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USA Murated Nation or, the Sublime Spherology of Security Culture

In David Foster Wallace's 1996 novel Infinite Jest, Mike Pemulis, a student enrolled at Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA), one of the story's main locations, explains annulation, a system of energy production, in the following terms:

> [C]orollarying out of the micromedical model [of annular chemotherapy] was this equally radical idea that maybe you could achieve a high-waste annulating fusion by bombarding highly toxic radioactive particles with massive doses of stuff even more toxic than the radioactive particles. A fusion that feeds on poisons and produces relatively stable plutonium fluoride and uranium tetrafluoride. All you turn out to need is access to mind-staggering volumes of toxic material.[1]

This process yields a new territorial arrangement, also popularly called the Great Concavity or Convexity depending on the vantage point; the "street argot"[2] for US citizens is "Concavity" to indicate the way in which the Reconfiguration has taken a bite out of the United States. The novel imagines a cycle of waste creation and utilization that is the result of annulation or of cold fusion, a system seeking to produce a "Tighter, Tidier" United States of America by "shooting national wastes into space,"[3] meaning inner not outer space: the states of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, northeast Massachusetts and upstate New York now forced onto Canada.

The Reconfiguration reshuffles the nation-state and larger intergovernmental military alliances: NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is dismantled to give way to ONAN, the Organization of North American Nations, a continental coalition that Marathe, a Québec separatist, thinks of as an "invasion of paper."[4] ONAN's

"paper atrocities,"[5] though, actually manifest themselves in terms of more high-tech materials, plastic, glass and mirrors, marking American borders and invariably referred to as "protective" measures—the glassy sheen of such fortifications forms a state sealed off through techno-shields. ONAN's fantasy of control takes the form of sublime machinery located at the limits of a now "renewed" United States defined as an ostensibly detoxified but in reality lethally fenced-off existence: Infinite Jest is an exploration of spectacular technological enclosure, but the novel further functions as a reflection of political "life" in the state of exception beyond the "end" of the Cold War. As such, this article insists on continuity, as opposed to a radical break announced by "September 11," in terms of the ideological systems and dominant paradigm of government in place in and outside of Wallace's book. The state fantasy that operates in Infinite Jest as well as outwith it, at present, is still largely a Cold War imaginary construct—inner-world protection/consumption of security, to name one element of this obsessive, paranoid order—so that declarations referring to the end of this "thing," the Cold War, occur too quickly.[6] The imperative, following Jacques Derrida, is to resist end-time delivery in favor of a philosophical "vigilance" targeted at and against the apocalyptic tone:

> We cannot and we must not—this is a law and a destiny—forgo the Aufklärung, in other words, what imposes itself as the enigmatic desire for vigilance, for the lucid vigil [veille], for elucidation, for critique and truth, but for a truth that at the same time keeps within itself some apocalyptic desire, this time as desire for clarity and revelation, in order to demystify or, if you prefer, to deconstruct apocalyptic discourse itself and with it everything that speculates on vision, the imminence of the end, theophany, parousia, the last judgment.[7]

In his essay on "September 11," Derrida similarly interrogates the concept of limits, on the one hand as it refers to "what is called the end of the Cold War" and hence the imposition of a term/structure that blocks off inquiry or confrontation—"9/11" in this instance is understood as an "event," unexpected, unknown—and, on the other, as it pertains to the absolute necessity and urgency of a mode of thinking that precisely refuses such limits.[8] If this "thing" of the Cold War is interminable, then philosophy, interpretation, recognition cannot "[falter] at some border or frontier"[9] but must stay wakeful, watchful, for the ends/aims of such acts of speech or seduction. What is to come, then, is an investigation that proceeds by keeping vigil, as it were, over a "thing" brought to so-called conclusion but which continues to shape politics in its "aftermath": this type of reading thereby engages with questions of enduring legacy and inheritance as well as periodization—all of which are issues that recur in contemporary scholarship on the (illimitable or, conversely, terminated) Cold War and the "terrible infinity"[10] of the "war on terror".

Arguments against continuity—by Phillip Wegner, for one, or Donald Pease—focus on the Nineties as an interregnum, a "strange space" in which the United States seeks to articulate a new state fantasy aligning citizenry with the regulatory discourse of a superpower that has, momentarily, lost its catastrophic and at the same time constitutive enemy, giving the nation an organized if not yet/ever fully accomplished existence that is simultaneously also always threatened.[11] Both Wegner and Pease talk about the attack on the Twin Towers—Wegner's discussion is situated between "two deaths," the fall of the Berlin Wall and "9/11" which in a sense "repeats" the "true Event" of 1989—as a historical break which "finally and definitely" concludes the Cold War.[12] These arguments are persuasive but nonetheless dismiss the dynamics

that return the "thing" of the Cold War to the "war on terror," which doesn't fundamentally alter the organizing metaphors or policies of the state of exception, the curious political and legal lacunae that exist at its heart,[13] yielding a condition of siege that re-affirms, "after the planes,"[14] the mechanisms and logic of the Cold War or of what Timothy Melley designates as the "covert sphere".[15] The fantasy formation that Wegner and Pease discuss is no newly configured or emergent order but a resumption of business as usual, the catastrophe of the status quo[16] that corresponds to the exceptional measures taken by a state in suspension. The periodizing argument, consequently—while in and of itself raising issues about its "intolerable and unacceptable" nature at the same time that it appears inevitable[17]—in this instance, because speaking of a radical rupture, fails to recognize the reconfiguration of the Cold War, never a monolithic "thing," into a condition of "afterness" that is blind to the idea of catastrophic continuity. The "end" of the Cold War—like democracy—is yet to come, and if Wegner begins his extraordinary study by remarking that the 1990s function in terms of a Benjaminian "moment of danger" (always here, now), then Wallace's novel, by contrast, does not demonstrate historical possibility in this pre-millennial/"post"-apocalyptic moment but, instead, comments on the prevalence of Cold War-like interior-forming state fantasies that keep structuring whatever comes "after" the "end".

The fictions at work in Infinite Jest are, by extension—because the Cold War is ongoing—also those of current US culture as state of exception which, to gesture towards Peter Sloterdijk, conceptualizes or dreams of a "spherology," a crystal palace "aesthetics of immersion".[18] The main tendency of the forces in the novel is this retreat but also failure to accomplish Sloterdijk's lost "orb motif";[19] criticism focusing

on Infinite Jest invariably picks up on those same energies, closing in, closing off, attempted to either be achieved or resisted. The culture under investigation in Wallace's long book, whose form creates a maze-like textuality or spatiality of getting lost and losing bearings, of uncontainable excess or waste,[20] overwhelmingly is that of loops, insides, enfoldings, enrapture.[21] The predominant manifestation of state desire to enter into or occupy an immersive condition of "being-in"[22] is the Lucite fortification that rings the Reconfiguration, designed as a symbol of sovereign power yet which paradoxically points to its opposite; walls are not "pure interdiction," as Wendy Brown argues, but produce "an imago of sovereign state power in the face of its undoing."[23] In her study, Brown considers Israel's security fence, referring to the US (itself appealing back to Israel) for technology and legitimacy, in light of settler colonialism built "in the name" of a state of emergency: the wall is suggestive of the suspended laws, violence, fractures of this particular technique of government that, far from temporary, has become permanent.[24] In Infinite Jest, the interior-forming shield at the border between what used to be the US and Canada operates according to the same principles; a structure of containment and mythologized interior purity, this spatial fantasy is at once an indication of immersive capture/coherence and erosion or failure, because spheric security is impossible, as well as ruinous. The novel, then, stages an investigation into the dreamworld/disaster "spherology" of the state of exception in the "afterlife" of the Cold War—undead, undying—whose political/legal emptiness and crystal palace interiority govern citizen existence as colonized subjects. The order that operates in Wallace's novel corresponds, outside, here, now, to the political realities that define, or keep indefinite, the state of exception, this "unthinkable thing"[25] that invariably incorporates the "thing" of the Cold War.

