elucidates on what I mean when she writes, mothers' "risk choking or smothering their child with an excess that fills it to the point of freezing, or leaves it starving for more" ("sexual difference," 121). "As the silent unrecognized support," mothers become either the kind who "'give too much' i.e. the suffocating mother" or the kind who "'give too little' i.e. the selfish mother" (121). The "suffocating mother" and "the selfish mother" represent two extremes of maternity in a culture which refuses to acknowledge the woman who is, and is more than the mother" (121). Avril is both. In one memory, she is "giving too little," and the other she is literally "smothering" Orin in his nightmares (121).

Like the geometrically perfect path of hysteria Avril assumes in Orin's "first memory" of her, she also assumes an almost celestial hold over Hal, rather than a traditional bond between mother and son (11). According to Hal, Avril has "this way of establishing herself in the *exact center* of any room" which he describes as "unsettling" (*original emphasis*, 521). Avril's presence "in the *exact center*" of the room is an interesting image of doubling/mirroring for the *Entertainment* itself, the "absent center" of the novel (Boswell 126, Wallace 521). Hal asserts that whenever "Avril [enters] a room, any sort of pacing [reduces] to orbiting, and Hal's pacing [becomes] vaguely circular" (521). Thus, Avril is so corporeally significant, so physically present, that she literally distorts and controls Hal's attention. And here we find another image of doubling; like Avril, the *Entertainment* is so significant, it controls and distorts our perception of the maternal-feminine. It's clear that Avril has a strong effect of an almost celestial gravitation on Hal, as does the *Entertainment*, in that it too affects almost everything around it.

Interestingly, Orin "once described Avril … during a late-night round of Family Trivia, as The Black Hole of Human Attention" (521). A *Black Hole* is a deformation of space-time and at its center there is a singularity, which is a very compact mass. Around a black hole there is an

event horizon, or 'point of no return,' because even light cannot escape its boundaries. Its 'blackness' derives from the fact that it absorbs all light and reflects none. Thus, as "The Black Hole of Human Attention," Avril doesn't sound very motherly or emotionally inviting (521). Perhaps for Orin then the logic of a "mother-death-cosmology is very true and believable (230). Yet, Avril is not responsible for Orin's murder. Orin is killed by Luria P., so by the logic represented in the film, perhaps she will be Orin's mother in the "next life" (788). Whatever the case may be, we can see that as a mother figure, Avril is elided by a masculinist logic and judged harshly for every move that she makes.

Peculiarly, when Helen "Hugh" Steeply talks about Hank Hoyne, a victim of the *Entertainment*, he explains "His world's as if it has collapsed into one small bright point" (508). The description of 'victim' Hank Hoyne contrasts with Avril's. While Avril is a "Black Hole;" absent of all light, the victim's "world" is "one small *bright* point" (*my emphasis,* 521, 508). Even though Hoyne has chosen the pleasure of watching the *Entertainment* over life, he is literally painted in a more positive light than Avril. Avril apparently has darkness at her core, which colors her character as having nothing good, nor positive, nor redeeming, while Hoyne at least has light, and the possibility of something good, positive, and perhaps even redeeming. Yet, before I cast blame, this is only Orin's description of Avril, and not an opinion shared by all. Still, Avril's situation, as being judged and elided by a masculinist logic or value, even if it is just Orin's, is analogous to the effects of viewing the deadly *Entertainment*. As deadly as the *Entertainment* is to watch, its masculinist take on the feminine is worse, and so Avril cannot be the only one hurt by its dismissive representation. Even though Hank Hoyne eventually dies, Avril and other maternal feminine have it worse off than he does in that they are the truly "absent figures" of *Infinite Jest* (Boswell 126).

Another mother-figure found in the narrative is Mildred Bonk. If any character embodies the logic of a "mother-death-cosmology," more so than even Avril herself, it is Mildred Bonk (230). Bonk joins Ennet House for crack and alcohol addiction, among other things. During a Boston AA meeting, she delivers a graphic and disturbing speech about her experiences as an addict, explaining how she "smoked Eightballs of freebase cocaine like a fiend all through her pregnancy even though she knew it was bad for the baby and wanted desperately to quit" (376). Here, Bonk is clear in her ideals. She hopes to be a traditional mother, doting, careful and healthy. However, Bonk is an addict and she knows this. In this case, Bonk's addiction is stronger than her desire to be what is traditionally defined as a 'good mother.' After awhile, she "finally delivers … a still umbilically linked dead infant" and when she sees it, she gets "introduced to the real business-end of the arrow of responsibility" (376). In other words, she is aware that she has failed in her attempt to be the ideal mother-figure. Yet, instead of accepting "responsibility" for her failure, she is so "overcome with grief and self-loathing that she [erects] a fortification of complete and black Denial" (377). Bonk's "black Denial" goes so far that she "[holds] and swaddl[es] the dead thing just as if it were alive instead of dead" and she begins "to carry it around with her wherever she [goes], just as she imagin[es] devoted mothers carry their babies with them wherever they go" (377).