This essay, consequently, seeks to analyze ONAN's "defensive" mechanisms with reference to Cold War walling or weapons policy, most notably Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), itself a corollary of the atom bomb. If SDI and Reconfiguration machinery at times seem to merge in this discussion, it is because they are, to a certain extent, both fictions: there are only, to refer to Bruno Latour's work, differences of degree between them. Regarding the development of technology, Latour argues that there is no "frontier beyond which one really moved into matter," that texts and matter/machines continually move back and forth between each other, so that technological projects, to begin with necessarily fictions, might approach reality before losing it again, by degrees.[26] In other words, technology is concurrently spirit and matter, never quite and unequivocally one without the other; particularly in relation to such obvious fantasies as SDI, any attempt to distinguish between existing and purely fictional devices becomes problematic. The argument to follow demonstrates a latent awareness of this difficulty, in that it tends to leave open the passage between stages—in this case between SDI and fictional appropriation in Wallace's novel—in order to gesture towards the "variable geometry" of technological projects, starting out as texts, turning back into texts.[27] The implications this openness brings about is a practice of critical thinking that considers both SDI and its modification in Infinite Jest as technological fictions: similarly dream-like, articulating one of the fundamental fantasies/pathologies of the Cold War, the Reconfiguration and the state of exception, that is, spherical protection.

As Paul Edwards claims, the techno-strategic developments of the Cold War form a closed world, which simultaneously works as technology, political system and "ideological mirage."[28] In his book, Edwards investigates the American "fantasy of global control through high-technology," which concurrently functions as fiction of "global closure";[29] "post"-Cold War ONANite politics continues to implement such dream-like siege-systems closing off the United States. Edwards remains concerned with Cold War discourse specifically articulated through computer systems, information machines that make possible the ideology of the conflict, but the following argument is interested in developing the aesthetic dimensions/immersions of this ongoing state of emergency "being-in," particularly in terms of a poetics of the techno-sublime. In Wallace's novel, the reconfigured United States is plotted as a dream space by way of substances that, "melt[ing] into partnership with light",[30] are described in aestheticized terms: Lucite fortifications, planar mirrors, angled glass walls that indicate the possibility of finding protection through equipment crystallizing a technologized, fetishized mythology of shelter. Specifically, the materiality of these enclosing mechanisms refers to an aesthetics associated with Cold War weapons systems—the atom bomb as well as Reagan's SDI, obliterating the distinctions between offense and defense—but the persisting technological Cold War project is also in evidence in architecture: MIT's student union in the book, which itself gestures towards the function of the institution in the military-industrial complex. MIT's involvement in the development of continental air defense arrangements is especially relevant here; in the late 1940s, the institution was instrumental in the manufacture of centralized technologies of defense that functioned as SDI's antecedents, consolidating the institute as a major force in fantasies of total defensive systems.[31]

Yet, the institution's significance in the novel rests predominantly with the union, which serves as the link between the research MIT undertakes, its resulting applications—the embrace of SDI-related padding fictions—and ONANite Concavity politics, whose objective is the instigation of a closed, but also lobotomized, world. If Infinite Jest is a novel about the reformation of the nation, it is also concerned with the plasticity of the skull, or the Reconfiguration of subjectivity as vacuity, essentially aligning the interiority of the citizenry with the "empty space"[32] of the state of exception, whose void is reproduced internally. As a result, annulation is a doubled project affecting the physical as well as psychical US spaces in the book, both of which are engineered into Concavity. In terms of subjectivity, this means a machination into a state of ontological erasure, the predominant philosophy at work in the book, often commented on with reference to irony or postmodernism as exhausted literary practice,[33] but not often related to the larger political forces that are in (empty) place in the state of exception and which MIT's union, an "enormous cerebral cortex of reinforced concrete and polymer components,"[34] makes apparent. The union acts as an indication of state fantasy/strategy at work in and beyond Infinite Jest, namely the creation of national but also individual encagement best recognized in terms of a "hollow brain-frame," the internal emptiness and "psychorepressed cerebral state"[35] that ONANite Reconfiguration as well as contemporary US culture instigate as model of citizenship.

The correlation between the topographical territory of the concave United States and the corresponding psychological Concavity, concretized by the union, moves further than MIT, at the vanguard of annulation development. The union's

architect prompts connections to the other training grounds—ETA—for contained citizenship occurring "inside the lines of the court"; the "hollow brain-frame" union is designed by the "topology world's close-curve-mapping Übermensch" A.Y. Rickey, who also planned the "cardioid" ETA, whose teaching philosophy is to "take apart your skull very gently and reconstruct a skull for you".[36] Both buildings attest to a type of "SACPOP," an acronym standing for strikes against civilian populations that, in these instances, specifically target students in order to "de-skull" and train them into future "full service"[37] subjects interpellated as walled-in, hollowed-out USA citizens. This emphasis on the skull, and therefore on a "creātus, manufactured, conditioned, bred for a function," exists throughout the book, in the "soft-skulled" newborns in the Concavity/Convexity, in ETA cranial dismantling and subsequent Reconfiguration/reprogramming literalized in MIT's "hollow" Übermensch-made cortex, and in Jim Incandenza's "Entertainment" that leaves its viewers "[e]mpty of intent."[38] Such measures comment on the annulation process with reference to its etymological root, to bring to nothing, or to a "full service" US/ONAN citizenship that is "everywhere undead."[39] A process of "ground-clearing,"[40] it returns the function of the state of exception in existence outwith the novel, capturing being in a "kenomatic"[41] condition, the inorganic stillness of Freud's pleasure principle, whose aim is absolute inertia.

The argument of this essay on Infinite Jest bifurcates into two parts, united in an effort to interpret ONANite deformity as a process whose aesthetic articulation—"a whole bright spanking new millennium"[42]—is instigated on the basis of Cold War machinery targeted inwards. The Reconfiguration's narrative of self-preservation operates as a system of enclosure producing an "autoimmunitary terror"[43] that

reshapes state of nation and state of mind, the latter manufactured into a subject position "empty of intent": cerebral ground zero functioning in a technologically constituted, contracting space—USA "murated nation".[44] As such, the first part of this paper, "SDI Aesthetics," looks at how atom bomb and Strategic Defense Initiative are at the basis of the "mirage" of protection sublimely rendered, in Wallace's book, through mirrored, glass-walled and plastic-coated structures that further absorb subjectivity; the second part enters MIT's student union, which in the novel functions as an expression of "post"-Cold War ONANite modernity that keeps referring back to the Cold War. The union's plasticity prompts an investigation into the material's aesthetic properties but also its Reconfiguration of the world through processes of substitution capturing Gentle politics of "renewal," order, hygiene. The overall perspective of this essay is, then, attentive to high-tech materials and devices that seal off a culture seeking to preclude death through gadgetry but that, in the process of doing so, really instigates it. The spell-binding technologized environment of the United States—in and outside the novel a "protected democracy" that "is not a democracy at all" but "thing"-like, suspended, "legally unnamable"[45]—constitutes a death-world: entrancing, concave, spherical.