There are several important layers to assess in Bonk's story. First of all, Bonk literally gives birth to death, meaning that unlike Luria P., not only is Bonk the "woman that kills," but also the "kid's mother" (788). Just like the example of Luria P., Bonk's scenario doesn't follow the logic of "mother-death-cosmology" to a tee (230). In order for Bonk's story to line up perfectly with "mother-death-cosmology," she would have to kill her "kid," and then be the

"kid's mother" in the "next-life" (230, 788). Unfortunately for Bonk, these two events happen simultaneously.

According to "mother-death-cosmology" the reason mothers are so doting to their "kid" is that they are trying to apologize for its murder in the past life, however Bonk conflates her past life with the present (230, 788). As a result, Bonk "denies" her infant's death, and follows through with her apologies anyway, trying to perform the role of a "devoted" mother even after she has already killed her child (377). According to the logic of "mother-death-cosmology," Mildred Bonk is simply doing 'what all mothers do' eventually. In any case, through Bonk's speech, we (as the audience) get to witness a supposedly real scenario of how "mother-death-cosmology" might actually play out in reality (230). Though Bonk's story conflates the timeline a bit, she can be thought of as living example of the mother-death figure that the *Entertainment* represents. Even though Bonk's story sort of plays out the logic of a "mother-death-cosmology," that doesn't mean that the *Entertainment*'s representation of this logic is any less dismissive or demonizing toward the maternal-feminine (230). Not all females or mothers are like Mildred Bonk, or any part of the "mother-death-cosmology" for that matter (230). The fact that the *Entertainment* urges otherwise is another reason its content is so truly distressing.

THE WOMB OF SOLIPSISM

Both Joelle and Notkin are relatively unreliable sources when it comes to what they know for sure about the *Entertainment*. The only person that could possibly know more about the film than Joelle and Notkin is James O. Incandenza "Himself," but he is dead. Yet, before we surrender or conclude that there is nothing definitive to say about the film, the novel gives us one more shot to figuring out the deadly samizdat.

Though not necessarily as good as being 'brought-back-from-the-dead,' the wraith character is by all accounts the apparition of the dearly departed James Incandenza. The wraith uncannily resembles James, sounds like James, knows what is going with the Incandenza family and E.T.A., and explains many things that "he himself" had done "when animate," which align perfectly with what we know of James' life (835).

The wraith character appears to Gately as he recovers from the bullet wound injury he receives during the flight with Canadian thugs outside of the Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House [sic]. In the hospital, Gately goes in-and-out of consciousness, and in-and-out of "pain-and-fever-dreams" (830). He explains "who [knows] what [is] necessary or normal for a self-proclaimed generic wraith" (829). Gately also "considers the up-front dream quality of the dream he [is] dreaming," but is "so confused that his eyes roll back in his head" (830). In response, "the wraith [makes] a weary morose gesture as if not wanting to bother to get into any sort of confusing dream-v.-real controversies" (830). The wraith is the closest thing we have to the auteur 'Himself,' and although it's yet another unreliable source, it's another perspective through which to gather information about the film.

The wraith explains to Gately that "very few wraiths [have] anything important enough [to say]" that they would be "willing to stand still for the kind of time" it takes to "interface"

with “animate men” (831). This particular wraith, on the other hand, “is willing” and has something very “important” to say (831).

The wraith imparts to Gately that the deadly *Entertainment* was made for his “muted son,” which, if we can assume that the wraith is indeed the apparition of James Incandenza, must be Hal Incandenza (838). Hal’s “mutedness” puts him in a similar class to the feminine. Like the feminine, Hal is “Human scenery … seen (but not heard) … sort of human furniture. *Figurants* the wraith says they’re called” (838, 835). Yet, the difference between Hal and the feminine is that James acknowledges Hal “mutedness” as a problem and does everything in his power to fix it, creating the *Entertainment* itself to fix it (838). However, in James’ creation of the *Entertainment*, he paradoxically ‘mutes’ the feminine in an attempt to save his son. So it’s clear that the masculine has no problem aligning itself with an “oppressive logic of sexual difference” (Shutte 52). As a male, Hal is worth saving, while the feminine becomes scapegoat to point where she must apologize to the masculine for all of her supposed failures. The wraith even “confesses that he had, at one time, blamed the boy’s mother for his silence. But what good does that kind of thing do, he said” (837).

Like so many other characters in the novel, the wraith initially wants to blame Avril for the silence of his son. As a result, the wraith comes up with a better way of reaching his son, a “good kind of thing” (837). However, what the wraith thinks passes for a “good kind of thing” is not really good at all (837). In fact, instead of placing all the blame for Hal’s silence on Avril alone, or on one female alone, the wraith cleverly universalizes the guilt and concocts the “mother-death-cosmology” that the film depicts (230).

The wraith tells Gately that he “spent the whole sober last ninety days of his animate life working tirelessly to contrive a medium via which he and the muted son could simply *converse*.

To concoct something the gifted boy couldn't simply master and move on from to a new plateau" (*original emphasis*, 838, 839). We know that the "medium" the 'animate' wraith chooses is film, i.e. entertainment (838). The wraith also specifies that the content he wanted in the film had to be difficult and complicated enough so that the "gifted boy couldn't simply master" it (839). It seems that we (the reader/audience) may have a lot in common with Hal. Through this entire study, the *Entertainment*, and even it's "mother-death-cosmology" has proven somewhat inextricable, demonstrating how even a "gifted" scholar cannot "simply master" the medium (230, 839).

From there the wraith continues to spell out the entirety of his reasoning for the creation of the film. He assures Gately that the film was;

> Something the boy would love enough to induce him to open his mouth and come *out* … His last resort: entertainment. Make something so bloody compelling it would reverse thrust on a young self's fall into the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death-in-life. A magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant still somewhere alive in the boy … To bring him 'out of himself,' as they say. The womb could be used both ways. A way to say I AM SO VERY, VERY SORRY and have it *heard.* (839)

In this quote, the wraith uses words like *induce* and *womb*, which call to mind images of birth, and even rebirth. To *induce* generally means to stimulate, yet here I think the wraith's use of the word has more to do with the word's association with birth, than its general definition. The *induction* of a birth can be brought on naturally as well as artificially. The wraith has already explained that he had tried every kind of *natural* remedy for his son's silence, so the next logical

step is something *artificial*. Though indeed a "contrived medium," the film was the wraith's "last resort" and so apparently it supposed to act as the *artificial* stimulus to Hal's rebirth (838, 839).

In the above quote, the wraith also mentions "the *womb* of solipsism" as being the direction in which Hal is "falling" (839). "The *womb* of solipsism" is a bad place considering the fact that "solipsism" is an over exaggerated self-interest and the *womb* is a place where Hal can find comfort in his solace (839).[35] The fact that the wraith wants to direct Hal away from "solipsism" is not my point of contention, in fact I think its noble and caring (839). It's the wraith's wish to direct Hal away from "the *womb* of solipsism" that really worries me (839). In order to protect himself, or if Hal were scared, he would indeed throw his arms up over his head and assume the fetal-position (like most anyone would), being comforted by the mimicry of his position within the *womb*. Accordingly, the *womb* imagery would make sense if Hal really were protecting himself in this way, but he isn't. The film is the wraith's "contrived" and *artificial* means of giving Hal all the protection and saving he requires, which basically removes Hal's need for the *natural womb* of his mother and any maternal-infant bonding associated with it (838). So then, the truly appalling thing about "the *womb* of solipsism" from which Hal needs rescuing, is not "solipsism" at all, but the fact that it's a "*womb*" (839). It being a "*womb*" implies that the maternal-feminine is responsible for giving-birth to Hal's exaggerated self-interest in the first place (839). Again, it's dismissive and reductive to conflate woman with her *womb*, yet the film casts blame on the feminine for Hal's "fall toward solipsism" by borrowing the word for its own disturbing purposes (839).

Even more troubling, the wraith's explanation ends with the line "the *womb* could be used both ways," meaning it is being used for dual purposes (*my emphasis*, 839). The double-meaning (i.e. the dual purpose) of the "*womb*" indicates that while Hal's "fall into the *womb* of

solipsism" must be avoided, the wraith has fitted Hal with an *artificial womb* via the experience of watching the film (839). While both *wombs* are appealing to Hal, the film is meant to be *more* appealing and to "reverse thrust on his fall into" the former (839). Thus, even while the wraith conflates woman with her womb, he still chooses the same vocabulary to describe his own, albeit *artificial* "medium" (838). Though the film's *womb* may be *artificial*, it removes the need for a mother-figure at all, taking the female out of the entire birthing-equation.

Hal's artificial *womb* is created "to bring [Hal] 'out of himself'" (879). In one sense, Hal is a passive recipient of salvation, in another, he can literally rebirth himself, becoming self-reliant. In my opinion, whether Hal passively receives salvation, or becomes self-reliant and rebirths himself, his "fall" toward "solipsism" starts all over again (879). The wraith obviously thinks that by removing the mother-figure from reproduction to begin with, he can end the cycle and "reverse [Hal's] fall" (879). The *natural womb* of the mother, according to the wraith, is not what Hal requires; in fact, the mother's *womb* may be what led Hal astray to begin with. Thus, not only is the mother-figure completely removed from the birth-process, she is associated with Hal's back-peddle, or "fall in to solipsism" (839). Subsequently, the mother-figure's *womb,* one of her most precious assets and distinctive physical features, is taken from her and turned into a "magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant" (839). However, this "toy" does not titillate Hal so much as it teases, toys and mocks the feminine, reminding the female that even her unique physical design can be taken from her to be recreated and turned artificial (839). Like Irigaray's *speculum,* "while [the film] imitates its object, it also objectifies the object of its gaze" (Moi 130).