SDI Aesthetics

Investigations beyond apparent endings interrogate conceptions of historical time and narrativization; the secret continuities between the Cold War as a system of state, military and techno-strategic operations and current globalized military-industrial governance require different periodization operations alert to "afterlives".[46] If the Cold War entered an era of renewed vigor in the 1980s—"Cold War II,"[47] a term that

Edwards adopts from Fred Halliday—then Infinite Jest suggests the persistence of the conflict that has, since 1989, come into yet another Reconfiguration: Cold War III. The strategic framework of this war might no longer be a final, world-ending confrontation with the Soviet Union, but the continued pursuit of American superpower domination still occurs through defensive formations alert to "foreign" threats that come from within: its own abjections. "[E]ssentially an aesthetic affair,"[48] the American clean-up operation remains a Cold War enterprise because the waste-displacement machinery in the book refers to SDI which, though technologically unfeasible and therefore never implemented, was an ideological victory. Infinite Jest's border mechanisms are automated shields founded on SDI's political success as a "defensive" arrangement that gave its supporters the moral high-ground,[49] but the US President in the novel, Johnny Gentle, further models his "strategic defense initiative" on the aesthetic properties of Reagan's proposal and, beyond that, of the atom bomb, the threat that SDI was meant to guard against.

SDI's fantastical articulations—spectacular as well as unrealizable, including projects for "ground-based lasers bouncing off orbiting 'smart mirrors'"[50]—imagine a space-based missile defense operating by way of satellite detection whose tracking information then feeds into computer systems, in turn launching the counterforce. On a conceptual level, thermonuclear explosions expedite proposals for an inviolable defense: their existence, not simply detonation, clearly sits at the heart of schemes that comprise high-tech mechanisms whose shrouding functions are conceived in terms of particle beams "bouncing off" mirrors. The relationship between weapons and mirrors, however, stretches beyond SDI death ray reflections: a fantasy dreamt up by Reagan, not a "Man […] of Glass"[51] but Teflon President, SDI's mirrored enclosures

also return the image of the ultimate Cold War "deterrent," the atom bomb. Prior to any investigation alert to the obliteration of distinctions between offensive and defensive measures—they are all considered "shields"[52]—the splendor of these weapons systems already aligns them: they seek to raise a defensive perimeter that congeals into transparent architectures. Along with mirrors, the aesthetic dimensions of glass and plastic operate as a holy trinity of strategic defense linked up to the bomb which, from its first deployment—code named Trinity—yields a glass sphere.

Tested on 16 July 1945 at White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, Trinity's luminous mass ascends to form a "thick parasol of a […] bright but spectral blue."[53] As the shock front subsequently "cools into visibility,"[54] the residue on the ground, directly beneath the blast, consists of sand and the remainders of the bomb's metal tower superheated into bits of green glass: Trinitite reflects and congeals the gadget's radiant energy. Beyond the utopian possibilities both were invested with,[55] the analogy that unites bomb with glass extends to the mythology of the device. Before it was consecrated by a pile of black rocks—as much a memorial to the world that just ended as to the one that exploded into existence—there was talk of preserving the site as a national park, accessed through a "sheltered walk" and containing an "atomsite exhibit in place under glass."[56] Finally proved unfeasible—the intransience marking Ground Zero was already present radioactively, preventing the construction of such a monument—an atomic aesthetic nonetheless materialized. The heat and blinding light of superpower cool into glass and the translucency of related techno-forms, the "shiny, silky" plasticity so evocative of weapons systems.[57] "[G]reat, glass sphere[s],"[58] the outcome of nuclear detonations, however, also exist as counter-measure fantasies: shields like mirrors designed to deflect catastrophe.

It is the "undreamt-of possibilities for automated, centralized command and control" centers and their related metaphors of "leakproof containers" and "integrated systems"[59] assuring total area defense that inspired Reagan's SDI. As a technological "mirage," it was preceded by earlier air-defense shielding programs like SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment), which antedated the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS), itself activated in 1960. These systems all hung together, technologically but also in terms of their shared dream-worlds, projected across the US from within subterranean command centers like the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) in Colorado, which Ronald Reagan visited during the Republican presidential primary campaign in 1980. Reagan described NORAD as "an amazing place,"[60] a zone of closed, air-conditioned comfort where American power, invisible to the world above, seemed unlimited, a suggestion of boundlessness in a finite space. Subsequently, on 23 March 1983, Reagan announced his Strategic Defense Initiative, a fully-automated upgrade of those former, rapidly obsolete defensive arrangements; in many ways, it represented a culmination of research projects into one over-arching fantasy of C^3I.

What happens in Infinite Jest—published and set after the "end" of the Cold War in an ostensibly "post-Soviet" era where "Dems and GOP"[61] have dismantled—is an adjustment and realization of SDI into a waste projecting facility (as if to comment that threats are internally produced).[62] Johnny Gentle's Clean United States Party (CUSP) now holds a "white-gloved finger on the pulse" of an end-times superpower:

> [t]here was no real Foreign Menace of any real unified potency to hate and fear, and the US sort of turned on itself and its own philosophical fatigue and hideous redolent wastes with a spasm of panicked rage that in retrospect seems possible only in a time of geopolitical supremacy and consequent silence, the loss of any external Menace to hate and fear.[63]

CUSP consequently sweeps to victory, and Gentle is inaugurated as US President in a "Fukoama microfiltration mask,"[64] a reference to the particular manifestation of the future that the party hopes to instigate: "American renewal"[65] through crystalline/polymerized fortifications. ONANite modernity—because it is an expression that, for all of Gentle's millennial rhetoric to "[torch] the past,"[66] is decidedly modern—means shields of transparency put in place by a technology that is invisible yet also tangible, a symbol of infinity and omnipresence as much as it stands for tantalizing remoteness.[67] Glass, mirrors, plastic: these are the materials of choice to articulate the Reconfiguration, a treaty that is forced into being through the threatened detonation of "UPSIDE-DOWN MISSILES IN U.S. SILOS".[68] This holy trinity of substances suggests the existence of a "moral order,"[69] a Clean US Party whose mandate is purity, hygiene, whiteness, the "twinkle of the USA".[70] The radiance of such sublime techno-forms belong to a system of aesthetic meaning, Cold War-style, that keeps reflecting the image of the bomb (and of fascism) while it also creates arcs of circularity pertaining to the endless returns bouncing off annulation gadgetry.

In her article on the postmodern carnival in Infinite Jest, Catherine Nichols uses Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque as a circular figure which "meant to evoke nature's constant state of renewal" to argue that Wallace replaces this image of regeneration with those "of thinly veiled redundancy".[71] The most obvious example

of this shift is annulation—the "energy of waste"[72]—that also reconfigures the territory of the United States:

> The effect of annular fusion on ONAN's physical landscape has deformed the terrain itself into an image of grotesque circularity. This apparently ideal process has become so successful at ridding the environment of toxins that is has also eliminated all inhibitors to organic growth. The result has split the region into "a rainforest on stereobolic anoids" and a land resembling a desert. Thus, the topography has been warped into two halves, the "Great Concavity" and the "Great Convexity," which, though clearly distorted, combine to form the closed system of a self-reflexive mirror.[73]

Despite the ambiguity in this passage—the Concavity/Convexity as two distinct regions when they articulate different (US vs. Canadian) perspectives of the same place or phenomenon—Nichols' argument is, otherwise, convincing: it focuses on a Janus-faced practice that "[warps]" and enfolds space in a system that "only perpetuates stasis."[74] Her comparison of annulation to a "self-reflexive mirror" is an appropriate metaphor in a text so concerned with formations or deformities of the self; these two words, concave and mirror, reflect another self-portrait that neither Wallace nor Nichols mentions, but which raises a tradition of work on reflected abnormalities. In Parmigianio's 1524 painting Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror, which stretches the subject's proportions over the curvature of the looking glass, the artist's "fingers hang insect-like from the end of a monstrous appendage."[75] This work—"dominated," as Warren Steele remarks in a discussion on the mirrored reflections of the cyborg, "by deformation and obscurity"[76]—is indicative of an entity that has been broken, the united states of a body overshadowed by an enormous white-gloved hand and ringed by the reflective surfaces of clear, "protective" walls.