Recall that none of the descriptions of the film preclude one another, and if one seems to have harsher implications for the feminine, it is only because of the limited perspective of the

character through which we are hearing about the film. Indeed, the film "imitates" and simultaneously "objectifies" the feminine in just about every possible way (130). Likewise, as *speculum* the *Entertainment* has emptied, repressed and replaced the feminine to the point of her becoming the real "absent center" of *Infinite Jest* (Boswell 126). The attempt of the film to take the empty space that itself created and fill it with a replica of a real woman, is by far its most egregious fault. Though the *womb* is obviously not woman's only precious feature, the *Entertainment* as *speculum* hones in on it as if it were, offering itself up as a replacement for and remedy to the mother-figures that have supposedly failed so many of the characters. Through the *speculum* of the *Entertainment*, we come to know the female characters through essentialist logic of sexual difference. The *Entertainment,* steeped in its "masculine subjectivity," has "taken it upon itself to represent the feminine" (Grosz "ethics of alterity," 179). The *Entertainment* not only "objectifies" and "imitates" the feminine, but "pierces" right through, exposing all of her "secrets," "mystery," and effectively removing her power, her voice, and her ability to be anything more than a body or vague outline—"a *figurant*" (Moi 130, 131; Wallace 835).

INFINITE JEST (*V*) *OR* (*IV*)? WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The deadly *Entertainment*, or better *Infinite Jest* (*V*) *or* (*IV*) markedly shares its name with the title of the book. From everything we've learned about the *Entertainment* thus far, how is that similarity supposed to be read? Does the film stand-in to represent the novel itself?

In the preceding chapter of my study, I unveiled the true goal of the *Entertainment*—Not simply its reason for being created, or how it was meant to be used, but also the meaning of its content. Though the *Entertainment* plays a major role in the novel in a great many ways, perhaps its biggest and most worrisome role is its embodiment of the feminine. While the *Entertainment* "takes it upon itself to represent the feminine," the real female figures of the novel are left struggling just to be seen and heard (Grosz "ethics of alterity," 179).

While the *Entertainment* embodies femininity, the female is left merely performing the role. Thus, the female figure is the real "absent center" of the narrative, since to understand her means to see her through the lens of the *Entertainment* (Boswell 126). As we saw, even the female figures themselves began to see themselves and each other through this disturbing and distorted lens.

Yet, we can't just leave things at that. Irigaray's method of investigation calls for one final action to be taken. What we have yet to see is one of Irigaray's "wide ranging upheavals" (Grosz "ethics of alterity," 179). True, Elizabeth Grosz writes that Irigaray "accepts Freud's identification of the repressed with femininity," but takes it one step further, claiming that "if what is represented is the feminine, it is possible to regard women, not as having an unconscious, but as being it (for men, for the phallic, for patriarchy)" ("sexual difference," 107). Thus, in the same way that Freud ponders the unconscious' potential overthrow and rise to power, femininity can be seen as the "threat the unconscious poses to civilization in its symptomatic 'return'"

(Grosz "sexual difference," 107). So it seems that according to Irigaray's methodology, where there are "points of repression" there are also "sites of a symptomatic eruption of femininity" (Grosz "sexual difference," 109). Thus, Irigaray's methodology proves that the feminine is the "unconscious element" on which the *Entertainment* as a symbol thrives (Grosz "sexual difference," 103). Without the feminine, the *Entertainment* wouldn't really stand for anything. While the *Entertainment* represses and debases the feminine, it also needs the feminine, which is the confusing and double-dealing nature of Irigaray's *speculum*. Most importantly, Irigaray shows us that through metaphorical and sometimes even literal probing, what was once a novel where the feminine had been cast aside, is now a novel bubbling-over with femininity.

Elizabeth Grosz explains, Irigaray's main concerns are to place discourses "on trial, not to destroy or reject it once and for all (which is in any case both phallocentric and utopian), but to devise a series of tactics which *continually question* them" (Grosz, "sexual difference" 113). Likewise, I have no less respect for Wallace or the masterwork that is *Infinite Jest* because of its "unacknowledged debt to the feminine;" rather I believe that a novel like *Infinite Jest* thrives on interaction, intrigue and questioning (Shutte 52). I do not condemn nor am I offended by Wallace or his work.

In summary, "Irigaray's strategy is not to use the rules to win (the game is in any case rigged) but to disrupt the old game in order to initiate new ones, 'jamming the theoretical machinery' in order to enable new 'tools,' inventions and knowledge to be possible" (Grosz "sexual difference," 139). Simply put, I, like Irigaray, have placed *Infinite Jest* "on trial" in hopes of expanding its meaning to include the feminine and at the very least form "new knowledge" (Grosz "sexual difference 139). By taking the *Entertainment*, even with all of its faults and treacheries against the feminine, and turning its own lens back in on itself, I have

"jammed the theoretical machinery" of *Infinite Jest* (Grosz "sexual difference," 139). Now, an alternative representation of women in *Infinite Jest* is possible, with the *Entertainment* itself acting as the "new tool" and a more genuine representation of the feminine being the "new knowledge" (Grosz "sexual difference," 139).