Infinite Jest, though, has its own fictional analyses of mirrored distortions; Nichols' "self-reflexive mirror" is not simply a figure of speech, selected because it so frequently occurs in the book, but a concrete manifestation of annulation, a process that continues the politics of the Cold War. This association between annulation/Cold Containment and the Cold War is indicative of the prevailing political order at work in the novel, so aware of the still functional closed and enclosing world of the emergency state, despite being set in a "post-Soviet" environment. Mirrors form closed circuits, the "Cage[s]" of James Incandenza's pentalogy of movies (Cage [I], II, III, IV, V) that variously utilizes "four convex mirrors [and] two planar mirrors" returning the image of a soliloquizing actress, or else are set in "solitary confinement" or at carnival shows where spectators are transformed into gigantic, translucent, eyeballs.[77] The achieved objective, in Cage III, is not transcendence but endless replication, the "mirror-cult"[78] also exceeding the domain of individual subjectivity, expanding to the geo-political situation of the pre-millennial and still Cold War-like United States. The Reconfiguration's "new look" recycles US history through the perversion of the Gentle administration's presidential tactics that instigate ONANite mutually assured (but bogus) dependency. In space, this "new look" is apparent as the "glass-walled" Concavity/Convexity fitted with ATHSCME fans, "Air-Displacement Effectuators"[79] that delineate new American borders. These are further marked by outposts of catapult facilities that "fling great twine-bundled waste-vehicles into the subannular regions of the Great Concavity."[80] As an arrangement, this line of "defense" ostensibly safeguards the "considerably tidier Experialist U.S. of A"[81] and resembles anti-missile missile projects researched since the closing stages of World War II and, in particular, Ronald Reagan's SDI.

In the novel, SDI turns into a defensive perimeter furnished with Lucite walls, "Air-Displacement Effectuators" and "les trébuchets noirs, spectacular block-long catapults"—whose "slings are of alloy-belted elastic"—that stand in "this like blimp-hangarish thing."[82] The system is supported by "transformers and high-voltage grids" hooked up to a "monstrous mega-ohm insulator-cluster"[83] to the north of Boston; its resemblance to that other technological fiction, SDI, emerges by way of its functioning on both material and metaphorical levels. Parallels exist through the rhetoric of defense against contaminants but also in terms of its concrete, or translucent, expressions: the fortifications are reflections of SDI's mirrored stages, just as they return every other measure and machine of containment at work in the novel.

As the Reagan administration proposed it, SDI was imagined on the principle of engagement with enemy ballistic missiles along their entire launch-to-impact trajectories; its premise rested on the four stages of flight during which an ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) could, hypothetically, be destroyed.[84] It is a system that was for the most part based in, or else looking toward, outer space: stations basing lasers, for one, are either placed in a geostationary orbit, in a constant and analogous loop around the planet where they permanently hover over Soviet missile silos, or in a lower orbit, a location requiring more battle posts. Conversely, however, lasers can be situated on mountain peaks and beam their rays, from there, up to large relay mirrors similarly positioned in geostationary orbits; these then transmit energy to a collection of smaller mirrors in lower orbits, with the objective to obliterate single missile boosters in quick succession.[85] SDI is a dreamworld-deathwish of imaginary

full control set up against chaos; Gentle's checkpoints attempt to ward off, at the same time that they create, an apocalypse of toxic waste through an arrangement of facilities that is similarly mirror-bound and mirror-like. All these polished shields at redrawn borders only replicate the conditions of Janus-faced Cold War power, at once targeting an "external Menace" and "[turning] on itself" in a process of total war—defined through "the infinite development of weaponry"—that results in "endo-colonisation," meaning the "colonization of one's own territory".[86] Gentle tries to force the consequences of the nation-state's "hideous redolent wastes"[87] onto Canada, but the resulting deformities of such "experialist" politics nonetheless affects United States internal dispositions: the energies expended are inward-tending.

If Johnny Gentle borrows and subsequently warps the campaign slogans and self-mythologizing shout-lines of former Presidents, then the appropriation of Teflon Man's model of strategic defense for once suspends this practice of systematic deformation. Instead, Gentle's adoption of the ballistic missile shielding system is precisely that, an embrace and retrofitting of a mirrored structure designed to guard against invisible invasions that shift, in form or formlessness, from rocket to antigens. Cold War weapons delivery systems now function as mechanisms to parabolically displace waste in trajectories that mirror the arc of intercontinental ballistic missiles. The giant fans, standing at the cusp of the reconfigured United States and blowing stenches northward, act like a retooled SDI. It is telling that ATHSCME checkpoints no longer even mask as "protective" measures, but function as aggressive formations whose "Concavityward" delivery of toxic materials sound like tennis ball bombs that go "WHUMP" and can also turn nuclear: "a little mushroom cloud of green fuss hangs in the air".[88] Tennis fixtures are occasionally played as modified versions of a

"nuclear-conflagration game";[89] the "shot heard around the world" that opens Don DeLillo's 1997 novel Underworld, aligning baseball and the Soviet bomb, here comes to indicate the sustained interplay of nuclear gadget and strategy, creating an atomic loop between ATHSCME—the "whole fusion/fission waste-annulation thing"[90]—tennis and movies.

There is, then, a "fusion [...] thing" between the "super-secret-formulaic composition materials"[91] that produce tennis racquets, Incandenza's fatal entertainment cartridge and ONAN's American "defense" perimeter. Incandenza, film maker, ETA founder, "AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] optics man,"[92] links all three through polymerized, metonymic chains that display high-tech plastic gleam. Tennis racquets are made of "high-modulus-graphite-reinforced polycarbonate polybutylene resin [that] are organochemically identical I say again identical to the gyroscopic balance sensor and mise-en-scène appropriation card and priapistic-entertainment cartridge implanted in [James Incandenza's] anaplastic cerebrum".[93] Incandenza is further instrumental in annulation evolution:

> his development of gamma-refractive indices for lithium-anodized lenses and panels is commonly regarded as one of the big half-dozen discoveries that made possible cold annular fusion and approximate energy-independence for the US and its various allies and protectorates ... .[94]

Cold Containment is, clearly, linked to the Cold War, but Incandenza consolidates the association: he was formerly an "applied-geometrical-optics man in the ONR [Office of Naval Research] and SAC [Strategic Air Command]," who designed "neutron-scattering reflectors for thermo-strategic weapons systems" before becoming

"celluloid-bound".[95] He proceeds to make a movie that imitates (in good plastic form) the consequences of atom bomb detonations: push-button command creates the living dead. Incandenza's "Infinite Jim" function then, which one actor relates to the director's practice of filming at "multi-lensed length," in fact refers to his ability to form chains of alliance that, to follow Mike Pemulis' lead in the novel, can be conceptualized as a "huge right triangle":[96] cold fusion→fatally entertaining cartridge→tennis. This triangulation/trinity interlinks technology, the unconscious and war games, which conditions subjects into total immobilization. The triangle points geographically northward, towards Canada, but its outward projections are, even so, flung back to the place of origin: ATHSCME mirrors of strategic defense launch back that which "you hope will not return".[97]

The trajectory of the "WHUMP" expulsion, after all, boomerangs back as one of homecoming, a ricochet movement that becomes apparent when looking at what happens to both movie viewers and tennis players. Incandenza is not the only figure to align cold fusion and Cold War nuclear strategy sports. Gerhardt Schtitt, ETA coach, with "skin so clean-sheet white it almost glows," is one of the "earliest sign-carrying faithful" supporters of Johnny Gentle's CUSP because he "was swept away with the athletic-Wagnerian implications of Gentle's proposals for waste".[98] Tennis, according to Schtitt, opens up or, rather, inwardly unfurls a