Yes, *Infinite Jest* is largely a 'boys' club.' Yes, there are very few female characters in the novel. Yes, the representation of the female figures is worrisome at best. No, David Foster Wallace did not often write female characters, or from the female perspective (with a few exceptions including the *unnamed* female interviewer in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*). These are some of the numerous reasons why a gendered reading of *Infinite Jest* might not seem obvious, and why issues of gender have not been given as much weight as other prevailing themes. However, like I have stated before, acknowledging gender issues inside the text does not push the prevailing themes aside, but indeed makes for a direct confrontation between those themes and the reader. As Toril Moi explains in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, "the silences, gaps and contradictions of the text are more revealing of its ideological determinations than are its explicit statements" (94). Though not the most obvious or accessible avenue, a gendered reading of *Infinite Jest* adds to the already booming scholarly enterprise that is quickly becoming Wallace Studies.

In David Lipsky's book *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*: *A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace*, Wallace confesses that he originally titled *Infinite Jest*, "*A Failed Entertainment*" with "the idea that the book is structured as an entertainment that doesn't work" (79). I agree, in fact, I like to think of *Infinite Jest* as "*A Failed Entertainment*" because in its failures, in its fissures if you will, the feminine bubbles out (79).

Wallace sincerely states that "God, if the book comes off as some kind of indictment of entertainment, then it fails. It's sort of about our relationship to it. The book isn't supposed to be about *drugs*, getting off drugs. Except as the fact that drugs are a metaphor for the sort of addictive continuum that I think has to do with how we as a culture relate to things that are alive" (81). Not to use the author himself to support my argument (because he's not the one doing the hard work to read/interpret his novel), but I think Wallace's statement is revealing. Entertainment obviously isn't Wallace's only concern in *Infinite Jest.* I would also argue that entertainment and Wallace's employment of it as a theme is just another "sort of addictive continuum that … has [more] to do with how we as a culture relate to things that are alive" and thus it becomes a mechanism for depicting how men relate to women in the novel (81).[36]

Still, if what entertainment does is just a symptom of a larger "addictive continuum" present in "how we as a culture relate to things that are alive" then entertainment isn't the real problem (81). However, even Wallace admits that in *Infinite Jest*, and in general, "[he doesn't] have a diagnosis. [He doesn't] have a system of prescriptions. [He doesn't] have four things that [he] think[s] are wrong … It seems to [him] that it's more of a feeling, a sort of texture of *feeling*," and the pervasive question "why do we feel empty and unhappy?" (82) This study certainly answers why the female/feminine is "empty and unhappy" by the way that the characters and various subjectivities "relate to things that are alive" (82). Yet, if I have been successful as I think I have with Irigaray's methodology, in giving the feminine so much consideration, where before she had none, her figure now rises, and she is once again complete and full-bodied. Back in the proper spotlight, the feminine claims her proper place at the forefront of our imaginations, thoughts, and concerns.

NOTES AND ERRATA

[1] Called *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace*.

[2] Deconstruction interprets meaning within a text to the point of exposing the contradictions in both its logic and structure. In general, deconstruction demonstrates that texts "are not a discrete whole, but contain several irreconcilable and contradictory meanings, and thus can bear more than one interpretation." The most interesting thing that deconstruction reveals is that texts themselves inextricably "link various interpretations and that the incompatibility of these interpretations are irreducible" (Li and Cheng, 1.1).

[3] The *Entertainment* is listed as "*Infinite Jest* (*V*) *or* (*IV*)?" in footnote '24' "James O. Incandenza: A Filmography," however the film is also referred to by different names throughout the text. One being the *cartridge*, and the other being the *samizdat*, which means "a banned entertainment. The varying names for the film will be used interchangeably throughout this study —See Wallace-*Infinite Jest* (993n24).

[4] The word "victim" is used in the novel, however I tend to see the viewers of the *Entertainment* as having a choice—i.e. to view the *Entertainment* or not. Although, there are many scenes where viewing the *Entertainment* is described as an almost involuntary reflex (including the medical attaché scene), I am in agreement with the character Marathe who believes that these so called "victims" should at least exhibit a shred of resistance or will of choosing *not* to watch. Marshall Boswell exquisitely notes that "Wallace's mysterious *Entertainment* can be figured as an addiction, a product that we freely choose to embrace but which has the paradoxical end effect of robbing us of our wills" (134).

[5] Narratively-speaking, the first "victim" of the deadly *Entertainment* we encounter is the medical attaché. He views the cartridge on the evening of April 1, "Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment at 1927h." By "0020h., 2 April, [the medical attaché] has wet both his pants and the special recliner." Just before "0145h … his wife arrives back home." She "notices that the expression of rictus of [the medical attache's] face nevertheless appear[s] very positive" so "she eventually and naturally turns her head following his line of sight to the cartridge-viewer." Now, by "mid-afternoon on 2 April Y.D.A.U.: the Near Eastern medical attaché; his devout wife; the Saudi Prince Q_____'s personal physician's personal assistant … the personal physician himself …two Embassy security guards; and two neatly groomed Seventh Day Adventist pamphleteers … [are] all watching the recursive loop … looking not one bit distressed … even though the room smell[s] very bad indeed" (Wallace 37, 54, 78, 87).