> continuum of infinities of possible move and response, ... beautiful because infoliating, contained, this diagnate infinity of infinities of choice and execution, mathematically uncontrolled but humanly contained, bounded by the talent and imagination of self and opponent, bent in on itself ... .[99]

Schtitt's teaching philosophy, centered on the submission of the will and subsequent incorporation into the "larger imperatives of a team (OK, the state)," is less about transcendence than it is about containment, a condition he keeps repeating; play really remains a closed system, a conditioning program that trains ("post"-) Cold War subjects to participate in the apparatus of the game, the state, the Law.[100] The curved glass of the tennis court already indicates this "infoliating" order; nets and fences, as well as opponents, so thinks Hal Incandenza, act as mirrors, the entire court a mirror further encased within panels of glass.[101] "[Aquarium] glass" manifests the concentric cycles of "systems inside systems"—mirrors within mirrors within mirrors; like the movie Infinite Jest, tennis carries out an inward vector, arriving at a "final enclosing isolation".[102]

If play leads to self-erasure,[103] then the tennis court's encagement, which itself mirrors the Concavity's "glass palisades" and Johnny Gentle's flights into an "oxygenated Lucite portabubble,"[104] is but a variation on a theme: transparent superdomes drape over already vanishing entities in order to progressively disappear them. This itinerary, also apparent in end-time war-games like Eschaton as played by ETA students, is one of self-destruction, not simply on an individual level, but nation-wide. The chain of association between cold fusion→fatally entertaining cartridge→tennis forms a "triangular horror"[105] that is finally one of implosion. Triangulation develops a "post-Soviet" mode of imprisonment that hardly differs from its precedent, the Cold War state of emergency executed by way of the outputs of closed systems. After the imagined end of the Cold War, the United States remains a culture of containment, armed to the teeth against waste and chaos: the "Tighter, Tidier" USA, as Marathe states, is a "murated nation," the "one-time World

Policeman" who "retire[d]" to "have its blue uniform deep-dry-cleaned and placed in storage in triple-thick plastic dry-cleaning bags."[106] Isolationist and infinitely inward-bound, the United States, still seeking to occupy an inviolable sphere, is "bent in on itself" by way of the "obliterating trinity" of strategic defense articulated through glass→mirrors→plastic.

USA Plasticity

Beyond the mirrored perimeter of the waste displacement system, ETA war games and conditioning programs all joined up in an agenda designed to wipe clean United States geography and psychosphere, Cold War III aesthetics also materializes in the "soft-skulled" representation of MIT's student union. The results of Cold Containment R&D are already in evidence in the institution's plasticized student union/giant brain, whose bendable texture implies the "soft-skulled" deformities spawned in the Concavity/Convexity and ETA's hollow citizen-shaping practices, but what the building further exemplifies is a practice of molding and substitution that is at work throughout the book. The political project instigated by the Gentle administration constitutes an effort to totally reshape the physical reality of the United States, made "new" in synthetic form; these policies invariably are practices of plastic transformation applied to both nation-state and citizenry. The many skull-modeling references belong to this same rhetoric of synthetic production and Reconfiguration: Concavity governing presupposes the world to be bendable, replaceable. This process of "renewal," though, is one of polymerization that is first and foremost in evidence at MIT, mimicking life but actually part of a deathly process; polymerization is not, as

Thomas Pynchon writes in Gravi*ty's Rainbow* (1973), "resurrection" but, instead, it is a movement that leads from "death to death-transfigured."[107]

While the union signals (via its function as part of a larger whole, that is, MIT) SDI upgrade into "the whole fusion/fission waste-annulation thing," it also acts as a "reinforced concrete and polymer" expression of the "soft-skulling" operations that occur both here and elsewhere. This practice is, to a certain extent, laid bare in this building, which exemplifies Gentle substitution techniques switching the living with the lifeless in one "magical operation,"[108] as Roland Barthes notes: plastic articulates Concavity strategies of creating (giant) bending and hollowed-out skulls. A soft, plastically finished thinking or thoughtless machine, MIT's union approximates biological life forms and functions as the seat or "nest"[109] of Cold Containment operations. It is here that ONANite modernity is most palpable, though the building's aesthetics remain associated with Cold War dream weapons through annulation research whose outcomes yield the "Lucite portabubble[s]" that function as both personal and national defense matter. Configured as a fully plasticized, flexible superbrain, the student union and, by extension, MIT more generally finally realize the "flawless, funereal"[110]—because death-like, empty, "soft-skulled"—comfort for US citizens that computerized systems of protection sought to cause through SDI-type shielding technologies. As a doubled project, annulation consolidates particularly at MIT's union; on the one hand, the "whole fusion/fission waste-annulation thing" is designed to provide full area coverage to "defend" the United States against (its own) waste, while on the other it operates as a policy of subject drainage.

In the novel, the narrative enters the building by way of a "student engineer, a pre-doctoral transuranial metallurgist"[111] whose passage through the union resembles a trip through space in J.G. Ballard's terms, that is, by overlaying geometries of buildings and geographies of apocalypse with human organisms.[112] The journey is a "fantastic voyage," a reference to the 1966 movie of that title, in which a miniature submarine enters the blood stream of an injured Eastern bloc scientist working on nanotechnology and defecting to the United States; the navigation is one of mastery—Cold War micro/macro technology presiding over, and inside, the subject and thereby saving lives.[113] MIT's union becomes corporeal, a body to be traversed by the engineer passing through extensive "interneural stairways," "little-used many-staired neuroform way[s]" and up to the "artery-red fire doors"[114] leading to the Union's rooftop. What happens here is an entry into polymerization, into the production of plastics and plastic utopianism in which MIT, "in bed with Defense,"[115] participates.

The student's course through the union ends on the building's "soft latex-polymer roof," which "is cerebrally domed […] and everywhere textured […] with sulci and bulbous convolutions."[116] Neurological vocabulary interfaces with the language of space travel—"deorbited balloon eyes"—and the materials gradually developed over the course of World War II:

> [T]he slick latex roof make rain-drainage complex and footing chancy at best, so there's not a whole lot of recreational strolling up here, although a kind of safety-balcony of skull-colored polybutylene resin, which curves around the mid-brain from the inferior frontal sulcus to the parieto-occipital sulcus … means that even the worst latex slip-and-slide off the steeply curved cerebrum's edge would mean a fall of only a few meters to the broad butylene platform, from which a venous-blue emergency ladder can be detached and lowered to extend down past the

> superior temporal gyrus and Pons and abducent to hook up with the polyurethane basilar-stem artery and allow a shimmy down to the good old oblongata just outside the rubberized meatus at ground zero.[117]

To look at this building, the "North American seat of Very High Tech"[118] and nerve centre of superpowers, is to notice a plastic narrative in terms of both the institution's construction material and the material's plasticity and shapelessness, this matter which, at least in "some stage of its history [,] is capable of flow."[119] To enter the union is to pass into the ONANite plastic age, stretching elastically beyond yield-points—the moment when a body is permanently deformed—so as to include, yet again, paradoxical attributes: the rhetoric of impermanence and ephemeralization as opposed to its million-year survival rate, its hardened molding that, in particular cases, never again softens, its rounded, tubular, bulbous forms that disguise complicity with terminal technologies through the adoption of warm, living biomorphic systems.[120] This building is the result of a process that, despite its apparent mobility, also desires to attain conceptions of shelter to alleviate dangers of falling, great plastic spheres that drape around the United States and keep it safe from death, from dirt or mould that speak of death.[121] MIT's student union materializes, in its "soft-skulled" reproduction, a pocket utopia and dream of immortality achieved through plastic enclosure—eternal life implied through Tupperware vampirism.[122]

Johnny Gentle's mandate, the "Tighter, Tidier" United States, is in evidence at MIT, superbrain engaged in enhancing strategic defense initiatives that, on the roof top of the building and as an individual protection kit, are configured as "nest[s]" made of latex.[123] The "nest" is "industrially soft,"[124] a promise of US power offering a sanctuary against the forces of nature/chaos: the technological refinement at MIT is a

consequence of the politics of Gentle-ness. Yet this paradise of MIT plasticity, stretching to encompass the rest of the United States, operates on the basis of a technology that, for all of its softness, remains lethal. It is an embalming process that protects to death and that hides its "death-transfiguration" through the replication of living organisms: at MIT's union, the passage over nature occurs under cover. Colors feign the natural; they encompass the "off-white of living skull"[125]—the bone-colored tans that are remade in labs and injected into chemical compounds—and the "venous-blue" emergency ladder dyed in the color of deoxygenated blood, running in the systemic veins from organs to the heart. The terminology used suggests life-giving properties, the sustenance of living things through "safety-balcony" and "emergency ladder" supplied by plastics: better living through chemistry, through polymer embrace. Any danger of falling is balanced by soft landing, a "[shimmying] down" towards "ground zero," the atom bomb's designated target.

It is this effortless movement towards the nuclear hypocenter that further indicates the triangulations between glass, mirrors and plastic so apparent in the book, also bearing in mind that corporations like Du Pont pioneer in both synthetic fibers and atom bomb components.[126] Such triangulations, aesthetic as well as relating to means of mass production, expound the correlations linking up "soft" or Gentle technologies and the nuclear weapon. Never mind that the Reconfiguration comes about as the result of threatened atomic self-immolation whose fallout is then blown northward through "ATHSCME HELL-FANS"; the link between "nest[ing]" technology and military hardware is apparent, at a glance, by looking at the "great hollow brain-frame"[127] of the skull-colored union building. The skull, a reminder of death, also functions as a reference to James Incandenza, whose master copy of his

fatally entertaining movie Infinite Jest, instigating the zombification of its viewers, is contained in his interred head. As such, the association between MIT's student union and the "hollow brain frame" of the skull implicitly suggests the instigation of a death-world that establishes itself through imitation, repetition.

Mimicry of life occurs at the level of metaphor and color, the artificial substances that take on the hues of the living, like the circulation of blood pumped to the heart; from the very beginning, the development of plastics corresponds to processes of substitution. Products like wood, marble, ivory are duplicated by what Paul T. Frankl, an American architect and furniture designer, called "materia nova"[128] in 1930: it surpasses the limitations of nature. Even though the patent on celluloid, the oldest plastic, was taken out by Alexander Parkes in 1855, the "Plastic Age" was not proclaimed until much later. Industry insiders, so claims Jeffrey Meikle, began to announce it in 1927, and in the following years, dreams of technological utopia—similarly evidenced by the formation of Rocket Societies working to achieve a functional escape vehicle—really took off.[129]

In his book Form and Re-Form, Frankl notes that the new materials "speak in the vernacular of the 20th Century" and articulate "the language of invention [and] synthesis":

> [w]e are no longer preoccupied with our past. We are piercing the future. Not merely are we looking into a future—we are actually being propelled into a future: a morrow more thrilling, more breathtaking, more compelling in its dictatorship than the flimsy traditions of the 19th Century.[130]

Frankl echoes the Futurists, even more so in his 1932 publication titled Machine-Made Leisure, where he announces that "We love [the machine]" in "breathless adoration,"[131] in the rapture of the techno-sublime; he holds out the promise of a future that is configured in terms of the constructions of modernity—the skyscraper, the department store and the airplane. The device that lurks in the shadows, however, and is developed under the auspices of a German dictatorship, is the rocket, outfitted, in Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, with a new plastic, Imipolex G, "an aromatic heretocyclic polymer" devised by Wallace Carothers at Du Pont.[132]

Plastic consciousness expanded in the 1930s, the decade when "materia nova" no longer simply fake nature but "bring to the service of industry an array of new properties—the new gifts," according to John Gloag, "of lightness, translucency, transparency, texture and color".[133] While he remained ambiguous about the substances and their transforming technologies, he was nonetheless seduced by their aesthetic brilliance exhibited at World Fairs in New York and San Francisco in 1939. Like Henry Adams, who visited the Paris exhibition in 1900, Gloag stood awed when confronted with the "remarkable ideas about the alliance of light with transparent and translucent materials," and commented on "the enclosing of objects in irregular masses of transparent plastic, so that they interrupted and distributed a beam of tinted light."[134]

They perform, then, tricks of light, transmit it in an "infinity of variations" for the purpose of consumption,[135] yet what also happened, and helped to swell public awareness of the material, was the development of thermo plastics, forming "a galaxy of new materials"[136] encompassing, for example, polystyrene and polyethelene.

Though the definition of plastic—"anything which possesses plasticity, that is, anything which can be deformed under mechanical stress without losing its cohesion, and is able to keep the new form given to it"[137]—also applies to thermo setting plastics, most common in the interwar period, these are, once subjected to heat and pressure, converted into "insoluble, infusible masses, which cannot be further re-formed."[138] They are stable, inert, immortal, and retain the shape of their first, and only, molding. Thermo plastics, on the other hand, capable of being softened and re-softened indefinitely, suggest, as Barthes writes, "the very idea of … infinite transformation," so that plastic is "less a thing than the trace of a movement,"[139] a means by which to "torch the past" and boost a paradoxical culture of im/permanence through the mobility of molecules. These curious oppositions—between lightness and strength, durability and transience—unite into one form or, rather, to follow Barthes, converge into one CUSP movement: the age of Gentle strategic defense and "soft-skulling" annulation.

Considering Gentle's mission statement, which twists Jack Kennedy's inaugural address out of shape, plastic is the proper substance to articulate America's "new look," itself a cheap imitation of "original crystals,"[140] that is, the national policies of former US Presidents. Gentle politics—masked and "rubber gloved"[141]—invariably is devised in sterile venues and implemented through white-suited government agents: its experialist, endo-colonial procedures belong to a fascist aesthetic.[142] What comes into being through such processes, a triumph of the will passing over nature, is Plastic Man, a.k.a. Johnny Gentle; another fictional figure, Plastic Man is a revenant, a comic figure launched in 1941. In the strip plasticized during an accidental exposure at Crawford Chemical Works, Plastic Man also appears

in a booklet titled Plastics (1941) by V.E. Yarsley and E.G. Couzens as well as in Gravity's Rainbow. In Pynchon's novel, Plastic Man is a tainted hero, because associated with the chemical and rocket cartels that widen across the planet; in Yarsley and Couzens' account, he belongs to a similar order of total dominance. Control however, in this case, does not lie with Plastic Man, who is no Übermensch but instead fragile, a delicate being coming into a "world of color and bright shining surfaces, where childish hands find nothing to break, no sharp edges or corners to cut or graze, no crevices to harbor dirt or germs."[143] He is "surrounded on every side" by plastics, "this tough, safe, clean material" used in the coating of the walls, the floors, "silent and dustless," to form "the universal plastic environment."[144]

Plastic Man takes up the concluding stages of Yarsley and Couzens' book; encased in plastic, the man-child himself is no longer purely flesh but plastically finished. He cleans his teeth with plastic brushes before replacing them with artificial dentures, "with 'silent' plastic teeth" and plastic spectacles so as to watch plastic films—the end entails a lowering into the grave "hygienically enclosed in a plastic coffin,"[145] though this might be what he has lived in, undead, from the very beginning. It is the creation of a synthetic universe, or, at any rate, of a plastic nation that motivates Johnny Gentle's CUSP in Wallace's Infinite Jest; the territorial Reconfiguration is fenced by convex walls of anodized Lucite to keep chaos "north of order,"[146] north of the United States. Lucite, a transparent thermo plastic, was made up and promoted in the late 1920s by, amongst other firms, Du Pont; its properties were itemized by Grace Fraser in 1945 in a sequence of traits that seem to point towards the plastic's boundlessness:

> Great transparency and light transmission: strength: rigidity: water and weather resistance: dimensional stability: dialectic strength: light in weight: unlimited color range: non-flammable.[147]

The obsessive semi-colons, like polymerized chains, imply a continuity, the diffusion or piping of light, "strength, stability and whiteness" past obstacles like full stops; the material is used in aircraft construction, bomber noses, cabin and cockpit enclosures and escape doors as well as for dental instruments.[148] In a novel so attentive to teeth and hygienic cavities, Lucite is a material at once associated with gleaming teeth stretched into a cold smile, ready to bite, and the polymer components of military hardware.