[6] These varied accounts being the main focus of this study.

[7] No doubt, more can be said here about *Infinite Jest's* "refusal to fix meaning," however that would involve another extensively long study involving Roland Barthes theories about the *Death of the Author.* Though relevant and sadly fitting, this study will acknowledge its allegiance to Barthes' theories without getting caught up in them (*Death of the Author*, 147).

[8] By 'endearing' I mean that, at least in Forsterian logic, Orin's use of the term *gynecopia* is "surprising in a convincing way," qualifying Orin as one of Forster's "round" characters. Though, even as a "round" character, Orin is more complicated than his apparent hyper-masculinity, athleticism, or relentless seduction indicate (Citation?)

[9] Though of course in its almost too-often-tendency, *Infinite Jest* supplies a seemingly superfluous informational passage, not unlike an encyclopedic definition that explains, "There are just as many idioms for the female sex-organ as there are for the male sex-organ…that

females are capable of being just as vulgar about sexual and eliminatory functions as males" (Wallace 201).

[10] Andrew Steven Delfino, in his master's thesis called "Becoming the New Man in Post-PostModernist Fiction: Portrayals of Masculinities in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*," examines sexual difference from a masculine point of view. Delfino questions both normative masculinity's dominance and its underlying essentialism of sexual difference. Delfino describes *Infinite Jest* as a fictional portrayal of masculinity that "does not deal with women or respond to feminism … or even the backlash against feminism in any prominent way," and so he concentrates on "what can be learned about … masculinity … from portrayals of men among men" (3).

[11] Bustillos writes "Gender issues, to me, take a very distant back seat to what I see as the larger issues in the book … All this by way of saying that, while I like thinking about all kinds of perspectives w/r/t IJ ('with respect to' *Infinite Jest*), I think they could draw you away from the book's 'real concerns', maybe, if you gave them 'too much weight'" (Bustillos, *Wallace-1*). Bustillos goes on to clarify that she believes *Infinite Jest* is not at all concerned with "gender issues," but rather with "human issues" (Bustillos, *Wallace-1*). I agree with Bustillos wholeheartedly that *Infinite Jest* is concerned with "human issues" like communication, intimacy, success/failure, and family (Bustillos, *Wallace-1*). Indeed, these "human issues" make up a great deal of the novel's internal tension (Bustillos, *Wallace-1*). However, it is Bustillos' distinction between "gender issues" and "human issues" that I find most troubling (Bustillos, *Wallace-1*). As Bustillos sees it, if "gender issues" were given too much weight/importance, the "book's real concerns" would fall by the wayside (Bustillos, *Wallace-1*). Yet, in glossing-over the problem of "gender" Bustillos suffers the same essentialism of sexual difference found inside

the novel (Bustillos, *Wallace-1*). To remedy this, the feminine must be considered, and even contended with as an important element within and outside of the novel.

[12] This is not true of all cases. In fact, in April and May of 2010, the representation of women in *Infinite Jest* became the subject of what one Wallace-1 listserv participant Gregory Carlisle, author of *Elegant Complexity: A Study of David Foster Wallace's* Infinite Jest, called "my favorite Wallace-l thread in a long time!" (*Wallace-1*). Another prominent voice on Wallace-1 listserv Elizabeth Freudenthal, spends a few moments in her essay "Anti-Interiority: Compulsiveness, Objectification, and Identity in *Infinite Jest*" talking about "Avril's and Joelle's O.C.D. as being ways to control their own domestic space because they are living in a man's world and cannot control any other spaces, versus Johnny Gentle, whose O.C.D. allows him to control whole continents" (*Wallace-1).*

[13] Irigaray not only seeks out the unacknowledged or "repressed" feminine, she also questions phallocentrism and the masculine subject. Elizabeth Grosz summarizes Irigaray's directive when she writes, "Phallocentrism is the use of *one* model of subjectivity, the male, by which all others are positively or negatively defined. Others are constructed as variations of this singular type of subject" ("sexual difference," 105).

[14] See Irigaray-Part I of *Speculum.*

[15] Which will be discussed separately, in reference to each individual's testimony.

[16] Helen "Hugh" Steeply's androgynous sexuality blurs and complicates notions of sexual difference to a point that Luce Irigaray's work alone cannot account for it. Though it would be a very intriguing addition, there will not be a consideration of androgyny in this study.

[17] Steeply is "*pretending* to pretend to pretend to betray" to the U.S.O.U.S. (Wallace 107, 106).

[18] Though Joelle is indeed "heard" here, she is interviewed by Steeply whose cross-dressing complicates his masculinity to the point where the gender roles reverse. Joelle can be "heard" in this scene because her testimony is being filtered through Steeply's imperfect masculine perspective. Because Steeply exhibits certain feminine traits due to his cross-dressing, it is Steeply who ends up "mute," rather than Joelle (Wallace 835).