The plastification of the United States of America, however, goes beyond Johnny Gentle, white-gloved Plastic Man, though his party certainly exacerbates a trend that gradually replaces America's cotton flag, which carries earlier white crimes, with "crisp nylon"[149] national colors. The transformation of the United States into a superpower—because, as Barthes notes, plastic "gives man the measure of his power,"[150] which explodes beyond the limits of nature into a "galaxy" of high-tech twinkles—begins and continues with the transmutation of elements and the diffusion of artificial and atomic light. The objective that motivates Cold waste Containment is that "Tight, Tidier" nation that Gentle heralds in his Inauguration Address: a "murated nation" walled in through SDI-like gadgetry and soft technologies that, like the narrative glide in the passage on MIT's student union, slip towards (physical, psychical) ground zero. The union functions as the archetypal model of an ONANite "autoimmunitary" order of existence that embodies a techno-aesthetic whose movements only ever "shimmy down" to the blankness of superpower explosions, the

cold and Cold War stasis of an overwhelming and inward-turning technological power. This arc or orb similarly describes the "thing" of the state of exception, in that it conceptualizes its spheres of operation: absolute interiority; death-like protection; captured being-in; subjectivity shelled, entranced, in an immersive, disastrous security state.

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[1] David Foster Wallace, Infinite Jest (London: Abacus, 2009), 572.

[2] Ibid., 1032.

[3] Ibid., 382 & 402.

[4] Ibid., 777. The re-arrangement of letters is even more blatant in French, where NATO is abbreviated as OTAN.

[5] Ibid., 776.

[6] Jacques Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," in Giovanna Borradori, Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 92 & 96.

[7] Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," Oxford Literary Review, Vol. 6, Dec. 1984, 22.

[8] Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 92 & 90.

[9] Ibid, 90.

[10] Phillip E. Wegner, Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: US Culture in the Long Nineties (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2009), 82.

[11] Ibid, 9. See also Donald E. Pease, The New American Exceptionalism (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press). It is particularly in the Introduction that Pease talks about state fantasy formation that induces subjects into interiorizing the processes, beliefs and desires of the state. Pease also compellingly discusses the "Thing" of the Nation with respect to the Enemy, which "has always already completed the destruction of the national Thing that it has always not yet accomplished." (18)

[12] Wegner, 24-25.

[13] Giorgio Agamben, State of Exception (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 16.

[14] Don DeLillo, Falling Man (London: Picador, 2007), 8.

[15] Timothy Melley, The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[16] Walter Banjamin, The Arcades Project (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 473.

[17] Fredric Jameson, A Singular Modernity (London & New York: Verso, 2012), 28-29.

[18] Peter Sloterdijk, In the World Interior of Capital (Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 9 & 169.

[19]Ibid., 5.

[20] On this note, see, for example, Elizabeth Freudenthal, "Anti-Interiority: Compulsiveness, Objectification, and Identity in Infinite Jest," New Literary History, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Winter 2010), 191-211. An article about "anti-interiority" as a mode of resistance against a "closed-off inner life," Freudenthal also comments on the novel's "distinctive form" in terms of "the hoarded collections of endnoted information, the sentences both excessive and obsessively precise, the drive to pack as much as possible into the syntactic and narrative spaces." (196) This type of narration is itself indicative of embeddedness.

[21] See, for example, N. Katherine Hayles, "The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and Infinite Jest," New Literary History, Vol. 30, No. 3 Ecocriticsm (Summer 1999), 675-697; Mary K. Holland, "'The Art's Heart's Purpose': Braving the Narcisstic Loop of David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest," Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Spring 2006), 218-242; Stephen J. Burn, *David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest: A Reader's Guide* (London & New York: Continuum, 2012); Heather Houser, "Infinite Jest's Environmental Case for Disgust," in Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou, eds., The Legacy of David Foster Wallace (Iowa

City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 118-142, in which Houser argues that solipsism, self-involvement, self-indulgence are "psychological analogs to the self-reflexive style of postmodern cultural forms." (120)

[22] Peter Sloterdijk, Terror from the Air (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 108.

[23] Wendy Brown, Walled States, Waned Sovereignty (New York: Zone Books, 2014), 25.

[24] Ibid., 30-31. On the shared projects of wall-building between the US and Israel, see p. 8.

[25] Agamben, State of Exception, 51.

[26] Bruno Latour, Aramis, or The Love of Technology (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 222. See also p. 23, where Latour notes that "[b]y definition, a technological project is a fiction, since at the outset it does not exist, and there is no way it can exist yet because it is in the project phase."

[27] Ibid., 24.

[28] Paul N. Edwards, The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold-War America (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 1996), 1.

[29] Ibid., 7 & 8.

[30] John Gloag, Plastics and Industrial Design (London: George Allan & Unwin, Ltd., 1945), 26.

[31] For more information on MIT's role in the development of centralized and automated defense systems, see Edwards, The Closed World, 75–93.

[32] Agamben, State of Exception, 60.

[33] See, for example, Samuel Cohen, "To Wish to Try to Sing to the Next Generation: Infinite Jest's History," in Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou, eds., The Legacy of David Foster Wallace (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 59-79. Cohen also relates this "erasure" to literary expression and postmodernism (also with reference to Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram") which, according to Wallace "has lost its … power to make meaning, instead becoming empty" (72). In "E Unibus Pluram," Wallace likens irony to "a sort of fetal position, a pose of passive reception of comfort, escape, reassurance" and continues that irony "serves an almost exclusively negative function. It's critical and destructive, a ground-clearing." David Foster Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (London: Abacus, 2011), 41 & 67.

[34] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 184.

[35] Ibid., 186 & 582.

[36] Ibid., 460, 983n3 & 521.

[37] Ibid., 83.

[38] Ibid., 12, 399 & 508.

[39] Ibid., 263.

[40] David Foster Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (London: Abacus, 2011), 67.

[41] Agamben, State of Exception, 6.

[42] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 394.

[43] Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 96.

[44] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 127.

[45] Agamben, State of Exception, 15.

[46] See Melley, The Covert Sphere, but also Dan Grausam, On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2011) and Adam Piette, The Literary Cold War: 1945–Vietnam (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

[47] Edwards, The Closed World, 276.

[48] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 383.

[49] See Edwards, The Closed World, 293. It was a success because its proponents could claim the moral advantage—they were in favor of a defensive arrangement—and therefore managed to undermine the Nuclear Freeze Movement.

[50] Ibid., 289.

[51] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 9.

[52] See, for example, Richard G. Hewlett and Francis Duncan's history of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), whose second volume is called Atomic Shield, 1947–1952: A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission Vol. II (University Park & London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969).

[53] Richard Rhodes, The Making of the Atomic Bomb (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 673.

[54] Ibid., 671. (emphasis original).

[55] On this note see, for example, Jean Baudrillard, The System of Objects (London: Verso, 2005).

[56] Peter Bacon Hales, Atomic Spaces: Living on the Manhattan Project (Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1997), 360.