[19] Joelle Van Dyne is referred to as "P.G.O.A.T (Prettiest Girl Of All Time)" by her once boyfriend Orin Incandenza (Wallace 239). Joelle on the other hand, feels alienated by her beauty, even freakish. Joelle describes herself to Don Gately at Ennet House saying "I'm perfect. I'm so beautiful I drive anybody with a nervous system out of their fucking mind … they can't think of anything else and don't want to look at anything else … I am deformed with beauty" (538). Unfortunately for Joelle, whose real name is "Lucille Duquette," her father is a man who knows of the beauty under the veil, and it is he whom her beauty compels the furthest (795). During Molly Notkin's testimony to the U.S.O.U.S. (The United States Office of Unspecified Services), Notkin reveals that Joelle's father, whom Joelle calls "my own personal Daddy," had desired his own daughter, drilling a "hole in the bathroom wall [to peep] … ever since Madame Psychosis (Joelle) and the Auteur's son (Orin) had first arrived to sleep together" (861,794). When Joelle's mother puts all of this information together, she goes down to "Daddy's acid-lab in the cellar, to disfigure herself with acid … [but] the Mother had hurled the low-pH flask at the Daddy, who reflexively ducked; and that the rotter, one *Orin*, right behind … instinctively ducked also, leaving Madame Psychosis—open for a direct hit, resulting in the traumatic deformity" which now requires her to "hide" behind the veil (*original emphasis*, 794, 785). Joelle's use of the U.H.I.D. (Union of Hideously and Improbably Deformed) veil after the "traumatic deformity" is interesting since she explains to Gately how she already felt "deformed with beauty" (794, 538).

In this scene we see that Joelle's beauty is dangerous to both her, and to those that desire her. "Orin—punter extraordinaire, dodger of flung acid extraordinaire" promptly breaks the relationship between himself and Joelle "within months of the traumatic deformity," indicating that Joelle's beauty is all Orin ever cared about (223, 795). James on the other hand, even after Joelle's "traumatic deformity," still considers Joelle his filmic muse and he uses her in his last and greatest work, the *Entertainment* (794).

[20] Grosz also writes, "Both Irigaray and Kristeva are interested in articulating the hitherto unexpressed debt that a patriarchal symbolic order owes to femininity, and particularly to maternity," so it's clear that Irigaray is not the only theorist interested in exploring these "upheavals" ("sexual difference," 102).

[21] The term "mother-death-cosmology" comes up again in Molly Notkin's testimony regarding the *Entertainment* (Wallace 230). Through Notkin's testimony, we will learn more about what exactly "mother-death-cosmology" is, as well as what Joelle, as the maternal figure in the film is apologizing for (230). However, these revelations will be discussed at length in the following chapter of this study (230).

[22] While Joelle's testimony does reveal that she has a lot of knowledge about what went into the creation of the film, she knows very little about the results. Again, although she stars in the *Entertainment* and can recall the scenes being filmed, she does not know what went into the completed project and has never seen it for herself. Through Joelle, we (the reader/audience) may not be able to conclude much about the *Entertainment*, but whatever we don't get from Joelle, we get more than enough from Molly Notkin, who is also taken in for questioning by the U.S.O.U.S. Though Molly Notkin was not directly involved in the making of the film, she certainly reveals a lot to the agents interrogating her. Again, Notkin's wordy testimony makes us

as readers, want to re-think and re-examine scenes like Notkin's party—looking for moments when Joelle may have opened up to Notkin about the film.

[23] Chapter 4: The Womb of Solipsism will elaborate on this matter.

[24] The production company credited with the deadly *Entertainment* is "Poor Yorick Entertainment Unlimited" (Wallace 993).

[25] Luria P., on the other hand is promiscuous and sexually aggressive, and *does* kill her mate (Orin) after reproduction (well sex at least). In our introduction to Orin Incandenza we see him catching cockroaches in a glass tumbler and then killing them by blowing smoke into the jar. When Orin is brought in to the A.F.R. by Luria P., he is killed in a giant glass tumbler overflowing with roaches—see (Wallace 971, 972).

[26] You will see this quote again in Chapter 3: Mother-Death-Cosmology, but the argument will have a different focus.

[27] This will be unpacked in Chapter 3: Mother-Death-Cosmology.

[28] You will see this quote again in Chapter 3: Mother-Death-Cosmology, but the argument will have a different focus.

[29] How her act is "surrender" and not "conquest" is above me, but it doesn't really matter because both are disturbing (Wallace 566). I'm sure it makes all the difference to Orin, but even it were the other way around; I don't think he would notice.

[30] Even though Joelle is also kidnapped, her conversation with the U.S.O.U.S. is somewhat less confrontational than Notkin's.

[31] Both Molly Notkin and Joelle Van Dyne are in agreement about this particular detail. Though there are some contradictions between Joelle and Notkin's testimony they are trivial at best. Through Irigaray's methodology, in order to turn the "perceptual eye" of the film in on itself, it

is better to "hear" than dismiss what the two female characters have to say (which already happens all-too-often with this novel) (Wallace 835).