[57] In Don De Lillo's Underworld, young Eric jacks off into a condom "because it had a sleek metallic shimmer, like his favorite weapons system". (New York: Scribner, 1997), 514.

[58] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000), 723.

[59] Edwards, The Closed World, 82.

[60] Ronald Reagan quoted in E. P. Thompson. "Why is Star Wars?", in Thompson, ed., Star Wars (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985), 16.

[61] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 382.

[62] This is, amongst others, what Slavoj Žižek argues in Welcome to the Desert of the Real, in which he notes that the US, in the Cold War, the "war on terror" is, in each case, fighting "its own excessive outgrowth." See Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real (London & New York: Verso, 2002), 27.

[63] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 382. This is precisely the argument that both Pease and Wegner make in their respective, and compelling, books. See Wegner, Life Between Two Deaths, and Pease, The New American Exceptionalism.

[64] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 382.

[65] Ibid., 383.

[66] Ibid., 381.

[67] On the subject of plastics and modernity, see Judith Brown, "Cellophane Glamour," Modernism, Modernity, Vol. 15, No. 4, 605-626.

[68] Foster Wallace, Infinite Jest, 407.

[69] Jean Baudrillard, The System of Objects (London & New York: Verso, 2005), 43.

[70] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 105.

[71] Catherine Nichols, "Dialogising Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest," Critique, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Fall 2001), 7.

[72] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 572.

[73] Nichols, "Dialogising Postmodern Carnival," 7.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Warren Steele, Body of Glass: Cybernetic Bodies and the Mirrored Self. PhD diss, University of Glasgow, Nov. 2007, 155.

[76] Ibid., 156.

[77] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 986, 987 & 988.

[78] Ibid., 230.

[79] Ibid., 394, 385 & 241. Gentle most clearly functions as a distorted reflection of John F. Kennedy, though he also employs Eisenhower's election strategy (New Look) as well as Nixonian schemes of MADness in angry outbursts—he threatens to detonate upside-down missiles in their silos and to irradiate Canada by means of ATHSCME fans if ONANite rearrangement is opposed. (407) With respect to Kennedy, Gentle's second Inaugural Address deforms JFK's first presidential speech: "Let the call go forth, to pretty much any nation we might feel like calling, that the past has been torched by a new and millennial generation of Americans". (381)

[80] Ibid., 241.

[81] Ibid., 391.

[82] Ibid., 240 & 241.

[83] Ibid., 241.

[84] These four phases begin with the "boost phase," during which the rocket boosters lift the gadget into outer space; the "post-boost phase," the period immediately after the rocket motors burn out and during which the post-boost vehicle, the "bus," dispenses its warheads to travel their separate arcs of disaster and releases any decoys or other penetration aids; the "mid-course phase" throughout which these warheads and decoys streak toward their destinations; and finally the "terminal phase," the moment the weapons enter the atmosphere and hit their targets. Stephen Van Evera, "Preface," in Steven E. Miller and Stephen Van Evera, ed., The Star Wars Controversy: An International Security Reader (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), xi.

[85] Ben Thompson, "What is Star Wars?", in E.P. Thompson, ed., Star Wars, 32. See also William E. Burrows, "Ballistic Missile Defense: The Illusion of Security," Foreign Affairs 62, Spring 1984, 849–851.

[86] Paul Virilio & Sylvère Lotringer, Pure War (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 94 & 95.

[87] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 382.

[88] Ibid., 543, 181 & 269.

[89] Ibid., 996. On nuclear strategy and postmodern aesthesis, see Dan Grausam, On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 76–103.

[90] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 570.

[91] Ibid., 30-31.

[92] Ibid., 82. "ETA's hilltop grounds are," further, "traversable by tunnel". Its subbasements, arrived at through these tunnels, used to host "former optical and film-development facilities" (51).

[93] Ibid., 30-31.

[94] Ibid., 63-64.

[95] Ibid., 63 & 162.

[96] Ibid., 225 & 570.

[97] Ibid., 1031.

[98] Ibid., 80 & 1031.

[99] Ibid., 82 (emphasis original).

[100] Ibid., 82 & 83. On the subject of play as supremely rational endeavor, see also Mark Bresnan, "The Work of Play in David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest," Critique, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Fall 2008), 51–68.

[101] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 176 & 261.

[102] Ibid., 261, 67 & 645.

[103] See Bresnan, "The Work of Play," 52.

[104] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 489 & 439.

[105] Ibid., 650.

[106] Ibid., 127 & 383.

[107] Pynchon, Gra*vity's Rainbow*, 166.

[108] Roland Barthes, Mythologies (London: Vintage, 1993), 97.

[109] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 187.

[110] Baudrillard, America, 2.

[111] Foster Wallace, Infinite Jest, 185.

[112] See, for example, J.G. Ballard, The Atrocity Exhibition (London: Flamingo, 2001).

[113] I would like to thank Mark Dorrian for reminding me of this movie through his excellent paper on "Vision, Motion and Miniaturization: The Political Imagery of Powers of Ten," delivered at the Sensory Worlds: Environment, Value and the Multi-Sensory conference, 9 Dec. 2011, University of Edinburgh.

[114] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 185.

[115] Ibid., 186.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid.

[119] V.E. Yarsley and E.G. Couzens, Plastics (Harmondsworth & New York: Penguin Books, 1941), 11.

[120] On this note, it is worth mentioning Buckminster Fuller and the 1960s London collective Archigram. Archigram, especially, proposed a mechanically-determined aesthetic, inspired by the chemicals, electronics and aeronautics industries, and used plastic compounds to design inflatable living arrangements or NASA-style pods. See, for example, Simon Sadler, Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2005). On Buckminster Fuller, see Michael John Gorman, Buckminster Fuller: Designing for Mobility (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2005).

[121] See Pynchon, Gravity*'s Rainbow*, 723 and Wallace, Infinite Jest, 1043.

[122] This is a reference to "Forever Ware," Eerie Indiana, directed by Joe Dante, 15 Sept. 1991, in which a housewife preserves herself and her two eternally teenage boys in air-tight plastic pods. (DVD, Hearst Entertainment Productions, 2006).

[123] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 186.

[124] Ibid., 187.

[125] Ibid., 186.

[126] See, for example, Pap A. Ndiaye, Nylon and Bombs: DuPont and the March of Modern America, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

[127] Ibid., 407 & 186.

[128] Paul T. Frankl, Form and Re-Form: A Practical Handbook of Modern Interiors (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 161.

[129] Jeffrey L. Meikle, American Plastic: A Cultural History (New Brunswick, NJ & London: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 2. On Rocket Societies, see Frank H. Winter, Prelude to the Space Age: The Rocket Societies 1924-1940 (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983).

[130] Frankl, Form and Re-Form, 163 & 5.

[131] Paul T. Frankl, Machine-Made Leisure (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1932), 12.

[132] Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow, 249.

[133] Gloag, Plastics and Industrial Design, 17.

[134] Ibid., 53.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., 45.

[137] Yarsley and Couzens, Plastics, 10.

[138] Ibid., 12.

[139] Barthes, Mythologies, 97.

[140] Ibid., 97.

[141] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 384.

[142] On this note, see Pynchon, who writes that plastic (or Imipolex G's) "target property most often seemed to be strength—first among Plasticity's virtuous triad of Strength, Stability and Whiteness (Kraft, Standfestigkeit, Weisse)". *Gravity's* Rainbow, 250.

[143] Yarsley and Couzens, Plastics, 154.

[144] Ibid., 154 & 155.

[145] Ibid., 158.

[146] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 1043.

[147] Grace Lovat Fraser, "Different Types of Plastics, Their Properties and Uses," in Gloag, Plastics and Industrial Design, 78.

[148] Ibid.,79.

[149] Wallace, Infinite Jest, 384 & 287.

[150] Barthes, Mythologies, 97.