[32] Notkin is obviously isn't involved in the creation of the film. However, her removed perspective of the film still adds to our knowledge of the *Entertainment*. This scenario remarkably mimics the parable of the three blind men and an elephant, i.e. Three blind men are asked to describe an elephant; the first man stands on top of the elephant, describing the mound-like shape of the elephant's back; the second man stands under the elephant, describing the leathery tree-like legs; the third man stands back from the elephant without touching it and simply listens to the first and second men describe the elephant. Though it might seem like the third blind man gets the best perspective about what an elephant looks like, he doesn't experience it for himself, and so he must rely on the descriptions of the other two men. The point of the parable is that no one description of the elephant is better than the others', but that all perspectives are equally valuable. Let's say that in *Infinite Jest*, the first man represents the wraith's perspective, as creator of the *Entertainment*. The second man represents Joelle's perspective, as star of the *Entertainment*, a little too close to the action to give us a complete picture of the film. The third man represents Notkin's testimony. Though Notkin doesn't experience the film herself, i.e. she wasn't involved in its creation, and thankfully she doesn't watch it, her perspective is equally as valuable as both the wraith and Joelle's. All in all, the analogy here is that in order to get the most complete picture of the *Entertainment*, we must acknowledge the validity of each testimony. None of the testimonies are more valid than the others', because as I have already said they are all unreliable and doubtful for one reason or another. It is so important that all perspectives be considered, so that we end up with the most complete picture of the *Entertainment* as possible, even in the face of all of our limitations. Thus,

we are also like the three blind men, groping for a grasp on something astoundingly big and complicated.

[33] The A.F.R. (*Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents* or "The Wheelchair Assassins), F.L.Q. (*Front de libération du Québec* or "The Quebec Liberation Front"), and U.S.O.U.S are all kidnapping anyone who might have had involvement with the auteur (James). Their hunt obviously leads to the capture of Joelle and Notkin, but also Joelle's radio station intern and Poor Tony, among others. Ultimately, all agencies are drawing near to the Incandenza family, who are their primary targets. Unfortunately, Orin is seduced and taken in by Luria P.; an A.F.R. agent whom Orin thinks is merely a Swiss hand-model. In fact, for Orin, Luria P. nearly plays out the "mother-death-cosmology," in that she is responsible for his murder, but we have no way of knowing whether she "will be his next-life's mother" (Wallace 230, 788). The A.F.R. and F.L.Q. are kidnapping people because they want to get their hands on the original cartridge of the film, and the U.S.O.U.S. is simply working to prevent that. The A.F.R. and the F.L.Q. want to disseminate the deadly film to the United States, and so for them the film is literally a weapon of war.

[34] Notkin is not the only character to presume that Avril is the subject of and inspiration for the *Entertainment*. Both Orin Incandenza and Helen "Hugh" Steeply make the same presumption. According to Hal, Orin "wants to blame her (Avril), won't admit it, needs to, won't admit it, sweepingly blames the whole affair of Himself on her" (Wallace p1014n110). Just the same, Steeply presumes Avril to be the subject of the *Entertainment* because of her "prior possible involvement with" the medical attaché in service of the Saudi Prince, who also happens to be the first victim of the *Entertainment* (92). Yet, Steeply summarizes perfectly that "they're theories

and countertheories" and so Avril is not the only person to blame, and not the only person falsely represented by the film (92).

a. I should also mention that this is the second case of possible incest we have come across, the first being Joelle's situation with her "own personal Daddy" that resulted in her "tragic deformity" (Wallace 861, 785). A closer look at the concept of incest in *Infinite Jest* would certainly put an interesting twist on the idea of sexuality and sexual difference, but this topic will be explored elsewhere, perhaps in future projects.

[35] Hal even defines the term himself; "Think alienation ... Existential individuality, frequently referred to in the West ... what we're really talking about here is loneliness" (Wallace 111).

[36] In Lipsky's book, Wallace also states that "Entertainment's chief job is to make you so riveted by it that you can't tear your eyes away … And the tension in the book [*Infinite Jest*] is to try to make it at once extremely entertaining—and also sort of warped, and to sort of shake the reader awake about some of the things that are sinister in entertainment" (79). Wallace isn't trying to say that entertainment itself is sinister, but that entertainment is pleasurable, yet does not give the viewer sustenance. He states, "the thing that's sinister about it is that the pleasure that it gives you to make up for what it's missing [i.e. sustenance] is a kind of … addictive, self-consuming pleasure" (79, 80). The only thing that saves us presently is the fact that "most entertainment isn't very good" (80). The timeline of *Infinite Jest* that Stephen Burn sets roughly from 1933 to 2010, has already passed, but how long do we have until entertainment becomes "good" enough to do the kind of damage it does in the novel itself? Then again, if entertainment is just another "addictive continuum" of a larger problem, then entertainment isn't the only medium capable of doing damage, in fact, the medium isn't the problem at all, it's the fact that our culture is wiling

to “give themselves away” to “addictive, self-consuming pleasure” as opposed to genuine “sustenance” (79, 80).

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